DRAMATIC PERSPECTIVE IN CHAUCER'S *THE CANTERBURY TALES* AND *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

One of the most important problems we face in modern literary history is when we try to explain the artistic innovations of the past in terms of contemporary critical criteria. So that when dealing with character in the Middle Ages we inevitably pass through the conceptions drawn by the Renaissance writers, the romantic idea of individuality and the modernist and postmodernist conflict between subject and art. On the other hand Roberth Scholes and Robert Kellog in *The Nature of Narrative* state

> All art is traditional in that artists learn their craft from their predecessors to a great extent. They begin by conceiving the possibilities open to them in terms of the achievements they are acquainted with. They may add to the tradition, opening up new possibilities for their successors, but they begin, inevitably within a tradition (4).

It seems that the assumption that any writer belongs to a tradition is an unquestionable axiom in literary criticism and textual analysis. Aristotle said so in *De Poetica* when in his analysis of epic poetry and tragedy he proposed Homer as a model for other writers. Later in time T. S. Eliot insisted on this debt of the individual artists to a received and given tradition and in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" says that a situation of cultural and literary vacuum is not possible in creative writing. Tradition always exists and any poet or artist must have this "historical sense", being the seminal difference the acceptance or the rejection, and so modification of such tradition (49-52).

There is nevertheless an important aspect in the fact that subject and identity in the Middle Ages, and specially in the XIVth century, appeared as a result of the development of the economical and social structures which primed a social relationship based on the private enterprise and free will of

Ricardo Sola, *Selim* 7 (2000, for 1997): 161—180

the subject against a collective pattern of thinking and believing imposed upon the individuals. Cultural and literary expressions had finally to accomodate to this social and economic condition and frame. Literary subject, literary character, authorship, the percepcion of self arose once the economic subject had been established.

Brewer uses the label "Gothic spirit"(1970) to define the fourteenth century spirit and temper, meaning by that the introduction of realistic, lively characters, humor, irony, naturalistic tone given to plot and story, as well as the different attitude of the writer to his works, i.e. the rising of a new type of authorial voice. The fourteenth century is the time in which emerges subjectivity in the modern sense, the individual as protagonist and maker of his own life and historical and economic conditions, (J. Kristeva 1974, Juan Carlos Rodriguez 1974, Max Weber 1969) versus the individual patterned by history and society (Lee Paterson 1987, 1990, 1991. David Aers 1988). This new perception of self in real life gave way to a new perception of self in literature, a dialogic, negotiated perception of the self.

Although Dante in *La Divina Commedia* deals with the historical subject in a specific time and circumstances, and Langland in *Piers Plowman* identifies subjectivity with religious identity showing the struggle between the inner and the outer sides of the self, and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the knightly identity and subject is unveiled when his private decisions in front of different and axiomatic challenges make him responsible for his sins and his repentance, it is Chaucer in the dualistic approach to the I the first to establish a true distance between the real and the fictional self, introducing an unknown category in poetic narrative tradition, the "dramatic" self, in *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*. This time the perception is dualistic and mimetic between fact and fiction, represented by the two I, the "ignorant narrator" and the learned diplomatic Chaucer. This step forward allows the poet to use analogy, homology, and even a simulacrum of autobiography, and the opportunity of giving personal, authorial interpretation and control.

This techniques and rhetorical device is not new and is closely connected though with variations to the classical (Boethius, Ovid, Virgil) and biblical narrative traditions. There were alsdo a wide spectrum of narratives and narrative traditions to which Chaucer could refer to. Yet we must distinguish

between written, narrative tradition and oral, dramatic tradition, though also formal is less clear to show (Bryan & Dempster 1958, Schaar 1967, Mann 1975, Bowden 1967, Ruggiers 1967). Chaucerian scholars who have studied the sources and analogues to Chaucer's works have fixed mainly their attention on social types and estates and the correspondent literary or historical or narrative tradition referring to them, i.e. scientific (Curry 1960), classical (Robertson 1962), always affecting the description, and this fact must be emphasised, of some narrative elements: nature, character, uses and customs, ideas and themes. As a result we have a complete analysis and classification of traditional patterns, relationships, debts, influences, and so on an so for, to explain all these elements that make a story, a narrative as such: character, action, plot, beginning-middle-end, literary topoi, literary genres, literary groups.

Following Aristotle's rules a character first must be life-like and so in connection with real known people, and second a character must be a universal, a type. This takes the thread of our analysis to the topic of realism, something that is used by many Chaucerians scholars to support the idea of Chaucer's modernity and originality. And its is true, but let us have a look at Bloomfield's essay "Chaucerian realism". Bloomfield starts with a general assesment

> There is good reason why realism in general is such a popular subject in literary theory and criticism, for in one way or another one might say that it is central to any discussion of literature even art. As the ancient theory of imitation or mimesis testifies, art must claim to be real in some sense if it is to be taken at all seriously. The whole problem lies, of course, in what sense or senses art is real (180).

Aristotle's concept of mimesis, as we know, is not concerned with metaphysical thought - as may in Plato - but with the factual evidence that men are naturally imitative, they enjoy imitating and learn by imitation. So the content of literature is not everything that can be imitated, but that side of Nature wich effect may be *mediated* by the manner of imitation or representation, that is to say, its form. We do not simply react to what we are shown but rather to how we are shown it. Then Bloomfield touches upon another

important aspect, very much studied by formalist critics (vid. Todorov, *Lo Verosímil)*

> A basic realism in narrative is concerned with the establishment of an air of truth or plausibility to a tale. Narratives use such strategies to avoid the accusation of lying. This type of realism may be called "authenticating realism" and is to be found in one way or another in almost all narratives (181)

A piece of literature is a thing in its own right, different from those other things it imitates or represents, and it is the manner of imitation what determines the kind of realism in art. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* there are two basic authenticating devices: the dream-vision pattern that helps to establish the distance between dream and reality, the self and the percepction of the self, in the opposite way as Bloomfield suggests, and the individual interplay of the pilgrims, as Kittredge explains it, but considered as a "dramatis personae" not as narrative characters. Although there is a rhetorical tradition at the background of this technique the kind of realism, i.e "mimesis" represented belongs to a dramatic tradition more than a narrative one.

The theoretical frame that the contributors to Boitani and Mann's *Companion* use is based on criteria and judgements not radically different from the ones already known to us, nor do they completely explain from the point of view of a literary tradition the rising of this new individual characterization. In Chaucer as Patterson says, character is the result of a conjunction of the specific and the general:

> It (Dryden) has also assumed that the key to his meaning resides in the proper understanding of his characters: how we interpret *Troilus and Criseyde* will be determined by how we understand the three protagonists; and *The Canterbury Tales* are habitually read as indexed to the ethical register of their tellers. In fact, the controversies that have traditionaly preoccupied Chaucer criticism have focused not on the legitimacy of this procedure but rather on the terms of its practice. On the one hand is a self-proclaimed "historicism" that insists on the priority of stylistic and iconographic traditions, rhetorical programs, and a required exemplary meaning; on the other a "criticism" that privileges mimetic accuracy and commonsense psychology. In both cases Chaucerian character is seen as a conjunction of the specific (whether derived

> from stylistic imitation, rhetorical precept, or empirical observation) and the general (whether taken to be authoritative truths or universal human nature.(1991:15)

but Patterson still collides with the same ideas he wants to criticize and returns once more to a kind of thematic - subject vs history - level which does not explain the stylistic design of *The Canterbury Tales*. Surely it is Chaucer who better expresses this dialectical tension between subject and history, between the inner and the outer-self, between canon and parody in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* choosing dramatic dialogue and theatrical performance to represent this conflict, and so making the character, the subject, the "dramatis personae" more relevant than story and narrative in front of the audience:

> And whan that he was out at dore, anon
> He planed awey the names evrychon
> That he beforn had written in his tables;
> He served hem with nyfles and with fables.
> " Nay, ther thou lixt, thou Somonour!" quod the Frere
> "Pees", quod oure Hoost, "for Cristes mooder deere!
> Tel forth thy tale, and spare it nat at al."
> "So thryve I," quod this Somonour, "so I shal!"
> (CT 1755-1764)

In the Middle Ages there was one only possible definition of character, both in tragedy and epic, and it followed the features described by Aristotle and although Aristotle conceives of action as more important than character in tragedy and comedy he also thinks that epic narrative is inferior to drama in this process of imitation or "mimesis", so that it is in drama where character and action are better developed. There is, however, one important distinction to bare in mind: fable is the combination of incidents, and character is what makes us ascribe certain moral qualities to the agents. In the same way character in a play is what reveals the moral purpose of the agents. To put it in other words character is what unveils psychological complexity, i.e., individual identity versus individual type. Sklovsky says, "… probablemente, el carácter, tal como lo comprendemos nosotros, surge como resultado de la contraposición del hombre corriente al "personaje" (… surely, character as we understand it, arises as a result of the opposition between common man

and the individual", and he goes "…aquí, en la percepción de la diferencia empieza a crearse el carácter" (… here, in our perception of the difference character appears)(128). Horace goes even further when he says that characters must be suitable for the genre, and the question, once again, is: what kind of genre do the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* belong to?

There is not a specific genre, a particular literary tradition to which we can refer to, and, in some sense, to support "authenticating realism", saying that "Chaucer had real-life models" is to miss the point twice: first insisting upon the obvious i.e. that realism in literature always means looking at real life, and second forgetting that literary patterns and forms can also be models for other literary works. So in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* the combination of the specific and the general, the life-like individual and the type was possible through the contextual and intertextual reference to the only one literary expression that used "mimesis" and character as "dramatis personae": the medieval theatre. To support this pose two important clues are given, one by Tydeman when he comments some aspects of "closet theatres" and quotes:

> Richard Axton suggests that this mode of separation between actors and narrator would mean that the cast (probably professional players) would not need to learn complicated Latin speeches, simply improvising to the narrator's story-line, while the learned author or narrator avoided the stigma of too close an association with the acting fraternity (27-28).

Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* having in mind a stage, i.e., interplay of narrator and actors. The other clue is given by Hans-Jürgen Diller showing intertextuality in action between medieval stage and medieval painting and glass-working

> The drama, to which I want to turn now, is a richer medium that the ones considered so far, because it combines word and image. The image, moreover, is a living image…Like the other verbal media, it can represent speech (which the pictorial media cannot). But over and above the verbal and the pictorial media, it can represent action iconically as developing in time(51).

Diller sees the interaction between drama and the pictorial media as a kind of process in which the former acts as a model for the latter, so that when the medieval glass-worker builds a biblical scene in the gothic glass window of the church he looks at theatrical representation not to biblical narrative. It is not surprising, then, that Derek Brewer (1974) pointed out the paralelism between the design of the tales and the design of a Gothic cathedral, each tale being the equivalent to one of the scenes represented in the gothic glass windows of the church. We readers realize the truth of that when we see that Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*, as the narrative proceeds, is showing more and more interest in "theatrical interplay" and less in the telling of the story, as it happens when we reach the prologues to "The Manciple's Tale" and "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale", or at the opening of *Troilus and Criseyde* where the rhetorical "invocatio" is used as an "introductio" to the play.

As we know the tales in *Il Deccamerone* are told using a static frame, while those in *The Canterbury Tales* move inside a dynamic one (Sklovsky). In the latter the pilgrims, the tellers, travel towards Canterbury and in their very detailed way enjoy themselves with the telling of the tales, as in a game (Josipovici). In *Il Deccamerone* we hear two voices: the author/ narrator and the tellers, the Florentine gentlemen and ladies; but in *The Canterbury Tales* we hear several voices: the authorial voice, the narrator's, the pilgrim Chaucer and the rest of the pilgrims (E.Talbot Donaldson). These voices are not merely reporting and narrating, but also arguing among them, discussing about different topics and subjects, and commenting about the excellence or ugliness of the stories, abusing each other, and so on and so forth. The pilgrims are described as individuals as well as types:

> A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That fro the tyme that he first began
> To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
> Trouthe and honour, fredom and cursteisie.
> (CT 43-46)

everyone in either the inner or the outer audience would be familiar with the typical portrait of the type, and that means that a social and literary conventional pattern is behind the mere lines and words (Jill Mann 1973). From this

point of view it seems most difficult to explain the following lines that describe the real knight in the group of people in front of the audience:

> But to tellen yow of his array,
> His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
> Of fustian he wered a gypon
> Al bismotered with his habergeon,
> For he was late ycome from his viage,
> And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.
> (CT 73-78)

All the prilgrims in the General Prologue, the Host and later the author/ narrator/ pilgrim Chaucer are depicted with these two perspectives.

Jill Mann described in her book *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* the catalogue that stayed as a background for the depiction of the pilgrims in the "General Prologue", while Claes Schaar in *The Golden Mirror* developed a systematic study of descriptive literary techniques at the back; Bryan & Dempster in their recollection *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* studied and showed the debts of Chaucer's work to other authors and to a classical and medieval narrative tradition. D.W. Robertson in his *A Preface to Chaucer* explored the learned and mythological tradition in which Chaucer was inserted, and W.W. Curry in *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* the scientific one, etc., just to mention a few.

Later Piero Boitani and Jill Mann in their anthology *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion* have developed with the help of other chaucerians scholars more modern approaches and, let us say, posmodern analysis studying Chaucer's works and retaking the same facts and evidences pointed out in previous studies, some of which I have already quoted. But in some way, I think, they miss the chance - specially when dealing with *The Canterbury Tales* - and the opportunity to explain the reason for such "rich individual variety and interplay", as they seem to be repeating old concepts, ideas and themes in more modern terms and expressions. Let us have a brief look to some of the contributions in the anthology which more clearly deal with the topic I am proposing here.

Benson in his article *"The Canterbury Tales*: Personal drama or experiment in poetic variety" settles his point with a well-known and right statement:

> For many, the clearest signals of the variety of the *Canterbury Tales* are the sharply differentiated tellers and their intricate relationships before, after, and sometimes during the tales. No other story-collection has a frame that is so lively and dynamic (93).

This, in fact, supports his view that the collection of tales reveals a sharply interplay among a group of speakers/ tellers, but next the question is to choose between personal drama or experiment in poetic variety to justify it. It seems that Benson is in favour of dramatic interplay and so he brings Kittredge's much quoted definition of this design and develops what he calls "dramatic theory":

> Kittredge argued that the individual tales are not told in Chaucer's own voice, but that each is a dramatic expression of the personality of its particular teller: "The Pilgrims do not exist for the sake of the story, but *vice versa*. Structurally regarded, the stories are merely long speeches expressing, directly or indirectly, the characters of the several persons - they are more or less comparable, in this regard, to the soliloquies of Hamlet or Iago or Macbeth (94).

Once Kittredge and Benson have stated that the tale is an extension of the personality, ideas and behaviour of the teller they inmediately think of character, not type, and in order to explain what character is they refer as a way of example to Hamlet, Iago and Macbeth - we may say to a literay tradition -. The important fact to notice here is that none of the scholars link the "acting and doing" of the tellers to a narrative tradition for there is none. Further on Benson goes on saying:

> Given such diverse and energetic portraits it is all too easy to imagine *The Canterbury Tales* as fully developed and psychologically complex characters, like those we know from realistic novel or popular film (96).

On the one hand the dynamism and complexity of the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* take the scholars to the field of performance, to the field of

film, as well as to the idea of character as it is seen in realistic fiction. On the other, Benson does not explain the needs and reasons why Chaucer moved from a static and "energetic portraits" into "complex characters", so establis - ing an opposition between passive portraits and active characters. Finally Benson adds:

> Scholars have even argued that Chaucer must have had real-life models and suggested specific names, but the latest studies con- firm what some earlier readers understood - the *General Prologue* describes types rather than specific individuals (96).

Gower, the Gawain poet, Langland and the early Chaucer all belong to the tradition we have briefly described so far. Their stories are made of topoi, prototypes, standard groups, story patterns, even though the self might be perceived as part of the fabulated and the conventional. Chaucer breaks this traditional path in *The Canterbury Tales* due mainly to the parodic nature of his work:

- when he describes the characters he makes a parody of both literary tradition and real individual.
- when the pilgrims speak they make a parody of both social estate and his humorous counterpoint.
- when Chaucer describes Chaucer he perceives himself as a parody of himself.

The conclusion is that subjectivity, the perception of self in modern sense, in the Middle Ages is the outgrowth and source of parody, and when used in literature, as in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, comes from comedy, the comic and parodic nature of some ele- ments in Medieval plays, such as Noah's wife action and gesture in *Noah's Flood*, the complaining and locality of the shepherds in *Prima Pastorum*, and the interplays among the shepherds themselves and between the shepherds and the rags, Mak and Gyll, in *Secunda Pastorum*, for example.

Although Kittredge describes *The Canterbury Tales* as a "human com- edy," with the pilgrims as dramatis personae, and Lumiansky in *Of Sondry Folk* applied the concept systematically to the entire poem pointing out that there was a "personal dramatic interplay" between the teller and the tale,

considering the tale as an extension of the teller's character and individuality,. i.e. subjectivity, still they both understood that Chaucer was following a narrative tradition and in their interpretation moved within the limits of a written text. This "dramatic" approach is questioned by Marshall Leicester arguing that there is a misunderstanding between "written text" and oral performance:

> The objection to this "dramatic" model that I would particularly like to single out is its disregard for the poem's insistent, though perhaps intermittent, *textuality*, for the way the work repeatedly breaks the fiction of spoken discourse and the illusion of the frame to call attention to itself as a written thing (216).

Leicester claims that the "road-side drama" approach has a "central confusion: the confusion of *voice* with *presence*", the confusion "that the voice in a text (is) traceable to a person, a subject, *behind* the language, an individual controlling and limiting, and thereby guaranteeing, the meaning of what is expressed" (216-217). Leicester is trapped in the textuality of his text and unable to see that in real drama voice and presence cannot live without each other; he is trapped in the textuality of narrative traditions that he applies to Chaucer.

The case with *Troilus and Criseyde* being slightly different in quantity is similar in quality if we analise Criseyde's part in the "play". It is generally assumed that women's characters as portrayed by the men writer's of the Middle Ages, and also the few women writers themselves, had very few personality possibilities. The women of the period are either Virgin Marys or shrews. There seem to be no women that possess a natural mix of human traits. There are the Virgin Marys, women who are completely innocent of everything and do not get out into society much… There are the shrews and they are more of a possession, as it the adulterous Alison to her husband in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" or the wife and daughter in "The Reeve's Tale". Even the woman in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is also depicted as the deceitful tramp when she sets up Gawain by giving him her undergarment, leading to his fall to the Green Knight. But romance brings forward a different type of women (Katharina M. Wilson 1984, Mary B. Rose 19860, Carol M. Meale 1993).

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer makes up his mind and collects these three traditions, spiritual love, courtly love and sexual love depicting a parodical "dramatis personae" of those types of medieval women, the saint, the ideal lady, the passionate woman and the whore woman. He transforms any kind of superimposed or established behaviour and percolates these types of women into one more realistic, naturalistic and practical perspective. Let us see how Criseyde is described in the poem, how the author sees her, and how she finally unveils her truthful nature and personality.

The first time Criseyde is described by the author (TC I 99-105) is seen as an ideal, hyperbolic being: "Nas non so fair", "forpassynge every wight", "aungelik", "a thing inmortal", "an hevenyssh perfect creature". After being granted protection by Hector she stays in Troy keeping "hire honour" and "hire estat." At the temple, Criseyde is still beautiful but she is also a widow dressed in black, umatchable in her beauty, but "ful lowe and still allone, / Byhynden other folk, in litel brede" (TC I 178-179). As we see, Chaucer is following here all the good qualities that the courtly love system would attribute her as the lady of the romance where "the lady is regularly represented as perfect in all her attributes. The basis of this idea is, of course, the high social position of woman." (Dodd 7-8). Yet Criseyde has no high position by herself in Troy's society, she has the borrowed rank given to her by Hector and this is her weakness in the conventional system.

Later on (I 281-294) Troilus sees Criseyde for the first time -through the eyes of the narrator-. She is the ideal woman, again, and her physical appearance and presence makes Troilus almost faint, in front of that vision of love, "the nevere thoughte hym so good a syghte." Here Troilus attitude and feelings suit well the predicaments of the courtly love system and so he suffers deeply, he is sleepless, he wants to kill himself, he is obssesed with how may win her will and retain her favour. He is the real lover of the romance who fulfills all the conditions established by Andreas Capellanus and Chrétien de Troies.

Troilus confesses his love for Criseyde to Pandarus, and Pandarus seeing the critical situation in which the young knight is tries first to deter him from his pledge and obsession. Pandarus tries to cool him down and describes woman -in the typical bourgeois view- as an object of love, as a fragile being that sooner or later suffers the assaults of the love and yields to it. Either ce-

lestial or real, Criseyde, it is not an exception and her youth indicates that it is more appropriate and natural for her to follow the path of love.

> And for to speke of hire in specyal,
> Hire beaute to bithynken and hire youthe,
> It sit hire naught to ben celestial
> As yet, though that hire liste bothe and kowthe;
> But trewely, it sate hire wel right nowthe
> A worthi knyght to loven and cherice,
> And but she do, I holde it for a vice.
> (TC I 981-987)

In this way Pandarus provides Troilus and us with a most skeptical and realistic point of view establishing than the proper condition of the woman is rooted more in her carnal body than in her social image or spiritual shyness, and so he questions the standards of the courtly love system and stands in favour of the new more naturalist tradition as the modern view to order the relationship between women and men. Once the plan has been designed Pandarus approaches Criseyde who describes her situation in the context of the Trojan war and her personal restraints: she is a vidow - as the Wife of Bath - and she must moderate her natural impulses - contrary to the Wife of Bath.

> I! God forbede!' quod she. 'Be ye mad?
> Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
> By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!
> Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
> It satte me wel bet ay in a cave
> To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
> Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.'
> (TC II 113-119)

Criseyde protests her bad luck (TC II 407-504), once she has known what her uncle Pandarus's words are leading to. Altough the author, along Book II, seems to be building up a sort of moral image and reliable shape for Criseyde, we do not really know if Criseyde's feelings are sincere or if she is just facing serious menace on her social stability, very weak and delicate, let us say. Being a vidow Criseyde tries to behave as the perfect lady of the romance

and as the perfect pure and chaste woman, yet the question is: does she believe in those two types of women, or is she just prentending? Later on (TC II 624-644) Troilus is described, again, as the perfect knight of the romance but also as the worthy Christian one, if we compare this description with the knight in the group of pilgrims.

Criseyde is at the window watching the comitive of knights and warriors who comes back from battle passing by her house. Troilus is mong them. So at this point the author wants to make sure that both we listeners and Criseyde perceive Troilus as the brave, mild, gentil and truthful knight of the romance suitable and right for Criseyde. But it is when Crisyede in her room recalls Troilus "manhood" that she seems to "see" Troilus under the two conventional courtly love views: as a model of knighthood and as a likely lover. In fact, Criseyde tries to convince herself that her luck, at the end, si not so bad. She and we are in front of a dual vision, a vision between what we see and what it is.

We reach the turning point when Criseyde in a systematic way thinks of the pros and cons of her relationship with Troilus (TC II 694-812). She unveils her thoughts but he does not speak it is the omniscient narrator who tells us what she is thinking and the reasons why she should reject or accept Trolius approach. Among other things she says that she does not want to get married -opposite to the Wife of Bath- because husbands are always a non-sense and marriage is a noisy thing. Is she insinuating that she prefers and adulterous relation? When the Wife of Bath insists upon the fact that sexual intercourse is blessed by the Holy Book, The Bible, she links this heterodox statement with her own experience, her multiple marriages and husbands, so marking a radical difference, so far, with Crisyede. Both are willing to have lovers: The Wife of Bath through her husbands because husbands bring herm, besides sex, comfort and commodity; Criseyde through an adulterous lover who will also bring her comfort, commodity, security and protection. It seems as if in both cases sex was used for other means but both women be-long to different social strata, the wife is an independent woman, she earns her life and she is a member of the working middle-class", Criseyde would like to be independent but she is commited to the rules of the war and limited in her actions by her father's treason. We can touch and trust the Wife of Bath, but Criseyde fakes away whenever we want to grab her.

These words represent the climax of the action. Criseyde who has been featured as an ideal lady, according to the courtly love system, a perfect woman according the Bible and Christian thought, even has been given an aurea of virginity and chastity, speaks by herself in the frame of her real state -a traitor's daughter under Hector's protection-, she has nothing: no father, no friend, no rank, no virtue, except her body and her personal abilities. And Criseyde considers becoming a feigning lover.

> With that she gan hire eyen on hym caste
> Ful esily and ful debonairly,
> Avysyng hire, and hied nought to faste
> With nevere a word, but seyde hym softely,
> Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely,
> And in swich forme as he gan now devyse,
> Receyven hym fully to my servyse,
>
> Bysechyng hym, for Goddes love, that he
> Wolde, in honour of trouthe and gentilesse,
> As I wel mene, ek menen wel to me,
> And myn honour with wit and bisynesse
> Ay kepe; and if I may don hym gladnesse,
> From hennesforth, iwys, *I nyl nought feyne.*
> Now beth al hool; no lenger ye ne pleyne.
> (TC III 155-168)

Crisyede accepts Troilus' love, and in a courtly manner she is going to be for him the ideal lady/ lover for his demanding knight. The fact the she says that her words and actions "are not feigning -Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry* declares that dramatic action is a feigning action- does not mean she is not going to play her part in the performance (III 170 and ff.), although she seems ready to play it happily and enjoyingly. It is at this point when the parodic nature of Criseyde's action transforms the whole "narrative" poem into a "play", or at least makes us think of a theatrical tradition more than a narrative one.

We may think that this perspective stands in front of what have been said so far by the scholars concerning this poem, and that our point of view risks deforming the true meaning of Chaucer's work, but the truth is that once Criseyde is forced to part away from his supposed lover, she seems less tor-

mented and troubled than Troilus. She offers a practical diagnosis to the problem, unveiling her deeply concerns and interests (TC IV 1254-1415) when we realise that many of the reasons to calm down and fulfill destiny are a repetition of the ones given previously to accept Troilus's love and demand. Just in this context we can read the author's irony

> And treweliche, as writen wel I fynde,
> That al this thyng was seyd of good entente,
> And that hire herte trewe was and kynde
> Towardes hym and spak right as she mente,
> And that she starf for wo neigh whan she wente,
> And was in purpos euere to be trewe:
> Thus writen they that of hire werkes knewe.
> (TC IV 1415-1421)

So at this point we get to the conclusion and Criseyde's action and attitude are both clear. For the sake of her life she has been acting the parody, performing, playing her role of the ideal lady, the virtuous woman and the lusty lover. It sounds strange and extravagant but let us see how Diomedes is taking Troilus's path and approaching Criseyde exactaly in the same way as the former did: introducing himself as the perfect, gentle, worthy knight who promises deep feelings, strong friendship, honour and obedience. And listen to Criseyde's words:

> But natheles she thonketh Diomede
> Of al his travaile and his goode cheere,
> And that hym list his frendshipe hire to bede;
> And she accepteth it in good manere,
> And wol do fayn that is hym lief and dere,
> And tristen hym she wolde, and wel she myghte,
> As seyde she; and from hire hors sh'alighte.
> (TC V 183-189)

These words take us round to the beginning of the play: different character, same action.

V. A. Kolve in *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, deals with Chaucer's use of narrative imagery and visual art and his audience knowledge and application of such material.

> … the visual contexts of the *Canterbury Tales*, especially, in how a knowledge of the symbolic traditions current in the visual arts of the later Middle Ages can clarify and deepen our response to his narrative poems (1).

In the medium of visual arts Kolve acknowledges both the alteration of such material through time and the inaccuracy of any claim which maintains that Chaucer and his audience knew the same identical portraits. He works with the premise that both Chaucer and his original audience would have known them and "understood" certain examples of narrative imagery. That is true but no so important since visual arts develop its narrative and symbolic iconography from medieval theatrical scenography. When he maintains that the iconographic image is "characteristically assimilated to the verisimilar and mimetic texture of the whole" and that those two conditions are "discovered within the images one forms in attending to the narrative action itself" (Diller 60), we must assume that the reader or listener "represents" in his mind images, action and characters as in theatre, not real but mimetic, not prototypical but individual, not the standard but the parodic, and that Chaucer and his "audience-in-front-of-him" knew the same "dramatic portraits".

There is a strong connection between the depiction of characters in *The Canterbury Tales* and the depiction of characters in medieval theatre. The realistic details and naturalistic features described in the tales belong to the world of theatre more than to a specific known narrative tradition. To put it the other way round, Chaucer sees a theatre performance when he describes the Tabard Inn and theatrical characters when he describes the pilgrims, and follows the "closet theatre" pattern, with a narrator and a mime, all of them on the stage, being in turn protagonists and audience, when he designs the structure of the collection. Even more, when Chaucer uses humour and irony, he takes advantage of the parodic element, considered by Aristotle in *Poetics* and Bajtín in *La Cultura Popular en la Edad Media y Renacimiento* as the constitutive element of comedy in front of tragedy, as the constitutive element of the popular against the established, courtly and literary taste, as the constitutive element of subjectivity.

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