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Chaucer's Poetics and the Evolution of the Narrator in Troilus and Criseyde

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Chaucer's Poetics and The Evolution of the

Narrator in Troilus and Criseyde
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BY

Judith I. Green

THESIS

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As one modern poet has observed, the true subject of poetry is poetry. Despite the widespread prevalence of the modern critics' attitude of elitism concerning poetics and aesthetics, the study of these disciplines is in no way restrained to this century. Only recently has Chaucer been rescued from the fate of the "inspired barbarians"[1] whose art was wondered at but seldom analyzed for more than a catalog of references and background materials. That Chaucer's art is conscious is now an accepted fact; to what extent he established a system by which he practiced his art has not been fully explored. To this end I have studied what has been called his most fully developed work, Troilus and Criseyde.

In the Troilus, the statements of Chaucer's poetical ideas are to be found in the narrator's prologues and in his interpretations. An interpretation of Chaucer's credibility as narrator--at least an analysis of his attitudes as narrator-- is necessary if one is to interpret his comments. E. T. Donaldson describes the aim of poetry as "the double validation of truth by finding in it the past and making it live in the present."[2] Chaucer's narrator certainly does this. Chaucer sets himself up from the beginning as an objective relator of historical facts. It is at once evident that Chaucer has cre-

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[1] Thomas R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer (3 vols.; New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), III, 294.

[2] E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1970), p. 94.

ated a paradox: the historian-narrator has been objective about the facts but his attitude toward them is certainly not objective. The narrator reacts and changes with the sequence of events narrated; he is the only fully developed character in the poem.[3] The author has made the narrator a mouthpiece for the story line and for what may be called his "extraneous" statements. A recognizable effort has been made to establish the narrator's truthfulness and his aloofness.[4] If we accept the contention that Chaucer was not only conscious of his artistry but painstakingly careful about it, it is clear that there was reason for what seems the "extraneous" statements related by the narrator. These statements, which I will examine in detail, reveal Chaucer's poetic and aesthetic theories. My approach to an analysis of the poetics implied in the Troilus differs from that taken by Payne in his extensive study of the same subject in that I intend to deal more closely with an analysis of the text. Many of my conclusions, however, are essentially the same.

I have based my analysis upon some knowledge of the society and world view of the middle ages in order to avoid the modern critical tendency to project my modern system of

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[3]G. T. Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," in Chaucer and Chaucerians, ed. by D. S. Brewer (Alablma: University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 71.

[4]Morton W. Bloomfield, "Distance and Predestination in Troilus and Criseyde," in Chaucer Criticism, Vol. II: Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems, ed. by Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 197.

"truths" about art upon this work. In a very complete study of the differences between medieval and modern approaches to literature, D. W. Robertson has demonstrated that our modern critical dialectic of opposing tensions is non-applicable to the graded systems and hierarchies into which almost all phases of life and thought of the middle ages are divided. In the Divine Order which included all, contraries in the modern sense existed only as the result of false human perception which could not discern the larger "Whole" of the system. This basic difference of viewpoint accounts for a distorted view of literature and art before the Romantic Period, according to Robertson.[5]

For the most part, the function of the medieval poet was not to express his emotions and moods but to reflect the world outside himself. The reflection was a veil for the philosophical truth or "nucleus" behind it; thus one can discern the distinction between the basic medieval poet's functions and the modern poet's efforts to reveal or recreate a personal experience. These truths were not to be easily attained but were the reward for only the most astute reader. The aesthetic of the medieval world was a combination of a continuation of classical philosophy and a catalyst of Christian teaching.[6]

A comprehensive study of the classical philosophies studied by medeival man is to be found in Robertson. It will

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[5]D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 4-8.

[6]Ibid.,]5-18.

suffice here to say that Plato's _Timeaus_ and the mathematical theories of Pythagorus as well as the poets Petrarch, Ovid, Virgil, Cicero and Horace were known and revered. The works of these men formed a basis for Augustine's _Confessions_, as well as for Boethius' _Consolation of Philosophy_ and Dante's literary treatises, all important theological and aesthetic works for the middle ages and for Chaucer.[7]

Thus the background and basis for medieval aesthetics is much different from our background, but not only was the theory behind the art different, so was the basic structure. Robert M. Jordan, in an illuminating study, has declared that the medieval aesthetic concieves of art not as an organism that lives and grows but as an inorganic material. The modern organic theory of structure which, he says, was nurtured by the imaginative literature of the romantic period and has produced the novel, broke down the sense of distance previously essential in narrative forms. Thus what critics have been calling

> The irregularities and inconsistencies of a Chaucerian narrative, particulary the recurrent disruptiveness of illusion but also the other overt evidence of the maker's hand--the exposed joints and seams, the unresolved contradictions, the clashes of perspective--are not simply the signs of primitive genius... nor are they trivial stylistic blemishes... They are significant determinants of Chaucer's art...[8]

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[7]Robert M. Jordan, _Chaucer and the Shape of Creation_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 36-37.

[8]_Ibid._, p.8.

They are physical manifestations of his aesthetic. This explanation of medieval literary structure in terms of inorganic form emphasizes the artist as conscious "maker" as opposed to our modern portrait of the artist as participant in his own work which is somehow self-perpetuating.

This very general outline of the most significant differences of modern and medieval aesthetics should point out that Chaucer was born into a world in which it was as natural for the artist to study his art and choose between methods and schools as it is now.[9] The contributions of numerous medieval poets and philosophers to Chaucer's overall aesthetic views have been documented by many; notably the French and their traditions by Muscatine,[10] Manly and Robert Kilburn Root.[11]

That Chaucer's knowlege of his world was very broad is an established fact. Root has remarked that "Chaucer's mind is remarkable rather for its breadth [of knowledge] than for its depth, for the extent of his interests rather than for the intensity of his convictions."[12] Chaucer knew a considerable amount about most disciplines that concerned his

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[9]John Matthews Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer (New York: Holt and Co., 1926), p. 273.

[10]Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

[11]Robert Kilburn Root, The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation (3rd ed.; New York: Peter Smith, 1950).

[12]Ibid., 22.

era--astronomy, astrology, alchemy, philosophy, metaphysics,
theology--and evidence of his learning is to be found in all
his works. He has been said to wear his learning "lightly,"[13]
that is, he is able to scrutinize the social and natural world
about him for extended periods of time without experiencing the
ultimate truth of its limitations. But if he did not produce a
super cosmic art that explored the extremities of Creation, he
was none-the-less very aware of the natural hierarchy and man's
place in it. He has incorporated into his major works his
statement of truth;and if Troilus and The Canterbury Tales are
secular poems they are also extended examinations of the human
condition by a sensitive poet and an orthodox Christian, and
they are therefore concerned with ultimate truth. Chaucer has
expressed his vision of God and man both through explicit state-
ment, technique, and structure.[14] This concern with these things
and the acknowledged success of Troilus and Criseyde make this
poem most important for the study of his poetics.

Book One opens with what modern critics have called a
prologue. The first eight stanzas are the narrator's direct
address to the audience. His purpose in this work is made
clear--"The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen" (I 1,),[15]--as well

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[13]Jordan, The Shape of Creation, p. 63.

[14]Ibid., 63-64.

[15]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed.
by F. N. Robinson (2nd ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,
1957), pp. 389-479. All subsequent quotations from Troilus
and Criseyde are from this edition.

as his attitudes--the servant of "that God of Loves servantz"
(I, 15). He says he is an "instrument" thereby fulfilling
the medieval tradition of the poet as a builder who plans be-
forehand how best to dispose of the parts at hand.[16] The parts,
the facts and truths, are pre-eminent to the work itself as
the narrator consistently reminds us throughout the poem. The
"audience" is immediately caught up and asked to participate
in the emotional relevance of the story. All lovers are asked
to bring to bear their feelings and remembrances about love to
make the story more realistic and therefore help the narrator's
skill. This implies an understanding of the reactions of an
audience that is always quick to criticize that which they do
not feel to be credible. By asking the audience to bring their
own attitudes to the story, the author's attitudes are thereby
outwardly de-emphasized; and he can carefully and subtly exer-
cise a quiet influence on their ideas.

Lines 13 and 14, "A woful wight to han a dreary feere,/
And to a sorwful tale, a sory chere," imply a strict adherence
to the appropriateness of tone and subject matter. This point
is stressed repeatedly and is adhered to throughout the poem
itself. Gerould writes of the Troilus in general, "the mood is
sustained, moreover, there is no loss of dignity through the
shift to comedy."[17]

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[16]Jordan, The Shape of Creation, p. 42.

[17]Gordon Hall Gerould, Chaucerian Essays (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 84.

The narrator proceeds to summarize the story, thus
the outcome, already known to most, is emphasized and the
builder has revealed all his parts. It was quite traditional
to give the audience an advance summary of the story of a long
narrative poem. Suspense was not necessary in medieval story-
telling; instead the paradox of extensive use of foreshadowing
to inject expectancy into a story was used.[18] He ends his sum-
mary with the statement

> But how this town com to destruccion
> Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle;
> For it were here a long digression
> Fro my matere,...   (I, 41-44)

The narrator again and again emphasizes his efforts to stick to
the matter at hand. The purposeful deletion of facts unre-
lated to the story is recognized by Lounsbury

> The course he took in refusing to introduce
> the non-essential...came from the exercise
> of his own critical judgement. He is full
> of references to the necessity of avoiding
> details which were then regularly expected.
> It is clear from his practice of disembar-
> rassing his story from everything that did
> not add to the effect, that the poet had
> come to comprehend fully the principle that
> in art the half is greater than the whole.[19]

Book Two starts with a direct statement about the poet's
relationship to his material. The maritime imagery is used to
project the comparison of the steersman and his boat, and the
poet and his matter. Again, the stress is on the inability

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[18]Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," p. 75.

[19]Lounsbury, Studies, pp. 329-330.

of the narrator-poet to deviate from the set material. The
implication of this image is that the material is difficult for
the poet to handle, perhaps suggesting, as Brewer states, that
the "narrator must maintain throughout something of that ini-
tial naivité, lest he be held responsible for the calamity."[20]
The narrator, fittingly enough, calls upon the muse of history,
Cleo, in the second stanza to rhyme his book but wants no other
help for he says "That of no sentement I this endite,/ But out
of Latyn in my tongue it write." (II, 13-14) To relate strictly
that which is found in the Latin is his only concern, or so he
says. This is an often found repetition that the narrator is
going to stick to the matter at hand, thus de-emphasizing his
own participation in the telling of the story. In reality, his
participation becomes more and more important and the relevant
details of the story start to take second place to the narrator's
poetic concerns in this book.

Tradition as "language," that is, a set of local his-
torical accidents that determine the particular materials with
which the poet builds, is unstable and certainly not permanent.[21]
Chaucer recognized this, as is evident from the disclaimer which
occurs at the beginning of Book Two:

> Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
> Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so.   (II, 22-25)

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[20] Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," p. 75.

[21] Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of
Chaucer's Poetics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 70.

In lines 1023-43, Pandarus gives Troilus some advice on letter writing. One of his main points is that one must adhere to sytle and speech appropriate to the subject matter, thus reiterating the narrator's short comments in Book One, and adding that the reason one should be careful is that inappropriateness of style is the mistake of a "jape."

> "Ne jompre ek no discordant thyng yfeere
> As thus, to usen terms of phisik
> In loves termes; hold of thic matere
> The forme alwey, and do that it be lik;
> For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
> With asses feet, and hede it as an ape,
> It cordeth naught, so here it art a jape."   (II, 1037-43)

In the other two stanzas of Pandarus' advice, he exhorts Troilus not to "reherce" a clever word or phrase too often lest it become dull and meaningless--a fitting enough admonition for a letter-writer or storyteller.

In Book Three, the narrator plays a very prominent part. A high rhetorical style is used in the "prologue" which centers attention for 49 lines on the narrator and his immediate compositional problems.[22] The poet-narrator prays to Venus in the "prologue" or "proem" to Book Three, again asking for help

> Now, lady bryght, for thi benignite,
> At reverence of hem that serven the,
> Whos clerc I am, so techeth me devyse
> Som joye of that is felt in thi servis.
>
> Ye in my naked herte sentement
> Inhielde, and do me shewe of thy swetnesse.   (III, 39-44)

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[22] Jordan, The Shape of Creation, p. 84.

He calls himself the clerk of those that serve Venus, and
one is reminded of his earlier description of himself as the
servant of those that serve the god of love (I, 15). He is
again declaring the position of the poet to be subservient
to the "matter" with which he is working. In Book One he
first professed no experience of deep feeling and asked the
audience to supply it. In Book Two (stanza two) he asked for
no other aid than with the facts as they exist; here he has
changed his position somewhat and asks for some "sentement"
or deep feeling to help him write more convincingly of love.
The narrator-poet's subtle shift of emphasis from the facts
involved to the emotions involved is drawing him and his pre-
viously objective feelings closer into the story. He is draw-
ing in the audience who must necessarily follow their only
leader down his private footpath.

The narrator appeals to the muse of epic poetry:

Caliope, the vois be now present,
For now is nede; sestow nought my destresse
How I mot telle anonright the gladnesse
Of Troilus, to Venus heryinge?
To which gladnesse, who nede hath, God hym brynge!
(III, 45-49)

In Book Two the objective muse of history was called upon to
help with the facts concerning Troilus' sorrow and happiness.
The narrator's switch to the muse of epic poetry and his plea
to her enunciates his new concern ["destresse"] not for Troilus,
but for the creation of his poetry. Thus another shift is tak-
ing place; the narrator of history is becoming a conscious poet
and the difference strongly implied is emotion. A parallel

between the relating of facts and objective non-involvement, and
the creation of poetry and emotional involvement is being drawn
very carefully and most subtly in order to emphasize the impor-
tance of emotional involvement in the process of creation.

Later in Book Three, the narrator interupts his story
with two stanzas of parenthetical comments:

> But soth is, though I kan not tellen al
> As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,
> Yet have I seyd, and God to forn, and shal
> In every thyng, al holy his sentence;
> And if that ich, at Loves reverence,
> Have any word in eched for the beste,
> Doth therwithal right as yourselven leste.
>
> For myne wordes, heere and every part,
> I spoke hem alle under correccioun
> Of you that felyng han in loves art,
> And putte it al in youre discrecioun
> To encresse or maken dymynucion
> Of my langage, and that I you biseche.
> But now to purpos of my rather speche.   (III, 1324-37)

He has stepped up again in his humble guise to remind us that
the facts he is relating are unalterable, but he admits, for
the first time in the poem, that there are parts of this nar-
ration that are totally his creation. The narrator-poet has
become poet-narrator in this book. The audience is asked to
notice that which he has added and to judge its worth; he is
thereby directing the attention of the audience further away
from the facts of the story and closer to the poet and his con-
cerns.

Jordan states that the conclusion recalls the beginning
of this book by returning the narrator to prominence and clar-
ifying the process of narration by explicitly closing "my thridde

bok." It serves completely to enclose the matter of lover's "wele." Again, the narrator is using a sort of envelope technique.[23]

The narrator bids Diane, Cupid, and the Muses farewell as the joyous part of the love story is ended. He is left to his own invention and the guidance of the Furies in Book Four. He describes his emotional reaction to his matter:

> For which right now myn herte gynneth blede
> And now my penne, allas! with which I write,
> Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite.   (IV, 12-14)

He is following through with his change of character, and emotional involvement has developed from objective reporter. For the first time, he questions the "authors" whom he is reporting in "...if they on hire lye,/ I wis, hemself sholde han the vilanye" (IV, 20-21). He is here suggesting his independence as a poet.

In order that we do not lose sight of his stance as humble narrator he interjects a stanza about his inability to relate Cressida's "heigh compleynte."

> How myghte it evere yred ben or ysonge,
> The pleynte that she made in hire distresse?
> I not; but, as for me, my litel tonge,
> If I discryven wolde hire hevynesse,
> It sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse
> Than that is was, and childisshly deface
> Hire heigh compleynte, and therefore ich it pace.   (IV, 799-805)

The narrator is juxtaposing his position as relator of facts and as creator of poetry and very subtly leading the audience to accept him more and more in the latter form. This ac-

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23Ibid., 88.

ceptance plays an important role at the end of the poem. He
brings in his independent opinion again in these lines:

> And trewe liche, as writen wel I fynde
> That al this thyng was seyd of good entente;
> And that hire herte trewe was and dynde
> Towardes hym, and spak right as she mente,
> And that she starf for wo neigh, whan she wente,
> And was in purpos evere to be trewe: (IV, 1415-1420)

The narrator is consciously unfolding a portrait of himself
independent of the story and thereby describing the relationship
of the poet and his material and the poet's relationship to his
audience.

There has been sustained controversy over Book Five and
the last fifteen stanzas of the poem which have been called
everything from an irrevelancy--by J. S. P. Tatlock[24] and W. C.
Curry[25]--to "the end to which the whole story inevitably moves."[26]
For my part, I will only say that the "epilogue" continues to
demonstrate the characteristic narrative comments I have thus
far been examining.

Book Five opens without the usual "proem" and the nar-
rator remains withdrawn for an unusually long period. Troilus'
period of suffering is presented uninterrupted as the narrator
attends strictly to the business of relating the story and re-
frains from expounding or otherwise drawing attention to himself.

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[24]J. S. P. Tatlock, The Mind and Art of Chaucer (Syracuse:
Syracuse University Press, 1950), p.40.

[25]W. C. Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (2nd ed.;
New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960), p. 297.

[26]Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 128.

Thus the audience is led further and further into the unrelieved
emotions of the story and the degree of emotional intensity
is unmatched elsewhere in the poem.[27] After relating Troilus'
doubts, Criseyde's actions, and the realization of Troilus of
Criseyde's unfaithfulness we are relieved, almost at the end of
the poem by the narrator's comments. Again, he stresses the
necessity of adhering to the facts that pertain to the story.

> But for that I to writen first bigan
> Of his love, I have seyd as I kan,--
> His worthi dedes, whose list hem heere,
> Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere   (V, 1768-1771)

He is, it seems, reviewing the comments that he has previously
made about composition and his position as narrator. The nar-
rator again reminds us that he is in no way responsible for the
events of the story:

> Byseechyng every lady bright of hewe,
> And every gentil womman, what she be,
> That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
> That for that gilt she be not wroth with me. (V, 1772-75)

His apostrophe to his book, often analyzed, is more
or less a medieval convention, but with Chaucer labeling a pas-
sage conventional is not to say that is meaningless.

> Go litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye.
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So send myght to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
> But subgit he to alle poesye;
> And kiss the steppes, where as thous seest pace
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.   (V, 1786-92)

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[27] Jordan, The Shape of Creation, p. 92.

He is for the first time calling the story of Troilus a poem, a tragedy, a book; and above all he is calling it _his_. Suddenly the "I" is not the historian-narrator who has slowly become a "poet" but Chaucer, a serious poet, conscious of classical tradition, aware of the problems inherent in the change of language and he is most of all concerned about the integrity of his text. Several stanzas later, he localizes himself in time by dedicating his book to two contemporaries.[28]

The poet has created what he refers to as a tragedy. To Chaucer, 'tragedy' had a specific shape and meaning--that laid down by Boethius in the second book of his _Consolation_. Chaucer's own translation of the essential passage reads:

> 'What other tyng bywaylen the cryinges of tra-
> gedyes but oonly the dedes of Fortune, that
> with unwar strook overturneth the realms of
> great nobleye?'

To which he added a gloss:

> 'Tragedy is to seyn a dite of prosperite, for
> a tyme, that endith in wrechidnesse.'[29]

Thus his _love_ _story_ has ended, according to the conscious delin- iation of his own poetic definition. But this is not to say that the poem has ended in the tragic manner. The historian's job is finished, but the poet's is certainly not.

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[28]_Ibid._, 103.

[29]Nevill Coghill, _The_ _Poet_ _Chaucer_ (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 67.

In the same stanza, lines 1789-92, he consigns his book to critical posterity with an injunction. Here the past functions as an artistic norm or tradition. "Alle poesye" summons up an abstract body of aesthetic principle, the sources or examples of which are specified in the representative catalogue.[30]

Chaucer brings in the relationship of future audiences to his material in the next stanza:

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

His concern for the structure and the meter of the poem demonstrates the poets' consciousness of his poetic contributions to the matter.

The narrator devotes the next five stanzas to the death of Troilus and his much argued about ascension. His laughter, it seems to me, does not come so much from a cynical repudiation of man's joys and sorrows as from his knowledge of a cosmic harmony in which he has played a part. The whole medieval aesthetic is based upon a Divine Order or harmony of which the narrator has been aware. His declaration and demonstration of it serves to widen the philosophical and aesthetical scope of the poem. Thus the dedication to "moral Gower" and "philosophical Strode" are fitting enough.

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[30] Payne, The Key, p. 84.

The poet finishes the poem with a prayer to Christ for reconciliation thus directing the attention of not only the audience but the narrator-poet heavenward. Ultimately in the vision of God and his Divine Order there can be no "tragedy," since there is no change. Thus the extent upon which a situation is "tragic" depends upon length of vision. To the historian-narrator, the love story in itself is tragedy. To the poet, Chaucer, whose vision is not limited by the time span of the story, Troilus has not ended in "wrechidnesse" and the poem therefore is not ultimately a tragedy. Within this perspective the affairs of humanity can be contemplated only with cool and assured laughter.

I have attempted, in this study, to somewhat free this poem from the confining grasp of the modern elitist critic by approaching this piece of literature with an understanding of the medieval aesthetic forces behind it. The narrator-poet is the key device through which Chaucer puts forth the basic poetic ideas. In the voice of the narrator "the ambiguities of the poetics become controlled and useful elements of the poem."[31]

Chaucer engages us in a continuous dialectic with the narrator which defines and locates both poet and audience.[32] From the beginning of the poem, the audience is unmistakably aware of the character who relates the story. As I have pointed out repeatedly, the narrator develops and so do his ideas about

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[31]Ibid., 226.

[32]Ibid., 231.

composition. The narrator started from the traditional stance
as humble "builder" who must relate his story as a series of
historical facts. He stressed his lack of responsibility for
the events, his lack of experience in emotional involvement,
his careful selection of appropriate tone and diction and strict
adherence to the necessary details of the story. As the poem
progressed so did the narrator. In Book Three the narrator
displayed a concern for the composition of the material. He
became not only poetically involved but emotionally involved.
The narrator still disclaimed the events of the story which were
out of his control, but was not disclaiming the poetic compo-
sition. The end result of this development came in the "Epilogue"
when the poet emerged totally from the historian-narrator to
re-emphasize his poetic concerns: the responsibility of the
artist to adhere to historical events; the selection of appro-
priate and necessary information, tone and style; his contribu-
tion of structure and meter to the story proper; the necessity
of balance between intellect and emotion; and, the relationship
of audiences to his work.

Brewer has explored the uses of the narrator in the
Troilus and has come to the conclusion that Chaucer's narrator
not only had traditional responsibilities but also had a duty
to the poet himself. He says:

> The poet in putting the poem together had to main-
> tain his own morale, to remain confident that what
> he was doint was worth doing, to refuse to lose his
> own way in the story, and to ensure that in working
> out his intention he should achieve what every au-

thor aims at in a major work, a continuing fall-
out of meaning, which should sift slowly down into
the memory and modify understanding.[33]

The evolution of the narrator in the _Troilus_ is the re-

sult of Chaucer's compromise between his responsibility to

long standing traditions and his responsibility to himself as

an artist. Chaucer's declaration of his poetics through the nar-

rator becomes a controlled and meaningful means to suit his end.

Payne has best summed up the resourcefulness of Chaucer's method:

> What in other poems makes the perception of truth
> through art seem all but impossible, becomes in
> this poem a means of defining the _ways_ in which we
> percieve through art, and of involving us along
> with the author in the perception.[34]

It is, indeed, "his way of validating the moral generalization

which the poem serves by including the poet and ourselves and

the poem within the humanity which they are to measure."[35]

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[33] Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," p. 75.

[34] Payne, _The Key_, p. 226.

[35] _Ibid._, 220.

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