THE DIVERSITY OF LOVE: MULTIPLE VOICING IN THE NARRATOR OF

TROYLS AND CRISEYDE

by

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ABSTRACT

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, love is not a simple matter. Critics have long noted the apparent disparity between the poem's larger focus on the worldly love of the main characters and the sudden call for a love of God in the poem's closing stanzas, but even the secular love of Troilus and Criseyde exists in several forms that are often incompatible with each other. Presented alongside the divine Christian love are a courtly love inspired by the pagan Cupid, a simple lust of the flesh, a human love that nevertheless participates in the binding love of creation, and a transitory love that is a gift of changeable Fortune. While many critics argue that God's love is the dominant form against which all others must be measured, this thesis puts forth the alternative that no one kind of love in the poem has precedence; it is on the plurality of attitudes towards love that the poem focuses.

The much-discussed narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* facilitates this view of the poem. While we might expect this storyteller's extensive commentary on the theme of love to lead us to an understanding of love's role in the poem, the narrator's discussion is itself ambiguous; he holds all the perspectives on love that his story contains and does not consistently privilege one above another. His own disjunctive attitudes encourage us to see him not as a well-rounded character but as a collection of fragmented viewpoints, each with its own voice and each a reflection of the attitudes within the story itself. Although together these voices have the apparent authority of their role as storyteller, as a whole, the narrator repeatedly points to his inability to shoulder the responsibility for meaning that his role calls for. By providing misleading allusions to previous "auctores," he also confounds any attempt to search for authority in sources outside the text. We are made aware that clues to
love's meaning in the poem cannot be found in the conventional places; we must ourselves decide which of the many views of love holds precedence.

The narrator's plurality of voices is thus the key to the nature of love in *Troilus and Criseyde*; his many attitudes reflect the richly various possibilities open to us in the non-fictional world.
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INTRODUCTION

Any reader of *Troilus and Criseyde* must conclude that the subject of love is among the poem's primary concerns; love mocked, adulated, despaired over and scorned moves the plot and provides the vehicle for much of the poem's philosophical content. Love is also problematic in the poem, lending the work a large part of its fascination and continuing to engender a wealth of critical commentary that seeks to resolve the issues its treatment raises. Most of the discussion of these issues to date has focussed on the difficulties many see in the poem's conclusion, in which an apparently sudden and extreme shift of viewpoint seems to reject uncompromisingly the value of Troilus's earthly love for Criseyde, a value we have nonetheless been led to appreciate for some eight thousand lines.

The reasons for this ostensible thematic breach have engaged the attention of a great many critics who have, in general, proposed two solutions to the problem. Some acknowledge the gap, arguing that the poem's ending is a palinode that exists simply to deny all that comes before it; others suggest that *Troilus and Criseyde* is a thematically unified poem in which the final exhortation to abandon earthly love for the love of God is the culmination of a progression through the poem from secular matters to those of the spirit. I concur in part with the critics who offer the former solution because I feel that the evidence the other critics have offered for a thematic progression in the poem is unsatisfying. However, I do not believe that the poem need therefore be a work that is aesthetically marred by a final moment of disjunction. The poem's closing shift of viewpoint is important, and any reading of the poem must come to terms with the ending, but this final shift in perspective is not the only one. Several breaks in the unity of attitude towards love exist in
Troilus and Criseyde, and indeed, these inconsistencies are both a dominant characteristic of the poem as a whole and an integral feature of its design.

Even within the large part of the poem that deals with the worldly affair of Troilus and Criseyde, perspectives on love are far from concordant. The poem opens with love personified as a god who heads a cult of service and devotion to the courtly ideal of fin amour. Troilus becomes, it first seems, an exemplary subject of this god, but Pandarus's involvement in his friend's advancement explicitly introduces a new perspective on love as the possibility of procurement becomes an issue. As the affair draws closer to its consummation, the concept of love sometimes loses its religiosity and elevation, becoming instead a simple, lustful pleasure of the flesh. But sometimes another shift occurs, and love is extolled as the divine force through which the multiplicity of earthly existence is bound in a harmonious unity. As such, love is allied with the Christian God in His role as creator of the physical universe, and the praise of love is also a praise of God’s creation, every rock, plant and beast, as it moves through the changing seasons.

Once Troy chooses to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, however, Fortune becomes the dominant force in the poem, replacing Cupid and underscoring the temporality of creation; love becomes just another gift of the indifferent and changeable mistress. But it is a gift nonetheless, the loss of which throws Troilus into an agony of hope, reminiscence and despair. When the conclusion comes, the gift, whether it is an ennobling passion, the heat of physical desire or a participation in the joy of creation, is stripped of its worth. Troilus and the narrator suddenly hold the world and all temporal forms of love in contempt, and a new kind of love is proposed: the eternal love of God. In the transformation, the human tragedy loses its significance.
These disparate perspectives on the poem's central subject matter are difficult to reconcile especially since the transitions between these viewpoints are so abrupt. Which view should hold ultimate sway is not readily apparent. Some critics, whether or not they see a unified poem, suggest that we should cast our gaze on *Troilus and Criseyde* from its closing vantage point because it is a high one and has the virtue of being in final position, but there is no gradual slope to its peak. Its vast and sudden distance from the rest of the poem and the brief time we spend there weaken its usefulness as a point from which to view the work as a whole. The poem's lack of cohesiveness on the matter of love remains unrelieved by the conclusion, but the other perspectives on love are also poor candidates for the dominating viewpoint, for while any one might hold precedence over other worldly perspectives, none can deny the value of spiritual love.

Much of the reason for the difficulty critics have had ascertaining the prevalent viewpoint of the poem lies in the work's lack of a central authority. To be sure, the story has a narrator, and he comments on his material extensively, but although we might expect his commentary to be the key to an understanding of his tale, it is instead a major source of the poem's ambiguity. At various times, the narrator occupies every point along the spectrum of views on love; he participates unreservedly in each one and makes no discernible progression from one to another. He provides no indication of which perspective should be privileged; worse still, it is difficult to imagine all of these viewpoints belonging to a single persona. In fact, the narrator is rather poorly equipped to fill the requirements of the consistent and psychologically well-rounded character some have made him out to be.

He is not, however, a literary failure, despite his inconsistencies. His comments
can indeed be the key to an understanding of love in the poem, but only if we see them as belonging not to a single entity but rather to a series of character fragments, all cast together in the authoritative role of storyteller. Each fragment speaks with its own voice which is inseparable from the vantage point it occupies, and each speaks with an authority equal to all the others. There can be no reconciliation of these voices, nor need there be. In their multiplicity, they reflect human love in all its forms. By denying the poem a single focus for authority, these voices more accurately depict human experience, in which ultimate authority is elusive and perspectives are manifold.

This thesis develops the view that the very absence of a unified focus paradoxically gives the poem a single point of meaning. It is the multiplicity of perspectives that is the ultimate meaning of love in the poem. Troilus and Criseyde, from the narrator's opening obeisance to a deity of love to his final prayer to God, is a microcosm of human reactions to a difficult and many-sided experience. In order to support this view, I will first look at the poem's depiction of love and show where I feel perspectives on this topic change, demonstrating how the narrator at various times holds each viewpoint and so shares in the shifting attitudes of the story he is engaged in telling. When I come to the poem's conclusion, I will consider the responses of other critics to this last and greatest disparity in the poem's views on love, and I will explain why these arguments fail to satisfy me that the various perspectives form a unified movement from the worldly to the divine. Finally, I will show how the narrator with his many views on love can be thought of as a series of separate voices that together are the authority for the poem's meaning, for while they do not allow us to put one perspective on love above any other, they do show us the possibilities that confront us every day, reminding us that we must always
make the final assessments of the meaning of our experiences. In the end, *Troilus and Criseyde* is a celebration of love’s richness; any one viewpoint on its own could be satisfying, but none could match the gloriousness of this poem’s engagement in the fascinating variety of human experience.
THEME: LOVE IN TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

To begin my examination of Troilus and Criseyde, I will look first at another poem, Giovanni Boccaccio's Il Filostrato. I will do so partly because Il Filostrato is widely acknowledged to be Chaucer's principal source for Troilus and Criseyde and partly because, whatever their relationship to one another, the poems tell very similar stories that nevertheless belong to two very different works. A glance at Boccaccio's treatment of love in Il Filostrato will highlight the distinctive and unusual handling Chaucer gives the same aspect of what is roughly the same tale.

In Il Filostrato, love is a relatively simple matter. The love that Troilo and Criseida share for a time is an illicit sexual love which is acceptable to the main characters as long as it is kept secret. The need for furtive, infrequent meetings between the lovers sharpens their desire, making their love worth the risk of a loss of good reputation if it is discovered. The value of this love is clear when it is compared to married love, which, because it is socially legitimate, cannot provide its participants with such heightened desire. Even Criseida recognizes this:

"Stolen water is a far sweeter thing than wine had in abundance; so the joy of love which is hidden surpasses greatly that of a husband always

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1Stephen A. Barney, Explanatory Notes: Troilus and Criseyde, The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 1021. Robert A. Pratt in "Chaucer and Le Roman de Troye et de Criseida," Studies in Philology 53 (1956): 509-39 maintains that Chaucer also used a French translation of the Italian poem, but, as Barney points out, the French translation is so close to its original that the possibility of its use "does not substantially alter our sense of how . . . [Chaucer] reshaped Boccaccio's poem. There is no question that the Filostrato is Chaucer's prime source."

Until Criseida is forced to leave Troy, she and Troilo enjoy the fruits of their illicit love, which comes to an end only through the lady's fickleness. After this, Troilo does not fault his involvement in such *fin amour* for his sorrows but blames instead Criseida's faithlessness; his views on love remain the same.

In fact, perspectives on love throughout the story are consistent, but the narrator's views on the subject play the most important role in the thematic unity of love in the poem. The narrator provides a consistent framework for the events of his story. He introduces in the proem his own love-longing which parallels that of Troilo before the latter's acceptance by Criseida, and he suggests to his lady that he wishes the same fulfillment of desire that Troilo enjoys for a time:

> And if you are as perceptive as I believe you to be, you will be able to understand the greatness and the nature of my desires, what their limit is and what thing more than any other they ask for. . . . (15)

At the poem's close, the narrator, like Troilo, condemns not love but faithless women as he addresses amorous young men:

> . . . I pray you . . . that you mirror yourselves in Troilo's love which

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4I deliberately refrain from naming Boccaccio the narrator of the poem, for, as I shall demonstrate later, the identification of a textual voice with the actual voice of an author is problematic. But see also apRoberts and Seldis xviii–xx. They show that the identity and even existence of a genuine "Filomena" is difficult to ascertain, so we cannot be certain that Boccaccio is recounting a real experience, let alone that he is identifying himself with the narrator of the story.
my verses have displayed above because, if you will read them in the right spirit, you will not lightly have trust in all women. (VIII. 30)

He declares that the "perfect lady" is not aloof as some noble ladies are; she "has a stronger desire to be loved and takes delight in loving . . . and she fulfills her promises" (VIII. 32). Thus, the storyteller's attitude towards a major theme of his tale is consistent and accords with the attitudes evident in the story itself.

Boccaccio's narrator also helps make the theme of love in the poem unambiguous by providing an initial statement of intention that is clear and consistent with (if not necessarily borne out by) the details of his story:

Therefore, worthy lady, I composed these rhymes into the form of a little book, in perpetual testimony, to those who see it in the future, both of your worth, with which in the person of another these rhymes are in large part adorned, and of my sorrow. . . . (13)

We can then approach an understanding of the purpose of the entire work by examining to what extent the story of Troilo and Criseyda fulfills the narrator's promise. Our task is kept reasonably simple by the narrator's consistent treatment of love, his limited interruption of the story once it gets underway and his clear intentions for the work, namely, that it be both a disclosure to his lady of his thoughts and desires and a warning to young men to choose their paramours carefully.

Despite its many similarities to Il Filostrato, Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is a very different poem, and much of what distinguishes it from its source lies in the nature of its narrator's role and commentary. Chaucer's taleteller is highly visible

5Sanford B. Meech, Design in Chaucer's Troilus (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1959) 23.
throughout the story itself, he has a much less personal involvement in his material and his viewpoints are confusingly prolific. Compared to that of Boccaccio's narrator, his role is highlighted, but its purpose is obscured.

While the narrator of *Il Filostrato* is himself involved in a love affair, Chaucer's narrator is inexperienced in matters of the heart and devotes his service to those who serve:

For I, that God of Loves servantz serve,
Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse,
Preyen for speed, al sholde I therfore sterve,
So fer am I from his help in derknesse.⁶

Thus, if Boccaccio's narrator is closely involved in the material of his tale, Chaucer's is distanced from his story and looks on with the eyes of an outsider. His purpose, as far as he states it in the poem, is also less personal—he intends to tell the "double sorwe of Troilus" but does so not simply for his own benefit:

For so hope I my sowle best avaunce,
To prey for hem that loves servauntz be,
And write hire wo, and lyve in charite,
And for to have of hem compassioun,
As though I were hire owne brother dere. (I. 47–51)

Unlike Boccaccio's narrator, who helps himself directly by using his story to appeal to

his lady, Chaucer's narrator helps himself by helping others:

... if this may don gladnesse
Unto any lover, and his cause availle,
Have he my thonk, and myn be this travaille! (I. 19–21)

From this position, the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* is particularly well-suited to provide a wide context for his story as Boccaccio's narrator is not, but in the end, Chaucer's taleteller creates a context so broad that the work loses a sense of ultimate purpose; his final exhortation to return home from "worldly vanyte" (V. 1837) would hardly win him compassion from young lovers or "grace" from the pagan God of Love. Again unlike Boccaccio's narrator, Chaucer's appears to change not only his attitude towards love but also his reasons for telling his tale. As an authority for the meaning of the story, he is misleading, yet his persistent presence throughout his story suggests that his unsatisfying fulfillment of his role is important to the meaning of the whole poem.

Because the various views that Chaucer's narrator holds on love are reflected in the story he tells, I will now turn to an examination of the diversity of the attitudes towards this crucial concept that are displayed by both the narrator and the characters of his tale and that curiously tie the narrator to the material of his story even as his self-professed inexperience in love distances him from it. This strange relationship ends in the poem's final crux, in which the dominant perspective on love shifts from the worldly to the otherworldly; the poem's end is utterly distanced from its beginning, and we are left with a literary work in which the idea of love is both

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more dynamic and more puzzling than in Boccaccio's comparatively unified poem.

Chaucer's narrator begins his tale by treating Troilus's fortunes and misfortunes in love as a matter of great gravity. In the world of the opening stanzas, the narrator's role is a humble but nonetheless important one, and he calls not on an earthly woman to help him perform his task as Boccaccio's narrator does but on nothing less than a Fury, a "godesse of torment." In this world, the God of Love holds sovereignty, and he has the power to bring his worshippers (and even those who don't worship him, as Troilus soon finds out) to heaven or terrible woe. The practice of love is clearly a serious and lofty endeavor; the narrator himself does not dare to love. His initial discussion of the activity is couched in Christian terms,¹ and Cupid, like the Christian God, can bestow grace on his followers and even advance souls.

What seems to be the Christian God is also invoked by the narrator several times, but Love appears to have much of God's power, and the confusing alternation of the two gods in stanzas five, six and seven suggests that they are being closely identified with each other. Still, Love is clearly not purely a god of Christian charity because the best way to win his grace is through the service not of Christ or even the Virgin but of an earthly lady:

And biddeth ek for hem that ben at ese,
That God hem graunte ay good perseveraunce,
And sende hem myght hire ladies so to plese
That it to Love be worship and plesaunce. (I. 43-46)

¹See William George Dodd, *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959) 191-96 for a detailed account of the Christian works Chaucer echoes in these stanzas.
The use of Christian language here simply serves to elevate the love of Troilus by emphasizing its place in a hierarchical structure headed by an otherworldly figure and by highlighting the character-building sacrifice it requires of its host. This is the conventional "religion of love," and the motif continues when the narrator later praises Love's ability to win followers: "Blissed be Love, that kan thus folk converte!" (I. 308). Once Troilus has been "converted," Pandarus acts as Troilus's priest, counselling a confession from his repentant friend:

"Now bet thi brest, and sey to God of Love,

'Thy grace, lord, for now I me repente,

If I mysspak, for now myself I love.'

Thus sey with al thyn herte in good entente."

Quod Troilus, "A, lord! I me consente,

And preye to the my japes thow foryive,

And I shal nevere more whyle I live." (I. 932–38)

After this "absolution" of his previous sins, Troilus follows tradition by setting out to serve Love by serving his own lady.

Also conventional to the cult of Love is the ennobling effect this service has on Troilus and all those who love well. In an apostrophe to Venus, the Goddess of Love, the narrator attributes to her the power to exalt her subjects:

Algates hem that ye wol sette a-fyre,

They dreden shame, and vices they resygne;

Ye do hem corteys be, fresshe and benigne. . . . (III. 24–26)

Barney, Explanatory Notes 1025.
Dodd 129–30.
This power that can make "worthi folk ... worthier of name" (I. 251), the narrator says, truly improves Troilus's character:

And in the town his manere tho forth ay
Soo goodly was, and gat hym so in grace,
That eech hym loved that loked on his face.

For he bicom the frendlieste wight,
The gentilest, and ek the mooste fre,
The thriftiest, and oon the beste knyght
That in his tyme was or myghte be. . . . (I. 1076–82)

After Troilus's affair with Criseyde is consummated, the knight's character is further enhanced, and the narrator spends three stanzas describing these improvements, ending once again with an allusion to the Christ-like characteristics of Love:

Thus wolde Love—yheried be his grace!—
That Pride, Envye, Ire, and Avarice
He gan to fie, and everich other vice. (III. 1804–06)

It is important to note, however, that these qualities become a part of Troilus only when he feels hopeful and favoured by Love; his service to Love, unlike true service to the Christian God, is no comfort to him in his time of darkness once Criseyde has betrayed him, and Criseyde's mere absence from Troy makes Troilus curse himself, nature, fate and both Cupid and Venus (V. 207–10).\(^\text{11}\) This is hardly the behaviour of

\(^{11}\)Stephen Medcalf, "Epilogue: From Troilus to Troilus," The Later Middle Ages, ed. Medcalf (London: Methuen, 1981) 299. As Medcalf puts it, "Troilus is convincingly shown as purified by the sufferings of his first 'sorwe' to deserve the consummation of earthly love: he is not shown (as Griselde and Constance in the Canterbury Tales are shown) purified by his second 'sorwe' for heaven, only made miserable."
a noble and devoted servant. Thus, this love, although sometimes elevating, is, from the Christian perspective, firmly grounded in the world; it is not the same love that the narrator asks young men and women to choose in the closing stanzas of the poem. Likewise, although the reputation Troilus gains while happily in love is so great "That it up rong unto the yate of hevene" (III. 1725), this reputation comes from spending his time and money freely on jousting, dressing well, feasting and otherwise entertaining a host of well-born friends (III. 1718–22). These are clearly not the kinds of activities that ensure one a place within heaven's gates.

The world of Troilus and Criseyde that I have thus far presented is one in which the elements of "courtly love" are prominent features. I realize that the usefulness of the term "courtly love" has been the source of much debate, but

13It was C. S. Lewis who did much to promote the idea that Troilus and Criseyde illustrates the principles of courtly love, arguing this first in "What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato," Essays and Studies 17 (1932): 56–75 and later in The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (London: Oxford UP, 1938). In The Allegory of Love, Lewis calls Troilus and Criseyde "a great poem in praise of love" (197) and maintains that it makes concrete the allegorized figures of the Roman de la rose, a work which he feels exemplifies the tenets of courtly love. T. P. Dunning in "God and Man in Troilus and Criseyde," English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, eds. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen, 1962) 164–82 agrees with this view, as does Dodd, but see Dodd for a more detailed analysis of the courtly love elements in Troilus and Criseyde. More recently, however, D. W. Robertson, Jr. and John F. Benton have questioned the validity of courtly love and its usefulness as a critical concept in The Meaning of Courtly Love, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany: State U of New York P, 1968). Benton in "Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love" Newman 19–42 says that historically what scholars such as Lewis call "courtly love" never existed during the middle ages. In "The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts" Newman 1–18, Robertson agrees and maintains further that works such as the Roman de la rose and Chrétien de Troye's Lancelot are satirical, and they do not, moreover, satirize courtly love, but rather mere "idolatrous passion." According to Robertson, Troilus and Criseyde is a historical allegory which warns of the potential outcome of New Troy's (that is, London's) decadent passions in Chaucer's time. Most recently, Richard F. Green, "Troilus and the Game of Love," Chaucer Review 13 (1979): 201–20 criticizes Benton for replacing an admittedly "unhelpful critical oversimplification" with "an equally difficult sociological one" (201), but Geoffrey Hughes in "The Sovereignty of Venus: The Problem of Courtly Love," English Studies in Africa 25 (1982): 61–77 sensibly points out that
whether or not one feels the term is fruitful, there can be no doubt that much of *Troilus and Criseyde* takes place in a universe where love is personified as a god who can bestow grace and favour on subjects made worthy either by devoted service to a lady or the gracious reception of an honourable knight. It is a universe whose ideal is summarized in Antigone’s song, in which the persona is a "humble subgit" to a god whose "grace" has provided her with the perfect love of a knight who is "moost ententif / To serven wel" (II. 838–39) and has inspired her "To flemen alle manere vice and synne" (II. 852).

If the poem consistently presented love as *fin amour*, all would be well, but Antigone’s utopian view of courtly love is not the only perspective that the narrator and his characters provide. Even as early as Book I, suggestions of purely physical, sexual love are in evidence, and while courtly love can allow worthy subjects the consummation of desire, it has no place for the baser passions sometimes portrayed in the poem. Once Troilus knows that Pandarus will speak to Criseyde on his behalf, the knight rather too strongly insists that his intentions are honourable:

"But herke, Pandare, o word, for I nolde
That thow in me wendest so gret folie,
That to my lady I desiren sholde

\[11\] (cont’d) courtly love can be useful as a literary artefact whether or not it has any basis in historical fact and that

No matter how teasing or impenetrable the ironies of Chrétien or Andreas may be, nor how problematic the issue of origins, be they in Ovid or Catharism, all four of these influences emphasize the distinctive duality of love; that love produces the impulse to idealism, to service, to joy, to spirituality, to gentleness, to nobleness, as well as the impulse to possession, to jealousy, to use, to sensuality, to suffering and to degradation. (76)
That toucheth harm or any vilenye;
For dredeles me were levere dye
Than she of me aught alles understode
But that that myghte sownen into goode." (I. 1030–36).

The universe of *Troilus and Criseyde* now suddenly includes not only courtly love, but a love that is born of more churlish motives. True, Troilus may not have such intentions, as he is so eager to point out, but his very denial brings the idea of a purely sexual love to our minds, and it becomes an immediate counterpoint to the love we have seen thus far.

In Book III, Troilus is again careful to make a distinction between his affair (as well as, this time, Pandarus's involvement in it) and anything that might suggest lechery:

"But here, with al myn herte, I the biseche
That nevere in me thow deme swich folie
As I shal seyn: me thoughte by thi speche
That this which thow me dost for compaignie,
I sholde wene it were a bauderye.
I am nought wood, al if I lewed be!
It is nought so, that woot I wel, parde!" (III. 393–99)

His vigorous denial of pandering once again brings the idea of procuring to the forefront, and Troilus's offer in return for Pandarus's trouble becomes all the more shocking:

"And that thow knowe I thynke nought ne wene
That this servise a shame be or jape,
I have my faire suster Polixene,
Cassandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape—
Be she nevere so fair or wel yshape,
Tel me which thow wilt of everychone,
To han for thyn, and lat me thanne allone."

But these implications of "bauderye" are not the only instances that deflate the loftiness of Cupid's service. More explicit allusions to carnal love are also in evidence.

At the end of Book II, Pandarus uses the first of a series of hunting metaphors with clearly sexual connotations as he commends Criseyde on her good fortune in having "bagged" Troilus without even trying: "'And right good thrift, I prey to God, have ye, / That han swich oon ykaught withouten net!'" (II. 582–83). Later he continues the motif just before Troilus's feigned sickness: "'Lo, hold the at thi triste cloos, and I / Shal wel the deer unto thi bowe dryve'" (II. 1534–35). We might expect this sort of language from the often ignoble Pandarus, but he is not the only one to use it. The narrator adopts the prevailing attitude of his characters to continue this motif after Troilus finally regains consciousness in Criseyde's bed and takes her in his arms: "What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / Whan that the sperhauk hath it in his foot?" (III. 1191–92). Even Troilus echoes this language:

This Troilus in armes gan hire streyne,
And seyde, "O swete, as evere mot I gon,

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13For further discussion of the instances in which Troilus's behaviour is discourteous, see Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 489–90.
Now be ye kaught; now is ther but we twyne!

Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!" (III. 1205-08)

Surprisingly, Criseyde implies that she, too, has been ready and waiting for the consummation of her affair: "'Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere, / Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought heere!'" (III. 1210–11). But perhaps Criseyde’s attitude is only the natural result of the thorn the narrator hopes she has caught when she sees Troilus ride by her house, a thorn which the narrator uses to anticipate the climactic sexual act of Book III: "God sende mo swich thornes on to pike!" (II. 1274).

All these breaches of courtly decorum would be enough in themselves to make us question the validity of fin amour as the prevailing model of love, but the storyteller destroys any claim courtly love might have to this position most decisively during the consummation scene. Within the long interjection that takes the place of the actual moment of sexual fulfillment once Criseyde has finally opened herself to Troilus at III. 1309 ("'Welcome, my knyght, my pees, my suffisaunce!'"), the narrator seems once again to cast aside his earlier reverence for the service of Love to which he says he dared not aspire, implying instead that this "heaven’s bliss" may be purchased with one’s soul and astonishingly wishing that he had done so: "Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought, / Ye, or the leeste joie that was theere?" (III. 1319–20). The narrator quite blatantly contradicts his former stance. From this perspective, Troilus’s love for Criseyde is not much different from that of Diomede, who, after he "catches" Criseyde by taking the bridle of her horse, proceeds to "fish" her heart:

This Diomede, of whom yow telle I gan,
Goth now withinne hymself ay arguyng,
With al the sleghte and al that evere he kan,
How he may best, with shortest taryinge,
Into his net Criseydes herte brynge.
To this entent he koude nevire fyne;
To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and lyne. (V. 771-77)

It is not only the love of the main characters that is presented in this way, however, for as the narrator indicates through another use of the hunting metaphor, Venus can also inspire ignoble love in anyone; she regularly brings lovers together in the same way as a fisherman traps his fish (III. 35). All of these carnal images of love are clearly at odds with Antigone's vision of a very pure and elevated courtly love:

"But wene ye that every wrecche woot
The parfit blisse of love? Why, nay, iwys!
They wenen all be love, if oon be hoot.
Do wey, do wey, they woot no thyng of this!" (II. 890-93)

At this point, we might be willing to entertain the notion that the apparently noble love of Troilus and Criseyde is being undercut by references to base sexuality, but love in Troilus and Criseyde does not appear merely in the form of a dichotomy with Antigone's love on one side and lust on the other. At times, love is not a personal, private experience but is instead a universal agent that binds together the multiplicity of creation. From this perspective, love, whether lustful or the result of pure service to a lady, is natural, inevitable and desirable, and since it is part of the very foundation of the world, it transcends both other forms of love and partakes in
the divinity that created both this world and its binding principle.

Troilus, just before he consummates his love affair with Criseyde, praises Love in the religious language with which we have become familiar, showing a Christian humility when he thanks Love for bestowing grace on him "... that koude leest disserve" (III. 1268) and when he uses words that echo a prayer by Dante to the Virgin Mary in Paradiso XXXIII. 14–18.¹⁴ But this time when Troilus equates Love and "Charite" (III. 1254), Cupid seems indeed to approach more closely the Christian concept of God; he is called the "holy bond of thynges" (III. 1261) and is therefore the harmonizing principle that brings the diverse elements of the world together in an accord that approaches the unity of the divine.¹⁵ Love is here an integral part of the natural world, and so from this perspective, the love of Troilus and Criseyde is another strand in the fabric of the physical world, a fabric kept from unravelling by the power of Love: "... Love is he that alle thing may bynde, / For may no man fordon the lawe of kynde" (I. 237–38). The narrator holds this opinion of love, too, for he says, early in Book I, that because Love has this power, it is foolish to believe (as Troilus did) that one can resist his bonds: "The yerde is bet that bowen wole and wynde / Than that that brest ..." (I. 257–58). He echoes this image from the natural world in the consummation scene:

And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
Gan echo of hem in armes other wynde. (III. 1230–32)

¹⁴Howard H. Schless, Chaucer and Dante: A Revaluation (Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984) 122.
Thus here, the love of the two protagonists is part of the larger scheme of the universe and is no longer a purely human achievement in an isolated "bower of bliss."

Framing the consummation at the beginning and end of Book III are two more elaborate acclamations of the cosmic power of Love, one based mainly on *Il Filostrato* III. 74–79 and the other on Boethius’s *De consolatione Philosophiae* II. m. 8. The second of these is the second of Troilus’s *cantici*, and he celebrates his happy love affair by developing further the idea that Love holds the physical world together harmoniously. Love is directly connected with heaven and is thus divine; he is responsible for keeping the sun, the moon and the various elements fixed in the relationship in which they were created, and he even keeps the land from being overwhelmed by the waters from which it was divided on the third day of creation:

"Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce
Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye,

Bynd this acord, that I have told and telle.

"That, that the world with feith which that is stable
Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge,
That elementz that ben so discordable
Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,
That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,

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16 Peter Dronke, "L’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle," *Studi Medievali* 3rd ser. 6 (1965): 421.
And that the mone hath lordshippe over the nyghtes:
Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!—

"That, that the se, that gredy is to growen,
Constreyneth to a certeyn ende so
His flodes that so fiersly they ne growen
To drenchen erthe and al for evere mo;
And if that Love aught lete his bridel go,
Al that now loveth asondre sholde lepe,
And lost were al that Love halt now to-hepe." (III. 1744–64)

Intimate with the love that holds creation together is the love experienced by humankind, love

"... that with an holsom alliaunce
Halt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye,
... that kneteth lawe of compaignie,
And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle. . . ." (III. 1746–49)

Clearly, Troilus is setting his own accord with Criseyde into a context of universal harmony.17

Troilus's song completes the frame begun by the narrator in his invocation of Venus in the proem of Book III. The narrator calls upon Venus, who, like her son Cupid, is also a god of courtly love, ennobling those who are in her power:

Ye fierse Mars apaisen of his ire,

17Dunning 166.
And as yow liste, ye maken hertes digne;
Algates hem that ye wol sette a-fyre,
They dreden shame, and vices they resygne;
Ye do hem corteys be, fresshe and benigne. . . . (III. 22-26)

But she also is an embodiment of cosmic love; her might is felt "In hevene and
helle, in erthe and salte see" (III. 8), and she is part of the Christian God's love
that links up the chain of being:

. . . man, brid, best, fissh, herbe, and grene tree
Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne.
God loveth, and to love wol nought werne,
And in this world no lyves creature
Withouten love is worth, or may endure. (III. 10-14)

Venus has sovereignty over the affairs of humankind as well, being the cause of
friendship and harmony between kingdom and household, and she inspires simple lust,
whether it be in so exalted a being as Jove or in the human fish that are caught in
human weirs. Love, therefore, here in the person of Venus rather than her son
Cupid, encompasses Antigone's courtly love as well as base lust and goes beyond them
to be the foundation of creation itself. Since it is the narrator who makes the
invocation to Venus, we might think that this transcendent love, receiving its authority

11I disagree with Joseph E. Gallagher's opinion in "Theology and Intention in
Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer Review 7 (1972): 54 that in this passage
. . . Christianity is extremely superficial, for the united universe has . . . no center
toward which human love ought to tend." God and His love are explicitly mentioned,
and the love of other creatures is identified with His by juxtaposition. I side instead
with Robert Kilburn Root, Notes to Book 3, The Book of Troilus and Criseyde, by
a curious blending of the cult of Love and of Christian Theology."
from the teller’s voice and framing the poem’s central episode, could be the dominant form of love in the poem, but even this love does not reign supreme throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*. After the joyful Book III, Love suddenly wanes as a moving force, and cruel Fortune fills the void left behind. Even the love that participates in the joy of creation now merely comes and goes with the changes of temporal existence.

Although Cupid is a fully personified presence when he bends his bow and shoots the unsuspecting Troilus, Love never again appears as a character after Book I; he is only praised, invoked and spoken of by the humans in the poem. When Troilus’s love affair begins to go badly, the narrator blames not the God of Love for removing his favour from the lovers, but Fortune:

> From Troilus she gan hire brighte face  
> Awey to writhe, and tok of hym non heede,  
> But caste hym clene out of his lady grace,  
> And on hire whiel she sette up Diomede. . . . (IV. 8–11)

From then on, the universe of the poem becomes increasingly governed by an unpredictable inconstancy that, although personified as a deity, is, unlike the God of Love, indifferent to human prayer.

Fortune’s apparent usurpation of Love’s power comes to dominate the last two books of the poem, but it is even foreshadowed before Troilus’s second song, first by Pandarus’s ironic warning to Troilus that he may spoil his good fortune through carelessness and then by the narrator’s remark that Troilus meets Criseyde in bed for
the second time only because "Fortune it wolde" (III. 1667). And although Troilus, on the fateful day that sees the Trojans decide to trade Criseyde for Antenor, calls on Love to help him (IV. 288–94), he does not name the agent who removed him and Criseyde from Love's grace:

"Syn ye Criseyde and me han fully brought
Into youre grace, and bothe oure hertes seled,
How may ye suffre, alas, it be repeled?" (IV. 292–94)

As Troilus prepares to kill himself at IV. 1184–90, the narrator suggests that the knight does so because he believes that ". . . Love and cruel Fortune it ne wolde / That in this world he lenger lyven sholde" (IV. 1189–90); however, Troilus himself blames only Jove and Fortune for his predicament (IV. 1192). And before this, the until now apparently devoted servant of Love exclaims to Fortune that he has always held her above all the gods:

"Allas, how maistow in thyn herte fynde
To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?

"Have I the nought honoured al my lyve,
As thow wel woost, above the goddes alle?" (IV. 265–68)

Thus, despite Troilus's final prayer to Love as he rides through Troy gazing at the places that mark a happier time in his love affair, the latter half of the poem emphasizes a second force—that of inexorable change. While Troilus asks Cupid "'What joie hastow thyn owen folk to spille?'" (V. 588), he blames Fortune and fate

19Dunning 178.
for his troubles more often, and so does the narrator.

But while Cupid has lost his sovereignty, there is also no talk now of universal harmony; both kinds of love are incompatible with the idea of indifferent and inevitable change. Troilus's love for Criseyde also loses its lustful undertones; these, too, are inconsistent with the tragedy of Fortune and are reserved instead for Diomede's proclamations of love which now offer a point of contrast that enhances Troilus's noble woe. Love is now a gift of changeable Fortune, a gift whose loss is a grievous necessity. At the end of Book V, however, even the transitory nature of Fortune's favour loses its tragic significance as we reach a point of view that is removed from the physical world altogether. As Troilus's sad story is about to end, the narrator begins to see the ups and downs of Fortune from a broader perspective, viewing them as unavoidable properties of the transitory physical world, as inevitabilities that we must simply put up with as well as we can:

Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus,
But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus,
And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde;
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
God leve us for to take it for the beste! (V. 1744–50)

When Troilus dies, he is also able to see from this wider point of view as he reaches the eighth sphere and looks back on "This litel spot of erthe" (V. 1815).20

Since he is dead, however, he no longer has to "take it for the beste," but he is not simply indifferent to the world's woes; his disgust with earthly concerns is vehement and, from a worldly perspective, rather cruel as he laughs at the grief experienced by the mourners at his own funeral:

. . . [he] fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste,
And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste. . . . (V. 1816–24)

Troilus's suggestion to us, the narrator says, is that we give our hearts entirely to heaven itself, and this love of heaven is the final category of love in *Troilus and Criseyde*; it precludes all the other forms of love that the poem has presented thus far.\(^{21}\) The narrator continues to speak from this new perspective, condemning Troilus's courtly love, the virtue and pleasure it afforded him, and all the gifts of inconstant Fortune:\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\)John M. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition: A Reexamination of Narrative and Thematic Contexts* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972) 155. As Steadman notes, "The contemptus mundi expressed in the *fyn* stanza is directed not only toward earthly love and lust, but toward the entire complex of worldly goods and earthly felicity."

\(^{22}\)I disagree with Peter Dronke, who, in "The Conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medium Ævum* 33 (1964): 48–49, maintains that to see Troilus's death at the hands of Achilles as the antecedent for "Swich fyn" is to read Boccaccio, not Chaucer. Dronke astutely notes that Chaucer's interpolation of the stanzas describing Troilus's
Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
Swich fyn hath his estat real above!
Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse! (V. 1828–32)

Even the love that cements the physical world is rejected because the earth, for all its harmony, is only a very imperfect copy of the perfect unity of God and is not worth celebrating. The narrator compares the world's transitoriness to the brief life of flowers, recalling and condemning the image of Troilus and Criseyde embracing like the woodbine and the tree; he counsels young lovers, whose love grows within them as organically as they grow themselves, to shun the changing world entirely and offer their hearts to God instead:

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with youre age,
Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,

22(cont'd) ascent to the spheres between the stanzas based on VIII. 27 and VIII. 28 of Il Filostrato makes the knight's arrival at his celestial vantage point the logical referent for "Swich fyn," but while I concede that Troilus's "noblesse" and "grete worthynesse" may be rewarded by his placement at the eighth sphere, his pleasure, royal status and the "false worldes brotelnesse" can have little to do with his journey after death. Even Dronke recognizes that the "Swich fyn" stanza cannot be entirely positive in tone despite its location: "Yet while these lines insist that Troilus's end is triumphant, they cannot help recalling that in another sense all that Troilus was, all that he had and all that he desired, came to nothing" (48). I believe that this "other sense" is the only sense in which we can read the stanza, given the parallels it makes between Troilus's love, nobility and worthiness on the one hand and his pleasure, high estate and the world's falseness on the other.
Finally, the narrator dismisses the pagan gods of the poem and their works with scorn, and Cupid and Venus, though they are not named, must be included: "Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaille / Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!" (V. 1852-53). The alternative to loving the things of the world is, of course, to love Christ who will not and cannot fail to love us back: "And syn he best to love is, and most meke, / What nedeth Feynede loves for to seke?" (V. 1847-48). The narrator finishes the poem with his own prayer to Christ, blatantly contradicting his initial stance of the fearful and unworthy mortal that serves the "God of Loves servantz." Here we see the final and rather shockingly abrupt shift of viewpoint.

Of all the shifts in the poem, this is the one most difficult to bring into harmonious relationship with the rest of the work, for it denies completely the value of everything that we have seen thus far and does so in a very few stanzas. In size, it is insignificant against the thousands of lines that precede it, but its content is so surprising and belongs to so authoritative a voice that it demands special consideration. And indeed, this one disparity has elicited so much critical comment that it has earned the designation of the "epilogue" or "palinode" problem. I will take time now to examine the critical work that deals with the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, for in coming to terms with the conclusion, critics have proposed a variety of meanings for the work as a whole. Although these critics have isolated a number of anomalies and inconsistencies in the poem's ending, I will not consider all of the interesting problems that they pose; I will instead focus on the thematic discrepancy between eternal love in the "epilogue" and the various forms of worldly love evident in the rest of the poem.
Commentary on this issue can be roughly divided into two types, that which agrees that a discrepancy exists and that which maintains that this discordance is merely apparent and that the poem is unified. C. S. Lewis's work on *Troilus and Criseyde* belongs to the first category. He believes the ending of the poem to be a true palinode, and is apparently comfortable with the idea that the poet retracts his work as it is coming to a close:

The Chaplain's palinode does not stand alone. In the last stanzas of the book of Troilus, in the harsher recantation that closes the life and work of Chaucer as a whole, in the noble close of Malory, it is the same.

We hear the bell clang; and the children, suddenly hushed and grave, and a little frightened, troop back to their master.\(^{23}\)

Walter Clyde Curry is not so complacent; he finds the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* particularly unfortunate, but in the end he does not feel it necessary to view the closing stanzas as part of the poem:

What follows in the Epilog to the completed drama . . . is dramatically a sorry performance. . . . Here in the Epilog the poet, without having given the slightest hint of warning, suddenly denies and contradicts everything that has gone before in the poem. . . . Fortunately, however, the Epilog is not a part of the whole and is detachable at will, and one need not of necessity consider it at all in an interpretation of the drama.\(^{24}\)

According to Joseph E. Gallagher, the ending is so much at variance with the rest of

\(^{23}\)Lewis, *Allegory of Love* 43.

the poem that despite the "epilogue's" piousness, Chaucer is right to revoke the whole work in the retraction to the *Canterbury Tales*:

At the end he finally chooses the higher good, but the choice is different from the one which he has been making for over eight thousand lines. Those lines choose worldly love, and Chaucer rejects them in the *Retraction* because of that choice.25

For a great many critics, however, the thought that Chaucer sacrificed the integrity of his poem for the sake of moralizing is unacceptable. E. Talbot Donaldson, for example, objects to the term "epilogue," arguing that it "implies that this passage was tacked on to the poem after the poet had really finished his work. . . ."26 In a variety of ways, Donaldson and other commentators who agree with him seek to reconcile the ending with the rest of the poem. Although Stephen Medcalf feels that ". . . the switch about from an immersion in the present time to Troilus' overview after death [is] too sudden," he sees "little or no inconsistency" in the shift from secular to eternal love, saying that, while worldly love is at fault because it is mutable, all love is a manifestation of God.27 Other critics see a continuity between a Boethian criticism of the transitoriness of earthly love that they maintain is present from the poem's beginning and the final "Swich fyn" stanza.28 Still other scholars take

21Gallagher 48.  
23Medcalf 298, 300.  
24See, for example, Conlee 36; Steadman 154–56; P. M. Kean, "Chaucer's Dealings with a Stanza of *Il Filostrato* and the Epilogue of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medium Aevum* 33 (1964): 46; and Peter Christmas, "*Troilus and Criseyde*: The Problems of Love and Necessity," *Chaucer Review* 9 (1975): 283–96. Robertson in *Preface to Chaucer* 501 casts as scornful an eye on the love of Troilus for Criseyde as Troilus does himself from the eighth sphere:
a different approach, seeing in Troilus's constant love the virtue that not only earns him the reward of Dante's eighth sphere, but also bridges the apparent gap between the mutable love of the world and the eternal love of God; as Elizabeth D. Kirk puts it, "... God loves not as Criseyde loved Troilus but as Troilus loved Criseyde."

There are, however, fundamental difficulties with these bids to reconcile the poem with its conclusion. Medcalf's view that God's love subsumes all other forms of love is too simple a solution. Medcalf divides the experience of worldly love into two parts, a happy and a miserable: love is happy only insofar as it reflects the constancy of the divine, but it is miserable in its mutability. It follows, therefore, that any happiness in earthly love is merely illusory since by its transitory nature secular love cannot reflect divine immutability. Thus, Medcalf supports the narrator's exhortation against "feynede loves" but does not explain the great celebration of this illusion's inherent worth in the larger part of the poem; even when Fortune removes her favour from Troilus, the lengthy and sympathetic portrayal of his misery attests to

\[\text{(cont'd)}\] . . . [Troilus's] laughter is the ironic laughter with which Chaucer depicts Troilus' "wo" from the beginning, a laughter which he, and Troilus from his celestial vantage point, would bestow on all those who take a sentimental attitude toward such love as that between Troilus and Criseyde.


the value of what he has lost.\textsuperscript{11} The narrator's higher perspective is one that denies the world, not one that encompasses it.

A failure to recognize the praise of worldly love evident both in the joy at its inception and in the heaviness at its loss is also the problem with criticism that imposes a Boethian framework on the entire poem. Richard Waswo correctly notes that while \textit{contemptus mundi} is explicit in the ending, it is nowhere so in the rest of the poem;\textsuperscript{12} again and again the value of the things of this world, however transitory, is stressed. And the narrator's scornful "Swich fyn" and "Lo here" stanzas are not a true transcendence of the world. Far from coming to the blissful recognition that the physical world is meaningless in the larger scheme of things, the narrator clearly demonstrates the world's importance by his contemptuous and vigorous denial; something truly insignificant would not be worth such attention.

But critics who argue for a unity in the poem built on the similarity between Troilus's faithful love and the divine constancy of God also ultimately fall short of a satisfying explanation because they cannot account for every aspect of Troilus's character. In their eagerness to make Troilus's journey to the eighth sphere an apotheosis, they forget his disturbing offer to pander for Criseyde's uncle in return for what this king's son vehemently denies is the same service. In fact, none of the critics who see a thematically unified \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} can bring into account its myriad of shifting perspectives and attitudes. The narrator's advice to young lovers in

\textsuperscript{11}Jordan in "The Narrator in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}," \textit{English Literary History} 25 (1958): 248 notes that the narrator does not interrupt his narrative in Book V as much as he does earlier. Viewing Troilus's sorrow is an intense experience because the reader is "unable to withdraw periodically to the narrator's level of perception."

the ending is still a sudden change of viewpoint for a man who earlier would have
sold his soul for a night of sensual pleasure; the falseness of the world is not
apparent in the initial and elaborate establishment of Cupid's cult; Troilus is not
always an exemplary knight.

_Troilus and Criseyde_ is a poem too disjunctive to allow a thorough reading
unified by philosophical and theological models of love. Recognizing this, some critics
have sought to resolve the poem's inconsistencies by assigning them to the one obvious
authority figure—the storyteller—who after all, provides in direct commentary much of
the poem's variance. Giving responsibility for this plurality of perspectives to the
narrator can engender problems of its own as I shall point out, but it recognizes that
the narrator and his commentary are crucial to an understanding of the poem; his
voice is the frame that surrounds the story and gives it an external point of
reference, and it speaks to us directly as no other voice does. Thus, any
disjointedness in the teller's assessment of his tale must be accounted for if we are to
come to terms with love in _Troilus and Criseyde._

33Jordan, "Narrator" 244-45.
Of the many attitudes toward love articulated in *Troilus and Criseyde*, some are made explicit through the words and actions of the main characters of the story, but all are voiced by the narrator. In the opening, he is the servant of those who toil in the courtly service of the god of Love, deferent and solemn in his undertaking to tell of Troilus's unhappy affair and conscious of the gravity of his role as retainer to the acolytes of this high lord. It is the narrator who allows us to see Cupid and his works, showing us the god as he looks "rowe/ Right for despit" (I. 206-07), as he strikes Troilus quickly and thoroughly, and as he lives in the eyes of Criseyde whose look leaves Troilus "thorugh-shoten and thorugh-darted" (I. 325). The narrator also stresses several times the ennobling effect the service of Love has on Troilus.

But even when the narrator is clearly presenting a universe governed by the courtly cult of Love, his voice is not always consistent; he loses the respectful intonation of his initial praise of Love and lovers when he describes Cupid's ability to catch his thrall-like subjects: "And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle" (I. 210). This irreverence continues when he compares the high-born Troilus to an errant horse brought into line by its master's whip:

As proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe
Out of the weye, so pryketh hym his corn,
Til he a lasshe have of the longe whippe—

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34 Jordan in "Narrator" 253 notes that the views held by the narrator change throughout the poem: "Each appearance of the narrator effects not only a rhetorical readjustment but also a shift in perspective...."

Than thynketh he, "Though I praunce al byforn
First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe
I moot endure, and with my feres drawe. . . ." (I. 218–24)

This rustic language does not seem too far removed from that which the narrator uses when he gleefully calls for more thorns to prick Criseyde, when he compares the lovers to a hawk and its prey, and when he faults himself for not having sold his soul for even the "leeste" of their sensual joys.

Yet the narrator can also with a Christian piety celebrate the love that binds creation, embracing along with it both the courtly and carnal aspects of the pagan Venus. His heart begins to bleed when he vehemently blames Fortune for Troilus's second sorrow (IV. 12), forgetting entirely his service to a once almighty God of Love; later, he even forgets his sympathy with both Troilus's weal and woe and the joyful harmony of creation, however seasonal, as he advises young lovers not to pray devoutly to Love for themselves and other lovers, but to turn their hearts from the world completely and give them instead to Christ. It is little wonder that Donaldson characterizes the narrator as fraught with an inner turmoil that leads to a poetic "nervous breakdown."36

Donaldson's approach to understanding this surprisingly complex persona is, however, only one of several approaches proposed by critics increasingly interested in

the problem. Some choose to see a mentally sound narrator and ascribe his inconsistencies instead to artistic incompetence. Murray F. Markland, for example, uses the narrator's apparent lack of skill to unify the poem:

The performer goes off stage awkwardly. . . . And watching that fussy narrator fumbling to a close does not give to the story of illicit love a "high level of moral elevation," . . . which would be a rejection of the story, but a high level of comic humanity.37

But, illustrating perhaps that the difference between a fool and a wise man is negligible, other critics argue for a deliberately deceptive narrator; Richard Waswo goes as far as to suggest that this deviousness is a reflection of Chaucer's delicate position at court:

. . . We can call this cagey fellow Chaucer because we can find in the poet's historical situation as a bourgeois writing for royalty the motivation for all his disorienting poses, all the ways he presents and conceals himself in his narratives.38

Though not all critics would agree with Waswo's identification of the narrator with Chaucer himself throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, many, in the interest of reconciling the poem with its ending, are willing to assign the final stanzas to the poet. While Elizabeth Salter approaches the division of the narratorial voice into

38Waswo 12; see also Frost 38.
narrator and poet with some trepidation, she nevertheless suggests this as a solution to the "epilogue problem":

... if, indeed, the poem makes any use of narrator as distinct from author, it does so at the same time as it engages in a process of transformation. ... In *Troilus and Criseyde* (to imitate a famous aphorism of C. S. Lewis) the narrator died into reality, enabling the poet to speak out with a kind of freedom hitherto denied to him.  

Gallagher hears Chaucer's own voice at the end of the poem as well, but is uneasy about other inconsistencies in the narrator's voice: "At least from time to time Chaucer is probably creating a character for the narrator somehow different from whatever vision he may have of himself."  

Whether one chooses to see a narrator whose personality is, in some remarkable way, able to hold convincingly the myriad of viewpoints in the poem or whether one chooses to see the poet change places with the storyteller from time to time, one comes up against unavoidable difficulties. The danger of the views that propose a narrator who is insane, inept or cunningly deceptive is that, aside from leading to awkwardly complicated readings, they threaten to subordinate what the narrator says to who the narrator is; perhaps the very complexity of the narrator's stance should encourage us to shift our focus away from the question of his continuity.

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41 Gallagher 61.
as a character.\footnote{Anne Falke has said that "The narrator's very inconsistency produces an effect beyond the concept of character."} Waswo voices a similar opinion, saying that the narrator is "not consistently anything or anyone," and he recognizes that our prejudice as readers and critics for a "seamless" narrative is disadvantageous to the understanding of such intricate poems as *Troilus and Criseyde*:

... The unity of a complex narrative, like that of a culture or a person, must inevitably include contradictions. Once we liberate our notions of readerly competence and writerly merit from the straitjacket of seamlessness, we can recognize just how much the energies and fascination of our greatest literary works proceed not from their asserted or discovered coherence but, on the contrary, from the seamier side of their irreducible tensions, blatant contradiction, and precarious paradoxes.\footnote{But neither Waswo nor Falke goes on to realize the full implications of their observations. If the narrator is not consistently anything or anyone, he must be a collection of smaller fragments inconsistent with each other. Those who hear Chaucer's own voice at the conclusion and separate the voice here from that of the narrator of the rest of the poem anticipate this view, but I, for one, do not feel comfortable.}

\footnotetext[42]{Payne moves in this direction when he calls the storyteller a "magician, the half-clown of a narrator-scholar-poet." He recognizes the multiplicity of the narrator's stances and the fact that this "character" is no more than an illusion (224), but he still feels a need to identify this illusion sometimes with Chaucer speaking ironically (228–29).}

\footnotetext[43]{Anne Falke, "The Comic Function of the Narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Neophilologus* 68 (1984): 134–36.}

\footnotetext[44]{Waswo 8.}

deciding which words belong to the "real" Chaucer and which are those of a fictional storyteller.\textsuperscript{46} Jordan observes that "It is difficult in these days of relativist psychology to speak authoritatively of the 'real' anybody . . . ,"\textsuperscript{47} but he still maintains that it is the poet's voice that speaks at the poem's close. Jordan does, however, acknowledge that whatever identity we attribute to the narrator is not of crucial significance to an understanding of the poem,\textsuperscript{48} saying that we can, if we wish, simply call the final voice "serious . . . straight, [and] free of ironic humour and of ironic seriousness."\textsuperscript{49} Again, I am reluctant to pass judgement on either the authenticity or "seriousness" of any of the narrator's voices relative to any others. We cannot know with any certainty what Chaucer the poet really intended for his work. Perhaps the poem's closing moral voice is, for critics such as Jordan, Gallagher, Salter, and Ida L. Gordon, simply a more convincing mask than those that come before it; that this voice is concerned with the particular problems of communication through the written word, identifies itself as the author of the poem and mentions the historical poets John Gower and Ralph Strode is all merely circumstantial evidence that the "real" Geoffrey Chaucer is "stepping out from behind his mask."\textsuperscript{50} Chaucer's reality is lost to us in time. What we do have is the poem, and the teller that speaks to us in this poem speaks with many voices.

\textsuperscript{46}H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "The Art of Impersonation: A General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," \textit{PMLA} 95 (1980): 214. Although he is speaking of work done on the Canterbury Tales, Leicester's words are appropriate also to studies of \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}: "Different critics find the poet in different passages of the same tale. . . ." Lawton sees the final voice as appropriate to the sad ending of the story; he finds no need to attach this voice to Chaucer (82). However, he does ascribe the narratorial voice in other parts of the poem to a "fictionalized Chaucer–persona" (86).

\textsuperscript{47}Jordan, \textit{Shape of Creation} 103.

\textsuperscript{48}Jordan, \textit{Shape of Creation} 67. Earlier, though, Jordan assigns the final stanzas to Chaucer without qualification; see "Narrator" 239.

\textsuperscript{49}Jordan, \textit{Shape of Creation} 104–05.

\textsuperscript{50}Jordan, \textit{Shape of Creation} 103.
In an important study, Donaldson separated the first-person narrator of the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* into three personas, Chaucer the pilgrim, Chaucer the man and Chaucer the poet, each in dynamic interplay with the other two.\(^{51}\) I have already pointed out some of the problems associated with attaching historical personages to the voices of a narrator, but Donaldson seems to have cleared the way for curing the "insanity" of the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*; this victim of an apparently acute case of multiple personality can be relieved, in a manner of speaking, by granting independence to each of his facets. H. Marshall Leicester is one critic who has taken advantage of the opportunity afforded by Donaldson's work. He observes that the experience of a voice speaking to us as we read is purely a creation of language and its grammar, and that the fact that a text is nothing more than a text necessarily means that there is no living person behind the voice we hear.\(^{52}\) He goes on to apply these observations to the *Canterbury Tales*, developing a way of reading the work that demonstrates how first-person language creates a sense of character and distinguishing this reading from that which assumes a fully developed character existing behind and prior to the utterances on the page:

..."voiceness" is a property of any text, and it is therefore theoretically possible to read any text in a way that elicits its particular voice, its individual first person. Such a reading would, for example, try to attend consistently to the "I" of the text, expressed or implied, and would make the referential aspects of the discourse functions of the "I." To put it another way, a voice-oriented reading would treat the second and third persons of a discourse (respectively, the audience and the world), expressed


\(^{52}\)Leicester 217.
or implied, primarily as indications of what the speaker maintains about audience and world and would examine the way these elements are reflexively constituted as evidence of the speaker's character.³³

For Leicester, the tale tells its teller. However, I must concur with Barbara Nolan in her assessment that Leicester, in the end, places too much emphasis on establishing the personality of first-person voices;⁴ nevertheless, I feel that in allowing us to see the speaker as a function of the text, Leicester has opened the way for identifying a given voice not with some imagined entity (not even the historical Geoffrey Chaucer) existing outside the text but simply with what the voice says.

Nolan herself identifies three voices in the General Prologue, clerkly, pilgrim and host, by isolating the ideology and rhetorical strategy characteristic of each one. She sees these voices as the sides of an argument on truth and the ability of fiction to convey truth; this argument is played out as the Canterbury Tales unfolds.⁵⁵ In separating voice from character, Nolan frees herself (and us) from the sometimes tortuous necessity of forcing the various poses of the narrator into a psychologically consistant personality. Her approach and those like it are relatively new to Chaucer studies, but the concept of multiple voicing in works of narrative fiction has existed for decades. M. M. Bakhtin, for example, has identified what he calls "heteroglossia" as a fundamental characteristic of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically

³³Leicester 217.
⁵⁵Nolan 155.
organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphasis)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. 44

This multiplicity of language and voices need not, according to Bakhtin, be represented by an exactly corresponding multiplicity of characters and speakers; he demonstrates that within the speech of a given persona shifts in language can happen. Such occurrences he calls "hybrid constructions":

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems. 57

It is just such a "hybrid construction" that Nolan sees operating in the General Prologue, signalled by the word "bifil" and marking the boundary between clerky voice and pilgrim voice; David Lawton recognizes "hybrid constructions" as characteristic


57Bakhtin 304.
of Chaucer's work.\textsuperscript{58}

However, while Bakhtin acknowledges that a narrator need not speak with a consistent voice, he postulates the existence of an absolute authorial voice belonging to the "real" author. This voice can appear as the words of another character or simply exist on a plane beyond the text itself, sensed by us in some intuitive manner.\textsuperscript{59} Nolan seems to agree with this notion, for she decides that despite the variety of voices and perspectives in the \textit{Canterbury Tales}, the Parson's are privileged and his tale alone among all the others "will probe the true causes of things directly. . . ."\textsuperscript{60} Coming to such a conclusion is not unlike hearing Chaucer's own "serious" voice at the end of \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, and once one accepts the notion that a text can contain an array of voices created by the language of the text itself, the concept of an authorial voice that unambiguously represents the author's actual speaking voice becomes problematical.

Stephen M. Ross, in an article that examines voicing in William Faulkner's \textit{As I Lay Dying}, warns of the dangers inherent in identifying any voice with the author of the text it appears in:

\begin{quote}
\ldots by trying to straddle the gap between author as person and text as discourse, the use of "voice" to identify an author or implied author skirts the issues that the very concept of "author" raises. It confuses all too easily "creator" with "speaker"; such a definition of "voice" tries to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58}Nolan 159; Lawton 3–4.
\textsuperscript{59}Bakhtin 313–15.
\textsuperscript{60}Nolan 163; I should note, however, that Nolan at times expresses some caution in attributing absolute authority to the voices that close the \textit{Canterbury Tales}: "\ldots the Parson's Tale and the Retraction offer images of finality and closure that \textit{may} bring the Canterbury fictions to an end . . . ." (158).
explain discourse grounded in a represented world by turning it into discourse grounded outside the represented world. . . . the author, like the narrator, is constituted by mimetic voice, and the paradox of fictional representation remains unresolved.61

Ross's notion of voice is one I find particularly useful for the analysis of love in *Troilus and Criseyde*, for it allows every voice in the text to exist on an equal footing with every other, and it supports my reluctance to ascribe the concluding voice to Chaucer.

I do not intend to make a thorough analysis of voicing in *Troilus and Criseyde*, nor do I propose to investigate Chaucer's exploration of language and the expression of truth through language in the poem as Nolan has so admirably done for the *Canterbury Tales* (though *Troilus and Criseyde* would be fertile ground for either investigation). For me, the consideration of voice analysis presents a unique opportunity to come to terms with the theme of love in the poem. Once we can divorce the narrator's various changes of viewpoint from the notion of character and once we can attach these smaller fragments to the attitudes they convey rather than to personalities, we are free to consider the viewpoints themselves and assess their impact on our reading of the poem.

61Stephen M. Ross, "'Voice' in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*," *PMLA* 94 (1979): 305. See also Lawton xiv; he points out that the writer is "subsumed by fiction."
What significant conclusions can we draw after we deny the narrator a foundation in character and snip what is left into pieces of attitude bereft of any underlying personality? I agree that at first glance the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* that I have proposed may seem to be little more than a sorry collection of contradictory opinions. But this motley collection has two features that make it very significant indeed: its attitudes towards love mirror those found in the story itself, and together, the voices uttering these views are cast in the role of storyteller, the most authoritative role in the poem.

The narrator’s tone of voice obviously changes as his story progresses, but more importantly, it changes to suit the part of the story that is immediately at hand. So despite the distance the narrator puts between himself and his material when he claims to be merely a servant of the servants of Love, the separate voices he is composed of are so close in tone and sentiment to those of his characters that, as a whole, he has a much closer affinity to his tale than Boccaccio’s narrator has to the story that is partly meant to reflect his own sorrow in love.

When the narrator opens *Troilus and Criseyde* and describes a world governed by the God of Love, his tone is self-effacing; he characterizes himself as "unlikely," a mere "sorwful instrument." His seriousness in invoking Tisiphone, his reverence in describing the joys and pain associated with the service of Love, his role in that service, however humble, and his use of the language of Christianity reflect the gravity, elevation and hierarchical nature of courtly love. The narrator’s voice here helps to create an image of the universe in which love well-practised and well-placed is the highest good anyone can aspire to, but it also foreshadows Troilus’s humble
supplication to Love once the god’s arrows have pierced him:

And to the God of Love thus seyde he
With pitous vois, "O lord, now youres is
My spirit, which that oughte youres be.
Yow thanke I, lord, that han me brought to this.
But whethir goddesse or womman, iwis,
She be, I not, which that ye do me serve;
But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve.

"Ye stonden in hir eighen myghtily,
As in a place unto youre vertu digne;
Wherfore, lord, if my service or I
May liken yow, so beth to me benigne;
For myn estat roial I here resigne
Into hire hond, and with ful humble chere
Bicome hir man, as to my lady dere." (I. 421-34)

Conversely, the voice that calls for more thorns to prick Criseyde, admiringly characterizes Love's power to subjugate those who mock him as the plucking of proud peacocks and compares Troilus to a fat farm horse is clearly distinct from the first voice. There is no gentility in this second voice, and its churlish qualities, "wink and nudge" broadness and unpretentiousness help it to realize the sentiments it expresses—physical pleasure at all costs, even the cost of one’s soul. This voice has the same jaunty irreverence as Troilus's when he expresses the scorn for lovers that makes him Cupid's target in the first place: "... 'God woot, she slepeth softe / For love of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte!" (I. 195-96). And Pandarus, who
most often uses this unrefined tone of voice, is the first to utter the sexual puns that the narrator seems fond of as Troilus and Criseyde near the consummation of their affair.

When speaking of the love that binds the world, the narrator's tone is eulogistic and lofty, calling to mind the praise of God implicit in the harmony of His creation and echoing especially Troilus's voice as he praises cosmic love. Until the actual invocation of Venus as a poetic muse at line 39, the proem to Book III could as well have been spoken by a happily amorous Troilus; this voice is clearly one that is at peace with love and the rest of the world. The parallel between the voice of the proem and that of Troilus's second canticus becomes even stronger when one considers their structural symmetry; each stands as one of two pillars framing the climactic scene of consummation.

When Fortune's cruelty is the topic, the narrator weeps and bleeds along with his protagonist, and the teller's voice sometimes elicits as much sympathy for the lost love as Troilus's does: "And now my penne, alas, with which I write, / Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite" (IV. 13–14). The narrator's contempt for Fortune's fickleness is also as spiteful and despairing as Troilus's:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle
And kan to fooles so hire song entune
That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune!
And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,
Than laugheth she, and maketh hym the mowe. (IV. 1–7)
This voice, by railing impotently against Fortune's changeability, sorrowing over the worldly good that has been lost and fatalistically emphasizing the irrevocability of that loss ("But Troilus, now far-wel al thi joie, / For shaltow nevere sen hire eft in Troie!"), echoes Troilus's experience and underscores the tragic powerlessness that this perspective offers.

At the poem's close, the narrator's disgust with the world parallels the scorn he tells us Troilus expresses. The formal repetition of "Swich fyn" and "Lo here" helps to create the didacticism of this moral viewpoint. The voice here must sound authoritative because this is the one perspective that cannot allow any others; from this vantage point, there is no love other than that of God—all others are "feynede." The very integrity of the viewpoint calls for a tone of voice that gives the impression that what it says is the final truth. Consequently, the narrator speaks as though he, too, has stood at the eighth sphere and looked from this perspective at "This litel spot of erthe that with the se / Embraced is . . ." (V. 1815–16). His final truth and the scorn with which he expresses it are Troilus's, and they are the direct result of Troilus's transcendent perspective after his death.

Because the narrator's voices clearly embody the attitudes they express, each is allied with the other voices of the poem that express the same sentiments and opinions. Bestul and Huppé have both noted the peculiar emotional affinity the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* has for the matter of his story. For Huppé, this affinity is an intimate relationship between the storyteller and his tale, almost as close as if the teller were within his own story: ". . . indeed it cannot escape notice how involved the narrator is with his character; he shares Pandarus's joy in the manipulation of events; he admires and feels for Troilus, and is attracted to
For Bestul, the connection exists between the narrator's responses to his story and those that Chaucer meant to elicit from the poem's readers: "The narrator displays the complex of feelings the audience is expected to have and responds as it seems Chaucer intends for his audience to respond." Both critics conclude that this identification of teller and tale makes the secular world of Troilus and Criseyde convincing so that the final turn-around can effectively demonstrate how deceptive and tempting temporal reality truly is, but there is no need to privilege the last voice; it, too, is mirroring the part of the story it comments on.

Since the narrator reflects the diverse perspectives of his own story so well, his changes, in a sense, are the story, and he is in the curious position of framing the tale and being central to it at the same time. As such, he cannot in the usual way give us the final word on how we are to view love in the poem, but his diversity of perspectives, taken together, can point the way to an ultimate meaning, for although the voices of the narrator are multifold, they have one obvious connection to each other: they are all assigned to the role of storyteller. Together they belong to a fictional construct that, in a conventional reading of the poem, should have the authority to indicate the significance of the story—he is, after all, the one who tells it.

The authoritative role these voices have been cast in is, I believe, crucial to the meaning of love in the poem; each voice (and, therefore, the viewpoint it gives

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63 Huppe 183; see also Lawton 79–82; Barney, "Troilus Bound" 446; Manzalaoui 155–56; and Payne 231.
64 Bestul 369.
65 Huppe 192, 194; Bestul 369.
66 Jordan, "Narrator" 249.
67 Gordon goes as far as to suggest that we should not even "separate what the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde says in his own person from what he says in his narrative . . . ." (93).
voice to) shares equally in the authority of the larger whole to which it belongs. However, by itself the role that the voices fill cannot be the solution to the meaning behind the diverse and contradictory perspectives the poem offers. While the narrator’s lack of involvement with love paradoxically allows him both to distance himself from his story to such an extent that he can adopt a variety of perspectives, and to get so close to his material that he almost becomes a part of it, this remoteness also undermines any authority he and each of his voices might have to elucidate the meaning of his own story. Moreover, the narrator deliberately confuses the very notion of a textual authority by often confessing his inability to express his material adequately. Nevertheless, this peculiar storyteller can tell us much about the meaning of love in the poem both despite and because of his unreliability.

As the ostensible creator of Troilus’s and Criseyde’s tale of doomed love, the narrator spends much of his time making us aware that we cannot hold him accountable for the story he is offering to us. Because his tale is about love, he frequently excuses its apparent inadequacy by admitting that he is not a lover himself:

\[\ldots\text{though I speeke of love unfelyngly,}\]
\[\text{No wondre is, for it nothyng of newe is;}\]
\[\text{A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis. (II. 19–21)}\]

In fact, as we have seen, he can speak very "felyngly" of various kinds of love, and his self-professed ineptitude is a deliberate deception that is so obvious a ruse that it calls attention to itself and brings the issue of authority to the forefront as we read.

But the narrator does not stop at declaring his own incompetency. He further avoids responsibility for his story by alluding frequently to an "auctor" whose work he
is apparently faithfully reproducing. At first, this explicit mention of the story's source and the narrator's translation of it may seem a convenient answer to the problem of authority since we could, if we took him at his word, view the narrator as more a scribe or translator than a storyteller. But we cannot take the allusions to an ultimate "auctor" at face value, either, however tempting it might be to situate the locus of authority outside the poem altogether. For one thing, anyone aware of *Il Filostrato* would recognize it as the poem's primary source and would therefore be acutely aware of the great number of changes its "translator" made while rendering the work.\(^67\) And furthermore, although the narrator cites several sources, he never mentions Boccaccio, even though if anyone could be the narrator's "auctor," it would be the Italian poet. Instead, the storyteller mentions the mysterious "Lollius," whose Latin name sounds impressive but whose apparent presence behind the poem is a deliberate deception. In the very first allusion to Lollius, the narrator attributes Troilus's initial song to the alleged Latin author when in fact it is a close rendering of Petrarch's Sonnet 88.\(^68\) What this blatant misdirection underlines is that there is no "auctor" beyond the narrator himself; as Frost notes, "... his *Troilus and Criseyde* is the version we get, not that of 'Lollius.'"\(^69\)

Even when the narrator cites credible sources at appropriate points in the text, they are tangential to his material; Homer, Dares and Dictys appear in Book I as a mere footnote to the love story:

> But the Troian gestes, as they felle,
> In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,

\(^{67}\)See Meech for a particularly thorough examination of Chaucer's treatment of *Il Filostrato.*

\(^{68}\)Huppé 187.

\(^{69}\)Frost 34.
Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write. (I. 145-47)

When the narrator does this again at V. 1771 (citing only Dares this time), Waswo comments, "We are here referred to texts that . . . [the narrator] acknowledges to be irrelevant to his subject, while he coyly withholds from us the relevant ones. . . ."  

Again and again we are faced with the problem of locating the authority of the poem, as the only apparent authority figure continually denies his own responsibility and places it instead on outside sources that are obviously inadequate.

Confronting us with such fundamental literary issues is something that Chaucer appears to do in several of his works. Jesse M. Gellrich believes, for example, that Chaucer in his dream visions undermines the idea that "auctoritee" can be reliably found in and imitated from the received wisdom of "olde bokes":

To a significant extent, Chaucer's dream visions and Dante's *Commedia* demonstrate an alternative to one of the basic premises of the idea of the Book in the middle ages—its firm grounding in the Platonic and Augustinian concept of imitation. This premise is at work most obviously as one medieval reader of Scripture after another copies precedent *auctores* on the interpretation of a passage. . . . But in Chaucer and Dante the idea of copying or rewriting is displaced by a new kind of interpreting, one that no longer allows for the straightforward validation of meaning in an "old book," the sequence of events, or the voice of a speaker.  

Much the same could be said of *Troilus and Criseyde*, whose narrator deliberately

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70Waswo 18.
subverts the traditional notions of textual authority.\textsuperscript{72}

As readers of the poem eager to find out what it all means, we may appear to be in an intolerable situation; the storyteller himself is certainly not the authority that we need, but neither are the enthusiastically endorsed but ultimately misleading "sources" of the poem. But despite this, Chaucer's work is not meaningless. The narrator's frequent allusions to sources that either do not exist or have little to do with the main thrust of the story make us aware that the source of this tale is really its teller, and we are forced to examine and re-examine his ability to shoulder the responsibility of making clear the story's meaning. Meanwhile, our awareness that the location of such authority is problematic and may not be taken for granted is heightened as we read.

Because the narrator is so visible throughout the poem, it is easy to notice his various attitudes towards love and hear the variety of voices he uses to express these views. The narrator's confessions of inadequacy serve only to emphasize the admirably skillful rendering his voices give of the different kinds of love. Theirs is a virtuoso performance that underscores their distinction from each other and highlights their role in expressing the poem's diverse perspectives on love. At the same time, the narrator's elaborate apologies for his lack of skill ask us to mistrust or at least be skeptical about the storyteller's ability to provide the meaning of his own story. Once we find that we must question the one authority figure in the poem, we are left to rely on our own resources; the absence of authority in either the text or its antecedents necessarily means that the responsibility for meaning lies instead with the

\textsuperscript{72}Lawton 77–79.
reader as the narrator even explicitly tells us from time to time:  

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For myne wordes, heere and every part,
I speke hem alle under correccioun
Of yow that felyng han in loves art,
And putte it al in youre discrecioun
To encresse or maken dymynucioun
Of my langage, and that I yow biseche. (III. 1331-36)
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When we do "putte it al in oure discrecioun," we find that we have a choice of viewpoints much like that offered by the fragmentary voices; it is finally up to us to decide which perspective is the one to privilege, for the voices themselves can't tell us. Their inability to stand as an absolute authority for the meaning of love throughout the poem is paradoxically what makes them able to point to the poem's ultimate message—their diversity is our diversity, and so they remind us that we must gather meaning ourselves from the multiform experiences of our lives.

It is true that despite the poem's many shifts of viewpoint, the act of reading in which we must engage in order to experience the text at all is a linear one; it necessarily puts the various viewpoints in an order that can imply a hierarchy in which the final view is a culmination of what comes before it. However, I feel that Chaucer has effectively undermined the sense of progression inherent in the linear medium in which he has chosen to work. I agree with Robert M. Jordan and Mahmoud Manzalaoui that the structure and character development of *Troilus and Criseyde* is inorganic, for the narrator's sudden shifts of attitude and many intrusions

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71Payne 222–23. But see also Payne 177; Nolan 162; Lawton 6; and Gellrich 27.
into the narrative invite us to see the underpinnings of what could easily have been an organic, cohesive story.\textsuperscript{74} But while Jordan feels that the conclusion of the poem is like the apex of a gothic cathedral, the point of "eternal stillness" that all the structure's parts and lines of perspective arrive at,\textsuperscript{75} I believe the poem's end makes a poor pinnacle. It is dwarfed and ill-supported by its foundation; rather than resting securely upon its secular base, the concluding perspective denies the value of what is supposed to be holding it up. Whether or not Chaucer consciously chose to create a poem in which the final divine perspective does not truly transcend the previous worldly material and cannot, therefore, be the ultimate point at which all the others arrive, \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} nevertheless stands as such a work; its views on love are prolific, but not even the love of God is allowed an unambiguous triumph over the other kinds of love in the poem. The possibilities the poet offers in his work are all equally valid. Chaucer does not prescribe to us the way in which we ought to love; he describes instead the ways in which we do.

\textsuperscript{74} Jordan, \textit{Shape of Creation} 64–110; Manzalaoui 146–49.
\textsuperscript{75} Jordan 108.
CONCLUSION

Within Boccaccio's story of Troilo and Criseida, Chaucer may have seen an opportunity to present to his readers a variety of ways to look at love. In the English poet's rendering of Boccaccio's tale, Troilus's noble birth and bearing and Criseyde's cautiousness in accepting his advances allow Chaucer to show us their love as courtly—secular, but nevertheless elevated above mundane concerns. The physical climax that even this high-born affair aspires to, however, opens the way for the poet to emphasize love's sexual side and its baser motives, while also allowing a more transcendent view that sees even sexual intercourse as part of the larger scheme of creation; whether humans sacrifice their happiness to a demanding god of Love or, without giving a thought to higher matters, fornicate happily whenever the opportunity arises, they can nevertheless participate in God's fecund universe. Criseyde's infidelity, however, allows Chaucer to look at her affair with Troilus from another angle, one in which motives for love and universal patterns of relationship lose their relevance, and individual tragedies of fortune hold sway. Troilus's death provides a final opportunity to leave the world completely and cast a critical backward glance.

Chaucer exploits the rich possibilities of his material in order to provide us with these many ways of looking at the same thing. He uses his narrator and our expectations of the narrator's authority in and responsibility for the story he tells as the catalysts that bring about an awareness of our own experience of love and our role in finding meaning in that experience. The narrator's frequent interruptions of his story call our attention to him, and we cannot help but notice the way he abruptly changes his attitudes towards his subject matter. As we become more and more aware of him, he increasingly confounds our attempts to see him as a
psychologically complete and consistent character. He turns our attention also to his apparent ineptitude at expressing his material competently, making us wonder just how we will find out the significance of the story he tells. He leads us to believe we can find the story’s meaning in its sources until we realize that he is sending us to look in all the wrong places. When we return again to the narrator, as we must do since he leaves us nowhere else to go, we are forced to confront his fragmented nature and to see in it the diversity of perspectives his various voices give life to. We are left, finally, with this collection of voices and viewpoints and, to make sense of it all, our own judgement.

Chaucer’s narrator makes us realize that textual authority and meaning are not straightforward matters. But the narrator’s purpose is not solely to make us less complacent about where we can look for the meaning of love in the poem. Because each narratorial voice depicts its particular attitude towards love so convincingly, the narrator as a whole also shows us the abundance of possible perspectives in the flawed but undeniably rich human world. The prominent but unauthoritative and inconsistent teller of *Troilus and Criseyde* presents us with what we confront every day—the multiform, sometimes confusing but always fascinating experience of reality. Rather than making one kind of love the dominant kind and leaving us when we turn from the poem with a single view of an experience that we can otherwise see many facets of, Chaucer denies us nothing. He gives us the world and even a rejection of it. In the end, it is up to us to decide which view or views of love take precedence.

Charles Muscatine recognizes the value of such a comprehensive and non-judgemental view of the human condition:
To dwell at length on the attractiveness of earthly love and then to repudiate all in a palinode is neither philosophical nor artistic. But to present secular idealism as a beautiful but flawed thing, and to present practical wisdom as an admirable but incomplete thing, to present them, indeed, as antithetical and incongruous to each other, is by implication to present a third view, higher and more complete than either.\footnote{Charles Muscatine, \textit{Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning} (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964) 132.}

Love in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} is also presented from such a viewpoint, and I believe that we do the poem an injustice when we try to reconcile or put into a hierarchy the many kinds of love we see from there. It is the diversity of love that is the poem's strength, for it both more accurately reflects our experience than a less ambiguous piece of fiction could and exists as a testimony to the richness of human love. What makes this holistic view possible is the peculiar narrator of the poem whose disparate voices are the bright tones that comprise this comprehensive and beautiful whole; they echo our own experience, and speak to us, finally, of the bounty of our existence.
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