

THE FOOL'S TALE

by 45

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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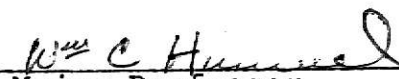
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THE PROLOGUE OF THE FOOL'S TALE

I nolde nat yow ywis with this offende,
But swich a wight I am I doe entende
To tellen trewely my aventure,
And tellen honestly its truwe nature.
Ye may nat this I knowe al bylyve,
But par ma fay I nolde no man dycyve.
The sonne han goon doun I knowe nat wher
But my good wyf my tolde hit was ner.
Thanne doun I sat to sene what werk ther was
And swich I saugh, hit nas a hopeles cas!
I swapte my hed and lay to slepe me doun,
Whan from the light of dremes world renoun
I saugh aproche a fatte personage,
Who semed short ek red and of gret age.
"Who be ye?" quod I, quod he, "This is my name,
Polonius, of gret Shakespare fame."
Throgh halwes ful of bokes he me ladde
Til comen to a chambre large we hadde.
I sat, and he upon a stage stod
And sone recche in this ilke mod
Aboute the stories twayne of povre Troilus.
But to my greve and ek distres tis thus,

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Thogh wys as alwey was, he spak thanne so,
Foryive hit me, I spek it to my wo,
I han foryat a dele of his speche,
And halvended, I gesse, of al he recche,
Nat forthy yif this lyketh yow ywis,
Al preisen gooth to hym, which justys ys;
By Calkas! This long ys right sodenly
And ye perchaunce wolt be wroth, and I
Afered be yow may with justys shende.
But, ech thing mot han a gynnyng and an ende,
So wolde I now this vois lay doun to slepe
And from this page to my tretys lepe.

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Heere endeth the Fool hys Prologe

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE TALE OF THE FOOL

Polonius thus seyde: "In tymes oold
Chaucer the maker al this storie told.
Hit was aboute fair Criseyde of Troye
And of hir sorwe soore and ek hir joie.
He tolden han of fierse Troilus,
And of his frend the noble Pandarus.

40

The hero of his tale Ector was,
Hyt ys ne cause to stare, this ys the cas,
For sikerly he han the grettest fame
Of eny man, I care nat his name.
But he so bisy was in werres stryf
That he ne tyme hadde, upon my lyf,
To taken part in this sad storie,
And forthy lost al chaunce for longe glorie.
Ye pinchen han the crab the grette bere,
Which in astrologye ys siker cleere
The tyme whan love ye knowe ys heighe on hye,
Hyt was swich tyme but yf bokes lye.
Thenne cupide with an arwe Troilus slawe,
And he gan waxen red as eny mawe.
He was in love and thenne al wrecchednesse
For he ne thenken coude on blessednesse;

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He was in love for sothe, and syke, and feynte,
 But mayde han noon, this was his smerte pleynte.
 In love he was but with ne oon he knewe,
 In love he was but han ne hope of rewe.

60

The housbonde of Criseyde, olde Pandarus,
 A baude he was and forthy cleped thus,
 At hoom he sat with hys deer wyf the trewe
 And ek the fair with fautes noon, or fewe.
 They sitten hoom and feer the huge rayn,
 Hyt was lik Noe and hys flood agayn.

Thenne at the dore lik thunder al at ones,
 A knock they heren and shoken to hire bones.
 Quod he "Oh herte, more dere thanne my lyf,
 Se who ther ys, but take with yow a knyf."

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Whan openen wyde she han the faste dore,
 Pore Troilus neigh drenched stod ysore,
 He wepte, criede "Mercy" and "a ha."
 "Why crydestow?" quod she, "and why 'a ha'?"
 "A ha for water han fulfild my throte,
 Mercy or elles I dye as in a mote."

Thanne han she routhe on his sore plight,
 And to hir stewe derk with but o light
 She wente and shewed hym hir bedde queynte,
 Whan sodainly he happed han to feynte.

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She was as fair as that I sayd biforn
 But strong as thilke Hercules toforn.

Sin she was looth to leve hym lyen ther
 She caste hym upon the bedde and beer.
 And as he slep, anonright tho hym mette
 How that a turtel, in tweyne plates shette,
 Tobresten han hys chest to rente hys herte.
 Thanne gan he waken and outhen slep to sterte,
 He axed hymselfe what mene han this dreame,
 And what semblaunce to the worldes reme.
 The turtel was of turteles far the beste...
 Allas noght wyte he, ne nought the leste.
 Thanne Africanus from the Galaxye
 Gan Troilus tellen, therwhyle in bedde he lye,
 "The turtel ys to turteles al beautee
 And Criseyde ys pereless magestee."
 Thus Troilus knewe who he mote woo
 For who to sigh, for who to crie "ah so."
 He gan to rave and dighte for to syken,
 And in hys botme gan every-deel to styken.
 Whan stynten han the rayn and sonne yshoon,
 He gan to thenk to se hir al aloon.
 He thonked hem and to hys brother sente,
 Deiphebus who hate werres rente
 And forthy hadde mo tyme thanne Ector hadde,
 So to this brother al hys hope he ladde.
 And axed hym to use hys curtesie
 And on the morwe call for companye.

90

100

This was to doon and that the morwe night.

Whan Troilus cam he feynt a soure plight,

110

"A wo," he seyde, "I hav a foul disese

And onliche compaignye wol doe me ese."

But as he lye in swich a narwe roun,

In trouthe hyt nas ne bigger thanne a tounbe,

And he was fatte, oon onliche at a tyme

Coude visite hym -- neighe was hys plannes prime.

Quod Pandarus to hys Criseyde dere,

"Sin that for Troilus lyf I mikel fere,

Vouche sauf hym, swete, a minut of your care,

And evene I wol se how that he fare."

120

Whan she aprochen han unto hys bed

He gan to mone "Mercy, I dye deed."

Criseyde axede hym in siker drede

Yf he was drenched or out of hys hede.

"Ye, ye, I drenched am" quod he,

"Lik as the sonne for love of the se

Ys drenched in the west, and I spek trewe,

Or as the foule is drenched in the stewe

For mannes love of mete, and mo I love."

In shorte wyse he swar by God above

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That al hys lyf mot be for hir plesaunce,

And al hys brede wol doe hir observaunce.

But wonderliche and ek to hys distresse

She seide hym nay, and seyde it was wodnesse.

Yf he mot dye he coude nat lyf sustene
 But for hys love she cared **h**ought a bene.
 She loughed "Pandarus ys ne cokewold,
 And I nyl make hym oon." She thus hym told.
 But Troilus wote wel of al swich love
 And he hir tolde so by heighe Jove:

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"I wite wommennes mote han hire game,
 Ples teche me, my owen swete dame."
 Thys mad hir passioun to bren lik fyre,
 "I care ne for your love a pissemyre!"
 Quod she, "Your hope by god ys al forslewe."
 Quod he, "Thys ys a straunge loves hewe."
 Quod he, "ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha,
 I understond thys game to an A."

Thenne gan he twiste hys propre fatte face
 To maken hyt fierse, and whan hyt was in place
 He gan to rore: "I wol han yow by fors"
 He seyð, "Yf that hyt liketh yow of cours."
 Quod she, "To al thy love I telle the Nay!
 This nil nat do, ther ys na mo to say."
 Thenne, theroute hys roum a vois hire heren -
 "Thys ys a grave message that I beren."

150

The vois was that of thilke Pompeus,
 The brother of that famous Tydeus,
 Hys fader was the grette Romulus,
 Hys hors ycleped was the olde Taurus.

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Hys speche he recche to Deiphobus

And thenne to Criseyde and Troilus:

"Nought but for that hir fader Calkas ys,

Or elles that Criseyde hys doughter ys,

She moot out gooth unto the Grekes hoost,

I wot tomorwe she wol be a goost."

Pandare up stod and shook hys manly bones

Thenne sat ayein and wepte for the nones.

Stout Troilus gan beet hys huge breste

And coughed longe and criede of al the beste.

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The wyf of Priamus, hys wyf fro Bath,

Of fayeres olde and truwe ye tolden hath.

Oon Robin Goodfelwe cam thenne to Troilus

And in hys ere he sat and recche thus:

"For shame, ye have I se a mannes berd,

Where ys your mannes hert? be ye aferd?"

Nay nay, thought Troilus of leonyn herte,

But I nil sterve, I nil han payne smerte.

Thenne Robin seyde, "Ye knowe the resoun for

That the Grekyssch hoost han nevere slayn Ector,

180

And ful ten yeres he sleeth hire companye?

Hys gret corage sheweth hire cowardye!

Whoso shal shew a strong and bold visage

Wol se how Grekyssch strengthe ys fals corage.

Who mordred han hire feyntyse wikked mightes

But hem that palen, ferful mys and wightes?

Why han hire slayn but men of low renoun,

Whan Eneas the bold ys nat in toun?

Ek Horaste hys frend hys gypon weres

Ne Greke hym slawe han in many werres.

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Criseyde ys ne love to yow ywis!

And yf she gooth ne thing to yow hyt ys!"

This speche gan t'abregge hys slogardye

And he gan thenken of corage hye.

This speche so on grette Troilus wroghte

To saven Criseyde was al hys thoughte.

"By Goddes love," quod he, "avoy distresse,

I am a worthy knight so God my blesse.

I wol affrayan Achilles and that anoon,

Thenne al the Grekissch hoost wol be fordoon.

200

Shal I chalange hym in wordes rewde?

With royne avaunt hym telle I han hym slewe?

Thanne wol he quappe for al undigne fere,

I seggen shal 'Cherl dye heere!'

Valour unwemmed shal taak for Troie vengeance!

But he may fight, this happen may perchaunce.

For hys honour what he may do who konne."

This thorough hys wit lik thonder-leyt yronne.

"I mot hym so chalange that he may fer

But hys honour ne comen nevere ner.

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Hyt mot be dide I knowe in privetee,

In swich manere as yeves suretee

That hys honour ys sauf. I knowe the weye!
 I wol hym finde wherso he hidde, and seye
 'Sire, I chalange yow to sleen me!'
 This chalange wol hys honour siker free.
 My chalange nouthe wol I thus hym bare,
 To drawe hys swerd and slough me yif he dare!"
 This Troilus dide and that sanz forther thought,
 Anoon-right hys sowle calme hevene sought.
 Thus endeth the storie of Troilus and hys wyf
 As tolde Chaucer, I swar upon hys lyf.

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סוף החלק הראשון¹

התחלת החלק השני²

Ne Chaucer ys, I knowe, Shakespare the make,
 But Chaucer Chaucer ys I siker take.
 Whan wroughte the gret Shakespare the Troian storie
 The message he chaunged thus in hys historie.
 Hys hero was Pandare for hys noblesse,
 Ek for hys curtesye and gentillesse.
 He wroot how that withinne the toun wel-stout
 Of Troie, yong Troilus eten han hys fruit,
 Hys hoom was ther. Hys herte was in the werre
 Ayen the Grekissch hoost, but noon he fere,
 Ne Diomedé, Ektor, ne Menelaus,
 Ne Achille, Arge, ne Papandraus.
 Troilus enbrouded was in grene and reed,
 Short was hys gowne, smale was hys mannes heed.
 He thenken was aboute the werre hote,
 Ek how he held hys lif noght at a grote
 Withoute honour. As swyth, thenne percen han
 An arwe sobre Troilus breste. "I can
 But dye," he thoughte, "Povre Troie, alas
 I dye for yow and that ys my solas."
 He wreste out the arwe long and kene,
 But whan he saugh the shape he seyde, "I wene
 This ys ne arwe playn, I wot hyt wel.
 Hyt ys fro cupid and nought fro fos yvel."

230

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Nat forthy, whyle in peyn he stod lik stoon,
He saugh a mayde, she nas but al aloon.

Pale he torned ek sik to hys stomak,
Hys eyen shette and al hys bones quak.

250

This mayde ycleped was Criseyde the faire,
Hir fader, the famous prechour with whyte heyre
Oold Calkas was, hyt nas but evene so,
Hyt Calkas was who woot al Troian wo.

Whan that the hevy Troilus fel in love
And mot be sik as seye goddes above,
He inly gan to thenken with shrewed insighte
Of al he mighte nat doe, and al he mighte.

Yf that he hir shulle taak in mariage,
But wedded blis he thought ys cruel servage.

260

"Paraunter," he seyde, "paraunter hyt ys nought nede
She wol be myn, hir herte and maydenhede
Withoute the foul sevice of an husbonde.
She mot to bedde anoon I understonde.

But yf perchaunce she nil to bedde ago,
I dradde to live, but dradde to dye also."
Troilus thoughte al aprehencioun,

"To be or nat that ys o questioun.

Yf hyt mo noble ys to hav but peyn,
Or fighte ayein the se of wo and geyn

270

Swete paas. To dye - to slepe - na more -
And by o slep to ende oure lif ful sore.

To slep, to dreame, but who may seye paraunter.

That I wol dreme, hyt coude ben a misaunter.

I may nat dreme, I konne by my fey,

I may but slepe, I may but slepe alwey!

That ys to sterve which ys by God forboden.

But I nil fere, I am with charme loden,

And she wol siker in swete swowne feynte,

I trowe I knowe how to make thys queynte."

280

But Troilus thanne gan waxen reed thenne pale,

Chaunginge hys huwe he stod til nighter-tale.

And on the morwe stil lik stoon he was,

He thoughte at ones, to tellen hir hys cas,

But sote swa he swar he neighe swelte.

Al syk he was, I fere nat goode he felte.

He coude ne com to a conclusioun,

He stod lik stoon in that condicioun

Foure dayes, til peple gan to talken

How that the bolde Troilus hyt semed han taaken

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Hys leve of al hys sensibilites.

"A shame hyt ys he loste hys facultes."

Whan Troilus hadde ysaugh the swete Criseyde,

She hadde hym ysaugh; he was hir gyde.

She loved hym as muchel as mighte be.

He had a mannes heed as she coude see,

Ek bowed legges, and heiry mannes armes,

He was fulfild with al the knightly charmes.

Thenne streyt she wente to hir uncle dere,

Pandarus, the prime of curtesye, "Here," 300
 She syde, and bete hir breste swole and sore,
 "I have but peyn I nevere hadde yore."
 Thenne Pandarus for a fisicien sente.
 "Nay nay," quod she, "that ys nat what I mente.
 For fro my eyen ariseth my distresse."
 "I wot now wel what ys youre pour siknesse.
 Ye mot but reste and this I knowe forsothe,
 This is the weye for eyen and herte bothe."
 "My uncle swete, I mot but seye hyt thus,
 The cause of al my peyn ys Troilus!" 310
 "I care nought thenne who hys fader ys
 Venjaunce wol we have, I trowe ywis!"
 "Nay uncle dere, he ys al my delit,
 Hyt ys for love, my foul derke plit."
 "He was my frend but siker todasshen hys joye
 I shal, and show this harme to al of Troie!"
 "Oh em what seistow! ples understonde,
 I love hym and crie but for hys honde."
 "Nyce," he seyde, "I spie a turtle dove.
 I thenk that yow, my nece, ben in love." 320
 Hire heren a knoken at this conclusioun.
 Pandarus seyde, "Yow mot sit here adown
 And I wol se who at the dore I fynde,
 I wol retourne, now yow mot wait bihynde."
 Whan Pandarus cam to the dore faste

He saugh hys frend with eyen doun ycaste.

Thenne Troilus seyde, "I have a hevye herte
Which wol, I knowe, fro al my peyn tosterte."

Answered Pandare, "A sermoun for to holde
I hav ne tyme, tomorwe perchaunce I wolde."

330

Then blyve, in steped Troilus and seyde ful softe,

"I may nought tellen, though yow ask me ofte."

Pandarus seyde, "Yow mot to hom agoon,
I bisy am and mot ben al aloon."

"I can, Pandare, reherce hir gracious name,
But that yow knowe, love ys ne jape ne game.

Wel thenne I wol yow telle and that anon,
I saugh Criseyde, my herte to hir ys gon."

Quod Pandarus, "Tee hee, these are tydinges
I knowe nat how to seye swich gode thinges."

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Pandarus to hys chaumbre Troilus ladde.

Whan Troilus spied Criseyde he was ful gladde,
But eek he was neigh dede, and ek was she.

Pandare loghed, and seyde "It nede nat be."

He asked Troilus yf he ne love Criseyde,
Troilus paled and gnawed hys thombe and seyde

In tonge lowe and fro hys throte, "Yis --
Traytour, I wol tohewe yow ywis."

Thenne seyde Pandarus, of al swich fere yshorn,
My dere Criseyde but wolde by yow ben baren

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"Pandare!" criede she "-- I love hym -- wel --"

"Yow bothe ben in love mo thanne somdel!

I wol yow tellen nouthe a thing o tweye
 How that yow shulde yow beren. This ys the weye:
 Siker yow bothe mot holden this love secree;
 And of yong thoughtes seye nought, this graunte me;
 Be ware of quereles withinne Troie,
 But inne, by Jove youre fo ne latte hav joie;
 Lewed peple ofte may yow tellen 'Fy!'
 Yow mot al heren, but lette, a stree, seye I!;
 Youre habit shulde shewe youre heighe kinrede,
 Hyt ys the cappe wol descryve the hede."
 Thenne hadde hire cheere, unbridled felicitee.
 Hire konne nought deme swich possibilittee
 As thenne bityde. I knowe nought Goddis ende.
 Hire heren he mot unto the Grekes wende.
 The parlement seyde this conclusioun,
 That to recyven a grette champioun,
 An olde Troian hors of swete fame,
 Pandarus mot agon. Hyt nas ne game.
 He passe mot into the Grek meschief
 Though al of Troie seyde weilawey for grief.
 This was the tragedie, a gret court-man
 Lik thilke Pandarus who served han
 Hys sovereyn ek hys peple and hys toun,
 Who hadde for stedfaste trouthe gret renoun,
 Who hadde for honestee mad frends nat fewe,
 This thilke Pandarus hys fare mot rewe.

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But evere and anon hyt ys the weye,
 The goode sufre, whyle the yvel pleye. 380
 I coude yow tellen a storie of swich a wight,
 A grette personage, hys tymes light,
 Whan that he spak hyt nas but swete and wyse.
 He knewe what was and coude tomorwe devyse.
 He moerdred was and by a princely swerd,
 A prince out of hys hed as I hav herd.
 But I nil recche of this but for o poynte,
 The world o corsed spyte ys al disjoynte.
 The gode Pandarus ne han deserved travaille
 But natheless hyt coude hym nought availle, 390
 He mot ago and that withoute fors,
 So that hys toun shulde han the Troian hors.
 This was the sore ende of hire gladnesse.
 Now al was crewel wo and hevynesse.
 Thenne Troilus criede and speeke, "This ys ne geste.
 This lykth nat me, nay, ne nought the leste."
 He gan to mone and forthy gan to preche.
 Heer ben I trowe the wordes of hys speche.
 "Frend, Troian, man of my contre,
 Ye ben my frend, feithful and just to me, 400
 But wo, wo Pandarus, Pandarus wo.
 Hyt ys ne justys that yow mot ago.
 But softe ye now, what wolde the feyr Criseyde?
 Spek my love, spek my swete mayde."

Quod she, "Troilus, this ys matere grave,
 How gladde I am that yow Pandare wol save."
 Thenne Pandarus sobbynge, hys furial bale
 Bēwepinge, Troilus kiste, "Ye gale
 World this frend who here ys ysworn
 To dide don do what nevere was biforn. 410
 I drat ne lenger the Greke abusioun,
 This man ys truwe inne my opynyoun."
 Thenne Pandarus torned and blesed the companye,
 And seyde, "Nouthe, I fere ne vileinye."
 Thenne Pandarus fulfilled hys destinee
 And wente away by sad necessitee.
 Blyve up sterte Criseyde with manly rage
 And stinted nought, with bold and fiers corage
 She ladde Troilus up to the gate of Troie.
 Whan this the peple saugh, they dide rejoie, 420
 They ros and Troilus called a worthi knyght
 Who shulde Pandarus withinne a fourtenyght
 Bringen bak. The peple gan al this
 To syngen, and Troilus tellen of al hire blis.
 Thenne lusty Troilus with knees that shaken
 Wente forth to maken the fo to quaken.
 Whan that the Grekis oost did hym biholde
 They gan to fere, hire blod gan torn al colde.
 Quod Diomedes, "By God, what thyng ys here!
 I synke in shame, I can ne ronre for fere." 430

Troilus, who semed double for hys drede
 Which mad hym shook, with teris hys God he bede
 Hym hyde. Hys swerd he drewe and hys eyen shette,
 And gan destoryen al the eyr he mette.
 With worthi, strong, and bold, and mighty strokes
 Did Troilus fighte as tellen olde bokes.
 Hys helm tohewe was, hys knees tobeten;
 Ful softe Pandarus name he gan to heten.
 And thus did Troilus shewe hys worthynesse,
 And thus he shewed hys mary and noblesse.
 But soth to seye hyt mot be Goddes wille,
 Behinde Troilus gan sporne the gret Achille
 And with o strook he did pore Troilus smyte,
 And siker took fro Troilus al delyte.
 Whan Criseyde ysaugh what Troilus betyde,
 The shene fro hir eyen han al out slide.
 Hir face gan to shewe but malencolie,
 And she gan synken into a fantasie.
 She wende hir weye bisyde a river depe,
 And quietly gan bothe hir eyen to wepe.
 She thought the many, mottelee, spekle gleemes
 That fro the river shoon, were swete beemes
 Fro som se of feyre coloured floures,
 And inne she wente to slepe in swich odoures.
 But al at ones, thonder gan to clappe,
 And al the peple seyð hyt nys ne jape,

440

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"The Goddes in hevene hav siker som wytynge
 Of what shul be, whyle we hav ne wenyng."

Thenne hire spied with joie a cler visage,
 Hé was, lik of Paradys the image,
 Pandarus. He cam withinne Troie anon;
 The peple wepte for joie, ye everichon!
 The storie in joie concluded hadde thus,
 How al and some hadde loved Polonius.

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סוף הכל³

For my analysis I have chosen the following subjects: dream allegory, the courtly love tradition, the narrator, and the language. The first of these, dream allegory, is particularly significant because it was one of the most widely used conventions inherited by Chaucer. Chaucer uses this device in The Book of the Duchess and in the Parliament of Fowls. Since the Fool's Tale also uses this convention for satiric purposes it is relevant for this analysis.

Since the courtly love tradition was a widespread and accepted medieval convention, it is necessarily important in the love relationship between Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. The mores of the courtly code so pervade the work and are so integral to it that in writing or analyzing a parody of a medieval love story, it is essential to treat this tradition.

However, Chaucer's treatment of the narrator does not derive from a widely practiced convention; it is one of the unique artistic accomplishments of Chaucer. For this reason it is important to discuss the parallel treatment of the narrator in the Fool's Tale. Indeed, since the subtle and often barely perceptible presence of the narrator in Troilus and Criseyde becomes blatantly exaggerated in the Fool's Tale, a discussion of the specific use of the narrator becomes even more pertinent.

As to language, clearly, Chaucer's Middle English differs sufficiently from Modern English to warrant an analysis of language. But more than this, the specific characteristics of Chaucer's poetic diction and their parallels in the Fool's Tale make this subject even more relevant to an analysis of the Fool's Tale.

Dream Allegory:

Dream allegory is particularly important in Chaucer's early work. The Book of the Duchess begins with the narrator's inability to sleep and the dream that comes to him when he finally does fall asleep. In the Parliament of Fowls the narrator begins by reading a book and soon falls asleep. He is guided through his dream by Africanus.

In the Fool's Tale the narrator is also troubled; but insomnia or the drowsiness which accompanies late reading are replaced by the hopeless despair accompanying a task as difficult as writing a poem in Middle English. The narrator resolves his problem in sleep. This sleep echoes the Parliament of Fowls when the dreamer meets someone from the other world who will be his guide. In Chaucer it was Africanus, here, it is "Polonius, of gret Shakespare fame." Whereas Africanus brought the narrator into a beautiful garden, Polonius made use of a "chambre large"; there he mounted a stage in order to declaim his dramatic tale.

In Polonius' narration the Parliament of Fowls is again drawn upon, but this time it is confused with an incident in Troilus and Criseyde. Polonius' tells us of Troilus (lines 85-87):

And as he slep, anonright tho hym mette
How that a turtel⁴, in tweyne plates sheet,
Tobresten han hys chest to rente hys herte.

In this dream the effeminate Troilus is substituted for Criseyde. Similarly, the turtle is substituted for the eagle. The image is further burlesqued when Troilus, trying to interpret the allegorical meaning of his dream, reasons that "The turtel was of turteles far the beste."

Polonius has not forgotten that Africanus was very important in Chaucer. He is, therefore, directly brought into the story. It is Africanus who came down "...from the Galaxy" to interpret Troilus' dream for him and in doing so set the story in motion.

The Courtly Love Tradition:

Chaucer uses the courtly love tradition both satirically, and as a matter of convention. The Fool's Tale utilizes this tradition in mock seriousness only. Chaucer's Troilus falls suddenly and absolutely in love as required by the tradition; he then suffers all of its intense and desperate symptoms. He moans and groans; he is sick with grief and despair; it could prove fatal. In Polonius' first story Troilus is indeed suddenly struck with love, and forthwith, become "al wrecchednesse." But his love differs from most in that it is undirected. We see immediately that Troilus is an unusual lover.

In Chaucer, Troilus is a bold and masculine warrior. But Chaucer satirizes the tradition in making him something of an effeminate lover. We see, for example, that when he has the opportunity to join Criseyde in bed, he faints and Pandarus must literally throw him into her arms. Polonius goes a step farther in his interpretation. Troilus is a self-deluded coward. When he hears that Criseyde must go to the Greeks he beats his breast then sits down and cries. When in line 176 Robin Goodfelwe asks him "...be ye aferd?" He bravely answers "Nay nay... But I nil sterve, I nil han payne smerte." Troilus is, of course, also effeminate. At line 73 while standing in the rain he cries and

begs of Criseyde to let him in or he will drown. Furthermore, to complete the irony, while Troilus is cowardly and effeminate, Criseyde is courageous and strong. When Troilus knocks at the door and Pandarus is afraid to answer it, Criseyde does. Besides this Polonius tells us in lines 81-82 that:

She was as fair as that I sayd biforn
But strong as thilke Hercules toforn.

Later, when Troilus is brought to understand whom he loves, he again undergoes the prescribed symptoms of love, but not the typical symptoms (lines 97-100):

Thus Troilus knewe who he mote woo
For who to sigh, for who to crie "ah so."
He gan to rave and dighte for to syken,
And in hys botme gan every-deel to styken.

In Chaucer when Troilus is confronted by his beloved he undergoes the courtly syndrome of reaction. In the Fool's Tale these are exaggerated, and her very uncourtly response to his distress is to ask him if he is "out of hys hede." He elaborates and makes his declaration clear in the best courtly fashion. But, contrary to expectation, as her final comment she "seide hym nay"; she even laughs at him. According to the code, Troilus would invariably kill himself. In this tale Troilus thinks she is being coy (lines 141-142):

I wite wommennes mote han hire game,
Ples teche me, my owen swete dame.

In Polonius' second story Troilus is again suddenly shot by Cupid. In the courtly tradition the pain accompanying love is so sharp that Cupid's arrow is taken almost as a physical reality. In the Fool's Tale it is a physical reality. He feels he is wounded,

allows that he is a patriotic martyr dying in the defense of Troy, then recognizes the arrow as one from Cupid's bow. Again Troilus' love symptoms are not in strict accord with the established norm. He stands transfixed for four days. He has seen Criseyde and is in love with her. His immediate comic flaw is indecision. He is in a quandary, shall he live or die? Should he marry her or try to plant the seed of his affection "Withoute the foul service of an husbonde." In Chaucer's work Troilus also contemplates death, but in the Fool's Tale Troilus' thoughts seem somehow familiar. In lines 268-277 he says:

To be or nat that ys o questioun.
 Yf hyt mo noble ys to have but peyn,
 Or fighte ayein the se of wo and geyn
 Swete paas. To dye - to slepe - na more -
 And by o slep to ende oure lif ful sore.
 To slep, to dreme, but who may seye paraunter
 That I wol dreme, hyt coude ben a misaunter.
 I may nat dreme, I konne by my fey,
 I may but slepe, I may but slepe alwey!
 That ys to sterve which ys by God forboden.

Following the traditional hero of the courtly tradition, Chaucer's Troilus dared not tell Criseyde of his love. He was tormented by fear and wracked with premature despair. Polonius' version has a parallel situation. Troilus cannot, of course, think of telling Criseyde of his passion; and as with Chaucer's Troilus, he seems to have difficulty bringing himself to reveal his vulnerable state even to his good friend Pandarus. Troilus visits Pandarus and says (lines 332-336):

I may nought tellen, though yow ask me ofte.

 I can, Pandare, reherce hir gracious name,
 But that yow knowe, love ys ne jape ne game.

Then without further prodding, encouragement, or provocation he belies his seeming hesitancy; he continues (lines 337-338):

Wel thenne I wol yow telle and that anon,
I saugh Criseyde, my herte to hir ys gon.

The ease with which Troilus prattles about his heart's inmost secret after a perfunctory gesture to the code, makes a mockery of the courtly rules of decorum.

The final burlesque is of the courtly hero himself. In Chaucer he was, of course, bold and fearless, handsome and full of fire. Polonius' description of Troilus contrasts significantly with Chaucer's. He is obese, has a disproportionately small head, hairy arms, and bowlegs. In Criseyde's words, "He was fulfild with al the knightly charmes." When it came to courage, he was not found wanting; he neither wanted, nor had any, nor was to be found. Criseyde, who was brave in Troilus' name, literally dragged him to the gates of Troy to fight the Greeks.

The Narrator:

In Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde the narrator plays an integral part. The story, in a great measure, is the narrator's interpretation of the events he relates. Consequently, he is a distinct character whose personality is felt. In the Fool's Tale this technique is carried to an extreme in the use of Polonius. The first indication of this comes in the Prologue where the author apologizes for recording only about half of what Polonius has told him. From this it is evident that Polonius is still the master of verbosity; he is by example, the advocate of less matter and

more "art." The story that we get has been filtered through Polonius' understanding, values, and emotional self-involvement.

He begins the first part of his tale telling us that Hector was the most important figure in the story because he was the most famous and respected. The fact that he was far too busy to take part in the events being related is immaterial. It is for us rather to be understanding and indulgent. Immediately, we see that Polonius' definition of the dramatic hero is not the generally accepted one. We get further insight into the nature of the narrator from such a non sequitur as that in lines 61-62:

The housbonde of Criseyde, olde Pandarus,
A baude he was and forthy cleped thus,

His logic is imperfect and his memory inaccurate. Often this is flagrantly brought to our attention by his preoccupation with appearing perceptive and erudite, as for example in his geneological statements in lines 157-160:

The vois was that of thilke Pompeus,
The brother of that famous Tydeus,
Hys fader was the grette Romulus,
Hys hors ycleped was the olde Taurus.

His characteristic involvement in intrigues is apparent as he momentarily departs from the story to note with relish in line 116, speaking of Troilus: "...neighe was hys plannes prime."

Polonius fails to understand the essential qualities of the characters in the story. His interpretation of the "facts" is ironic. On learning that Criseyde "...moot out gooth unto the Grekes hoost" Polonius says (lines 167-170):

Pandare up stod and shook hys manly bones
Thenne sat ayein and wepte for the nones.

Stout Troilus gan beet hys huge breste
And coughed longe and criede of al the beste.

The same irony is present in Polonius' rendition of Troilus' reasoning concerning fighting. To Polonius one may have a "leonym herte" and still say (line 178), "But I nil sterve, I nil han payne smerte." In fact Troilus' sweet dream, described in lines 197-205, of destroying Achilles and the "Grekissch hoost" is actually a reflection of the deluded self-importance of the narrator. The enthusiasm with which Polonius relates Troilus' fatuous solution to his dilemma shows Polonius' admiration of its ingenuity. Such wily ploys have indeed their courtly parallels (lines 197-205):

By Goddes love, quod (Troilus), avoy distresse,
I am a worthy knight so God my blesse.
I wol affrayan Achille and that anoon,
Thenne al the Grekissch hoost wol be fordoon.
Shal I chalange hym in wordes rewde?
With royne avaunt hym telle I han hym slewe?
Thanne wol he quappe for al undigne fere,
I seggen shal 'Cherl dye heere!'
Valour unwemmed shal taak for Troie vengeance!

The fact that Troilus dies at the end, that his soul "...calme hevene sought" does not detract from the heroism or insightful ingenuity of Troilus. The unfortunate conclusion to Troilus' best laid schemes is reminiscent of the fate of Polonius himself.

In the second part the narrator's presence is felt even more. This comes as no surprise since Polonius is purportedly retelling the story as written by Shakespeare, an author for whom he must have had the greatest affection. The esteem in which he holds Shakespeare is immediately apparent. In line 223 Polonius implicitly seems to raise Shakespeare above Chaucer: "Ne Chaucer ys I knowe,

Shakespeare the make." But, he remembers that in all fairness he must treat the authors impartially; the question of superiority is not relevant. Thus, in the next line there is in effect an apparent, innocuous, if foolish, disclaimer: "But Chaucer Chaucer ys I siker take." With the problem dismissed and his conscience clear Polonius begins his tale: "Whan wroughte the gret Shakespeare the Troian storie..."

This time his hero is Pandarus. Besides the similarity in the sound of the names Polonius and Pandarus, the heroic criteria that he now establishes are especially suitable to Pandarus, and dear to his own heart; they are the courtly virtues of "noblesse," "curtesye," and "gentillesse."

Polonius is confident in his keen knowledge of princes and their attitudes towards love. He applies these opinions with some accuracy to Troilus (lines 257-264):

He inly gan to thenken with shrewed insighte
Of al he mighte nat doe, and al he mighte.
Yf that he hir shulle taak in mariage,
But wedded blis he thought ys cruel servage.
Paraunter, he seyde, paraunter hyt ys nought nede
She wol be myn, hir herte and maydenhede
Withoute the foul sevice of an husbonde.
She mot to bedde anoon I understonde.

Polonius observes that the people thought that Troilus had "...loste hys facultes." But Polonius assures us that the true cause of Troilus' madness derives from love. He is right and understandably enjoys the superiority of this particular insight.

One wonders if Polonius in his narration might not occasionally have confused several of Shakespeare's plays. Troilus'

thoughts beginning "To be or nat..." is one such instance. Another instance is Pandarus' advice to the lovers in lines 353-362. The advice rings suspiciously familiar. One wonders if these are the words of Shakespeare's Pandarus:

I wol yow tellen nouthe a thing o tweye
 How that yow shulde yow beren. This ys the weye:
 Siker yow bothe mot holden this love secree;
 And of yong thoughtes seye nought, this graunte me;
 Be ware of quereles withinne Troie,
 But inne, by Jove youre fo ne latte have joie;
 Lewed peple ofte may yow tellen 'Fy!'
 Yow mot al heren, but lette, a stree, seye I!
 Youre habit shulde shewe youre heighe kinrede,
 Hyt ys the cappe wol descryve the hede.

The same can be said of Troilus lamentation over Pandarus' fate (lines 399-400):

Frend, Troian, man of my contre,
 Ye ben my frend, feithful and just to me,

And another familiar echo at line 403: "But softe ye now, what wolde the feyr Criseyde?"

When Polonius, by this time apparently fully involved in the story, relates that Pandarus is to be traded to the Greeks, he cannot forbear a few personal observations. He shows his indignation in lines 370-380:

.....Hyt nas ne game.
 He passe mot into the Grek meschief
 Thought al of Troie seyde weilawey for grief.
 This was the tragedie, a gret court-man
 Lik thilke Pandarus who served han
 Hys sovereyn ek hys peple and hys toun,
 Who hadde for stedfaste trouthe gret renoun,
 Who hadde for honestee mad frends nat fewe,
 This thilke Pandarus hys fare mot rewe.
 But evere and anon hyt ys the weye,
 The goode sufre, whyle the yvel pleye.

In the lines which follow Polonius comes dangerously close to digressing into an entirely different and quite personal story (lines 381-392):

I coude yow tellen a storie of swich a wight,
 A grette personage, hys tymes light,
 Whan that he spak hyt nas but swete and wyse.
 He knewe what was and coude tomorwe devyse.
 He moerdred was and by a princely swerd,
 A prince out of hys hed as I hav herd.
 But I nil recche of this but for o poynte,
 The world o corsed spyte ys al disjoynte.
 The gode Pandarus ne han deserved travaille
 But natheless hyt coude hym nought availle,
 He mot ago and that withoute fors,
 So that hys toun shulde han the Troian hors.

We see his personal involvement again when he comes to the death of Criseyde. Apparently he is reminded of his own posthumous "experience," the death of Ophelia. He therefore becomes sentimental. He relates the incident with pathos which can grow only from genuine emotions. But his spirits revive as he comes to his conclusion. Here he shows his true whimsical nature and final complete identification with the courtly Pandarus. Pandarus is finally recognized and acclaimed by all. Polonius' tale ends with his apparent complete satisfaction (lines 463-464):

The storie in joie concluded hadde thus,
 How al and some hadde loved Polonius.

Language:

Finally, I should like to take note of a few specific points in the general imitation of Chaucer's language. In Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde in Book III line 65 Troilus seems to choke over what he has to say, "'Ha a,' quod Troilus so reufully."

This is burlesqued in the Fool's Tale by carrying it farther as in lines 73-75. Troilus was at the door:

He wepte, criede "Mercy" and "a ha."
 "Why crydestow?" quod she, "and why a ha?"
 "A ha for water han fulfild my throte,"

And then again in lines 147-148. When Troilus has been refused:

Quod he, "ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha,
 I understond thys game to an A."

In Polonius' story Chaucer's colloquialisms are also employed with an attempt at capturing much the same tone though at some points this is exploited for its own humorous possibilities. Evidences of this occur for example in lines 136, 144, 167-168, and 360:

But for hys love she cared nought a bene.

I care ne for your love a pissemeye!

Pandarus up stod and shook hys manly bones
 Thenne sat ayein and wepte for the nones.

Yow mot al heren, but lette, a stree, seye I!

In his Prologue to the Parson's Tale Chaucer mockingly employs the alliteration used by the poets of the North; he does not like alliteration and shows it in a ridiculous conglomeration of sound. The Fool's Tale employs the same device but takes it a step farther. The first use of it is in line 246. Troilus is examining the arrow with which Cupid has wounded him: "Hyt is fro cupid and nought fro fos yvel." It is used again in line 279. Troilus is imagining Criseyde's response to his overwhelming

charm: "And she wol siker in swete swowne feynte." It is exploited finally fully following, in fact, the same sounds used in line 279. Polonius describes the thoughts of the transfixed Troilus (284-285):

He thoughte at ones, to tellen hir hys cas,
But sote swa he swar he neighe swelte.

In general I have tried to be faithful to Middle English vocabulary and grammar and Chaucer's meter and the couplet rhyming of most of the Canterbury Tales while composing a parody on his Troilus and Criseyde. The key to the parody is the narrator, Polonius. If we laugh, it is because of his foolish misrepresentations, characterizations, and emotional self-involvement, all presented with an ironic air of dignity.

I should like to conclude with a special note of caution to the over-zealous reader. I firmly believe that the story of Troilus and Criseyde as told in the Fool's Tale is not strictly true.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The end of the first part
- ² The beginning of the second part
- ³ The end of everything
- ⁴ The use of Middle English "turtel" for Modern English "turtle" is an anachronistic addition for humorous effect.

THE FOOL'S TALE

by

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The Fool's Tale is a Parody in two parts of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. Following the Tale is an analysis of it which explores the use and parody of dream allegory, the courtly love tradition, the narrator, and the use of language.

The dream allegory of the Fool's Tale burlesques that in Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls. In Chaucer the dreamer's guide is Africanus, here, it is Polonius. Instead of the conventional garden, Polonius makes use of a "chambre large" where he mounts a stage to declaim his dramatic tale.

The convention of the courtly love tradition is treated in the Fool's Tale only with mock seriousness. The necessary love symptoms are there but exaggerated; furthermore, in the first story, Troilus' love is undirected. When his love finally does center on Criseyde, unlike Chaucer's hero, Troilus proves a self-deluded coward.

In the second tale the figurative love wound becomes a physical reality. He recovers and soon falls in love with Criseyde, but he is soon revealed as foolish, physically preposterous, and a coward.

As in Troilus and Criseyde the narrator of the Fool's Tale has an important function. The Fool's Tale is told from his unique point of view. Throughout, he is emotionally involved with the events he relates; this consequently flavors his narration. Perhaps the clearest example of this occurs at the very end of the poem. In the second tale Polonius identifies with the courtly Pandarus who is finally acclaimed by all. Polonius is so happy

with this triumphant conclusion that in the last line of the story he inadvertently substitutes his own name for that of Pandarus:

The storie in joie concluded hadde thus,
How al and some hadde loved Polonius.

Regarding the imitation of language, several specific parallels should be noted. In the Fool's Tale, as in Chaucer, at one point Troilus chokes over his words; but in the Fool's Tale it is carried ad absurdum.

The colorful colloquialisms which are identifying characteristics of Chaucer are, of course, included and their basically humorous effect exploited. A clear example occurs in lines 167-168:

Pandare up stod and shook hys manly bones
Thenne sat ayein and wepte for the nones.

In general I have tried to be faithful to Middle English vocabulary and grammar and Chaucer's meter and the couplet rhyming of most of the Canterbury Tales while composing a parody on his Troilus and Criseyde.

The events of the story as presented in the first part of the Fool's Tale follow generally those of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. In the first part of the Fool's Tale Troilus is suddenly smitten with an overwhelming love. But he has no love object. He is just in love per se.

In Chaucer, Pandarus is the go-between for Troilus and Criseyde; in Polonius' tale, Pandarus is simply between them. He is her husband. Thus Pandarus has an entirely new function; instead of bringing Troilus and Criseyde together, he keeps them apart.

In Chaucer, Troilus, during a terrible storm, comes to Pandarus' house, while Criseyde is there. Through Pandarus' machinations he is admitted into Criseyde's bedroom. Polonius doesn't remember it quite that way. Troilus does come to the house during a terrible storm but the inclement weather is more than a mere excuse to bring Troilus into the house; Troilus is almost drowned. He is admitted into Criseyde's bedroom but not by the wily, conspiring Pandarus. Pandarus simply sits innocently in his place while his wife takes charge of Troilus.

The interview at Deiphobus' house between Troilus and Criseyde, instead of serving to cement a love relationship, brings ridicule from Criseyde and ludicrous responses from Troilus. As in Chaucer, Criseyde must go to the Greeks. While Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde deplore the news, their responses are different from those of Chaucer's characters.

Finally, the story is concluded with the death of Troilus at the hands of Achilles. However, the fierce aggressiveness of Chaucer's Troilus is transformed into the peculiar bravado of a cowardly Troilus.

In the second part of the Fool's Tale Troilus is literally wounded by Cupid. But, somewhat reminiscent of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream, instead of immediately being in love, he falls in love with the first woman he sees. This happened to be Criseyde. Polonius assures us that she also fell deeply in love with Troilus. In this version of the story Pandarus has not planned Troilus' visit, as in Chaucer, nor is he indifferent, as in the

first part of the Fool's Tale; he is terribly disconcerted and anxious for Troilus to leave. When Troilus relates his love for Criseyde, Pandarus perceives that if she loves him and he loves her, they are in love with each other. In the midst of their joy and Pandarus' advice, reminiscent of Polonius' advice to Laertes, news comes that the Trojan Parliament decided to trade Pandarus to the Greeks for "An olde Troian hors...." Again Troilus must face the Greeks because of Criseyde. In this case she drags him out to the gates of Troy to fight. Troilus, knees shaking and eyes closed, advances but is slain by the merciless Achilles.