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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Anita K. Bergeson entitled "Chaucer's Questioning Impulse: Reading the Dream Visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Laura L. Howes, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Tom Heffernan, Tom Burman, Joe Trahern

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

Thesis
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CHAUCER'S QUESTIONING IMPULSE: READING THE DREAM VISIONS AND *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Anita K. Bergeson
August 2006

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to Dr. Phil Hanse, under whose guidance my reading of Chaucer began, with profound appreciation for his encouragement and deep regret that he could not see its completion.

Acknowledgements

I owe a large debt of gratitude, which I cannot come close to repaying, to Dr. Laura Howes, for her invaluable support and guidance. I wish to thank the entire dissertation committee for their advice, comments, and encouragement as the project began and progressed to completion. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Tom Heffernan for teaching and guidance that began with my first graduate class, Dr. Joe Trahern for teaching Old English and kindly agreeing to serve on the committee, and Dr. Tom Burman for serving on the committee and introducing valuable references I would not have otherwise encountered. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Lynn Champion, for time to write.

ABSTRACT

Models of medieval reading often describe a process that divorces emotion from intellect or that sees the reader in a position of dominance over the text. This project examines *rēden*, with its overlapping meanings of interpretation, counsel, advice, and control, and reading scenes in Chaucer's early dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In these poems, Chaucer uses *rēden* to question and reassess acts of reading as an interactive process between text and reader. In the *Book of the Duchess*, reading is emotive interpretation that consoles neither the narrator nor the Black Knight. The *House of Fame* explores reading and textual production in the story of Dido and Aeneas, Fame's decisions, and the tidings in the House of Rumor. The *Parliament of Fowls* illustrates how multiple forms of advice can lead nowhere. By drawing upon prior texts in setting out the above ideas, Chaucer also points to disagreement with the texts upon which he draws. *Troilus and Criseyde*, which contains a greater number of readers, expands ideas contained in the dream visions. In treating Criseyde as a text, the narrator's, Pandarus', and Troilus' readings attempt to control her, yet Criseyde resists and offers texts that prove difficult to interpret or control. The narrator demonstrates that stories are conflicting, unsatisfying, unruly, and even capable of betraying an author. Rather than separating intellect and emotion, Chaucer's reading scenes assert the conjunction of the two and the interactivity of reader and text: readers can rewrite a text, but they cannot escape the source—there is neither liberty from, nor a tyranny of, tradition.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Reading Chaucer

Characters in Chaucer's poetry are often reading something. The *Book of the Duchess* narrator, in order to combat his sleeplessness, asks for a book "To rede and drive the night away" (49). In the *House of Fame*, the narrator reads the story of Dido. The *Parliament of Fowls* narrator reads Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and the two inscriptions on the gate to the Garden of Love. Pandarus famously reads an "old romaunce" on the night Troilus and Criseyde consummate their relationship (III.980).[1] Troilus and Criseyde read the letters each sends to the other via Pandarus. The narrator tells us at times what his source, "Lollius," does and does not say.

Acts of reading are, however, more complex than just reading of words in a text or on a wall. In significant moments, Chaucer uses "rede" to signify multiple meanings of the word. The *Book of the Duchess* narrator reads the story of Ceyx and Alcyone and reacts thus:

> I, that made this book,
> Had such pitee and such rowthe
> To rede hir sorwe that, by my trowthe,
> I ferde the worse al the morwe
> Aftir to thenken on hir sorwe. (96-100)

Reading here is the perusal of a book, but also, as the lines following "rede" suggest, the contemplation of it, as the narrator feels pity to learn of Alcyone's sorrow. The *House of*

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[1] Texts of Chaucer's poetry from The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed., Larry D. Benson, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Fame's Dido addresses the absent Aeneas: "For thorgh yow is my name lorn, / And alle myn actes red and songe / Over al thys lond, on every tonge" (346-48). Dido fears the reading and singing of her name, but also the interpretation of her deeds "on every tonge." In response to the other birds' opinions about the debate over the formel, the cuckoo offers an interpretation from his point of view, advising, "Lat ech of hem be soleyn al here lyve! / This is my red, syn they may not acorde" (*Parliament of Fowls* 607-608). The narrator at the start of *Troilus and Criseyde* advises his audience to bow to love: "therefore I yow rede / To folowen hym that so wel kan yow lede" (I.258-259). Pandarus offers his guidance in a form of "rede": "I love oon best, and that me smerteth sore; / And yet, peraunter, kan I redden the / And nat myself; repreve me na moore" (I.667-669). After protesting against the presence of Troilus' letter, Criseyde takes it from Pandarus and removes herself to her chamber, "Ful pryvely this lettre for to rede; / Avysed word by word in every lyne" (II.1174-1175). She looks at the words on the page, but she also does more: she advises herself and deliberates over every word of the text with which she has just been presented.

In the above and in other instances discussed in subsequent chapters, Chaucer signals his interest in reading, advice, guidance, counsel, learning, and interpretation through forms of the verb *rēden*. Although scholars have noted Chaucer's interest in key words such as *entente* and *sikernesse*,[2] it is surprising that his use of *rēden* has received little attention. Rosemarie McGerr briefly mentions Chaucer's use of the term as she

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[2] Elizabeth Archibald's insightful "Declarations of 'Entente' in *Troilus and Criseyde*" (Chaucer Review 25 [1991], 190-213); Stephen Barney's "Suddenness and Process in Chaucer" Chaucer Review 16 (1981): 18-37; and more recently, Timothy O'Brien's "*Sikernesse* and *Fere* in *Troilus and Criseyde*" Chaucer Review 38 (2004): 276-93. Chaucer's linguistic awareness in terms of character names is examined in Susan Schibanoff's "Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's *Troilus*," Speculum 51 (1976): 647-58.

discusses Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde*, which "present[s] discourse as a game of reading one's own advantage and blinding others to one's true intent" beginning with Pandarus' first visit to Criseyde.[3]

Middle English *rēden* derives from Old English *rǽdan*, which is derived from Common Teutonic forms of the word, all sharing a meaning of giving counsel, taking charge, or controlling something. According to the OED, "the application of this to the interpretation of ordinary writing, and to the expression of this in speech, is confined to English and ON," with the latter perhaps being influenced by English.[4] In Old English, *rǽdan* had seven basic meanings: to give counsel or advice; to consult, deliberate, or take counsel about something with someone, to debate in council, or to provide for; to determine or decide, to take action against someone; to rule, govern, or direct; to have possession of; to explain, as in a riddle, or to read a book; to read aloud; to prepare.[5] Some Old English meanings did not carry over into the next period: to resolve after deliberation, to take action against a person, to have possession of. Middle English *rēden* retained and expanded upon the meanings of its earlier counterpart. The basic definitions to advise or counsel, to rule or govern, to read a book, to read aloud, to debate in council, to explain, and to prepare are evidenced in both periods.[6]

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[3] Chaucer's Open Books (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 107. Ivan Illich also mentions in passing that the root word of English "read" means to give advice or interpret (In the Vineyard of the Text [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 58). Joyce Coleman's discussion of references to reading in Chaucer consciously excludes any multiplicity of meaning and deals only with silent, oral and what she terms "aural" reading, being read to by someone else (Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 150); her discussion of reading in the later Middle Ages unfortunately ignores the dynamism of reading in Chaucer's works.
[4] OED, *read*, v.
[5] Bosworth and Toller, *rǽdan*.
[6] Bosworth and Toller, *rǽdan*; MED, *rēden*, v.1.

In the Middle English period, shades of meaning expanded earlier definitions. In the sense of reading a book, *rēden* now included "To read for particular information," or "To read [a specific language] with understanding" (MED). "To read" in the sense of "to explain" could mean to explain in speech or writing, to explain a truth, to state a cause, cite a proverb, or recite poetry; interpreting a dream or different language enlarged the Old English sense of reading for the purpose of solving a riddle. Added meanings included: to learn by reading, to teach or instruct, to give a lecture or moral lesson, to tell a story, to discern something (by sight and realization in the mind), to deduce, to guess, think or intend, to estimate a number of something, to order or direct something, to consult together, to guide or direct oneself (MED). When Chaucer's narrators and characters "rede" they read an image, text, or character, and they might also attempt to explain, interpret, guide, counsel, or control oneself or others. The *House of Fame* narrator seeks someone to counsel him after the story he has read in the temple, but there is no one else in the vast desert. The birds offer and explain their advice in the debate over the formel in the *Parliament of Fowls*. Pandarus offers guidance and counsel to Troilus and Criseyde.

Chaucer's exploration of reading calls up a number of questions: What conclusions are we to draw from a poem in which the narrator appears to misinterpret the text he reads, praying to Morpheus for sleep instead of to Juno for a dream, and is rewarded with sleep and a dream anyway? If the great *auctores* in the House of Fame really obtain their material from Rumor, and if there are two stories of Dido with no one to advise the narrator Geffrey about them, how could their works be authoritative? What does one do with the garden of Love in *Parliament of Fowls*, filled as it is with figures of

pleasure and pain, inscribed as it is with a wall and a single gate upon which there are also competing inscriptions? What does one do with Cicero's text, which Macrobius discussed in his authoritative text on dream interpretation, when reading his book has not provided answers and leads the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator to read more books? What are we to make of Pandarus' reading practices, which seek to guide and control his friend and his niece? What are we to make of Criseyde's readings of situations, which seem astute but also alternate with a lack of insight? What do we do with the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator, who gets involved in a story from which he appears to distance himself at its conclusion? What are we to make of the multiple forms of advice the narrator gives at the end of the poem? In raising such questions, Chaucer also questions the literary tradition with which he works, and instead of leaving definitive answers to some of these questions, he seems to revel in developing them for his own readers to ponder.

The main argument of what follows is that Chaucer uses *rēden* and scenes involving reading to explore problems of interpretation, guidance, and control, to exoplore the boundaries of reading and to question the literary tradition from which he draws. His examination of reading is tied to questions of authorship as well. As medieval practice was to use existing stories, the texts one composed were naturally dependant, in varying degrees, upon the texts one read. A.J. Minnis argues that the medieval theories of authorship contained in scholastic prologues, specifically those related to compiler and *auctor*, influenced the way in which Chaucer saw his role as a writer. Where an *auctor* was responsible for the material, a compiler's responsibility was only the order of the material; he "is not responsible for his reader's understanding of any part of the

materia."[7] A compiler was a reporter, and this role was one that Chaucer used in crafting his narrators, rather than setting them up as *auctores*. Minnis notes that "Chaucer was fond of assuming self-depreciating literary roles, and the role of compiler would have been particularly congenial to him." [8] Closing his discussion of Chaucer, Minnis concludes that "so deliberate was he in presenting himself as a compiler that one is led to suspect the presence of a very self-conscious author who was concerned to manipulate the conventions of *compilatio* for his own literary ends." [9] Indeed, Chaucer plays with the role of narrator as compiler, especially in *Troilus and Criseyde*, as the narrators he creates are no mere compilers who record material drawn from authorities; rather, this role is a disguise for reshaping and innovating upon the stories that he read. Further, Chaucer also seems to have recognized in the guise of compiler the ability to formulate a different perception of the material upon which he drew, and to draw attention to the role of the narrator-poet as a shaper of perception. The narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*, for all his protestations that he follows his author, often deviates to give his audience a different point of view. Although he tells his audience that "Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne," in his proem to Book II, he has also advised them that "every wight which that to Rome went / Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere" (II.36-7).

Thus, medieval ideas of poetic composition are also important to this study. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whose work Chaucer read and quoted,[10] advised that one should keep the end in mind from the very beginning. His oft-cited analogy is that the construction of a poem is similar to the creation of a building: "Let the mind's inner

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[7] Medieval Theory of Authorship (London: Scolar Press, 1984), 202.
[8] Medieval Theory of Authorship, 209.
[9] Medieval Theory of Authorship, 210.
[10] At *Troilus and Criseyde* I.1062-1071.

compass circumscribe the whole area of the subject matter in advance."[11] Poetry was to begin with an end in mind and return to it in the conclusion. As McGerr points out, Geoffrey's advice for artificial rather than natural organization was in keeping with the idea of planning one's project with an end in mind: one should not merely start a text at the beginning of a story; rather, it was preferable to begin with the end, the middle, or to use a proverb.[12] Such a theory did not mean that the intervening material would not change the end, of course, but the idea of opening and closing with the same idea lent balance.[13] As McGerr has described, the concern with linking beginning and conclusion signifies "a desire...for harmony of a text's means and ends, or at least a close relationship between an author's intent and the end of the literary structure he or she chooses to express it."[14] The opening and closing stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde* are one example, as the narrator tells us that he sets out to relate "The double sorwe of Troilus...Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.1, 4). McGerr's examination of how Chaucer manipulates medieval conventions of closure provides a link between writing and interpretation: "Chaucer's poems depict various sorts of conclusion—human judgment and literary convention—as falsely conclusive and instead part of an ongoing process of interrogation and (re)interpretation."[15] Where McGerr's study ultimately concentrates on the audience's role in the process of closure, my focus rests on how

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[11] *Poetria Nova* rans. Jane Baltzell Kopp. Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts. James J. Murphy, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pg. 34.
[12] Chaucer's Open Books, 20.
[13] As evidenced in the works of the *Pearl*-poet. E.g. *Pearl*'s concluding line, "Ande precious perlez vnto His pay" (1212), reflects the first line, "Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye" (1); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begins and ends with references to the siege of Troy (1, 2525); the opening and closing of *Patience* is also structured in this fashion (1, 531). Texts from The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds., York Medieval Texts, Second Series (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).
[14] Chaucer's Open Books, 24.
[15] Chaucer's Open Books, 2.

Chaucer uses readers *in* his texts to question literary convention and authorship. Chaucer's audience and the readers in his texts are interrelated, but the difference is important: McGerr's approach places a more subjective emphasis on the process of interpretation, while I consider not the response of Chaucer's readers but those readers in his poetry. An examination of readers within Chaucer's texts provides insight into his complex ideas of reading, and if one wishes to consider potential audience responses, illuminates questions Chaucer wished his audience to consider.[16]

Some of these reading scenes make use of source texts, with deviations occurring at important moments, and with the incorporation of allusions to other sources. For example, in a scene to be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5, Pandarus' first visit to Criseyde finds her with her ladies, reading the siege of Thebes in her garden. Pandaro's first visit to Criseida in *Il Filostrato* is by comparison quite simple: "Then Pandaro, who was eager to help the young man he so dearly loved, left him to go where he pleased and went off to find Criseida. Seeing him coming she rose to her feet and greeted him from some way off."[17] What Boccaccio covers in short space, Chaucer elaborates, creating a scene which ominously and literally opens the book to a story of kinship and betrayal before shutting it in favor of the unfolding love story in which Criseyde will become involved. Chaucer's innovations in this scene not only highlight Criseyde as a reader, but

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[16] For the sake of consistency, for the remainder of the study I refer to "audience" as the listeners and hearers outside of Chaucer's texts—the historical and the imagined audience who would have read or heard the poem, as Paul Strohm defines them in Chapter 3 of Social Chaucer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). Since reading is a term of great significance to my work, I use it throughout in closer proximity to the medieval definitions of the term than to our own. Readers are interpreters, explainers and explicators, controllers, guides. When dealing with specific readers, I shall clarify as near I can the kind(s) of reading I see occurring.

[17] II.34. Chaucer's Boccaccio, N.R. Havely, ed. and trans., (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980). Citations refer to Book and Stanza numbers.

also that the story of Thebes that she reads exists in different versions—she reads the romance version, while Pandarus says he knows that story, "For herof ben ther maked bookes twelve" (II.107), the twelve books of Statius' *Thebaid.* As will be discussed below in Chapter 5, although the Theban stories are in many ways similar, they also differ in important ways. Here, as elsewhere, Pandarus asserts himself as an authority, while Criseyde offers a different reading. Pandarus, like the narrator, is both a reader and a creator of fictions: the narrator creates new material in deviating from and contradicting his source, "Lollius," and Pandarus creates events such as the jealousy of Horaste, yet their words are not always authoritative although both attempt to assert authority.

Scenes where narrators and characters are reading, frames to the dream visions and the dreams themselves, and allusions to other texts in Chaucer's contexts also call attention to conflicts between books and characters. Chaucer explores reading and how stories unfold even as they are read and rewritten. The *Book of the Duchess* narrator rereads Ovid; Scipio's role as guide is questionable, and the book from which he comes is unsatisfying to the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator-dreamer. The *House of Fame* rewrites Virgil and Ovid and destabilizes literary tradition in placing its source in the House of Rumor. The *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator and Pandarus attempt to rewrite the story even as the love story reaches an end that is outside their power to change. Through such explorations, Chaucer destabilizes the place of the writer within the work: stories are conflicting, unsatisfying, unruly, even capable of betraying a writer who is involved in his story. The end that one must keep in mind when writing, as Geoffrey of Vinsauf recommended, is complicated by the intervening material in ways that are not always reconcilable. In writing such conflicts into his poetry, Chaucer subverts authority—that

of texts, and that of writers. In effect, he challenges authority through embedded narratives, readers, and writers whose different texts cannot be reconciled to a fixed meaning, or even a single conclusion.

While some scholars have seen Chaucer's purposes as quite similar to those of his predecessors and contemporaries,[18] and although some of the issues they address are similar, the results are quite different in Chaucer. The role of the guide in a text, from Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* forward, influenced dream vision poetry. Whereas Virgil is a worthy guide for much of Dante's journey, and Dante asserts a confident place for his *Commedia*,[19] Chaucer's attitude toward his sources and guides is more ambivalent. As he sets out to follow Virgil in the *Inferno*, Dante tells the shade of the Roman poet "Now go; a single will fills both of us: / you are my guide, my governor, my master" (*Inferno* II.139-140). Virgil explains to the confused Dante that the inscription on the Gate of Hell is a warning to leave behind cowardice and hesitation when entering (*Inferno* III.14-18). As they wait for the angel to unlock the gates of Dis, Virgil reassures Dante that he

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[18] E.g.: Fleming argues that Chaucer's method in *Troilus and Criseyde* is similar to that of Dante, in creating a dialectic between Christian classicism and pagan authors (Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus* [Lincoln: University of Nebrasks Press, 1990], 41). Fleming sees the poem as a quiet critique of Boccaccio's "pseudopagan narrator" (247). Overall, his reading supports Robertson's argument that the poem is a Boethian tragedy (A Preface to Chaucer [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962], 473-75). Burrow's theory of "Ricardian poetry" sees Chaucer, Langland, Gower, and the *Pearl*-poet as creators of poems with "a loose-woven, open texture" limited by their forms of Middle English, which were inferior to both continental counterparts such as Dante and the high style of later English poets (Ricardian Poetry [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971], 43-44). Jane Chance views Chaucer's use of myth in the tradition of medieval mythographers such as Bersuire and Theodulf of Orleans (The Mythographic Chaucer [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995]); however, as Fyler points out, Chaucer omits the moralizing of texts such as the *Ovide Moralisé* (Chaucer and Ovid [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], 17).

[19] In the *Paradiso*, for instance, he distances confidently himself from his readers, telling them in their "little bark[s]" to "turn back to see your shores again: do not / attempt to sail the seas I sail" (II.1-5). In beginning the *Paradiso*, he beseeches Apollo's aid, but also asks for laurels, putting his material in order first before Apollo's help: "I shall take as crown the leaves / of which my theme and you shall make me worthy" (*Paradiso* I.26-27). Text from The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, 3 vols., trans. Allen Mandelbaum (NY: Bantam, 1980-1984).

returned from the lower regions once before and knows the way (*Inferno* IX.28-30).[20] Dante unquestioningly accepts Virgil's guidance through the *Inferno* and as far as Virgil can travel in the *Purgatorio*. Virgil also has divine authority, as Beatrice descends to them before they enter the Inferno to validate his guidance.

Chaucer's narrators have no such guide as the worthy pagan Virgil or the heavenly Beatrice, with whom Dante ascends to his vision of heavenly paradise.[21] Figures from authorities that appear in *House of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls*, on the whole, notably fail to guide. In the *Parliament*, Scipio does not interpret the inscription as Virgil did for Dante; instead, he tells the narrator it is not meant for him and pushes him through the gates before disappearing. In the *House of Fame*, the eagle's first words to Geffrey are not the explanation he seeks, but a startling "Awak!" (560) and a comment about how heavy he is to carry (574).[22] The eagle does explain what the narrator sees as they ascend, but Geffrey refuses the eagle's last explanation. He tells the eagle, "Nay, certeynly" he does not want to learn about the stars; he says he is too old, that it does not matter (it is "no fors") because "I leve...Hem that write of this matere, / As though I knew her places here," and the sight may burn his eyes (994-95, 1011-1017). In addition

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[20] Other instances of Virgil's guidance include: his explanation of the infernal rivers, *Inferno* XIV.94-120; his advice of courtesy toward three of the sodomites in the Seventh Circle, *Inferno* XVI.15-18. He angrily rebukes Dante for paying so much attention to the quarrel between Adam and Sinon, *Inferno* XXX.130-132. He reassures Dante that he is still with him, *Purgatorio* III.22ff; his rebuke of Dante for being distracted by the talking of the shades, *Purgatorio* V.10-18. He advises Dante to have confidence and cast his fear aside, *Purgatorio* XXVII.20-32.

[21] Piero Boitani points out that in the *House of Fame* the eagle calls Geffrey by his first name, as Beatrice does to Dante; however, whereas Beatrice is sent to save Dante, the eagle is sent to bring Geffrey to where he can hear tidings, and Chaucer hears not of God's Love but of Venus. Additionally, the eagle's plain language does not resemble the divine language of Dante ("What Dante Meant to Chaucer," Chaucer and the Italian Trecento, Piero Boitani, ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 119, 124-25).

[22] As Karla Taylor points out, the pedantic, bossy eagle of the *House of Fame* is not the divine guide of the *Paradiso*; instead, she argues, "he embodies the magic of fiction" (Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy' [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989], 36).

to the joke at Geffrey's expense, the narrator's refusal of this knowledge indicates that his assurance in his books is not total—although he will rely upon them, the "As though" in his statement indicates a measure of uncertainty about the knowledge they provide. Chaucer reduces the guides' presence and the potency of their advice; the narrator is alone much of the time, whether he is standing in the desert sand, the Houses of Fame and Rumour, in the Temple of Venus, or observing the debate of the birds. The books the narrators read are more constant companions: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in *Book of the Duchess*, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and the other books the narrator takes to reading at the end of *Parliament of Fowls*; *House of Fame* books include Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (mentioned by the eagle, 1001-1008), Boethius' *Consolation* (972-78), and of course the books of the authors on the pillars in the House of Fame itself. The stories of Troy and the *Roman de le Rose* painted on the glass in *Book of the Duchess* (326-33) and at least part of the story of Dido in *House of Fame*[23] are perhaps not literally texts in that they are not written in words, but they represent texts with which Chaucer was familiar.

Neither guides nor books, however, lead to a redemptive vision, as in Dante, or to the explicitly moral lessons of the contemporary *Confessio Amantis*, *Piers Plowman*, and *Pearl*. Whereas Gower's Genius is the confessor who advises the lover of the moral of each story in the *Confessio Amantis*,[24] Chaucer creates no such character in his dream

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[23] On a wall, the narrator says that the beginning of the *Aeneid* is "written on a table of bras" (142), but he soon switches to a vocabularly of vision: "First sawgh I," "And I saugh next," "There saugh I," for example (152, 174, 209). What he sees may still be written words, but the repeated use of "saugh" lends ambiguity to the activity and can imply either the reading of words or the observing of painted images.

[24] E.g. At the conclusion of the version of Ceix and Alceone presented in this text, Genuis advises Amans to take heed of dreams because they are often prophetic (IV. 3124-27). Amans replies in this instance as in others by confessing to Genius and using religious language: "Mi fader, upon covenant / I dar wel make this avou" (IV.3132-33). See also "Min holy fader" at the end of the Tale of Florent (I.1865); likewise, Genuis often calls Amans "Mi Sone" (e.g. IV.3134, V.4238). Text from The Works of John Gower, 4 vols. G.C. Macaulay, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

visions; rather, figures that are elsewhere allegorical counselors are silent figures in a garden behind a gate that leads to either pleasure or pain. In Passus XVIII of *Piers Plowman*, the debate of the four daughters of God, which centers on what they perceive as a conflict between justice and mercy, is solved by Christ. The daughters do not question Scriptural authority as they try to resolve their differences—indeed, they rely upon Scripture for its authority.[25] Christ solves the argument in his citation of the New Law as elucidated in Matthew 5:17, that he comes not to destroy the law but to fulfill it.[26] Additionally, once the dreamer discovers it, the meaning of Dowel is not in question; rather, it is the doing of Dowel that is the problem. Haukyn the Active Man, for example, knows what he should do and confesses his sins, but afterward goes back to sinning. The dreamer's pilgrimage is achieved by the end of the poem, although it needs to be restarted by Conscience. Langland's interest in defining terms in his allegory focuses not on the ambiguity or overlapping meanings of the terms, but on a moral lesson that involves the intent to do good, the knowledge of it, and how one can align one's deeds with that knowledge. At least one moral purpose seems to be clear: to do well, to lead a virtuous life in a perilous world, is difficult but necessary.

The Middle English *Pearl* is overtly Christian, and although there is debate over what or how much the dreamer has learned by the end of the poem,[27] he does seem to

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[25] For instance: Truth quotes Psalm 29:6 at line 181a; Peace quotes Psalm 4:9 at ll.185-86. Christ uses Scripture to defeat Satan in an argument of words, arguing that it is right according to reason and the Old Law "That gilours be bigiled" (B.XVIII.339). Text from Piers Plowman: The B Version, George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds. (London: Athlone, 1975).

[26] B.XVIII.349a.

[27] Sandra Pierson Prior, for example, sees the dreamer's remorse upon waking as indication of incomplete conversion because the dreamer in lines 1184-85 calls it a true vision, but then doubts that it was; she calls *Pearl* a poem of "limited progress" (The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet [East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996],184). Others, however, read the dreamer's change more positively: Spearing, e.g., argues that while the dreamer's grief was self-absorbed in the beginning of the poem, by the end his

have put aside the despair that troubled his spirit before his dream and learned a Christian moral. Waking up after his attempt to cross the river to the heavenly city, he sighs and acknowledges, "Now al be to þat Pryncez paye" (1176). He accepts that his Pearl is in heaven, he has learned that men are too eager to have more when they should be content, he commends his Pearl to God, and ends with a prayer that God "gef vus to be His homly hyne / Ande precious perlez vnto His pay" (1211-12).[28] The dreamer no longer lies in despair in the garden and instead looks to heaven. *Pearl* and the other poems of Chaucer's contemporaries mentioned above are by no means simple in their unfolding, and some address other issues that also interested Chaucer.[29] As Brewer has noted, Chaucer is unlike his contemporaries in his disinterest for allegory, and he shared in common with Lollardy a distaste for glossing.[30] Chaucer's poems are also set apart for their particular ambiguities and the questioning of valorized texts, using those same texts to ask questions of them.

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thoughts extend to others and his grief is lessened (Medeival Dream Poetry [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 128-129).

[28] Andrew and Waldron note that "gef" may be either a preterit or present subjunctive verb: thus, the lines read either "He granted us all to be His humble servants and precious pearls to His pleasure" (as they translate it), or, if "gef" is subjunctive, the sense of the line is as Borroff translates it: "O may we serve him well, and shine / As precious pearls to his content"; in either case, there is a suggestion of the dreamer's changed vision and spirit.

[29] Langland, Gower, the *Pearl*-poet and Chaucer were all clearly interested in the dream vision. Gower and Chaucer were interested in order and Nature in the *Confessio Amantis* and the *Parliament of Fowls*. Langland and Chaucer are both interested in the corruption of the clergy in *Piers Plowman* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Kane sees a number of connections and argues that there are more similarities between the two than at first seems to be the case, such as their self-conscious artistry and use of the modesty topos ("Langland and Chaucer: An Obligatory Conjunction," New Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism, Donald Rose, ed. [Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1981, 5-19], Reprint, Chaucer and Langland [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989], 126). Muscatine concluded that the *Pearl*-poet, Langland, and Chaucer were all responding to social crises but chose different ways of representing those crises and different styles and tones in doing so (Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972]).

[30] "The Reconstruction of Chaucer," Studies in the Age of Chaucer Proceedings 1 (1984), 9, 17.

Although Chaucer has been seen to have a moral purpose in his dealings with words,[31] it seems that Chaucer's use of ambiguity is rather different from that suggested by St. Augustine. Augustine dealt with the ambiguity of words by setting out the idea that learning happens not through words but through the mind and through Christ, rather than an earthly teacher; words are reminders of things, but not the things themselves.[32] In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine also discussed the importance of clarity over ambiguity, of the unveiling of what is hidden, and of the importance of valuing the truth behind the words instead of the words themselves.[33] Chaucer's play with words seems, however, to revel in creating ambiguity that leads to possible interpretations rather than clear, certain ones. Catherine Cox has argued that Augustine's view of metaphor as the usurpation of a word from a proper to an improper thing reveals at the same time an anxiety over the fact that words are not absolute property.[34] Cox builds upon Carolyn Dinshaw's ideas of the feminine text and of refusals to "read like a man" that challenge patriarchal order,[35] adding to the discussion an emphasis on feminine aspects of language. Feminine language, in their view, is not just language used by women, but language used by a man or woman that resists the prevailing authority. Both argue that feminine texts and feminine language resist masculine control, resist being defined in conventional terms,

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[31] John Fleming views Chaucer as such and cites Augustine's *De dialectica* as evidence that ambiguity was a vice, an obstacle to work beyond in order to understand truth (Classical Imitation and Interpretation, 5, 51). Chance similarly argues that "The Augustinian and Macrobian idea that truth hides beneath a false outer layer or cloak traditionally justifies reading classical poetry and reappears…in England in Chaucer, Gower, and others" (The Mythographic Chaucer, 103). As I point out above, I interpret Chaucer's poetic ends as different from his contemporaries in a number of ways.

[32] *De Magistris*, Chapter XI-XII. Basic Writings of St. Augustine, Whitney J. Oates, ed., vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1948).

[33] Book IV.VIII-XI. Text from D.W. Robertson trans., On Christian Doctrine (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958).

[34] Gender and Language in Chaucer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 12-13.

[35] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 18-25.

and Cox sees poetic language especially as feminine in its polysemy. It seems that although Chaucer probably would not have called his use of language feminine, he possessed an awareness of the ways in which shades of meaning could create ambiguity and be used to consider other ways of reading.

As A.J. Minnis and Marjorie Curry Woods have pointed out, poets and rhetoricians in the later Middle Ages possessed an interest in the "literal or verbal level as an end in itself."[36] Reading on a literal level is, by turns, interpretation, seeing a text, offering advice, attempting to control others, telling a story, searching for learning; these acts are related, but not the same, for the subjects, objects, and actions involved differ: advice, for instance, can take the form of control, but it does not necessarily mean that an advisor controls the object to whom s/he offers advice. Instances of *rēden*, scenes involving reading, and narrators and characters in Chaucer's poems manipulate words to their own or to labyrinthine ends. There is no clear authority in the man of authority who appears as the *House of Fame* breaks off; he is located in the House of Rumor, all the people there eagerly flock to him, and he is someone the narrator does not know who "semed for to be / A man of gret auctorite" (2157-58). Chaucer uses "auctorite" to question that idea, and the entire poem exhibits anxiety over *auctores*. When Pandarus "hath fully his entente," there is no clear, definitive interpretation of his act the morning after the consummation (III.1582). As Tison Pugh has recently argued, one can argue for a sexual act in Pandarus' activity (he "gan under for to prie" under Criseyde's sheet at III.1571), and one can argue against that argument; the ambiguity suggests that there is an

[36] Quotation in Woods, "In a Nutshell: *Verba* and *Sententia* and Matter and Form in Medieval Composition Theory," The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1992), 21. Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982).

unknowability to Pandarus' character.[37] Pandarus' reading of "an old romaunce" the night before conjures similar ambiguity—does he read a book, or look upon the lovers as if they act out a scene from an old romance?

A few governing ideas regarding general assumptions, the chronology of the poems, and critical methodology should be noted at this point. In discussing Chaucer's narrators as readers of texts, I claim that they are not to be identified with Chaucer himself. In doing so, I follow the distinction made by Donaldson and those who have followed in his footsteps—thinking not only of the *Canterbury Tales* narrator as one of Chaucer's fictional creations, but also the narrators in his other poems.[38] David Lawton, for example, argues that the narrator is a fiction: "Narrators are always concealments, bookish secrets."[39] A. C. Spearing has challenged this separation of narrator and poet, specifically the application of Donaldson's distinction to Chaucer's other poetry. Spearing argues that because the narrator is a vernacular poet, to claim that the narrator was not the author would have been too bold a statement in Chaucer's time—it was equal to competing with classical poetry. Instead, he views the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*

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[37] Queering Medieval Genres (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 91.
[38] "Chaucer the Pilgrim" PMLA 69 (1954): 928-36, reprint, Speaking of Chaucer (New York: Norton, 1970), 10-11.
[39] Chaucer's Narrators (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 14. Lawton, however, denies the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator such a place. In his view, the only the dream narrators are characters in the poems; in his reading the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator is a performer and mediator rather than a separate character (89). Such a role still suggests a distinction separate from Chaucer. For the separation of poet and narrator see also E.F. Dyck, "Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Chaucer Review 20 (1986), 171; Cox, Gender and Language in Chaucer, 16; Boitani, English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, trans. JK Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 134, 188. In regard to *Troilus and Criseyde*, Sturges comments that whatever the case, the emphasis is on reading and writing (Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in Literary Narrative, 1100-1500 [Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991], 140).

as "a collective and anonymous voice."[40] Richard Waswo also equates the narrator with Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde*, claiming that although the narrator assumes "masks, pretenses, and disguises," there is no clear differentiation between author and narrator. He adds that "The writer of this poem is anything but blind."[41]

Indeed, the author of *Troilus and Criseyde* is not blind, but the narrator, the author's device, for much of the poem strains against and, perhaps intentionally, temporarily blinds himself to the end he has outlined at the start of the poem. Although he begins with the explicit purpose of telling Troilus' "double sorrow," he becomes engaged in the action of the poem itself as events unfold. In Book III, as day intrudes upon the lovers, the narrator involves himself with an exclamation: "But cruel day—so wailaway the stounde!— / Gan for t'aproche" (III.1695-96). In the next to last stanza of the same book, the narrator praises Love, "yheried be his grace!", that makes all vices flee from Troilus (III.1804). He does not defer the praising of love to his audience of experienced lovers as we might expect from a narrator who in Book I has told his audience he is only the servant of love's servants (I.15). Rather, his direct praise of love suggests that the narrator has gotten caught up in, perhaps even feeling himself, the joy of love that his characters feel. Donaldson argued that the narrator even falls in love with

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[40] "A Ricardian 'I': The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," Essays on Ricardian Literature in Honour of John Burrow, A.J. Minnis, Charlotte Morse, Thorlac Turville-Petre, eds (Oxford, 1997), 8, 16; also "The Medieval Textual 'I,'" Plenary Lecture, 40th International Congress on Medieval Studies, 7 May 2005. John Finlayson has argued similarly, that Chaucer's narrators in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowles* are generic voices, "rhetorical device[s]" common to Chaucer's sources and contemporaries ("The *Roman de le Rose* and Chaucer's Narrators," Chaucer Review 24 [1990], 199). See also Donald R. Howard, "Chaucer the Man," PMLA 80 (1965), 341; and, Boitani who, although seeing the *House of Fame* narrator as a counterpart of the real Chaucer, views the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator differently (Medieval English Narrative, 199).

[41] "The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," English Literary History 50 (1983), 12.

Criseyde.[42] The narrator's lack of objectivity, then, explains in part his exclamations in the last two books of the poem. In the very first line of the Book IV proem, the narrator laments over the shortness of the characters' joy, "welaway the whyle," and accuses Fortune of being a "traitour comune!" (IV.1, 5). If being subject to love is being subject to Fortune, as Lady Reason tells the Lover in Boethian fashion in the *Roman de la Rose*,[43] a text Chaucer knew and translated, then the narrator has put himself in such a position in *Troilus and Criseyde*, failing to distance himself as far as he perhaps should have from his pagan material. His involvement in the story is also suggested by the multiple methods he uses to try to conclude the poem in Book V: an apology (for the story—he'd rather write about good women, V.1772ff.), a proverb (beware of men, V.1779-85), a poet's hope for recognition ("go litel book," V.1786-92), an exemplum (Troilus goes to the eighth sphere, V.1807-13), a summary of the poem (the "swich fyn" stanza, V.1828-34), an admonition (to "yonge, fresshe folks," V.1835-48), an appeal to indignation of the audience ("Lo here..." stanza, V.1849-55), and a dedication and prayer (V.1836-69).[44]

It is also true that, as Waswo points out, the narrator is, like Chaucer "a bourgeois writing for royalty";[45] however, such a correspondence need not mean that the narrator *is* Geoffrey Chaucer himself. Brewer cautions: "If we take the poet's presentation of his own self as a simpleton within the poem who is a separate self-contained character, we do an injustice to the subtlety with which this apparent simple-mindedness, so often

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[42] Speaking of Chaucer (New York: Norton, 1970), 68.
[43] ll.4837-4923.
[44] Murray Evans, "'Making strange': the narrator (?), the ending (?), and Chaucer's Troilus," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 87 (1986): 218-28, Reprint, C. David Benson, Critical Essays on Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" and His Major Early Poems, 165.
[45] "The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 12.

associated with literalism, is connected with the *totality* of the poet's mind."[46] This view is important for guarding against treating the narrators as if they are characters in a novel, and in emphasizing the subtlety with which Chaucer writes a narrator who appears to be a simpleton. Indeed, the narrator is not the feeble man he says he is. The simple-mindedness of the narrators seems, in part, to be a joke at Chaucer's own expense, a means of self-deprecation and of some sort of distance from his real self, and is part of the complexity of the poet's mind. As Thomas Garbaty pointed out some years ago, Chaucer's narrators have the appearance of being common sense simpletons, while Chaucer himself certainly was not.[47]

The scholarship equating Chaucer with the narrator also assumes for the narrators an authoritative position that they do not possess on a consistent basis.[48] The multiple endings to *Troilus and Criseyde* noted above gesture toward the inconsistent authority of the narrator. Kane rightly points out that biographical inferences about Chaucer drawn solely from his works are logically suspect: "We forget that the personalities of themselves which they project in their works may conceivably be disingenuous, for those personalities may be an element in the design of the works, a part of the poets' technique"; he adds that "the fictional entities [are] important to their authors as

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[46] "The Reconstruction of Chaucer," 13, emphasis original. He counters arguments such as Larry Sklute's: "In Chaucer's dream visions, the persona is always a whole character" (Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer's Poetry [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984], 23).

[47] "The Degredation of Chaucer's 'Geoffrey'," PMLA 89 (1974), 99-102. His insightful discussion curiously lacks reference to the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator.

[48] Sturges notes that when the narrator does offer explanations, they are not authoritative, suggesting that "the audience is thus reminded both that simple facts demand interpretation and that no single interpretation, the narrator's included, can be guaranteed true" (Medieval Interpretation, 145).

imaginative creations."[49] Fyler's comparison is also apt: whereas a Boethian narrator is authoritative, Ovidian ones are not.[50] The obtuse narrator of the dream visions is partly a joke on Chaucer, and partly a serious statement about how much authority a writer might claim. Machaut includes in *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse* a compliment to himself in the mouth of his lord: "my friend, I want to beg you to be so kind as to set yourself to making for me a lay or complaint about my love and my sorrow. For I know very well that you know all the theory and practice of true love in all its aspects."[51] In Chaucer's dream visions, we find no such assured statement of the narrator's abilities. The narrator's introductory comments about love in the *Parliament of Fowls* offer a direct contrast to the sure knowledge of Machaut's narrator:

> The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
> Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
> The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne:
> Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
> Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge
> So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke
> Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke. (1-7)

Theory and experience in Machaut become a process of confusion in Chaucer's poem.

In working with this *Dit* in the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer eliminates Machaut's indirect compliment to himself, as the narrator wakes up to write and says only that he will "Fonde to put this sweven in ryme / As I kan best, and that anoon" (1332-33). Although he challenges the ability of dream authorities Joseph of Egypt and Macrobius to interpret his dream as he begins to relate it (276-289), the long prologue to

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[49] The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies (London: H.K Lewis for University College: 1965), reprint, Chaucer and Langland, 4, 11-12.
[50] Chaucer and Ovid, 19-20.
[51] Text in Barry Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), 39.

the dream emphasizes the narrator's "sorwful ymagynacioun," "melancolye" and "drede" (14, 23-24), which call into question his authority; as he says in the opening lines, "Al is ylyche good to me— / Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be" (9-10). Comparison to other of Chaucer's sources also attests to this kind of relationship. Froissart's narrator in *Le Temple d'Honneur* sets out to tell his experience; hardly a day goes by, he relates, that "one does not hear tell of something new that has happened somewhere or other," and, it is more credible if seen with one's own eyes. He also says that pleasure impels him to write on this occasion.[52] The *House of Fame* narrator begins much less assuredly, pondering the causes of dreams and stating that he does not know them:

> Ne kan hem noght, ne never thinke
> To besily my wyt to swinke
> To knowe of his signifiaunce
> The gendres, neyther the distaunce
> Of tymes of hem, ne the causes,
> Or why this more then that cause is. (15-20)

Where Froissart begins with pleasure, the unknowing of the dreamer creates an air of anxiety that only seems to build as he does now know what to make of the things he sees—where Froissart equates vision with credibility, Chaucer through his narrator equates vision with uncertainty.

The narrators are devices through which Chaucer explores such questions, playfully yet seriously assigning those tasks to the oft-confused or frustrated "I" or Geffrey who does not always know what to do with the material before him. This view of Chaucer's narrators is analogous to Lynn Staley's argument that Chaucer's poetry offers

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[52] Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, 133.

an implicit lesson to Richard II concerning his ability to rule;[53] where Staley sees in the poems political and historical commentary, I see in the narrators a commentary on literary tradition. Chaucer's impulse is a bold one, to dwell upon ambiguities through the oft-puzzled narrators, to examine the ways in which stories are complicated by their own histories, and to question the authority of literary texts even as he makes use of them. A narrator's seeming lack of control over his material, like the *House of Fame*, *Parliament of Fowls* and *Troilus and Criseyde* narrators' passive observations or intense involvement in the story, gesture to a concern with authorship and the fruits of reading. What was one to gain by reading the *Somnium Scipionis*, for instance? The recovery of knowledge that one already possessed, according to monastic versions of *lectio* and *meditatio*?[54] A growth of character?[55] Or something else that is not quite what one expects, given common expectations of dream visions and of poetry more generally? While Chaucer certainly felt that reading was worthwhile, the rewards and the mental labyrinths in his poetry also point toward a curiosity about the great books he, and by extension his narrators, read. Perhaps anxiety is also involved, of a kind different from despair over being able to equal the great *auctores* of the past, i.e. Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence,"[56] but an anxiety about texts and the conflicts that develop as they are rewritten. To put it another way, using a poetic example: where the speaker in William Collins' "Ode on the Poetical Character" peers into Milton's garden from the outside,

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[53] "Gower, Richard II, Henry of Derby, and the Business of Making Culture," Speculum 75 (2000), 75. The ambiguity in Chaucer's poetry opens up the possibility for a number of interpretations, including Staley's argument of implicit political commentary.
[54] Jean LeClerq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 149-50.
[55] Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 180-82.
[56] The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford University Press), 1973.

where "My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue: / In vain—such bliss to one alone / Of all the sons of souls was known" (71-73), Chaucer's narrators roam around in and explore the gardens of his literary predecessors to try out their gates and borders.[57]

Another operating principle of this study is that there exists a continuity of theme from the early to later poems. Chronology of the dream visions is, to an extent, debatable, but the generally accepted order is *Book of the Duchess*, *House of Fame*, *Parliament of Fowls*. The *Book of the Duchess* is accepted to be an early poem because it does not show the influence of the Italian works to which Chaucer later referred, and because of its likely connection to the death of John of Gaunt's wife Blanche.[58] The *House of Fame* probably dates from the late 1370s, perhaps 1379-80.[59] The *Parliament of Fowls* may be assigned a place in the late 1370s or early 1380s after the *House of Fame* and before

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[57] Laura Howes also points out that in the *Book of the Duchess*, "the narrator's literary heritage is not just 'evoked' but is actively tried out in the poem" (Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997], 51).

[58] There is general concord among scholars that the poem has some correspondence to the death of John of Gaunt's wife Blanche of Lancaster, although there is disagreement about the dating of the poem: Brewer argues for a composition date between Blanche's death on 12 September 1368 and a plan for Gaunt to remarry that took place in November of that same year (Chaucer and His World [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1978, 1992], 91); Pearsall also dates the poem soon after Blanche's death (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992], 92); also John H. Fisher, The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 542; and Donald Howard, Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World (NY: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 148. James Wimsatt dates it to 1369 (Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of the *Book of the Duchess* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968], 1-2); also F.N. Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 315. Strohm dates it between 1368-1371 (Social Chaucer , 53). Robertson argued that the poem was written to be delivered at an annual memorial service for Blanche ("The Historical Setting of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," Mediæval Studies in Honor of Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., John Mahoney and John Esten Keller, eds. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press], 172). Edward I. Condren builds upon Robertson and argues for a date of 1377; his theory is unconvincing in its failure to account for the lack of Italian influence in the poem ("The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A New Hypothesis," Chaucer Review 5 [1971], 211). If composed as late as he argues, Dante's Beatrice surely would have provided a fitting model, but there is no suggestion of her in the poem.

[59] John Fyler, Explanatory Notes, The Riverside Chaucer, 978. Pearsall dates the poem a bit earlier, c.1374-78, after he began customs job, alluded to at ll.652-55, and before his second trip to Italy, since the poem shows no influence of Boccaccio (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 110).

Troilus and Criseyde.[60] Although the dating of the *House of Fame* is not certain, the relative chronological proximity of the *House of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls* suggest a deepening interest in the themes Chaucer began exploring earlier. The dream poems share a concern with reading and its rewards or efficacy. There are counselors who sometimes do not quite seem to be counselors: the *Book of the Duchess* narrator cannot seem to comprehend the Black Knight's grief, the eagle leaves the narrator to see and hear what he may in the *House of Fame*, Scipio in *Parliament of Fowls* disappears and leaves the dreamer on his own, Pandarus acts as more than a counselor, and the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator attempts to advise his audience but cannot completely control his version of the story.

This interest in reading continued with the expansion of Chaucer's own reading. The *Book of the Duchess* has much in common with the French poems of Machaut, while the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and *Troilus and Criseyde* attest to the influence of Dante and Boccaccio. From the French poetry of Machaut Chaucer certainly would have found a connection between love and poetry; in poems such as the *Dit de la Fontainne Amoreuse*, "the characters are obsessed with poetry."[61] The influence of the Italian texts was not to obliterate the importance of familiars such as the *Roman de la Rose* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, but issues of reading and authorship deepened once he encountered the self-assured Dante of the *Commedia*. The poetic form and the "completeness" of individual poems also changed even as the poems in question

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[60] Charles Muscatine, Explanatory Notes, The Riverside Chaucer, 994.
[61] James Wimsatt, Chaucer and His French Contemporaries, 83.

possess shared concerns.[62] The more he read, the more concerned Chaucer seemed to be about the place of reading, and of texts and their writers.

Studies dealing with historical reading practices are important insofar as they illuminate what Chaucer may have known, observed and adapted for use in his poetry. Reading practices in Chaucer's time differed conceptually and practically from those of the earlier Middle Ages. Nicholas Howe has argued that the connection between interpretation and reading in Old English was that of a communal activity: "In an oral culture, to give counsel is of necessity to speak and thereby to create community."[63] Monastic models of reading contained an oral dimension, as the copying of a text was done as one monk dictated to the copyists, and in the practice of *ruminatio*, or mumbling over a text. Although there are isolated accounts of people reading silently, such as that of St. Ambrose which Augustine recounts with surprise in his *Confessions*, reading aloud was the predominant practice until the twelfth century. Such reading, as LeClerq has described, was auditory and physically active, a bodily as well as a mental exercise.[64]

As reading came to be a silent practice from the twelfth century forward, it could occur on a more solitary basis, which gave room for one's own interpretations. Paul Saenger even claims that "silent reading emboldened the reader, because it placed the source of his curiosity completely under his control."[65] There were still communities of readers who practiced oral reading, as one practice did not obliterate the other. As M.T.

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[62] Robert Sturges also traces Chaucer's continual interest in problems of interpretation (Medieval Interpretation, 126). His study emphasizes the role communication, or rather a lack thereof, between dream narrators and characters, and the *Troilus and Crisyede* narrator and his audience.
[63] "The Cultural Construction of Reading in Anglo-Saxon England," Old English Literature, ed. R.M. Liuzza (Yale University Press, 2002), 7.
[64] The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, 19-20.
[65] "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," A History of Reading in the West, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 137.

Clanchy has pointed out, the rise of documentary culture did not constitute the demise of oral reading.[66] Yet the kind of reading one practiced did seem to make a difference. Saenger claims that "Private visual reading and composition thus encouraged individual critical thinking" in contrast to public oral reading and dictation, which reiterated received authority and interpretations.[67]

Chaucer's exposure to reading practices certainly would have occurred in many places and on many occasions. The extent of his formal schooling has been a matter of debate; one of Edith Rickert's theories was that he attended St. Paul's Cathedral School as a child because the books known to have been there during Chaucer's lifetime include ones he is known to have read.[68] Howard agreed, and his biography follows another of Rickert's theories, that Chaucer may also have attended the Inner Temple, one of the Inns of Court, during the period between 1360 and 1368.[69] During this stretch of time, however, there is little record of Chaucer's activities, the anecdote placing Chaucer at the Inner Temple dates from two centuries after his lifetime, and much is uncertain about Chaucer's theorized presence there and precisely the kind of education the Inner Temple

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[66] From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), 278.

[67] Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 137. Michael Camille argues that the change in reading practices is connected to the marginal images in manuscripts that commented upon and challenged, although never completely subverted, the authority of the text with which they shared space in manuscripts of the thirteenth century forward (Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992], 10, 41-47).

[68] "Chaucer at School," Modern Philology 29 (1932), 259. Howard agrees with Rickert (Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World, 25), but Pearsall is skeptical of this theory (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 30-31).

[69] Howard, Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World, 74-77. Rickert, "Was Chaucer a Student at the Inner Temple?", The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature (University of Chicago Press, 1923), Reprint, Freeport, NY: Book for Libraries Press, 1968) 28. Where Rickert and Howard see Chaucer's attendance as evidence of legal training, Pearsall again disagrees, arguing that the Inns of Court before 1400 provided a "quasi-university education, not specifically directed towards the law" (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 30).

provided at the time, as extant evidence dates from the fifteenth century forward.[70] As Pearsall and Nicholas Orme note, one should not overlook the importance of Chaucer's service in the Ulster household.[71] In the royal households to which he was attached from a young age, Chaucer likely observed and participated in many kinds of reading, from the instruction of children in basic reading of Latin letters, to the composition and delivery of literature,[72] legal documents, and other types of writing, in both oral and silent forms.

Chaucer's experiences in aristocratic and royal households are likely to have also acquainted him with conventions of letter writing. Martin Camargo notes that *ars dictaminis* treatises, which gave precepts for letter writing, came later to England than to Italy and France, the two main centers of *ars dictaminis* in the Middle Ages; additionally, he posits that it flourished in England during the century between roughly 1350 and 1450 (half of which encompasses Chaucer's lifetime) when there was a growing need for clerks and lawyers.[73] Camargo also sees a connection between *ars dictaminis* and poetry,

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[70] D.S. Bland, "Chaucer and the Inns of Court: A Re-Examination," English Studies 33 (1952), 146-54. Rickert's source is Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer, which gives an anecdote about one "master Buckley" seeing a document that stipulated a fine against Chaucer for beating a Franciscan.

[71] Orme, in describing education in aristocratic households, states that "Literacy, and the elementary knowledge of Latin it involved, were probably universal among the later medieval English aristocracy of both sexes" (Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England [London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989], 170). Orme claims that the young Chaucer, in the service of the Countess of Ulster, must have been educated there as well during his time in that household (164). As Orme sees medieval education taking place on an informal level as well as under the formal instruction of a tutor, his theory seems to be that Chaucer's education in the household was one that took place in the form of observation. Pearsall notes that in the household Chaucer would not have been formally schooled, but would have been educated in anything from kitchen duties to swordsmanship, dancing, music, and even some poetry (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 33, 40).

[72] Howard notes the importance of French and chivalric literature to which Chaucer was likely exposed during his time in the Ulster household (Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World, 43, 65-66).

[73] "Introduction," Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 31. Reasons for its demise are cause for speculation. For instance, Malcolm Richardson traces three main reasons: the demise of feudal society and the use of the rhetorical forms attached to that social hierarchy, the growth of the legal profession in England, and the English system of common law" ("The Fading Influence of the Medieval *Ars Dictaminis* in England After 1400," Rhetorica 19 [2001], 237-40); John O. Ward cites a rise in literacy and vernacular use throughout Europe ("Rhetorical Theory and the Rise and Decline of *Dictamen* in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance," Rhetorica 19

with letter-writing as a medieval "prerequisite for every other area of study."[74] As Camargo has elsewhere pointed out, letters had an oral and a written component—like literary texts, they were partly written, partly read aloud—as the sender dictated the letter to a scribe, who shaped it according to standard principles, and the bearer of the letter often read the letter aloud, publicly, to the recipient.[75] Thus, even if Chaucer had no formal training in *ars dictaminis*, in his positions in aristocratic and royal households, as controller of customs, and/or on the diplomatic missions on which he was sent, he likely encountered at least the verbal formalities of letter writing in conducting business.[76]

Chaucer's poetry attests to an awareness of oral and silent reading. In the *Canterbury Tales*, the Miller addresses his hearers, and Chaucer the narrator suggests to his audience—listeners and readers—that "whoso list it nat yheere / Turne over the leef and chese another tale" (I.3176-77). The *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator worries about the future of his poem, praying that none "myswrite the" (V.1795)—a miswritten text could

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[2001], 221-22). There is also debate over how much presence, prior to its demise, *ars dictaminis* had at Oxford. R.J. Schoeck argues that it had a noticeable presence because extant treatises have Oxford connections ("On Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford," Mediæval Studies 30 [1968], 219). James J. Murphy, however, is skeptical of the overall presence of rhetoric in England before the fifteenth century, although he notes Chaucer and Gower as exceptions to the rule that "there is virtually no vernacular literary consciousness of a rhetorical tradition" ("Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford," Medium Ævum 34 [1965], 12); he has also voices this opinion elsewhere, e.g. "Literary Implications of Instruction in the Verbal Arts in Fourteenth-Century England," Leeds Studies in English 1 (1967), 126. N. Denholm-Young pointed out that regardless of whether these forms of rhetoric were taught at Oxford, there was knowledge of the basic principles in England in the fourteenth century ("The *Cursus* in England," Collectedc Papers of N. Denholm-Young [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969], 47).

[74] "Introduction," Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition, 33.

[75] "Where's the Brief? The *Ars Dictaminis* and Reading/Writing Between the Lines," Disputatio 1 (1996), 4. As Murphy points out, Alberic of Monte Cassino, the writer of the earliest known treatises of *ars dictaminis*, combined Ciceronian divions of speech with letter writing (Rhetoric in the Middle Ages [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 207). Medieval formulae for letter-writing were thus rooted in both oral and written discourse.

[76] John McKinnell postulates that Chaucer probably knew *dictamen* from example letters rather than from the rhetorical treatises themselves, but even so, example letters would have relayed the standards of letter-writing ("Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Essays on *Troilus and Criseyde* Mary Salu, ed. [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979], 79).

lead to silent and/or oral misreadings. Criseyde participates in both kinds of reading. In her garden, where she and her ladies read about Thebes, the group of women seem to be reading from one text; Criseyde refers to one book, telling Pandarus that they have stopped reading, "as the book kan telle" (II. 104) where Amphiorax falls through the ground. The details suggest that the book is being read aloud by one of them. A short while later, after Pandarus delivers Troilus' letter, she goes to her chamber and apparently reads it by herself. While she could be reading the letter aloud, if she did so, there is the chance that others nearby could hear. She would have no reason to read the letter aloud, however, because there is no indication that any of her women or friends know about the romance with Troilus: she sits alone as she mentally wrestles with herself about the merits and drawbacks of involvement with Troilus (II.689-808), on the consummation night Pandarus is careful to separate her from her ladies, and when Criseyde is about to leave Troy in Book IV, she is tortured by the inane chatter of her friends as she quietly anguishes over leaving Troilus. She has no one in whom to place such confidences; thus, it does seem that she reads Troilus' first letter, and probably subsequent ones, silently.

Roger Chartier's work on the history of reading practices claims an interaction between the reader and book as object that privileges the reader, as he asserts that "authors do not write books: they write texts that become written objects."[77] One virtue of his approach is that it realizes reading as a dynamic process subject to fluctuation according to the abilities, culture, and time in which a reader exists, yet it devalues the

[77] The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 10. Elsewhere, he has stated, with Guiglielmo Cavallo, that "reading is not already inscribed in the text...a text exists only because a reader gives it meaning" ("Introduction," A History of Reading in the West, 1).

place of the text in such an interaction to the extent to which a book does not have an existence apart from the reader, and a text tends to become a secondary, almost static, object in this schematization of reading. There is of course a difference between a text sitting silent and closed on a bookshelf and one that is in the process of being read. To an extent, the person reading a poem does infuse it with life, as evidenced in the standard present tense verbs used in academic writing to describe events as they happen in a text. Letters and books are of course objects of reading, yet as the material that facilitates reading, interpretation and the writing of other stories, it is difficult to maintain that they exist only as objects. The extent to which Chartier's position is extreme is that his theorization of reading threatens to remove the role of the author from the text. Books offer clues to the author's ideas, however difficult those may be to discern, even if the author is in many ways unknown to us.

Carruthers' important discussion of reading offers a constructive model. She argues that texts rather than authors possess authority, and that texts become authorities through meditation and commentary on them, being stored in memory—in short, they gain value through mental circulation. Her model of reading suggests that rather than existing as an object of readerly control, "the text has meaning within it which is independent of the reader, and which must be amplified and 'broken-out' from its words, as they are processed in one's memory and re-presented in recollection."[78] She argues for an interactivity where the reader actively engages the text in order for it to become part of his memory and for him to comment on it. Although texts do not exist only in

[78] The Book of Memory, 190-91.

manuscripts (the purpose of reading is to store texts in memory),[79] they are necessary for the process of reading that she describes, acknowledging that authorities were not revered as untouchable but were texts that could become intellectual property of the readers. In discussing an "ethics of reading," where the end of reading was not so much knowledge but the growth of character, which was "constructed out of bits and pieces of great authors of the past," she assumes that, although the text is remade by the one reading it and gathers authority through that process, the end result was a canonical or moral understanding of a text.[80]

Rita Copeland, discussing translation as an act of cultural appropriation, argues that "each response to an existing text involves a new configuration of authorial functions which alter the status of the texts within the system."[81] For Copeland, invention is an interpretive act, "a hermeneutical performance on a traditional textual source,"[82] an idea that seems particularly apt to the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Copeland's model theorizes that each translation of a text remakes it in a way fashioned by linguistic exigency, which in her view is the usurping of Latin by the vernacular, as well as one vernacular displacing the other. In applying such ideas to Chaucer, she concludes that Chaucer exercised a "free play," where "the translation should substitute itself for its source and efface the presence of that source."[83]

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[79] The Book of Memory, 8.
[80] The Book of Memory, 180-84. One example she cites is a dialogue that Petrarch wrote between himself ("Francesco") and Augustine; Francesco has digested Virgil for moral benefit (168).
[81] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 140.
[82] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages, 179.
[83] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages, 202.

Yet the constant gesturing to books and authors in Chaucer's poetry suggests that rewriting a story brings prior version(s) into the present one, and (as with Virgil and Ovid in the *House of Fame*) the antecedents are not effaced but translated and interpreted in a way that demonstrates one text's necessary, although conflicted, reliance upon other texts. I argue that Chaucer is not investing authority in previous texts as Carruthers' model of reading would argue, nor is he displacing them as Copeland would assert; rather, translation and interpretation point to a relationship with prior texts that is resistant yet obligatory, as occurs in the rewriting of the Dido-Aeneas story in the temple in the *House of Fame*, discussed in Chapter 3, and perhaps best typified by the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*. As discussed in Chapter 4, his relationship to his source is one of resistance, as he attempts to write his own text but is also bound by his source.

The configuration of reading that emerges from Chaucer's poetry is its interactivity, its dependence upon a number of elements. On a practical level, Chaucer's poem to Adam Scryven and the narrator's consignment of *Troilus and Criseyde* to poetic posterity, where he wishes that "non myswrite the" (V.1795), attest not only to an awareness of the "gret diversite" of the English language (V.1793), but also to the fact that the existence of a text is dependant upon those writing it down. On a more artistic level, it is associated in the poems with counsel, with a search to learn something. Reading is also connected to control. Characters who "rede" in Chaucer's poems sometimes try to exert control, and although in *Troilus and Criseyde* they are bound by external forces,[84] the impulse to control exists within the work itself, Pandarus and the

[84] "As the Trojan world becomes hemmed in by its approaching doom, so Chaucer's narrative comes to seem more and more book-determined, bound by its literary sources" (Fyler, "*Auctoritee* and Allusion in

narrator being prime examples; they both react to and comment upon Criseyde, who resists being merely an interpretation, a text of someone else, and who offers readings of her own. The larger story the narrator writes intrudes upon the story Pandarus has been crafting, as the Trojan parliament approves the exchange of Criseyde and Antenor. Once embarked upon the story of Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator must finish it with Criseyde's leaving Troy, never to return to Troilus. As much as he'd like to write otherwise, of Penelope or Alceste, at the end of the poem, he has to subordinate his wishes to the tradition to which the material belongs. While readers in the audience may attempt to control the text with their interpretations, Chaucer highlights both the actions of readers in the poems *and* the importance of texts which facilitate those readings.

Whether oral or silent, reading practices are interpretive ones. Chaucer's use of *rēden* plays out multiple scenarios. If we read, we: read words on a page out loud and silently, counsel someone, explain something to someone or to ourselves, or seek to govern someone. Sometimes we merely read words on a page, but we might often do more than these at once—whether alone or with others. We read different versions of the same story. Using forms of *rēden* and scenes involving reading practices, Chaucer indicates an interest in how texts are received, how characters become texts to be guided and reinterpreted by other characters, how authorship and fame are dubious because of the origins of the material with which an author works, how these lead to deep and often unresolved questions. He questions the stability of words, calls attention to their

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Troilus and Criseyde," Res Publica Litterarum 7 [1984], 83). See also McGerr, 115-16. In relation to gender and romance, Angela Jane Weisl has astutely observed that "Chaucer is both bound by the conventions and traditions of romance and determined to challenge them" (Conquering the Reign of Femeny: Gender and Genre in Chaucer's Romance, Chaucer Studies XXII [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995], 3).

purposes, complicates the roles of those who use them, and questions the signification of important figures and ideas contained in his sources. Kathryn Lynch has argued that unresolved questions in Chaucer's dream visions are a reflection of philosophical debates of his time. She is careful to point out that Chaucer was not an academic philosopher, but she claims that he was aware of debates over singulars and universals and questions of understanding and will, concluding that Chaucer's dream visions explore but do not resolve these issues.[85] My conclusions about Chaucer's questioning impulse are similar, but achieved by focusing on issues of reading rather than philosophy.

The chapters that follow elaborate the above ideas by examining readers, reading, and literary works in individual poems. The second chapter will begin by examining how the *Book of the Duchess* foregrounds the questions explored by later poems. Chapter 3 begins with the *House of Fame*'s deepened interest in dream visions, readers, texts, and authority, followed by the *Parliament of Fowls* and the continued relationship of the dream narrators to poetic authority and the nature of experience and reading. There is much to say about *Troilus and Criseyde*, and chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to elucidating important interpretive and authorial moments.

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[85] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 27-28, 58-59, 80-82, 87, 104. She does, however, suggest that Chaucer had university training, following what she admits is speculative evidence (16-22).

CHAPTER 2

Reading, Dreaming, and the Knight's Tale in the *Book of the Duchess*

For Chaucer, dream visions are realms of texts not only because they contain figures from and allusions to other texts, but also because they themselves contain texts.[1] From the panels of the *Roman de la Rose* in the dreamer's bedroom and the Black Knight's reconstruction of White in the *Book of the Duchess*, to the story of Dido and the authors bearing the weight of their stories in the *House of Fame*, to the inscription on the gate to the park and those unlucky in love in Venus' temple in the *Parliament of Fowls*, texts and the materials of poetic composition occupy an important place in the dream visions. The placement of texts inside the dreams and as frames to the dreams themselves—directly with the narrator's reading of Ceyx and Alcyone and Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, indirectly with the allusions to dream commentary in the opening lines of the *House of Fame*—creates in each poem an environment of reading.

In their reading, Chaucer's dreamers are often left to their own devices, whether they lack or possess a guide. Typically, dream vision guides reveal some type of truth.[2] In Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Africanus reveals the music of the spheres to Scipio and

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[1] Boitani points out that books dominate the dream visions, focusing on the continuity of theme they provide within and between dream poems and on allusions and clues to Chaucer's sources in the poems, which he argues constitute a game wherein audience members would try to identify the source ("Old Book Brought to Life in Dreams: the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*," The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer, 2nd ed., Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 60-61). See also Brewer: "A passionate desire to read books is the most notable and persistent desire in all Chaucer's works, deeper and longer lasting than love itself" ("The Reconstruction of Chaucer," 4).

[2] A.C. Spearing, Medieval Dream Poetry, 18.

explains that he should seek the good of the commonwealth rather than fleeting earthly fame; Philosophy's education of Boethius includes the idea that all men desire good but they mistakenly see what is transitory as good rather than the true good that comes from God who is the highest good;[3] Dante ascends to heavenly vision with the assistance of his guides. Counselors appear in Chaucer's French sources as well. Amant in *Roman de la Rose* is virtually bombarded with advice: e.g. Love counsels endurance, Reason encourages him to forgo his covetous love and instead embrace the moderate love of her friendship, La Vieille advises against generosity and loving only one person.[4] In Machaut's *Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne*, the king asks his counselors Raison, Love, Loyalty, and Youth for advice, and he decides that the knight's sorrow over his false lady is worse: because the lady's knight is dead, she may be consoled by God whereas the knight's pain endangers his soul.[5] In Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours*, Esperance and Plaisance appear to the lovelorn dreamer and guide him to Love; Esperance offers, in Philosophy-like fashion, medicine to restore him and acts as advocate to his lady, while Plaisance instructs him to have restraint and be constant.[6] In Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*, Love advises the young lover-poet to serve his lady always and to bear misfortune humbly.[7] His love for her becomes passionate, but he learns from Esperance, who appears to him like a physician, that his own distress is what prevents him from

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[3] *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III.
[4] The Romance of the Rose, trans. Charles Dahlberg, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 58, 99-102, 226-28.
[5] Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, ed. with translation by James Wimsatt and William Kibler (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 140-58.
[6] Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, trans. Barry Windeatt, pp. 46-48.
[7] Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pp. 174-76.

having his lady.[8] Chaucer's dream visions, on the other hand, do not offer the education of the dreamer that one might expect, as guides either do not exist or they disappear. Where Virgil remains with Dante for as long as he can and is succeeded by Beatrice, Africanus pushes the dreamer of the *Parliament of Fowls* through the garden gate, only then to disappear entirely; Jove's eagle carries Geffrey to the Houses of Fame and Rumor but sits and waits while Geffrey observes. Visionary literature such as Boethius' *Consolation* and Dante's *Commedia* also focuses on the progressive understanding of the narrator-pilgrim through dialogue, yet dialogue in Chaucer's dream poems rarely details a progression to heightened understanding: the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer finally understands that White is dead but in reaction only expresses pity; in a one-sided dialogue dominated by Jove's eagle, Geffrey in the *House of Fame* learns that sound is nothing but "eyr ybroken" (765) but explicitly refuses the eagle's education about the stars; Scipio's notable action is to push the dreamer through the gate, and the debate of the birds in the *Parliament of* Fowls descends into bickering and offers no productive advice to Nature. If Chaucer's dreamers are educated, their education occurs in ways that do not conform to traditional expectations of medieval dream literature. The *Book of the Duchess* dreamer only seems to have learned that White is dead, rather than any larger lesson about death itself; the *House of Fame*, with the challenging of dream categorization in the proem and the dreamer's emphasis on what he *sees*, questions the idea that dreams offer education, and his observations of Fame and Rumor suggest that the "tydynges" he observes are disillusioning. At the end of the *Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator continues to read, searching for something "To fare / the bet" (698-99),

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[8] Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pp. 252, 256, 260.

suggesting that what the dream has taught him is that they reveal little of what he seeks. Instead, the end of the poem emphasizes reading.

Writing of the monastic reading practices of *lectio* and *meditatio*, Le Clerq explained that "Ovid, Virgil, and Horace *belonged* to these men as personal property; they were not an alien possession to which to refer and quote with reverence," and when reading, "the searcher discovered it [wisdom] because he already possessed it; the texts gave it an added luster."[9] Carruthers' model of reading and memory, noted in the previous chapter, draws upon Le Clerq's and emphasizes the impact of reading upon character. However, a different process of reading occurs in Chaucer's dream visions: the narrators read in order to pass through the night, or in search of "tydynges" or to learn a "certeyn thing." For Chaucer's dream narrators, reading involves not the recollection of wisdom already possessed, but a search that occurs in the dream framework and inside the dream, both inside and outside the self, in books they have read and in texts they encounter. And as is the case in at least one instance, the narrator does not find what he seeks, thus questioning the place of reading. Can reading be useful, if what one discovers is, as in the *Parliament of Fowls*, not what one seeks? As the narrator of that poem comments, "For both I hadde thyng which that I nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde" (89-91).

In exploring reading, Chaucer's three early dream visions also share a concern over the relationship of the poems themselves to texts that have come before them. As is commonly acknowledged, like other dream visions Chaucer's dream poems exhibit a

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[9] The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, 149-50, emphasis original.

self-reflexivity, a self-conscious relationship to preceding texts.[10] Edwards argues that such a self-consciousness provides a foundation from which Chaucer writes poetry aspiring to "equal footing with the *auctores* of the past and the few contemporary writers (Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch) who dared vie with them."[11] Boitani has suggested that Dante was, for Chaucer, "a classic—a poet to venerate or to ignore, but impossible to imitate."[12] Others, however, have challenged the notion that this self-conscious relationship to sources is indicative of an intent to imitate Dante or any of his notable predecessors. Karla Taylor, for instance, points out how in the *House of Fame* Chaucer's narrator is unlike Dante's poet, who is "a transparent medium through which God's perfect expressiveness shines."[13] Rather, she argues, Chaucer offers "a broad questioning of the authenticity of any human version of the world or history, whether it be Virgil's, Ovid's, or Chaucer's own."[14] Fyler argues that allusions to visionaries end up suggesting that "vision is faulty."[15] John McCall claims that figures such as *plaisance* in Chaucer become feelings rather than allegorical signifiers.[16] Howes asserts that Chaucer's use of garden *topoi* draws upon the French *paradys d'amours* in order to parody and subvert

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[10] Spearing notes that "the dream poem becomes a device for expressing the poet's consciousness of himself as a poet and for making his work reflexive" (Medieval Dream Poetry, 6). Steven Kruger also points out that most medieval dream visions are self-reflexive (Dreaming in the Middle Ages [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 134-35). For Chaucer in particular, see Larry Sklute, The Virtue of Necessity (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 7; Robert Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 4.
[11] Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer, 14.
[12] "What Dante Meant to Chaucer," Chaucer and the Italian Trecento. ed. Piero Boitani (Chaucer and the Italian Trecento. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115.
[13] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 30. Howes makes a similar point in focusing on Chaucer's gardens, which are dependent upon perception, unlike the unchanging nature of the earthly paradise in *Purgatorio* XXVIII.7-9 (Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention, 60).
[14] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 30.
[15] Chaucer and Ovid, 43.
[16] Chaucer Among the Gods (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1979), 44.

such conventions.[17] Chaucer's use of Ovid, Helen Cooper notes, was "critical, not subservient."[18] Indeed, the influence of authors such as Ovid or Dante and the presence of conventional figures or *topoi* need not have persuaded Chaucer to imitate his sources with the same intentions as those authors possessed. As his depictions of reading and texts suggest, Chaucer's sources seem to have inspired him to compose poems which draw upon, but which also suggest disagreement and conflicted relationships with, his sources.

While Chaucer had not yet encountered Dante or Boccaccio when writing the *Book of the Duchess*, this early poem shares with the later dream visions common sources that include Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and French court poetry. The poem's indebtedness has, on occasion, caused some to undervalue it, concluding that it is a nice poem but lacks the artistry or depth of Chaucer's later compositions. Pearsall, for instance, labels the Black Knight's refrains overdone, and calls awkward the list of heroes and heroines inferior to White at ll.1054-87.[19] Alfred David contends that "the *Roman de la Rose* exhausted the possibilities of the form it created" and that the *Book of the Duchess*, along with the *House of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls*, are "tentative expressions of great but as yet unfulfilled literary ambitions."[20] As Lynch points out, however, Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose* is not the exhausted end of the vision; rather, it is a transitional poem, one in which "[t]he world has begun to seem a bit confusing to the

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[17] Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention, 12, 36.
[18] "Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority," Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century, Charles Martindale, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 72. For similar readings of Chaucer's relationship to his sources, see David Lawton, Chaucer's Narrators, 37.
[19] The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 92.
[20] The Strumpet Muse (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 15, 20.

author who tries to make it an image of truth."[21] Lynch has also asserted that Chaucer was interested not only in love, romance, social and personal concerns in his dream visions, but also used—whether through direct familiarity or as a result of a more general intellectual climate—scholastic debates over the imagination, the intellect, logic, reason, the will, and the relationship between divine and human truths.[22] Lynch concludes that in the three early dream poems, Chaucer "is content to raise philosophical problems without offering firm resolutions."[23] Indeed, if we look for closure, of form and of pertinent issues, in Chaucer's poems, we are often disappointed, as have been those who see either the *Book of the Duchess* or all the dream poems as experiments that Chaucer found unsatisfactory.[24]

In addition to Lynch's assessment of Chaucer's interest in philosophical problems, the inconclusive or "open" nature of Chaucer's poetry has been discussed in positive terms by Sklute and McGerr, whose arguments include *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales* as well as the dream visions. Sklute succinctly defines inconclusiveness as "either fail[ing] to answer the questions the work raises or offer[ing] answers that do not sit comfortably with the reading experience."[25] As Sklute also points out, Chaucer uses conventions but arrives at "a relatively unconventional attitude toward the nature of poetic truth and the function of poetry."[26] McGerr argues that Chaucer's poems resist closure, instead offering "a 'reading lesson' of sorts—an internal model for

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[21] The High Medieval Dream Vision (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 144.
[22] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 14-25.
[23] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 28.
[24] Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 117; David, The Strumpet Muse, 22; David Wallace, Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 15-16, 21.
[25] The Virtue of Necessity, 4.
[26] The Virtue of Necessity, 7.

deferral of closure in the reading process—that encourages readers to take a critical or revisionary stance, not just toward the poem in hand but toward texts of all kinds."[27] Indeed, if one approaches the *Book of the Duchess* with the expectation that the dreamer's vision will be corrected and there will be some final truth affirmed, those expectations would likely lead to an assessment of the poem as inferior. The poem is a frustrating one when approached with the expectation to ascertain in it what one typically might find in a dream vision: a narrator with a problem, who in the course of the dream is educated by an authoritative guide, visits a *locus amoenus* of one type or another and encounters an advisor or a series of advisors, whose perspective has changed by the end of the dream, a perspective either in hope or knowledge of love fulfilled, in condemnation of earthly love, or one of leaving behind the transitory joy and sorrow of the world. In depicting an uncured ailment, in using guides, in the casting of a dream as a reward for diligent reading, in identifying reading with learning, Chaucer himself sets up such expectations in the *Book of the Duchess* and in subsequent dream poems. Chaucer plants seeds of frustration, but he also plants the seeds for a reassessment of reading.[28]

The *Book of the Duchess* sets up a number of issues addressed in subsequent dream visions and in *Troilus and Criseyde*. It explores obstacles to meaningful communication,[29] as well as the relationship between books and experience in a dream

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[27] Chaucer's Open Books, 13.

[28] Although my argument here may appear to be the same as McGerr's, see pp. 7-8 of the Introduction for discussion of our different focal points.

[29] Ferster, Chaucer on Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69-70. See also Sturges, who argues that all of Chaucer's longer poetry depicts obstacles to communication; according to him, the *Book of the Duchess* expresses a failure of communication in the dialogue between the dreamer and knight (Medieval Interpretation, 127).

environment.[30] More significantly for my current purposes, although forms of *rēden* occur less frequently than in the other poems to be discussed, the *Book of the Duchess* articulates a concern with the place of reading and interpretation and the relation of texts to their antecedents. In articulating these issues, the poem also comments on the relationship between poetry and consolation.

The act of reading first comes into the *Book of the Duchess* when the sleepless narrator reads a book, having decided that doing so is a better pastime than playing chess:

> So whan I saw I might not slepe
> Til now late this other night,
> Upon my bed I sat upright
> And bad oon reche me a book,
> A romaunce, and he it me tok
> To rede and drive the night away. (44-49)

He reads the Ovidian story of Ceyx and Alcyone, which here ends with the death of Alcyone after a dream visit from her husband affirms that he is dead.[31] Alcyone hears Ceyx's advice, "Let be your sorwful lyf" (202), and dies on the third day. Her reaction to die rather than stop being sorrowful has been labeled a "willful misinterpretation,"[32] as has the narrator's reaction to the story. While "rede" in the above lines at first only seems to mean that the narrator looked at the words and read them, silently or aloud, he also takes his reading as a form of counsel. He comments that if he hadn't read and taken heed of the story, "Yif I ne had red and take kep" (224), he would be dead because of his sleeplessness. The advice he culls from the story is from Alcyone's prayer to Juno, that

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[30] The Key of Remembrance, 115.
[31] Ceyx and Alcyone are metamorphosized into kingfishers in both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XI.731-48, and Machaut's *Dit de la Fonteinne Amoreuse*, in Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pg. 32.
[32] Ferster, Chaucer on Interpretation, 72. See also Michael Cherniss, Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1987), 175.

when she goes to sleep Juno will let her see her husband and learn if he is well (108-121). The narrator, however, prays directly to Morpheus for sleep. Kay Gilliland Stevenson argues as that his prayer for sleep is a misreading, pointing out that even though there are similar occurrences in Machaut's *Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse* and Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours* (in the former, a duke promises Morpheus a cap and feather bed; in the latter a lover promises Jove a gold ring), the promises in the French poems are "much more logically connected to the character's experience immediately before the vow."[33] Jill Mann likewise sees the narrator's response as "undisciplined and arbitrary."[34] Rather than misinterpretations, one might consider Alcyone's and the narrator's responses as reinterpretations. The ambiguity of Ceyx's advice is worth note: "Let be your sorwful lyf" can be seen as either Alcyone interprets it, to let go of her life, or to cast aside her sorrowful life and continue living, as those who see Alcyone's response as a misinterpretation contend—the wording allows for both possibilities. Instead of interpreting the advice in the two ways noted, the narrator seizes upon a different part of the story. Upon waking after the dream that ensues, the narrator again focuses on sleep as the main theme, calling the book upon which he has fallen asleep "of Alcione and Seys the kyng, / And of the goddes of slepyng" (1327-1328). The narrator's and Alcyone's reactions depict the act of reading as non-standard reinterpretation in response to their

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[33] "Readers, Poets, and Poems within the Poem," Chaucer Review 24 (1989), 4.

[34] "The Authority of Audience in Chaucer," Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature, Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, eds. (D.S. Brewer, 1991), 11. See also Jordan, "The Compositional Structure of the *Book of the Duchess*," Chaucer Review 9 (1974), 104; Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, 128-29; Anderson, "The Narrators in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*," 222; Lynch, Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 40. Robert Hanning's reading is perhaps closest to mine, as he argues that the narrator's misinterpreting is a kind of metamorphosis of the story ("Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*, Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction, Leigh Arrathoon, ed. [Rochester, MI: Solaris, 1986], 137, 140).

situations. Steven Davis has acknowledged the narrator's reaction as a rereading but one that he says exhibits "a lack of what we might call hermeneutic sophistication," as well a need for "a presumably deeper and more Chaucerian sense of morality and the 'good of literature.'"[35] However, the narrator's view is not re-adjusted or "corrected" in the course of the poem (nor for that matter is Alcyone's), as his labeling it a story of sleep at the end of the poem indicates. Implicit in the story as retold and in the narrator's reaction to his book is the question of how reading the story relates it to the ones upon which it draws: a story of reunited love in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Machaut's *Fonteinne Amoureuse* becomes a story of death and sleep.

As he introduces his dream, the narrator highlights its relationship to dream authorities:

> Me mette so ynly swete a sweven,
> So wonderful that never yit
> Y trowe no man had the wyt
> To konne wel my sweven rede;
> No, not Joseph, withoute drede,
> Of Egipte, he that redde so
> The kynges metynge Pharao,
> No more than koude the lest of us;
> Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus...
> I trowe, arede my dremes even. (276-289)

"Rede" clearly means interpretation here, as the narrator questions the ability of two medieval authorities on dream interpretation, Joseph of Egypt and Macrobius, suggesting that they are inadequate to the task. Joseph's prophetic powers of interpretation will not

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[35] "Guillaume de Machaut, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and the Chaucer Tradition," Chaucer Review 36 (2002), 396.

suffice for his dream, neither are Macrobius' categories of dreams, from nightmare (*insomnium*) to oracle (*oraculum*), suitable.[36]

Further questioning of texts' relationship to their predecessors occurs in the narrator's awakening within the dream. From his bed, the awakened dreamer sees images of the story of Troy and the *Roman de la Rose*.[37] Such weighty stories, upon which Chaucer draws heavily in other poems, have little effect on this dreamer, however. He has "gret joye" in the painted glass—but because none of the window pains are broken: "with glas / Were al the wyndowes wel yglased / Ful clere, and nat an hole ycrased" (322-24). His description of the images is straightforward:

> For hooly al the story of Troye
> Was in the glasynge ywroght thus,
> Of Ector and of kyng Priamus,
> Of Achilles and of kyng Lamedon,
> And eke of Medea and of Jason,
> Of Paris, Eleyne, and of Lavayne.
> And alle the walles with colours fyne
> Were peynted, both text and glose,
> Of al the Romaunce of the Rose. (326-34)

The narrator takes pleasure in the glass, but does not react in more specific fashion to anything that he sees. He does not pause to read or comment upon the images of the French text and its gloss. In later poems, Achilles and Jason will be "fals and reccheles" (HF 397, 401), Lavinia part of the story of false Aeneas in the *House of Fame*, and Ector and Helen will become minor characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*; for now, they are removed from any significant qualities, be they moral, ethical, or symbolic: they are just parts of a visual story, and of which version(s) the narrator leaves unspecified. Such a

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[36] I follow Kruger's interpretation here, of a hierarchy of dreams in Macrobius' *Commentary* (Dreaming in the Middle Ages, 23).
[37] McGerr has called it "an awakening into literature itself" (Chaucer's Open Books, 49). See also Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, 129.

lack of reaction suggests that what follows will be different from stories he recognizes, and their lack of effect on the narrator suggests a turning away from them in favor of experience—as the sudden appearance of the horse and the hunt also suggests.

At the same time, of course, the dream experience itself is filtered through books—including the *Roman de la Rose*, widely acknowledged along with a number of Machaut's and Froissart's poems as sources for the *Book of the Duchess*. James Wimsatt has traced the indebtedness of the *Book of the Duchess* to these French poets, noting that the *Roman de la Rose* is a source for the majority of the garden descriptions in the poem, and detailing Chaucer's borrowings from Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours*, Machaut's *Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse*, *Jugement du Roy de Behaigne,* and *Remede de Fortune*.[38] At the same time, there are of course significant deviations: Wimsatt claims that the metamorphosis of Ceyx and Alcyone into kingfishers is "nearly excised by Chaucer,"[39] but Chaucer deletes that entire portion of the story, and it ends with no suggestion of reuniting after death, as birds or any other type of being.[40] As Wimsatt himself points out, "The conventions provided important tools, but they did not control."[41] In this vein, Davis has argued that Chaucer borrows from and critiques Machaut but does not dismiss him, seeing a significant borrowing in Machaut's revision of the place of the poet in the poem, who attempts to traverse the social gulf between poet and patron.[42] Indeed, where Copeland's view of medieval translation as displacement would see Chaucer attempting

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[38] Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 20, 103-4.
[39] Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 116.
[40] Also, Minnis points out that Chaucer ignored the moral interpretation of the *Ovide Moralisé* version of Seys and Alcyone where his ship was equated with the human body, the sea with mortal life, and the wind with sin (Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 18).
[41] Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 126.
[42] Steven Davis, "Guillaume de Machaut, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and the Chaucer Tradition" Chaucer Review 36 (2002), 394.

to efface the French texts, he does quite the opposite. Chaucer's borrowings from these poets were likely to have been recognized by his audience: the *Roman de la Rose* was a well-know poem, which Chaucer translated part of at some point in his life;[43] Froissart had spent time in the English court as a chronicler to Edward III's Queen Philippa until her death in 1369, [44] and Chaucer likely met him in the 1360s as they traveled from England to Calais at the same time.[45] Machaut wrote the *Fonteinne Amoureuse* for Jean Duc de Berry as the duke left for England in 1360 as a hostage after the Treaty of Bretigny.[46] Chaucer's use of the French poems makes explicit the *Book of the Duchess*' debt to them. It does of course diverge in a number of important ways, as borrowing elements from their poems reinterprets what he found in the French texts.

Minnis argues that Chaucer rewrites Machaut's *Behaingne*, where the King concludes that the knight whose lady scorned him suffers more than the lady whose lover is dead, for she will forget him. Instead, Chaucer's poem suggests that the lover whose lady is dead suffers more.[47] A number of other instances could be cited; the rereading of Ceyx and Alcyone discussed above emphasizes death and sleep rather than the reuniting of separated lovers after their deaths. Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours* provides another instance. Froissart's narrator is a sleepless lover who prays for sleep: "yet not long ago I did want to sleep and prayed so much to Morpheus, to Juno, and to Oleus, that they should send me sleep."[48] This prayer seems to be facilitated by his own mind, for no other impetus is given, unlike the prayer influenced by the book as in Chaucer's poem.

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[43] See Alfred David's Explanatory Notes, The Riverside Chaucer, 1104.
[44] Wimsatt, Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 118-20.
[45] Pearsall, The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 68.
[46] Wimsatt, Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 112.
[47] Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 110.
[48] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pg. 42.

Chaucer's narrator is likewise sleepless, and probably a lover.[49] After walking through a *locus amoenus,* Froissart's dreamer sits under a hawthorn tree and, remembering the pain of love, utters a complaint wishing for death.[50] Plaisance and Esperance appear, educate him against speaking ill of love, and advise him to be constant; he has composed a lay that he recites to Love, who gives the dreamer "such a reward as a true lover ought to receive," implying that his lady will love him, and advising him to trust in Hope.[51] Chaucer combines the subject of love in the *Paradys d'Amours* with that of death influenced by John of Gaunt's situation[52] and by Machaut's *Jugement* poems, taking from Froissart's poem attributes of the poet-lover and assigning them to both the sleepless narrator and the Black Knight uttering a complaint. Chaucer's inclusion of death eliminates the lover's wish fulfillment present in Froissart; his rewriting also removes the allegorical counselors. Chaucer's dreamer has no guide in the dream, nor does he have the social rank nor the knowledge of fulfilled love appropriate to counsel the Black Knight,[53] and the knight is not in a position to advise anyone, himself included. Froissart's Esperance, Hope, does not appear, nor is there an overlord or king as in Machaut's poems to utter a judgment or offer comfort. Although Chaucer's use of these texts does not gesture to the deeper disagreement with sources that will appear in later poems, his creation of experiences that are at once bookishly bound and divergent seems the first step to using such a complex combination of sources to ponder their usefulness,

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[49] Spearing and Minnis point out that the narrator's symptoms of sleeplessness, melancholy, fantasy, sickness closely resemble those of a lover (Medieval Dream Poetry, 59; Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 103).
[50] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pp. 42-43.
[51] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pg. 53.
[52] See Introduction, note 58.
[53] Minnis claims the knight also has "greater experience and depth of feeling" than the dreamer (Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 109).

and the sources of books themselves, as he does in the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls*.

The narrator's experience in the dream has been a source of considerable debate among scholars. Veering away from the hunt that brought him out of his bedchamber, the narrator sees a man in black sitting at the bottom of an oak tree and wonders, "Who may that be? / What ayleth hym to sitten her?" (448-48). After the Black Knight recognizes his presence, the narrator sets out to learn more: "I gan fynde a tale / To hym, to loke wher I myght ought / Have more knowledge of hys thought" (536-538). One of the central points of debate about the *Book of the Duchess* is how much knowledge the narrator has, and whether he is obtuse or tactful. Since the Black Knight mentions death in the lyric he recites when the dreamer encounters him, should the dreamer not know that death is a problem? Some years ago, James Kreuzer saw the narrator as naïve, arguing that this naïveté functions as a means of building suspense in the dream.[54] Some wonder if the narrator realizes before the end of the poem that the knight's lady is dead, while others speculate whether, as one who speaks colloquially, he can decipher the knight's formal language.[55] Others have speculated that the narrator might be acting politely, conventionally to a social superior, especially since the Knight is a figure of

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[54] "The Dreamer in the *Book of the Duchess*," PMLA 66 (1951), 544.
[55] Robert Jordan, "The Compositional Structure of *Book of the Duchess*," 107; Ruth Morse, "Understanding the Man in Black," Chaucer Review 15 (1981), 207; McGerr, Chaucer's Open Books, 52-53; Arthur W. Bahr, "The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's the *Book of the Duchess*," Chaucer Review 35 (2000), 50.

John of Gaunt lamenting the death of his wife Blanche.[56] The narrator has also been seen as both tactful and confused.[57]

It seems clear that a certain amount of tact is requisite in depicting any dreamer addressing a social superior, no less one with some correspondence to a real person as in this instance. As Minnis characterizes it, "the class-determined power and privilege of Gaunt's social position have been textualized in terms of a superiority of sentiment and emotional capacity."[58] Additionally, and often overlooked in arguments over this narrator, the position of the poet among aristocratic superiors in Froissart and Machaut is bound to have influenced the social dynamic in the *Book of the Duchess*. Yet Chaucer also diverges from those sources in crafting a narrator lacking the self-assured boldness of the narrator of the *Fonteinne Amoreuse*, a composer who hands his patron the transcription of the latter's complaint and upon whose lap the lord falls asleep, nor does he cast the narrator explicitly as a lover as is Froissart's poet in *Paradys d'Amours*. Chaucer's narrator is less confident, only implicitly a lover, less sure of the predicament of the Black Knight—but perhaps deliberately so, not only to give purpose to the knight's words, but also to critique the French narrators as overly confident of the company in which they find themselves. A book, rather than a sleeping aristocrat, lies upon the lap of Chaucer's dreamer. The narrator seems deliberately constructed not to show that he is either tactful or naïve—for as Garbaty argues, these views are too extreme[59]—but to emphasize the importance of reading itself. As Sturges points out, the Knight's refrain,

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[56] Muscatine noted the narrator's feigned ignorance (Chaucer and the French Tradition, 102). See also Minnis, Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 107.
[57] Bahr, "The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's the *Book of the Duchess*," 50.
[58] Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 109.
[59] "The Degradation of Chaucer's 'Geffrey,'" 98.

"Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest; / I have lost more than thow wenest" (743-44, 1137-38, 1305-1306), "insists that he must be interpreted rather than understood."[60]

The narrator encounters the knight and his story, itself constructed in part through composition. The dreamer overhears the Black Knight reciting a poem of lament:

> "I have of sorwe so gret won
> That joye gete I nevere non
> Now that I see my lady bryght,
> Which I have loved with al my myght,
> Is fro me ded and ys agoon.
> Allas, deth, what ayleth the,
> That thou noldest have taken me,
> Whan thou toke my lady swete,
> That was so fair, so fresh, so fre,
> So good that men may wel se
> Of al goodnesse she had no mete!" (475-86)[61]

Later, telling the dreamer how he fell in love with White, he says that he diverted himself "to kepe me fro ydelnesse, / Trewly I dide my besynesse / To make songes, as I best koude" (1155-57):

> Lord, hyt maketh myn herte light
> Whan I thenke on that swete wyght
> That is so semely on to see;
> And wisshe to God hit myghte so bee
> That she wolde holde me for hir knight,
> My lady, that is so fair and bryght! (1175-1180)

Thinking he will either die or tell her of his love, the knight opts for the latter, "my tale I tolde" (1199). Like the simple and trite rhymes of his lyric, he does so without proper skill, "For many a word I over-skipte / In my tale, for pure fere / Lest my wordes mysset were" (1208-1210), and she refuses him (1243). Texts are embedded in the knight's

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[60] Medieval Interpretation, 136.
[61] On the line numbering of this passage, see Benson's textual note to lines 479-80 in The Riverside Chaucer, pg. 1137.

experience, and he sees it as a "tale" in the lines quoted above. The dreamer shares his view, as he "herde hym tel thys tale" (710).[62] Both additionally highlight the literary nature of the knight's telling by using the term "complaint": the dreamer describes how the knight grows pale "Whan he had mad thus his compaynte" (487); the knight says that his "song ys turned to playnynge" (599). His experience of the past and his retelling of his experience take the form of literary activity.

The knight speaks for a considerable amount of time about White's beauty: she was "fairer, clerer, and hath more light / Than any other planete in heven, / The moone or the sterres seven" (822-24); she could dance, sing, laugh, and play, and was friendly (848-54); she had hair "most lyk gold" (855-58); her eyes were "Debonaire, goode, glade, and sadde, / Symple, of good mochel, noght to wyde" and seemed to bespeak mercy (860-67); she was moderate, "nas to sobre ne to glad" (880). The knight exclaims over her beauty:

> But which a visage had she theretoo!
> Allas, myn herte ys wonder woo
> That I ne kan discryven hyt!
> Me lakketh both Englyssh and wit
> For to undo hyt at the fulle. (895-99)

Despite his protestation of impoverished language, he does, however, go on to say that she was "white, rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed, / And every day hir beaute newed" (905-906). She was exemplary: "For certes Nature had swich lest / To make that fair that trewly she / Was hir chef patron of beaute, / And chef ensample of al hir werk" (908-11). Her neck was perfect, her throat "a round tour of yvorye" (946). As the knight describes

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[62] Howes notes that "tale" is used by the narrator for the stories of others rather than his own, and by the Knight for his own story (Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention, 42-43).

her, she is, literally, white. She is as gracious as, maybe more than, the Biblical Esther (985-88); she knows reason (1011-12); she was his everything (1037-41); she was as good and true as Penelope or Lucretia (1081-87). The Black Knight's descriptions of White are more poetically elaborate than the rest of the poem.[63] They also occupy a substantial portion of the poem; Muscatine noted that "The center of the poem is an idealized description of the lady, with a narrative, likewise idealized, of the winning of her by her lover."[64] This view of the knight's description has endured in more recent criticism seeing White as idealized and conventional,[65] reconstructed by "a hegemonic courtly discourse,"[66] indicative of the preservation that art offers.[67] In the course of the knight's description she becomes a text.[68]

Lynch has questioned such evaluations, however, arguing that the Black Knight also sees White's singularity, in saying that "y sawgh oon / That was lyk noon of the route" (817-18), and especially in his description of her as "to myn yë, / The soleyn fenix of Arabye, / For ther livyth never but oon, / Ne swich as she ne knowe I noon" (981-84).[69] While these instances suggest that the knight sees White's uniqueness, the knight also insists that everyone else saw in her what he did: she was the "alderfayreste" (1050), for "all that hir seyen / Seyde and sworen hyt was soo" (1052-53). In the knight's telling, her virtues, however unique they might have been, garnered universal approbation. Lynch

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[63] Minnis, Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 81-82.
[64] Chaucer and the French Tradition, 101. Also Robertson, "The Historical Setting of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," 187.
[65] Bahr, 53. Sklute Virtue of Necessity, 32; Kiser, Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991), 15.
[66] Burger, 337.
[67] Walker, 15.
[68] Burger, 338.
[69] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 46-47. For a similar view of White as not entirely conventional, see J.J. Anderson, "The Man in Black, Machaut's Knight, and Their Ladies," English Studies 73 (1992), 417-30.

further sees the knight as progressing from abstracting White in his early descriptions to representing her as a known entity, indicated by "the 'Nay' that is her only actual word in the poem."[70] The "Nay" is not her "actual word," however, for the Black Knight explains to the dreamer: "I kan not now wel counterfete / Hir wordes, but this was the grete / Of hir answere: she sayde 'Nay'" (1241-43). As he admits, he is translating. Here, and in the descriptions of White cited above, the knight puts forth his reading of her—as beautiful, moderate yet superlatively perfect, and now lost. Chaucer may be drawing upon nominalist discussions of singulars, as Lynch asserts, but he is also drawing upon romance conventions that paradoxically lay claim to the particularity and universality of the courtly lady. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier au Lyon*, for example, Yvain recognizes Laudine's particular grief over the death of her husband, as well as "her beautiful hair, which shines more brightly than pure gold," "eyes [that] flow with an endless stream of tears, yet there were never eyes so beautiful…I have never seen such a beautifully formed face, so fresh and so delicately colored…yet no crystal or mirror is so bright and polished." Yvain continues, "Would she not be amazingly beautiful to behold were she happy? After all, she is, even now in her fury, so fair….Never again would Nature surpass herself in a work of beauty—she has already exceeded the limits." In *Cligès*, Alexander's description of the lady with whom he has fallen in love includes a neck "eight times whiter than ivory."[71] Bright skin, gold eyes, beauty that is the "chef ensample of al hir [Nature's] werk" (911): a courtly lady seems always to be described, to use the Black Knight's words, "lyk noon of the route" (818).

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[70] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 50.

[71] Both poems from The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes, trans. David Staines. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), Yvain's description occurs on pg. 274 , Alexander's on pg. 97.

Although there is little reading as an act of opening a book inside the dream, the knight's descriptions constitute a reading of White that constructs her as a text.[72] Yet as she is reconstructed in the Black Knight's retelling, his idealizations create a sense of remoteness from her, even while she was alive. The majority of his descriptions are of the time before she accepted him, when she was still the distant woman that he loved unrequitedly, and he says little of their life together: he became "The gladdest, and the most at rest" (1280), while she forgave any of his errors and "took me in hir governaunce" (1286). She was ever true, and of the two together, he says:

> Our hertes weren so evene a payre
> That never nas that oon contrayre
> To that other for no woo...
> Al was us oon, withoute were.
> And·thus we lyved ful many a yere
> So wel I kan nat telle how. (1289-97)

As before, the knight idealizes, which might be considered reasonable for a grieving courtly lover to do. At the same time, White becomes both text and loss. The happiness of their togetherness abbreviated in favor of a past where he loved her from afar and a present where he laments her absence, the knight's tale emphasizes her remoteness. Referring to the knight's reconstruction of White, McGerr contends that the poem "suggests the power of poetic language to transcend mortality at the same time that the poem reveals the limitations of that power," for White remains dead.[73] The dialogue ends as the knight finally states that "She ys ded" (1309), and the dreamer reacts in pity: "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!" (1310). The "truth" revealed by the knight—

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[72] Walker, "Narrative Inconclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic in the *Book of the Duchess*," 15.
[73] Chaucer's Open Books, 59-60. Also Lynch: White is "felt less as a presence than, within conventional generic expectations, as an absence toward which the poem is striving" (Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 42).

"what ye have lore" (1135), according to one of the narrator's questions—is that she is dead, that she is lost.

Considering the dialogue between the dreamer and knight, the end of the dream, and the poem as a whole, debate often arises over the issue of consolation. Early in the dialogue, the dreamer casts the knight's telling as a remedy for his sorrow:

> For by my trouthe, to make yow hool
> I wol do al my power hool.
> And telleth me of your sorwes smerte;
> Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte,
> That semeth ful sek under your side. (552-57)

The dreamer raises the expectation of consolation, in response to which scholars have sought to find it in the poem. Strohm, for instance, asserts that the dreamer's questioning of the Black Knight "certainly promotes a series of healing recollections."[74] Boitani identifies a "consolatory design" in which "the consolation offered to the Knight, and through him to John of Gaunt, is that of the 'happiness of requited love,' which compensates for the cruel joke of Fortune and the final blow of death."[75] Wimsatt concludes that because of the influence of Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours* and Machaut's *Fonteinne Amoureuse* and *Remede de Fortune*, "the *Duchess* can be classified most appropriately...as a poem of 'complaint and comfort.'"[76] Helen Phillips has argued that in the poem "Boethian philosophy...offers an escape from human grief, but at the cost of denying the reality of the intensity of human, individual consciousness."[77] The dialogue

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[74] Social Chaucer, 52. Coleman also sees the knight as "cured," but fails to explain how that happens in the poem (Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France, 176).
[75] English Medieval Narrative, 145.
[76] Chaucer and the French Love Poets, 104.
[77] "Structure and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*," Chaucer Review 16 (1981), 115. Robertson also saw Boethian consolation in the poem, but would disagree with Phillips' conclusion about individuality ("The Historical Setting of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, 177, 190).

suggests otherwise, however. The knight refers to Fortune but does not, like Boethius, learn to regard Fortune's workings as beneficial to those to whom she seems cruel and cruel to those who seem blessed by her on earth. The knight views Fortune as "The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle" (620) against whom he has lost a chess match. Fortune has no faith, law or measure; she is like a scorpion who, continuing the chess metaphor, "stall on me and tok my fers" (654). His excuse for Fortune indicates that he does not comprehend the Boethian moral about the deceptive nature of good Fortune and the educative nature of bad Fortune,[78] for he focuses on his lady's value rather than an understanding of the workings of Fortune: had he been Fortune, he would have done the same and taken her; therefore, "She oghte the more excused be" (678) because "I dar wel swere she took the beste" (684). In Boethius' text, one of Philosophy's first actions is the dismissal of the Muses, yet at the same time she uses poetry and reason to educate and console Boethius. Remembrance and poetry put the Black Knight's feelings in order, but also bring further sorrow:

> Allas, myn herte ys wonder woo
> That I ne kan discryven hyt!
> Me lakketh both English and wit
> For to undo hyt at the fulle. (896-99)[79]

Moreover, where the knight in Machaut's *Behaigne* also blames Fortune for his lady taking another lover, he comes to realize that rather than blame Fortune, Bonne Amour, or the lady, he should instead learns that "one should not so love his joy that he is unable to do without it, when it's ended."[80] Chaucer's use of a similar scene seems to contain a

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[78] *Consolation of Philosophy*, II.VIII.
[79] See also 461-64, 1244-49, 1301-1306.
[80] Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pg. 102.

deliberate revision, with the Black Knight's thought process stopped before any of the realizations of the knight in the French poem.

The Ovidian story also bears consideration in the debate over consolation. As is generally noted, Alcyone and the Black Knight are similar in sorrowing over a lost spouse.[81] As mentioned above, the story as the narrator reads it ends with Alcyone's death, whereas Ovid's and Machaut's versions end with husband and wife reunited as kingfishers. The story in Chaucer's poem does not include the reuniting after death which would suggest consolation for the grieving spouse, be it Alcyone or the Black Knight. Another of Chaucer's sources, the *Remede de Fortune*, concludes with the poet being comforted by Hope,[82] a concept excised from the *Book of the Duchess.* Moreover, the narrator does not comment upon either Alcyone's or the Black Knight's story in a way that would invite a viewpoint that looks to the future. Even though the knight rides toward a castle with white walls, which has been read as indicative of a new beginning, a "blank slate,"[83] the walls of the castle are still by virtue of their color associated with his lost wife, and his vision remains bound to the earth.

Consolation has been seen as an issue for the narrator as well, due to his "sorwful ymaginacioun" (14) at the start of the poem. McGerr points out that the present tense verbs describing his "sorwful ymaginacioun" in the opening lines of the poem suggest

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[81] See, for instance: Boitani, English Medieval Narrative, 144; Phillips, "Structure and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*," 108-109; Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer, 83; Bahr, "The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's the *Book of the Duchess*," 55. As Cyndy Hendershot argues, the similarity between the two also places the knight in a feminized position ("Male Subjectivity, *Fin Amor*, and Melancholia in *The Book of the Duchess*," Mediaevalia 21 [1996], 9).
[82] Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pg. 408
[83] Hanning, "Chaucer's First Ovid," 140.

that even though he has slept, his prior state is also his present one.[84] Denis Walker argues that although the narrator and the knight fail to be consoled in the course of the poem, the responsibility to unite the different sections of the poem lies with the reader, who can be consoled through making such relations.[85] Considering that all the narrator learns in the course of the dialogue is that White is dead, which audience members would already have figured out, the conclusion of the dream is anti-climatic, frustrating, and even a bit comical, rather than comforting. As a poem in commemoration of John of Gaunt's wife Blanche, it compliments Gaunt in praising and lamenting what he has lost, but does not attempt to console him by explaining the working of Fortune or looking beyond the world. The lost woman, the text inside the dream, contributes to questioning the purpose of dreams, for White's conventionality is one from which neither the Black Knight nor the narrator learn a higher truth about love or death. As Lawton observes, Chaucer "presents him [Gaunt] with a poetic monument to his grief."[86] Helen Cooper points out that pagan elegies typically mentioned an afterlife.[87] In fact, no one in the poem thinks of the future. Alcyone focuses on her sorrow, Ceyx on the fact that he is dead. The narrator and Black Knight emphasize the past and the present: the narrator speaks of his reading and the dream that he *had*, the knight focuses upon the love and lady he *had* and the sorrow he *has* (especially the chiasmus in "y am sorwe and sorwe ys y" [597]), the poem ends with the narrator's assertion that this *was* his dream and now it "ys doon." The narrator's lack of commentary within the dream also points to this

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[84] McGerr, Chaucer's Open Books, 46. Also Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, 137.
[85] "Narrative Inconclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic in the *Book of the Duchess*," 15. David argues that both the waking narrator and the audience are consoled (The Strumpet Muse, 21).
[86] Chaucer's Narrators, 56.
[87] "Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority," 76. Edwards also affirms that the knight's looking to the past makes consolation problematic (The Dream of Chaucer, 91).

emphasis—he records events in the dream, focusing on the moments of the dream as they unfold—and his rereading of Ovid seeks not to put it in a universal moral order but to apply it to a particular situation. The poem answers its own question about consolation, suggesting that one will not find it here.

The narrator's response to White's dead—"hyt ys routhe!"—resembles his response to the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. Taking both stories as ones of pity, he comes again to a conclusion that one might not expect because he does not progress to a meditation about emotional pain or death. His only interpretation of White, that it is a pity that she is dead, suggests that for the *Book of the Duchess* narrator (as well as for Alcyone) reading has less to do with the meditative intellect than with emotional response. This model of reading is quite different from that described by Le Clerq and Carruthers: the dreamer discovers the knight's truth and is led not to the rediscovering of wisdom or the growth of ethical character but to a reaction of pity that is inconclusive—to what does his pity lead him? What, if anything, has he understood (about the knight, White, himself, death, experience) in expressing pity? These questions remain, as the hunting horn intrudes to end the dream, and the purpose of the dreamer's experience is unclear. His inconclusive response is further emphasized by a lack of commentary outside of the dream. After waking, the poet of *Paradys d'Amours* thanks Morpheus, "through whom all true lovers, as is right, are comforted in dreams and visions," and his messenger Iris.[88] Having prayed to Morpheus, the *Book of the Duchess* narrator wakes upon the book he has read—a seeming invitation for the kind of conclusion in Froissart's poem. Instead, Chaucer's narrator offers no meditation upon his reading or the knight's

[88] Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pg. 57.

story, other than finding it "so queynt a sweven" (1330), such a curious dream, that he will write it "in ryme" (1332). It is a curious wonder, echoing the preamble of lines 276-89 that questions the categorization and purpose of the dream.

Reading as an emotive experience in the *Book of the Duchess* points to its individuality—it may be rather conventional, in the case of the Black Knight, or rather unconventional in the cases of Alcyone and the narrator-dreamer. Each contributes to the reassessment of reading and the purpose of dreams in the poem. Texts with a presence in the *Book of the Duchess* that contain conventional elements—the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, the *Roman de la Rose*, Machaut's and Froissart's poems, White—have unexpected results. Rather than meditating upon White, the narrator's pity is inconclusive and does not offer the consolation he sets out to provide to the Black Knight, and it is unclear that he has learned anything other than that the lady is dead.[89] The knight's sorrow is validated rather than corrected by the dreamer's response. The absence of a guide such as Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's Raison and Boethius' Philosophy, in the presence of other concepts from their works, underscores the emotive reading evidenced in the poem. Rather than rational resolution or consolation, the readers redirect themselves: the Black Knight rides to his castle whose walls remain suggestive of his loss, and the narrator seems to find distraction rather than consolation in reading his book, his emphasis on sleep, the dream and the Black Knight's story, and writing his dream at the end of the poem.[90] The narrator's rereading of the Ovidian story leads to the dream, suggesting that interpretation itself might facilitate dreams, an idea that questions

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[89] Even the *Roman de la Rose* dreamer admits, in parting the petals of the rose, "All this I should not have done" (pg. 353).
[90] Hanning reads the ending lines as escape ("Chaucer's First Ovid," 124).

medieval authorities on the subject: can a dream be prophetic if it is based on an interpretation? Might it instead be a nightmare, or a fantasy? Might none of the dream categories be sufficient? What is the intellectual and literary purpose of a dream? Such questioning also begins the *House of Fame*.

CHAPTER 3

The "ful confus mater" of the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls*

Concerns over the ability of dreams to reveal truth, a poem's self-conscious relationship to other texts, and the place of reading and antecedent texts in the *Book of the Duchess* also find expression in the *House of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls.* The theme of books versus experience again appears, and the opening lines of both poems emphasize reading. Both end in searching: the *House of Fame* narrator's search for "tydynges" breaks off in mid-sentence with a "man of gret auctorite" (2158); the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator keeps reading and reading for "som thyng for to fare / The bet" (698-99). Each poem, however, seems to draw a different conclusion concerning books and reading. The *House of Fame* suggests that the great literary authors' material is an indistinguishable blend of truth and lies rooted in gossip, thereby questioning the very material that one reads. On the other hand, the conclusion to the *Parliament of Fowls* suggests that although reading Cicero's text has been unsatisfactory before the dream, so have the dream experiences in Venus' temple and the debate of the birds, and reading books might be a more fruitful enterprise after all.

The poems' statements about reading are themselves connected to the rewards granted to the dreamers. Although the eagle explains that Geffrey's journey is a reward for his service to love, he also criticizes the narrator for reading so much that, "domb as any stoon, / Thou sittest at another book / Tyl fully daswed ys thy look" (656-58).

Africanus appears to tell the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator that "Thow hast the so wel born / In lokynge of myn olde bok totorn,...That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte" (109-112). The nature of their rewards is not clear, however, as the *House of Fame* narrator who has read so diligently about love voyages through the sky to the House of Fame, where the authors of war are more prominent than those of love. The love of "commune profit" advocated in the *Parliament* narrator's reading of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* is not the kind of love he observes in the temple of Venus, nor in the self-centered debate of the birds which follows.

The revelation that takes place in the Houses of Fame and Rumor expresses the "truth" of what constitutes famous stories and calls attention to the process of composition. The *Parliament of Fowls* explores, sometimes all at once, issues of love, poetry, reading, dreaming, and the poem's relationship to prior texts. The authority of Nature, of the *Somnium Scipionis* which Macrobius valued, and the assuredness of Dante's division of infernal and paradisal love are questioned in this poem through the noisy debate of the birds, the narrator's dissatisfaction with reading Scipio's dream, the gate inscription, and the contents of the park itself. In examining issues of reading, of dreams, and of source texts, the *House of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls* deepen the questioning begun in the *Book of the Duchess* concerning the kind of truth one expects to be revealed in a dream vision.

The *House of Fame*

The *House of Fame* places textual production directly in front of the dreamer's vision. He observes a text, as did the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, but he also sees the

raw material of which poems are composed. The *House of Fame* is a poem born of intense reading, deep thought, and great ambivalence. Seeing Dido live a conflicted literary life, observing a labyrinth of "tydynges," of fragile yet sturdy wicker that is quite potent in its ability to disseminate gossip, the narrator views issues of truth, textual composition, and poetry at once.

At one time, scholars pondered how to situate the *House of Fame* with Chaucer's other poetry. Muscatine viewed it as experimental and inconsistent.[1] In the decade after Muscatine's study, B.G. Koonce argued for unity and artistry in the poem by reading it as an allegory of earthly and heavenly love and fame imitative of Dante's *Commedia*.[2] Scholars have since reevaluated the poem, arguing that its unity lies in its self-conscious relationship to dreams and books themselves. Confessing himself somewhat bemused, Spearing has said that it is a poem "which seems ready to fly apart when touched, but in which also everything comes to seem connected with everything else."[3] Boitani claims that the poem expresses a conscious inferiority to Dante, where Chaucer "comes to understand the limits of his 'vertu' and his 'art', measuring them against Dante's achievements."[4] Taylor disagrees, however, arguing that where Dante asserts a place for the authorized word of God, Chaucer points to the fictive nature of stories and the problem of determining truth, and that Chaucer ultimately challenges Dante but offers no

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[1] Chaucer and the French Tradition, 108. Payne tends to this view as well, surmising that Book I is not related to the rest of the poem, and that Book III is a "reduplicating tedium" of Book II (The Key of Remembrance, 133, 227).
[2] Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in *The House of Fame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), especially 75-88, and Chapters III-V where Koonce argued that Books I, II and II of the *House of Fame* are comparable to Dante's Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, respectively.
[3] Medieval Dream Poetry, 73.
[4] "What Dante Meant to Chaucer," 124.

alternatives to him in the *House of Fame*.[5] The poem's relationship to authority has been noted by a number of critics. Cooper argues that "the auctores of the *House of Fame* are shown to be the spokesmen for an arbitrary Fame whose relationship to truth is completely random. Authority is reduced to the level of rumor."[6] McGerr asserts that the poem "encourages readers to question the criteria for discerning truth in any form of discourse."[7] Fyler notes that "books and life prove to be equally suspect as sources of truth."[8] Hanning also concludes that the depiction of Fame points to "the impossibility of any viable authority."[9] Edwards similarly ponders, "Given the arbitrary nature of signs and their interweaving of truth and falsehood, how can authority function to enforce distinctions and secure the possibility of knowledge over and against rumor and opinion?"[10]

A self-conscious relationship to other texts is also a self-conscious relationship to reading. In the *House of Fame*, reading complicates both the texts the narrator has read and, as indicated in the Proem, the status of dreams themselves, expanding the *Book of the Duchess* narrator's challenging of Joseph and Macrobius. Where the *Book of the Duchess* suggests that interpretation may cause dreams, the *House of Fame* clouds the issue. The narrator begins, "God turne us every drem to goode!", then proceeds with a complex sentence that interrogates dream interpretation:

> For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
> To my wyt, what causeth swevenes
> Eyther on morwes or on evenes,

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[5] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 38, 40-41.
[6] "Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority," 77-78.
[7] Chaucer's Open Books, 61.
[8] Chaucer and Ovid, 23, also 57.
[9] "Chaucer's First Ovid," 141.
[10] The Dream of Chaucer, 8-9.

And why th'effect folweth of somme,
And of somme hit shal never come;
Why that is an avision
And why this a revelacion,
Why this a drem, why that a sweven,
And noght to every man lyche even;
Why this a fantome, why these oracles,
I not; but whoso of these miracles
The causes knoweth bet than I
Devyne he, for I certainly
Ne kan hem noght, ne never thinke
To besily my wyt to swinke
To knowe hir significance. (2-17)

He continues to catalogue possible causes: dreams are caused by bodily humors, or "By abstinence or by seknesse," or a prison cell, or being "to curious / In studye," or melancholy, or dread, or devotion and contemplation, or "the cruel lyf unsofte / Which these ilke lovers leden," or spirits, or the soul's knowledge of what is to come—concluding "But why the cause is, noght wot I" (21-52). The catalogue is, as Fyler points out, "an instance of order gone haywire."[11] The narrator's deferrals of causation in the Proem, using the anaphora of "or" to enumerate a variety of options, suggest in the very structure of the Proem the confusing plethora of possible interpretations, setting out a chaos of interpretation that later resurfaces in the House of Rumor. As Kruger points out, the opening lines highlight the difficulties presented in interpreting dreams as they were treated by commentators from Macrobius and Augustine forward, who tended to see dreams as both suspect and revelatory.[12] Edwards argues that the Proem establishes the idea that "dreams are not intelligible species or proper objects of knowledge," adding that questions are raised about the causes of dreams "precisely in order to leave them

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[11] Chaucer and Ovid, 25.
[12] Dreaming in the Middle Ages, 57.

unanswered."[13] The array of possible causes for dreams (the naming of which suggests that the narrator does know them although he declares otherwise) runs a gamut of bodily, mental, and physical conditions; rather than leaving unanswered questions, however, the chaotic catalog suggests that dreams, as the narrator will later discover of Fame, are perhaps even arbitrary. The introduction to the dream seems to confirm that idea; unlike the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* where reading bears a direct relationship to the dream, the narrator goes to sleep out of habit: "Whan hit was nyght to slepe I lay / Ryght ther as I was wont to done, / And fil on slepe wonder sone" (112-14).

Additionally, in the Invocation preceding the dream, the narrator makes murky the purpose of the dream. The narrator prays to Morpheus who lives "Upon a strem that cometh fro Lete" (71) that he will tell the dream correctly. Then, he asks "he that mover ys of al" (81) to give joy to those who hear it, but he also curses any who through "hate, or scorn, or thorgh envye, / Dispit, or jape, or vilaneye, / Mysdeme hyt" (95-97). This passage seems to draw upon the poet's address to his audience in Froissart's *Le Temple d'Honneur*: "And I want you to prepare yourself for reading it and attend properly to what the material may mean, for the novelty of the subject may naturally stimulate the heart and, if the attention is divided, then the act of reading urges it to be more perceptive and receptive to novelties."[14] Both invite the audience to interpret, but the address is more ambiguous in the *House of Fame*, for instead of a reading that will move the heart, Chaucer's narrator leaves ambiguous the purpose of rightly or wrongly interpreting the

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[13] The Dream of Chaucer, 94, 97. See also Lynch, Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 66. Bennett comments that the Proem sets up the idea that "we should be prepared for developments that may be far from conventional" (Chaucer's *Book of Fame*: An Exposition on 'The House of Fame' [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 5).

[14] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, 133.

poem. Such an Invocation also conjures the incongruous combination of sleep and forgetfulness. While Morpheus is connected to dreams and dream visions, in this instance, as Minnis comments, "Morpheus…is not a reliable Muse,"[15] for the reference to Lethe also brings into the poem the idea of erasing memory, upon which accurate telling of the dream is dependant. The Invocation comically yet strikingly creates an environment where interpretation seems necessary because of the prayer and curse, but with an invocation to sleep who resides downstream of forgetfulness, certainty is nigh impossible.

Within the dream, the narrator's reading first occurs in the Temple of Venus. Unlike the images in the bedchamber which have no effect on the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, this dreamer stops to read the story of Dido and Aeneas, which appears first as words and then images:

> But as I romed up and doun,
> I fond that on a wall ther was
> Thus written on a table of bras:
> "I wol now singe, yif I kan,
> The armes and also the man
> That first cam, thurgh his destine
> Fugityf of Troy contree,
> In Italye, with ful moche pyne
> Unto the strondes of Lavayne." (140-48)

Quoting (and modifying, with "yif I kan"[16]) the opening of *Aeneid*, the story that follows is couched in terms of vision: "First *sawgh* I" the destruction of Troy, "And next that

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[15] Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 165. Bevington notes that Morpheus is "a ridiculous deity to invoke when Geffrey is requesting the attention of his audience for the next hour" ("The Obtuse Narrator in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," Speculum 36 [1961], 291). See also Kiser, Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 26.

[16] Taylor sees "yif I kan" as a sign that "the dreamer's recreation of the *Aeneid* differs from the original in a way that is almost a personal signature of new authorship" (Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 28). Although Kiser acknowledges that it is a "very personalized version of the *Aeneid*," she calls the

sawgh I" how Venus came down to tell Aeneas to flee the city; how Aeneas' wife Creusa was lost in a forest, and her ghost told him to flee to Italy; how he fled with his father and his household (151-93); how the storm arose "That every herte myght agryse [tremble] / To see hyt peynted on the wal" (209-11); how Venus prayed to Jupiter to save Aeneas; how Aeneas tells Dido his story (151-253); how Aeneas sails toward Italy (433); how Aeneas and the Sybil go to Hades to see his father (439); how Aeneas arrives in Italy (451). As Taylor points out, there is a blurring of the boundaries between visual representation and speech, presenting the story of Dido "as a mental experience" that relates the experience of reading the story.[17] The narrator is, literally, sight-reading.

The story is a retelling of the "traytour" Aeneas (267) and foolish Dido "That loved al to sone a gest" (288). As is commonly acknowledged, the story draws upon the Dido of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides*.[18] It begins "Thus writen" on a tablet (142), then moves from seeing to speech then back to seeing, all related to forms of oral and silent reading. When the *House of Fame* narrator encounters Dido's part of the story, he notably switches from seeing to telling and uses the present tense: "But let us speak of

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borrowings from the *Heroides* a short while later "inappropriate Ovidian echoes" (Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 28).

[17] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 25-26. Edwards calls it a "drama of recollection" in a "theatre of images" that includes speeches (The Dream of Chaucer, 101).

[18] The twelfth century *Roman d'Eneas* also treats Dido sympathetically, but Minnis dismisses it as a source on the grounds that the technique both poets use, *ordo naturalis* as opposed to *ordo artificialis*, was a widely known technique and not specific to the French poem (Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 188). Barbara Nolan discusses the *Eneas*-poet's description of Dido's love as foolish, which draws upon the Dido of the *Heroides*, but she does not connect it with the *House of Fame*; (Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman antique* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 84-89). Nolan points out that the French poet translates Ovid's *stulta* (*Heroides* VII.28) to *fole*. Since both label Dido's love foolish, and the French poem borrowed from Ovid, it is difficult to determine whether Chaucer used the *Eneas* as a source.

Eneas, / How he betrayed hir, allas, / And lefte hir unkyndely" (293-95).[19] The narrator's "unkyndely" suggests sympathy for Ovid's Dido,[20] recalling the later Roman poet's version, which strips her of the frenzy Virgil uses to describe both her love and her reaction to Aeneas' leaving.[21] Rather than attributing Aeneas' departure to divine intervention as in Virgil,[22] the Ovidian Dido focuses on Aeneas' lack of "trouthe." For example, Ovid's Dido writes, "A second love remains for you to win, and a second Dido; a second pledge to give, and a second time to prove false."[23] Chaucer's Dido asks, "O, have ye men such godlyhede / In speche, and never a del of trouthe?" (330-31), generalizing where Ovid's does not, and amplifying the comment about Aeneas' oaths into false speech more generally—a concern that resurfaces in Book III of the *House of Fame.*

Chaucer's Dido is not only Ovid's, as the above instance suggests. Where Ovid's Dido wishes for the Fame of her relationship with Aeneas to be buried,[24] Chaucer borrows from Virgil reference to the working of Fame:

> "O wel-awey that I was born!
> For thorgh yow is my name lorn,
> And alle myn actes red and songe
> Over al thys lond, on every tonge.
> O wikke Fame!—for ther nys

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[19] Sklute claims that the story in the temple is not really about the story itself but about "the relationship between a storyteller and the medium through which he tells his story" (Virtue of Necessity, 38), yet the story and its medium hardly seem separable as the text becomes image and image becomes text.
[20] Bennett, Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 38; Bevington, "The Obtuse Narrator in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 294; Sklute, Virtue of Necessity, 39; Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer, 101.
[21] Enflamed with love after hearing Aeneas' story, Dido walks through Carthage in a frenzy like a wounded deer (IV.68-76); Fame spreads news of Aeneas' plans before he can speak with her, and she raves as if at a Bacchic festival (IV.301-302); confronting him, she insults Aeneas' lineage, denying that Venus is his mother, and says that he was instead nursed by Hyrcanian tigresses (IV.365-67); see also IV.283-84, 433-34, 465-66.
[22] See *Aeneid*, IV.360-61, 393-96, 440-49, 566-70.
[23] *Heroides* VII.17-18. See also VII.7-10, 29-30, 79-82.
[24] *Heroides* VII.92.

Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!" (345-50)

Fame's speed echoes *Aeneid* IV.173-74, where *Fama* spreads word of Dido and Aeneas' meeting in the cave; Dido's awareness of her lost reputation draws on IV.321-23 where she tells Aeneas that she has lost the good fame she had.[25] Dido provides a thematic link to Fame in Book III but attributes cruelty to Fame, who will instead be revealed as a goddess of whim. Dido's perception of Fame also foreshadows Criseyde's comments regarding her own literary afterlife in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Glenn Steinberg has argued that the *House of Fame* focuses on poets in "conflict over legitimacy and supremacy," but also that allusion to an authority stakes a claim to some of its cultural capital.[26] Fyler claims that in both Ovid's and Chaucer's texts, Virgil is cast as "half historian, half liar," other than the reliable guide that he was for Dante, and that the *House of Fame* asks whether Aeneas is heroic or faithless.[27] Indeed, in using Ovid's Dido, Virgil's text becomes less authoritative, and focusing on Aeneas' faithlessness questions his heroism, as Ovid also does when his Dido accuses Aeneas (and Virgil) of lying when he said that he bore his father and his household gods on his shoulders.[28] Hanning has characterized the story as the "usurpation" of Virgil by Ovid's *Heroides*.[29] Ovid's text does take over in relating Dido's story, yet to rewrite Virgil, to reread him by using Ovid, also creates a rereading of Ovid: Dido is ruined not only by

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[25] Many scholars have noted the influence of Virgil in Dido's speech here. For instance, Koonce, Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame, 117-18; Bennett, Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 37; Boitani, Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 182-83.

[26] "Chaucer in the Field of Cultural Production: Humanism, Dante and the *House of Fame*," Chaucer Review 35 (2000), 184-85.

[27] Chaucer and Ovid, 31, 39, 45. McGerr argues that including Dido's point of view makes a place for alternate interpretations and serves as a reminder that such alternatives are possible (Chaucer's Open Books, 67).

[28] *Heroides* VII.79-82.

[29] "Chaucer's First Ovid," 152. Bennett characterizes it similarly: "All of Chaucer's sympathies, even while he shows her folly, are with Dido" (Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 38).

Aeneas' falsehood—telling "How he betrayed hir, allas, / And lefte hir ful unkyndely" (294-95)—but also by Virgil's *Fama*, and by her own "nyce lest," her foolish desire (287). Sheila Delany argues that Virgil and Ovid claim separate truths,[30] and according to Taylor, using Virgil and Ovid together makes obvious that each is a fiction.[31] As Minnis points out, there was sufficient awareness in Chaucer's time of the fact that Virgil had manipulated chronology to make Dido co-existent with Aeneas, even though he had probably not encountered Boccaccio's discussion of the subject in the *Genealogia*; rather, Chaucer probably encountered the idea from familiarity with Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, which he cites in the G Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, or from Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. Minnis concludes, "It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that Chaucer was aware of the fictionality of the story, or at least that its historical truth was questionable."[32] The conflict between Virgil and Ovid as recast in Venus' temple foreshadows the quarreling over Troy between the enshrined authors in Fame's palace. The conflicting stories in the temple, however, suggest that rather than battling for supremacy or gathering authority through using Ovid and Virgil, as Steinberg claims, the texts are subject to interrogation. There is a dual re-reading in the narrator's experience in the temple, indicating the interdependency of the two stories, even as one questions the other: Dido is both wronged by Aeneas, as in Ovid, and subject to Fame, as in Virgil; the false Aeneas of the *Heroides* is also the Aeneas who leaves because the book, Virgil's *Aeneid*, says so (427-32).

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[30] Chaucer's *House of Fame*: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984), 56. Also Lynch, Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 71.
[31] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy,' 29.
[32] Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 233.

The textuality of Dido's story also appears as the narrator refers to the sources of the images. After Dido "rof hirselve to the herte / And deyde thorgh the wounde smerte" (374-75), the narrator refers his audience to both texts: for "alle the wordes" of Dido and the way in which she died, "Rede Virgile in Eneydos [*Aeneid*] / Or the Epistle of Ovyde, / What that she wrot or that she dyde" (378-80). The narrator's awareness of the story's textual heritage is punctuated by a catalog of false men from Ovid's *Heroides* (Demophoon, Achilles, Paris, Jason [twice false, to Hypsipyle and Medea], and Theseus who "as the book us tellis" left Ariadne for her sister Dianera) and by the excuse he gives for Aeneas' leaving Dido. As noted above, he leaves because the book said so: "But to excusen Eneas / Fullyche of al his grete trespass, / The book seyth Mercurie, sauns fayle, / Bad hym goo into Italye" (427-30).[33]

One might extract a moral about love from the scenes of Dido who is, the narrator points out, foolish for loving Aeneas too soon.[34] Yet as Minnis notes, Chaucer's version of the story minimalizes the importance of Venus whose influence is much more direct in Virgil.[35] Even though the narrator finds the story in Venus' temple, the lesson is rather about false men, and not against loving but against loving without knowledge beyond appearance. Unlike the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess*, who refrains from commentary on events in the dream as he relates them, the *House of Fame* narrator does reflect on the dream as he recounts it:

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[33] The excuse for Aeneas resembles the excuses the narrator gives in *Troilus and Criseyde*: e.g. that his author does not say what Criseyde is thinking (III.575-77), that he only says what his author says (II.17-18). The excuse for Aeneas seems to be a way of side-stepping the assignment of responsibility; rather than blame Aeneas entirely, the book is the culprit (the reasons of Aeneas' founding of Rome and marrying Lavinina are omitted in the version the narrator sees). See Chapter 4 below for discussion of the narrator's excuses in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

[34] E.g. Koonce, who saw Dido as an example of carnality (Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame, 111-13).

[35] Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 194.

Allas! what harm doth apparence,
Whan hit is fals in existence!
For he to hir a traytour was;
Wherfore she slow hireself, allas!
Loo, how a woman doth amys
To love hym that unknowen ys! (265-70)

He additionally advises his audience against the false appearances of men like Aeneas:

Therfore be no wyght so nyce
To take a love oonly for chere,
Or speche, or for frendly manere,
For this shal every woman fynde,
That som man, of his pure kynde,
Wol shewen outward the fayreste,
Tyl he have caught that what him leste;
And thane wol he causes fynde
And swere how that she ys unkynde,
Or fals, or privy, or double was.
Al this seye I be Eneas
And Dido, and hir nyce lest, [foolish desire]
That loved al to sone a gest. (276-88)

Where the *Book of the Duchess* narrator concludes with pity for Alcyone and the death of White, this narrator's emotive reading does extract a moral against loving too soon. Additionally, the narrator's comments—in the present tense where the story is in the past, in offering proverbial advice that "Hyt is not al gold that glareth" (272) and "he that fully knoweth th'erbe / May saufly leye hyt to his yë" (291-91), and in referring his audience to other stories (Ovid and Virgil, 378-80, and Virgil, Claudian and Dante, 448-50)—foreshadow the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* who acts likewise as he writes his story and casts himself as a reader. John Finlayson has argued that the *House of Fame* narrator's commentary makes him into "a character rather than merely a recording device."[36] Compiling the story results in commentary upon it, but it does not necessarily

[36] "Seeing, Hearing and Knowing in *The House of Fame*," Studia Neophilologica 58 (1986), 49.

make the narrator into a fully realized character.[37] As Lawton points out, the narrator is not characterized with the consistent tone and range of responses that one expects from a character; rather, the narrator is a persona who is part of the workings of the poem and whose voice is not the author's.[38] The narrator becomes even more of a presence in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where it is clear that he has added to and deviated from the story he has read. In the *House of Fame* such addition happens to a lesser degree, in instances such as the exclamation of "How he [Aeneas] betrayed hir, allas, / And lefte hir unkyndely" (294-95); he laments over the images in a fashion similar to the *Troilus* narrator who laments over his pen in setting out the last two books of that poem. In both poems, the faithful translator occupies an uneasy position, one that in the *House of Fame* will be complicated by what the narrator sees later in the poem.

The narrator, alone in the temple, wonders who made the images, "But not wot I whoo did hem wirche, / Ne where I am, ne in what contree" (474-75). Introducing the lament of Dido, the narrator makes a place for himself in the story:

> In suche wordes gan to pleyne
> Dydo of hir grete peyne,
> As me mette redely— [truly]
> Non other auctour alegge I. (311-13)

At first glance, these might seem the words of a confused narrator, for we know that Chaucer draws upon both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides* in the story on the temple walls. At the same time, however, what the narrator utters is true (and is perhaps one of Chaucer's quietest jokes): there is no other author for the story as it appears before his

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[37] In this I agree with Spearing's caution about separating the narrator too far from the poet, although I disagree with his assertions that one cannot detect a narrative persona operating in Chaucer's poetry. See Introduction pp.17-20.

[38] Chaucer's Narrators, xii, 47. Sklute makes a similar distinction between poet and persona/narrator (Virtue of Necessity, especially 7-9, 26).

eyes, for as it exists in the temple it *is* in fact his, as the combination of Ovid's and Virgil's stories occurs in his dream, and there really is no other author. Chaucer also seems to be drawing on *Le Temple d'Honneur*; the company of people to whom the poet is telling his dream asks him to write it down, which he does, saying "with my own hands I wrote my dream, neither more nor less, in the form that you see."[39] In Chaucer's poem, phrasing the dreamer's activity as seeing potentially disguises the fact that reading—he knows both Ovid and Virgil, since he refers readers to them (378-80)—has facilitated the images, as well as the declaration of authorship itself.

He exits the temple to find someone to advise him (to "rede" him) who made the images inside, but there is no one to do so, and the dreamer dramatically finds himself alone in a vast desert:

> As fer as that I myghte see,
> Withouten toun or hous, or tree,
> Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond;
> For al the feld nas but of sond
> As small as man may se yet lye
> In the desert of Lybye.
> Ne no maner creature
> That ys yformed be Nature
> Ne sawgh I, me to rede or wisse. (483-91).

The desert has been seen as a spiritual and a creative wasteland.[40] On the other hand, McGerr argues that the sand is not a wasteland because it is "the material of artistic creation," of which the temple of glass is made.[41] Edwards observes that the sand, "minute and as seemingly infinite as in the Libyan desert, represents what he is about to

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[39] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pg. 133.
[40] For the former view, see Koonce, Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame, 81, 126; Bennett, Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 47-48. For the latter view, see Boitani, English Medieval Narrative, 108, and Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame, 10. The desert has also been seen as a blank expanse representative of the real world (Kiser, Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 29; Hanning, "Chaucer's First Ovid," 153).
[41] Chaucer's Open Books, 68.

uncover in a realm of ever increasing sound."[42] Sklute similarly argues that the desert lends "an uncertain value to the images and an uncertain value to the experience" in the temple.[43] Fyler finds the dreamer in an epistemological dilemma because he does not know who made the images.[44] While the dreamer is in a conundrum, the scene also underscores his assertion that there is no other author for what he has seen: no one is there to counsel him because *he* created the images through his reading and dreaming.

Delany and Koonce claim that the ambiguities in the poem are resolved through the narrator's exclamations to God: "God turne us every drem to goode!" (1), "the holy roode / Turne us every drem to goode!" (57-58), and, standing by himself in the desert, "O Crist...that art in blysse, / Fro fantome and illusion / Me save!" (492-94). Koonce saw such lines as opening up the possibility for ironic allegorical interpretation, wherein the poem explores true and false love and fame.[45] For Delany, the narrator's exclamations suggest a "skeptical fideism" that, despite the ambiguities in the poem, express a reliance upon God to resolve what the narrator cannot.[46] Such readings discount the humor of an exasperated narrator who figuratively throws up his hands over the interpretive puzzles with which he is confronted. Additionally, as Edwards points out, the references to God suggest that "some kind of intention ought to be at work," but they do not resolve the issue in the Proem (lines 1 and 57-58) of what causes dreams.[47] Taylor points out that the pleas to God neither claim truth nor provide instruction for interpretation.[48] Additionally,

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[42] The Dream of Chaucer, 102.
[43] Virtue of Necessity, 39.
[44] Chaucer and Ovid, 40.
[45] Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame, 57, 72.
[46] Chaucer's *House of Fame*: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism, 41.
[47] The Dream of Chaucer, 98.
[48] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 38.

McGerr notes that the exclamations give a sense of closure, but that sense is undermined by the inconclusive intervening material.[49] Indeed, and rather than offering the advice Geffrey seeks, the appearance of Jove's eagle redirects his vision.

The narrator's journeys in the dream express a relationship to books that in Book I questions the authority of the narrator's books, in Book II appears to affirm, and in Book III again questions them. In Book I, Virgil and Ovid become problematic rather than authoritative.[50] In Book II, the narrator's flight with Jove's eagle leads him to refuse experience and turn to his books instead. Jove has asked the eagle to carry Geffrey to the House of Fame "To do som disport and game, / In som recompensacion / Of labour and devocion" (664-66), for a reward "So that thou wolt be of good chere" (671). As Hanning points out, the flight with the eagle recalls "the heavenly journey to find truth or complete a great task," while at the same time, "Chaucer trots out these metaphors of enlightenment" only to deflate them.[51] Kruger similarly argues that the poem's "revelatory movement keeps being weighted down, pulled back from abstract causes and ideas."[52]

The eagle tells Geffrey where Fame lives, "An so thyn owne bok hyt tellith" (712), i.e. as Virgil describes in *Aeneid* IV.181-88, and as Ovid describes in *Metamorphoses* XII. The eagle also explains that "Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken" (765) and that "Be experience" he will prove that all sound comes to Fame's abode—it moves

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[49] Chaucer's Open Books, 62.
[50] As Fyler notes, Virgil does not serve as a guide for the narrator as he was for Dante; the Christian Dante goes to heaven, this narrator only to the House of Fame (Chaucer and Ovid, 44, 54).
[51] "Chaucer's First Ovid," 153-54.
[52] "Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer's *House of Fame*," Chaucer Review 28 (1993), 128.

upward as does water when a stone is tossed in it (788-803). On the way up, Geffrey thinks of Martianus Capella and of the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille,

> That sooth was her descripsion
> Of alle the hevenes region,
> As fer as that y sey the preve;
> Therfore y kan hem now beleve. (987-90).

Experience proves his books correct, and so Geffrey refuses knowledge of the stars; he tells the eagle, "For y am now to old" (995), he will instead believe his books, "Hem that write of this matere, / As though I knew her places here" (1012-14), and besides, he might be blinded: "Hyt shulde shenden al my sighte / To loke on hem" (1016-17). He refuses the eagle and, by extension, the authority of Jove who sent him and the authority of Dante's divine eagle who appears in a dream as Lucia carries the sleeping Dante to the gate of Purgatory in *Purgatorio* IX and who speaks authoritatively on divine justice in *Paradiso* XIX. Yet the narrator's refusal, qualified with "As though," indicates that his assurance in his books is not total—although he will rely upon them, his statement indicates a measure of uncertainty about the knowledge they provide. His experience of literary texts in Book III affirms that resignation.

The Houses of Fame and Rumor reiterate the question of Book I: What do we do with conflicting stories? The narrator observes the process of composition, a blend of gossip, rumor, lies and truth, and the "rewards" that poets receive for their labors. The House of Fame contains things that are read, authors, and those who seek her favor; Rumor depicts the material used by authors in making texts.

Inside Fame's dwelling, Geffrey sees "many a peler / Of metal that shoon not ful cler," upon which stand "folk of digne reverence," authors which he readily recognizes

(1421-22, 1426). The authors bear their stories on their shoulders, for example Statius "bar of Thebes up the fame / Upon his shuldres, and the name / Also of cruel Achilles" (1461-63). Writing of the weighty matter of stories, Geoffrey of Vinsauf instructs the readers of his treatise on poetry: "You thirst now to understand this whole art. But instead, slice off small portions, and do not take up several together, but instead lift one at a time—a very small one—and less by a good bit than your shoulders are willing and able to bear. So it will be a pleasure and nothing heavy to lift."[53] While some authors fare well (e.g. Ovid "bar up wel hys fame" 1486-85), the authors of Troy share a burden not so pleasurable as the labor Geoffrey describes. Among them are Dares and Dictys, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne and Geoffrey of Monmouth; they bicker, accusing Homer of lying:

> But yet I gan ful wel espie,
> Betwex hem was a litil envye.
> Oon seyde that Omes made lyes,
> Feynynge in hys poetries,
> And was to Grekes favorable;
> Therfor held he hyt but fable. (1475-80)[54]

The dreamer's observation in the House of Rumor reinforces this idea:

> Thus north and south
> Wente every tydyging fro mouth to mouth,
> And that encresing every moo,
> As fyr ys wont to quyke and goo
> From a sparke spronge amys,
> Til al a citee brent up ys. (2075-80)

Tidings flare up and spread like fire engulfing a city; while Troy was not burned by gossip, it was probably the most easily identifiable burning city in literature (and the

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[53] *Poetria Nova*, pg. 104.
[54] This debate goes back to Plato, who concluded that Homer told lies because he portrayed the gods as both good and bad (*Republic*, 379a-381e, 391b-c).

rewriting of the story by numerous authors lead to numerous re-burnings of the city). Authorial contention over a story of Troy resurfaces in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Here, it recalls the conflict between Virgil and Ovid in the first part of the dream, again gesturing not only to the disagreement between but to the interdependence of different versions of the story. Translation may attempt to displace previous texts, as Copeland argues,[55] but in Chaucer's text the previous versions remain as palpable referents because of that very attempt at displacement, as the bickering between the authors of Troy demonstrates: Homer has to occupy a central position for the debate over his veracity to have currency.

Taylor reads the bickering over Troy as indicative of the necessity of reading, where "Authors need the help of readers to make their voices heard."[56] The force that makes other voices heard, however, is irrational, as the goddess herself acknowledges to the first and eighth companies. The first asks for good fame "In ful recompensacioun / Of good werkes" (1557-58), which Fame refuses "For me lyst hyt noght" (1564); the eighth asks for good fame although they had done "the grettest wikkednesse / That any herte kouthe gesse" (1813-14), and Fame's denial of their request hinges not on reason but again on her whim: "Al be ther in me no justice, / Me lyste not to doo hyt now, / Ne this nyl I not graunte yow" (1820-22). Fame's irrationality seems an extension of the individual reading displayed in the *Book of the Duchess*, where the narrator rereads Ceyx and Alcyone according to his own situation and reacts to the story of White with pity. Fame's reading, however, has wider repercussions, affecting the world of texts, a world in which the narrator is deeply involved, as indicated by the eagle's chastisement of him

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[55] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages, 94, 198. See my Introduction, pp. 32-33.
[56] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 35.

for sitting inside and reading so much that he does not even know his neighbors. Fame's actions indicate that there is no reason why some stories are forgotten while others are either valorized or become infamous.

The narrator pauses his description of the authors and their stories:

> What shulde y more telle of this?
> The halle was al ful, ywys,
> Of hem that written olde gestes
> As ben on treës rokes nestes;
> But hit *a ful confus matere*
> Were alle the gestes for to here
> That they of write, or how they highte. (1513-19 emphasis added)

As well as echoing the catalog of causes for dreams that become a "ful confus matere" in the Proem to Book I, the confusion referred to here foreshadows the House of Rumor where there is such a swell of tidings that Geffrey hardly finds a place to stand (2041-42). Books and dreams, and the stuff of books as he observes in this dream, are full of confusion that is not easily ordered, and the narrator does not attempt to put them in order.[57] One might read this comment as indicative of the narrator's ineptitude; on the other hand, it displays an authorial choice: without cataloguing the "olde gestes" as he catalogued possible causes of dreams and instead of putting the unruly matter in order, he relays the sense of disorder created by the authorities in Fame's house. Recording an observation, in this instance, is a matter of authorial choice, blurring the boundary between author and compiler.

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[57] Lynch reads the poem as a parody of attempts to organize the world (Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 64).

Bennett argued that Rumor is disordered and chaotic, unlike Fame's house,[58] yet the House of Fame itself is not as ordered as it seems, as the above description indicates. To be sure, the wicker House of Rumor takes disorder to a new level as it unravels poetic composition. It presents "the raw material of tradition"[59] as the images in the temple and the material of the authors on Fame's pillars are reduced to tidings: if a text is an interwoven tapestry, the House of Rumor presents a tangled snarl of yarns. The narrator gives another catalog, again of "ful confus matere":

> And over alle the houses angles [corners]
> Ys ful of rounynges and of jangles
> Or werres, of pes, of mariages,
> Of reste, of labour, of viages,
> Of abood, of deeth, of lyf,
> Of love, of hate, accord, of stryf,
> Of loos, of lore, and of wynnynges,
> Of hele, of seknesse, of bildynges, [comforting]
> Of faire wyndes, and of tempestes,
> Of qwalm [plague/death] of folk, and eke of bestes;
> Of dyvers transmutacions
> Of estats, and eke of regions;
> Of trust, of drede, of jelousye,
> Of wit, of wynnynge, of folye;
> Of plente, and of gret famine,
> Of chepe, of derthe, and of ruyne;
> Of good or mys governement,
> Of fyr, and of dyvers accident. (1959-76)

The plethora of subjects above, of which numerous poems have been composed, becomes in the passage below an even further confused mass of information. After the eagle places him inside the wicker house, he describes the tidings he sees and hears:

> And every wight that I saugh there
> Rouned everych in otheres ere

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[58] Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 171, 176. Boitani has also argued that Fame, although fickle, imposes order (Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame, 6).
[59] Delany, Chaucer's House of Fame, 106.

A newe tydynge prively,
Or elles tolde al openly
Ryght thus, and seyde: "Nost not thou
That ys betyd, lo, late or now?"
"No," quod he, "telle me what."
And than he tolde hym this and that,
And swor therto that hit was soth—
"Thus hat he sayd," and "Thus he doth,"
"Thus shal hit be," "Thus herde y seye,"
"That shal be founde," "That dar I leye." (2043-54)

The narrator views rereading in action as tidings are whispered, "rouned," or passed "al openly," all sworn to be the truth. As Steinberg comments, "Chaucer seems to imply that poetic tradition persists and evolves primarily through opposition, struggle, and discord."[60] Indeed, a story changes with each telling:

But al the wondermost was this:
Whan oon had herd a thing, ywis,
He com forth ryght to another wight,
And gan him tellen anon-ryght
The same that to him was told,
Or hyt a forlong way was old, [before it is 2 or 3 minutes old]
But gan somewhat for to eche
To this tydynge in this speche
More than hit ever was.
And nat so sone departed nas
Tho fro him, that he ne mette
With the thridde; and or he lette
Any stounde, he told him als;
Were the tydynge soth or fals,
Yit wolde he telle hit natheles,
And evermo with more encres
Than yt was erst. Thus north and south
Wente every tydyging fro mouth to mouth,
And that encresing every moo,
As fyr ys wont to quyke and goo
From a sparke spronge amys,
Til al a citee brent up ys. (2059-80)

[60] "Chaucer in the Field of Cultural Production: Humanism, Dante, and the *House of Fame*," 184.

And of the tidings that fly out, he observes a lie and true speech competing for the same window. They quarrel with each other, with the result being that neither wins:

> "Lat me go first!" "Nay, but let me!
> And here I wol ensuren the,
> Wyth the nones that thou wolt do so,
> That I shal never fro the go,
> But be thyn owne sworen brother!
> We wil medle us with other,
> That no man, be they never so wrothe,
> Shal han on [of us] two, but bothe
> At ones, al beside his leve,
> Come we a-morwe or on eve,
> Be we cried or stille yrouned."
> Thus saugh I fals and soth compouned
> Togeder fle for oo tydynge. (2096-2109)

They are inseparable, each becoming a "sworen brother" to the other, again whether cried out loud or whispered. True and false versions of a story become indistinguishable, and they proceed directly from Rumor to Fame: "Thus out at holes gunne wringe / Every tydynge streght to Fame, / And she gan yeven each hys name, / After hir disposicioun" (2110-13). The tidings, themselves of dubious veracity, are then subject to the whim of Fame. As Sklute observes, "The combination of truth and falsehood that constitutes rumor may also be said to constitute reputation and, by extension, the varied, authoritative, and famous documents" with which Chaucer was dealing.[61] In the process the narrator observes, stories are doubly filtered by Rumor and Fame, and the "oo tydynge" of true and false "compouned" suggests that it is nearly impossible to determine whether Homer or his accusers are liars, or whether Ovid or Virgil is telling the truth about Dido and Aeneas. It is likely, according to what the narrator sees, that they all used the tidings of "fals and soth compouned" in writing their stories.

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[61] Virtue of Necessity, 26.

The "end" of the poem as we have it also fails to validate one perspective over the other. The narrator hears "a gret noyse withalle / In a corner of the halle, / Ther men of love-tydynges tolde" (2141-43) and sees everyone running as fast as they can, as in a "hepe" (2149) they climb all over each other, look up, and step on others in anticipation. The poem ends with the narrator's comment that "Atte laste y saugh a man, / Which that y [nevene] nat ne kan; / But he semed for to be / A man of gret auctorite" (2155-58).[62] Where Boitani tends to view the man as Dante,[63] others disagree that he can be named or that he possesses authority. Bennett argued that "It seems unlikely that he was intended as a *deus ex machina*: the main action [seeing tidings] is manifestly over."[64] Taylor makes a similar point, that the focus of the poem is the process of how tidings come to be, and the man of authority could not validate anything for a certainty.[65] As Spearing states, the poem "lead[s] up to the non-delivery of doctrinal truth by one who only '*semed* for to be / A man of gret auctorite.'"[66] As Edwards also states, "anything he might say within the system of discourse that Chaucer has conceived would necessarily be subverted."[67] Indeed, he *appears* to be a man of great authority, but he is unnamed and located in the house of gossip where tidings are dubious.

Edwards reads Book III as a speculation that "poetry might be the only form of knowledge."[68] If so, its foundation is unreliable. The depictions of Fame and Rumor

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[62] Editor's addition at line 2156.
[63] "What Dante Meant to Chaucer," 124.
[64] Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 184.
[65] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 38. For similar conclusions, see also Hanning, "Chaucer's First Ovid," 150; Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," Speculum 60 (1985), 874; McGerr, Chaucer's Open Books, 77; Lynch, Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 79.
[66] Medieval Dream Poetry, 82, emphasis original. See also Finlayson, "Seeing, Hearing and Knowing in *The House of Fame*," 55.
[67] The Dream of Chaucer, 120.
[68] The Dream of Chaucer, 112.

undermine authority: Homer might be a liar, but so might his accusers. The gossip and reinterpretation observed by the narrator are the stuff of texts, the foundation of reading. What is perhaps most disturbing about the poem's presentation of Fame and literary materials is that the narrator does not comment, positively or negatively, on what he sees in Rumor, and he offers little commentary on Fame. He denies that he is there to seek her favor:

> "I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
> For no such case, by me hed!
> Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
> That no wight have my name in honde." (1874-77)

His conclusion, that he will "As fer forth as I kan myn art" (1882), seems to suggests that if there is a lesson he learns, it is against seeking Fame.[69] Because he is a writer, however, there seems to be no way that he can avoid the arbitrary goddess; Geffrey has just observed that all sound works its way there and that Fame works her will, unbidden or not. Whether he likes it or not, she has his "name in honde."[70] And, as Bennett pointed out, while Geffrey does not seek Fame, at the same time "he avoids pretentiously despising Fame."[71]

What are readers and writers to do, then? Distrust all? Treat all reading subjectively? Laurel Amtower argues for the latter, seeing the poem's examination of authority leading to the conclusion that reading is subjective and must be freed from the

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[69] As Hanning puts it, "By the time he and we have experienced the workshop of Fame, Geffrey's reluctance makes excellent sense, for we know that the judgments of posterity and the fame-giving labors of the great storytellers are merely versions of rumormongering" ("Chaucer's First Ovid," 156).
[70] Fyler makes a similar point, in Chaucer and Ovid, 61. See also Spearing, Medieval Dream Poetry, 84; Delany, Chaucer's House of Fame, 103.
[71] Chaucer's *Book of Fame*, 163.

"tyranny of tradition."[72] Reading does take on subjective dimensions in the poem, but rather than gesturing to a need to free oneself from tradition, the *House of Fame* indicates the opposite, that tradition is inescapable, flawed though it is by contradictions, also suggesting that it is less than tyrannical. No sound escapes Fame, nor do alternatives to her appear. The workings of Fame, the only active authoritative figure in the poem, are arbitrary and without reason. In the *Somium Scipionis*, by contrast, the Elder Scipio tells the Younger that wanting fame on earth is a narrow aspiration and that he should look to eternal reward instead.[73] Earthly fame is equated with gossip in the *Somnium* but with a different purpose: in Cicero's text gossip illustrates the narrowness of such fame; in Chaucer's text the emphasis is that Fame is gossip, there is no alternative, and she casts a wide net as every sound makes its way to her. Fyler argues that although the *House of Fame* highlights "the impermanence and illusory quality of every subject it has touched," we are also left with a sense of the "vitality" of transitory things.[74] Yet this vitality is cast in dubious terms by the bewildering number of tidings in Rumor's wicker house, as well as the man of *auctorite*'s appearance there; everyone except the narrator flocks to him for what he can offer, and their easy recognition of him suggests that he is well-known there. There is, in short, no authority that does not depend upon Rumor and Fame. Authority is at the least potentially misleading, and at the worst arbitrary. Literary tradition is destabilized in the poem, as the House of Rumor is part of its perpetuity, and the place of reading and authorship are thereby questioned. The poem questions what Dido and

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[72] "Authorizing the Reader in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," Philological Quarterly 79 (2000), 289. Robert Clifford comes to the same conclusion ("'A Man of Great Auctorite': The Search for Truth in Textual Authority in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The House of Fame*," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 81 [1999], 161).
[73] Stahl trans., pp. 75-76.
[74] Chaucer and Ovid, 64.

Aeneas ultimately signify, as the images in Venus' temple comment upon each other, complicating the truth of the story, which seems to reside wholly in neither: the images in the temple are the result of the true and false tidings that escape together. Rather than asking readers to choose one story over the other, the poem seems to query both: can Aeneas be both false to Dido and heroic—"Pius Aeneas" as the narrator calls him (1485), using Virgil's own phrase when he sees Virgil bear his fame?

Boitani has claimed that Chaucer's theme in the *House of Fame* is "the disorder of the human universe in contrast with the order of the natural cosmos, the theme of reality and illusion."[75] I would revise his thesis by stating that the theme seems to be the disorder created by reading and texts themselves, which paradoxically seek to make sense of the world (the *Aeneid*, for instance, ultimately relates the founding of Rome). The dreamer's experience points to a lack of success on the part of literature in relaying an ordered sense of the world. Chaucer is not imitating Dante here,[76] but showing how the classical literary tradition both poets share is quite conflicted. Dante inscribed Virgil into his poem as an authoritative guide, and translated Statius into a Christian in *Purgatorio* XXII. In the *House of Fame*, both occupy pillars of iron as writers of warfare; they are part of the crowd of authors who bear up the weighty matter of Troy, and who argue among themselves (1475-80). Dante's translation of the two authors occurs as part of his redemptive journey, while in Chaucer's poem they are retranslated to question their authority. As Steve Ellis points out, "Dante's utter surrender to the *auctoritas* of

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[75] English Medieval Narrative 161-62.

[76] Boitani sees Chaucer's relationship to Dante as that of an inferior; Dante was "a classic—a poet to venerate or to ignore, but impossible to imitate" ("What Dante Meant to Chaucer," 115). Ginsberg also argues that Dante was to Chaucer both grand and remote (Chaucer's Italian Tradition [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002], 30-31).

Virgil...can find no echo in a poem which questions the very concept of literary *auctoritas*."[77] Because they are Dante's authors, Chaucer seems not only to question them, but Dante's use of them as well. As Boitani himself points out, "Dante is his own god of Fame" because he grants fame to the inhabitants of the *Inferno* and uses it "as a means to salvation" in *Paradiso* XVIII.13ff., where Cacciaguida tells Dante that he must tell all of his vision.[78] Chaucer's Fame, however, the grotesque goddess drawn from the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*, provides no such rescue. Amtower concludes that readers are responsible for determining value,[79] but the narrator's journey demonstrates that texts can be faulty guides, and readers should be wary. Texts are the stimulus for reading and the products of it, and the process of textual production depicted in the poem suggests that the value readers attach to a work by creating an interpretation of it resembles the creation of yet another tiding about a story.

In the end, it seems that neither books nor experience prove entirely dependable. Geffrey's flight with the eagle validates what he has read, but he refuses, in favor of reliance upon his books, the eagle's offer to show him the constellations. The dreamer's decision is called into question by his observations of Fame and Rumor, as he observes the experiences of which texts are composed—the act of telling is an experience that becomes inseparable from the books composed of these tidings.[80] The answer to the question of reliance upon books or experience seems to be that there is no real separation between these two entities in Chaucer's dream visions. The eagle rebukes the narrator's

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[77] "Chaucer, Dante, and Damnation," Chaucer Review 22 (1988), 285.
[78] Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame, 78, 90.
[79] "Authorizing the Reader in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 283.
[80] Boitani argues the opposite, that there is a contrast between books and experience in the poem (English Medieval Narrative, 163).

being cooped up reading, but he proceeds to give the narrator an experience that shows him what his books have already indicated, "so thyn oune bok hyt tellith" (712). Having identified himself as a writer in the invocations to each book of the poem,[81] the relationship between books and experience becomes an issue of authorship as well. Books, images on the wall, seeing and hearing tidings, dreaming itself—all are interpretive experiences. Similar issues arise in the *Parliament of Fowls*, a "complete" poem, unlike the *House of Fame* which breaks off and leaves the dreamer still sleeping, but one that in many ways expresses the same concerns.

The *Parliament of Fowls*

Issues of love and poetry, evidenced in Geffrey's visit to the temple of Venus in *House of Fame*, are magnified in the *Parliament of Fowls*. Love occupies the narrator's mind from the start; it is "The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne, / Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge, / The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne" (1-3). The opening lines draw upon Horace's *ars longa vita brevis,*[82] merging love and poetry, which in the following lines become issues of reading. The narrator does not know Love himself, but reads about it:

> Yit happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede
> Of his myrakles and his crewel yre.
> There rede I wel he wol be lord and syre;
> I dar nat seyn, his strokes been so sore,
> But "God save swich a lord!—I can na moore." (10-14)

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[81] ll. 77-80, 517-28, 1091-93.
[82] Bennett, The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 28; Boitani, English Medieval Narrative, 173; Sklute, Virtue of Necessity, 49; McGerr, Chaucer's Open Books, 86; Boitani, "Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams," 68.

Fyler argues that the poem "explicitly raises the question of what it means to be a reader instead of a lover,"[83] but as the opening lines set out, reading is an integral part of love and poetry, the crafts so hard to learn.[84] The narrator describes his general practice: "Of usage—what for lust and what for lore— / On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde" (15-16). Then, he tells of a particular reading experience:

> Nat yoore
> Agon it happede me for to beholde
> Upon a bok, was write with lettres olde,
> And thereupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
> The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne. (17-21)

While reading can be for pleasure, "for lust," as well as for "lore," on this occasion knowledge of "a certeyn thing" occupies him, drawing on *rēden* as reading for learning and for particular information, in addition to the senses of guidance, advice, and counsel. The narrator reads so eagerly for such a purpose, in fact, "That al that day me thoughte but a lyte" (28). His book is "'Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun.' / Chapitres sevene it hadde, of hevene and helle /And erthe, and soules that therinne dwelle" (31-33). Love, poetry, reading, and now a relationship to other texts are quickly foregrounded in the frame to the dream.

There is a conscious concern throughout with the place of reading. Stopping his reading of Cicero because it is getting dark, the narrator readies himself for bed, "Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse, / For both I hadde thyng which that I nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde" (89-91). Reading this book has not given him what he sought to learn and has given him what he did not want. The love of which the narrator

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[83] Chaucer and Ovid, 83.

[84] Kiser argues that the opening lines create an analogy between love and poetry as crafts that are difficult; one of her main arguments is that Chaucer points out how difficult it is to write poetry (Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 43-44).

seeks to learn seems not to be the love for commonwealth nor the lechery presented in Scipio's dream.[85]

Kiser sees lines 90-91 as "a failure to get started on the poem at hand,"[86] but the dream that follows is cast as a reward for the reading he has just completed. As Africanus tells him,

> "Thow hast the so wel born
> In lokynge of myn olde bok totorn,
> Of which Macrobye roughte nat a lyte,
> That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte." (109-12)

The narrator denies a connection between his reading and his dream—"Can I not seyn if that the cause were / For I hadde red of Affrican byforn" (106-107)—but it is clear that his reading has influenced the appearance of Africanus. At the same time, the poem seems to question the nature of the reward, since the narrator's reading of the book has not provided that which he seeks. A few lines later, the dreamer attributes the dream to "Cytherea," Venus, "That with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest / And madest me this sweven for to mete" (114-15) and asks for her help in writing. He attempts to recast the dream, as one related less to Cicero than to the love with which he began, but as he will later see, they are contained in one realm.[87]

After Africanus "me hente anon" (120), he takes the dreamer to a walled park, and the narrator is confronted by the inscription on the gate. The inscriptions, written in gold and black, read:

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[85] Cherniss, Boethian Apocalypse, 125; Boitani, "Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams," 68.
[86] Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 45.
[87] Love in its different manifestations, many have noted, is an important occupation in the poem. For instance, Bennett, The Parlement of Foules, 148; Brewer, Introduction, Parlement of Foulys (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 14-16; McCall, Chaucer Among the Gods, 63; McGerr, Chaucer's Open Books, 88.

"Thorgh me men gon into that blysful place
Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;
Thorgh me men gon unto the welle of grace,
There grene and lusty May shal evere endure.
This is the wey to al good aventure.
Be glad, thow redere, and thy sorwe of-caste;
Al open am I—passe in, and sped thee faste!"

"Thorgh me men gon," than spak that other side,
Unto the mortal strokes of the spere
Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,
Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.
This strem yow ledeth to the sorweful were
There as the fish in prysoun is al drye;
Th'eschewing is only the remedye!" (127-40)

The narrator's reaction is interpretive paralysis, stuck as if between two magnetic rocks:

Right as betwixen adamauntes two
Of evene might, a pece of yren set
Ne hath no myght to meve to ne fro—
For what that oon may hale [attract], that other let [repels]. (148-51)

He stands in such a state, "that nyste whether me was bet," until Africanus "my gide, / Me hente and shof in at the gates wide" (152-54). His "gide" tells him that "this writyng nys nothyng ment bi the" because it is only for Love's servants (158-59). Telling him, "I shal the shewe mater of to wryte" (168), Africanus takes the dreamer's hand, and they enter the park only for Africanus to disappear, and once again Chaucer's dream narrator is on his own. Cherniss points out that as Boethius instantly recognizes Philosophy, so does the dreamer know Africanus, whose dissolution suggests that there is no one authority that can guide him.[88] As Chaucer conjures elements of dream visions in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame* only to use them to a different purpose than

[88] Boethian Apocalypse, 125, 129.

other poets, here the expectation of revelation that a guide might otherwise supply is again frustrated.

As reading has a dual nature, for pleasure and learning, "lust" and "lore," so does Love. Cherniss points out that Love is not in this poem "a single allegorical figure, capable of coherent characterization or analysis"; additionally, the two inscriptions on one gate suggest that these two kinds of love cannot be wholly separated.[89] Cherniss acknowledges the poem's differences from Boethian predecessors, such as the *Roman de la Rose* where Love is both allegorical and consistent in his presentation. Thus far, love is "dredful joye," the lechery of those who whirl around the earth according to Scipio's dream, and something to direct not to oneself but to "comune profit"; in the dream, the narrator encounters love as paralytic, destructive, and irrational, but also natural.

Nearing the temple of Venus, the narrator sees figures: Plesaunce, Array, Lust, Curteysie, Craft, Delight and Gentilesse standing by themselves under an oak, Beauty unadorned, Youth, Foolhardiness, Flattery, Desire, "Messagerye," Meed, and an unnamed "other thre" (218-29). He also observes Peace and Patience sit by the door, with Patience on a hill of sand (242-43), as well as "Byheste" (promises), Art, and a company of others "withinne and ek withoute" (244). Encountering such figures, one might expect them to speak to the dreamer, as happens in other dream visions, but Chaucer's dreamer records them without commentary.[90] In Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours*, Plesaunce is one of love's ladies who counsels the dreamer to have restraint and be constant, and whose

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[89] Boethian Apocalypse, 120, 127.
[90] Kiser sees the figures as "waiting idly for some action in which to take part" (Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, 48).

speech consoles the dreamer.[91] Youth is one of the king's counselors in Machaut's *Jugement du Roy de Behaigne*, and Courtesy, Beauty, and Desire are among the king's household who ask the lovers to stay after the debate is decided.[92] Where in the French poems these figures counsel and comfort the dreamers and lovers, they are in Chaucer's poem reduced to silence,[93] indicating that it is unclear what the dreamer can learn just from *looking* at them. Ferster suggests that the figures' ambiguity results from a "confusion between self and world" on the part of the narrator "that results from self-interested interpretation."[94] The dreamer's observation of the figures, couched in terms of sight and lacking the commentary present in the *House of Fame*, suggests that there is nothing that he can, or does, learn from them.

The approach to the temple is also highly influenced by Boccaccio's *Teseida* VII,[95] where Palamon's prayer visits the temple of Venus. Chaucer borrowed a number of figures: Courtesy, Beauty (also unadorned), Youth, Foolhardiness, Flattery, Peace, Patience. Yet those who speak in Boccaccio's poem—e.g. Beauty and Charm, "each of them praising the other"[96]—are also silent in *Parliament of Fowls.* The list in Chaucer's poem includes what seem to be pleasant and unpleasant aspects of love, which has led to the conclusion that that the love represented in and near Venus' temple is of the

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[91] Windeatt, Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues, pp. 46-47.
[92] For Youth's advice, see Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pp.152-54, 160.
[93] My argument here agrees with Minnis' argument that Chaucer strips moral allegories from stories in order to pay attention to the literality of texts. My argument diverges in focus from Minnis in that I see the literal level as indicative of a kind of reading different from allegorical exegesis and of an interest in reassessing reading; Minnis asserts that Chaucer writes as an "historical" poet expressing interest in past thoughts and actions of pagans in *Troilus and Criseyde* and The Knight's Tale (Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 5-6, 22).
[94] Chaucer on Interpretation, 52.
[95] Bennett, The Parlement of Foules, 81-83; Boitani, English Medieval Narrative, 176; McCall, Chaucer Among the Gods, 61.
[96] *Teseida*, Havely trans., Chaucer's Boccaccio, pg. 129.

cupidinous kind.[97] However, as none of the figures speak, it is difficult to discern what they would say about themselves, about love, or about the dreamer. Moreover, while Craft, Meed, and Foolhardiness are located near the temple, so are Curteysie and Gentilesse,[98] and absent from Chaucer's park are the more negative personifications of Foul-Mouth, Shame, and Fear present in the garden of the *Roman de la Rose*. Ferster argues that "Seeing an object is action because to see it may be to transform it through interpretation."[99] Indeed, the dissolution of Africanus and the silencing of figures who appear in source texts may be statements about the poem's literary antecedents: Virgil and Ovid in opposition led to confusion and a subtle commentary on the narrator's own authorship in the *House of Fame*; in the *Parliament of Fowls* the translation of articulate figures into silent ones suggests that they literally have nothing to say, in this garden, to this dreamer.

Inside the temple, the narrator hears the hot sighs of Jealousy (246-52), sees Priapus ready to copulate as he was when caught by the ass (253-59),[100] and views Venus "in a prive corner" laying on a bed, naked from the waist up: "The remenaunt was wel kevered to my pay, / Ryght with a subtly coverchef of Valence— / Ther was no thikkere cloth of no defense" (271-73). In his commentary on the *Teseida*, Boccaccio says he is using the second kind of Venus, "who causes all kinds of lust to be desired."[101] Referring to "the author" in the third person, he adds that "Through Venus's beauty, which we

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[97] Brewer, Introduction, The Parlement of Foulys, 31.
[98] Cherniss, Boethian Apocalypse, 132; Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid, 90. McCall likewise notes that in this section of the poem "joy mingles with ugliness and its pleasure with anxiety and failure" (Chaucer Among the Gods, 61).
[99] Chaucer on Interpretation, 60.
[100] As Chance points out, "This moment of delay, sexual frustration, suspension, matches neatly the conclusion of the debate among the birds" (The Mythographic Chaucer, 99).
[101] *Teseida*, pg. 131.

know to be a frail and transient thing, he represents that false judgment of pleasure-lovers which through true reason we can very easily recognize and prove to be baseless."[102] Chaucer's narrator only comments that Venus' covering is pleasing (as cited above, she is "wel kevered to my pay") and that he walks outside "myselven to solace" (297). It is unclear what has prompted the need for solace, for between the two comments, the narrator has not stayed to look at Venus but has walked further into the temple, observing maidens who have "here tymes waste" in service of Diana (283), as well as images:

> peynted overall
> Ful many a story, of which I touche shal
> A fewe, as of Calyxte and Athalante,
> And many a mayde of which the name I wante. (284-87)

He sees failed lovers painted there, depicting "al here love, and in what plyt they dyde" (294): Semiramis, Candace, Hercules, Biblis, Dido, Thisbe, Piramus, Tristram, Isolde, Paris, Achilles, Helen, Cleopatra, Troilus, Scylla, and Ilia, "the moder of Romulus" (292). As in the *Book of the Duchess* and *House of Fame*, images from texts appear on the wall in the dream. Like those in the *Book of the Duchess* and like the figures outside the temple, these are also silent, and the narrator does not comment on them directly as does the *House of Fame* narrator, who pauses considerably over Dido's story. Ferster comments that "An uninvolved narrator could report on the existence of the garden without needing solace,"[103] yet it remains unclear whether he is in need of solace after seeing Venus, the images on the wall, or both. The images and figures in the temple suggest negative attributes of Venus, holding what the black inscription promised. At the same time, there is no clear boundary between the territory associated with the golden

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[102] *Teseida*, pg. 132.
[103] Chaucer on Interpretation, 54. For the opposite view, see Spearing, Medieval Dream Poetry, 99.

inscription and the darker territory of Venus; in fact, as Cherniss observes, there seems to be some shared space, for the narrator sees Cupid and Wille forging and tempering arrows (212-17) just after describing the temperate, paradisal landscape that is neither hot nor cold, filled with "holsom spice and gras," where neither death nor sickness occur, and there is "joye more a thousandfold / Than man can telle" (205-209).[104] As Cherniss also points out,

> Venus cannot be wholly evil; she is a permanent, inseparable part of the symbolic garden which encompasses love's complex experience...'Th'eschewing is the only remedy' (line 140) by which one can be certain of avoiding the fate of love's unhappy martyrs, but if one does not enter the garden, he also eschews the promise of the gold inscription.[105]

Indeed, where Dante's gate contains one inscription and leads to the Inferno, the gate to Chaucer's park leads to both good and bad love, blurring the distinction between the two.

Exiting Venus' temple, the narrator comes upon the hill where Nature sits while her birds flock to her. As allegorical figures are reduced in Venus' temple and elsewhere in the park, the birds are just birds: the only gift they have is speech and unsatisfactory advice.[106] Nature decrees that the birds will choose their mates "By my statut and my thorgh my governaunce" (387), and the choice must be accepted by both parties, according to "oure usage alwey, fro yer to yeere" (411). The royal tercel chooses first, as he is the most noble of the birds, but two other tercels in attendance also choose the formel, prompting the debate that ensues over Nature's chosen exemplar: "In hire was

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[104] Boethian Apocalypse, 131.

[105] Boethian Apocalypse, 134. Bennett argues that "the ambivalence of the concept is part of the very theme of the poem" (The Parlement of Foules, 98).

[106] Maureen Quilligan argues that the birds' speech de-allegorizes them, as opposed to their allegorical existence as embroidery on Nature's dress in Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae* ("Allegory, Allegoresis, and the Deallegorization of Language: The *Roman de la rose*, the *De planctu naturae*, and the *Parlement of Foules*," Allegory, Myth, and Symbol, Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981], 164-176).

everi vertu at his reste, / So ferforth that Nature hireself hadde blyse / To loke on hire" (376-78).[107] The birds' comically noisy advice is revealing of their impatience and plays with the overlap between *rēden* as reading/interpretation and advice. The lower birds protest over the delay in being able to choose their mates, crying out "Whan shal youre cursede pletynge have an end?" (495), with the goose, cuckoo, and duck chiming in, in birdlike fashion, "Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!" (499). The cuckoo offers to speak "of my owene autorite" for worm-fowl with the opinion that "For comune spede," the debate should be held and concluded (506),[108] while the turtledove says "Bet is that a wyghtes tonge reste / Than entermeten hym of such doinge, / Of which he neyther rede can ne synge" (514-16). The turtledove advises those who know nothing about such things against offering advice, but the "rede" in her speech could also mean those unable to interpret the situation. The other birds offer their "red," their interpretation of the situation and advice for a conclusion so that they may choose their mates. The goose's "kakelynge" is that "I seye I rede him, though he were my brother, / But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!" (566-67). The turtledove "preyse[s] nat the goses red" (586), preferring instead the idea that he should serve her always even if she never loves him. The cuckoo speaks for birds who eat worms, and wanting to have his mate in peace, counters: "I reche nat how longe that ye stryve. / Lat ech of hem be soleyn al here lyve! / This is my red, syn they may nat acorde" (606-8). The wording emphasizes that there is a considerable amount of "red"-offering occurring, with all of the birds interpreting from their own points of view.

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[107] White is similarly described in the *Book of the Duchess*, ll. 908-11.
[108] As McGerr points out, the argument for "comune profit" in Cicero is here voiced by the cuckoo, "a less likely authority" (Chaucer's Open Books, 94).

As Sklute points out, "each of the disparate opinions [of the birds]...has about it a political validity that makes unanimous consensus impossible and even obscures the question at issue."[109] The tercelet falcon's opinion is that the debate cannot be solved by reason, concluding that the most suited for is the eagle who is one "worthieste / Of knyghthod, and longest had used it, / Most of estat, of blod the gentilleste" (548-50). In fact, Reason, the corrective Lady Philosophy figure of the *Roman de la Rose*, whose advice the king chooses over that of Youth, Love, and Loyalty in Machaut's *Jugement du Roy de Behaigne*,[110] is absent from this park. Nature, who began this debate by declaring "Hold youre tongues there!" (521), declares it finished: "Now pes...I comaunde heer!" (617). She decides that the formel herself will choose, but adds her own advice:

> "But as for counseyl for to chese a make,
> If I were Resoun, thanne wolde I
> Conseyle yow the royal tercel take,
> As seyde the tercelet ful skylfully,
> Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce
> That to yow hit oughte to been a suffisaunce." (631-37)

Her acknowledgement that she is not Reason highlights the unreasonability of the debate, with birds descending into bird sounds and noisily critiquing each other: the goose's call for "Pes!" to speak her part (564) mimics Nature's hushing of the throng; the duck criticizes the turtledoves' advice: "by myn hat!...Who can a resound fynde or wit in that?" (589-91); the goose tells the duck "Ye queke" (594); the tercelet calls the goose a churl (596), accusing his words of being "Out of the dunghill" (597).

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[109] Virtue of Necessity, 55.
[110] Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune, pg. 158.

Nature's intervention and her insistence on the free choice of the formel as well as the other birds has led Bennett and others to claim that Nature is an authority.[111] However, Nature does not control the choice of the formel. She is a counselor whose advice is ignored, as the formel emphatically makes her own choice to "nat serve Venus ne Cupide / Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye" (652-53). As Lynch has rightly pointed out, the division that some have drawn between Venus and Nature is not as neat as it seems, for Nature's realm is not the place of perfect harmony it has been seen to be.[112] Rather, Lynch makes note of Nature's tenuous control over the birds, whose cacophony of opinions threatens to devolve the debate into chaos.[113] She has to interject to call for "Pes!", and the "red" of the birds leads nowhere. As Sklute points out, "Authority…is here being undermined by an implication that individual opinion has its own validity."[114] Although Nature retains control of the birds, casting her control as incomplete makes her less of the authority figure that she is in Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae*, drawn as she is upon that figure, as the narrator points out (316-18).[115] Cherniss sees the irresolution of the debate and the varying forms of love in the poem as an indication that "Chaucer does not wish to satisfy his narrator's quest for 'a certeyn thing' by reducing love in all its

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[111] The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation, 107, 112, 141-42. Also Brewer, Introduction, 30; Lawton, Chaucer's Narrators, 42; Cherniss, Boethian Apocalypse, 136-37; Chance, The Mythographic Chaucer, 83; Sarah Emsley, "'By Evene Acord': Marriage and Genre in the *Parliament of Fowls*," Chaucer Review 34 (1999), 142.

[112] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 86. Additionally, Ferster points out that Venus and Nature cannot be separated entirely, for pleasance and gentilesse exist in both (Chaucer on Interpretation, 56-57).

[113] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 86.

[114] Virtue of Necessity, 56. Aers has rightly argued that the poem is subversive of and critiques objective, universalizing, and moralizing authority; instead, the poem gestures to self-reflexivity and "a marked epistemological modesty" ("The *Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, the Knower and the Known," 5, 14).

[115] Lynch's analysis tends to the conclusion that the authority of Alan's Nature is questioned, although she does explicitly express it. Minnis is skeptical of such a conclusion, although he does note that Chaucer's birds "stand in marked contrast to the fearful respect with which Alan's I-persona listens to Dame Nature, letting her do all the talking" (Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems, 272). For Nature as authority and reconciler of difference, see Bennett, Parlement of Foules, 109, and Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer, 141.

variety to conformity to the dictates of any or all of a series of abstract figures and concepts."[116] James Dean has argued that the roundel with which the birds conclude after the formel's decision provides temporary harmony that celebrates "the general concord and uplift of the lyric vision."[117] However, one might also argue that the birds' roundel redirects the inconclusive end of the debate, singing of the perfect harmony that does not exist in the garden, for not "ech of hem recovered hath hys make" (688).

Indeed, the harmonious song is punctuated by the birds' "shoutyng," which awakens the narrator. The poem ends with reading:

> I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
> To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
> I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
> That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
> The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare. (695-99)

The narrator continues to read presumably as if the dream did not matter, but of course it did, for it facilitates further reading, the quantity of which is punctuated by the four appearances of "rede" in as many lines. Moreover, the concluding lines connect the reading with further dreaming: he will read to "mete" something better. Reading is a catalyst for a dream, but so is a dream a catalyst for further reading. McGerr notes that the narrator's reading at the end "both returns us to the opening and presents the narrator's story as open-ended."[118] And, because reading is connected to learning and because of the overlapping definitions of *rēden*, he will continue to seek out something for learning, for advice and guidance—in short, he will continue to seek advice/guidance/interpretation/knowledge "alwey." As McGerr argues, the *Parliament of*

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[116] Boethian Apocalypse, 141.
[117] "Artistic Conclusiveness in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," Chaucer Review 21 (1986), 124.
[118] Chaucer's Open Books, 83.

Fowls is a "polyvocalic" poem, one with various opinions about love, but no one dominant viewpoint.[119] The narrator continues to read, as if enough reading would provide the answer, or at least a better "certeyn thing" than provided here, where the varying views of love are not resolved with certainty into one view. Sklute contends that the narrator's continued reading at the end "is not a conclusion but an indication of future plans based on previous failures."[120] Although I assert that the dream visions are not failures, but that they offer a purposeful questioning of reading to reassess its place, Sklute's claim of a continued quest for a "certeyn thing" (or "tydynges") in more dreams, or more poems, seems valid. Reading unspecified texts at the end leaves one to wonder, to what *kind* of books does the narrator turn? Does he keep reading of love or find another subject? The ambiguity calls up a number of possibilities, but seems to affirm the value of reading itself, and of love and poetry, intertwined as they are from the beginning and throughout the poem.

The *Parliament of Fowls* adds to the questioning of the dream vision in the *Book of the Duchess* and *House of Fame*, serving as a challenge to the genre itself in the disappearance of Scipio—the previous reading does not suffice, and if Scipio's dream is unsatisfactory, so are Macrobius' categories, already questioned in the *House of Fame* Proem. Nor does the dream experience suffice in the *Parliament*, populated as it is by figures from other visions—like the silent texts in the *Book of the Duchess* narrator's bedchamber, most figures are a catalog of silence; others like the birds resemble the noisy, "confus matere" of Fame and Rumor. Yet the narrator's concluding lines suggest

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[119] Chaucer's Open Books, 82.
[120] Virtue of Necessity, 47.

that to read more books *is* the only recourse. As Lynch points out, there is no evidence that suggests that the dreamer is changed by the end of the poem because he still reads to find the "certeyn thyng" he seeks in the beginning of the poem, and "although 'olde bokes' had successfully provided him with the matter of the poem, they had not wholly satisfied him."[121] Lawton argues that the poem points out that "the act of reading, the ordering of experience and emotion, produces art."[122] In the *Parliament of Fowls*, as well as the *House of Fame* and *Book of the Duchess*, reading does have a relationship to the production of art, but the narrator's experiences demonstrate that the production of art is a disordered, disjunctive process, as neither the act of reading nor the rewards for that reading follow a neat, ordered path. Reading and the writing of poetry demonstrate the complexity and disorder involved in putting one's reading in order: it is meandering through a dream landscape and happening upon a knight clad in black, wandering through a temple and seeing a maze of conflictingly mixed true and false ideas, walking in a park without clear divisions between the arrows of Cupid and Wille and Nature's tenuous control of her birds. Through the narrators, the landscapes, the books, and the figures in the dream visions, Chaucer challenges the ways in which dream visions were used by other authors. Using the dream itself and its attendant conventions, he uses the dream vision to challenge and to reassess its purpose: can dreams be vehicles for true vision, as bound as they are in the world of reading and texts, which are themselves such confused matter? And, if not, can they still be useful vehicles for exploring reading itself?

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[121] Chaucer's Philosophical Visions, 108-109.
[122] Chaucer's Narrators, 46.

The "environment of reading"—the texts, the stuff of texts, moments of reading, of allusions to other texts—in the three dream visions suggests that their self-reflexivity is part of their purpose, to examine the purposes of reading and dreams. Dreams are facilitated by interpretation, or they are arbitrary; the schemata of dream interpretation are unsatisfactory as they lead to confusion. The absence of reason from all three poems suggests that both dreaming and reading schemata are unsatisfactory. As in the *Book of the Duchess*, reading is in these later dream visions an individual process: the solitary dreamers in the temples of Venus, reading Cicero, observing Fame and Rumor, Nature and her birds. Reason's absence from all three dream visions also gestures to the individuality of reading. Forms of *rēden* are more prevalent in the *Parliament of Fowls* than the *House of Fame*, which emphasizes sight (an act which nonetheless is still connected to reading), where reading is advice, counsel, a search for learning. Where the *House of Fame* creates an uneasiness about the stuff of texts and their authors that is also expressed but to a lesser degree in the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *Parliament* does emphasize that reading can be useful. Despite the unsatisfactory reading of Cicero at the poem's start, reading is valued in its connection to "lore" in the poem's opening lines and especially in the closing lines, reiterating the interpretive, advisory nature of reading as the dreamer ends by looking to the future, which does not occur in the other two dream visions.

As in the *Book of the Duchess*, reading is not a recovery of knowledge but a discovery, a search for something new; it is the "newe corn" issuing from "out of olde feldes" (*Parliament of Fowls* 22-23). This search involves the shades of meaning contained in *rēden*: advice, counsel, guidance, learning, interpretation. Reading in the

dreams is a means of discovery, but not of what one might typically expect (e.g., the lack of consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*, or of a *demande d'amour*, a direct question to the audience as in the Franklin's Tale). Rather, it is the discovery of a garden of love with no clear boundaries, one that blurs from pleasant to destructive love, of the places of Fame and Rumor where there are no clear boundaries between deserving and undeserving authors, true and false tidings.

Before turning to *Troilus and Criseyde*, further conclusions are worth noting. The dream narrators' observational stances of seeing and hearing, themselves part of the reading process, are punctuated by interpretation: the *Book of the Duchess* narrator's pity; the *House of Fame* narrator's statement that no other author made the images in Venus' temple, and that he is not there for Fame; the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator's quest for something better to read. The dreamers are not educated in the conventional sense that one expects of a dream vision, that is, to reveal a spiritual truth or lover's consolation; rather, they demonstrate a different kind of reading that alternatively defers and seeks a claim to authorship—a kind of reading that Chaucer also explores with the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde.* Their reading offers a model that questions the "storehouse of the mind":[123] White is stored in the Black Knight's mind, but recollection of her fails to bring solace, nor does the narrator learn a profound truth from hearing about and recording her; in the *House of Fame*, the storehouse of the mind is shown to be problematic by the narrator's observations in the houses of Venus, Fame, and Rumor; the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator observes Nature possessing incomplete control of the birds, and the search

[123] See Carruthers, The Book of Memory; also the Invocation to Book II of the *House of Fame* (524-25).

for a "certeyn thing" to store in his mind remains an as-yet unfulfilled but ongoing process.

In this process, dreams become less a realm of truth than one of questioning, or reevaluation. Revelation inside the dream is either anti-climactic or inconclusive in the exclamation of White's death, the appearance of the "man of great authority," the formel's decision to defer love followed by the roundel, the waking reading of the narrator: dreams function as places of inquiry that rethink the purpose of reading and of dreams themselves. They are more often places of solitary exploration than of dialogue that leads to higher understanding, in the narrators who see the story of Dido, observe Fame's hall and her supplicants, and see and hear the crowded and noisy workings of Rumor, the images in Venus' temples, and the debate of Nature's birds. Guides themselves possess uncertain authority, as Geffrey first sees validation of but then rejects the eagle's advice, and Africanus disappears after shoving the narrator into the park. While dream visions generally explore uncertainties about the world, those uncertainties are most often resolved in favor of a view that looks beyond the world,[124] offers a guide for negotiating the world,[125] or, as one interpretation of the *Roman de la Rose* maintains, the dream satirizes the dreamer to show his degradation in worshipping and possessing the rose.[126] The three dream visions of Chaucer discussed here, by virtue of their inconclusiveness and reading scenes, question such purposes, and while not offering a

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[124] For instance, the *Pearl* dreamer wakes and commends his pearl to God, who he sees as "A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin" (1204).

[125] I am thinking here of *Piers Plowman*, where the problem of sin is not solved, but identified; for example, at the end of the poem, the friar works his way into Holy Church and gives easy contrition "for a litel silver," duping Conscience who must become a pilgrim and seek Piers Plowman, who will destroy the friars (B.XX.368-86). The solution is not easy, which is part of Langland's argument, but one is given.

[126] Fleming, The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

full counter-model, they seem to point in the direction of dreams having purposes divergent from those contained in the poems of his predecessors and contemporaries. Love, like poetry a "craft so long to lerne" (*Parliament of Fowls* 1), is idealized, consuming, destructive, but a part of Nature as well as of Fame. Stories are likewise consuming, but, the poems suggest, a vital part of the narrators' waking and dreaming worlds, in which reading in its various forms is an integral part. The announcement of death, the appearance of authority in Rumor's wicker house, and the formel's decision not to love, for this year at least, frustrate expectations of higher truth or resolution of the poem's conflicts. Kruger points to a tension in medieval dream commentary and literature, in that ideally dreams could be places that drew clear boundaries between transcendent and earth-bound visions, but even the most heavenward-looking dream visions do not entirely leave behind earthly concerns.[127] Chaucer suggests that this middle territory is a realm of reading puzzles, of a goddess who can stretch from earth to the heavens, and which can be so involving that narrators do not think of looking to the future, or do so only to read more, perhaps finding even more interpretive puzzles. The *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator seems to have found, as well as created, many such conundrums in his recasting of Boccaccio's story.

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[127] Dreaming in the Middle Ages, 74, 124-25.

CHAPTER 4

"my penne, allas, with which I write": The Narrator and Criseyde

Troilus and Criseyde and the dream visions share a number of attributes, including a narrator who is not a lover, debate concerning love, use of material from Ovid, Boccaccio, Dante, Boethius and the *Roman de la Rose*, and a self-conscious relationship to other books. In exploring issues common to the dream visions, the poem does so in different fashion. Where the dream framework facilitated distance from the audience, the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator takes occasion to address the audience and draw it into the story. While the dream narrators' reading prompts dreaming and the experience of dreaming facilitates reading and writing, *Troilus and Criseyde* is a product of reading the narrator has done before the start of the poem.

Troilus and Criseyde expands the idea of *rēden* as interpretation, guidance, and counsel, and explores reading as control, an idea less prevalent in the dream visions. One notable exception is contained in Dido's lament over Fame:

> O wel-awey that I was born!
> For thorgh yow is my name lorn,
> And alle myn actes red and songe
> Over al thys lond, on every tonge. (*House of Fame* 345-48)

As discussed in Chapter 3, Dido's statement about Fame foreshadows a statement Criseyde makes about herself late in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Dido fears the control of readers, yet as the poem reveals, Fame's control of reputation depends not upon worth

but whim. Ovid resists Dido's infamy and Aeneas' good fame, although he also contributes to it and is himself subject to Fame. The merging of Virgil's and Ovid's texts in the temple of the earlier poem foreshadows *Troilus and Criseyde*, a poem whose characters are composed of attributes from Boccaccio and other sources as well as from original inventions. As will be discussed in the following, the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* resists recapitulating Criseyde's infamy even as he contributes to it.

The narrator addresses his audience and draws attention to the fact that he is writing a story. For instance, in Book III, as Troilus and Criseyde address each other in bed, he begins by referring to his source:

> But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al,
> As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,
> Yet have I seyd, and God toforn, and shal
> In every thing, al holly his sentence;
> And if that ich, at Loves reverence,
> Have any word in eched for the beste,
> Doth therwithal right as youreselven leste.
>
> For myne wordes, heere and every part,
> I speke hem alle under correccioun
> Of yow that felyng han in loves art,
> And putte it al in youre discrecioun
> To encresse or maken dymynucioun
> Of my langage, and that I yow biseche.
> But now to purpos of my rather speche. (III.1324-37)

Putting his language under the correction of audience members—both the lovers who "felyng han in loves art" and the more general "youreselven"—draws them into the story,[1] and although he appears to abdicate responsibility for the text he is writing, the

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[1] Ida Gordon claimed that "the narrator's interventions...remind the audience or reader of the part they must play in the understanding of the poem" (The Double Sorrow of Troilus [London: Oxford University Press, 1970], 90). Waswo claims that the narrator asks the audience not only to respond to the poem, but also "to help him create the poem" ("The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 9). See also Boitani, who argues that listeners become "to some extent co-authors" (English Medieval Narrative, 202); and Sturges,

comments of the narrator also coyly play with the role of the author as a compiler of source material. He intersperses deference to his audience with first person possessives, where third person pronouns would have sufficed: "myne wordes," "my langage," "my rather speche" rather than "these wordes," "this langage," and "this rather speche." This passage relays quite well the interactive nature of reading in the poem. The details *he* has written are the ones which draw the audience into the poem: audience members can make meaning, but they do so by interacting with his text, not that of his author.

The interactivity in the above passage is part of the poem's unfolding of a spectrum of readings: the narrator reacts to "myn auctor" even as he defers to him, creating a text to which his audience reacts. Troilus surrenders authority to Pandarus, even as he writes letters and treats Criseyde as a text; Criseyde reads, reacts to, and writes texts; and Pandarus treats both Troilus and Criseyde as characters in his own story, conceived partly out of books and partly out of his own fictions. Reading in *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrates that the process is not a uniform one. The affection that the narrator, Troilus, and Pandarus hold for texts leads to discomfort and disillusionment with their texts. In the case of Criseyde, texts (whether her own or the narrator's) offer no sure defense against the attempts of others to control her, as they are continually held up for interpretation. While reading constitutes an attempt to guide, advise, and control as well as interpret, the texts in *Troilus and Criseyde* prove unruly. Texts themselves do not share the same purposes—for Criseyde, texts are defensive, while for Pandarus they are assertions of authority, and they serve both purposes for the narrator. The depictions of

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who comments that the narrator sets up a relationship where "readers can accept, reject, or modify, in their own readings, everything the narrator says" (Medieval Interpretation, 145).

readers, texts, and authors create a dynamic that calls into question their motivations and authority. In short, texts betray everyone in the poem. Because it is the narrator who introduces us to the story and from the first introduces himself as a reader and writer, it seems logical to begin with discussion of his role. Consideration of Troilus is interspersed with the narrator and other characters. Discussion of Criseyde concludes the current chapter, with the next focusing on Pandarus.

The first stanza of *Troilus and Criseyde* signals the narrator's role as reader and writer as well as his emotional proximity to his material. The opening lines introduce his purpose, "The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen...In lovynge, how his aventures fellen / Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.1-4). He concludes the stanza with an invocation of Tisiphone, for assistance with "Thise woful vers that wepen as I write" (I.7), in the next stanza labeling himself "the sorwful instrument, / That helpeth lovers, as I kan, to pleyne" (I.10-11). While the first lines are fairly straightforward in setting out the purpose of the poem, those that follow signal a level of involvement that suggests that he is not just "telling" the story of Troilus by relaying the sense of what his author said. At other times, however, the narrator assumes the role of compiler by referring to "myn auctour," doing so for instance twice in the Book II proem: "Disblameth me if any word be lame, / For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I" (II.17-18); "Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne" (II.49). As Minnis has demonstrated, a compiler did not claim authority: "An *auctor* was supposed to 'assert' or 'affirm', while a compilator 'repeated' or 'reported' what others had said or done."[2] In the narrator, Chaucer manipulates both ideas, as moments when the narrator says he is a compiler are more often moments of innovation

[2] Medieval Theory of Authorship, 193.

when he diverges from his source. The two references noted above preface a section of *Troilus and Criseyde* containing a large number of divergences from Boccaccio, both alterations and innovations, indicating that the narrator is not following his author as faithfully as he claims. But if he is not merely a compiler, what is his relationship to what he writes: does the narrator become an *auctor*?

Chaucer's narrator has a different relationship to his audience than does Boccaccio's in *Il Filostrato*. The narrator of the Italian poem, Filostrato, inscribes his primary audience into his poem: an individual, gendered reader called Filomena. In the Prologue, Filostrato reveals to her the purpose of the poem: he writes to relieve his sorrow and stay alive because she has left. When she reads "Troiolo," she should read his actions and words as Filostrato's own, and she should read "Criseida" as herself:

> wherever you find Troiolo lamenting and grieving over the departure of Criseida, you may clearly recognize my own words, tears, sighs and torments—and wherever you find beauty, good manners and any other praise-worthy feminine features described in Criseida, you may take such things to refer to you.[3]

Reading Criseida as herself entails more than just interpreting the good attributes as references to herself, however. Considering what follows, Filostrato's comment that the poem stands as "a perpetual testimony to your nobility" is harshly ironic.[4] Filomena is not the only audience for the poem. The narrator later advises young men to "look about you, be warned," pity Troiolo and themselves, and pray that Love "grant you such clearsightedness in loving that you will not end up dying for the sake of a wicked woman."[5] Having invoked her as the reader of the poem, Filostrato implicitly accuses

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[3] *Il Filostrato*, Pr.10.
[4] *Il Filostrato*, Pr.10.
[5] *Il Filostrato*, VIII.33.

Filomena: only a wicked woman, one such as she, would leave. For Filomena, the purpose of the poem is to read it, have pity on Filostrato, and return to Naples. The young men he addresses should not only pity Troiolo, but also stay away from wicked women such as Criseida/Filomena. At the end of Chaucer's poem, the narrator issues a warning against men: "Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!" (V.1785).

Whereas Filostrato's addresses to his audience are gendered, Chaucer's narrator calls generally on all lovers: "ye lovers...Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse" and "preieth for hem that ben in the cas / Of Troilus" (I.22, 24, 29-30). The lovers should also pray for the narrator,

> to God so dere
> That I have might to shewe, in som manere,
> Swich peyne and wo as Loves folk endure,
> In Troilus unsely aventure. (I.32-35)

The requests continue, including prayers for those who despair over love, for those who are the subject of "wikked tonges" (I.39), and for those who "ben at ese" (I.43). Before beginning the story proper, the narrator says that through these means he will also pray for Love's servants, and "for to have of hem compassioun / As though I were hire owne brother dere" (I.49-50). Boccaccio's narrator is a lover himself, and a scorned one at that, while Chaucer's narrator makes no such claims, demurring, "For I, that God of Loves servantz serve / Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse" (I.15-16). Such comments leave open more room for interpretation than Boccaccio allows,[6] yet, as noted above, the space

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[6] Sturges notes that the narrator's address to his audience at the beginning of Book I puts upon the audience "indirect responsibility for his creation of the text...this narrator creates the possibility of a kind of collaboration with his presumably more knowledgeable readers" in Medieval Interpretation, 144. See Morton Bloomfield for an opposite view, that Chaucer creates a distance from pagan characters that highlights the superiority of Christianity, in "Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*," PMLA 72 (1957), 19-20.

allowed is not one of such liberty as it first appears because the story is rewritten under the guidance of the narrator. Arguing that the object of reading in the Middle Ages was to divorce intellect from emotion, Chauncey Wood asserts that the author's address to the reader performs such a function, acting as "a device by which the author reminds the reader that the fiction is a fiction, reminds the reader of the cerebral rather than the visceral pleasures of the text."[7] While the narrator creates awareness of his poem as such, his addresses to the audience invite both intellectual and emotional engagement.

A number of scholars have examined the narrator's relationship to his material. While acknowledging the narrator's sympathy with the pagan characters, Wetherbee concludes that a subsequent withdrawal from them occurs toward the end of the poem which underscores the Christianity of the narrator.[8] The narrator's withdrawal has also been seen to create distance between earthly things and transcendent perfection in order to demonstrate the limitations of fiction as well as of human love.[9] Others have viewed the narrator as part of Chaucer's interest in writing as a "historical" poet, one seeking to emphasize the thoughts and actions of antique characters, rather than their morality.[10] At the same time, the narrator is not entirely distant from his characters as he calls for

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[7] "The Author's Address to the Reader: Chaucer, Juan Ruiz, and Dante ," Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture, Patrick Gallacher and Helen Damico, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press , 1989), 58. Also Albrecht Classen, "The Dangers and Promises of Reading, Two Medieval Viewpoints: Wolfram von Eschenbach and Geoffrey Chaucer," Medieval Perspectives 12 (1997), 60.
[8] Chaucer and the Poets, 22, 52.
[9] John Ganim, Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 101-102.
[10] Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 5-6. For Chaucer's interest in history, see also Windeatt, "Classical and Medieval Elements in Chaucer's *Troilus*," The European Tragedy of Troilus, Piero Biotani, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 111-31; and Lee Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), especially 105-107.

"sympathetic participation" on the part of the audience.[11] In refiguring the narrator's relationship to the audience, Chaucer also reconfigured the narrator's relationship to the poem—his position as servant to lovers rather than lover is at the same time compromised by his declarations, his defenses of Criseyde, and his attempts to conclude the poem. In these actions, the narrator comments on the nature of a poet's relationship to the texts upon which he draws. Rather than adding to the authority of a received text, as Carruthers claims happened as readers commented upon, imitated, and stored texts in their memories,[12] the narrator demonstrates uneasiness about such a relationship: he cannot avoid the story preceding his own, but he can argue that parts of it are inadequate and not possessive of the authority that it might seem to accumulate through his rewriting of it. At the same time, the narrator acknowledges his source by rewriting it. Copeland has argued that vernacular translation "displace[s] the very text it proposes to serve"[13] and that "the translation should substitute itself for its source and efface the presence of that source."[14] Translation results in something different in *Troilus and Criseyde*, however; rather than displacing antecedent texts, the narrator's relationship to his source material and his own text calls attention to the need to examine the relationship between authors and their sources and between texts that share the "same" story. The narrator demonstrates the impossibility of total displacement: he has read a text, and he has written his own that he *claims* adheres to his source but in reality diverges from and disagrees with it, yet in the end he must come back to that source. He cannot displace the

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[11] Nolan, Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman antique*, 205. See also Gordon, Waswo, Boitani, and Sturges in note 1 above.
[12] The Book of Memory, 214.
[13] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages, 4. See also Nolan, Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman antique*, 6.
[14] Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages, 202.

text from which he draws and even in his innovations refers to it, indicating the inescapability of tradition. He can disagree with, but not efface, the previous version—and the power of that disagreement depends not upon doing away with but upon acknowledging prior texts. While seeking to write his own story, as if asserting authority, the narrator must also recognize "myn auctor." Indeed, the narrator's alterations to the story attempt to displace its antecedent but in doing so inevitably refer back to it.

While the majority of the narrator's reading has taken place before the poem begins, his interpretations in the poem are carefully disguised. Few instances of *rēden* are connected to the narrator. He uses the word in giving advice about love in Book I: "Men *reden* nat that folk han gretter wit / Than they that han be most with love ynome" (I.241-42, my emphasis). He advises his audience to bow to love: "The yerde is bet that bowen wole and wynde / Than that that brest, and therfore *I yow rede* / To folowen hym that so wel kan yow lede" (I.257-59, my emphasis). After Troilus is struck by love and languishes in pain that he disguises from others, the narrator relates that Troilus' suffering is unknown to Criseyde: "But wel *I rede that*, by no manere weye, / Ne semed it that she of hym roughte, / Or of his peyne, or whatsoevere he thoughte (I.495-97, my emphasis). In these instances, the narrator cites a proverb (what men advise about love), offers advice to bow like a sapling in the wind rather than to break, and reads and explains Troilus' situation. A greater number of references occur indicating what his author says or what books tell than to what he reads. However, these comments serve as a coy device, as he only *appears* not to be "rede"-ing when he defers to his source. The

focus rests not on forms of *rēden* but on disguised acts of reading; just as his source is disguised, so are the narrator's innovations largely disguised.

References to his author create the guise of compiler. The narrator twice calls his source "Lollius": he introduces the *Canticus Troili* "As writ myn auctor called Lollius" (I.394), and "as telleth Lollius," the coat of Diomede, containing the brooch that Troilus had given Criseyde, was dragged around Troy (V.1653). The identity of "Lollius" has been the subject of curiosity and a number of theories. A number of years ago, one critic speculated that that Lollius was a friend of Petrarch's who might have transcribed *Il Filostrato* and through whose hands the manuscript that Chaucer encountered might have passed.[15] More common is the theory that Lollius was a medieval misinterpretation of Horace's *Epistle* 1.2.1 addressed to his friend Maximus Lollius, with the misinterpretation identifying Lollius as a writer of the matter of Troy rather than Horace's addressee. Kittredge advanced this theory, arguing that Chaucer, like his contemporaries, mistakenly thought there had been a real Lollius who had written about Troy but whose text was lost.[16] Chaucer used Lollius, Kittredge argued, as a fiction to lend the poem an air of antiquity and to convey the appearance of a faithful translation.[17] The latter view of Lollius as a fiction has been elaborated by scholars since Kittredge who, while they might not agree that Chaucer mistakenly thought there had been an author by that name, have seen Lollius as a humorous joke which Chaucer's audience

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[15] Lillian Herlands Hornstein, "Petrarch's Laelius, Chaucer's Lollius?", PMLA 63 (1948), 63, 80.
[16] "Chaucer's Lollius," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 28 (1917), 48-54. Robert A. Pratt also pointed out that Chaucer would have known the excerpt from Horace from John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, noting that a twelfth century and a fourteenth century copy of the text contain the passage in forms though to be the mistaken translation in question ("A Note on Chaucer's Lollius," Modern Language Notes 65 [1950], 185-86).
[17] "Chaucer's Lollius," 72-76.

would have recognized and enjoyed,[18] as a means of claiming historicity,[19] or as a device to lend an air of ancient authority to Boccaccio.[20] Lollius has also been seen as a disguise for Boccaccio and a joke at Boccaccio's expense.[21] Another view is that Lollius is a lie that refers to Boccaccio as well as to Horace's *Epistle*, resulting in a double reference that makes room for both a Horatian and Christian moral address to young people at the end of the poem.[22] Lollius can of course refer to more authors than Boccaccio, although Boccaccio is the most immediate source for the poem and is never named in any of Chaucer's poetry.[23] Whether or not Chaucer thought there had been a real Lollius who authored a text, using that name as his source can serve a purpose other than the ones cited above, as it could also be a playful fiction that, in effect, refers the audience to no one. Even if Chaucer thought there had been a Lollius, his text was lost and thus referred

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[18] Strohm, Social Chaucer, 61.

[19] Taylor, Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 45. Wetherbee sees a "tradition of Lollius" that refers to the Latin, romance, and mythographical material contained in the poem that creates distance from the pagan viewpoints of the characters (Chaucer and the Poets, 25).

[20] Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 25; Nolan, Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman antique*, 209.

[21] For the former view, see Boitani, "Style, Iconography and Narrative: the Lesson of the *Teseida*," 189. Wise advanced the latter, Lollius as both Boccaccio and a joke on Boccaccio: Middle English 'loll,' 'lollard,' and 'loller' referred to "a thick-tongued babbler careless about his articulation" (The Influence of Statius Upon Chaucer [New York: Phaeton Press, 1911. Reprint, 1967], 6).

[22] Fleming, Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 192-95.

[23] Hornstein noted that one fourteenth manuscript of *Il Filostrato* names Boccaccio as the author, but it dates to 1397, after *Troilus and Criseyde* was composed ("Petrarch's Laelius, Chaucer's Lollius?", 79). Pratt discussed the possibility that Chaucer had read the *Filostrato* at the library of Galeazzo II Visconti in Pavia on his 1378 trip to Italy ("Chaucer and the Visconti Libraries," ELH 6 [1939], 197). However, Pratt did not mention whether the manuscript would have named Boccaccio. Pearsall also notes that Chaucer might have had access to both Galeazzo's and his brother Bernabò's libraries (The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, 109). E.R. Curtius pointed out that the identification and non-identification of authors' names in their own works throughout the Middle Ages was a practice that traced back to Greek poets (the idea that the poet should not be named in an epic) and Roman poets (who did name themselves) (E.R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953], 515-18). Bennett read Arcite's disguise as Philostrate in the Knight's Tale rather than Penteo as in the *Teseida* as wordplay indicating that Chaucer knew that Boccaccio wrote both the *Teseida* and *Filostrato* ("Chaucer, Dante and Boccaccio," in Boitani, Chaucer and the Italian Trecento, 92). Fleming concludes that Boccaccio "was certainly far too famous for us to seriously entertain the idea for even a moment that Chaucer did not know whose poem he was translating" (Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 246).

the reader to nothing of substance. As Richard Utz has argued, Lollius is "a parody of a confining tradition" that more well-educated portions of his audience (i.e. Gower and Strode) would have recognized as part of a narrative layering Chaucer created that disguises his own innovations.[24] "Lollius" attempts the authentication of, while at the same time disguises, the liberties taken with the poem's sources.

Troilus and Criseyde has rightly been called "thoroughly and self-consciously aware of its poetic ancestry."[25] Some of the narrator's comments referring to that ancestry are disingenuous, however. In a moment telling for its seeming deference to and simultaneous blame of his author, the narrator does not tell us what Criseyde is thinking as Pandarus invites her to dinner and lies, telling her that Troilus is out of town. The narrator noticeably sidesteps: "Nought list myn auctour fully to declare / What that she thoughte whan he seyde so, / That Troilus was out of town yfare" (III.575-77). The narrator draws attention to a number of ideas: that he is writing a poem, that he is (supposedly) following his author, that what Criseyde is thinking would be important to know, and that his source fails to give guidance as to her thoughts. It is true that Boccaccio does not say what she thought, but his author in fact has nothing to say about such a scene because Boccaccio's characters do not go to Deiphebus' house. The Italian poem progresses directly from letter writing to Criseida and Pandaro arranging for Troiolo to come to her house while her women are away at a festival.[26] The narrator's

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[24] "'As Writ Myn Auctour Called Lollius': Divine and Authorial Omnipotence in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives, Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode, and Richard J. Utz, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 143-44.
[25] Fyler, "*Auctoritee* and Allusion in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 73.
[26] *Il Filostrato*, II.142-43.

identifying of his author as the origin of the omission disguises the fact that it is the narrator himself who "Nought list…fully to declare" what Criseyde is thinking.

The narrator acts similarly at other moments. He is deliberately ambiguous about Criseyde in an instance where "rede" appears: "But wheither that she children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught, therefore I late it goon" (I.132-33). If the sense is that he has not read it elsewhere, the narrator is being contradictory, for Boccaccio's Criseida has no children.[27] If he refuses to explain, he draws attention to her unknowability, as he also does in the instance cited above. The play on "rede" functions cleverly: the narrator will not explain it, or he has not read it, or both—in effect, he neither refers to a book nor explains it in "letting it go." He also contradicts his source when he says that no book tells how long it was before she betrayed Troilus (V.1086-90), whereas Boccaccio relates that "she had already set her heart on someone else" on the tenth day (VII.14). Such comments center largely around Criseyde, indicating both an impulse to defend her and an engagement on the part of the narrator that transcends his posture of compiler.

Not all inventions are disingenuous. Carruthers argues that "the student of the text, having digested it by re-experiencing it in memory, has become not its interpreter, but its new author, or re-author." In her configuration of reading, this digestion of texts results in a growth of character; she cites, for example, Petrarch's dialogue between himself ("Francesco") and Augustine, where Francesco has digested Virgil for moral benefit.[28] According to Ivan Illich's reading of Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*, canonical works were not texts to be digested but "building materials that could be used

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[27] *Il Filostrato*, II.69.
[28] The Book of Memory, 168.

in the construction of new mental edifices."[29] To use the building analogy, the narrator compiles but also replaces a number of Boccaccio's bricks and adds many of his own, creating a structure which looks quite different from that of his author. Such a process, the building a new structure using parts of the previous one, also suggests a digestion of the texts that Illich would deny, and that Hugh of St. Victor does mention,[30] a making of one's own after mulling over the story, but digestion with a result different from that of readers such as Petrarch's Francesco. In such activity, the narrator appears to set himself up as an authority.[31] However, his role of compiler, who must return to his source, comes into conflict with any authority he quietly asserts, and he cannot completely reconcile the two roles at the end of the poem.

While calling upon his audience to participate, writing verses that weep, asking Tisiphone for assistance with his sorrowful verses, and deferring to "myn auctour,"[32] the narrator involves himself in the story. Wetherbee points out that the narrator's direct invocation to Tisiphone in Book I draws him into the story, unlike Statius who distances himself from the Fury by having Oedipus invoke Tisiphone.[33] While the narrator's advice against scorning Love, to "Forthy ensample taketh" of Troilus (I.232), suggests distance from his story, other commentary indicates otherwise. Although much of Book II is taken up with the characters' dialogue, when the narrator does interject with commentary, it is

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[29] Illich, In the Vineyard of the Text, 105.
[30] Ideas are stored in the memory like items in a chest, which Hugh compares to a stomach from which one regurgitates and tastes the idea (*Didascalicon*, Chapter xi).
[31] Waswo has claimed that identifying Lollius as his author is a technique that appears deferential but in reality really works to "assume superiority to the audience" ("The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 18).
[32] In the Book II proem, e.g., the narrator defers to his author: "Disblameth me if any words be lame / For as myn auctor seyde, so sey I" (II.17-18), which he reiterates at the end of the proem: "Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne" (II.49). This instance is particularly telling of the real construction of the poem, as Book II contains some of the scenes most original to Chaucer—the narrator is not merely following his authority. See also II.700.
[33] Chaucer and the Poets, 33.

noticeable. After Criseyde sees Troilus ride by her window and asks herself, "Who yaf me drynke?" (II.657), the narrator interrupts to defend her for not falling suddenly in love:

> Now might som envious jangle thus:
> "This was a sodeyn love; how might it be
> That she so lightly loved Troilus
> Right for the firste sighte, ye, parde?"
> Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe!
> For every thing a gynnyng hath it need
> Er al be wrought, withowten any drede.
>
> For sey I nought that she so sodeynly
> Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne
> To like hym first, and I have told yow whi;
> And after that, his manhood and his pyne
> Made love withinne hire for to myne,
> For which by process and by good service
> He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse.
>
> And also blissful Venus, wel arrayed,
> Sat in hire seventhe hous of hevene tho,
> Disposed wel, and with aspected payed,
> To help sely Troilus of his woo.
> And soth to seyne, she nas not al a foo
> To Troilus in his nativitee;
> God woot that wel the sonner spedde he. (II.666-686)

These comments work against the narrator and draw attention to the possibility that she *did* fall in love suddenly,[34] and at the same time they offer a defense for her.[35] As in the story of Dido and Aeneas in the *House of Fame*, the rewritten story resists a negative reading of the woman in question, but the narrator's comments also trigger such readings. The narrator's posture is suggested by his comment that if anyone says she fell in love

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[34] For instance, Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus, 82; Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, 66; Barney, "Suddenness and Process in Chaucer," 28; Edwards, Chaucer and Boccaccio, 61-62.
[35] Howes, "Chaucer's Criseyde: The Betrayer Betrayed," Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning, R.M. Stein and S.P. Prior, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 339.

suddenly, "mote he nevere ythe!" Boccaccio's Criseida reacts to the sight of Troiolo quite differently; when she sees him, "the fearfulness that was preventing Criseida from reaching a decision fled away as she admired his manners, his pleasing behaviour and his courtesy."[36] The narrator's defense is not only against potential audience reactions, but versus his source, where she did fall in love rather suddenly.[37] In *Il Filostrato*, after Pandaro leaves, Criseida "dwelt upon all such matters with pleasure" as she considers her options.[38] Criseyde's reaction, by contrast, shifts between hope and dread in a long deliberation (II.694-810). As Windeatt observes, Chaucer's Criseyde has "double" reactions where Boccaccio's Criseida has one, and Chaucer "often complicate[s] interpretation of his characters."[39]

In the course of the poem, the narrator's involvement deepens—so much so, that Donaldson claimed that the narrator falls in love with Criseyde.[40] As noted above, deviations from and innovations upon his source tend to focus upon her. In Book III, after Criseyde welcomes Troilus, "my knight, my pees, my suffisaunce!" (III.1309), the narrator praises the "blissful nyght" and comments of himself:

> Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought,
> Ye, or the leeste joie that was there?
> Awey, thow foule daunger and thow feere,
> And lat hem in this heneve blisse dwelle,
> That is so heigh that al ne kan I telle! (III.1319-23)

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[36] *Il Filostrato*, II.83.
[37] My reading here agrees with Elizabeth Salter, who read the narrator's comments as an invitation to "take a more generous view of Criseyde" than Boccaccio allows ("*Troilus and Criseyde*: Poet and Narrator," Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600, Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson, Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk, eds., [Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982], 288).
[38] II.68.
[39] "Chaucer and the *Filostrato*," Chaucer and the Italian Trecento, Piero Boitani, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 179.
[40] Speaking of Chaucer, 68.

It is the narrator who curses the arrival of day after the second night the lovers are together, "But cruel day—so wailaway the stounde!— / Gan for t'aproche" (III.1695-1696), before saying that they also curse the day. After discussing how Troilus' nobility is enhanced by love at the end of Book III, the narrator praises Venus, Cupid and all nine Muses, concluding, "I kan namoore, but syn that ye wol wende, / Ye heried ben for ay withouten ende!" (III.1812-13). As E.F. Dyck theorizes, the narrator's involvement with the story humanizes him, diminishing his rhetorical ethos while at the same time increasing his human ethos.[41]

His inconsistent commentary also indicates his proximity to his poem: sometimes he refuses to explain. In Book V he gives the text of Criseyde's letter, commenting only that she wrote "for routhe— / I take it so" and she "seyde as ye may here" (V.1587-88). A puzzling instance occurs in Book III when Pandarus visits Criseyde on the morning after her first night with Troilus, reaching under the sheet and "at the laste" kissing her (III.1571-75). He patently refuses to explain what happens: "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III.1576). His brief comment has, of course, led to speculation about just what goes on in this scene, especially when the same stanza ends with "And Pandarus hath fully his entente" (III.1582). More discussion of that scene follows below in the section on Criseyde and in Chapter 5, pp.185-88. For now, suffice it to say that the narrator's refusal to reveal anything further creates an uncomfortable quandary: what really happens? Do Pandarus and Criseyde have sex? Such moments both call attention to the narrator's activity and emphasize his role in the poem, even when he offers no

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[41] "Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Chaucer Review 20 (1986), 178. He also argues the narrator gets involved with Criseyde to the extent that in Book III "Criseyde has taken control"; see Chapter V for my discussion that it is Pandarus who instead controls the action in Book II.

interpretation, for they occur at moments when interpretive assistance seems most needed.

The narrator's involvement becomes problematic in Books IV and V. In the proem to Book IV, he laments his task:

> But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
> Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
> That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle
> And kan to fooles so hire song entune
> That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune!...
>
> From Troilus she gan hire brighte face
> Awey to writhe, and tok of hym non heede,
> But caste hym clene out of his lady grace,
> And on hire whiel she sette up Diomede;
> For which myn herte right now gynneth blede,
> And now my penne, allas, with which I write,
> Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite. (IV.1-5, 8-14)

The above lines not only draw an implicit connection between Criseyde and Fortune,[42] but they also demonstrate the narrator's relationship to both. A more objective narrator or a moralizing narrator might comment that Fortune can sing so well to fools that they are blind and stop at that point. Chaucer's narrator, however, adds the personal exclamation "traitour commune!" Modern editing has punctuated the narrator's feeling about Fortune for emphasis as an exclamatory statement, but it only re-emphasizes the rhyming of lines 2 and 5, which equate "Fortune" with "traitour commune." The second stanza again indicates emotional involvement, as his heart begins to bleed, and explicitly connects emotion with writing: "my penne, allas, with which I write" is emblematic of the narrator's actions throughout much of the poem. Writing is a means of expressing resistance as well as attachment to the very material with which he works.

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[42] Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, 486.

He defends Criseyde as he sets out to tell "For how Criseyde Troilus forsook— / Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde" (IV.15-16). These lines perform a double duty, denying while simultaneously affirming what he seeks to preclude: that she was untrue. He adds, suggestive of a defensive posture, "Allas, that they [folk] sholde evere cause fynde / To speke hire harm! And if they on hire lye, / Iwis, himself sholde han the vilanye" (IV.19-21). He has only just admitted her untruth, to claim here that he should not be blamed for speaking ill of her, even to the extent that those who "speke hire harm" should be seen as liars. His words relay the defensiveness of one who feels betrayed, and his feeling of betrayal is, as Wetherbee points out, also evidenced by his invocation of Mars and the Furies for assistance in writing this book (IV.22-26).[43]

Conflicted by the task of relating what occurs, the narrator conveys a sense of discomfort. After Criseyde tells Troilus of her plan to return ten days after the exchange, he comments,

> And treweliche, as written wel I fynde
> That al this thing was seyd of good entente,
> And that hire herte trewe was and kynde
> Towardes hym, and spak right as she mente,
> And that she starf for wo neigh whan she went,
> And was in purpos ever to be trewe:
> Thus written they that of hire werkes knewe. (IV.1415-21)

The narrator knows of her actions, although in line 1421 he seems to deny that knowledge, and is uncomfortable with such knowledge: "treweliche" and the repetition of "trewe" overemphasize the narrator's point. He would rather put the burden of her intent upon other authors, which does not work, since it is his story. As before, he attempts to

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[43] Chaucer and the Poets, 36. As Salter also pointed out, the Book IV proem relays the narrator's "mixed feelings" about what he must write but also opens up the possibility of opinions about rather than judgments of Criseyde ("*Troilus and Criseyde*: Poet and Narrator," 286).

excuse her "good entente" but creates suspicion in that very attempt. The narrator, as Woods asserts, acts as both counsel for the defense of Criseyde and as her prosecutor.[44]

His excuses are part of a struggle against an end to which he must but does not want to conform. In the final two books, the narrator encounters difficulty in keeping his word to tell of Troilus' double sorrow, and in Book V he suffers as he keeps his promise.[45] After the speech in which Criseyde laments her condition and turns to Diomede (V.1054-85), the narrator strives against his story:

> Ne me ne list this sely woman chide
> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
> Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe. (V.1093-99)

Where before he would not reveal her thoughts, here he offers an explanation—that she was sorry—with the same objective of defending her. As before he lamented over his pen, "allas" appears as evidence of the narrator's struggles against writing what he must. The use of "wolde" indicates his quandary: he *will* not but *wishes* to excuse her out of pity.[46] One of the narrator's contradictions of Boccaccio, also mentioned above, occurs at this point in the text:

> But trewely, how longe it was bytwene
> That she forsook hym for this Diomede,
> Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene.
> Take every man now to his bokes heede,
> He shal no terme fynden, out of drede.
> For though that he began to wowe hire soone,
> Er he hire wan, yet was ther more to doone. (V.1086-92)

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[44] "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and Her Family," Chaucer Review 20 (1985), 34-36.
[45] Mark Lambert, "Telling the Story in *Troilus and Criseyde*," The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer. 2nd ed., Boitani and Mann, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91.
[46] Boitani also notes that the narrator "always tries" to excuse Criseyde (English Medieval Narrative, 209).

Again he protests "trewely," as if wishing that no book told the space of time in question. Reference to Boccaccio, however, reveals the opposite of what the narrator asserts, for in *Il Filostrato*, Criseida's affections had turned elsewhere by the tenth day.[47] The narrator also betrays his own earlier statement, which gives an approximate number of days. Immediately after Criseyde avows, "withouten any wordes mo / To Troie I wol, as for conclusioun" (V.764-65), the narrator states that "er fully monthes two / She was ful fer from that entencioun!" (V.766-67). The overstatements, that "trewely" no author says and that no reader will find the space of time in question, bespeak the narrator's struggle to excuse her.[48] In reaching for explanations, he acts in a fashion similar to Troilus, who attempts to excuse her in thinking that he miscalculated the span of ten days (V.1185-91).

Yet the narrator does not identify only with Troilus, whom he presents as prone to "fantasie," i.e. delusion (V.261, 623).[49] After Troilus reads Criseyde's first Book V letter, the narrator's address to his character indicates a broader perspective: "But Troilus, thow maist now, est or west, / Pipe in an ivy lef, if that the lest!" (V.1431-32). Two of Pandarus' thoughts, which he keeps to himself, are similar: "Ye haselwode!...God wot, refreyden may this hote fare, / Er Calkas sende Troilus Criseyde!" (V.505-8); and "From haselwode, there joly Robyn pleyde, / Shal come al that that thow abidest here. / Ye, fare wel al the snow of ferne yere!" (V.1174-76). The proverbial expressions indicate the same thought: Troilus makes music in vain (he has just written a letter to her), the fire of his desire will become cold before Calchas sends Criseyde to him, and, as it is impossible

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[47] VII.14.
[48] Donaldson made a similar point, Speaking of Chaucer, 70, 74.
[49] Pandarus directly tells Troilus it is "fantasie" to be so sorrowful (V.329, 358).

for what he desires to spring from hazelwood, she is like the snow of last year: forever departed.

The conclusion to the poem also plays out the narrator's reaction to the story he has been relating. As the concluding stanzas commence, he says that he would tell a different story if he could:

> Besechyng every lady bright of hewe,
> And every gentil woman, what she be,
> That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
> That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.
> Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se;
> And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
> Penelopeës trouthe and good Alceste. (V.1772-78)

What is he to do, wishing he could excuse Criseyde, wishing he could write a different conclusion but being bound to the text upon which he draws? He cannot interpret Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus in accepting Diomede as anything but betrayal, no matter how he tries. At the same time, he has composed a character who is more than a betrayer. The narrator concludes instead that a moral is to beware of men. They are, after all, the ones who should (Calkas, Pandarus, Troilus) or do promise (Ector) to protect her and fail to do so. His innovations challenge the dichotomy that either Criseyde is true and will return or that she is fickle. His deferrals of authority and his contradictions of Boccaccio assert that prior stories are inadequate—they fail to give him the information he seeks, or the information that they provide is insufficient. Nonetheless, he is still faced with the knowledge of her betrayal and must conclude the poem.

In the face of interpretive crisis the *House of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde* narrators turn to God. The *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator does so only at the end of the poem: faced with material he cannot seem to reconcile, he turns to the great Christian

reconciler, "Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve, / That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon" (V.1863-64). Robertson argued that the ending dismisses cupidinous love, Troilus' love for Criseyde, in favor of the love of God:[50]

> O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
> In which that love up groweth with youre age,
> Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
> And of youre herte up casteth the visage
> To thilke God that after his ymage
> Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,
> This world that passeth soone as floures faire.
>
> And loveth hym the which that right for love
> Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,
> First start, and roos, and sit in hevene above;
> For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
> That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
> And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
> What nedeth feynede loves for to seke? (V.1835-48)

Fleming, like Robertson, sees the end as Christian commentary on the clearly pagan story which precedes it.[51] Gordon argued that the end did not advocate a repudiation of the world so much as a changed perspective that would see "the beauty of the world as the work of its Creator, and not prize it only for its own sake...[and] to love in the world only what is good, for in loving for the sake of goodness we are also loving God."[52] Wetherbee claims that the narrator's proximity to the characters serves the purpose of his going beyond them in the end, that he explores human love in order to transcend it both artistically and spiritually.[53] Muscatine viewed the end of the poem not as a repudiation of courtly love *per se*; instead it "present[s] secular idealism as a beautiful but flawed

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[50] A Preface to Chaucer, 501.
[51] Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 74.
[52] The Double Sorrow of Troilus, 54.
[53] Chaucer and the Poets, 43-46, 52.

thing."[54] Brewer, focusing less on the moral nature of the ending and like Muscatine considering the interplay of style and genre, sees the repudiation of earthly love as a logical conclusion following Troilus' tragic fall from happiness.[55]

The above assessments depend upon seeing the narrator as detached from his material in the concluding stanzas. The narrator certainly seeks to remove himself from the story in comments that defer to what others say, proverbially and in books: "men seyen that at the laste, / For any thing, men shal the soothe see" (V.1639-40); Diomede's tunic, to which is affixed the brooch Troilus gave Criseyde, is dragged through Troy "as telleth Lollius" (V.1653); Troilus performs many knightly deeds "As men may in thise olde bokes rede" (V.1753); "I fynde" that Troilus and Diomede fight each other "With blody strokes and with wordes grete" (V.1758-59); and, as for Criseyde, "Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se" (V.1776). At the same time, such comments also bind the narrator to his text, for they draw attention to his role in composing it.[56]

Where much of *Troilus and Criseyde* draws upon *Il Filostrato*, Troilus' ascent to the eighth sphere is borrowed from that of Arcita in Boccaccio's *Teseida*:

> Then he turned downwards to look again at what he had left behind him. And he saw the little globe of earth with the sea and air encircling it and the fire above, and he judged it all to be worthless by comparison with Heaven. But then, looking backwards for a while, he let his eyes linger upon the place in which his body remained.
>
> And he smiled to himself, thinking of all the Greeks and their lamentations, and greatly deplored the futile behaviour of earthly men whose minds are so darkened and befogged as to make them frenziedly pursue the false attractions of the world

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[54] Chaucer and the French Tradition, 132.
[55] "Comedy and Tragedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 101-102.
[56] My view here is similar to that of Sturges, who argues that "The narrator advises detachment; but his own example in arriving at detachment encourages involvement" (Medieval Interpretation, 158-59).

> and turn away from Heaven. Then he departed to the place that Mercury allotted him.[57]

Troilus likewise sees "This litel spot of erthe…and fully gan despise / This wrecched world" (V.1815-17). He looks down,

> And in hymself he lough right at the wo
> Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
> And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
> The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
> And shoulden al oure herte on heven caste;
> And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
> Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle. (V.1821-27)

Troilus' and Arcita's final destinations are similarly ambiguous, as the location of each within the eighth sphere is not specified in either text.[58] Howard argued that the end of the poem suggests that Christian philosophy is inadequate, that the end of the poem is not the *contemptus mundi* it seems because those tracts more often described the ugliness and contempt of the world in specific terms, whereas Chaucer generalizes (as does Boccaccio, which Howard does not note): "The things of this world in the *Troilus* have not been presented in the *contemptus mundi* manner as slime or worm's meat or dung and corruption; they were beautiful, enthralling things." Rather, Howard concluded, the end "plays upon medieval ambivalence about the world."[59] Dyck adds a compelling explanation in pointing out that the "Lo here" stanza which dismisses pagan beliefs also dismisses Mercury, who appoints Troilus a place in the heavens, thus dismissing Troilus'

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[57] *Teseida*, XI.2-3.
[58] Boitani, "What Dante Meant to Chaucer," 127; Edwards, Chaucer and Boccaccio, 74. Pugh concludes that "Troilus's apotheosis is not a reward for living justly or for making the right choices: it is arbitrary….Christian teleology gives meaning to Troilus's death, but he deserves it no more than Criseyde or Pandarus" (Queering Medieval Genres, 105)
[59] "The Philosophies in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 170-71.

final appointment.[60] Waswo similarly concludes that rejection of the world is not a sufficient response to it[61] and that the concluding stanzas express Chaucer's "ambivalen[ce] about all the authorities—moral, political, and literary—he chose to serve; and even as he subjected himself to them, he subjected them to the test of his own experience as re-created for us by his poetry."[62]

Faced with an end to which he does not want to come, the narrator seeks to translate his story into a moral by using a variety of poetic devices. Just as the narrator uses multiple techniques to try to excuse Criseyde, he uses multiple methods to attempt a conclusion: an apology (for the story—he'd rather write about good women, V.1772ff.), proverbial advice (beware of men, V.1779-85), a poet's hope for recognition ("go litel book…" V.1786-92), an exemplum (Troilus goes to the eighth sphere, V.1807-27), a summary of the poem (the "swich fyn" stanza, V.1828-34), admonition (to "yonge, fresshe folks," V.1835-48), an appeal to the indignation of audience ("Lo here…" stanza, V.1849-55), and a dedication and prayer (V.1836-48, 1856-69).[63] The narrator creates a "sense of inconclusiveness induced by the presence of so many figures for endings."[64] Indeed, the stanza that denounces the cursed rites of pagans also ends with "Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche / In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche" (V.1854-55). To what place is he consigning poetry, in a stanza that dismisses "corsed olde rites," "thise wrecched worldes appetites" and calls Jove, Apollo, and Mars "swich rascaille," when he

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[60] "Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 179.
[61] Bonnie Wheeler makes a similar point in "Dante, Chaucer, and the Ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*," Philological Quarterly 61 (1982), 115.
[62] "The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 20.
[63] Evans, "'Making strange': the narrator (?), the ending (?), and Chaucer's Troilus," 165. See also Markland, who claims that the last "seventeen stanzas offer at least three endings," in "*Troilus and Criseyde*: The Inviolability of the Ending," MLQ (1970), 151.
[64] "'Making Strange': The Narrator (?), the Ending (?), and Chaucer's Troilus," 168.

also consigns his poem to classical authors by having it kiss the steps where Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius walked (V.1791-92)? As McGerr comments, the "piling on of closure devices" leads to a "retrospective view [that] reminds us that we have not left our earthly perspective behind, in spite of the narrator's suggestions."[65] Fyler points out that "our judgments are open to qualification, and—while we stay in the world—they remain tentative, ambiguous, often contradictory."[66] Woods' description of the conclusion is also apt: Chaucer uses convention to create "something profoundly original" that "den[ies] the possibility of simple responses."[67]

Viewing the end of Book V as the expression of multiple endings expressed by a narrator who struggles against and even feels betrayed by his story addresses what has been a quiet inadequacy in some scholarship. Some who have seen the narrator as not equal to Chaucer himself have then claimed that the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* does, however, belong to Chaucer. Such a leap in identification calls for explanation that has not yet been adequately provided. Boitani, for example, separates poet and narrator for most of his discussion of the poem, but claims that the last 10 lines of *Troilus and Criseyde* are where "Chaucer finally turn[s] away from his book, to address himself to the Infinite."[68] Boitani makes a sudden and curious shift from Narrator (he consistently capitalizes the word elsewhere) to Chaucer, with nary an explanation. Strohm assumes the shift in tone in the concluding stanzas means that Chaucer is speaking at the end, rather than the narrator: after addressing the young, fresh folks, "Chaucer shifts to a more

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[65] Chaucer's Open Books, 118. Sklute's identification of two endings is similar to McGerr's view; according to him, the first occurs at V.1765-98: "its morality grows directly out of the poem's action," with the second at V.1799-1869 which "undercuts" the conclusiveness of the first (Virtue of Necessity, 76).
[66] "*Auctoritee* and Allusion in *Troilus and Criseyde* ," 78.
[67] "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and Her Family," 36-37.
[68] English Medieval Narrative, 226.

general address in his bemused assault on rascally pagan gods and (apparently) on those poetic sources that got him into this trouble in the first place."[69] Up to this point, Strohm has referred to "narrative voices" and "the narrator," but quietly switches to "Chaucer" when writing about the end of the poem. Nolan argues that the narrator, whom she has earlier labeled the "narrating 'I'," becomes Chaucer in the address to Gower and Strode, but does not identify how it happens.[70] The only critic to my knowledge to offer more explanation is Howard, who identifies the narrator taking off his mask at the words "Go, litel book" and his reference to "the form olde clerkes speech / In poetry." In these lines, according to Howard, "we are made aware that this author destroying his mask is in fact the historical Geoffrey Chaucer, friend of John Gower and Ralph Strode."[71] How we are made aware of this "fact," however, still needs more compelling explanation. The shifting tones at the end of the poem do not *necessarily* mean that Chaucer himself is speaking. As Lawton points out, there is a change in tone, but "it is not at all a shift of voice."[72] The narrator has been from the start working toward the conclusion that sees Troilus "fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.4), which the ending(s) of the poem describe. Moreover, there is no clear moment where the narrator unmasks himself to speak directly as Chaucer.

The narrator's engagement with the text he is writing indicates that such detachment as he urges at the end is not so easily accomplished by the narrator of the world of books, the fat Geffrey carried by Jove's eagle, the humorous and sleepy narrator who prays to Morpheus, and the unsatisfied reader in the *Parliament of Fowls* who has

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[69] Social Chaucer, 57.
[70] Chaucer and the Tradition of the 'Roman Antique', 206, 245.
[71] "The Philosophies in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 172.
[72] Chaucer's Narrators, 82.

not found what he seeks but reads more *books* nonetheless. Salter argued that the narrator's attempts to excuse Criseyde express the poet's struggle to deal with his sources and the innovations he has made, and that the attempt to make his story conform to the one he received leads to a "nervous breakdown" at the end of Book V.[73] This "nervous breakdown" is deliberate, illustrating the difficulty of the leap of faith required to distance himself from the story with a Christian moral. The narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*, like Chaucer's other narrators, has committed himself so intensely to reading that it should not be surprising that, despite continued dissatisfaction, re-reading and critiquing of other texts, he is hesitant to disassociate himself with the texts of the world, and the world of the text. The pose of a compiler in *Troilus and Criseyde* is just that, a pose that the narrator cannot sustain. His innovations and contradictions would seem to set him up as an *auctor*, yet the openness of the conclusion suggests otherwise, as his call for disassociation with the world loses assertive power coming as it does after a number of other concluding techniques.

The above view might seem to suggest that the narrator is inept. Markland, for instance, labels him "a timid man" who "has not understood the significance of what he was saying" until the conclusion.[74] Such an assessment is one which Spearing's work on the narrator seeks to discount because he sees it implicitly devaluing Chaucer's poetry.[75] Although I disagree with Spearing's contention that the narrator is not separate from Chaucer, I share his concern over the valuation of Chaucer's artistry. Rather than an ironically obtuse narrator, I suggest instead that the narrator's inconsistencies, his

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[73] "*Troilus and Criseyde*: Poet and Narrator," 290-91.
[74] "*Troilus and Criseyde*: The Inviolability of the Ending," 152-53.
[75] "A Ricardian 'I': The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde,*" and discussion in Chapter 1, pp. 17-21.

contradictions of Boccaccio, his vacillations, and his disguised interpretations are a dramatization of responses to authority. He *is* an imperfect artist,[76] but deliberately so. The narrator's deviations signal an interest in invention that simultaneously uses and comments upon invention as the filling in of gaps left by a source: through the narrator, Chaucer invents gaps not found in his source to complicate the interpretations of situations and characters. What is the narrator to do with a character such as Criseyde, who is more than her sources, but also bound by them? Boccaccio's story is a yoke that the narrator wears heavily as he proceeds to the ending that he does not want to, yet must write. He cannot entirely displace the text with which he works, even though he purposely contradicts and points it out as inadequate. The narrator's relationship to Criseyde is a depiction of the rewriting of Ovid's and Virgil's stories of Dido and Aeneas that Geffrey encounters in the temple, except that instead of inserting a borrowed story for the voice of Dido as in the *House of Fame*, he invents a voice for Criseyde, and as a result, the narrator's engagement with Criseyde is more intense than Geffrey's sympathy for Dido's story.

The narrator is disruptive of the trust one might usually place in one who transmits a text. While an author such as Dante also explicitly addresses his audience, it is for a moral point, to look behind the veil of allegory he has provided to discern the moral, spiritual truth.[77] The addresses of Chaucer's narrator are more problematic: the narrator subjects himself to interpretation while the words contained in his addresses to the audience deny subjection to readerly control. The narrator's words are veils which the

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[76] Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid, 126.

[77] *Inferno* IX.61-63, *Purgatorio* VII.19-21; also Dante's *Convivio* II.prose 2.1, where the allegorical sense "is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction."

audience cannot completely pull back, whose nature is opaque rather than transparent. The importance of such a depiction is that Chaucer uses the narrator to question such self-assertive stances as Dante's and Boccaccio's,[78] and to challenge the uncomplicated moral of Boccaccio's poem (beware the wicked woman who betrays Troiolo/Filostrato) by relating a romance more complex than the one that unfolds in the Italian poem. Antique remedies, antique texts, an author labeled with an antique name, courtly convention, philosophical deliberation, innovation—the interplay of these elements reveals perspectives of reading, love, and authority that resist reduction to a single moral. They all have influence, and Chaucer does not seem to suggest that they be dispensed with entirely, but instead treated with a more critical, questioning eye.

Indeed, the only character labeled an authority in the poem provides cause for hesitation. Introducing Calchas in Book I, the narrator calls him "a lord of gret auctorite, / A gret devyn" (I.65-66). Equating authority with divination from near the very start of the poem suggests that authority is to be treated with hesitation, as the "lord of gret auctorite" who is correct in his prediction is also the betrayer of his city who quietly sneaks away to the Greek camp, after which the Trojans speak of "hym that falsly hadde his feith so broken" (I.89). Faithfulness and texts are intertwined: the narrator struggles to be faithful to his story in the face of his reactions to it, Troilus' faithfulness to his idea of Criseyde causes him pain, Pandarus' faithfulness to his friend means disloyalty to his niece. Faithfulness is of course a problem for Criseyde as well.

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[78] Taylor argues that Chaucer's narrator is modeled on Dante's not in order to imitate but to comment on Dante's converted narrator (Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 85).

Reading Criseyde: "thise bokes wol me shende"

One of Chaucer's most intriguing, maligned, and defended characters, Criseyde is also a reader, introduced as such in our first glimpse of her. After Calchas' departure for the Greek camp the narrator describes her thus: "For of hire lif she was ful sore in drede, / As she that nyste what was best to rede" (I.95-96). Compared to a reader who knows neither how to interpret the situation, nor what advice is best, nor how to govern herself, she seems to experience all three reactions at once. Parallel descriptions of Criseyde occur in Books IV and V. After learning of the exchange, she "brenneth both in love and drede, / So that she nyste what was best to reede" (IV.679). There is no comparison of Criseyde to an abstract woman here, suggesting that she legitimately does not know what to do. In Book V, she is led to the Greeks, "For sorwe of which she felt hire herte blede, / As she that nyste what was best to rede" (V.18). Away from her women and her house, deserted by her father, betrayed by the promise that Ector cannot keep, and by the only family member left to protect her, Criseyde again is like a woman unable to advise herself.

The two instances of simile suggest that she is not as interpretively feeble as she seems in the Book IV reference. After deciding to remain in the Greek camp, Criseyde utters a speech which sounds like a remarkably astute assessment of herself:

> "Allas, for now is clene ago
> My name of trouthe in love, for everemo!
> For I have falsed oon the gentileste
> That evere was, and oon the worthieste!
>
> Allas of me, unto the worldes ende,
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!

Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!" (V.1058-62)

She continues, commenting that women "moost wol haten me of alle" and will say that "I have hem don deshonour, weylaway!" (V.1063, 1066). Her comments have become validation for negative interpretations of her, and there has been a widespread assumption that her comments should be taken at face value. One of Robertson's less harsh comments agrees with Criseyde's own reading of herself, as he labels her "a sort of feminine Everyman," emblematic of the world's failings.[79] While he doubts her elsewhere,[80] in this instance he readily agrees with Criseyde. Fleming also notes that Criseyde "correctly predicts her fame."[81] Wetherbee claims that her words "condemn herself, charmingly but decisively."[82] Even those who do not agree with such readings as Robertson's and Fleming's take Criseyde's words at face value. Minnis and Taylor, for example, agree that Criseyde is aware that she will be seen as a negative exemplum.[83]

Such ready acceptance of her words obscures a point of importance. Criseyde's prediction of her infamy is an interpretation of herself rather than the fact it has been assumed to be—it is a textualization of herself; after being treated as a text by others and

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[79] A Preface to Chaucer, 498-99. For Criseyde as representative of women, see also Payne, Key of Remembrance, 194.

[80] E.g., that Criseyde ever possessed any real affection for Troilus: "Criseyde will always be true to herself"; "The mastery of a man like Troilus, a man of prowess and renown, a prince, and a handsome prince at that, would be quite an achievement." He doubts her reaction to Pandarus' delivery of Troilus' first letter: she "reluctantly, or coyly, permitted Pandarus to thrust Troilus' literary efforts into her bosom" (A Preface to Chaucer, 486). More discussion of the letter writing scenes follows below and in the next chapter.

[81] Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 179. Gordon, who sees irony, or at least more than literal meanings elsewhere in the poem, takes Criseyde's comments at face value (The Double Sorrow of Troilus, 87).

[82] Chaucer and the Poets, 192.

[83] Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 68; Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 65. See also Waswo, "The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 18; Schibanoff, "Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 651; Wetherbee, Chaucer and the Poets, 192; Woods, "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and Her Family," 33; Mann, "The Authority of Audience in Chaucer," 7; Gayle Margherita, "Criseyde's Remains: Romance and the Question of Justice," Exemplaria 12 (2000), 272.

resisting those efforts, she sees herself as a part of a text. And texts run the risk of misinterpretation and mis-writing, as the narrator acknowledges toward the end of the poem:

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englissh and in writing of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (V.1793-98)

The narrator's plea for both reliable translation and careful understanding might well apply to Criseyde; she is a reader and creator of texts, and her words and texts can be misunderstood, as happens both inside and outside the poem. Although Boccaccio had already written of her, as a character inside the poem she cannot be aware of that text. Additionally, neither Henryson nor Shakespeare had yet written their versions of her. From our vantage point, it is seductively easy to validate Criseyde's view, and while authors and scholars have assumed that Criseyde is correct, they have obscured the possibility that what she offers is an interpretation. Chaucer's Criseyde calls for a more nuanced reading than her own interpretation provides.

One reason that her reading of herself is to be mistrusted resides in her assessment of Troilus as one of the "gentileste" and "worthieste" men. Her interpretation is incongruent to the Troilus she has seen, who says on the consummation night that "Though ther be mercy writen in youre cheere, / God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!" (III.1356-7). Victoria Warren has convincingly argued that Troilus treats Criseyde as a text, loving not her but the image of her he has created, since many of his

experiences of her are not first-hand but occur through Pandarus.[84] Robertson and Fleming, who otherwise would disagree with Warren, express similar ideas concerning Troilus' lack of real knowledge about her. Robertson points out that when Troilus falls in love with her, he "has never talked to Criseyde, knows nothing of her character and manners, and has no idea whether she is a lovable person, a moral weakling, or a shrew."[85] Fleming builds upon Robertson's idea in arguing that Troilus' love is idolatry, as he creates an image of her: "Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde / In which he saugh al holly hire figure" (I.365-66).[86] Warren adds, moreover, that Troilus' unquestioning acceptance of Pandarus' questionable actions do not absolve him from culpability for behavior such as going along with Pandarus' lie about Horaste.[87] Cox argues similarly, that "it is Troilus who betrays Criseyde first" in his passiveness at parliament and in his fearful, "weak excuse" that rescuing Criseyde might result in her death; he concentrates on his pain and in his letter blames her for leaving.[88] The narrator's explanation of why Troilus does not kill Diomede "Lest that Criseyde, in rumour of this fare, / Sholde han ben slayn" includes a protestation of "And ellis, certeyn, as I seyde yore, / He hadde it don" (V.53-56). The narrator points out *why* Troilus does not act, his use of "certeyn" resembling his excuses of "treweliche" that attempt to excuse

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[84] "(Mis)Reading the 'Text' of Criseyde: Context and Identity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," Chaucer Review 36 (2001), 5-8.
[85] A Preface to Chaucer, 479.
[86] Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 75. In the "mirror of the mind," Chaucer is here drawing upon the lover of the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Consolation of* Philosophy 5.m.4.16-20, as Edwards points out (Chaucer and Boccaccio, 70); also Edwards' "Pandarus's 'Unthrift' and the Problem of Desire," Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'Subgit to Alle Poesye. Essays in Criticism, R.A. Shoaf, ed. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 81.
[87] "(Mis)Reading the 'Text' of Criseyde," 5-8. When she wants to know why Troilus is jealous, "for the lasse harm, he moste feyne" (III.1158), saying that the reason is that she might have once looked at Horaste.
[88] Gender and Language in Chaucer, 47. Also Woods, "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and Her Family," 36.

Criseyde, but he also re-emphasizes the fact that Troilus does not act to bring Criseyde back to him, underscoring Troilus' inaction, which betrays both Criseyde and his relationship with her. Even though she does not see all that the audience is able to see of Troilus' behavior, there is enough that she has observed to lend doubt to Criseyde's assessment of her lover's virtue.

Moreover, further evidence that her commentary is interpretation resides in Criseyde's fear that "thise bokes wol me shende," which calls attention to the textual nature of the existence into which she places herself. This process is aided by the narrator. In the lines preceding Criseyde's interpretation of her future, the narrator blames stories for her betrayal while trying to excuse her. In Book V, after the narrator says that she "took fully purpos for to dwelle" in the Greek camp, (V.1029), he uncomfortably explains the situation by deferring to stories: "the storie telleth us" that she gave him Troilus' bay steed, "I fynde ek in stories elleswhere" that she wept to see Diomede hurt by Troilus, and, reducing his sources to gossip reminiscent of the *House of Fame*, "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte" (V.1037, 1044, 1050). This deferral suggests both that "men say—I do not" and "men say—I know not", offering a further instance of the narrator's tendency to defend her and contradict his source. Focusing again on a textual Criseyde, he uses texts to attempt excusing her: "But trewely, the storie telleth us, / Ther made never woman moore wo / Than she, whan that she falsed Troilus" (V.1051-53). By calling attention to what stories say, the narrator highlights both his struggle to forgive her in his own work and the fact that she is bound to a textual existence, what stories have told him, rather than what he would prefer to say about her but says in a text nonetheless.

Determining how Chaucer's audience interpreted Criseyde is difficult, but he did imagine one reaction. In the G Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the God of Love rebukes "Chaucer" for writing about Criseyde's betrayal: "Hast thow nat mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Crisseyde Troylus forsook, / In shewynge how that wemen han don mis?" (G 264-66). The God of Love, too, essentializes the story of Criseyde, finding no fault with the actions of Troilus and Pandarus even though he condemns Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose* as "heresye ageyns my lawe" (G 256). If he condemns the translation of the French poem, he should condemn Pandarus' advice to Troilus, which in part derives from the *Roman de la Rose*.[89] It seems that the God of Love has misread *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer presents another misreading in Alceste's defense of "Chaucer" to the God of Love, as she humorously belittles his talent:

> for he useth bokes for to make,
> And taketh non hed of what matere he take,
> Therfore he wrot the Rose and ek Criseyde
> Of innocence, and nyste what he seyde. (G 342-45)

By asserting quite the opposite of what Chaucer did in writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, that he innocently and unknowingly translated what he read, Alceste's comment gestures to the careful attention Chaucer did pay to the material used to create Criseyde. If he had taken her from Boccaccio in the manner described here, she would remain an active letter

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[89] E.g.: Pandarus advises Troilus to tell of his sorrow because Pandarus sympathizes with him, for both "of love we pleyne" (I.711). In the *Roman de la Rose*, the God of Love advises Amant to find "a wise and discreet companion," preferably one who is also a lover: "You will tell him your whole situation and will ask his advice on how you can do something which might be pleasing to your sweetheart" (2686-2702). Pandarus tells Troilus to "Stond faste, for to good port hastow rowed," for "I hope of this to maken a good ende" (I.969, 973); Cf. The Old Woman's comment: "Then, if you follow my advice, you will come to a good harbor" (12759-60). Pandarus tells Troilus of Daunger, resistance or disdain, that stands in the way of Kynde (II.1373-79); this idea refers to the French text's Danger, who leaps in and rebukes both Amant and Bel Accueil when Amant approaches the rosebud, banishing the lover and accusing Bel Accueil of treason (2920-42).

recipient and writer rather than resistant;[90] she would still be the one who lures Troiolo out of hiding by a discreet cough and telling everyone to go to bed,[91] rather than a character in a bedroom, to whom Pandarus brings Troilus (III.953), after Pandarus advises everyone to go to bed (III.658); she would remain perceptive of Diomedes' advances, "yielding to such pressures" as his eloquence and handsomeness, having told him "You have to choose your time and moment carefully if you want to lay hold on someone's affections,"[92] rather than half listening (V.178-79) and politely responding to Diomede's offer of service with "good manere" (V.186), saying neither yes nor no to him (V.1002-1003), or being the subject of Diomede's "sleghte" that brings her "Into his net" (V.773, 775). Criseyde is "slydynge of corage" (V.825) rather than receptive to Diomedes' passionate nature as Criseida is in Boccaccio's poem.[93]

In the legends of good women following the dream encounter, Chaucer writes a response to his two readers, and perhaps a more quiet response to real audience members who might have interpreted *Troilus and Criseyde* in similar fashion: the legends are focused on the actions of bad men and the suffering they cause for women.[94] The lesson, one mentioned at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, is that woman should be wary of men. In the mouth of the *Troilus and Criseyde* narrator, the advice loses its effectiveness,

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[90] Although she first asks Pandaro to return Troiolo's letter, Criseida then "took it and placed it in her bosom" (II.114). Criseyde asks Pandarus to return it to Troilus (II.1141); Pandarus responds by shoving it down her breast (II.1154-55).As Criseida sits down to write, she thinks, "Now I must find a time and means to quench this flame...If Pandaro returns for my reply I shall give him a pleasant and favourable one" (II.115). Criseyde does not wish to write, the sense of which is that she thanked Troilus "but holden hym in honed / She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde / In love; but as his suster, hym to plese, / She wolde fayn to doon his herte an ese" (II.1222-25).

[91] *Il Filostrato* III.26.

[92] *Il Filostrato* VI.31, 33-34.

[93] *Il Filostrato* VI.33.

[94] McCall, for instance, argues that Chaucer "blamed the men for their unnaturalness—their perfidy, their unanchored flightiness, their selfishness" (Chaucer Among the Gods, 117).

occurring as part of a struggle to find some way to excuse Criseyde. However, as a response to his writing of Criseyde, the *Legend of Good Women*'s advice is clearer. Chaucer's Criseyde and the dialogue in the *Legend of Good Women* concerned with her suggest that readers should look deeper into the poem to reevaluate the circumstances and the behavior of the men which surrounded her.

There is no doubt that she is false to Troilus.[95] She has, however, been too readily judged and excused—by herself, the poem's narrator, her critics, and her defenders. Her comments about herself in Book V and her readings elsewhere in the poem resist masculine attempts to control her within the poem. Readings of her, and performed by her, suggest that while she cannot be exonerated for betraying Troilus, she is more than an object of idolatry,[96] and at the same time more than a victim of her circumstances. Those who wish to condemn her find evidence for doing so,[97] and those who wish to defend her do likewise—the poem affords both readings, the most effective of which resides between the two. As Muscatine claimed almost fifty years ago, she is neither innocent nor calculating but "ambiguously mixed."[98]

As noted above, one view of Criseyde is that of her own reading, the untrue woman who besmirches the reputation of all womankind. Such readings emphasize what they see as her selfishness. Gordon, for example, comments that Criseyde's love is motivated by "worldly, and largely self-regarding considerations."[99] Robertson saw her as a "fickle woman" who is the object of misdirected love, whose fear is "always self-

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[95] Howes, "Chaucer's Criseyde: The Betrayer Betrayed," 324.
[96] Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, 477, 499; Fleming, Clasical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, especially Chapter 1, "Quaint Light in Troy."
[97] As Cox points out (Gender and Language in Chaucer, 48).
[98] Chaucer and the French Tradition, 157.
[99] The Double Sorrow of Troilus, 84, and 101-8. See also Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, 486.

centered" and whose love is "a self-love that seeks the favor of Fortune."[100] Similarly, Fleming comments that the story is about "a wicked woman who destroys a noble man."[101] While Wetherbee acknowledges the depth of her character in contrast to Troilus' conventionality,[102] calling her "a remarkable person in her own right," he also sees in her a "practical, self-serving, materialistic view of life" and a "deep-seated instinct for self protection" that betrays both Troilus and Pandarus.[103] Donaldson called her Book V letter to Troilus "one of the most poisonously hypocritical letters in the annals of literature."[104] More recently, Suzanne Hagedorn has argued that "Criseyde's concern for herself outweighs her love for Troilus."[105]

Scholars resistant to such views of Criseyde have done much to rehabilitate the ways in which Criseyde refuses to conform to the above assessments. Although Richard Neuse goes too far in identifying Criseyde as a type of Beatrice, he points out that critics have overlooked the idea that "in being sent to the Greek camp in exchange for Antenor Criseyde has reason to feel betrayed herself."[106] Weisl discusses the lack of security that both Trojan society and romance conventions provide for Criseyde, in the insufficient protection offered her by the men in the story and in epic elements such as the eagle in her dream that intrude upon her private (i.e. romance) space.[107] For Weisl, Criseyde

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[100] A Preface to Chaucer, 472, 75, and 76, respectively.
[101] Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 179.
[102] Troilus is indeed rather conventional: a stricken, suffering lover who needs assistance to assuage his pain , much like Amant in the *Roman de le Rose*. Payne points out that 8 of the 10 apostrophes in the poem belong to Troilus, concluding that they make him the spokesman for love (The Key of Remembrance, 201); as such, they also make him the most conventional.
[103] Chaucer and the Poets, 195, 191, 182.
[104] Speaking of Chaucer, 82.
[105] Chaucer's Abandoned Women, 143.
[106] "*Troilus and Criseyde*: Another Dantean Reading," Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'Subgit to alle poesye', R.A. Shoaf, ed. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 207-208.
[107] Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 33-4, 46.

exemplifies the paradox inherent in romance, that women are central to, but marginalized by, the genre. Chaucer writes about love in a way that shows the limitations and unreachable expectations inherent in romances: "Because Criseyde has defied the genre's expectations by failing to remain faithful to Troilus, the poem cannot remain faithful to romance's slippery conventions."[108] Indeed, one reason Criseyde has been viewed harshly lies in her betrayal of romance: she lives in a practical, real world while Troilus lives in an idealized romance;[109] she also survives while he suffers and dies, and where suffering is heroicized, survival is not.[110] A more recent view is that of Mary Behrman, who argues that Criseyde is disappointed by Troilus, discovering that "her lover does not share her faith in the heroic ideal."[111] While Behrman counters views that essentialize Criseyde as either selfish and fickle or a victim, some of her claims for Criseyde's preference for heroism over courtly love are based on erroneous readings of important moments in the poem. She identifies the book that Criseyde and her ladies read as a "geste," a story of heroic deeds, when Criseyde herself calls it a "romanuce" of Thebes (II.100).[112] Likewise, she reads part of Criseyde's deliberation about love, "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothing n'acheveth" (II.807-8) as evidence of a self-confidence akin to that of "a doughty warrior."[113] The context of this quotation suggests otherwise. Just previous to the above comment, Criseyde has expressed concern over how busy she would have to be to please a lover if she chose to love, and has pondered how "every

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[108] Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 3.
[109] Margherita, "Criseyde's Remains: Romance and the Question of Justice," 269, 271-2. See also Weisl, Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 3, 48.
[110] Louise O. Fradenburg, "'Our owen wo to drynke': Loss, Gender and Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in Shoaf, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'Subgit to Alle Poesye', 89, 101.
[111] "Heroic Criseyde," Chaucer Review 38 (2004), 316, 319.
[112] "Heroic Criseyde," 319.
[113] "Heroic Criseyde," 322.

wikked tonge" would speak if it were discovered that she was in such a relationship (II.799-805). After the comment in question, the narrator tells us Criseyde vacillates between hope and dread, "now hoot, now cold" (II.810-11). Moreover, Criseyde then listens to the Song of Antigone, with its extolling of Love (e.g. "thanked be ye, lord, for that I love! / This is the righte lif that I am inne" [II.850-51]), again exhibiting a preference for romance rather than epic. In context, it is uncertain that any of her thoughts in this passage, especially "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothing n'acheveth," can be read as confident, to say nothing of heroic.

Also countering negative assessments of Criseyde, Dinshaw astutely points out the defects in Donaldson's and Robertson's readings of Criseyde in that both proved susceptible to feelings of betrayal by Criseyde.[114] Moreover, Dinshaw's insights into the role of reading in *Troilus and Criseyde* point toward the ways in which masculine acts of reading seek to contain the uncontrollable feminine text of Criseyde,[115] arguing that Criseyde's inconstancy is actually faithfulness to the patriarchal society that treats her as an object of trade.[116] Cox, drawing on Dinshaw's arguments, views Criseyde as an emblem of the instability of both texts and language; in her reading Criseyde is "subject to the manipulative maneuverings of the men who would inscribe her. She is in effect the

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[114] For instance, Donaldson's comment that he was "enchanted by Criseyde," but later called her Book V letter to Troilus "one of the most poisonously hypocritical letters in the annals of literature" (Speaking of Chaucer, 82). Dinshaw points out that Robertson's denial of emotional responses in favor of intellectual ones are betrayed at moments such as the one in which Robertson comments that the pun on "queynt" when Troilus addresses Criseyde's empty house (V.543), "is a bitter comment on what it is that Troilus actually misses" (Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, 500; cited in Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 34). Fleming makes the point that Robertson was arguing that "queynt" is an intellectual pun (Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 14-15, 34), yet as Dinshaw's argument demonstrates, Robertson's objectivity wavers when discussing Criseyde: e.g. Criseyde "reluctantly, or coyly, permitted Pandarus to thrust Troilus' literary efforts into her bosom" and "She shows no sympathy for the poor boy [Troilus] at all" (A Preface to Chaucer, 486, 487).

[115] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 39-47.

[116] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 58-62.

translated text of each reading, bearing the language that each imposes on her as each reader appropriates her as his or her own."[117] Both Dinshaw and Cox rightly acknowledge the ways in which Criseyde is treated as a text by others, yet their readings overlook Criseyde's constructions of herself. Defects in her reading noted above notwithstanding, the virtue of Behrman's argument is in its critique of Cox's and Dinshaw's views of Criseyde as reductive, as they make of her "another example of the endlessly suffering woman" subject to men.[118] While Criseyde *is* treated as a text by the poem's male characters—Pandarus who imposes texts upon her, Troilus who treats her as an object of romance, the narrator who compares her to his sources—she is not merely the text of others.

Gretchen Mieszkowski's argument about Criseyde is similar to Cox's and Dinshaw's in her claim that Criseyde is a mirror for the men who surround her, focusing on the ways Criseyde reacts to those around her: when she is with Pandarus she speaks like he does, and when with Troilus her speech resembles his.[119] While Criseyde's speech does change when she is around Troilus and Pandarus,[120] Mieszkowski's interpretation does not account for moments in which Criseyde resists Pandarus and when she ponders

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[117] Gender and Language in Chaucer, 43.
[118] "Heroic Criseyde," 315.
[119] "Chaucer's Much Loved Criseyde," 122. Muscatine made this point also, pointing out the different styles Criseyde uses to speak to Troilus and to Pandarus are adapted to the person with whom she speaks and that she reflects what others want to see (Chaucer and the French Tradition, 155-6). Although acknowledging Criseyde's thought processes as more than one-dimensional, Nolan views Criseyde's acts of reading as mutable, "mov[ing] from one rhetorical form to another" (Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman Antique*, 234).
[120] For instance: She jokes with Pandarus about his mistress when he asks if her book is about love (II.98); wondering at what Pandarus really means by telling her about Troilus, she thinks, "I shal felen what he meneth, ywis" (II.387), then asks for his advice. She speaks to Troilus with more formality: her first words to him address him as "Sire" (III.68,75) and thank him for his patronage: "First yow to thonke, and of youre lordshipe eke / Continuaunce I wolde yow biseche" (III.76-77); in the same scene at Deiphebus' house she tells him "Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely, / And in swich forme as he gan now devyse, / Receyven hum fully to my servyse" (III.159-61).

love by herself. Her response to the sight and delivery of Troilus' letter asserts a place for her own identity, as she tells him "Scrit ne bille, / For love of God, that toucheth swich matere, / Ne brynge me noon" (II.1130-32). Alone, she conforms to the speech of neither as she considers the consequences of a relationship with Troilus: because he is a king's son, it might be worse for her to scorn him; he is neither a fool nor a boaster; she cannot hinder him from loving her; he is second only to Ector; she is one of the most beautiful women in Troy; she is her "owene woman, wel at ese" and "Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!'"; she asks herself, "What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus?", answering by turn that she is "nat religious" and could keep her honor if she loves Troilus but then considers the loss of her freedom: "Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie / My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?"; she fears the talk of "wikked tonges"; she concludes that "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothyng n'acheveth" but still wavers between hope and fear: "And with an other thought hire herte quaketh; / Than slepeth hope, and after drede awaketh" (II.703-810). While these moments are not speech, they demonstrate that Criseyde does not simply conform to what Pandarus wishes or respond to Troilus in courtly fashion. Indeed, one moment in which she seems to think like Pandarus—that "It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie" (II.462)—reveals at the same time that she is not as malleable as Mieszkowski suggests.

While resisting others' attempts to control her, she textualizes herself—she presents herself as a text to be read. After refusing to reply to Troilus' letter, Criseyde does write on her own, responding to Pandarus' offer to write one for her. Rather than having her uncle construct a text of her for Troilus, she writes her own epistle. For Criseyde, the process of reading and writing does not indicate an attempt to control or

advise others, however, as her writing takes a defensive posture.[121] She tells Pandarus, "I nevere dide thing with more peyne / Than writen this, to which ye me constreyne" (II.1231-2), and Criseyde's presentation of herself is limited by the men around her. At the same time, her letter does afford some protection, as she covers her words under a shield (II.1328), so much so Troilus does not know what to make of it when he reads it: "But finaly, he took al for the beste" (II.1324). She creates an interpretive screen that makes definitive interpretation of her difficult, if not impossible. When Troilus reads her letter, "to the more worthi part he held, / That what for hope and Pandarus byheste, / His grete wo foryede he at the leste" (II.1329-30). As the narrator tells us, he relies partially upon his perception of the letter and partially upon the assessment of the letter Pandarus gave him before he read it, that "thow shalt arise and see / A charme that was sent right now to the, / The which kan helen the of thyn accesse" (II.1313-15). Interpretation of the text, even with Pandarus' guidance, does not lead to certainty for Troilus.

Interpretative uncertainty comes to the fore in the narrator's enigmatic comments about Criseyde on the morning after the consummation. To Pandarus' joking comments about the rain which must have kept her awake during the night, Criseyde responds by calling him a fox and accusing him of causing "al this fare," adding that "for al youre wordes white, / O, whoso seeth yow knoweth yow ful lite" (III.1565-68). After Pandarus reaches under the sheet, thrusts his arm under her neck "and at the laste hire kiste," the narrator refuses to interpret, saying that "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III.1576). He says that Criseyde forgave him and "with here uncle gan to pleye, / For

[121] McGerr similarly notes that Criseyde's engagement with the "rhetorical games" of the poem is defensive in nature; she does not initiate those games (Chaucer's Open Books, 108).

other cause was ther noon than so" (III. 1577-78). As noted above, the narrator's handling of the scene invites but also frustrates analysis. Criseyde's "pleye" could mean that she makes jest with him, or that she has sex with Pandarus and is not coerced into doing so. The overtones of the scene set up both possibilities. What the scene means for Pandarus, and what Pandarus does or does not do, will be discussed in the following chapter. The purpose it seems to fulfill for Criseyde is that it creates suspicion but does not affirm it—in a similar fashion, her labeling of Pandarus as a fox, a devious Reynard, opens up the possibility of "a perception of her uncle's fictions and fabrications that is far from genial,"[122] but one that is not wholly confirmed. Just how much she knows or suspects about Pandarus is left unsaid. The narrator's comment that he will not reveal what occurs reminds the audience once again that she is part of his text, and evaluation of this scene leads to uncertainty, whether one thinks well or ill of Criseyde.

Her Book V letter offers up another interpretive shield, with the defense that "Th'entente is al, and nat the letters space" (V.1630). As in other instances involving intent in *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, determining the nature of that intention is difficult. Donaldson's comment about the enigmatic nature of Criseyde is still applicable: "By learning more about Criseyde we know less; detail increases her mystery not our knowledge of her."[123] Hanning concurs, pointing outo that Criseyde "is susceptible of [mis]construction from several perspectives, none certified correct by the poem that

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[122] Havely, "White words, false world; Chaucer's Pandarus and the antifraternal tradition in 'Troilus,' Books I-III," Medium Aevum 61 (1992), 259.

[123] Speaking of Chaucer, 55-6. Dinshaw argues that Donaldson makes such statements to rationalize his reaction to Criseyde: "'You can never understand a woman' is a way of understanding her" (Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 37). My intent in using Donaldson's statement is not to validate what Dinshaw labels Donaldson's way of imposing a reading upon Criseyde. Rather, it seems to me that Chaucer's revisions both make her a more complex, more realized character than Boccaccio's Criseida, and creating ambiguity about her is part of that process.

contains them all."[124] We are given the full text of her letter rather than the narrator's summary as in Book II, but much of the letter seems hollow in its formality:[125] she begins, for instance, by calling him "Cupides sone, ensample of goodlyheede, / O swerd of knyghthod, sours of gentilesse" (V.1590-1), later continuing "Grevous to me, God woot, is youre unreste / Youre haste, and that the goddess ordinaunce / It semeth nat ye take it for the beste" (V.1604-6), and concluding "And fareth now wel. God have yow in his grace!" (V.1631). She weakly promises "Come I wole; but yet in swich disjoynte / I stonde as now that what yer or what day / That this shal be, than kan I naught apoynte" (V.1618-20). Because we do not see the Book II letter she writes, we have no way of determining whether the shield she offers here is similar to the previous one. The sense of the first letter is that she thanked him and would not love him except as a sister, but the narrator does not reveal the style in which she wrote those words; excusing his ability, he chooses to relay "Th'effect, as ferforth as I kan undersonde" (II.1220). In Book V, the narrator lets her words speak for themselves, but they obscure rather than reveal her purpose. If her earlier words resembled these, it would be easier to claim that she was fickle or selfish from the start; without such a basis for comparison, the intent of her later letter is less certain. After reading it, Troilus comes to see that she will not return, but he reaches that realization gradually, for the letter is still not a transparent text to him: "this lettre thoughte he al straunge," then "fynaly, he ful ne trowen myghte / That she ne wolde hym holden that she hyghte" (V.1632, 1635-6). As the narrator says, "at the laste, / For

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[124] "Come in Out of the Code: Interpreting the Discourse of Desire in Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," in Shoaf, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: "Subgit to alle Poesye" Essays in Criticism, 132, brackets original.

[125] Camargo, The Middle English Verse Love Epistle (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 81; McKinnell, "The Letter as a Type of Formal Level," 87.

any thing, men shal the soothe se" (1639-40), but it is not until he sees Criseyde's brooch on Diomede that "now ful wel he wiste, / His lady nas no lenger on to triste" (1665-6). Why did she write to Troilus? Her "entente" is difficult to ascertain, and we have no help from the narrator who, with a lack of confidence and another excuse for her, tells us that she wrote to him "for routhe— / I take it so" (V.1587-8). Although the details of the letter before us are a weak defense for her failure to return, determining her "entente" in writing remains a difficult task. These are in fact the last words we hear from Criseyde in the poem, as she offers up a text that Troilus still cannot construe correctly and that reveals nothing new to the audience, which already knows she will not return. Her motivation is masked by the words of the letter the narrator displays for us and by her enigmatic statement about the importance of "entente."

Detail also increases the complexity of Criseyde in moments where she is a reader of texts. Her reaction to the physical presence of Troilus' letter is clear: "Ful dredfully tho gan she stonden stylle" and tells Pandarus "To myn estat have more reward, I preye, / Than to his lust!", asking him to "Ber it ayein, for hym that ye on leve!" (II.1128, 1133-4, 1141). After Pandarus thrusts Troilus' first letter thrust down her bosom, Criseyde retreats to "hire chambre"

> Amonges othere thynges, out of drede—
> Ful pryvely this lettre for to rede;
>
> Avysed word by word in every lyne,
> And fond no lak, she thoughte he koude good,
> And up it putte, and wente hire in to dyne.
> But Pandarus, that in a studye stood,
> Er he was war, she took hym by the hood,
> And seyde, "Ye were caught er that ye wiste." (II.1173-83)

Criseyde's activity is reinforced by the appearance of "rede" as well as "Avysed," a careful deliberation of the entire letter. She reads out of dread yet finds that the letter lacked nothing, and she tells Pandarus he has been caught. One may wonder, at what has she caught him? Her comment seems to suggest that she knows what he is setting up, yet later at Deiphebus' house she is "Al innocent of Pandarus entente" (II.1723). It is not clear what, precisely, Criseyde thinks she knows after reading Troilus' letter, and the narrator does not tell us. It seems that if he wished, the narrator could reveal what Criseyde found, but he is reluctant to reveal more of her for scrutiny.

As noted above, texts constitute a defense for Criseyde, a way of resisting her male readers in the poem, and resisting definitive interpretations of her that would see her as solely a "feminine Everyman" type of the fickle woman,[126] or as a mere victim of her circumstances. Indeed, part of her complexity is that she is neither the heavenly Beatrice who guides Dante through Paradise, nor the Criseida who arranges for Troiolo to come to her house,[127] nor the silent, passive rosebud to Troilus' Amant. Rather than the divine guide Troilus sees in her—the saint in the shrine whose absence he laments after the exchange (V.553)—she is more earthly, more practical, and thus more fallible than the perfect woman of Dante, and she has a voice, thoughts, and desires of her own not granted to the object of Amant's desire. She is, as Aers has argued, an expression of the "interrelations between individual and society, between individual responsibility and

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[126] As Schibanoff argues, Chaucer's attention to etymology in Criseyde's parents, Calchas and Argyve who are connected to betrayal, does not hold true for Criseyde, whose name suggests no inherent characteristics; rather, her context, "widowhood, abandonment, war," rather than "innate feminine weakness" determine her ("Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 656).
[127] *Il Filostrato*, II.143.

given social circumstances and ideologies."[128] She participates in the game Pandarus initiates, but not readily so—she carefully deliberates and acknowledges the perils of love in a way that Troilus never considers, his response being one of automatic acceptance and subjection:

> of hire look in him ther gan to quyken
> So gret desir and such affecioun,
> That in his herte botme gan stiken
> Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I.295-98).

For Criseyde, as for the formel in the *Parliament of Fowles*, love involves choice. In both female characters, Chaucer gestures to the ways in which women experience love differently from men.[129] The formel had the benefit of benevolent Nature granting her wish that the choice be deferred. In stark contrast, Criseyde has no such protector; rather, she is compromised by those who should, and do vow to, protect her.[130] Her choice to love, like her choice to write her first letter to Troilus, is constrained. When she does write, her words conceal rather than reveal. Macrobius, Dante, and Boccaccio all discuss words as veils behind which truth can be found through allegorical interpretation. In his commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*, Macrobius says that fables either present a base

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[128] "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society," Chaucer Review 13 (1979): 177-200, Reprint, in Critical Essays on Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" and His Major Early Poems, C. David Benson, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 129.

[129] This idea also occurs in the *Book of the Duchess*, but less directly, as the Black Knight tells us that White refused him, implying choice. Both the formel and Criseyde give voice to a woman's potential response to love, Criseyde's being the more developed.

[130] Ector vows to protect her, adding that men will do her honor and "youre body shal men save" (I.120-3); Pandarus acknowledges he should, as her uncle do so, e.g. II.355-7; as her lover Troilus should do so, in addition to being man of Troy and as such included in Ector's pledge to her. At the parliament in Book IV, Ector speaks against the exchange, commenting "We usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV.182), yet as Dinshaw points out, "trafficking in women is a fundamental activity in Troy," illustrated by Pandarus' suggests to Troilus that he can find another woman for the distraught lover (IV.400-406) (Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 58-59).

story or holy truths "presented beneath a modest veil of allegory."[131] In the *Convivio*, Dante similarly writes that the allegorical sense "is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction."[132] He refers twice in the *Commedia* to looking beyond the veil of words: "O you possessed of sturdy intellects, / observe the teaching that is hidden here / beneath the veil of verses so obscure";[133] "Here, reader, let your eyes look at sharp truth, / for now the veil has grown so very thin— / it is not difficult to pass within."[134] For Boccaccio, "whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone."[135] In each instance, the writer refers to allegorical truth hidden under the covering, the veil, of the words in the text. In Criseyde, however, words are non-allegorical veils behind which the narrator does not allow complete access—although his excuses for her reveal guilt, they also conceal motivations and comprehension of this character; although she is more complex than Boccaccio's Criseida, she is also more mysterious. Rather than elucidating a higher truth, words obscure and frustrate attempts to do so: Criseyde is both *like* a woman who does not know what to "rede" and *is* a woman who knows not what to "rede." What we are left with are the veils, the shields that words supply. Chaucer's text invites us to examine the ways in which Criseyde as betrayer is inadequate to his portrayal of her—he invites us to ponder the interplay between his and Boccaccio's, Dante's and Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's texts. Criseyde is a potent instance of invention, expanding upon the silences in Boccaccio's text, but also more than a filling

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[131] I.2.11. Augustine also discussed the truth behind the veil of words (*De Doctrina Christiana*, Book IV.VIII-XI).
[132] II.prose2.1.
[133] *Inferno*, IX.61-63.
[134] *Purgatorio*, VII.19-21.
[135] *Genealogia*, XIV.VII.

in of gaps, especially in the narrator's contradictions of Boccaccio, which create a Criseyde that comments on the literary tradition he inherits. She displaces Boccaccio's Criseida but also refers back to her; Criseyde's added complexities complicate a depiction of her as a fickle woman, inviting examination of the ways in which she is "ywriten nor ysonge" that do not conform to her literary precursor. She is both innocent of and suspects Pandarus' intentions; she is attracted by Troilus and fearful of what a love relationship entails;[136] she does not return to Troilus, but this decision, like that to love Troilus, is influenced by external forces.

While she cannot be absolved of turning to Diomede, Chaucer's construction of Criseyde suggests that there is fundamentally more to her than her own negative reading of herself affords. She does not betray Troilus merely because she is fickle or because Fortune turned her wheel from "wel to woe." Responsibility for what occurs in the poem belongs to all its characters and its narrator. Like her uncle and father, she is a betrayer,[137] yet too often, her uncle is absolved of responsibility for his manipulations. She is responsible for betraying Troilus, as he is responsible for his inaction and acceptance of Pandarus' governance, and as Pandarus is responsible for his machinations.

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[136] Taylor points out that Criseyde's "Who yaf me drynke?" parallels the sudden love of Paolo and Francesca, but diverges when Criseyde is hesitant in considering the situation, which serves to "highlight the doubts and qualifications so fundamental to his poem and its love affair, and so foreign to the *Commedia*" (Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 66-67). See also Windeatt's discussion of Criseyde's "double reactions" that "complicate interpretation of his [Chaucer's] characters" in a way that does not occur in Boccaccio ("Chaucer and the *Filostrato*, 179).

[137] Woods, "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and Her Family," 34.

CHAPTER 5

Pandarus: Chaucer's Other Author

In the *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer experimented with a composer within the poem, as the Black Knight conventionally reconstructs his relationship with White; another instance is provided in the rewriting of Ovid's and Virgil's stories of Dido and Aeneas in the *House of Fame.* In *Troilus and Criseyde* the narrator is of course a writer, as he relates in the opening lines that his verses weep as he writes; his rewriting of Criseyde brings to the text a woman with a voice and complex motivation, unlike White who never speaks, like Dido in fearing the control of readers but more developed than the woman on the temple wall in the earlier poem. The narrator is not the only author in *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, as Chaucer created in Pandarus another author within the poem. Since Bloomfield tantalizingly called Pandarus "the artist of the inner story" in a footnote, scholars have noticed briefly that Pandarus acts like a poet.[1] Sturges asks, "Are Books II and III of *Troilus* Pandarus's poem?"[2] Boitani compares Pandarus to a "stage manager" writing a play and labels him "a Narrator-poet."[3] Fleming also compares Pandarus to a poet, one in his view influenced by *Le Roman de le Rose*.[4] Barbara Nolan has noted that Pandarus creates a romance, signaling Chaucer's interest in the interplay

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[1] "Distance and Predestination in 'Troilus and Criseyde'," 26n14.
[2] Medieval Interpretation, 216.
[3] English Medieval Narrative 195, 216.
[4] Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 98.

between poetry and erotic pleasure.[5] Indeed, pleasure is one of Pandarus' goals, but there is more of significance in the connections between Pandarus and poetic activity.

Similarities between the narrator and Pandarus have been noted, for they both are go-betweens,[6] unsuccessful in love and somewhat detached but simultaneously involved in the story,[7] agents who emphasize "the manipulations inherent in romance,"[8] "born storytellers,"[9] and readers.[10] Moreover, both he and the narrator are authors. Revealing the story he has concocted about the charges of Poliphete against Criseyde to those gathered at Deiphebus' house, Pandarus gets right to the point: "What sholde I lenger...do yow dwelle?" (II.1614). Likewise, the narrator asks a short while later, "What shold I lenger in this tale tarien?" (II.1622). In Book III, both Pandarus and the narrator act similarly: Pandarus guides Troilus "But now to purpos; leve brother deere" (III.330), and the narrator tells his audience "But certeyn is, to purpos for to go" (III.449). Carton has argued that the many similarities between the language of the two create a context in which their words leave responsibility in the hands of the audience.[11] While the audience

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[5] Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman antique*, 217. Also: Coleman's study of reading, which briefly mentions Pandarus as author as he reads an "old romance" as "his puppets speak classic lines of romance lovers" (Public Reading and Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France, 169); Howard notes that both Pandarus and the narrator manipulate events, but Pandarus is ineffective because he is a pagan ("Chaucer the Man," 341). Additionally, Evan Carton argues for a connection between speech, language and control in TC, but says that these acts defer authority to the audience of the poem ("Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus' Bed and Chaucer's Art," PMLA 94 [1979], 49). Weisl acknowledges that Pandarus acts as poet, and argues that the poet merges with his roles as servant of love and house-builder to make Pandarus into Ovid (Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 43).

[6] Hanning, "Come in Out of the Code" 132; Taylor, Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 51; Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, 146.

[7] Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid, 130. Carton sees the narrator and Pandarus as actively involved in events ("Complicity and Responsibility," 58). Sturges sees similarities between the two: each "transmit[s] a text he does not understand" Medieval Interpretation, 146-47).

[8] Weisl, Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 37. McGerr also notes the manipulative nature of both, focusing on their relationship to rhetoric (Chaucer's Open Books, 115).

[9] Fleming, Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 94.

[10] Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 47.

[11] "Complicity and Responsibility," 57.

is indeed called upon to participate in the story, and participation in the story is one of the compelling aspects of reading the poem, Pandarus takes a more assured, controlling stance than the narrator—he knows and plays the game quite well in maneuvering his friend and his niece. Appropriating for himself such control places a degree of responsibility upon his shoulders.

As Pandarus offers his services to the love-distraught Troilus in Book I, he assures his friend that, although he's been unlucky in love himself, he can be of help: "Kan I redden the / And nat myself" (I.668-669). In his words and actions, he establishes a connection between love, counsel, and interpretation. He sets himself up as an interpreter and guide, who, although unlucky in love himself, knows how to bring success to his friend. When Pandarus offers to "redden" Troilus, he not only guides and advises his friend, but to a great extent he also exerts control over him. Having revealed the cause of his distress and having heard Pandarus' advice that an unsuccessful lover can guide another to success, Troilus gives Pandarus governance of the relationship: "Mi lif, my deth, hol in thyn hond I leye" (I.1053). Troilus often seems incapable of action without Pandarus, who orchestrates the events that follow.

As Fyler importantly noted some years ago, Pandarus is a master at the art of lying, "a deviser of fictions to bring Troilus and Criseyde together."[12] Fyler's reading acknowledges Pandarus' pleasure in being a master of illusion, and suggests that many of Pandarus' comments are "unwitting"—that he does not know how appropriate his comments often are because he, unlike the audience of the poem, does not know what will happen. However, the lies Pandarus tells *in the moment* have an end that he certainly

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[12] "The Fabrications of Pandarus," MLQ 41 (1980), 115-16.

does keep in mind. In *De mendacio*, Augustine notes the importance of intent in determining whether someone is lying: a person who believes something to be true when it is actually false is not lying because his intent is not to be deceptive; lying involves an urge to deceive and happens when a person thinks one thing and says another. Moreover, according to Augustine, even well-intentioned lies are not acceptable because the good never lie.[13] As he introduces the real objective of his visit to Criseyde in Book II, Pandarus goes to the purpose of his material:

> "Nece, alwey—lo!—to the laste,
> How so it be that som men hem delite
> With subtyl art hire tales for to endite,
> Yet for al that, in hire entencioun
> Hire tale is al for som conclusioun." (II.255-259)

Those who tell tales—the "subtyl art" of liars and authors unscrupulously grouped together—always keep the end in mind. He craftily advances his plan as he tells her that he discovered Troilus' love as the Trojan prince was lying on the ground in a garden, groaning and crying out to the God of Love (II.506ff.). As we have seen in Book I, Troilus was languishing in his bedroom, not the garden, and the two were not out walking as Pandarus tells Criseyde. Of course, Pandarus tells her this story because she's asked if Troilus can "wel speke of love" (II.503)[14] and he has promised to help Troilus. All Pandarus' intention, as he demonstrates, is for the conclusion.

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[13] Chapters 3 and 8, respectively.

[14] Fleming notes that Pandarus conjures a romance world in his description: "a garden with a well, ... the habitat of the god of Love" (Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 98); Howes also points out that Pandarus creates a conventional garden setting in which to frame Troilus, and Pandarus "seems hyperconscious of the uses such gardens can be put to, of their meaning in the culture of courtly love" (Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention, 68-70, 79). My overall conclusions about the use of romance and courtly conventions are more akin to Howes' than to Fleming's.

That Pandarus fulfills the function of one who both reads and composes is clear from the narrator's comments at the end of Book I. The poem's quotation of Geoffrey of Vinsauf occurs at the very moment the narrator describes Pandarus' thoughts after he has pledged to help the suffering Troilus. As Pandarus devises a plan for approaching Criseyde, he:

> went his wey, thenkyng on this matere,
> And how he best myghte hire biseche of grace,
> And fynde a tyme therto, and a place.
>
> For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
> Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
> With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
> And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
> Aldirfirst his purpos for to wynne.
> Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,
> And caste his werk ful wisely or he wroughte. (I.1062-71)

In these lines, Pandarus' plotting and poetic composition merge; "matere" occupies Pandarus' mind,[15] and the narrator even calls Pandarus' plan "his werk,"[16] imagined before being enacted—not rashly, "with rakel hond," but deliberately.[17] This carefully-structured reference suggests that Pandarus knows all along what he is doing with his lies and oblique references, that they are not ironically unwitting, and that Pandarus might

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[15] M*atere* was, of course, not an exclusively literary term, but it did have literary significance. In addition to meanings of "Physical substance, matter," "building material," "A piece of wood," and "A bodily fluid," the *MED* lists "A narrative, exposition, discourse; tale, story," "A subject of discussion, exposition, or private reflection," and "The subject matter of a literary work," all attested to during Chaucer's time.

[16] Chaucer seems to be playing with this term in referring to Pandarus as well. Definitions in the *MED* include: "someone's deed," "a morally commendable act," "a morally culpable act," "an act or action contrasted explicitly with words, thoughts, appearance, intent," "an intention, a plan, or a plot designed to bring something about," "God's creative activity, the act of creation," and "Building, construction work." Geoffrey of Vinsauf is perhaps using *opus* in the sense of building, but the Latin meaning did include creative activity; the addition of Middle English *matere* to *werk* seems to indicate play with the word as a type of creative work.

[17] Taylor also notes the correspondence between Pandarus and poet here, but concludes that Pandarus is a book as well as a mediating poet (Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 52-54). While our views of Pandarus as poet are similar, in what follows I contend that Pandarus is more than a mediating presence.

know the implications of the story he himself is writing and in which he is participating. He plans with a conclusion in mind.

As does an author who reads texts and then writes his own, Pandarus dismisses one story in favor of another, as with the Theban scene in Book II. When he first visits Criseyde, he finds her reading a romance; as she tells him, "This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede" (II.100). Although the identity of Criseyde's book has been debated, it is most likely the French *Roman de Thebes*, as she not only calls it a "romaunce," but also describes how far they have read: from Laius' death, which begins the French *roman* and which Statius does not include, through the moment when Amphiaraus falls into hell (II.101-105). Pandarus dismisses her book in favor of the twelve books Statius' *Thebaid*: "Al this knowe I myselve, / And al th'assege of Thebes and the care; / For herof ben ther maked bookes twelve" (II.106-8). Catherine Sanok claims that Criseyde is in fact reading Statius, but her main reason in identifying Statius as Criseyde's text is that Pandarus says so,[18] a reading that imposes a text upon Criseyde as much as Pandarus' comment does. Paul Clogan points out that the references are to two different texts not only because Criseyde calls her book a romance, but also because the French version would have been more appropriate and preferable reading material for a group of ladies and because Amphiaraus is a bishop rather than a pagan seer.[19] He also claims that Chaucer's invention of the scene serves to "emphasize the uncle-niece relationship, and to affect

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[18] "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid* : Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," Studies in the Age of Chaucer 20 (1998), 46-47.

[19] "The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*," Medievalia et Humanistica 12 (1984), 175. In his foundational study of Chaucer and Statius many years ago, B. A. Wise pointed out these details in support of the French version as Criseyde's text, also pointing out the similarity between Chaucer's spelling "Amphiaraus" and the Old French spelling "Amphiarax" (The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer, 9).

tone and atmosphere."[20] Another of his claims is that Pandarus does not realize the important parallels between the sieges and fates of both Thebes and Troy.[21] While it is true that Pandarus does not possess foreknowledge of what will happen to Troy, the characters' references to two different books suggest, first, that their points of view differ: Pandarus' version is epic and militaristic, while, as noted in Chapter 4, Criseyde seems to prefer romance; although the stories are similar and they contain some of the same elements, their tones are different.[22] The scene also suggests that Pandarus may be aware of the appropriateness of the Theban story. Its significance resides in a gesture toward "the ill consequences of civil and fraternal strife."[23] Indeed, the tone is ominous—both books refer to the same story and are violent, but the French version to a lesser degree: the French version sees Eteocles and Polynices reunited before dying, while Statius' text emphasizes the irreconcilability of the brothers on the battlefield as well as after death. In the *Thebaid*, the Furies spur them on as they meet on the battlefield;[24] after they die, the two corpses on one pyre still contend with each other.[25] In the *Roman*, the brothers remain enemies after their deaths, as the earth will not hold the corpses; they are burned but their flames fight each other; urns will not hold their ashes, so they are put in one casket.[26] The significant difference is that on the battlefield, when Polyneices knocks Eteocles off his horse, Polyneices has pity for his brother, comforting him with kisses and

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[20] "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes," Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts 13.1 (1985), 26-27. Clogan elsewhere argues that Chaucer's use of Statius' poem and the medieval French *roman* indicate "an in-depth awareness of the differences between [them]" ("The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 175).
[21] "The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 180.
[22] As also noted in Chapter 4, pp. 156, Criseyde does, to some extent but not entirely, resemble Pandarus when in his company but also asserts her own ideas.
[23] "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes," 18-19.
[24] XI.401-403, 484-96.
[25] XII.422-441.
[26] *Roman de Thèbes*, 10175ff.

hugs,[27] a characteristically chivalric behavior. (In the *Thebaid*, Eteocles plays dead so he can kill his brother, and Polynices insults him before falling upon him and crushing him.[28]) Criseyde has not read this far in her version, but Pandarus' declaration of knowing all twelve books suggests a knowledge of the outcome in Statius' text, which lacks the softened enmity present in the medieval poem.[29]

Pandarus' choice is significant as he opts for a text that emphasizes to a greater degree the betrayal of kinship bonds. Criseyde and Pandarus' relationship is introduced via a lens of violence and betrayal, shaping the readings that Pandarus seeks to impose upon her, and the control he wishes to exert over her. The dark tone invoked in the story of Thebes has already been introduced into Book II when Pandarus awakens that morning before setting out for Criseyde's house. Outside his window Procne sings "whi she forshapen was" (II.66). Pandarus awakens at precisely the moment of violence in the Ovidian story:

> and evere lay
> Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
> Til she so neigh hym made hire cheterynge
> How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,
> That with the noyse of hire he gan awake. (II.66-70)

This reference and the entire scene involving the Theban story do not appear in Boccaccio. It seems that these references emphasize the betrayed bonds of kinship in the poem. As Sturges comments, the reference creates parallels between Philomela and

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[27] *Roman de Thèbes*, 9625ff.
[28] XI.561-74. The conflict is so horrible that Jove tells the gods to look away (XI.127-28), and even Mars and the other gods of battle leave the battlefield as the brothers meet each other (XI.411).
[29] As Edwards points out, Statius' poem is one where "heroism devolves to brutishness on the battlefield" ("Medieval Literary Careers: The Theban Track," European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance, Patrick Cheney and Frederick A. de Armas, eds. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002], 110).

Criseyde, Tereus and Pandarus, and "The use of this particular myth to send Pandarus out on his mission to deceive Criseyde inevitably creates an atmosphere of sexual misconduct that darkens the apparently light and bantering tone of their encounter."[30] Transferring the mythological reference to Pandarus, a blood relation rather than a brother-in-law as Tereus was to Philomela, intensifies the ominous tones. Attention to books in the Theban scene following Pandarus' awakening also serves to emphasize the power of reading and interpretation.

When Pandarus encounters Criseyde reading, one might even speculate that Pandarus stops Criseyde's reading for fear that she will read too far and connect the stories of Thebes and Troy.[31] He is, after all, visiting Criseyde for a particular purpose. After telling her he knows all twelve books of the Theban story in two and a half lines, he quickly dismisses that material: "But lat be this, and telle me how ye fare" suggesting that they "don to May som ovservaunce" (II.109-112). Although he is capable of referring to other texts, he seems to prefer shutting the book on them in favor of his own ideas. He is quite capable of making up his own stories, as he does at the end of Book II with the lie about Poliphete. His inventive techniques and active presence make him into an alternate author shaping his material with an end in mind.[32] For Pandarus, as for Chaucer and the narrator, reading is a means to authorship: the narrator has read this story elsewhere and he not only translates but also rewrites it; at times he attempts to counsel us about how to read the scenes (e.g. that Criseyde did not fall in love with Troilus suddenly, II.673-79),

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[30] Medieval Interpretation, 151-52.

[31] Wetherbee argues as much (Chaucer and the Poets, 116). For view that that Pandarus is not aware of the parallels between Trojan and Theban history, see David Anderson , "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," Studies in the Age of Chaucer 4 (1982), 120; and Clogan, "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes," 27.

[32] "Inventive" in the rhetorical sense of "invention" as a means of generating ideas and discourse.

he wishes he had written a different story (V.1777-78), and suggests alternate texts to his audience ("Rede Dares" for Troilus' deeds of arms, for example V.1770). Pandarus acts similarly but more forcefully in advocating his story: he tries to impose the story he knows about Thebes onto the one Criseyde reads, suggesting a different version of the story, in effect dismissing the authority of Criseyde's book.[33] He does not, of course, suggest that she read that story as he then dismisses both in favor of the one that he is writing: Criseyde might read an old story, or she could take part in one by adhering to his advice. Pandarus sets himself up as the authority, usurping the place of the Theban texts and the revelation about Troy that she might find in them.

The letter writing scenes in Book II advance both the affair and Pandarus' role in it. One might expect the text of the letters to be included, as the comparable letters are in *Il Filostrato* II, stanzas 96-106 and 121-27, and as is Criseyde's Book V letter. Instead, the focus rests upon their composition and delivery. Text is secondary to its milieu as Pandarus takes charge.[34] The emphasis on his delivery of the letter corresponds to the medieval rhetoric of *ars dictaminis*, where typically the author of a letter dictated it to someone else (a secretary or notary) who then wrote it out according to standard formulae. Camargo's significant work on *ars dictaminis* points out that the bearer, the one who delivered the letter, was often more important than the letter itself, for the real message of the letter was not in its contents but in the interpretation offered by the

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[33] Hagedorn notes a similar disregard for textual authority on Pandarus' part when he focuses on Apollo rather than the deserted Oenone in telling Troilus about Oenone's letter (Abandoned Women, 135).
[34] Camargo notes that the paraphrase of Troilus' letter highlights Pandarus' role to the diminishment of Troilus' involvement in the affair and speeds up the pace of events (The Middle English Verse Love Epistle, 54).

bearer.[35] Pandarus notably functions both as author and bearer of the letter he suggests Troilus write to Criseyde in order to alleviate the latter's love-sickness. Advising him not to write in "scryvenyssh" or artful fashion, Pandarus urges Troilus to write in plain language (i.e. without ornamented language or style). Troilus fears writing, "Lest of myn innocence I seyde amys, / Or that she nolde it for despit receive" (II.1048-49), to which Pandarus replies "If the lest, / Do that I seye, and let me therewith gon" (II.1051-52). Although Troilus writes in his own hand, he is in effect a scribe for the real author. Pandarus goes beyond suggesting the writing of Troilus' letter, appropriating authority for himself as he dictates the letter's content and form.

Pandarus advises Troilus to "hold of thi matere / The forme alwey" (II.1039-40), yet he significantly violates that rule himself.[36] When Pandarus arrives at Criseyde's house to deliver the letter, he notably elides the *salutatio* and *captatio benevolentiae*, the first two parts of a letter, and arguably the most important ones because they introduce the tone of the message, attend to social and familial hierarchies, and secure the good will of the recipient.[37] The Bolognese author of the twelfth century *Rationes dictandi* says that it is acceptable to omit these two parts—but this elision should be used only "when

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[35] "Where's the Brief?", 4.

[36] John McKinnell argues that Troilus' letter does not follow standard form because the *narratio* and *petitio* are out of sequence, with the latter, Troilus' request for mercy (II.1076), coming first when it should be after the former, his declaration of "woo" (II.1082). He notes that such an arrangement should occur only "when the latter becomes an immediate supporting argument for it" ("Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Essays on Troilus and Criseyde, Mary Salu, ed. [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979], 81). In Troilus' letter, one may indeed see the declaration of woe as a form of support for the request for mercy. Additionally, the author of *Rationes Dictandi*, which McKinnell cites for such rules, maintains that the *narratio* and *petitio* can be interspersed if the parts correspond, which in this case they clearly seem to do (Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts. James J. Murphy, ed. and trans. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971], 23-4).

[37] Camargo notes that the *ars dictaminis* treatises spent a great deal of time on the salutation and securing of good will not only because these sections were formulaic but also because of their importance: "an improper beginning would assure its [the letter's] failure" (The Middle English Verse Love Epistle [Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991], 9-10).

someone wishes to declare the scorn or anger or passion of an indignant mind." If there is no salutation, then the securing of good will (*captatio benevolentiae*) must also be omitted.[38] Neither Troilus nor Pandarus are angry, to be sure, but Pandarus' delivery of the letter does in large part fail to secure Criseyde's good will. Pandarus lures Criseyde into her garden, away from all others, playing on her fear of the Greeks by promising to tell her news of a Greek spy in town (II.1111-13). Once there, he exchanges her social fear for a private one. Seeing Pandarus pull out the letter, she reacts: "Ful dredfully tho gan she stonden stille," and emphatically tells him "Scrit ne bille, / For love of God, that toucheth swich matere, / Ne bring me noon" (II.1128, 30-32). Further, she exclaims, "Ber it ayein, for hym that ye on leve!" (II.1141). Pandarus of course does not return the letter as she asks: "'Refuse it naught,' quod he, and hente hire faste, / And in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste" (II.1154-55).

Pandarus' action is incongruous to the text he advises Troilus to record, for it seems to contain a salutation. Troilus' letter begins thus:

> First he gan hire his righte lady calle,
> His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,
> His blisse, and ek thise other termes alle
> That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche,
> And in ful humble wise, as in his speche,
> He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;
> To telle al how, it axeth muchel space. (II.1065-71)

In addition to the humorous jab at conventionally lengthy salutations which "axeth muchel space," this passage suggests that Pandarus, having dictated the letter to Troilus, knows the proper forms of salutation and securing of good will. However, Pandarus purposely violates these precepts in delivering the letter. As Camargo has noted, the

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[38] In Murphy, Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts, 20.

significance of a letter often resided not in the words themselves but in the bearer of the letter—Pandarus notably embodies this idea as he thrusts the letter down Criseyde's bosom. He knows the rules, but chooses not to follow them, instead guiding the lovers in the way he sees fit. Pandarus' action in Criseyde's garden is reiterated by Chaucer's choice of verbs—Pandarus "hente" his niece and "thraste" the letter. Pandarus collapses all formal parts of the letter in his delivery of it: *salutatio*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio*, *conclusio*. Taken as a request, a *petitio*, the tone of Pandarus' thrusting of the letter also economically uses eight of nine types of *petitio*.[39] As a letter was to speak for one who was absent,[40] Pandarus also quite literally speaks to his intentions for Troilus and Criseyde.

Letter-writing, similar to poetry, was in part textual and in part dependent upon oral delivery. Pandarus "redes" Criseyde, quite forcefully offering guidance through his physical actions—and his verbal innovations to and deviations from the text he carries point to his role as composer who also controls his material. As Hanning has argued, "the writing of letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* becomes less an exercise in coding and decoding a discourse of desire than an emblem for the process of imposing self-interested 'messages'—suggestions, interpretations, counsels—on others."[41] Notably, the scene in which Pandarus advises Troilus on letter-writing is also the scene in which he contrives Troilus' ride by Criseyde's window—dually highlighting his active engagement in and

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[39] *Preceptiva* (didactic), *conminativa* (threatening), *exhortatoria* (exhorting), *hortoria* (encouraging, inciting), *ammonitoria* (warning), *consultoria* (advising), *correptoria* (chiding), *absoluta* (mere request). The ninth is *deprecativa* (pleading), which is more incongruent to Pandarus' tone. The nine types of *petitio* are discussed by McKinnell, "Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 79.
[40] McKinnell, "Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 77.
[41] "Come in Out of the Code," 135.

skillful manipulation of the affair. As he sits with Criseyde, awaiting Troilus' ride by her house, the narrator tells us that "Pandarus saugh tyme unto his tale" (II.1193).

Pandarus continues to bear letters to and from the would-be lovers. As before, Troilus relies upon Pandarus: "But to Pandare alwey was his recours, / And pitously gan ay tyl hym to pleyne, / And hym bisoughte of reed and som socours" (II.1352-54). Pandarus then suggests they go to Deiphebus' house, where another of Pandarus' lies advances the story. Pandarus acts out of pity for Troilus—"for routhe...Som of his wo to slen" (II.1356-58)—but he deceives both Deiphebus, who "shal the [Troilus] ese, unwist of it hymselve" (II.1400) and Criseyde. Poliphete, according to Pandarus' tale, is about to bring legal charges of some kind against Criseyde. Pandarus seems to play upon a real fear of Criseyde's, for she responds emotionally, "I, no!" quod she, and changed al hire hewe, / "What is he more aboute, me to drecche / And don me wrong? What shal I doon, allas?" (II.1470-72). Pandarus manipulates his niece as he works to bring Criseyde and Troilus together. As Weisl claims of Pandarus' story about Poliphete, "This fiction both violates Criseyde's safety and preys upon her fear of violation."[42]

Pandarus' behavior at Deiphebus' house reveals more of his character. As he goes to tell Deiphebus and Helen to bring Criseyde to Troilus, Pandarus is curiously described as "withouten rekenynge" (II.1640). Benson glosses the phrase as "without calculation," "immediately" and "without saying anything more."[43] While one interpretation would hold that Pandarus acts without calculation and thus would absolve him of moral responsibility for his actions, he could also be acting without further comment. Pandarus

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[42] Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 43.
[43] Note to II.1640, Glossary.

has just "lepte" into Troilus' chamber and tells him only "God have thi soule, ibrought have I thi beere!" (II.1637-38). He goes outside without saying anything further, and the pace of his actions is quick. Further, the narrator relates that after he speaks to them, Deiphebus and Helen "nothyng knewe of his entente" (II.1665). If he went to them without calculation, there would be no use to highlight their innocence of Pandarus' designs.

As he tells Troilus of Poliphete's charges, "This Pandarus gan newe his tong affile" (II.1681). He lies as he tells Criseyde that Deiphebus and Helen are in the chamber with Troilus—they have just left to read a letter. The narrator carefully points out here that Criseyde is "Al innocent of Pandarus entente" (II.1723). Her uncle further urges her, "in ernestful manere" (II.1727), "Sle naught this man, that hath for yow this peyne! / Fy on the devel! Thynk which oon he is, / And in what plit he lith; com of anon!" (II.1736-38). He plays on her fears about wagging tongues, reminding her that no one yet knows about the two would-be lovers: "While folk is blent, lo, al the tyme is wonne" (II.1743). His words also serve as a commentary on his own endeavors: the time to act is while others are blinded, i.e. deceived.

As Pandarus will orchestrate the consummation scene that follows, he takes control in this scene as well. When Criseyde tells Troilus that he can serve her, it is Pandarus who responds first:

> Fil Pandarus on knees, and up his eyen
> To heven threw, and held his hondes highe:
> "Immortal god," quod he, "that mayst nought deyen,
> Cupide I mene, of this mayst glorifie;
> And Venus, thow mayst maken melodie!" (III.183-87)

He tells them that he will contrive a night for them to be together, "For I ful well shal shape youre comynge" (III.196).

Pandarus plans to have the two come together at his house, and the narrator comments that "This tymbur is al redy up to frame" (III.530), an additional allusion to Pandarus' workings suggestive of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*: Pandarus has built the foundation of his work up to this point; now, the lovers will come to his house, the frame or setting for what will transpire. Making sure everyone is in bed, "Pandarus, that wel koude ech a deel / Th'olde daunce...thought he wolde upon his werk bigynne" and brings Troilus out of hiding (III.694-95, 700). He tells Criseyde to keep quiet, "And whan my tale brought it to an ende, / Unwist, right as I com, so wol I wende" (III.769-770). The "tale," or "werk," brought to an "ende" is that Troilus will come to her—Pandarus treats the assignation as a story, one in which he participates and from which he derives pleasure.[44]

To reach the end of that tale, he lies in order to bring Criseyde to his house. In response to her uncle's dinner invitation, which includes a whispered threat never to see her again if she does not come (III.566-67), Criseyde perceptively asks whether Troilus will be there. Pandarus lies, swearing that "he was out of towne" and that even if he were there, "Yow thurste [need] nevere han the more fere; / For rather than men myghte hym ther aspie, / Me were levere a thousand fold to dye" (III.570, 572-574). The familial relationship between the two is emphasized in Criseyde's response; the narrator tells us that she "as his nece, obeyed as hire oughte" (III.581) Previous to this scene, Pandarus

[44] Additionally, the narrator tells us that Pandarus set out the plan, "Right for the fyn that I shal speke of here," to bring the lovers together (III.513).

has acknowledged to Troilus his treatment of his niece: "But wo is me, that I, that cause al this, / May thynken that she is my nece deere, / And I hire em, and traitour ek yfeere!" (III.271-73). He knows he deceives; nonetheless, he goes ahead with his plans.

When Criseyde arrives at his house, the emphasis remains upon Pandarus—as with the letter scene in Book II, any response she might have is elided by Pandarus' action, emphasized yet again by his seizing her: "With alle joie and alle frendes fare / Hire em anon in armes hath hire nome, / And after to the soper" (III.605-607), eliminating any expression or gesture on her part (she is even more silent here than in the Book II scene). After dinner and after convincing her to stay the night because of the rain, Pandarus is eager to see the completion of his plans:

> Pandarus, if goodly hadde he myght,
> He wolde han hyed hire to bedde fayn,
> And seyde, "Lord, this is an huge rayn!
> This were a weder for to slepen inne—
> And that I rede us soone to bygynne." (III.654-58)

Offering his "rede," he takes control of the situation, and everyone at his house soon goes to bed. When they are all a-bed, Pandarus is described in terms of his authorial "werk" as he opens the door to where Troilus has been hiding: "He thoughte he wolde upon his werk bigynne" (III.697), telling Troilus "this nyght shal I make it weel, / Or casten al the gruwel in the fire" (III.710-11). Pandarus takes responsibility upon himself again after Troilus has called upon a veritable Pantheon, from Venus to the Fates; Troilus, according to him, has a "wrecched mouses herte" and has been misreading the situation, for Pandarus tells him to "folwe me, for I wol have the wite" (III.736, 739). Pandarus, not the gods, will have the "wite," or blame, in this situation; he offers both a humorous jab at his friend, as well as another indication of the power that he appropriates in this situation.

He continues to use this power, employing a variety of techniques which play upon Criseyde's emotions and fears. When Criseyde says she will right the wrong of Troilus' jealousy over Horaste the next day, Pandarus tries proverbial advice:

> "Nay, nay, it may nat stonden in this wise,
> For, nece myn, thus written clerkes wise,
> That peril is with drecchyng in ydrawe.
> Nay, swiche abodes ben nought worth an hawe." (III.851-54)

He continues with an analogy to "fire in the hall" to incite her to act without further delay—when the hall is afire, there is more need for rescue than for debating how the candle fell in the straw (III.856-59)—and accuses her of never loving Troilus if she leaves him in his suffering all night, concluding that he knows she is too wise to leave him thus (III.862-68). Criseyde's response suggests that his rhetoric proves effective, as she avows "Hadde I hym nevere lief? by God, I weene / Ye hadde nevere thing so lief!" (III.869-70). Pandarus further accuses her of folly, malice, lack of virtue and lack of nobility (III.879-82). When she offers a ring for him to take to Troilus, he continues his diatribe against her: "Discrecioun out of youre hed is gon;...O tyme ilost, wel maistow corsen slouthe!" (III.894-96). He then cajoles her, reminding Criseyde that in Troilus "is so gentil and so tender of herte / That with his deth he wol his sorwes wreke...So speke youreself to hym of this matere, / For with o word ye may his herte stere" (III.904-5, 909-10). He further promises her, "Ne, parde, harm may ther be non, ne synne; / I wol myself be with yow al this nyght" (III.913-14).

Pandarus' techniques prove effective, for Criseyde consents to see Troilus and puts herself under the control of both men:

> "syn al my trist
> Is on yow two, and ye ben bothe wise,

> So werketh now in so discret a wise
> That I honour may have, and he plesaunce,
> For I am here al in youre governaunce." (III. 941-45)

The consummation scene continues to emphasize Pandarus' actions. When he brings Troilus to her bed, Crisyde blushes and is silent. Pandarus acts before Troilus can say anything, orchestrating the scene: he tells Criseyde to see how Troilus kneels, then goes to get a cushion and tells Troilus, "Kneleth now, while that yow leste; / There God youre hertes brynge soone at reste!" (III.965-66). Criseyde's words are summarized by the narrator who relates that she asks Troilus to sit. Instead, Pandarus is again the focus, as he redundantly advises her to tell Troilus to sit on the side of the bed. A short while later when Troilus faints, Pandarus steps in, advises his niece to be silent, "or we be lost!" (III.1095), puts Troilus in the bed, "And of he rente al to his bare sherte" (III.1099). It is Pandarus who asks Criseyde to forgive Troilus' jealousy, and he joins her in rubbing his hands and sprinkling water on him to revive the fainted lover.

As she kisses and comforts Troilus, Pandarus comments, "For aught I kan aspien / This light, nor I, ne serven here of nought. / Light is nought good for sike folkes yën!" He then "bar the candel to the chemeneye" (III.1135-37, 1141). Pandarus withdraws, but does not leave. It seems that he still watches the two of them, for he takes his leave a short while later, after Troilus has put his arms around Criseyde, "with a ful good entente / Leyde hym to slepe, and seyde, 'If ye be wise, / Swouneth nought now, lest more folk arise!'" (III.1188-90). He does not leave them until he seems sure of what will follow. By comparison, the role of Boccaccio's Pandaro on the consummation night is less important, as it is Criseida who makes arrangements and notifies Pandaro when all is

ready; Pandaro sends a messenger, rather than himself, to send for Troiolo.[45] They meet at Criseida's, not Pandaro's, house, where Troiolo rises out of his hiding place "with an eager expression of joy, and with quiet attentiveness came to meet her, eager to fulfill her every wish."[46] He needs no assistance to greet Criseida, to speak to her, or to kiss her before they go to bed. Troilus, by contrast, is silent and incapacitated, needing Pandarus to bring him to Criseyde, to guide his actions, to revive him when he faints, and to all but push him into bed. Setting the scene at Pandarus' house also emphasizes his significant role in finally bringing the relationship to sexual consummation: he is the architect, the framer who controls the setting for the lovers, the author who not only sets everything in motion but also must literally guide Troilus into bed.

Pandarus' actions on the morning after the consummation have been cause for speculation. He enters the bedchamber after Troilus has left and jokes about the rain which must have kept her awake all night. When Criseyde covers herself with the sheet after accusing, "ye causeth al this fare" (III.1566),

> Pandarus gan under for to prie,
> And seyde "Nece, if that I shal be ded,
> Have here a swerd and smyteth of myn hed!"
> With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste
> Under hire nekke, and at the laste hire kyste. (III.1571-75)

The narrator immediately comments, "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III.1576), and when Criseyde goes home the narrator adds, "And Pandarus hath fully his entente" (III.1582). What is it that Pandarus does in reaching under the sheet? Beryl Rowland claimed that Pandarus is a bi-sexual pimp tormented by desires for both Troilus

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[45] *Il Filostrato*, II.21-22.
[46] *Il Filostrato*, II.27.

and Criseyde that he cannot fulfill, yet at the same time she claims that Pandarus "apparently makes love to his niece himself," suggesting that at least one of his desires is attained.[47] Such a suggestion has in the past been called the argument of a "lunatic fringe."[48] Wetherbee contends that "we do not need to know" what Pandarus' intent is.[49] Taylor takes a more moderate approach; acknowledging the suggestiveness of the scene, she argues that an "innocent reading," that Pandarus and Criseyde are merely at ease with each other, is insufficient to the complexity of the scene. At the same time, she disagrees with those who see the scene as rape; rather, she argues that "It raises the specter of betrayal, though the violation it points to is...considerably more elusive" than to definitively suggest rape.[50] A number of other scholars have emphasized the suggestive language in the scene.[51] Pandarus reaches under the sheet, thrusts ("thriste") his arm under her neck, "and at the last"—after an unspecified amount of time has passed—kisses her. Although Archibald claims that Pandarus "has indeed had his way with Criseyde vicariously through the surrogate body of Troilus" and discounts the idea of physical violation, she convincingly argues that in *Troilus and Criseyde* "entente" has a sexual connotation not present in other authors' uses of the term, as "entente" can describe "satisfied desire" in addition to its more usual meaning of goal or intention.[52] Haldeen

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[47] "Pandarus and the Fate of Tantalus," Orbis Litterarum 24 (1969), 11, 15.
[48] Howard, "The Philosophies in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 160.
[49] Chaucer and the Poets, 163.
[50] Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy', 81.
[51] Carton sees it as "the consummate instance of evasive language" and argues that such wording cannot help but call our attention to the sexual possibilities. He concludes that "To take Criseyde himself is the logical extreme and the ultimate gratification of Pandarus' constant 'entente'" ("Complicity and Responsibility," 57-8). Pugh claims that "the text refuses to forbid such a reading" (Queering Medieval Genres, 91). Weisl has argued that the point of the scenes is its suggestiveness (Conquering the Reign of Femeny, 38). Fradenburg makes a similar argument ("'Our owen wo to drynke': Loss, Gender and Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 101).
[52] "Declarations of 'Entente' in *Troilus and Criseyde*, 202-3.

Braddy rightly points out that if "entente" meant merely bringing Troilus and Criseyde together for the night, there would be no use for Pandarus to visit his niece the next morning.[53] Having introduced Pandarus' relationship with his niece through references to a story of rape and the dark tragedy of the Theban story, there is a suggestion of improper behavior. The scene is also a carrying out of what Pandarus himself suggests in seizing Criseyde and shoving Troilus' letter down her bosom. The letter is a surrogate for Troilus, but it is also in many ways Pandarus' letter, as I have argued above, because of the role the latter takes in dictating and shaping its composition.

Violation, however, need not be literal in order to be present. Pandarus habitually compromises and invades Criseyde in ways that are not altogether physical: as he enters her house and proposes a different book, as he contrives Troilus' ride by her house, as he brings her to Troilus at Deiphebus' house, as he fabricates accusations against her, and as he brings Troilus to her on the consummation night—removing her from her own space to a location under his control. He verbally violates her space, space which is part of the "estat" she is so eager to protect in Books I and II. The would-be protector of his niece often takes an overly active role. As he comes into the garden to deliver the letter, he speaks of his "joly wo" and "lusty sorwe," rather than of Troilus' plight (II.1099). His references to the affair often include himself: Pandarus tells Troilus "myn avys anoon may helpen us" (I.620); he refers to "alle thre" of them as he pledges his help (I.990-94). When he gives Troilus Criseyde's letter, he comments, "Parde, God hath holpen *us*!"

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[53] "Chaucer's Playful Pandarus," Southern Folklore Quarterly 34 (1970), 77.

(II.1319, emphasis mine).[54] Pandarus does involve himself in the affair to the degree that he is more than a go-between, yet the narrator's comments about Pandarus' "entente" are as unrevealing as they are suggestive. If Pandarus has sex with Criseyde, he ruptures the text he has carefully labored to create. The narrator's vague commentary about Pandarus' actions and intent constructs what seems to be a necessary ambiguity: if Pandarus' goal was to have sex with Criseyde, the story would become one of how Pandarus betrayed Troilus. Chaucer refuses to reduce the scene to singular terms, and as it is a scene he invented, we have no recourse to his sources. The mythological and bookish allusions characterizing earlier interaction between Pandarus and Criseyde are absent from the scene as well, removing other allusions that might have provided clues. We are left with the context of Pandarus and Criseyde's relationship, which reveals little in its variable tones ranging from playful to ominous, and the narrator's uncomfortable comments which tantalize and yet obscure what really happens. It seems to be a deliberate textual puzzle, with Chaucer's impulse to offer questions coming to the fore: What is the nature of Pandarus and Criseyde's relationship? What are Pandarus' motivations and desires? To what ends will this author go—will he compromise his characters—to satisfy those vague desires?

The conclusion of Pandarus' "werk" seems to be the end of Book III, after the consummation night where he reads an old romance (III.980): a book and/or the lovers.

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[54] Futher instances include: Pandarus' comment to Criseyde, "For love of God, make of this thing an ende, / Or sle *us both* at ones er ye wende" (III.118-19, my emphasis). After the meeting at Deiphebus' house, Pandarus comes to Troilus "And on a paillet al that glade nyght / By Troilus he lay, with mery chere, / To tale; and wel was hem they were yfeere" (III.229-31). As he goes to bring Troilus to Criseyde on the consummation night, Pandarus comments "For love of God! And Venus, I the herye: / For soone hope I we shul ben alle merye" (III.951-52). See also IV.883-84.

Perhaps he does both. What is significant is that, like the narrator, he is an author who does not leave his material—not for the first three books, that is. His story seems to be complete when Book III ends. Pandarus' last appearance in Book III has the flavor of a denouement: the happy Troilus often takes him by the hand and praises Criseyde as they stroll through a garden (III.1737-42). In Book IV, when the lovers most need guidance, Pandarus withdraws, telling Criseyde that she and Troilus must reach a decision for "Wommen ben wise in short avysement" (IV.936), and giving Troilus only the advice that "my counseil is, whan it is nyght / Thow to hire go and make of this an ende" (IV.1114-1115). The appearance of "avysement" and "counseil" rather than a form of *rēden* suggests that here he is only an advice-giver, his power lessened. Sarah Stanbury attributes Pandarus' diminished presence in Books IV and V to a power shift, from his internal control of the affair to the larger political context of the war.[55] Indeed, Pandarus' control is not total, and there is a spatial shift as the story moves outward to the war and the city. The space the story inhabits is dominated by forces out of Pandarus' control: the Greeks' request for the prisoner exchange and the Trojan parliament. Nonetheless, having taken such an active presence in the story, impressing himself upon his niece and his friend, his disappearance into silence is noticeable. After hearing about the exchange in Book IV, he goes to Troilus who is in "derke chamber" and is "So confus that he nyste what to seye; / For verray wo his wit was neigh aweye" (IV.354-57). As before, he takes an active, personal interest in the affair, but here he loses his ability to advise. He can only look at Troilus, "whos hevynesse / His herte slough, as thoughte hym, for destresse"

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[55] "The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Studies in the Age of Chaucer 13 (1991), 153.

(IV.363-64). He then joins Troilus in weeping "And specheles thus ben thise ilke tweye" (IV.370). Pandarus' wordlessness is also emphasized in Book V. When Troilus has finally realized Criseyde's betrayal, Pandarus' reaction is stony silence: "As stille as ston; a word ne kowde he seye" (V.1729), the reasons for which the narrator cites in a whole stanza (he feels bad for Troilus' sorrow and shame because of his niece). When Pandarus finally speaks it is to denounce his niece, "I hate, ywis, Cryseyde," and says that if he knew how to, he would try to fix things, but he cannot (V.1732-1741).

Pandarus' exit resembles that of Boccaccio's Pandaro in that both are silent for a time, then utter contempt for Criseyde. Significant differences, however, do exist: Pandarus' denunciation of hate is paradoxically both more and less emphatic than Pandaro's. Though Pandarus says he hates Criseyde, he also says, "fro this world, almyghty God I preye / Delivere hire soon! I kan namoore seye" (V.1742-43). Pandaro's wish for Criseida is emphatic and vindictive: "I shall denounce her as strongly and as often as I can....Leave it to God, who may act as he thinks fit, and whom I pray as earnestly as I can to punish her in such a way that she will not be able to commit another crime of this sort."[56] Where Pandarus wishes for Criseyde's death, Pandaro wishes for Criseida a fate worse than death. Being a cousin of Criseida who has helped Troiolo gain his desire, his level of involvement is also less than Pandarus'; setting out to help Troiolo, Pandaro tells him that "The labour shall be mine entirely, but I want its sweet reward to be yours."[57] Pandarus' active involvement perhaps lends itself to this dual dismissal of Criseyde: his verbal treatment of Criseyde, although certainly not positive, is less harsh

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[56] *Il Filostrato*, VIII.24.
[57] *Il Filostrato*, II.32.

than in Boccaccio—he wishes for her not a textual, but a real end, deliverance from the world. Pandarus' hate resembles the narrator's admonishment against cursed pagan rites. Both have been involved in the material with which they are dealing and utter exclamations against it, and both conclude with prayers, Pandarus for Criseyde and the narrator for a generalized "us" (V.1866).

Dinshaw notes correspondences between the narrator's and Pandarus's reactions to Criseyde in the final two books of the poem as masculine responses to the uncontrollable feminine text of Criseyde—they read like men in that they "constrain, control, or eliminate outright the feminine."[58] Dinshaw also claims, however, that Pandarus' disavowal of Criseyde does not reflect his true feelings, that it is a gesture for Troilus' benefit and opens up the possibility that "reading *like* a man" is not the only option: one can also "read *as* a man."[59] That is to say, Pandarus presents a posture that one might conclude is yet another of his fictions. When Pandarus says he hates Criseyde, however, the narrator's description of Pandarus' motivations is notably vague. Pandarus, having listened to Troilus' lament and his claim that he did not deserve what Criseyde has done, stands silent for a reason: "For sory of his frendes sorwe his is, / And shamed for his nece" (V.1726-7). The motivations for his words denouncing Criseyde, by contrast, are introduced only with "But at the laste thus he spak, and seyde" (V.1730). There is neither affirmation nor denial that Pandarus' words are sincere. Since earlier we have seen Pandarus file his tongue and deliberately speak "for the nones,"[60] the lack of

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[58] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 51.
[59] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 63, emphasis in original.
[60] I.561, IV.428-31. In the latter instance he's called Troilus' affair "casuel plesaunce," after which the narrator comments, "Thise wordes seyde he for the nones alle, / To help his frend" and "He roughte nought what unthrift that he seyde."

intent here is significant. Dinshaw's presentation of this argument—that his words "cannot really be an expression of his own disappointment or disillusionment"[61]—reaches for a conclusion that absolves Pandarus in much the way that Pandarus' and the narrator's conclusions repudiate Criseyde: having seen Pandarus positively, Dinshaw wishes to explain away his assertion of hate much as the narrator's attempts to excuse Criseyde in Book V seek to remedy his earlier affection for her. Given Pandarus' earlier involvement in the affair, it is reasonable to assume that at this point he too feels betrayed by Criseyde.

Only a few lines later, he does fall into silence for the remainder of the poem. One might find Pandarus' exit from the story a validation of the futility of his authorship. It seems, however, that such a developed character as Pandarus, different in important ways from Boccaccio's Pandaro, has more purpose than futility. Pandarus' silence might be attributed to the idea that the story he writes has already finished.[62] One might also view Pandarus as a rhetorical exercise that illustrates the concept being discussed.[63] The latter view need not simplify Pandarus' important role in the poem, but amplify it instead—he is more than "rhetorical" in a pejorative sense. The reference to Geoffrey of Vinsauf in Book I relays how a poet should compose, and Pandarus offers an example of composition, although the real end of the love affair is not as Pandarus envisioned. Through Pandarus, Chaucer adds to the straining against the story that the narrator does: that is, to imagine ways the story could be different from its antecedent, to look at this

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[61] Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 63.

[62] Boitani raises the question of Books II and III being a story Pandarus writes, seeing his role as that of a Narrator-poet who acts as "a sort of stage manager" for the affair—his withdrawn presence after III is thus notable for its contrast to his activity in the previous books (English Medieval Narrative, 216).

[63] Woods notes that Chaucer used rhetorical structures in characters to delight his audience ("*Verba* and *Sententia*," 33).

story through multiple acts of reading (performed not just by Pandarus, but Troilus, Criseyde, the narrator, and his audience), to examine romance and point out the ways in which a text and/or a genre can fail: Pandarus is successful in bringing the lovers together, but the romance ultimately fails, and he is powerless to change the course of events. His text is also a disturbing one for its overtones of entrapment and violation. Pandarus' "romance" behavior highlights the troubling fact that he has failed to protect his niece and has traded the bonds of truth to one's relations for loyalty to one's friend—and, Pandarus has done so all too readily.

One might well be disturbed by Pandarus' presence in the poem. After all, he manipulates his niece verbally and physically, and his motives are questionable. What does he seek to gain by assisting Troilus in such an involved way? Despite his misgivings and his labeling himself a bawd, why does he move forward with his plans? What *is* the nature of the pleasure he obtains from the affair? Pugh's recent reading of Pandarus does much to account for Pandarus' unsettling and disruptive presence in the text—he is ultimately unknowable in Pugh's account because his desires are hidden (we cannot interpret them for a certainty) and his silence and fate at the end of the text are similarly unknown.[64] Pugh's reading gestures to the ways in which Pandarus destabilizes genre, romance, and gender roles in the poem, the ways in which his real motives are often concealed—he plots to bring Troilus and Criseyde together, but he does not seem altruistic in his repeated references to "us" or "all three" of them; there is some unrevealed thing he seeks in the course of the affair. In some respects, he resembles the dream narrators in search of "tydyngs" or a "certeyn thing" that eludes their grasp, yet he

[64] Queering Medieval Genres, 104-106.

lacks the hesitancy of those narrators. Like the words he uses, he is shifty, as he shifts from being friendly to proverbial, to manipulative, to desiring, to jovial. Such behavior is perhaps logical if we think of him in terms of an author who must comprehend the motivations and desires of his characters. Pandarus all-too-readily knows Troilus' predicament, having suffered it himself. Criseyde is a bit more difficult, so he uses a variety of devices: a story about Troilus' love-sickness, the letter and its bodily delivery, the staged ride-by, false stories about Poliphete and Horaste, verbal threats, and manipulation of setting.

Nolan argues that Pandarus speaks to Chaucer's "interest in the power of certain kinds of poetry to lead readers into the play of worldly (and specifically, erotic, sexual) pleasure."[65] While pleasure is certainly part of his goal, Pandarus as author signifies more than an interest in pleasure on Chaucer's part. He lies, he reinterprets Troilus' first letter and his later dream, he reads and redirects the reading of others. Should we condone or condemn such an author? The narrator's silence about the fate of Pandarus remains troubling, as it could either damn Pandarus to a hell of silence, or it could serve as silent approbation for the creative liberty he takes.

The reading of Pandarus presented here is a dark one, certainly. I wish to counter interpretations of Pandarus that view him as noble or merely a good friend to Troilus. Fyler, for instance, reads him sympathetically, as a character who to tries "to bring ordered happiness out of emotional torment."[66] While it can be said that Pandarus brings order to Troilus' early emotional torment, he cannot bring happiness to Troilus, to

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[65] Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman Antique*, 217.
[66] Chaucer and Ovid, 137.

Criseyde, or to himself after the prisoner exchange is announced and executed. Rather, the emotional torment intensifies in Books IV and V. Although Howard early recognized Pandarus' manipulations,[67] he later wrote that "Pandarus *is* a worthy gentleman...This counsellor to princes, one must assume, is possessed of those virtues which in Chaucer's time would have been thought to qualify him for such a role: learning, wisdom, dignity, intelligence, and a command for rhetoric."[68] Muscatine acknowledged the combination of courtly ideals and realism in Pandarus but, as Howard later did, maintained that "There is no question of his sincerity in courtly matters."[69] Sklute similarly has claimed that Pandarus has a "guileless proverbial nature [that] is totally winning."[70] As I hope to have demonstrated, the intelligence, learning, command of rhetoric, and the courtliness—to say nothing of dignity—Pandarus possesses are not as praiseworthy as Howard and Sklute have made them out to be.

To an extent, he makes both Troilus and Criseyde into victims—after all, Troilus is passive for much of the poem, languishing in lover's pain for the majority of the relationship, needing Pandarus even to help him undress (when Troilus faints, Pandarus wonders "is this a mannes herte?", and "of he rente al to his bare sherte" [III.1098-99]) on the consummation night. Criseyde, then, would be the niece whose trust is betrayed by Pandarus, victimized in some way by her uncle on more than one occasion (the thrusting of the letter in Book II, the morning after in Book III). To a certain extent, Pandarus is an infernal counselor who guides the lovers not to heaven's bliss but to an inversion of the

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[67] "Chaucer the Man," 341.
[68] "The Philosophies in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 160, emphasis original.
[69] Chaucer and the French Tradition, 139.
[70] Virtue of Necessity, 71.

paradisal love of which Troilus sings toward the end of Book III.[71] He is the namesake for the later English word "pander," after all.[72] The dynamics of the poem are more complex, however. His behavior does victimize Criseyde, yet her resistance, as I have argued in the previous chapter, indicates that she is more than a mere victim. Chaucer writes more complexity into his characters than to suggest such a stark contrast between perpetrator and victim. Criseyde is neither the woman in Boccaccio's poem who readily undresses for Troiolo, nor an entirely fearful creature paralyzed by her circumstances. Pandarus' behavior is also complex, as he shifts from friendly counselor to priest of love, to betrayer of trust, to pimp, injecting scenes with romance, comedy, even epic overtones.

The authority Pandarus appropriates speaks to the disruptive power of interpretation and composition. Like the narrator he seeks to create his own story. When Pandarus "reads" Troilus and Criseyde, he authorizes himself, and reading, interpretation, counsel, and control are closely intertwined throughout the poem, especially in his character. The "old romance" he creates is not the same old story. Although it contains traditional elements, such as the pain of the male lover and the gradual wooing of the lady through the assistance of a go-between, the story also diverges from tradition in the use of those conventions. As Howes has argued, Chaucer uses conventional literary elements to point out how inadequate they often are.[73] Pandarus exemplifies this process, as he is a product of convention, but also a product of Chaucer.

Like the poem's other characters, Pandarus is, in part, a product of books. His advice to Criseyde that beauty fades and old age will drive away potential lovers (II.393-

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[71] Robertson argues as much and labels Pandarus a falsely generous "priest of Satan" (A Preface to Chaucer, 479).
[72] The first occurrence of *pander*, n., cited in the *OED* dates from 1450.
[73] Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention, 11.

99) has its roots in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 2.113-18, the *Roman de la Rose* ll.12761-800, and *Il Filostrato* II.54. Pandarus stems from the fabliau pragmatism of Duenna's advice, as well as from the courtly Ami and Faus Semblant from the *Roman de la Rose*; in the latter instance, Pandarus as priest of love and Faus Semblant, "the friar who 'goes about stealing people's hearts.'"[74] He is an ironic Lady Philosophy as well.[75] For instance, in Book I Pandarus tries to find out the cause of Troilus' despair, he asks "For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe / To him that nevere tasted bitternesse?" (I.638-39). When Troilus complains that "Fortune is my fo" (I.837), Pandarus replies, "Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is commune / To everi manere wight in som degree?" and continues to describe the turning of Fortune's wheel (I.843-50).[76] Pandarus' "philosophy" is undermined a few lines later by his willingness to offer up his own sister if she is the one Troilus loves: "To Cerberus yn helle ay be I bounde, / Were it for my suster, al thy sorwe, / By my wil she sholde al be thyn to-morwe" (I.859-61). Neither Pandarus as Philosophy, nor Faus Semblant, nor Ami, nor his other literary sources are adequate in and of themselves. It is in the contradictory combination of these elements that Pandarus resides, at once conventional and unconventional.

A product of books, a reader of books, Pandarus is also an innovator, not wholly constrained by his textual history and, unlike the narrator, by the books he has read. If Pandarus is an example of an author's escape from the constraint of sources, which seems

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[74] Havely, "White words, false world: Chaucer's Pandarus and the Antifraternal Tradition in 'Troilus,' Books I-III," Medium Ævum 61 (1992), 254. For correspondences to Ami and Duenna, see Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, 139-41; Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Poetics, 59. One of Fleming's arguments is that Chaucer use of the *Roman de le Rose* is an important but overlooked influence on the poem (Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 92, 99).

[75] Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus, 40-41.

[76] He again refers to changes in Fortune toward the end of Book III, advising Troilus: "Bridle alwey wel thi speche and thi desir, / For worldy joie halt nought but by a wir" (III.1635-36).

to be the case even though he is part of a larger story that is bound to its sources, the results are discomfiting. His handling of the letter-writing scenes, the lies about Poliphete and about Horaste are conscious acts—Pandarus reads the situation and decides how to advance his purpose. He is aware of the events he manipulates as he plans to bring together Troilus and Criseyde. He acts to impose meaning upon Criseyde, and he constructs a text of both lovers in guiding and relaying the written discourse with which the affair advances to physical contact. His awareness of his actions is suggested when in Book III he tells Troilus, "for the I am bicomen, / Bitwixen game and ernest, swich a meene / As maken women unto men to comen" (III.253-255). It is not an entirely positive or flattering model of authorship, to be sure, to have an author who is a liar and, no less, a bawd, yet Chaucer seems to be pointing out that this author is a liar. Augustine differentiated between those who tell lies and those who are liars: the difference is that where some tell lies against their will, liars take pleasure in doing so, and when they cannot bring pleasure to someone by telling the truth, they mix truth with lies.[77] We have already seen conflicts between stories in the *House of Fame* and how the sources of the authors in the House of Fame are a mixture of truth and falsehood. *Troilus and Criseyde* provides another example; Pandarus' actions are similar to Augustine's model of liars and to the whirling winds in the House of Rumour, in that he tends to verbosity and blends truth with fiction—sometimes, rather, a blending of fiction with truth, as in the lie about Poliphete.

According to Patterson, "To grant Pandarus's view interpretive authority is to reduce *Troilus and Criseyde* to the *Filostrato*" for the latter text's misogyny and

[77] *De mendacio*, Chapter 11.

cynicism; it would mean that the only goal was sexual consummation.[78] Pandarus offers his own story, one indeed of sexual consummation and its attendant pleasures, both physical and narrative. He sets himself up as an authority to both Troilus and Criseyde—in the former case, with success; in the latter, he meets resistance. One need not, however, grant Pandarus the sole interpretive view in order to acknowledge the ways in which he manipulates events. Interpretive views in *Troilus and Criseyde* are granted to each of the characters as well as to the narrator—some clearly erroneous, as is often the case with Troilus; some astute, as with Criseyde's immediate reaction to Pandarus bearing Troilus' letter; some suggestive and ambiguous, cause for speculation and debate, as is often the case with the narrator, Criseyde, and Pandarus. The poem calls our attention to interpretive acts, and perhaps there is no authoritative view residing within the poem itself—we can grant readers in the poem interpretive credence or cast them into doubt, as their authority is limited by varying degrees. The poem is no more the realm of Pandarus alone than it is of the narrator alone. Rather, there is a spectrum of readings in which they, and Troilus and Criseyde, offer interpretations of their situations that by turns counter, acknowledge, conflict with, and even ignore other points of view. There is no sure, fixed authority in the poem. Such a claim need not suggest that the narrator and his characters are to be distrusted entirely, making reading into a futile process, but that their roles in the poem indicate that one must read very carefully and look beyond the veil that words are able to provide even on a non-allegorical level. The extent to which Pandarus and the narrator involve themselves in their stories speaks not only to the enthralling nature of reading and composing for an author himself, but also to the power of those acts

[78] Chaucer and the Subject of History, 140.

as they complicate familial relationships, love relationships, and an author's relationship to his material. Compilers they are not—rather, Pandarus and the narrator provide active demonstrations of how the role of author as compiler is complicated by the materials with which they work, the subjects of their stories, and their reactions to these materials.

Pandarus is, like the authors in the House of Fame, a pagan. By using a pagan character, Chaucer can explore this model of authorship from something of a safe distance, from which he could experiment with creative liberty—that which Chaucer, through the narrator, takes with Pandarus, and that which Pandarus takes with his material. One might judge Pandarus' behavior as part of his paganism, a judgment that cannot be passed on the narrator who denounces the "payens corsed olde rites!" (V.1849). Alternatively, this dismissal might be seen as a diversion on the part of the narrator, who points to the flaws of his characters in an attempt to detract from his own. He is another working out of the problems faced by the narrator, with a similar conclusion: desire, pleasure, and betrayal—emotional involvements with texts—do not lead to disengagement from them. Chaucer leads us to wonder about authors: if they cannot distance themselves from their material, how can there be an authoritative view in the text? How should we view claims to authority when an author contradicts his source and when another one lies?

As did Geoffrey of Vinsauf when discussing poetic composition, Hugh of St. Victor used a building analogy in discussing proper interpretation. He wrote that correct interpreters should "lay, so to speak, a certain foundation of unshaken truth upon which

the entire superstructure may rest."[79] Although Troilus' love is not a lie, the foundation Pandarus lays down for the affair resides in deliberate lies and manipulation—he builds not with a "rakel hond," but with a firm hand that nonetheless provides a shaky base for the superstructure that follows. Chaucer points to the fundamental instability of Pandarus' romance, which resembles a wicker house more closely than the sturdy castle protecting the rosebud in the *Roman de la Rose*, suggesting that an author's innovations might not contain a sure current of truth, or that what truth it contains is indiscernible from the whirlwinds with which it has been blended. Pandarus' end again echoes the *House of Fame*, as he becomes another silent man of authority. What can *silent* authorities say, when their task is instead to speak and advise? Neither the narrator's "multiple choice" ending nor Pandarus' silence provide certain guidance in the end.

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[79] *Didascalicon*, VI.4. Trans. Jerome Taylor. New York: Columbia, 1961. Murphy notes that the building metaphor stems from the Bible, e.g. Luke 14:28-29 ("A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," Review of English Studies n.s. 15 [1964], 14-15).

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