

Chaucer and Narrative Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Many of the stories found in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer are adapted from other sources, a common practice amongst Medieval authors. But Chaucer often draws attention to his derivations by explicitly naming a source for the stories he uses. This strategy is employed in different ways. In Troilus and Criseyde, a false source is cited, but in the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer names the actual source of the story. In this thesis, identification and close examination of Chaucer's source materials reveal his changes to the derived texts, and an analysis of the role of the narrator in each case demonstrates the different narrative strategies he employs. Although Chaucer is clearly using different strategies in the two works, both raise questions about final authority over a text. These questions are the central issues explored in this thesis.

RÉSUMÉ

Un grand nombre d'histoires dans l'oeuvre de Geoffrey Chaucer sont adaptées d'autres sources, une pratique courante entre des auteurs medievaux. Mais souvent, en nommant une source des histoires dont il se sert, Chaucer rend explicites ses dérivations. Cette stratégie est employée dans des façons différentes. Dans Troilus and Criseyde, une source fausse est nommée, mais dans The Clerk's Tale, Chaucer cite la vraie source de l'histoire. Dans cette thèse, l'identification et une examination attentive des sources de Chaucer révèlent ses changements aux textes, et une analyse du rôle du narrateur dans chaque exemple démontre les stratégies narratives différentes qu'il utilise. Evidemment Chaucer emploie des stratégies différentes dans les deux textes, mais dans les deux, des questions concernant l'autorité sur un texte sont soulevées. Ces questions forment le sujet central exploré dans cette thèse.

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INTRODUCTION

Borrowing freely from another author's work, often without acknowledging the debt to that author, was common practice amongst medieval authors. The notion of plagiarism did not exist--originality was not an important value in the Middle Ages. Many of Chaucer's works, including the Romance of the Rose, Troilus and Criseyde, and several of the Canterbury Tales, are adapted from other authors. In this analysis I have designated such adaptations as "derived texts." When a writer adapts the work of another author, with whom does final authority rest? And who is ultimately responsible for the text? These are concepts Chaucer explores in his work. But in order to understand the questions Chaucer raises and the conclusions he reaches, they must be contextualized in medieval theories of authorship and authority.

The title "auctour" incorporated the notions of both author and authority. According to A.J. Minnis, an auctour was "not someone merely to be read but also to be respected and believed." Minnis explains that the term

derived its meaning from four main sources: "auctour" was supposed to be related to the Latin verbs "agere" (to act or perform), "augere" (to grow) and "auieo" (to tie), and to the Greek noun "autentim" (authority). An "auctour" "performed" the act of writing. He brought something into being, caused it to "grow." In the more specialised sense related to "auieo," poets like Virgil and Lucan were "auctores" in that they had "tied" together their verses with feet and metres. To the ideas of achievement and growth was easily assimilated the idea of authenticity or "authoritativeness."¹

In order to have authority, a medieval work must have some Christian value, and must be "authentic," the work of a named author (Medieval Theory of Authorship 11). The first condition for authority posed a potential problem with regard to the "ancients," the classical writers. But medieval scholars did not abandon these writers; they recognized their expertise in the area of ethics. Instead, they relied on St. Paul's theory of ancient revelation² or made the works acceptable "by extensive moralisation" (Medieval Theory of Authorship 11).

Not all literary activities carried with them the title of auctour. In the prologue to Peter Lombard's Libri Sententiarum (1250-2), St. Bonaventure distinguished four ways of making a book, four different roles:

The method of making a book is fourfold. For

¹A.J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages (London: Scolar P, 1984) 10.

²A.J. Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982) 62.

someone writes the materials of others, adding or changing nothing, and this person is said to be merely the scribe. Someone else writes the materials of others, adding, but nothing of his own, and this person is said to be the compiler. Someone else writes both the materials of other men, and of his own, but the materials of others as the principal materials, and his own annexed for the purpose of clarifying them, and this person is said to be the commentator, not the author. Someone else writes both his own materials and those of others, but his own as principal materials, and the materials of others annexed for the purpose of confirming his own, and such must be called the author (St. Bonaventure as cited in Medieval Theory of Authorship 94).

Although St. Bonaventure qualifies himself as an auctour, often his contemporaries were denied the title. As far as the medievals were concerned, the better works were the more ancient ones--the older a book was, the greater its potential for auctoritas. The legendary statement of Bernard de Chartres is often cited as proof of this belief: "We are as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of ancients."¹ Jacqueline Miller explains that the comment is double-edged; although it acknowledges the debt of the contemporaries to the ancients, it also implies that the moderns see farther. She defends her position by referring to John of Salisbury's Metalogicon in which Bernard's remark is introduced by this explanation:

Our own generation enjoys the legacy bequeathed to it by that which preceded it. We frequently know more, not because we have moved ahead by our own natural ability, but because we are supported by

¹Jacqueline Miller, Poetic License (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 9.

the [mental] strength of others, and possess riches that we have inherited from our forefathers (John of Salisbury as cited in Miller 12).

He in turn cites Abelard's comment that a contemporary could write works as well as the ancients, but "it would be impossible for such a book to gain acceptance as authority" (as cited in Miller 13). A book needs time to accrue authority. This does not imply that the medievals disregarded their contemporaries; it simply means that older works were accorded greater authority. Sometimes, however, this formula became problematic. When a work was considered to contain auctoritas, there was a tendency to ascribe it to an "older and more respected" auctour (Medieval Theory of Authorship 11). Minnis claims that "no 'modern' writer could decently be called an auctour" in the Middle Ages. John of Salisbury's comments in the Prologue to the Third Book of his Metalogicon lament this unfortunate tendency:

Something that is true in itself does not melt into thin air, simply because it is stated by a new author...I do not agree with those who spurn the good things of their own day, and begrudge recommending their contemporaries to posterity...These opinions of the ancients are admitted, simply because of their antiquity, while the far more probable and correct opinions are, on the other hand, rejected, merely because they have been proposed by men of our time (as cited in Miller 14).

John acknowledges the honour due the ancients but also insists on the moderns' equal or perhaps even greater authority. His views are not necessarily representative of all medieval scholars, but certainly indicate a bifurcated

view of the concepts of authorship.

* * * * *

In this thesis, I will consider Chaucer's explorations of the concepts of authority and authorship. In both of the works considered, the Clerk's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde, there is an explicit disclosure of source. As H. Ludeke has observed, there are only five instances of such disclosure in all of Chaucer's work.⁴ I have chosen to focus on these two cases because they illustrate the most complex relationships between a narrator and his source(s). In the first section of each chapter, the historical development of the sources and the changes Chaucer made to them are examined. In the second section, Chaucer's different narrative strategies are analyzed. In both cases, the

⁴Barney cites H. Ludeke's observation (1026) that Chaucer only names his sources in three of his works besides the Clerk's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde. In the Physician's Tale, Titus Livius is named as the source. Versions of the story appear in the Roman de la Rose (5589-658), Gower's Confessio Amantis 7: 5131-306 and in Boccaccio's De claris mulieribus. C. David Benson in his notes to the Riverside edition observes that Chaucer's reference to Livy echoes the Roman de la Rose and may indicate that Chaucer did not know the original source. In the Monk's Tale, there are two direct references to source. One correctly credits Dante with the story of Ugolino which comes from Inferno 23, the other names Petrarch as the source for the Zenobia episode which actually comes from Boccaccio's De claris mulieribus. Lastly, line 21 of Anelida and Arcite alleges that the story is derived from Statius when in fact it comes partly from Boccaccio's Teseide.

attitude of the narrator towards his source is the key to narrative strategy.

Chaucer's narrative posture has been interpreted by some critics as similar to that of Bonaventure's compiler. The compiler, according to Minnis, is "not responsible for his reader's understanding of any part of the materia" (Medieval Theory of Authorship 201). Minnis claims that Chaucer "hid behind the 'shield and defence' of the compiler" (Medieval Theory of Authorship 210). The crux of this statement rests on the assumption that there is no distance between Chaucer and his narrator. The device of the narrator is visibly developed throughout his work. In the dream visions, Chaucer, the author/narrator is present in his work, and is often referred to by name. In poems such as the House of Fame, the distance between Chaucer, the author, and Chaucer, the narrator, is ironic; Chaucer has assumed a persona. In Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator is clearly distinct from Chaucer--there are no references to name, and Chaucer the author seems to be doing things of which the narrator is unaware, such as the use of the concealed source. His manipulation of the device reaches its zenith in the Canterbury Tales, when he introduces the framework narrative with its multiple narrators, including both himself and fictional narrators within the frame.

In considering these two works, I hope to illustrate Chaucer's concern with the use and adaptation of derived

text. In both Troilus and Criseyde and the Clerk's Tale, the narrators ultimately establish themselves as authority within the confines of the text. Although their attitudes towards their source(s) are initially very different, both represent the struggle of an author with his source material, and both provide insights into Chaucer's explorations of the concepts of authorship and authority.

CHAPTER 1

"God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!"

(Troilus and Criseyde, III.1357)

PART I: Sources and Origins

And by him stood, withouten les,
 Ful wonder hy on a piler
 Of yren, he, the gret Omer;
 And with him Dares and Tytus
 Before, and eke he Lollius,
 And Guydo eke de Columpnis,
 And Englyssh Gaufride eke, ywis;
 And ech of these, as I have joye,
 Was besy for to bere up Troye.

(House of Fame 1464-72)

This is the first introduction to Lollius, Chaucer's putative source for Troilus and Criseyde. To date, no one has been able to determine conclusively who Lollius was, if he actually existed, and why Chaucer included him in this list of luminaries. In the dream vision, the poet/narrator enters "Fames halle" (1357) and after seeing the "Goðdesse of Renoun" (1406), begins to describe the statues of the worthies lining the hall. The first is Josephus, identified as "a first-century Jew who became Romanized and was the

author of two books on Jewish History".⁵ After an indeterminate host of celebrities too large to be delineated--it would be "to longe to duelle"(1454)--the next statue is of "Stace," author of the Thebaid and Achilleis. Following Statius are those who "bere up Troye"(1472): Homer, Dares, Dictys⁶, Lollius, Guido de Columnis and Geoffrey of Monmouth. Subsequently there is Virgil, distinguished as the author of the Aeneid. Ovid, Lucan and Claudian are the final statues identified before the list is broken off, as the narrator decides that to continue would be a "ful confus matere"(1517).

The importance of the company with which Lollius is grouped is that all of the authors listed are historical, and, as Kittredge points out, "in every case the author is correctly associated with the subject" (48). It seems highly improbable that Chaucer would have included a fictional character in this list. As the House of Fame is believed to have been composed well before Troilus and Criseyde, the possibility that Chaucer included the name Lollius in this poem to authenticate his reference to him in

⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, trans. and ed. Brian Stone (London: Penguin, 1987) 242.

⁶ Although the spelling in the original is "Tytus," Kittredge asserts that this is "probably a scribe's error for Dytus (i.e. Dictys)" in "Chaucer's Lollius," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 28 (1917): 47 n1. Stone concurs, translating the word as Dictys, as does Fyler in his notes to the Riverside edition (365 n1467).

Troilus and Criseyde is doubtful.⁷

It is safe to assume that Chaucer did not invent the name Lollius. But as G.L. Kittredge asserts in his seminal article, "Chaucer's Lollius," Chaucer never saw any work by Lollius because it is almost certain that he did not exist. No major work on the Trojan War by Lollius has ever surfaced. However, the assumption that Lollius did exist was not challenged until the last century, when a theory was put forward by Latham suggesting that the error had its roots in a misunderstanding of the following lines from Horace:

Troiani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli,
Dum tu declamas Romae, Praeneste relegi.
(While you were declaiming in Rome, Maximus Lollius,
At Praeneste I reread the writer of the Trojan War.)
(as cited in Kittredge, "Chaucer's Lollius," 47)

The poet is addressing his comments to a friend, Maximus Lollius, and the writer to whom he refers is Homer. But Kittredge illustrates how the mistake of identifying Lollius as the writer could easily be made. He points out that

⁷ In his notes Fyler explains that the poem is generally dated around 1379-80. He cites Robinson: "the probabilities favor the early years...before the composition of the Palamon or the Troilus. The use of the octosyllabic couplet would have been more natural at that time than later. This date would also account for the transitional nature of the poem"(978). Stephen Barney, in his notes to the Troilus, provides a concise summary of the critical debate surrounding the uncertainty of the date of that poem's composition, and concludes that the only certainty is that the poem was completed before the death of Thomas Usk in March 1388, as he makes reference to the poem in his work. Barney assigns a probable date of 1382-85.

without capitals and punctuation, the second verse offers some difficulty:

Scriptorem belli troiani maxime lolli
dum tu declamas rome prenesti relegi.

Suddenly, it is no longer clear to the translator that "maxime" is part of the proper name--it appears to be a superlative--nor is it obvious that "prenesti" is a place. The lines are also unclear in that it would be easy to understand "scriptorem" as the object of "declamas" as well as "relegi." The lines would then read as follows: "O greatest Lollius, I have read you, a writer on the Trojan War, over again, while you have been declaiming [your poem] at Rome." Kittredge also notes ten Brink's hypothesis that there had been a scribal error resulting in a corruption of the text, in which "scriptorum" became "scriptorem." The lines would now read: "O Lollius, greatest of writers on the Trojan War." Kittredge goes on to explain that the subject of the Epistle is the Trojan War. This compounds the confusion as it seems logical to address a letter dealing with the Trojan War to one of its great raconteurs.⁸

It is impossible to determine who made the initial error--it seems doubtful that it was Chaucer. Robert Pratt argues on the basis of evidence from two medieval

⁸It is interesting to note that even further muddying the matter is the fact that there was a Lollius Bassus of the first century A.D. who did indeed write, although briefly, of the Trojan War. His epigrams are included in Kittredge's article (91).

manuscripts that this misconception was common in the Middle Ages.⁹ The lines from Horace's Second Epistle are included in John of Salisbury's Policrates (1159). Pratt notes that it may well be from this work that Chaucer learned the lines, as the Epistolae did not circulate widely in the Middle Ages. The first manuscript is a late twelfth century copy of the Policrates in which the line reads: "Troiani belli scriptorum maxime lollii." This is the same scribal error foreseen by ten Brink. The second manuscript is a French translation of the Policrates dating from 1372, in which the line is rendered as: "Car il dit, que lolli fu principal escivain de la bataille de Troye" (For he said that Lollius was the principal writer of the Battle of Troy). From this it appears evident that the conception of Lollius as a writer on the Trojan War was the result of a scribal error. If this is the case, the corollary is that Chaucer had never seen the work to which his narrator refers.

The reasons for Chaucer's citation of an unknown author as the source of Troilus and Criseyde is clearly part of his narrative strategy. In ascribing the poem to a source that cannot be verified, Chaucer can give authority to his work but also be free within the general framework of the story.

⁹ Robert Armstrong Pratt. "A Note on Chaucer's Lollius." MLN 65 (1950): 183-7.

The actual source of the poem is Boccaccio's Il Filostrato. But the episode on which Boccaccio's poem is based is derived from the work of another author, Benoit de Sainte Maure. Despite the lovestory's now well established place in Trojan lore, there is no mention in Homer of any affair between Troilus and Criseyde. In the Middle Ages, however, Homer's works existed only in corrupted and condensed versions and he was not considered to be the most authoritative writer of the Trojan War. Witness these lines in the House of Fame:

Oon seyde that Omer made lyes,
 Feynyng in hys poetries,
 And was to Grekes favorable;
 Therfor held he hyt but fable.
 (1477-80)

According to medieval scholars, Dictys of Crete and Dares Phrygius wrote the two important narratives concerning the Trojan War. Both were supposedly eyewitness accounts, one by a Trojan ally, the Phrygian, the other by an ally of the Greeks, the Cretan. Taken together, these two accounts may be seen to transcend the partiality of Homer or any other single author. As the English liked to trace their roots back to Troy, as described by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the History of the Kings of Britain, they naturally preferred histories with a Trojan bias, although it was not often admitted. Unfortunately, De Excido Trojae Historia by Dares had been translated, as Robert Root describes it, "in wretched Latin prose, which lacks not only literary charm,

but also elementary qualities of style".¹⁰ Dictys' work, Ephemeris Belli Trojani, is a journal, translated into Latin from the original Greek. This work, according to Root, is written in excellent Latin and is twice as long as the Historia.

In the later 12th century, Benoit de St Maure wrote an account of the Trojan War based on these two narratives. His work, entitled the Roman de Troie, is much longer, encompassing 30,316 lines. The first four fifths of the poem follow Dares and the last fifth draws mainly on Dictys. It was Benoit who added the episode of Troilus and Briseida to the story for which there is no precedent in either Dares or Dictys. As Root notes, Troilus appears frequently, son of Priam and brave warrior (xxiv). The character of Briseida (as she is known until Armannio's Florita of 1325¹¹) appears to be a conflation of two characters. Briseida and Chryseida appear in the Iliad I.184 and I.182, respectively. Their names are the accusative form of their patronymics; Briseis, daughter of Brises, and Chryseis, daughter of Chryses. Eriseis is the slave girl over whom Achilles and Agemmemnon argue; Chryseis is the daughter of

¹⁰Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde ed. Robert Root (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1945) xxii.

¹¹Giovanni Boccaccio, Il Filostrato eds. Robert anRoberts and Anna Bruni Seldis (New York: Garland P, 1986) xiii. This edition will be used for all references to Il Filostrato.

the seer, Chryses. The two are referred to in Dictys not by their patronymics but as Hippodamia and Astynome. A portrait of the beautiful Briseida appears in Dares. Benoit decided to use the character of Briseida in one of the episodes he added to the poem, and not recognizing the patronymic, designated her as the daughter of Calchas. He also told the real story of Briseis as he found it in Dictys, but as she is referred to as Hippodamia in that version, he did not realize the two were actually the same character.

Benoit's account is the story of the entire war, and the Troilus and Briseida plot is scattered throughout the narrative. The episode begins with the proposed restoration of Briseida to Calchas and ends with the death of Troilus, slain by Achilles. The entire episode, including 500 lines dealing with the end of Troilus, is under 2000 lines long. A Latin paraphrase of Benoit's poem was written by Guido delle Colonne in 1287. The Historia Trojana follows Benoit very closely, although some of the long speeches are condensed and some moral comment is added. Root notes that Guido does not make any reference to Benoit but rather names his authorities as Dares and Dictys. As Kittredge observes, Guido's name was "well-known and current" (49); apparently Guido's version circulated more widely than that of Benoit (apRoberts xv). Versions of both Benoit and Guido appeared

in Italian and French.¹²

In his Il Filostrato, Boccaccio focusses on one episode in Benoit's Roman de Troie--that of Troilus and Briseida. Renaming his main characters Troilo and Criseida, Boccaccio expanded the episode to include the hero's falling in love, the wooing and the final winning of his lady. He also created the character of Pandaro, Criseida's cousin, to act as a go-between. In Benoit's poem the main focus is Briseida's relationship with Diomedes and the rivalry that subsequently develops between Troilus and Diomedes. Indeed,

the greater number of the passages of the Roman de Troie which can truly have value as sources for the Filostrato have to do only with the relation between Criseida and Diomedes and with other things which are always superficial in character (Pernicone as cited in apRoberts xv).

Boccaccio's version is a departure from the historical accounts from which he drew the story. The Trojan War merely provides the setting for his tale of the two lovers. Boccaccio's narrator, the man struck down by love, is far more personally involved with his material; his narration is not detached and objective. Il Filostrato opens with a salute to his lady, Filomena. He sends her the story of Troilo, explaining:

as many times as you find Troilo weeping and
grieving for the departure of Criseida, that many

¹² For the principal exploration of the origins of the story, see Karl Young's The Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde. Rpt. New York: Gordian P, 1968.

times you may clearly recognize and know my own cries, tears, sighs, and distresses; and as many times as you find the beauty, the good manners, or any other thing praiseworthy in a lady written of Criseida, that often you can understand them to be spoken of you (Il Filostrato, Proem, 15)

The narrator goes on to explain that this is the extent of the comparison. His sympathy with his hero is apparent, and Troilo is the main focus of the poem. By recounting the suffering of the Trojan prince, the narrator hopes to move his lady to sympathy and encourage her to return to him. The incongruity of sending such a poem, in which the heroine's infidelity is given "the most trite of anti-feminist motives" (apRoberts xlvii), to a woman whom one wants to win back, and the fact that the moral of the story--"choose your woman well" (VIII.28-33)--does not coincide with his aim in writing the poem may perhaps be resolved in considering the role of the narrator. This may have made the text more attractive to a writer such as Chaucer who was interested in the device of the narrator. Chaucer's use of Il Filostrato is indisputable. There is a definite "lexical influence"¹³; he often follows Boccaccio's version verbatim. The changes and additions Chaucer made to Boccaccio's Il Filostrato are considerable--Troilus and Criseyde is nearly twice the length of Boccaccio's poem and there is a major shift of emphasis from Troilus to Criseyde.

¹³ Barry Windeatt, "Chaucer and the 'Filostrato'," Chaucer and the Italian Trecento ed. Piero Boitani (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983): 163.

And yet, as Barry Windeatt observes,

however transformed in its overall structure and overlaid in its detailed texture, the Italian original nonetheless remains within the Troilus at its core (163).

The Trojan legend was well known in the Middle Ages. Chaucer certainly would have been acquainted with the story in one form or another. His reference to Guido in the House of Fame makes it clear that he knew of this version, and it seems probable that he was familiar with the Benoît either in the original Italian or through one of the French prose redactions. Chaucer may have understood Guido as a source for Benoît due to the fact that Guido's version circulated more widely and it is Guido to whom he refers as one of the six worthies who "bere up Troye."¹⁴ Root claims that Chaucer had "before his eyes the version of the story found in Benoît and Guido" (xxxi). Chaucer probably knew Homer by name only, and there is no evidence that Chaucer used Dares and Dictys, except perhaps indirectly (Barney 1021). It has been argued that the portraits in Book V come from Dares, but as Root explains, Joseph of Exeter's Latin translation of Dares is the actual source of the portraits (Root xxxvi). Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy provides the philosophical basis for the poem, and there are also many borrowings from other authors, both contemporary (Petrarch,

¹⁴This is purely my own conjecture, and at this point I have no evidence to prove it.

Dante, Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris) and classical (Statius, Ovid).

Another potential source for Troilus and Criseyde, the validity of which has been widely debated, is Le Roman de Troye by Beauvau, the Seneschal d'Anjou. This work is a translation of Boccaccio's Il Filostrato although Beauvau credits Petrarch with its composition. The translation was initially believed to date from the fifteenth century. Both Pratt and Michael Hanly argue that the French version could have been written in the fourteenth century, and antedate Chaucer's composition.¹⁵ They also present evidence that Beauvau's translation not only antedates Chaucer's version, but also that Chaucer used it as a source for his Troilus and Criseyde. Pratt offers 309 parallels between the two texts and asserts that Beauvau's version was as equally important a source as Il Filostrato and that it may have been Chaucer's main source. He maintains that Chaucer's use of two sources is not surprising, and cites his translation of Boethius with the aid of Jean de Meun's Li Livres de Confort de Philosophie and his rendition of Petrarch's Griselda using the anonymous French translation (Pratt 509). A more recent study by Hanly, although putting forward some

¹⁵Michael Hanly, Boccaccio, Beauvau, Chaucer--Troilus and Criseyde: Four Perspectives on Influence (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1990). Robert Pratt, "Chaucer and Le Roman de Troyle et De Criseida" Studies in Philology 53 (1956): 509-39.

of the same theories as Pratt, is less adamant in its claim, conceding that despite the evidence, it is still not certain that Chaucer used the French version. The two major indications that Chaucer may have used Beauvau are his apparent preference for the French wording and its "variant thematic colouring" (Hanly 84).

The differences between the French and the Italian works stem largely from Beauvau's efforts to render his version more seriously courtly. Hanly feels that Chaucer may have been influenced by Beauvau's changes to the Italian. He proposes that "Beauvau can be seen as a middle ground...he intends to put back in its privileged place the code of love that Boccaccio merely exploits for its images and themes" (146). Some critics, including Windeatt and David Wallace, have dismissed the idea that Beauvau might be a source. Stephen Barney skirts the issue by stating that even if Chaucer did use the French version, "his use does not substantially alter our sense of how he reshaped Boccaccio's poem" (1021). Hanly's postulations seem to prove that it might. Although he admits that the connection cannot be proven conclusively, until it can be disproven, it should not be completely discounted.

PART II: Narrative Strategy

The work you recite is mine, O translator,
 But when you recite it badly it begins to be yours.
 Martial, Epigram to Fidentius¹⁶

In Troilus and Criseyde there is an unmistakable emphasis on source.¹⁷ As in the Clerk's Tale, a source for the poem is explicitly named. The narrator's attitude towards his authority changes throughout the course of the poem. At its inception, he professes to be a faithful translator, and at its close he is openly calling its authority into question. There is, then, a progression from scribe to auctour. Chaucer is exploring the concepts of authority in terms of an author's responsibility for his work, even if that work is a derived text. Using the device of the narrator,

¹⁶As cited in Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. and intro. D.W. Robertson (New York: Liberal Arts P, 1958) v.

¹⁷There are close to fifty references to source in the poem. See Appendix A.

Chaucer demonstrates how objectivity is an impossibility for creators of fiction. The narrator tries to maintain his posture as an impartial recorder, but he cannot. His emotional involvement with his material leads him to question the objectivity of his sources and makes him recognize his own bias. His attitude towards his source begins with reverence and ends with grudging respect. He finally takes responsibility for his own work, but still remains within the parameters of his source. Although he cannot alter the facts of the story, he can, as did the clerk, establish meaning within a derived text.

There has been considerable debate about whether the narrator can be considered distinct from Chaucer the author. David Lawton asserts that "there is no appreciable distance here between narrator and poet as long as we accept that the poet is caught mid-performance."¹⁸ Other critics such as Derek Pearsall have made the same claim--that Chaucer's narrator is merely a performance persona.¹⁹ E.T. Donaldson is the major proponent for the distinct narrator and several critics follow his line of reasoning.²⁰ The arguments for a distinct narrator are convincing. There are none of the

¹⁸David Lawton, Chaucer's Narrators (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985) 87.

¹⁹Derek Pearsall, The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 173.

²⁰E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (London: Athlone P, 1970).

named references to Chaucer that are in the dream visions; Chaucer the author seems to be doing things of which the narrator is unaware--it is Chaucer, not the narrator, who conceals his source. Chaucer the author also makes pointed references to his actual source such as the comment about the number of children Criseyde had (I.132-3), which despite the narrator's protestations, is specifically mentioned in **Chaucer's** source. The narrator and Chaucer have different sources--this would seem to indicate that they are distinct. In Boccaccio's Il Filostrato the narrator has a small role aside from the Proem and the Epilogue. Chaucer fleshes out the role of his narrator, making him far more active in the telling of the story. The narrator in Troilus and Criseyde appears to be the forerunner of the narrator who will appear in the Canterbury Tales--the naive narrator, the self-conscious teller of tales. Chaucer's almost constant use of first person narration makes his interest in the device of the narrator evident.

As discussed previously, Chaucer did adapt the story of Troilus and Criseyde from Boccaccio. But Boccaccio is never mentioned in the poem. And not only does Chaucer not ascribe the poem to its true source, he attributes it to an author whose works are not available. By choosing to identify Lollius as the source of the story, Chaucer gives his poem the weight of ancient authority--to those who do not recognize Boccaccio's Il Filostrato. He also ensures in

this manner that his putative original cannot be verified, leaving him free within the parameters of the story. He cannot, for example, change the main narrative events of the story or the events of the Trojan War. The narrator does make an effort to differentiate between his story and the story of Troy. As Kittredge notes, there are two occasions where each is clearly distinguished, one from the other--first, at the opening of the poem, his reference to "Omer, Dares and Dite" (I.146) and again at the end, his admonishment to "Rede Dares" (V. 1771) to those interested in the martial aspect of the story. Lastly, the attribution to an ancient source instead of the contemporary author makes the narrator's struggle with authority that much more difficult--the reverence due the classical writers was greater than that due contemporary authors.

Chaucer was not the only author to suppress the name of his actual source. In his work, Guido delle Colonne makes no reference to his immediate source, Benoit, but instead cites Dares and Dictys as his authorities. Root concedes that Guido may have had access to Dares' Latin text, but claims that it is unlikely that Guido read Dictys', and even if he had, his debt to Benoit is indisputable (Root xxv-xxvi). Boccaccio reported his sources to be ancient stories, "antiche storie" (Il Filostrato, Proem, 13) and never names Benoit or Guido. Root has suggested that upon reading Boccaccio's Il Filostrato and recognizing only part

of the story as coming from contemporary sources, Chaucer may have taken Boccaccio's reference to ancient stories as true rather than invented, and believed Boccaccio's source to be Lollius (xxxix). This seems less probable than Kittredge's explanation that Chaucer got the idea of suppressing the name of his source from Boccaccio himself (Kittredge 66). He cites Chaucer's use of Boccaccio's Teseide in the opening of his Anelida and Arcite: "This **olde storie**, in Latin which I find" (10, emphasis mine). Chaucer merely expanded the pretense to include the supposed discovery of a lost document, and gave his poem the additional authority of a named source. For those who recognize Boccaccio as the actual source of the poem, there is another way in which the device of the invented source works. The recognition of the pretense means that false authority becomes a convention--the invocation of the poet--and a subject of the poem--poetic authority.

The narrator describes himself as a mere translator in the poem's opening books. Through frequent references to reading and invocations of "myn auctour," he tries to establish his fidelity to his source. In the prohemium to Book II, he declares that he is not responsible for the poem's "matere," he is simply reporting the facts:

Forwhi to every lovere I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.

Wherefore I nyl have neither thank ne blame

Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely,
 Disblameth me if any word be lame,
 For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.
 (II. 12-18)

The narrator distances himself by deferring to the intention of his Latin authority. This is the same strategy employed in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women. In this poem, the goddess of love claims that the Romance of the Rose and Troilus and Criseyde constitute major transgressions against love.²¹ Chaucer's defence against the charges is that the poems are translations (see 341, 350): "what so myn auctour mente/ Algate, God wot, it was myn entente" (460-1). He is translating not only the words but also the intention of his source. It is the audience's responsibility to "herkneth with a good entencioun" (Troilus and Crisyde I.52).

The narrator professes to be translating verbatim, and refuses to take responsibility for one word of the text. And yet, at the beginning of all five books, he manages to involve himself in the action one way or another (Wimsatt 143). His claims that he knows nothing of love do not preclude his desire to be a lover, and this implicit desire anticipates the emotional involvement which he will develop with his heroine. He also tells his audience that he has Christian aspirations in telling the tale: "For so hope I

²¹ "Hast thow nat mad in Englysh ek the bok
 How that Crisseyde Troylus forsook?" (264-5)
 These lines are from the G Text of the poem as it is found in the Riverside Edition.

my sowle best avaunce" (I. 47). He does not yet understand that he cannot simultaneously maintain his pose as the historically accurate translator and fulfill the role of the poet with his own goal in telling the tale. At this point he believes that he can faithfully report the story as he finds it in his pagan source and project Christian meaning onto it without changing his role of scribe. He wants to achieve his own narrative purpose without accepting his responsibility as an auctour.

The narrator tries to emphasize his integrity as a translator. One example is the well known reference to the number of children Criseyde had (I.133). The narrator alleges the information is not in his sources. This is untrue--it is stated explicitly in I.15 of Il Filostrato that Criseyde had no children, and in Benoit she is referred to as a virgin "la pucele" (Barney 1026). By insisting on historical accuracy, the narrator attempts to underline his fidelity to his source:

But wheither that she children hadde or noon,
I rede it naught, therefore I late it goon.
(I. 132-3)

Paradoxically, this insistence on a minor detail prompts the audience to suspect his narrative actions. It calls attention to an unimportant question that would otherwise not be raised. His insistence makes it obvious that the information is in the original and that the narrator is trying to cover up his emendation to the authority. The

narrator wants to maintain the posture of the faithful scribe; he will not yet accept the role of the auctour.

And yet, at the same time, the narrator is emphasizing his control over the poem. He does not allow the poem to proceed without constant narrative intrusion. The two stances are at odds with each other. On the one hand he is merely translating the poem, on the other he is continually interrupting it with narrative comment:

But for to tellen forth in special
Of this kynges sone of which I tolde,
And leten other thing collateral,
Of hym thenke I my tale forth to holde,
Both of his joie and of his cares colde;
And al his werk, as touching this matere,
For it I gan, I wol therto refere.

(I.260-66, emphasis mine)

Entire stanzas discussing the poem's subject which has already been described in the introduction, the repetition of the narrative "I," the reference to the tale as his--all these things draw attention to the narrative process. By the second book, the narrator is beginning to admit the alterations to his source, but he feels that he must explain them to the audience: "Reherce it nedeth nought, for ye ben wise" (II.917); "As ye han herd byfore" (II.966); "To telle al how, it axeth muchel space" (II.1071). Often he claims he cannot delay the story with details (II. 1264) or that he does not want to make of things "a long sermoun" (II.1299, see also II.1564-68, 1595, 1622; III.470) and yet he is allegedly following his auctour word for word.

The narrator's emendations are indication that he is taking control of the narrative. However, he is anxious about assuming this role and shares his anxiety with the audience. The audience is an important part of the poem from its beginning. He invokes his audience as he invokes his muse, asking them to pray for Troilus (I.22-35). The narrator often directly addresses his audience: "Thow redere" (V.270); "Take every womman hede" (III.1224); "This, trowe I, knoweth al this compaignye" (I.450); "Now lat us stynte of Troilus a stounde" (I.1086). The last example is particularly prevalent (I.935; II.1709; III.218). The narrator not only draws his audience into the action, but also comments directly on how he will proceed, emphasizing his role as auctour.

The narrator's fidelity to his source is undermined early in the poem. Immediately preceding the account of the Canticus Troili, the narrator names his source for the first time:

And of his song naught only the sentence,
 As writ myn auctour called Lollius,
 But pleinely, save oure tonges difference,
 I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus
 Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus
 As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,
 Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here.
 (I.393-99)

The arrangement of the lines in the stanza is ambiguous. If the second line of the stanza came last, it would be perfectly clear that the narrator found not only the

"sentence" but also every word in Lollius' text. As it is, the stanza could be understood as meaning that the "sentence" is derived from Lollius but the actual words are from another source. The "tonges difference" does not necessarily refer to the difference between the narrator and Lollius; it could also indicate the difference between the narrator and Troilus. By creating ambiguity, there are clear implications that the narrator's allegations are false.

As the poem progresses, it becomes evident that the narrator is no longer merely translating. He is moving away from the authority of his source and beginning to take responsibility for his creation:

But sooth is, though I kan ant tellen al,
 As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,
 Yet have I seyde, and God tofore, and shal
 In every thyng, al holly his sentence;
 And if that ich, at Loves reverence,
 Have any word in echid for the beste,
 Doth therewithal right as youreselven leste.
 (III.1324-30)

The narrator is now submitting his work to the correction of his readers (III.1331-35), abandoning his previous disclaimers: "Disblameth me if any word be lame."

By Book III, the narrator is becoming emotionally involved with the poem. He now claims to be the clerk of Venus (III.41). He has lost sight of his original desire to be without "sentement" (II.13), and no longer wants to be the objective reporter:

Ye in my naked herte sentement
 Inhielde, and do me shewe of thy swetnesse.
 (III.43-4)

As the narrator becomes more involved with his story, he takes on more responsibility for his text. In the prohemium to Book II, he invokes Cleo, muse of history, in keeping with the posture of the objective historian, but in the prohemium to Book III, he calls on Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, as he perceives a shift in his role from scribe to auctour. One of the main indications of this shift is his defence of his heroine, Criseyde.²² As early as Book II, he is explicitly defending her from criticism. In Book I, his ambiguous gloss about children has been interpreted as an attempt to improve her acceptability as a woman because in Boccaccio's version(I.15), she is not only childless, she is sterile (Meech 377). But here, it is indisputable--the narrator is protecting his character:

Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
 "This was a sodeyn love; how myght it be
 That she so lightly loved Troilus
 Right for the first syghte, ye, pardee?"
 Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe!
 (II.666-70)

And he goes on to explain that she merely liked him at first, and then grew to love him--which, of course, is not the case. Robert Burlin observes that the narrator is "trying to make her actions conform to a standard of

²²Critics such as Donaldson argue that the narrator actually falls in love with his character, Criseyde. See n20.

morality that is clearly not in the poem" (116).

As he recounts the lovers' consummation, the narrator is so caught up in the fiction that he wishes he had enjoyed such a night and moans "Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought?" (III.1319). The sexual love aspects of the story are dominating. He has forgotten his initial Christian purpose in recounting the story: to "avaunce my sowle". But as the love affair cools, the narrator is able to disengage himself emotionally and regain control of the text. The inevitable failure of the romance reminds him of his original Christian aim. His intense involvement in Book III reveals to him his own bias and suggests that other authors must also be subjective. This leads to the possibility that his source is not the only authority. Although this is not explicit in the text, the narrator does start to introduce notions of doubt about the authority of sources: "but if that bokes erre" (III.1774). There are implications that he is beginning to consult other sources: "As writen clerkes in hire bokes olde"(III.1199). By Book V, the narrator is definitely delving into other sources: "I fynde ek in stories elleswhere" (V.1044). The reintroduction of the characters with the portraits in Book V also indicates that the narrator has started again with another source--the sketches are clearly introductory material. The narrator is referring to these new sources not only because the authority of his original source has

been diminished, but also to find alternative information so that he may continue to protect his heroine:

And treweliche, as writen wel I fynde
 That al this thyng was seyde 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 wente,
 And was in purpos evere to be trewe:
 Thus writen **they** that of hire werkes knewe.
 (IV.1415-21, emphasis mine)

His insistence that the proof of her good intent is in his sources reveals his bias; he wants to claim as a fact something that cannot be known.

In the prohemium to Book IV, he raises the possibility that his sources might be lying. His pen "quaketh for drede of that I moste endite," but he must remain within the parameters of his sources. At the very least he can temper the inevitable condemnation of Criseyde:

For how Criseyde Troilus forsook-
 Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde-
 Moot hennesforth be matere of my book,
 As writen folk thorough which it is in mynde.
 Allas, that they sholde evere cause fynde
 To speke hire harm! And if they on hire lye,
 Iwis, hemself sholde han the vilanye.
 (IV.15-21)

He is still defending Criseyde, as he does until the end of the narrative. As Book V progresses, the narrator tries to reject the authority of his sources altogether. He refuses to admit what is in his sources but by repeating what they do say, he is implicitly concurring: "Men seyn--I not--that she yaf hym hire herte" (V.1050). The narrator will not condemn Criseyde himself, explaining that her guilt is in

other books (V.1776), but this in itself is an implicit recognition of her culpability. He attempts to palliate the situation by suggesting that it is not known how long it took Criseyde to betray Troilus--"ther is non auctour telleth it"(V.1088)--but the placement of this assertion in the narrative makes it appear as if she conceded to Diomedes before the ten days had even passed. These implicit admissions make it clear that although the narrator is trying to defend his heroine, he does recognize the authority of his sources to the point that he does not alter the ending of the story.

The narrator has now conceded his bias and also taken responsibility for the fiction. No longer bound to his source, the narrator can finally claim his place as auctour, and gives the poem the Christian moral he initially intended. Now that the poem is completely his responsibility, he is concerned that it may be misunderstood:

And for ther is so gret diversite
 In Englissh and in writyng of our 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 also apologizes to the women in the audience--as auctour, responsible for his work, he can no longer transfer the blame to his source. But more importantly, he now explicitly refers to the work as his: "Go, litel bok,

go, litel myn tragedye" (V.1786). The ending of the poem is complex, but this does not necessarily indicate that the narrator is no longer speaking. He may be merely trying to achieve too much in these final stanzas.

William Provost claims that the Epilogue can be broken down into four units, each containing a similar message: that the poem be taken seriously.²³ I agree that the ending can be divided into distinct parts, but the narrator is doing different things. He is taking responsibility as an auctour, asking that he not be misunderstood and submitting the poem to the correction of others. With Troilus' ascent, he is establishing a Christian context for the poem and in the contemptus mundi passages rejects its pagan aspects. The closing prayer with its invocation of Mary is the narrator's final assertion of his control over the poem--the Christian moral he intended to advance from the poem's inception.

In Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator's role shifts. Initially, he tries to assume the role of a scribe and denies any responsibility for the text, although he does profess a narrative purpose. His emotional involvement with the poem reveals to him his own bias, and, implicitly, those of other authors. Although he does not reject his source, he does question it and ultimately establishes himself as

²³William Provost, The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974).

auctour within the context of the poem. By putting the poem in a Christian perspective, the narrator advances his own morals and asserts his own narrative authority. This assertion of authority marks a progression in Chaucer's use of the device of the narrator. In the dream visions, Chaucer the narrator is the immediate authority within the text as he is its originator--it is his dream. In Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer illustrates how a narrator who tries to assume the role of mere scribe comes to accept his responsibility for the text he has created. In the Clerk's Tale, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, the narrator must struggle to free himself from the constraints of external authority, and by using a framed structure himself, can assert his authority by establishing potential new meaning for the text.

CHAPTER 2

"And herkneth what this auctour seith therfoore"

(The Clerk's Tale, 1141)

PART I: Sources and Origins

The story of Griselda was popular in the Middle Ages, drawing the attention of Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer. It is believed that the Griseldis originated as a folk tale. Burke Severs, in his thorough study of the sources and analogues of Chaucer's version, notes that as early as 1871, R. Kohler suggested the story had its roots in folk tradition.²⁴ G.L. Kittredge was the first critic to determine that the story was a rationalized version of the Cupid and Psyche myth in combination with another folk tale.²⁵ Other critics such as D.D. Griffith agree that the

²⁴J. Burke Severs, The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale (New Haven: Yale UP, 1942) 4.

²⁵ According to Thomas Bulfinch, the Cupid and Psyche legend first appears in the works of Apuleius in the first century A.D.. Psyche is a mortal princess so beautiful that she outshines Venus. The outraged goddess seeks revenge by sending Cupid to make her fall in love with an unworthy man. But Cupid accidentally wounds himself with love's arrow and falls in love with Psyche himself. She is taken to a magic castle and visited by her new husband only in the darkness of

story is the result of the conflation of the Cupid and Psyche type with another tale.²⁶ Griffith explains that there are several constant events in the cycle: a superior or other world being marries an inferior or merely mortal individual; the two are separated for some reason; often after an other world journey, or the performance of impossible tasks, or both, there is a reunion. Recurrent in this type is the episodic nature of the narration and the patience, love and strong devotion of the mortal. A subgroup of this cycle is designated by Griffith as the "Tabu Group," involving the added characteristic of a condition or "tabu" placed upon the inferior party (this party is usually a woman). Often the mortal will not be aware of the tabu. Asking the lover's name, looking at him, or weeping are all frequent tabus. Elements of this genre can also include the lowly status of the inferior, the conferral of sudden powers, and the consent of the inferior's parents to the

night. He tells her she must never look at him, and although she is unaware of his identity, at first she obeys him. Finally, prodded by her jealous sisters, she attempts to look at him one night while he is sleeping, but she awakens him and he flies away. Psyche sets out to find him, and finds she must first appease Venus by performing various impossible tasks, including a voyage to Hades. Although she ultimately is foiled by the goddess, Cupid saves her and pleads his case to Jupiter, who placates his daughter Venus. Psyche is made immortal and the pair are happily reunited for eternity. This description of the legend is derived from Bulfinch's Mythology abr. Edmund Fuller (New York: Dell, 1959) 71-9.

²⁶D.D. Griffith, The Origin of the Griselda Story (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1931): 7-120.

union. Griffith also points out the role water plays in the myth--it represents transformation, and is symbolic of the entrance to the other world. In the Griseldis, the tale has been rationalized; in other words, the supernatural elements have been removed. The rationalization of this type includes the change of the superior party from god to king and the progression of tabus into tests. Griffith concludes that the Griselda story may well derive from a sub-group of the Tabu Group, in which the children are taken away.

Griffith cites six main episodes in the Griseldis correspondent to the subgroup as specific proof of the story's derivation²⁷:

Griselda Story

1. destitute peasant girl espoused by rich marquis

2. Griselda's promise not to disobey Walter

3. marriage and elevation

4. married life; testing of Griselda--seizure of the children

5. banishment--return to destitute status

6. reunion due to Griselda's fidelity

Tabu Sub Group

1. lowly mortal espoused by other world being

2. establishment of the tabu

3. marriage and elevation

4. married life; testing of the wife--seizure of the children

5. violation of the tabu--return to former status (journey begins)

6. reunion due to wife's fidelity

²⁷This chart is derived from information in Griffith's The Origin of the Griselda Story.

Traces of the story's folk tale origin also include the meeting of Griselda and Walter near a well, representative of the entrance to the other world; Griselda's amazing ability to hold back her tears until the testing is over; Griselda's sudden ability to rule; Janicula's approval of the wedding.

W.A. Cate disagrees that the tale is the conflation of two different types, claiming that his "Patience Group" of the Cupid and Psyche type (consisting of 37 variants in 11 languages) contains all the elements of the Griselda story.²⁸ As Severs notes, this group is a "highly specialized western development of the genre" (Severs 5). According to Cate, in the narrative sequence of this particular variant

the other world lover places upon his mortal wife requirements that, no matter what happens, she be obedient and neither show emotion (particularly that she not weep) nor protest; and in which children are mysteriously taken away from her, ostensibly to their death--actually to be reared by friends or relatives of the husband; and in which, during the celebration of the wedding of her husband to a new bride, the true wife--who has helped make preparations for the wedding--is recognized, restored to her rightful place, and the children returned (Cate 399).

The debate about whether the story is derived from one or two folktales notwithstanding, it is clear from the work of

²⁸Wirt Armistead Cate, "The Problem of the Origin of the Griselda Story" Studies in Philology 29 (1932): 389-405.

these scholars that the story is indeed derived from folk tale tradition. The events of the Griseldis correspond very closely to the tales which both Severs and Cate describe as typical of the Cupid and Psyche type. The difficult nature of this story has sparked off much critical debate. The behaviour of the characters has been interpreted in different ways--reactions range from incomprehension to revulsion. The often inexplicable events in the tale can be largely explained through this analysis of the story's folk tale origin.

The first known written version of the Griseldis appeared in 1353 in Boccaccio's Decameron. The story occupies a prominent position as the tenth tale told on the tenth day. Boccaccio's version was translated into Latin as De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia (A Fable of Wifely Obedience and Faithfulness) by Petrarch in 1373. There were actually two versions of his translation included in the Epistolae Seniles, 17.3 and 17.4. Giovanni Sercambi's abridged version of the story appeared at about the same time. His was in Italian prose and followed Boccaccio closely. The story was also transformed into Latin verse, based on the Latin of Petrarch, by Petrus de Hailles, near the end of the century.

There were also a number of translations into French before the end of the century. These use Petrarch as their source instead of Boccaccio. There are two known prose

translations into French, one by an anonymous author, the other by Philippe de Mezieres (1384-9), a version of which was included in a collection of stories, Le Menagier de Paris (ca. 1393). The date of the anonymous version is unknown, but according to Severs, it appeared before Chaucer wrote the Clerk's Tale (Severs 1). A dramatic version of the story, L'Estoire de la Marquise de Saluce Miz par Personnages et Rigme, written in 1395, was based on de Mezieres' account. Out of all these texts, Severs has determined that Chaucer had two texts before him as he created his Griseldis. One of those texts was clearly Petrarch's Latin Griseldis. The second was the anonymous French version. It has been suggested that Chaucer may have also used Boccaccio's original. This idea has been dismissed by many critics, including Severs, despite some definite similarities, especially in tone.²⁹ Be that as it may, it is still valuable to consider Boccaccio's version in order to understand the changes that Petrarch made to his source material.

Boccaccio's version of the Griselda story is a highly rationalized account of the Cupid and Psyche myth described earlier. Boccaccio gave the story a specific and real

²⁹One of the critics who advances this hypothesis is addressed by Severs in his book--W.E. Farnham. But even Farnham concedes that the similarities may be coincidental. Severs concludes the parallels are "pretty weak" (128) and that the notion is "untenable" (134).

locale, Saluzzo, and assigned his characters the names Walter and Griselda. It is difficult to determine in what form the story of Griselda reached Boccaccio. Griffith argues that he most likely eliminated many of the folk tale elements in order to present the fiction in a human context. Cate believes that the story must have been substantially rationalized before Boccaccio included it in his Decameron. He cites Boccaccio's impatience with Gualteri as proof that he could not have understood the true origins of the marquis' seemingly random behavior. The tenth story on the tenth day opens with a disclaimer from its narrator, Dioneo:

I want to tell you of a marquis, whose actions, even though things turned out well for him in the end, were remarkable not so much for their munificence as for their senseless brutality. Nor do I advise anyone to follow his example, for it was a great pity that the fellow should have drawn any profit from his conduct.³⁰

Cate draws no distinction between Boccaccio, the author, and Dioneo, the fictional narrator, who has been characterized throughout the novel as disreputable. Is it possible that Dioneo's frustration with the characters' actions does not necessarily indicate that Boccaccio misunderstood the tale's origins? Dioneo's conclusion about Griselda at the end of the tale may be more indicative of his own hedonistic character than anything else:

³⁰Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron trans. G.H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 813. All further references will be to this edition.

Who else but Griselda could have endured so cheerfully the cruel and unheard of trials that Gualteri imposed upon her without shedding a tear? For perhaps it would have served him right if he had chanced upon a wife, who, being driven from the house in her shift, had found some other man to shake her skin-coat for her, earning herself a fine new dress in the process (824).

Boccaccio may have learned of the tale in its unrationalized form and adjusted the reactions of his narrator to suit his character. What is clear is that the version from which Petrarch worked does not explain the actions of Walter and Griselda in terms of the folk tale rationale. Rather the story as Petrarch found it contained seemingly unjustified behaviour on the part of both characters.³¹ As Robin Kirkpatrick observes, the "prevailing sense in Boccaccio's version is that he has largely avoided moral conclusions...the final effect of [his] story is one of ambiguity".³²

Petrarch's version of the Griseldis is much more than a literal translation. Severs claims that Petrarch "alters

³¹The suggestion that Petrarch was aware of the tale's origins has been dismissed by Severs, who claims that Petrarch would not have credited Boccaccio solely if he thought he had merely adapted an already existing story (Severs 18-19). Petrarch added the detail of the meeting by the well, which would seem to indicate his knowledge of the folk tale because of the traditional significance of water as an entrance to the other world. However, Warren Ginsberg notes that this is a religious allusion, reminiscent of Rebecca and Rachel at the well (Gen 24:13-67 and 29:1-2).

³²Robin Kirkpatrick, "The Griselda Story in Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer" Chaucer and the Italian Trecento ed. Piero Boitani (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983): 233.

the whole tone of his [Boccaccio's] original" (Severs 12).

He converts the story into an exemplum editing out

Boccaccio's salacious references to 'shaking one's skin-

coat' and making Griselda into a model of the constant soul.

The moral he draws is overtly religious:

I thought to repeat this story now in a different style not so much that women today should imitate the patience of this wife, which seems to me hardly imitable, but that I may at least move my readers to imitate the constancy of Griselda; that since she was so faithful to her husband, we may venture to be so steadfast to our Lord, who, as James the Apostle says, may not be tempted with evil and would tempt no man. Yet he allows us to be vexed with many and sobering scourges, not that He may know our spirit, which He knew before we were begotten, but that our frailties might be made known to us through known and familiar signs. I would definitely include on a list of constant men whomsoever he was who suffered without murmur for his God what this rustic wife suffered for her mortal husband (As cited in Ginsberg 308).

In Petrarch's story the arbitrary actions of Walter are explained as the tests of a benevolent Christian God, and Griselda's response, lamented by Dioneo, is interpreted as the steadfast obedience of a Christian soul. There is a definite shift of focus from Valterius to Griseldis.

Boccaccio's heroine maintains close to total silence throughout the story, but in Petrarch, Griseldis is allowed some verbal response (Kirkpatrick 233). Despite this change of emphasis, Griseldis is not named in the story's title--De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia--she is only referred to as a wife. In Petrarch's allegory Griselda is a type, not an individual.

In the two different versions, the marquis responds differently to the people's request that he marry. The responses are indicative of the authors' distinct interpretations. Where Dioneo's Gualteri is cruel and cynical, Petrarch's Valterius appeals to God's mercy. Boccaccio's Gualteri is contemptuous of family and makes implicit allusions to adultery:

It is foolish of you to believe that you can judge the character of daughters from the ways of their fathers and mothers, hence claiming to provide me with a wife who will please me. For I cannot see how you are to know the fathers, or to discover the secrets of the mothers... (814)

Petrarch strikes this speech and in his version Valterius answers piously to the people's demands:

Whatever good there is in man proceeds from God alone. I entrust my station and the fate of my marriage to Him, hoping for his accustomed mercy (As cited in Ginsberg 310).

Boccaccio's Gualteri is much more cruel than Petrarch's Valterius (Severs 13). Ginsberg observes that Walter is clearly an agent in Petrarch's version (310). Petrarch edits out all the people's petitions to the marquis on behalf of Griselda because they are in vain, making the marquis seem more heartless. The criticism of Valterius is much diminished, and Dioneo's outright condemnation of Gualteri is omitted. Petrarch's reference to James in his epilogue makes it clear that the trials of Griselda are those of the Christian soul. Her sufferings can be compared to those of Job--God allows his followers to be tested.

Indeed, "Happy is the man whom God corrects: therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17). When Gualteri's arbitrary cruelty is interpreted allegorically, the story becomes more tenable to those who may not recognize its folk tale origins (including, perhaps, the author himself). Petrarch also greatly expands the short story from the Decameron, making important changes in characterization and narrative sequence.

The anonymous French version of the Griseldis is of an indeterminate date. It follows Petrarch's reworking very closely, and in this way is quite different from the de Mezieres version. The most significant alteration is the omission of Petrarch's prologue. There are enough other small changes, additions and omissions to establish that it was this version that Chaucer used, and not de Mezieres'. Despite the fact that the French version is a close translation of the Latin, Severs has determined in his analysis that Chaucer could not have used merely one or the other texts with glosses. The echoes of both sources are too frequent. He has also proved that Chaucer used the French version more extensively, even citing a precise ratio for line derivation, French to Latin, 5:3 (Severs 217). Chaucer's use of two sources results in what Severs calls "double translation," which has the effect of producing a richer, fuller translation. He uses the example of Walter's speech when he begins his testing of Griselda. In

considering the Latin, the French and the English, it is clear that the English is not only longer but also more expressive:

Sic alloquitur: "Nosti, O Griseldis,-neque enim presenti fortuna te preteriti tui status oblitam credo" (III.5-7)

Et lui va dire: "Tu sces bien, Griseldis,-et je croy que la dignite ou je t'ay mis ne te fait oublier l'estat ou je te pris" (III.8-10)

And seyde thus, "Grisilde," quod he, "that day
That I yow took out of youre povere array
And putte yow in estaat of heigh noblesse-
Ye have nat that forgeten, as I gesse?

"I seye, Grisilde, this present dignitee
In which that I have put yow, as I trowe,
Maketh yow not foryetful for to be
That I yow took in povre estaat ful lowe..."
(466-73)

The effect of the double source is clearly positive. It also affords a glimpse of how Chaucer created his own text.

Critical debate surrounding the Clerk's Tale has been great. Despite Muscatine's description of the tale as a "connoisseur's poem"³³, many critics have jumped into the fray. Since G.L. Kittredge's classification of the tale as part of the "Marriage Group" in 1912, a reply to the Wife of Bath's "heretical" views on marriage³⁴, the Clerk's Tale

³³Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkeley: U of California P, 1960) 191.

³⁴George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage" Modern Philology 9 (1912): 448.

has been subjected to many different critical interpretations. One major alteration that Chaucer made to his sources was to increase religious references. Kirkpatrick notes that Chaucer "hints more graphically at a direct analogy between Griselda's condition and that of Christ himself" (235). Compare the two introductions to Griselda:

Sed ut pauperum quoque tuguria nonunquam gratia
celestis invisit, unica illi nata contigerat nomine
(1316)
(but as divine grace visits from time to time the
hovels of the poor also, so he happened to have a
daughter by name Griselda)

But hye God somtyme senden kan
His grace into a litel oxes stalle.
(206-7)

The explicit biblical reference is to Luke 2.7-16. B.H. Bronson notes the parallels to Abraham, claiming that Chaucer is clearly offering "a paradigm for all of us, of constancy in adversity".³⁵ The early critics read the tale as exemplum. Kittredge (407), Muscatine (193) and James Sledd³⁶ all interpret the tale as pure allegory. Chaucer not only increased the religious references, he also humanized the plight of Griselda. Elizabeth Salter observes that Chaucer's emphasis on the suffering of Griselda evokes

³⁵B.H. Bronson, In Search of Chaucer (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1960) 111.

³⁶James Sledd, "The Clerk's Tale: The Monsters and the Critics" Modern Philology 51 (1954): 81.

the audience's sympathies to such an extent that it becomes "a barrier to total acceptance of the work in its original function".³⁷ The tale is pulled in two directions, between two worlds, the ideal and the real, which are "virtually irreconcilable" (Salter 62). Other critics maintain that the tale is psychologically coherent within the medieval context of the feudal system in which women and inferiors were the "thyngs" of their lords. Some critics describe the tale as philosophical exposition, others discuss its political implications.³⁸ In this analysis, however, I shall be considering how Chaucer's changes to the tale should be understood in terms of narrative strategy.

³⁷Elizabeth Salter, Chaucer: The Knight's Tale and the Clerk's Tale (London: Edward Arnold, 1962) 50.

³⁸ For a discussion of the tale as psychologically realistic fiction, see E. Pearlman, "The Psychological Basis of the Clerk's Tale" ChauR 11 (1977): 248-57. For articles which examine the tale's philosophical arguments, see David C. Steinmetz, "Late Medieval Nominalism and the Clerk's Tale" ChauR 12 (1977): 38-54 and J. Mitchell Morse, "The Philosophy of the Clerk of Oxenford" MLQ 19 (1958): 3-20. David Aers considers the political implications of the tale in Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination (London: Routledge, 1980): 169-73 as does Donald Reiman in "The Real Clerk's Tale: or, Patient Griselda Exposed" Texas Studies in Language and Literature 5 (1963): 356-73.

PART II: Narrative Strategy

As in Troilus and Criseyde, in the opening of the Clerk's Tale there is an unusually explicit disclosure of source. Naming Petrarch as the source of the tale foregrounds the concerns about authority over text which are raised by the clerk. Throughout the tale, the clerk wrestles with the problem of appropriation and the integrity of a text. By ultimately undermining the moral of the Petrarchan source, he makes clear how narrative strategy can challenge meaning within the confines of the text itself. All of the critical debate over the Clerk's Tale is useful, but the tale can also be considered as a comment on authorial relations to literary sources rather than simply as an example of one or another genre of tale. The clerk's struggle to interpret the tale of a literary predecessor and finally establish himself as auctor mirrors Chaucer's own attitudes towards the use and transformation of derived texts.

In the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer further develops his narrative strategy. By using a narrative framework, he can avoid the fixed meaning of an existing tale. The tale is filtered through different tellers: the character telling the tale, Chaucer the narrator, and Chaucer the author.³⁹ The effect this can have on a tale's meaning becomes clear early in the Tales. Chaucer the narrator, as distinct from the narrators of the individual tales, claims to be accurately recording the events of the pilgrimage. However, his penchant for misreading character becomes evident even before the General Prologue is over. The portraits are the first introduction to the pilgrims, but already the audience must begin to suspect the narrator's perceptions. The device of the naive narrator is used by Chaucer not only as a humorous comment on people's capacity to misconstrue reality but also to engage the audience in a conscious evaluation of the the narrator's judgements. Although the strategy used by Chaucer in the case of the narrator and in the case of the clerk are very different, both reveal how Chaucer's development of such narrative devices can be used not only to influence the tale being told, but also to

³⁹ Robin Kirkpatrick notes the effects of the framework on Boccaccio's version, and the results of the accompanying letters on Petrarch's rendition. She observes that in Boccaccio's Decameron, the teller is "the scurrilous and mercurial Dioneo. This in itself is enough to subvert any moral authority that the story--as the last tale in the Decameron and as an exemplum, supposedly of magnanimity--might be supposed to possess" (245).

involve the audience. In Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator fulfilled both these functions, but in the Canterbury Tales, the strategy of multiple narrators increases the effect of the narrative voice.

Although the portrait of the clerk is not exhaustive, in the 24 lines devoted to his description, there are clear indications of his character. This is a marked difference from Troilus and Criseyde, in which the audience can only guess at the narrator's character through his narrative attitudes. The clerk is the quintessential student, wearing threadbare clothing, "nat right fat" (even his horse is thin), preferring to study rather than to work. He has not yet obtained a benefice, although he "unto logyk hadde longe ygo" (Gen Pro 286). Nor is he willing to take a more secular "office" to support himself. To finance his studies, the clerk obtains money from friends, praying for their souls in return. This portrait is not an obvious indictment of the clerk, but it does point to a character who refuses to live in the material world, preferring a world of books. Despite his infatuation with words, however, he does not appear to talk very much: "Noght o word spak he moore than was neede" (Gen Pro 304). It seems as if the narrator is making clear the clerk's preference for the written word, because having "unto logyk hadde longe ygo," the clerk would presumably despise rhetoric. At the very least, the audience is alerted to this distinction between

the written and the spoken word. The narrator implies that this reticence is due to the clerk's immersion in thought. The host, addressing the clerk, reiterates the narrator's assumption: "This day ne herde I of youre tonge a word./I trowe ye studie aboute som sophyme;" (ClT 4-5).⁴⁰ And yet, heavy emphasis is laid on the speaking abilities of the clerk. In the General Prologue, the narrator carefully details his speech: "ful of hy sentence" and "Sownynge in moral vertu" (Gen Pro 306-07). And yet at the same time his language is "quyk"--"vivid, lively".⁴¹ He is able to speak with "forme and reverence" (Gen Pro 305), and still be vital. It seems that the clerk will easily fulfill the host's qualifications of "sentence and solaas" (Gen Pro 798). The final words of the clerk's portrait are: "Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche" (Gen Pro 308). It is evident that the clerk would gladly learn, especially considering his status of 'permanent student.' The idea of gladly teaching is more evocative, as it suggests a quality that seems to be in line with the tale he tells. The Clerk's Tale, at first glance, is full of "sentence": it

⁴⁰ Harry's assertion here is probably incorrect. Charles Owen suspects that the Clerk has been listening carefully, formulating his tale, and waiting to be chosen to speak (184). All further reference to line number will be to the Clerk's Tale unless otherwise noted.

⁴¹ Larry D. Benson, ed., The Riverside Chaucer, by Geoffrey Chaucer. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 28 n306.

teaches a lesson. In this examination of the tale, however, it will become clear that the clerk is not telling this story merely to impart a moral. He is telling it to establish his own authorial voice within a derived text and to prove his worth as a wordsmith and as an orator, qualities stressed in the introductory portrait.

In addition to the description of the clerk in the General Prologue, the placement of the portrait itself is important to note. His portrait is sandwiched in between that of the worldly Merchant and the Sergeant of the Lawe. It has been suggested that this is to create a contrast.⁴² I would agree that this is the case, but as a contrast of two extremes--on the one hand, being too attached to this world, and on the other being too far removed from it. In the descriptions of the merchant and the clerk there is a linguistic parallel: the rich merchant is "Sownynge alwey th'encrees of his wynnyng" (Gen Pro 275), and the impecunious clerk is always "Sownynge in moral vertu" (Gen Pro 306) (Bronson 64). Despite the emphasis on the clerk as able scholar and speaker, this portrait is to some degree a caricature. It is possible that, of all the pilgrims, the clerk is the closest to Chaucer, the author. Bronson goes so far as to claim that there is no need to distinguish between the clerk and Chaucer in this text (105). The

⁴² Kemp Malone, Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore: John Hopkins P, 1951) 156.

caricature does not preclude such an interpretation; self-parody is not unfamiliar in his work. The apparent similarities between the clerk and Chaucer make the Clerk's Tale a logical site to evaluate the problems of authorship and authority, the most personal of Chaucer's concerns in his work.

The narrator's presentation of the clerk provides the audience with the initial details, but it is not until the Clerk's Prologue that he actually speaks. Harry, the host, baits him by saying he is like a new bride, "coy and stille" (2). This slight, although in jest, is a goad to the clerk. Harry then attempts to establish his authority over the clerk by putting several restraints on him. He instructs the clerk to "Telle us som myrie tale," "telle us som murie thyng" (9; 15); he wants to ensure that the clerk will not preach nor put the pilgrims to sleep. Harry teases the clerk further by insisting that the clerk use neither "termes", "colours", nor "figures" (16), which are technical terms for the rhetorical devices used in the "heigh style" (18) common to scholars. The clerk, now prompted by Harry's needling, replies: "I am under youre yerde" (22), that is, subject to your authority.⁴³ But "yerde" also has a

⁴³ In "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale: The Monsters and the Critics Reconsidered" ChauR 8 (1973): 135, Dolores Warwick Frese argues that the terms the clerk uses in his Prologue ("governance", "obeisance" and "under yerde") are to be found in the Middle English version of The Rule of St. Benet, and therefore that the clerk's response to Harry is characterized

secondary, phallic, meaning.⁴⁴ The clerk's use of the word in this context not only coincides with Harry's simile of the bride, creating a kind of repartee, but also exposes as a sham his exaggerated deference to Harry. The clerk's potential for sexual joking adds a new dimension to his character--he may not be as serious as the narrator and the host have implied. He also uses words in his response to Harry which are key to the story: "governance" and "obeisance" (23;24). This aspect of the clerk as jester reveals his capacity for wordplay and is crucial to a consideration of the "Envoy." The clerk's response to the host's imposition of restraint demonstrates his ability to work within the confines of authority. His clever retort not only raises the question of literary authority but by employing sexual innuendo he also beats the host at his own game.

In beginning his tale, the clerk informs the audience immediately from whom he learned it--the great 14th century humanist, "Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete" (31).

by traditional religious obedience. In "The Clerk's Tale and the Theme of Obedience" *MLQ* 27 (1966): 260-9, John P. McCall identifies the theme of the tale as obedience and claims that the clerk's submission to Harry mirrors that of Griselda's to Walter.

⁴⁴ In the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary Vol 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971), under "yard", a meaning for "yerde" is given as "the virile member, penis". This usage stems also from the Latin "virga", and is documented as first appearing in writing in 1379.

However, as discussed earlier, Chaucer actually used two versions of the Griselda story, Petrarch's and the anonymous French rendition. Why, then, is only one of these sources disclosed by the clerk? Although Chaucer had two sources, it is not certain whether he conceived of the clerk as disclosing one and revealing the other. Perhaps it is Chaucer, the omniscient author, who is concealing the second source and setting the clerk up for some irony. It seems more likely however, given the control over his materials that Chaucer has accorded the clerk⁴⁵, that it is indeed the clerk who is actually concealing the French source. In terms of his narrative strategy, this would work very well. By revealing only one of his sources, the clerk can emphasize more easily the difference between himself and Petrarch. The audience is unaware of any possible differences which actually derive from the "hidden source" and as the tale does rely more heavily on the French version, there are many such instances. This concealment of a source facilitates the clerk's appropriation of the text as his own. This would mark a logical development of the device of the narrator. In Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer the author seems to be present at a certain level in the poem--the ironic revelations of the actual source point to

⁴⁵ Burlin notes that "Chaucer pays the clerk the supreme compliment--unparalleled in the Tales except perhaps in the performance of the Nun's Priest--of complete mastery over the materials of his fiction" (144).

his activity "behind the scenes." In the Clerk's Tale, the clerk is operating independently. Chaucer lends credibility to the clerk's authorship by using two known sources for the tale, and by having him reveal an actual source instead of a false one as does the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde.

Brewer notes that although the clerk is a logician, he tells a literary tale.⁴⁶ Is the clerk trying to establish the literary worthiness of his tale by citing the great Petrarch? Petrarch is a poet, but he is also "a worthy clerk" (27). A certain confusion arises--is the Clerk's Tale the tale of Petrarch the clerk, or of the clerk of Oxenford? The clerk does his best to set this potential confusion straight in the prologue by emphasizing Petrarch's death, and thereby establishing his rights to the story:

He is now deed and nayled in his cheste...
 But deeth, that wol nat suffre us dwellen heer,
 But as it were a twynklyng of an ye,
 Hem bothe [Petrarch and Lynyan] hath slayn...
 (29;36-38)⁴⁷

He then immediately proceeds to pass judgement on Petrarch's tale in speaking of Petrarch's "proheyme"(43), which is especially noteworthy because, as Dinshaw notes, it is "unique in all the fourteenth century versions and

⁴⁶ D.S. Brewer, ed. Chaucer and Chaucerians (London: Nelson, 1966) 164.

⁴⁷ Judith Ferester. Chaucer on Interpretation. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 117.

distinctly characteristic of Petrarch's 'heigh stile'".⁴⁸

The clerk is judging an element which is unique to Petrarch, and the verdict is critical:

I seye that first with heigh stile he enditeth,
Er he the body of his tale writeth,
A proheyme...
The which a long thyng were to devyse.
And trewely, as to my juggement,
Me thynketh it a thyng impertinent,
Save that he wole conveyen his mateere
(41-43; 52-54)

By editing Petrarch, the clerk clarifies his position as interpreter and critic of the tale. And yet in describing Petrarch's "impertinent" prologue, the clerk repeats almost all of its details, not really emending Petrarch, but certainly criticizing him. The clerk is actually more prolix than his source, using nineteen lines to edit fifteen lines of the original (Ginsberg 314). He is employing the rhetorical figure of occupatio--outlining the details and then judging them extraneous. As Ginsberg notes, the clerk's use of the occupatio can be seen as manipulative: the audience, not being acquainted with Petrarch's "mateere," is "cajoled into accepting the clerk's arbitrary judgement as authoritative" (314). Already the clerk is trying to establish himself in a position of authority. But his efforts are tentative. The clerk again refers to the tale as Petrarch's in the last line of the prologue: "But

⁴⁸Carolyn Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Poetics (Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1989) 136.

this his tale" (56, emphasis mine). It is fitting that a tale which considers questions of authority in its subject matter should be the locus for an exploration of authorship and authority over a text. The clerk's ambiguity of attitude toward his source can be seen as indicative of Chaucer's own conscious concern regarding the traditional borrowing of texts.

After the clerk gives one last nod to his Petrarchan source, he begins telling a tale in which he will establish himself as the final authority, at least within the framework of The Canterbury Tales. While Petrarch's version was epistolary, the clerk transforms the story into a true "tale," a spoken story. The clerk uses a seven line stanza and rime royal to tell his tale. Some critics have suggested that this style creates a serious tone (Muscatine 192). The clerk's use of an elevated poetic form accentuates his scholastic training and his desire to tell the tale well. Petrarch's version was in Latin (translated and sanitized from Boccaccio's Italian) and the clerk is anxious to prove his own English rendering to be elegant and dignified. Again, working within the limitations of his Petrarchan source, the clerk manages to impose his own authorial voice.

When the clerk begins the tale proper, he again paraphrases Petrarch's proeyme in his opening stanza. His constant reference to source seems to underline his

uncertainty about claiming authority over the tale. And yet, very early in the narrative, the clerk makes a subjective comment criticizing Walter, the marquis:

I blame hym thus: that he considered noght
In tyme comynge what myghte him bityde,
But on his lust present was al his thoght
(77-80).

The clerk's use of the first person transforms what could otherwise be viewed as objective commentary into a personal judgement on Walter. The unworldly clerk interjects with his own values in condemning the marquis' preoccupation with the present material world. Throughout the tale, the clerk does not refrain from making narrative asides. Speaking of his plan to test Griselda, the clerk says:

Nedeless, God woot, he thoghte hire for t'affraye.
He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,
And foond hire evere good; what neded it
Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,
Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?
But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede
(455-61; emphasis mine).

His criticism of Walter's plan is extensive. In Petrarch's version, there were only two lines denouncing the marquis but in the clerk's version there are seven (Severs 231). The clerk draws attention to his narrative voice, "I seye," leaving no doubt of his blatant narrative disapproval (see also 621-23; 701-08). The audience is being encouraged to side with Griselda, and to agree with the clerk's censure of Walter. He refers to the marquis' "cruel purpos" (734; 740) and his "wikke usage" (785).

This strong subjective interpretation is contrasted by a lack of narrative omniscience. The opening lines of the tale describe the people's choice of a spokesman to confront Walter about his refusal to marry. The clerk offers three possibilities as to why one particular man is chosen:

And oon of hem, that wisest was of loore--
 Or elles that the lord best wolde assent
 That he sholde telle hym what his peple mente,
 Or elles koude he shewe wel swich mateere--
 (87-90).

The spokesman himself explains his choice (101-02). Ferester claims that this passage "suggests the paradox of selfhood. The clerk, not acknowledging his role as creator, pretends the character knows things even he does not know" (Ferester 119). The clerk, then, at this point, although passing subjective judgement on the characters, is not taking a particularly aggressive stance as teller of the tale.

Throughout the tale, there is a continual use of the word "seem" (Ferester 99). Again, the clerk is vacillating between merely recounting the tale and actually establishing his authority over it. These lines describing Griselda's emotional state demonstrate the clerk's hesitancy:

Whan she had herd al this, she noght ameved
 Neither in word, or chiere, or contenance,
 For, **as it semed**, she was nat agreved
 (498-500, emphasis mine).

Later in the tale, he says of Griselda: "I **deeme** that hire herte was ful wo" (753). After carefully establishing his

role as teller in the prologue, he seems unsure of telling the tale in absolute terms. Despite this hesitation, the clerk does establish control over the tale through its telling. He not only interjects with subjective opinion, but also refers to the tale itself. At least three times he comments on how the tale is proceeding: "but shortly forth this matere for to chace" (341); "and shortly forth this tale for to chace" (393); "but shortly if this storie I tellen shal" (760). The clerk is constantly reminding the reader that **he** is telling the tale, and uses the first person frequently: "namoore of this make I now mencioun" (1006, emphasis mine). The reader's attention is drawn from product to process. By underscoring the clerk's method of approaching the tale, Chaucer makes clear his own preoccupations with textual authority.

Although the clerk's rendition of the tale does not include many emendations to his sources, the changes are important. One such alteration is the addition of a 12 stanza speech from Griselda (814-91). This veiled reproach of Walter is not found in Petrarch nor in the anonymous French version. After Walter informs Griselda that she must leave the palace, she recalls their wedding day:

O goode God! How gentil and how kynde
 Ye **semed** by youre speche and youre visage
 The day that maked was oure mariage!
 (852-54, emphasis mine)

In these lines Griselda's feelings of deception are obvious,

and through the addition of this implicit criticism, the clerk strengthens his interpretive position. As the tale progresses, the clerk's narrative skill becomes more evident. In Part VI, he effectively employs repetition to emphasize Griselda's plight. He uses the word "pitous" five times, three of these occasions being within seven lines of each other (1080-1086). In describing the reconciliation scene, the clerk emphasizes the poignancy of emotion felt by both Griselda and the onlookers, but not by Walter. By accentuating the stress of her ordeals and the intensity of her emotion at their termination, he reiterates that she is to be pitied for her trials at the hands of the cruel Walter. At one point, after the alleged murder of Griselda's children, the clerk poses a question:

But now of wommen wolde I axen fayn
 If this assayes myghte nat suffise?
 What koude a sturdy housbonde moore devyse
 To preeve hir wyfhood and hir stedefastnesse,
 And he continuyng evere in sturdinesse?
 (696-700)

The clerk calls upon his audience to consider Walter's actions in a realistic context. This moves the tale from the category of exemplum to a more explicitly realistic fiction. The clerk's narrative strategy of questioning works well, because Walter **does** devise a further test of Griselda's steadfastness. The clerk sees Walter's intractable desire to test his wife as ridiculous, describing him as "bounden to that stake" (704), that is,

the stake of "entencion".⁴⁹

It is not until the end of the tale that the clerk actually refers to himself as the "auctour" (1141). Now that he has completed the tale, he can qualify himself as the true auctour--a concept which binds together the idea of author and authority. He finally asserts complete control over the tale. He explains that the tale was not told so that wives would imitate Griselda, for that would be "inportable" (1144). The audience is then furnished with the original moral:

that every wight, in his degree,
Sholde be constant in adversitee
As was Grisilde; therfore Petrak writeth
This storie

(1145-48).

However, this is Petrarch's message, and by referring to his source, the clerk makes clear that this is not necessarily his own reading. Dinshaw claims that the clerk is making clear that Petrarch's allegorical reading of the Griseldis is "radically inaccurate" (136). Ferester points out that he is reminding us Petrarch is no longer controlling the tale (Ferester 117)--the clerk is alive and well, with a "lusty herte, fressh and grene" (1173); Petrarch is dead. The tale is followed by an Envoy, the originality of which

⁴⁹ In Chaucerian Fiction (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) 701, Robert Burlin notes that although the clerk criticizes Walter's behaviour, he also attempts to convince us that it is "recognizably all too human in its apparent inhumanity" (143) by describing Walter as one of a certain kind: "But ther been folk of swich condition..."

is brought expressly to the reader's attention by the subheading "Envoy de Chaucer." The lines are still spoken by the clerk, as he says "Herkeneth my song that seith in this manere" (1176) in the line immediately preceeding the Envoy. This section of the tale is specifically demarcated as no longer being Petrarch's; the message within is not to be confused with Petrarch's moral.

On a certain level, the Envoy makes the reader wonder what purpose the tale serves. In singing his song to the Wife of Bath, the clerk slips into a glib six line stanza, using the same three rhymes over 36 lines. Is the Envoy intended merely to cheer his audience after what appears to be a horrible tale? This sudden switch from elevated poetry to sing-song verse points to a definite change in tone.⁵⁰ The irony of the Envoy recalls the clerk's words to Harry in the prologue. Does the Envoy mark the reappearance of the jester clerk? Some critics such as Skeat claim that the Envoy is not in line with the clerk's character (Ginsberg 883). On the contrary, it is perfectly well-suited to him, and underlines his capacity for the humour and wordplay

⁵⁰ In Chaucer and his French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991) 285-6, James I. Wimsatt notes that the Envoy is indeed a song. Although the content "seems far from douceur,...in its versification it has a close relationship to the French, and versification is the basic constituent of natural music." The decasyllabic form "resembles common ballade and rondeau stanzas" and despite variations from French standards such as La Tremoile and Machaut "there remains a musical rhythm that justifies the clerk's calling the envoy a 'song'."

apparent in the Prologue. In telling the tale, the clerk heightens the characters of Walter and Griselda and uses different narrative strategies to transform Petrarch's story. His relation to his source at times seems hesitant, and yet by the end of the tale, he can refer to himself as the "auctour." His final assertion of authority over the tale is his subversion of Petrarch's moral.

The Envoy works on different levels. The song to the Wife of Bath is a satirical masterpiece, a fiercely funny nod to the woman who claimed "it is an impossible/ That any clerk wol speke good of wyves" (Wife of Bath's Prologue 688). The clerk not only tells a tale of an exceptionally good wife, he also praises the Wife herself in this mock encomium. The comic effect of the Envoy has been noted by many critics.¹¹ But the Envoy achieves more than comedy--it destabilizes the entire meaning of the tale. While the closing irony is a humourous aside, it also serves to obfuscate the clerk's final position. He tells a tale with an apparently clear lesson--"constance in adversity"--and

¹¹ Bronson calls the Envoy "an ironic sequel to the serious narrative...the Retort Courteous followed by the Quip Modest" (104). Barry Windeatt explains that "the striking transition from framed story into adjuring envoy allows an exhilarating effect of release" in "Literary Structures in Chaucer" The Cambridge Chaucer Companion eds. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986): 202. Muscatine describes the effect as "concessionary comedy. The clerk admits the opposition purposely, so willingly and extravagantly as to make safe from vulgar questioning all that has gone before" (197).

then deliberately undermines it in the Envoy. In the opening lines of the Envoy, the clerk emphasizes the death of Griselda:

Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience,
And bothe atones buryed in Ytaille;
For which I crie in open audience
No wedded man so hardy be t'assaille
His wyves pacience in trust to fynde
Grisildis, for in certain he shal faille.
(1177-1182)

Ferster calls these lines "mischievous declarations of independence" (117). Griselda is dead and the clerk leaves any resolution to the tale ambiguous. By not providing the audience with a final, fixed interpretation, the clerk ultimately asserts control over the text by undermining Petrarch's moral and establishing a new direction for meaning.

CONCLUSION

In the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer has delineated the struggle of an author to establish himself as textual authority. In Troilus and Criseyde as well as the Clerk's Tale, the naming of source draws immediate attention to the questions of authorship and authority over text. Both are derived texts, and in both, the narrators struggle to establish themselves as authority within the confines of the text. In the case of the clerk, the struggle is more overt and begins in the Prologue to the tale. His authority, the great Petrarch, is an actual contemporary author. The clerk's role shifts from that of commentator to that of auctour as he imposes his own narrative control and establishes a new direction for meaning. In Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator tries to establish his role as that of scribe, but he cannot maintain objectivity. He has a purpose in telling the tale and his narrative decisions accord him a certain responsibility for the text, despite his initial attempts to deny his role. As

he calls into question the authority of his sources, he takes control of the poem and establishes himself as the authority, at least within the confines of the poem itself.

Neither narrator strays beyond the parameters of his source--the main events in the stories are not altered. In this way, the narrators illustrate the possibility of establishing one's own authorial voice within a derived text. Chaucer demonstrates how both contemporary and ancient authority can exist within one text. The "matere" of the story is derived from the source; its meaning comes from the current author. The narrator in Troilus and Criseyde must eventually acknowledge the veracity of his sources, but also empowers his own authorial voice by putting the poem in a new Christian perspective. Miller claims that authority "implies restraint as well as freedom, limitation as well as power" (3). She explains that an external authority may constrain an author, but personal authority carries with it the burden of responsibility. In the Clerk's Tale, the clerk struggles to win his narrative freedom from an external authority. In Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator comes to terms with accepting the responsibility authority carries. In demonstrating how narrative strategy can challenge the stability of meaning within a derived text, Chaucer makes clear his own concerns with the use and transformation of literary sources. Troilus and Criseyde and the Clerk's Tale illustrate his

attempts to establish the integrity and authority of an author working within the tradition of derived texts.

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APPENDIX A

References to Source in Troilus and Criseyde

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|-----------|--|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| Book I. | 132-133 | Book III. | 1576 |
| I. | 141-147 | III. | 1774-1775 |
| I. | 159-161 | III. | 1811-IV.21 (III.1817;
IV.18-21) |
| I. | 393-399 (394) | | |
| I. | 492-497 (495) | Book IV. | 36-42 |
| | | IV. | 799-805 |
| Book II. | 8-49 (13-14, 18, 49) | IV. | 1415-1421 |
| II. | 100-108 | | |
| II. | 699-700 | Book V. | 15-21 (19) |
| II. | 1219-1220 | V. | 799-840 (799, 804, 816, 834) |
| II. | 1564-1568 | V. | 848 |
| II. | 1595-1596 | V. | 946 |
| II. | 1700-1701 | V. | 1009 |
| | | V. | 1032 |
| Book III. | 39-49 (cf. II.13-14
with III.43-44) | V. | 1037-1085 (1037, 1044,
1050, 1051) |
| III. | 90-91 | V. | 1086-1099 |
| III. | 442-455 | V. | 1459 |
| III. | 470 | V. | 1478-1484 |
| III. | 491-504 (502-503) | V. | 1562-1565 |
| III. | 575-581 | V. | 1646-1666 (1651, 1653) |
| III. | 967-973 | V. | 1751-1771 (1753, 1758) |
| III. | 1193-1199 (1196-1199) | V. | 1776 |
| III. | 1321-1330 | V. | 1803-1804 |
| III. | 1369-1372 | V. | 1854-1855 |
| III. | 1429 | | |

taken from: George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Lollius" Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 28 (1917): 92.

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