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## CHAUCERIAN IRONY REVISITED: A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

R.J. Schoeck

The topic of my paper is a broad one, for it embraces a range of questions within its field, which is Chaucerian irony as seen from the perspective of mediaeval rhetoric. My excuse for speaking on so broad a topic — and one unlikely to appeal to modernists or post-modernists, and certainly not to post-contemporaries — is in some part, I must confess, the desire to share my reflections with an audience composed of a goodly number of teachers and scholars of my own generation. Those who are of a younger generation may well feel like the German mediaevalists who greeted me at Trier in 1987 with a question about the Schoeck of Schoeck and Taylor published many years ago: “But he’s dead, isn’t he?” After retirement one cannot avail oneself of too many opportunities to assure his contemporaries that in point of fact he is not dead.

You will recognize that I have already drawn upon more than one mediaeval convention. I am beginning, you see, to move towards the definition of irony formulated by Bernard Dupriez (244): that is, of irony as a “super-ordinate” figure capable of marshalling numbers of ordinate tropes in the interest of global strategies. But in the spirit of a deeper *captatio benevolentiae* (one of the most fundamental, that is, most desirable, of rhetorical endeavours), I ask you to suspend modern theories of interpretation, not only because so many of them will have blown away by the next time we

meet in 1995, but rather because much of modern criticism, including modern theories of irony, is after the fact so far as Chaucer is concerned. I shall therefore emphasize the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was a standard text in mediaeval universities, rather than Quintilian's fuller *Institutes*, later also a university text but not available until the early fifteenth century. But of course there were other works: Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, St Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis*, the mediaeval rhetoricians, and the wealth of mediaeval commentaries: these were at hand for Chaucer, and a mediaeval theory of irony may be taken as given with strong certitude.

It is now sixty-six years since the appearance of J.M. Manly's influential lecture on "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians,"<sup>1</sup> so widely accepted as gospel for the next two decades; and I will remind you only that it was preceded by two years by the publication of Edmond Faral's *Les Arts Poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle* (1924), a volume that made available in a convenient form the works of Matthew of Vendôme, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Gervaise of Melkley, Everard the German, and John of Garland, all poetic and rhetorical masters of Geoffrey Chaucer.<sup>2</sup> In the half-century since World War II there has been a vigorous growth in rhetorical studies, made evident in a journal devoted to the history of rhetoric, and in professorships and centres or institutes of rhetoric in California and Germany, and doubtless elsewhere. We are all aware that there has also been an enormous expansion in studies of mediaeval thought and learning, and a flood of criticism on Chaucer and his contemporaries, as is much evident in a specialized journal, *Chaucer Review*. You will forgive me then, I trust, if I concentrate on only one Chaucer poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*, his one major completed work.<sup>3</sup>

Irony is one of the most subtle of the arts of rhetoric, and it is signalled according to Quintilian through discrepancy between speaker and audience or subject. It is a mistake, however, to say, as does Umberto Eco (in *The Name of The Rose*), that it "must always be prefaced by the *pronunciatio*, representing its signal and justification."<sup>4</sup> (*Pronunciatio*, is more than delivery.) Under the general heading, or mode, of irony one may work with litotes, hyperbole, antiphrasis, chleuamos (a self-mockery), and parody. In all of these Chaucer was a master ("My wit is short, ye may wel understonde"), even though he did not have the fullness of Quintilian's treatise on his desk (for the *Institutio*, as already remarked, was not rediscovered in the West of Europe until the early fifteenth century), nor did he have, as we in the twentieth century now have, the immensely learned manual of Lausberg.<sup>5</sup> But what he did possess was the main treasury of the Roman

dramatists and poets, satirists, philosophers, and other writers who made use of irony, as well as the great body of late patristic and mediaeval commentaries, together with a long and unbroken tradition of rhetoric in the schools, uneven though it sometimes was.<sup>6</sup>

As Faral's historically important scholarship on the arts poetic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries indicates quite fully, mediaeval poetics and rhetoric—even while they tended to overstress the techniques of amplification and abbreviation, which included devices such as *paraphrasis* that touch on irony—gave attention to the tropes of metaphor, antithesis, metonymy and synecdoche, periphrasis, allegory and its varieties; and all of these figures are subsumed by or related to irony. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was of course known continuously through the Middle Ages,<sup>7</sup> as was the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, and there too one could find the elements of irony, if not a theory of irony in any fullness. Chaucer is most likely to have been familiar with the eminently lucid exposition of Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis*, in which one finds irony defined as a trope by means of which one thing is said while its exact opposite is intended, and irony is distinguished from antiphrasis (following Augustine in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.567) in terms of antiphrasis being a use of words with a meaning contrary to their true, original meaning, whereas irony by the manner of delivery alone indicates what it wishes to be understood. Bede is notable as well for his substitution of Biblical examples in place of the usual literary examples in earlier rhetorics. Irony I take to be fundamentally rhetorical; and unless it be frivolous or perverse irony must have an end or purpose, and that end is most usually satire. Satire I take to cover or offer a wide spectrum of literary forms or modes, ranging from the indirection of irony to the directness of invective, and embracing many literary genres. Modern writers on irony tend to move away from rhetoric as traditionally understood; but it is important to realize that writers from Chaucer to Shakespeare would have begun by studying irony as a figure of rhetoric.

For convenience, simplicity, and, I trust, clarity, I shall order the rest of my paper in terms of audience or reader, speaker, and subject: three divisions which are obvious in themselves (but that does not necessarily mean simple), and they carry the sanction of centuries of authority before Chaucer's time.

Writing generally on what he interestingly calls "The Politics of a Poet" (and from a rich background of comparative mediaeval literature in its fullest and richest senses), the late W.T.H. Jackson declares that

When a poet undertakes to write an epic, he knows that he must take an elevated subject and treat it in a noble style, that he must assume the *persona* of an objective narrator who nevertheless is aware of the deep significance of the events he records and who therefore tells them with the gravity and dignity they deserve. He sets himself to deal with the subject in a form which his readers will recognize as suitable for the subject. If he does not do this, he runs a grave risk of being misunderstood. His epic may be regarded as a mock epic, as a parody, as a satire, even as a piece of light verse. In other words, the poet must subordinate his personality to the demands of the genre in which he writes and he may assume only the *persona* which is appropriate to that genre. (81-82)<sup>8</sup>

Satisfying though Jackson's formulation is in the large, it is somewhat restrictive, for he does not allow for a playing with the genre yet without the work's becoming a fully developed mock epic or parody. It is worth stressing that it is within the power of the poet to choose his style, to establish whatever distancing seems appropriate, and to define his subject; and we shall later see how Chaucer sets about to do this. But in the executive technique of making these decisions, the mediaeval author makes it clear to his audience — and to us, his readers — how reciprocal are the concepts and functions of audience, subject, and speaker. We separate them at risk in the act of interpretation, but risks are necessary in exposition and interpretation, provided that we make provision for — indeed, insist upon — a full reading that sets about seeing the poem as a whole.

There is the temptation to think of the audience of *Troilus and Criseyde* altogether and only in terms of that lovely fifteenth-century illumination from the Corpus Christi Cambridge manuscript of the poem.<sup>9</sup> From this manuscript one rather naturally thinks of an oral performance or presentation of the poem, which renders a significance discussed by Margaret Galway but more searchingly examined by Dieter Mehl.<sup>10</sup> Continuing the debate, Paull F. Baum, Derek Brewer, and others have challenged the older view and have interpreted the Corpus Christi illustration as a fiction. Yet it may well be that while the fifteenth-century illustration is itself a piece of historical fiction, Chaucer's poem nonetheless had a live performance at court. At the same time, however, the work is also a text for reading, and the poet almost certainly had in view a readership of his own and later ages. The two lines of interpretation are not self-excluding, and I agree with Mehl's shrewd words:

Chaucer seems to have been well aware of the challenge presented to his poetry by this consideration of such a wider appeal [that is, beyond the sphere of his personal control and transmitted to future generations] and he

must have wondered, as many poets did before and after him, how he could extend his own influence beyond the personal recital. One of the obvious and traditional means of doing this is to incorporate into the text the idea of a close relationship that would thus not depend on the actual presence of the author. (174)

Yet it is the very complexity and substantiality of the *auctor ipse* in the process of narrative — rhetorically developed and rendered — that audiences of his and subsequent ages have accepted.

Book One of the *Troilus* announces the subject and emphasizes the author:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,  
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,  
In lovyng, how his aventures fellen  
Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,  
My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.  
Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite  
Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write. (Book I, 1-7)

Here are implied or presented not only the subject but also the audience and the poet, who with some breaking with tradition invokes one of the Furies instead of one of the Muses. The poet-persona at the outset represents himself as both telling and writing the story.<sup>11</sup> In a fuller discussion of the matter one would of course turn to other poems in which Chaucer reflects the practice of the times according to which poets read their poems aloud (and sometimes sang them), and Robinson's notes give references to Chaucer's glancing at this tradition in other poems (814). Here may I record the experiment I initiated at Toronto in the early 1960s of reading the entirety of the *Troilus* aloud to an audience of students and colleagues. (Attendance was purely voluntary, and the audience grew to include a number who were not in one or the other of our three Chaucer sections.) There were three of us — Professor Laurence K. Shook, Mother St Francis (who published on Geoffrey of Vinsauf under her maiden name of Margaret F. Nims), and myself — and we divided the narrative sections and spoken passages among us. We were pleased to discover, incidentally, that although the three of us had been schooled in different departments of English (Toronto and Harvard, Chicago, and Princeton, each with its own roots in the philological traditions of Britain and Germany), our pronunciations of Middle English were in virtually total congruence. The experiment was repeated in one or two subsequent years, but unfortunately we did not think to make a tape of our readings. What matters is that the experiment was successful in

terms of audience, and it confirmed the oral qualities—the performance dimension, if you like—of the poem; and the experience greatly enriched our understanding of the poetry.

In the fourth stanza of the first book, lines 22–28, the persona speaks to a special audience of lovers (perhaps a part of the larger audience):

But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,  
 If any drope of pyte in yow be,  
 Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse  
 That ye han felt, and on the adversite  
 Of othere folk, and thynketh how that ye  
 Han felt that Love dorste yow displese,  
 Or ye han wonne hym with to gret an ese.

Only they, Mehl comments, “can really appreciate what is to come and only they can therefore react in the right way, which is, not to judge, but to feel sympathetic compassion for the characters in the story and for all who are in similar pain. To move his audience to such pity is the poet’s chief object” (176)—and it is, I add, a rhetorical appeal. But his address to the lovers in the audience is inclusive rather than exclusive; it is a piece of rhetorical cunning, for no one would want to be excluded from such an appeal. Shortly after the lines just quoted we lovers in the audience are told,

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.

(lines 47–51, bridging two stanzas)

These lines rather daringly advance the service of love as a religion with all the attributes of the Christian: charity, compassion, and the like. This rhetorical calling attention to a part or an aspect of the audience—a self-reflexive narrative synecdoche—forcing us to reflect on how far we ourselves qualify for inclusion in this audience<sup>12</sup>—is repeated and elaborated as the long poem develops. It is the experienced lovers present (are there any who would not claim membership in this select company?) who are addressed in the telling of Troilus’s experience in Book III, where the narrator picks up the impossibility topos<sup>13</sup> but then neatly sidesteps it:

Of hire delit, or joies oon the leeste,  
 Were impossible to my wit to seye;  
 But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste  
 Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye!

I kan namore, but thus thise ilke tweye,  
That nyght, bitwixen drede and sikernesse,  
Felten in love the grete worthynesse. (III, 1310–16)

Again and again we are reminded of the stance that Chaucer is only the intermediary writer—in terms of Bonaventure's formulation, either a *compiler* or a *commentator*.<sup>14</sup> First, he creates a fictional Latin author named Lollius; and in a number of passages Chaucer minimizes his own role, disclaiming responsibility other than that of a translator:

That of no sentement I this endite,  
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.

Wherefore I nyl have neither thank ne blame  
Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely,  
Disblameth me, if any word be lame,  
For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.  
Ek though I speeke of love unfelyngly,  
No wondre is, for it nothyng of newe is;  
A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis. (II, 13–21)

"Prey yow mekely" is a bold invocation of the humility topos, and in the next two lines he proceeds to dance neatly in a succession of figures of sound on the word *blame*, thereby indicating a playfulness with at least the sounds of words, but obviously extending the playfulness to meaning: from *blame* in line 15 to *disblameth me . . . lame*—the key figure is *polyptoton*, also called *traductio* or *adnominatio*, and covered in Book IV of the *Ad Herennium*, which also provides the well-known schoolboy example of excessive use of *polyptoton*: "O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the narrator playfully insures moral and aesthetic ambiguity in his auctorial intervention at the beginning of Book III, after Pandarus's swearing to Criseyde that Troilus would be out of town, and the active participation of the audience is required in the interpretative act:

Nought list myn auctour fully to declare  
What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,  
That Troilus was out of towne yfare,  
As if he seyde thereof soth or no;  
But that, withowten await, with hym to go,  
She graunted hym, sith he hire that bisoughte,  
And, as his nece, obeyed as hire oughte. (III, 575–81)

In his edition of the poem R.K. Root observes that "since the whole episode of the supper at the house of Pandarus is Chaucer's addition to the story, it

is not strange that his 'auctour' should be silent on this detail. This seems to be merely a literary device to suggest to the reader's mind a doubt as to Criseyde's sincerity" (473). True enough, but it is also a way of highlighting her unquestioning obedience to her uncle, whom she "obeyed as hire oughte" indeed.

*Ambiguitas* is usually treated by Renaissance rhetoricians (who were largely following the medieval traditions of rhetoric, but with the reinforcement of the Greek rhetoricians newly discovered) only in the light of a single word, and generally under the term *amphibologia*; but in Book II of the *Ad Herennium* there is a passage which has relevance for entering into the interpretation of the language of the poem and of the judgment of Criseyde in Book III, and the more so in later books, for the moral judgment cannot be isolated from an aesthetic judgment. The author of the *Ad Herennium* writes:

If a text is regarded as ambiguous, because it can be interpreted in two or more meanings, the treatment is as follows: first, we must examine whether it is indeed ambiguous; then we must show how it would have been written if the author [*scriptor* in the Latin] had wished it to have the meaning which our adversaries give to it; next, that our interpretation is practicable, and practicable in conformity with the Honourable and the Right, with Statute Law, Legal Custom, the Law of Nature. . . . (Loeb ed., pages 85-87)

One wonders whether the Pastons and other fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century readers of Chaucer from the legal community became active enough participants in the reading of the poem to bring to bear this rhetorical advice that confronts the range from the Honourable to the Natural Law. Donald Maddox has learnedly discussed customary law in the Middle Ages, and has offered the explanation that Chrétien de Troyes wrote his romances "as a literary medium for exploring the legal roots of social instability."<sup>16</sup> If this is true for Chrétien, may it not also be so for Chaucer not only in *Troilus and Criseyde* but also in *The Canterbury Tales* and the minor poems, where he dealt with questions of *disparitas cultus*, the common profit, and Natural Law?

A current of uncertainty, if not instability, runs through the poem, and early on in Book II we read, or hear:

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



But even that last word is ambiguous: *ythe* — does it mean “to prosper in the social world,” or does it mean “to thrive,” that is, “to make steady progress” (presumably in love), or “to grow vigorously”? There is, I agree with Mehl, clearly the intention of the *Troilus* poet “to present us with the same kind of uncertainty, pleasure and provocation that we meet in our daily relationship with complex and unpredictable human beings” (178).

The interpretation of individual characters in the poem could be, and it should be (especially in the teaching situation), pursued elsewhere at much greater length and depth; but we cannot leave the poem’s ambiguities or the problems in the interpretation of the characters of Troilus and Criseyde and their relationship without looking at that very fundamental and vexing question of her forsaking Troilus after she crossed over to the Greek camp:

But trewely, how longe it was bytwene  
 That she forsok hym for this Diomede,  
 Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene,  
 Take every man now to his bokes heede;  
 He shal no terme fynden, out of drede. (V, 1086–90)

*Terme* has several meanings: term or period, or goal or limit, as we find in Robinson’s Glossary. *Heede* too has its ambiguity: does it here mean head or source/beginning? Or does it urge paying heed to his putative book-source? *Terme* in fact has further meanings in the *OED*: a word or phrase used in a definite or precise sense (as in mathematics, or philosophy), or a word or phrase expressing a notion. *Out of drede*: doubtless. The narrator, we take it, is ironically expressing his assured belief that even if every person in the audience were to take to his books and do a source-study, he would find no limit: no precise sense. These lines thus illustrate the double ambiguity of the *Ad Herennium*, of both words and of a text. We have, in fine, an assertion of the rhetoric of doubtful authority, to use the perceptive phrase of Ralph Flores.<sup>17</sup>

By a number of rhetorical devices Chaucer has clearly endeavoured to involve his audience, and I think we must agree that he has brilliantly succeeded in doing so. Thus he has availed himself at one time or another, in varying degrees of development and with modulated explicitness, of the following rhetorical figures of appeal to the audience:

- adhortatio*: an appeal to do something by command, promise, or reason;
- admonitio*: a warning, urging the audience to avoid the dangers which have been disclosed;
- benevolentia*: an appeal to the audience for good will;
- comprobatio*: seeking favour by speaking well of the audience;

*excitatio*: arousing the audience by digression, invocation, or warning;

*obsecratio*: a request or prayer for help;

*testamentum*: commending profitable rules and precepts to the audience.<sup>18</sup>

There are still others, of course, in the repertoire of the *Troilus* poet. I would add with some comment the aside — that is, the words or short speech spoken in an undertone and addressed to the audience rather than to another character — beginning with the observation that the aside is not purely or simply a theatrical convention. Rather, it is a rhetorical convention or tactic which may incorporate or analogize the functions of the following: *dubitatio* (the apparent hesitation of the speaker), *apostrophe* (the sudden breaking off of the speaker to address someone or something), *antanaclasis* (a *diaphora* which occurs when the speaker takes up the words of another character and changes their meaning), *aposiopesis* (a sudden interruption, of which the *anacoluthon* may be a special but more quickly recognizable kind, one practised skillfully by Robert Browning but indulged in disastrously by Eisenhower and Bush) — and there are many others. The asides of a poet like Chaucer serve more than one function, obviously, but it is well to insist that their functional modes are always rhetorical. One function is analogous to that of the marginal art of the Middle Ages: the apes, dragons, priests, and jongleurs that were so much more than mere decoration, as too often traditionally interpreted. Here I follow the recent thesis of Michael Camille in *Image on the Edge*, which demonstrates pretty convincingly that the marginal is not only entertainment: it is also a means of glossing, even at times of parodying and problematizing the authority of the text, perhaps at times of subverting in more than one sense.<sup>19</sup> Chaucer's asides are a technique for holding in play a subtext, and often they are a gloss or even a subverting.

We may then accept Dieter Mehl's sound conclusion:

Chaucer's rhetorical involvement of his audience is not arbitrary, and it does not include all aspects of his story, but it concentrates on a number of important points where central questions of interpreting the story are at stake. (185)

My demurral would be only to urge that Chaucer's rhetorical involvement of his audience includes, it seems to me, a wider range of aspects than Mehl appears to consider. But clearly the performance or telling of the story is not complete without the participation of the audience, and, *out of drede*, [it] *shal no terme fynden*, to bend Chaucer's own words back upon the question. Further, to quote from Robert Payne's *Key of Remembrance*: "a fair

share of the illusion of reality comes not from the actual processes of characterization, but from the affective immediacy of the moral and emotional problems within which the existences of the characters are defined" (182). I glose: *affective immediacy* is the domain of rhetoric.

But this is not to say that interpretation of the characters or other elements of the poem is totally relative, as Stanley Fish would have it, or that all legal, moral, and psychological standards are relative. Rather, there is no *terme*: both in the sense that there are no fixed limits to the problem of interpretation, and that we shall not find a single word or phrase that solves the problem of interpretation in a precise or definitive sense.

Let us turn to consider the speaker, of whom much has already been said. The narrator of a mediaeval poem, it has been said, helps the audience by assuming a familiar stance.<sup>20</sup> The conventional recourse of the poet dealing with historical subjects was *Clio*, as in Horace:

Quem virum aut heroa lyra vel acri  
tibia sumis celebrare, *Clio*?

In these words from Ode XII of the first book — "What man, what hero dost thou take to herald on the lyre or clear-toned flute, O *Clio*?" — there is much of the ambiguity which recent Horatian criticism has celebrated. With Chaucer *Clio* is properly invoked in the prohemium to Book II: "O lady myn, that called art Cleo, / Thow be my speed fro this forth, and my Muse, / To ryme wel this book til I have do" (II, 8–10). But it is *Tesiphone* who is invoked in the beginning lines of the poem; and although there are precedents or parallels in classical and mediaeval poetry (see Robinson's note), it seems that the main function of the invocation of *Tesiphone* is to bring to bear the classical notion of the goddesses who inflict torment, together with Dante's description of them in canto ix of the *Inferno* (lines 37–51), thus validating the theme of the double sorrow. Given a co-creative audience, such allusion serves also to establish the quality of the speaker as a learned poet.

There is in fact more than one persona in the *Troilus*, and the ironic interplay among them — a prime force in the larger structures of irony — is above all in passages that are connected with matters of love: the nature of love, and consequently the conflicts between human and divine love, or with various human motivations in the serious game of love. The ambiguity of the *Amor vincit omnia* on the brooch of the Prioress in *The Canterbury Tales* (on which I have written elsewhere) colours the backgrounding of *Troilus*'s love, and the words of the lover in the Song of Songs can serve

to illuminate more clearly the nature and simultaneously the limitations of Troilus's love:

For I am wounded; my wounds burn with love.  
 The door to the soul of your lover is open. . . .  
 I hasten with joy [towards you], because I  
 languish for love.<sup>21</sup>

If Chaucer's older contemporary Richard Rolle (died 1349) could draw so heavily on the imagery of the Song of Songs, so could Chaucer. For the influence of the Song of Songs on Middle English religious lyrics is indisputable,<sup>22</sup> and that influence carries over into many secular lyrics. The poet Chaucer came of age in that climate of ambiguity concerning love, and a large part of the ambiguous lyrics dealing with human versus a more than human love have this resonance during the fourteenth century.

Over the course of writing a number of so-called "minor poems," Chaucer had built up one kind of public image, a well-know persona. He was one troubled by insomnia who picks up a book and promptly falls asleep, as in *The Book of the Duchess*: this was a persona surely known to many in the audience hearing the *Troilus* read. In a number of ways in the minor poems and later in *The Canterbury Tales* he will establish himself as a bookish reader, and one who is rather removed from the crowd. Yet irony, it has been said, is generated by discrepancies between subject, audience, and speaker: is this the case in this poem?

In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* there is the irony of a learned poet who claims not to know all about his sources, or who insists upon a source that does not exist — "Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere," the narrator declares towards the end of Book V (line 1771). The effect is largely to gain sympathy (always a noble aim in the manuals of rhetoric), but it also creates an air of unreliability. If Ovidian metamorphoses are founded on assumptions of both cosmic continuity or poetic power (Flores 109), Horatian ironies offer models for the presentation of a poetic persona, and for the sustaining power of irony.

All of this is swept away in the closing stanzas of the poem in which the poet-persona speaks in a confident and assured voice. The invocation of the Fifth Book is still to the Parcae, but Jove is seen as the controlling force. In the closing lines of the poem (lines 1786 following), that begin with the "Go, little book" topos, we encounter a rich battery of rhetorical resources: strikingly, the double apostrophe of "O yonge, fresshe folkes" (1835) and "moral Gower" (1856, following the confidently self-evident anaphoras (in lines 1828 following: "Swich fyn . . ." and 1849 following, "Lo here . . ."). But there

are many other rhetorical devices working: metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches, apotheosis, and others. The final paragraph is taut with the repetition and juxtaposition of rhetorical schemes and tropes with *topoi* that resonate with the familiarities of generations of the liturgy and of religious verse:

Thow oon, and two, and thre—

repetition, inversion, chiasmus, rich polyptoton, alliteration, all working with the stanzaic rhyme scheme:

Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,  
 That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,  
 Uncircumscript, and al maist circumscribe,  
 Us from visible and invisible foon  
 Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,  
 So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy digne,  
 For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.

Amen. (V, 1863–70)

(Both historically and theologically the word *uncircumscript* is striking, and this originality is greatly reinforced by the *hypax legomenon circumscribe*: these two heavily Latinate words stand out in the stanzaic context of language that is so strongly Anglo-Saxon and monosyllabic.)

The poet-persona who speaks these lines *propria persona* is evidently widely read in more than one literature, and though learned he is by no means foolish. Perhaps we might say that he is able to speak *propria persona* at the end of his epic precisely because he has been circumspect, judicious, tolerant of ambiguities—indeed, insistent upon them. And his reversion to the high style in the concluding dozen stanzas of the poem not only reminds us that this long poem is indeed an epic, but that style also confirms in the audience and readers their faith in his superlative competence as a poet qualified to stand with Statius and Dante, and it makes the more acceptable the implicit affirmation of essential unity of the so-called epilogue with the rest of the poem.

To adopt Frank Lentricchia's statement that "Literature is inherently nothing, or it is a body of rhetorical strategies waiting to be seized," Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* has always been seen as many things to many readers—an extension of his own repeated phrase, "Diversely folke diversely." But that the *Troilus and Criseyde* is very much a body of rhetorical strategies waiting to be seized and appreciated by an attentive audience is, I trust, self-evident. We must agree, I urge, with Manly's thesis that the

mediaeval treatises published and analyzed by Faral exerted a primary influence on the mind of Chaucer. But we must develop that thesis considerably to allow for a much fuller and more powerful rhetoric than Faral perceived and Manly brought to bear in his still memorable British Academy Lecture of 1926. For we have learned much in recent years about the role of memory in mediaeval culture, about invention and imitation, and, finally, about the authority of the Chaucerian text. Chaucer was indeed a master rhetorician, in whom the manifold traditions of rhetoric are brought to life by a mind in which there is a poetics of play for which the art of rhetoric is central, as I have written in my recent essay on *Homo ludens*, in which I offered a comparison of the theories of play in Chaucer and Huizinga.<sup>23</sup>

One needs to remark further on the ethos of the poet, that is, his character, disposition, and quality of mind. For Cicero—and this tenet or principle trickles through the mediaeval rhetorics and commentaries—the speaker had three main offices: to teach, to please, to move; and with three such functions it is not surprising that rhetorical theory and practice have so often overlapped with poetic theory and practice. That is altogether another question, but I might enclose the question by invoking the words of the Venerable Bede in his Preface to the *Ecclesiastical History*: “I have always thought it fitting to learn, to teach, and to write.” His triad is not much different from Cicero’s, and Chaucer might have put his own as being to read, to please, and to move.

Finally, to capture the essence of the Chaucerian ethos I would borrow from words recently written about Reinhold Niebuhr: “What gives his activities unity and power was his passionate sense of the tragedy of life, irony of history and fallibility of humans—and his deep conviction of the duty, even in face of these intractable realities, to be firm in the right as God gives us to see the right.”<sup>24</sup> Yes, even a poet has a duty to see, one might put it with a certain ironic litotes; but after reading Chaucer one must insist that even more than to see the right, it is for him or her to create a vision in which there is the beauty of that truth.

Lawrence, Kansas

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.M. Manly, “Chaucer and the Rhetoricians,” British Academy Lecture (London, 1926).

<sup>2</sup> Much of the textual work derived from the contribution of graduate students in Faral’s seminar in Paris.

<sup>3</sup> In mediaeval literature it is not always possible to declare a work complete, or to distinguish between *complete* and *finished*.

<sup>4</sup> See Dupriez, *Dictionary of Literary Devices*, 243. *Pronunciatio* points towards but is not to be equated with voice, or tone, or delivery. D.C. Muecke's *The Compass of Irony* (London, 1969) is an admirable introduction to the range of irony from classical to modern. *A Rhetoric of Irony* by Wayne C. Booth (Chicago, 1974) is a richly rewarding study of many phases and aspects of irony, but mostly modern.

<sup>5</sup> H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> On the teaching of rhetoric in fourteenth-century Oxford, with its thesis of the continuity of rhetoric in Western Europe, see R.J. Schoeck, "On Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford," *Mediaeval Studies* 30 (1968) 255-65.

<sup>7</sup> Harry Caplan notes that there are references to the book in the fourth century and into the ninth and tenth; "later the treatise was much used, abstracted, annotated, and interpolated"; and there are more than a hundred mss. of the work. Caplan adds that "complete commentaries began to appear as early, perhaps, as the twelfth century, translations as early as the thirteenth. The full story, however, of the influence which the treatise enjoyed in education and in the poetry and prose of the Middle Ages and Renaissance has yet to be worked out." Introduction to *Ad Herennium Dicendi*, Loeb Library (London and Cambridge, MA, 1954) xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>8</sup> W.T.H. Jackson, *The Challenge of the Medieval Text* (New York, 1985) 81-82.

<sup>9</sup> Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 61 — it is reproduced (in detail) on the cover of J.A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work* (Oxford, 1982), discussed (interestingly but not definitively) by M. Galway, "The 'Troilus' Frontispiece," *MLR* 44 (1949) 162-77.

<sup>10</sup> Dieter Mehl, "The Audience of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London, 1974) 173-89. Among other studies see Robert O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance* (New Haven, 1963) 228-32; and Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA, 1956) 44-66.

<sup>11</sup> For a general discussion, see the pioneering study by H. Lüddecke, "Die Funktionen des Erzählers in Chaucer's epischen Dichtung," *Studien zur englischen Philologie* 72 (1928). This discussion has been continued by E.T. Donaldson, and others.

<sup>12</sup> See further Mehl (at n. 10), 176.

<sup>13</sup> Curtius calls attention to the ageless quality of this topos, "emphasis upon inability to cope with the subject" — from the time of Homer onward there are numberless examples — see *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1953) 159-72; but he does not cite Chaucer, in whose poems there are many examples.

<sup>14</sup> According to St Bonaventure, in the fourth *quaestio* of his proem to his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, there are four ways of making a poem:

Sometimes a man writes others' words, adding nothing and changing nothing; and he is simply called a scribe [*scriptor*]. Sometimes a man writes others' words, putting together passages which are not his own; and he is called a compiler [*compilator*]. Sometimes a man writes both others' words and his own, but with the others' words in prime place and his own added only for purposes of clarification; and he is called not an author but a commentator [*commentator*]. Sometimes a man writes both his own words and others', but with his own in prime place and others' added only for purposes of confirmation; and he should be called an author [*auctor*].

This passage is quoted by Burrow in *Medieval Writers and their Work*, 29-30, and it is accessible in other modern works of scholarship (cited by Burrow). The distinctions must have been reasonably well known, for Chaucer, as Burrow notes, "is particularly

adept at exploiting, often for humorous effect, the possibilities of confusion between the various 'ways of making a book' distinguished by Bonaventure" (34).

<sup>15</sup> *Ad Herennium*, IV.xii.18. The line may be translated (as in the Loeb): "Thyself to thyself, Titus Tatus the tyrant, thou tookest those terrible troubles"; and it continues to be known in twentieth-century schools.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Flores, *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority — Deconstructive Readings of Self-Questioning Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984).

<sup>18</sup> There are, of course, many others. Here I draw upon the convenient grouping and follow the definitions in Lee A. Sonnino, *Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> See Jackson (at n. 8) 85: "The poet helps the audience by the assumption of other stances. . . ."

<sup>21</sup> One must note the new translation and interpretation by Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs* (San Francisco, 1990), which stresses the poem as explicitly about human love.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent study see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), and the review by Elizabeth Archibald in *TLS* (3 April 1992). Her thesis that "in the twelfth century one read the Song primarily not to discover its veiled truth (as Origen did), but to apply its message, live its love" is a challenging one: perhaps we should begin to think of the two traditions of the *Song* in the Middle Ages.

<sup>23</sup> See R.J. Schoeck, "Chaucer and Huizinga: The Spirit of *Homo Ludens*," in *Tales Within Tales: Apuleius Through Time*, ed. Constance S. Wright and Julia B. Holloway (New York, 1993) 97–106: "With Chaucer we are given a poetics of play, and Huizinga can provide a rich sense of playing as a civilizing function for our reading of Chaucer" (97).

<sup>24</sup> Arthur B. Schlesinger, Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Long Shadow," *New York Times* (22 June 1992). I do not of course wish to identify Chaucer with either Niebuhr or Schlesinger, rather to call upon Schlesinger's aperçu to perceive key elements in Chaucer's mind and spirit. Like Lincoln (as Schlesinger goes on to write about Niebuhr), he combined "moral resoluteness about the immediate issues with a religious awareness of another dimension of meaning": but for Chaucer that religious dimension was the dimension that gave colour and meaning to the whole. An imperfect analogue, perhaps (as most analogues are), but it will serve to identify and correlate Chaucer's sense of the tragedy of human life, his perception of the irony of history, and his observation of the fallibility of humans whether pagans in *Troilus and Criseyde* or contemporaries in *The Canterbury Tales*.

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