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‘AS WRIT MYN AUCTOUR CALLED LOLLUS’: DIVINE AND AUTHORIAL OMNIPOTENCE IN CHAUCER’S TROILUS AND CRISEIDE

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Chaucer’s Lollius has long been regarded by us critics and scholars as a mystery; and, to confess the truth, the thing has become a mystery indeed under our treatment. For in our discussions we have made no many mistakes about plain matters of record, and have omitted so many discordant conjectures, that the whole subject has become entangled to the verge of distraction and is now involved in a kind of erudiction mist. Let us try to extricate ourselves from the fogbound labyrinth, and to that end let us examine certain obvious phenomena—for such there are—in an orderly and logical manner, in the light of reason and common sense and of what we know of the habits of literary men.1

This powerful statement is the introductory paragraph of George Kittredge’s magisterial eighty-five-page essay entitled ‘Chaucer’s Lollius’. The site and date of this publication, the Harvard Studies in Classical Philology in 1917, may be regarded as representative of the critical methodology which dominates scholarly work on the Latin-sounding, seven-letter name which Chaucer mentions only three times in all his texts, once in the House of Fame (see 1464-72) and twice in Troilus and Criseide (I, 394; V, 1653).2 Kittredge and numerous other critics, in a veritable flurry of historical scholarship, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century and abating in the 1950s,3 defended the medieval

2All references to and quotations from Chaucer’s texts in this essay are according to The Riverside Chaucer, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
3For a fairly inclusive survey of opinions before Kittredge, cf. Eleanor O. Homond, Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 94-8, and Rudolf Steiner, ‘Chaucer’s Haus der Faini’, Englische Studien, 85 (1912), 486-9. It would be difficult to discuss all existing opinions on Lollius which appeared together with or
author against the insinuation that he might be guilty of the worst of all crimes a philologist can conceive of: plagiarism or, as Kittredge has it, 'fraud' or 'deceit'. Although the philological effort to exonerate a genial Chaucer from having simply fabricated or invented the name 'Lollus' is not always as openly acknowledged as in Kittredge's essay, it can be perceived as the ruling paradigm behind practically all the investigations which have tried to provide historical Lollus to Chaucer studies (or, similarly, historical 'Kytes' in Wolfram von Eschenbach studies).

To answer the vexing question of Lollus's identity, a variety of theories about medieval and Roman candidates—usually ones with some connection to the matter of Troy—have been advanced. Charles Huthway's sug-


"Kittredge, 'Chaucer's Lollus', 52: 62. An even earlier warning against attributing to Chaucer any capricious intentions with respect to Lollus is John Koch's 'Ein Beitrag zur Krich Chauers', Englische Studien, 1 (1877), 249-93. Numerous scholars have attempted to explain Chaucer's silence about his source for Troilus and Criseyde, Boccaccio's Filocolo, on the basis of biographical assumptions. Pietro Borsei (Boccaccio e Chaucer), (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1901), argues that Chaucer left Boccaccio unmentioned because the Italian poet was known as a man of loose habits and the English king would not have approved of Chaucer's celebrating him as his master source. More recently, Donald Howard has seen a disappointing personal meeting of both poets in Italy as the reason for Chaucer's ignoring of Boccaccio (Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 193-2).


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gestion that Lollus might stand for the thirteenth-century philosopher and
alchemist, Raymond Lull, sounds intriguing but is far-fetched and has been dismissed as such.8 Lillian Herlands Hornstein, trying to defend Chaucer against commentators who assumed Lollus to be 'a literary hali-
cination',9 detected a friend of Francis Petrarach, one Lullus Pietro Stefani de Toretti, to whom Petrarach in his letters referred as 'Lollus', as Chaucer's 'auctur'. In her opinion, Chaucer, before he wrote the House of Fame and Troilus and Criseyde, received a manuscript of Boccaccio's Filocolo (the main source for his Troilus) without Boccaccio's name but with the statement (oral or written) that the begetter was Lollus. A Roman historian of the third century, a certain Lollus Urbicus, the elder, has also been advanced as a possible source by a whole host of scholars ever since the late seventeenth century. This theory, one which led many such famous Chaucerians as Thomas Warton, Eleanor P. Hammond, and T.R. Loun-
berry, was successfully dismissed by Kittredge who was able to follow back among the possibilities of information and misinformation to its begin-
ings. In Spiegel's list of authors appended to the 1598 polemic,10 Hans J. Epstein, in his essay 'The Identity of Chaucer's Lollus', suggested Bassus Lollus, a first-century Roman, as the probable Classical authority from which Chaucer claims to have translated his Troilus.11 Several of Bassus' epigrams touch on the matter of Troy, and Epstein maintained that Chaucer may have had access to these texts either via a compendium or a florilegium, perhaps a yet unknown version of the Greek Anthology.

The most substantial theory on the etymology of Lollus has been proposed by Kittredge himself. Expanding on earlier indications made by R.G. Latham12 and Bernhard Ten Brink,13 Kittredge claimed that Chaucer's Lollus should be associated with Bassus Lollus whose name and reputation as an "auctor" on the Trojan War he encountered due to a careless or ignorant reading of the first line of Horace, Epistulae 1.2, a text which Chaucer might have stumbled upon while reading John of Salisbury's Poliorcetica VII, 9:

Troiani bellii scriptor. Maxime Lollis, dum tu declamans Roman, Prisciae relatio [-].

8Charles Huthway, 'Chaucer's Lollus', Englische Studien, 44 (1911), 161. Lillian Herlands Hornstein, 'Petrarca's Ladius, Chaucer's Lollus', PMLA, 63 (1948), 64.10
9Kittredge, 'Chaucer's Lollus', 53-9.11
Chaucer or Chaucer’s source, so Kittredge’s argument, must have misconstrued ‘Maxime’ as a simple adjective (instead of a noun). Moreover, if one introduces the (mis)reading ‘scriptor’ or ‘scriptorium’ in place of the accusative ‘scriptorem’, one arrives at the phrase: ‘Lollius, you greatest writer of the Trojan War’ or ‘Lollius, you greatest writer of the Trojan War’.

Thus, according to Kittredge, when Lollius is mentioned in the *House of Fame, Chaucer*

was not inventing; he was under a misapprehension. He believed that a work by Lollius had once existed, but, since neither he nor any of his acquaintances had ever seen it, that it was lost. [...] When Chaucer wrote the *Troilus*, his erroneous belief that one Lollius had written a (lost) work on Troy had not been corrected. [...] Accordingly, in the *Troilus*, as part of the fiction, Chaucer pretended to be translating faithfully the Latin work of Lollius. Lollius is not Boccaccio, nor Petrarch, nor Boethius, nor Guido; he is purely and simply Lollius—a supposed ancient writer on the subject. The fiction consists not in ascribing to Lollius a work on Troy (for that was merely an error) but in claiming to have this work in hand and to translate it faithfully. 

In 1950, Robert Pratt was able to substantiate Kittredge’s hypothesis by providing evidence of two medieval manuscripts in which the assumed textual corruptions actually occur. Of the misreadings/misspellings (‘scriptorium’ instead of ‘scriptorem’) Pratt found in a copy of John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (1150), which cites various lines from the Horatian *Epistola* while discussing the use of poetry in the teaching of moral philosophy. The second and more important one Pratt detected in a French translation of the *Policraticus* which a fourteenth-century Franciscan, Denis Foulechot, undertook for Charles V. Unlike Chaucer, who might have misread ‘lollis’ as vocative, Foulechot seems to have interpreted ‘lollis’ as nominative and mistranslated the passage as if Horace was introducing the principal ancient authority on the Matter of Troy:

*Cæli Horaci dic, quod lollis est principalis ex viro de la batalla de Troye.*

Kittredge’s findings, together with Pratt’s corroborating textual evidence, seem to have extricated Chaucerians from the pre-Kittredgean ‘dog-boxed labyrinth’ concerning Lollius. Consequently, Stephen A. Barney, in his *Explanatory Notes* to *Troilus and Criseyde* in the 1987 edition of the *Riverside Chaucer*, expresses his complete confidence that—given Pratt’s findings—‘[s]o better evidence that Kittredge was right could be desired’. 

I am far from challenging the theoretical possibility of Chaucer’s misapprehending a hypothetically existing version of John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* or his taking for factual information such a misapprehension by the author of some manuscript. However, I do have serious problems with construing a relentless causal necessity out of Pratt’s findings. After all, the misreadings which the dominant philological hypothesis attributes to Chaucer and/or his source are only supported by two relatively obscure manuscripts. Neither of them can be linked to Chaucer, and their existence certainly does not warrant Stephen Barney’s universalizing statement that an error like this ‘was current in Chaucer’s time’. Furthermore, I have a hard time believing that Chaucer, who had researched the earlier renderings of the Trojan War thoroughly enough to get intimately acquainted with Guido delle Colonne, Giovanni Boccaccio, and to know about the works or reputations of Homer, Dante, Dicys, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Josephus, Statius, Vergil, Ovid, Lucan, and Claudian would be willing to accept helters-skelter a certain ‘Lollius’ as the ‘principal’ authority on the Matter of Troy based on the evidence of one single (misapprehended) phrase. Therefore, in the absence of irrefutable, hard-core textual proof, I would like to abandon Kittredge’s ingenious philological approach.
hypothesis to pursue my own—one which situates Chaucer in the intellectual milieu of late-medieval England and which assumes that the author invented ‘Lollard’ as part of a poetic strategy which draws attention to the possible absolute power (potentia absoluta) the fourteenth-century author perceived to hold over the microcosm of his literary creation. While my intention with this essay is thus—on the one hand—to propose a historicizing variant to the philological status quo on the Lollard question, I would—on the other hand—to introduce a powerful exception against the ‘New Philological’ claim that any interpretive approach by a medievalist based on authorship must be ill-informed because medieval authors did not share their modern counterparts’ concern for copyright questions.20

In the preceding paragraph I invoked a term from late-medieval scholasticism to indicate a methodological assumption upon which the following deliberations depend. I will make use of the late-medieval nominalist concept of the absolute power (potentia absoluta) of God’s free will in a structural analogy with the power Chaucer wields as the author of Troilus and Criseyde. In recent years, critics have made ample use of nominalist thought to explicate some of the nuances of fourteenth-century texts whose writers

texts were less interested in restoring moral and religious commonplaces than in investigating the possibilities and limitations of language. Responding to the developing nominalism of the time and the pervasive uncertainty as to exactly what one could know, storytellers joined schoolmen in focusing not on truth but on such epistemological matters as the essential ambiguity of signs and the inherent complexity of language. Along with speculative grammarians, they explored processes of signification and modifications of meaning. And, along with semioticians, fiction writers investigated modes of signifying ways in which language altered concepts of reality. For those involved with the word, the emphasis was on inference, equivocation, and various kinds of confutandum or confundetur.21

Among late-medieval English texts, Chaucer’s have yielded most fruitful results for exploring potential correspondences with nominalist tenets, and Ralph Strode, the ‘philosophical’ (in two manuscripts ‘logical’)

20For the ‘New Philologists’ claims about authorship, see Stephen G. Nichols (ed.), The New Philology (special issue of Speculum, 65 (1990), especially the contributions by Suzanne Fleischman, Stephen G. Nichols, Gabriele M. Spiegel, and Steigfried Werner. This recent movement has been critically reviewed by Karl Stockmann, ‘Neue Philologie’, in Joachim Heintze (ed.), Moderne Wissenschaft: Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche (Munich: Insel Verlag, 1994), 398-427 (esp. 403-5, on ‘Autore, Werk.’).


 strode to whom Troilus and Criseyde is dedicated, has been presented as a probable source from which Chaucer might have gleaned basic epistemological and theological concepts propagated by fourteenth-century nominalists.22 For the purpose of this paper, I will apply the nominalist concept of divine omnipotence as a structural analogue, as a form of theological discourse which, not unlike literary discourse, participated in the negotiation of late-medieval and early modern human problems. I will attempt to suggest a correspondence between the divine creative act and Chaucer’s act of creating his literary fiction. Postulating such a correspondence seems far-fetched, as high and late-medieval authors almost never presented their work as a free creation es nihil or de potentia absoluta.23 Rather, readers are assured that texts are based on preexistent material, that the author is part of a well-established and clearly defined tradition of literary production and reception. As Ulrich Langer explains: Recourse to prior themes or elements was usually perceived as authenticating, in enabling, rather than disabling, for the fictional world was believed to celebrate the survival of human culture, not its original reinvention by an individual. Theologically speaking, the human author conceived of himself as an artifex, not as a creator or primum causae efficiens; he was caused to write by conditions outside himself. Human imagination, then, was not the freeing of the mind from the constraints of the existing world, but an ability


23Cf. Alastair J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholarly Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2nd ed. 1988), for an inclusive survey of high medieval and in-depth study of late-medieval authorial attitudes and nomenclature. A different, highly perceptive reading of Chaucer’s inclusion of the free will theme in his poetry has been advanced by Joerg O. Piche (‘Man’s Free Will and the Poet’s Choice: The Creation of Artistic Order in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale’, Anglia, 93 (1975), 335-60). He posits that the poet was cognizant of the concept of the posui-theologus in fourteenth-century Italian poets and shaped his ‘Knight’s Tale’ so as to have its perfect structure mirror that of divine creation. Troilus and Criseyde, especially in view of the contingency of its structure, demands a radically different view of God’s (and an author’s) role in his creation.
to reproduce images and spiritual constructs that were already contained in the created fabric of the world itself. The imagination allowed man to uncover the similarities in the vast network of signs around him, not to pro-
duce an alternative to that perfect work. Imagination, thus, is, in a sense, be-
longed partly to the objects contemplated, partly to the person contem-
plating them.24

With most late-medieval authors, the preeminence of this tradition can
hardly be overestimated.25 For Chaucer, it is certainly palpable in the
constructions of the narrators of his dream visions or the Treatise on the
Astrolabe.26 Even in his Troilus and Criseyde, the text in which narrative
strategies are most openly a topic, the poet devises a narrator who presents
himself as a mere interpreter, a faithful translator, of the Lollard master
fabric, who commits each of the five books with an invocation of
various Munces, and who leaves no doubt that he is a faithful servant of the
members of his audience, themselves servants of the God of Love. How-
ever, the existence of these and several other devices indicating external


25For a critical investigation of Deschamps', Utk., Gower's, Hoceville's, Lylygate's, Hennyson's, Douglas', Skelton's, Hawes' views on Chaucer's role as autor, see Joseph O. Fichten, 'Oho! weel goff all that Chaucer writyt von now—Autor and autocrat in 15th Century English Literature', in Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (eds.), Traditionswandel und Traditionserhalt (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 61-76.

26On the House of Fame, e.g., cf. Isaietilla T. Miller, Poetic License: Authorship and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 71. 'Thoughout the poem the narrator has alternately asserted his superiority to and attempted to disappear behind previously established versions of truth, claiming and discarding his role as author as he tests and rejects all available authorities, including himself. No position—whether of self-effacing dependence, or
assertive self-reliance, or even a more moderate middle position—has proven satis-
factory...What results is an oscillation among inadequate options that constantly surface,
call each other into question, and replace each other. The narrator's silence at the end
acknowledges the limitations of his own voice but also recognizes and predicts the ineluctable failure of the "true of get accurate" to maintain his status, and it recalls the
existence of similar failures that have occurred throughout the poem. No truly author-
tative voice has been discovered; no authoritative stem can be fully validated; and
the poetic voice and enterprise end. In his Troilus and Criseyde, however, Chaucer has
found a solution for this problem, one that allows him to acknowledge openly his
authority over the fictional text by attributing limited authority to Pandrasus, the
narrator, and himself. The focus classicus for disclaiming authority about compiling
the Treatise on the Astrolabe appears in lines 59-64, where Chaucer lets "anye lewey xe
knowe that "I am so unpert to have frounden this work of my labour of edde astrologes,
and have it translated in myn English oady for thy doctrine". In this text, Chaucer
undoubtedly chooses the compiler's mark.
more and more obviously theirs, but the source material still fully motivates the degrees of variation or self-involvement of the respective authors. 30

How can the nominalist stressing of God's absolute power result in new paradigms of thought which may facilitate more freedom for the individual in late-medieval England or early modern France and Italy? Nominalist thinkers (William of Ockham, Nicholas d'Auriol, Pierre d'Ailly, Gabriel Bied, to name only a few) stress the distinction between two aspects of God's power, the potentia absoluta (all the possibilities open to God, absolutely and hypothetically speaking) and the potentia ordinata (those possibilities He has chosen and are visible in the existing order of creation and salvation). 31 According to His absolute power, He could have chosen to create a different world, to incarnate Himself as an at or a stone, or to cause someone to have intuitive cognition of a non-existent. For some of these thinkers, the only limit to this power is the principle of non-contradiction—that is, God cannot do something logically contradictory. Of course, God has promised us that He will follow His own chosen order, so in fact God will not suddenly and arbitrarily exercise His absolute power in any way which might compromise the goodness and reliability of the divine legislator. 32 Still, even the merely hypothetical possibility of God's exercise of His potentia absoluta became a favorite tool for advancing


31 Brief late-medieval discussion of God's absolute terms can be found in Johannes Aleniensis's Vocabularium theologicum conciliens vocabularum descriptions, 1-1 (contains a Joanne Aleniius Mandelbomii (1575); cf. also Henrik A. Ohrman's helpful glossary appended to his Harvost of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Bied and Late Medieval Nominalism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 454-78. For a recent application of the dichotomy between the two powers to fourteenth-century English culture, see Lwa Ruffolo's Union and Carcophagy: Reflections of Skepticism in Fourteenth-Century English Poetry, PhD thesis, University of California at Irvine, 1993. Unfortunately, Ruffolo merely invokes the distinction as a vague cultural analog without presenting textual correspondences.

32 There is disagreement among experts in history, philosophy, and theology as to the consequences of the dichotomies of God's absolute power. A sizable group of scholars, among them Heiko A. Oberman and William J. Courtenay, maintains that the dichotomy between potentia absoluta and ordinata in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thought demonstrated both the contingency and the reliability of the existing order. In

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strictly separated levels of truth: a religious truth of revelation, which was
the only secure truth and which could only be attained by faith alone; or, a
contingent, secular truth which could be gained through human rational
thinking. Such separation of truth resulted in a shift of interest from trans-
cendence to immanence. Hans Blumenberg summarizes the general intel-
lectual consequences of the nominalist assertions about God’s absolute
freedom and autonomy:

The modern age began, not indeed as the epoch of the death of God, but as
the epoch of the hidden God, the Deus absconditus—and a hidden God is
pragmatically as good as dead. The nominalist theology induces a human
relation to the world whose implicit content could not have been formulated
in the postulate that man had to behave as though God were dead. This
induces a restless, taking stock of the world, which can be designated as the
motive power of the age of science.34

Although I do not want to claim the direct influence of any specific late-
medieval scholastic text on Troilus and Criseyde,35 I would like to contend that
Chaucer, similarly, begins to take stock of his own fictional world in a way
which may be unprecedented in late-medieval English literature but which has
clear parallels in the coreal philosophical superstructure. This
peripatetic cultural constituent will assist in understanding several of the
premises of literary representation in Chaucer’s text.

Chaucer intends to tell a story in which a mood of contingency sur-
rounds all characters. Consequently, his plot is ideally situated in the midst
of pagan times and the Trojan war, and for years the changing luck of
warfare has produced a general sense of calamity. If life outside the walls of
Troy is inexcusable, it is similarly contingent for Criseyde inside the city
cells. Her own father, Calkas, has left her behind and has become a traitor
to his city by joining the enemy. Her remaining male relative, ‘uncle’

34Hans Blumenberg, The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, tr. Robert M. Wallace
of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious,
and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450 (Chicago, IL, and London: University
of Chicago Press, 1992), 240-4) and Arnon Pankensteiner (Theology and the Scientific
Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century (Princeton, NJ:
Princeton University Press, 1986), 152-79), in contrast to Blumenberg, warn against
prototyping a simple causal connection between the theological doctrine of divine
omnipotence and the emergence of modern experimental science.

35That Chaucer did see and react against the potential dangers of radical medieval
realist thought can be deduced from his creation of the character ‘Troilus’ as a practical
literary caveat against Wyctlfisc realism in the poem. See my ‘For all that cown, cown
of necessitate: Chaucer’s Critique of Fourteenth-Century Beethovenian in Troilus
and Criseyde IV, 957-958’; Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 21 (1996),
29-31.

Pandarus, is not very reliable either, as the happiness of his friend Troilus
seems to take clear precedence over his niece’s well-being. Finally, like
fathers and uncles, even the Greek Gods cannot be trusted. They speak ‘in
amphitheatres I And for o sooth they tellen twenty lies’ (IV, 1406-7).36
Within this world of chance, Chaucer has strategically placed three well-
developed fabricators (or critics) of fiction—Pandanus, the Narrator, and
Lollis—whose limited creative powers in the end all refer the reader to their
prima causa efficios, Geoffrey Chaucer himself.37 Pandarus is a truly Chaucerian creation. The author takes special care in
transforming Boccaccio’s Pandaro into his very own Pandarus when he
attributes twice as many lines to this character as does Il Filistrate.38 As
John Fyler summarizes, ‘Pandarus operates as love’s strategist, the expert
in the Ovidian arts amatoria. He is an arfiter of situations, a deviser of
fictions to bring Troilus and Criseyde together.’39 Whatever his own
intentions, brotherly friend or voyeuristic pander, on the level of the story
Pandarus is the author of a web of rhetoric, mostly proverbial, which
enrages both Troilus and Criseyde to consent to a relationship.40 At
a decisive moment in the story, when he wants to underline the urgency of

History, 50 (1983), 1-25, who contends that some of the contingency in Chaucer’s text
might be due to his own sociological circumstances in the calamitous fourteenth
century.

37Cf. Lee Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History (Madison, WI: University of
Wisconsin Press, 1991), 26: ‘Throughout his early poetry Chaucer had insisted on
subjectivity as the unavoidable condition of all discourse, that all writing, both that
designed with cultural authority and that which purports to render experience directly,
is mediated by a historically specific human consciousness. The early complaints and
the dream visions constantly call attention to the narratorial voice, while Troilus and
Criseyde is both presupposed by the go-between Pandarus and delivered by an
unavoidable narrator, in effect defining itself as a study in mediation.’

38Cf. B. Sandford Merck, Design in Chaucer’s Troilus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse


40On Pandanus’ use of proverbs as an implicit ‘nominalist’ critique of a linguistic
universal, cf. the critical summary of my chapter on proverbs in Literaturhistorischer No-
minalismus im Spätmittelalter: Eine Untersuchung zu Sprache, Charakterzeichnung und
Sujetiv in Geoffrey Chau/er Troilus and Criseyde (Frankfurt a.M. et al: Lang, 1990),
73-108. In Paolo Maranzo-Foines’ review essay, ‘Le nominalisme de Geoffrey Chaucer
317: ‘Bien que d’origine individuelle, le proverbe exprime une vérité générale. D’autre
emploi couteux moyen d’argumentation juridique, il marque de son empreinte la méthode
scolastique et se répand dans tout les milieux. [Richard Ull].

notein en effet qu’au Moyen Age, ce n’est par tant l’expérience de vie empirique de l’individu
qui sont de critères de décision: ce sont des formes de langage cristallisées
Troilus’ visit to Criseyde’s bedchamber, he even invents a story about a Trojan with a fairly well-known, Greek sounding name, Horaste (Orestes), to whom she has—supposedly—promised her heart (III, 792-8). Although Pandarus does succeed in soothing Troilus’ desires, his rhetorical ruses must fail at easing Troilus’ pain when the young prince loses Criseyde to the Greek Diomedes. After all, Pandarus’ powers as a wielder of words are engendered, determined, and upheld by external causes, by the story line as presented in the master source, Lollius, and its rendering into English by the narrator. Deprived of linguistic means to carry the plot any further, his resigned ‘I kan namore seye’ (Y, 1743) hands back the story line and its characters to the next higher level of creative agency.41

The narrator of Troilus and Criseyde presents himself in typical self-effacing fashion to his target audience of courtly lovers. As they are servants of the God of love, he intends to serve them ‘As though I were hire owne brother deere’ (I, 51). He poses as the ‘sorrowful instrument’ That helpeth lovers, as I kan, to pleyne’ (I, 10-1 and for the longest time abstains from any claim to being the creator or originator of the story he is about to tell. Moreover, he renounces any ambition to potential personal additions to or comments on his material. He stylizes himself as a mere translator—sometimes a compiler—with no expertise in the ‘materie’ of his text who will faithfully represent not only the facts but also the feelings as expressed in his source: ‘Of no sentiment this endeale, | But out of Latin in my tonge I write’ (II, 13-4). At first sight, these statements and about sixty others suggested to Kittredge—who does not distinguish between narrator and author—that Chaucer wants his audience to confide in their narrator’s exact adherence to his Latin original.42 However, even if the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde is a much better candidate for identification with Chaucer than the boorish pedant of the dream visions or the natter of the Canterbury Tales, a closer look at his ambiguous statements and his changing involvement in his own story reveals that the narrator should be seen as just another playful level within a fictional world constructed to direct attention to and negotiate the absolute power of the author and free creator of this fiction.43

The narrator is far from being a mere ‘instrument’ through which his audience can reflect upon their own courtly loves. Rather, his numerous intrusions into the plot constitute the main source of contingency which permeates the poem. There is, for one, his increasing identification with the success and failure of the love relationship which, during Troilus’ and Criseyde’s first night together, makes him forget earlier and nobler intentions for his soul (‘For so hope I my sovel best avance. | To prey for him that Loves servantz be’; I, 46-7) and to offer it in exchange for the least of the lovers’ joys (‘Why nad I swich woon with my soule ybonght, | Ye, or the leeste jowe that was there’; III, 1319-20). As with Pandarus, the audience realizes that this fictionalizer, too, has a personal interest in the story which makes him deviate from his supposed Latin source and demonstrate powers of appropriation and variation of his material which go above and beyond those expected from a mere translator or compiler. Knowing he must finish his increasingly sad story, his heart ‘gyneth blode’ (IV, 12) and his pen ‘quaketh for drede’ (IV, 13). The most conspicuous examples of the narrator’s subjective tendencies are his confusing com-


42 For a differing view, see, e.g., Shearon E. Knopp, ‘The Narrator and His Audience in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde’, Studies in Philology, 79 (1981), 323-40. Knopp argues that Troilus and Criseyde ‘does not depend upon a contrast between the literal word of a latin narrator and the God-like creating intelligence of the poet for its effect. Its power comes instead from the use which a superbly competent narrator makes of his material to conform his audience with the essential inadequacy of human love. From the very beginning of Book I, his attitude illustrates the perspective which he will advocate in the Epilogue towards which he propels his audience even as he accepts them on their own terms as devotees of love. Although the narrator may not be identified with the poet, he probably comes closer in temperament and philosophy than any other figure in Chaucer’s works’ (324-5).
narratives concerning Criseyde: Did she have children or not (I, 132-3); how old was she (V, 836); did she or did she not recognize the obvious symptoms of Troilus’ lovesickness (I, 492-7); did she believe Pandaros’ protestations that Troilus had left town (III, 575-6); why did she not ask Troilus to rise when he was on his knees in front of her bed (III, 967-70); did she fall in love with Troilus too easily (II, 677)? He voices a suspicion, explains it away, but makes sure it lingers on our minds. [...] Characteristic are his whimsical digressions and beweaved explanations of things that are either self-evident or become problematic simply because they are explained. 44 This sfumato of defense or potential innocence reaches its peak when the narrator withholds judgment against Criseyde although all of his sources indicate—and Criseyde herself even foreknowingly extrapolates her future reputation (‘Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende, I Shal neyther ben ywriten nor yongsie! No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende’; V, 1058-60)45—how easily the faithful translator can defy textual tradition, including that of the venerable Lollis. Unhappy with his master-source, he seeks the reports of ‘they that of hire werkes knewe’ (IV, 1421), presumably actual observers of Criseyde’s actions. The narrator refuses to accept external causation in all his sources which blame Criseyde for abandoning Troilus for Diomede; he exclaims that he simply is not sure: ‘Men sey...’, I, 1050). However, he does know because ‘the storie’ (V, 1094) is positive about this piece of information, and it is his free decision to go ‘Farther than the storie wol devysse’ (V, 1094). The narrator, therefore, is pressured to adopt a final technique of saving his heroine: ‘And if I myghte excushe hire any wise, I for she so stowy was for hire untreuth, I biwy, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe’ (V, 1097-9); this he supports by claiming that sources are deficient or absent: ‘Ther is no auctour telleth it, I wene’ (V, 1088).46 The narrator’s obligation to follow the traditional storyline and morality is put to the test, and it becomes obvious to his readers that things could very easily turn out completely otherwise if someone with unlimited authority behind the narrator had only chosen to change them. These deviations are situated in starkest contrast with numerous occasions in the poem through which the narrator constructs the illusion of his own bookishness and close adherence to his source(s); for example: ‘For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I’ (II, 18); ‘Myn auctour shal I folwen, If I komne’ (III, 49); ‘And treflesichele, as written wel I fynde’ (IV, 1415).47

One of the most impressive of these many moments, when Chaucer’s narrator seems to place complete trust in his Lollis master-text, appears in Book III:

But sawe, paruyter, tom mat wyghten wolde
That every word, or sounde, or look, or cheere
Of Troilus that I hercbe sholdhe,
In al this while unto his lady dreme—
I trowe it were a long thin thing for to her
Or of what sith that start in swich dispayre,
His wordes alse, er every look, to peyte.

For sothe, I have neught herd it doon or this
In strowe son, se se min hem, I wene;
And though I wolde, I kounde nought, ywy;
For ther was some erthly hem betwenne.
That wolde, se synth myn auctour, wel comne
Neigh half this book, of which hym litel nought write
How sholdhe I change a lyn of it erlyne.

(III, 491-504)

Although the narrator and Lollis seem to be presented as conscious and capable compilers of preexistent material, this passage (and similar ones) also introduces readers to a sense of insecurity because they must realize to which extent he relies on a whole series of arbitrary choices by a host of retellers of the ‘real’ story of Troilus and Criseyde. Lollis evolves as

44Fons Diekstra, ‘The Language of Espionage: Some Chaucerian Techniques’, Dutch Quarterly Review, 11 (1981), 276. On Chaucer’s defending Criseyde against accusations of a ‘moderly love’ (II, 667), cf. E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (New York: Norton, 1979), 66: ‘People who had never thought that there was any formal law governing the rate of speed at which a woman should fall in love may suddenly start believing that there is one, and go looking in Andreas Capellanus to find out whether Criseyde has exceeded the limit’.

45This textual passage indicates in how arbitrary a manner Chaucer’s narrator places himself outside of existing and future readings of Criseyde. Cf. Gretchen Miezelski’s inclusive essay on the characterizations in these other readings, ‘The Reputation of Criseyde’, Transactions Published by the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 45 (1971), 51-153.


47Harry Winder, Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40-1, summarises: ‘The narrator mentions texts on twenty-nine occasions in the poem, and on twenty-two of these he inserts or implies his subjection to his sources. Expressions of deference to “myn auctour” occur when Chaucer is actually writing independently of Filialatio [...], and it is also noticeable that, when in Book V Chaucer’s text begins to overlap with the narrative of the traditional accounts of the story of Troilus and Criseyde, references become especially frequent’. See also Lisa Rune, Truth and Fictiveness in Chaucer’s Poetry (Haworth, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1991), 81; for her, the narrator ‘is most like Criseyde when he begins his betrayal of Lollis, slowly but definitively abandoning the “true” text to which he was previously quite sincerely committed’. 

‘As Wyt Myn Auctour Called Lollis’
only one element in a long chain of mediators each of whom made subjective decisions at least about inclusion and exclusion of information. Interestingly, the unreliable narrator drops Lollius’ name at the very moment when he relates to his audience Troilus’ song about the paradoxical nature of love. He explains the following about this passage:

And of his song naught only the sentence, As writ myn auctour called Lollius. But pleintly, tave ore imges difference. I dar wel sey, in al that Troilus Seyde in his song, loot oeye word right thys As I shal sey, and whosso list it here, Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here.

In one and the same stanza the narrator claims to follow slavishly, save for the differences between Lollius’ Latin and his English, his master source, and promises to relate something which is not at all part of Lollius, namely the exact words of Troilus’ song of which Lollius had only given the ‘sentence’, that is, a précis. Where did the narrator find the full citation? Does he have alternative sources? Did he himself author these lines for Troilus? By directly contrasting his claims for faithful translation, conspicuously authenticated by the invented name Lollius, with the open question about the authority for Troilus’ lyrics, a narrator’s potential power to create as he wishes is once again revealed.

The name itself, Lollius, provides another helpful piece of the puzzle: the significant Latinizing of the native English verb ‘loll’ which comprises such diverse meanings as ‘to hang limply’, ‘to mumble’, ‘to sing indistinctly’, or of the noun ‘loller’, which describes some kind of wastard who relied on others for support, might again underline the thesis that Chaucer created this fictional ‘auctour’ to draw attention to his own role as a late-medieval vernacular poet who arbitrarily combines and willfully juggles a large variety of available classical and postclassical materials.

Despite some intentional ambiguity about who is speaking at the begin-

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46Scholars agree that the so-called ‘Continous Troil’ is based on Petrarch’s Somn ‘S’amor non è’. Cf. Robert B. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer’s Poetics (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 184-7 and 201-9; and Patricia Thomson, ‘The Continous Troil’ Chaucer and Petrarch’, Comparative Literature, 11 (1959), 313-28. Bella Millitt, ‘Chaucer, Lollius, and the Medieval Theory of Authorship’, Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 1 (1984), 102, contends that Chaucer’s authoritative hand becomes palpable at this point: ‘His emphasis on the authenticity of Troilus’ song is more explicable if we take it as a half-private joke, directed to those members of his audience who would have recognized its actual source’.

47This tendency toward the Latinization of medieval intertexts is noticeable especially in his adaptations of Boccaccio. See, e.g., David Wallace, ‘Chaucer’s Amorpha’, 'As Wite Myn Auctour Colled Lollius' 141


*The narrator of Boccaccio’s Filocele presents himself also as a servant of Love’s servans. He subsequently claims to follow the true testimony of one Eurius, the priest who received Florio and company into the Christian religion. David Wallace, Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 50, concludes that ‘[h]ith Eurius and Lollius are (almost certainly) imaginary. But their supposed existence allows each poet to take up a particular authorial posture. Each suggests that his modern vernacular narrative is supported by the backbone of ancient authority’. However, it is exactly the validity of this authority which Chaucer is interrogating in his text. Cf. also Millitt, ‘Chaucer, Lollius’, 95, who holds that by enlisting of the Pope’s title, Chaucer seems to aim less at ‘the traditional compiler’s role than a mildly blasphemous parody of it’.
speech to the author. The starusa of transition is the one in which the narrator declares to have fulfilled his promise from the prologue to tell the 'double sorce' (I, 1) of Troilus ‘Flo wo to wele and after out of joie’ (I, 4). That story, the Trojan ‘tragedye’ (V, 1786) has come to its end with Troilus’ self-sought death. The prince’s surprising ascension—guided by Mercury—to the ‘eight spere’ (V, 1807) represents a moment of shifting perspectives from a partly determined and limited to an unlimited, undetermined power of narration. The medieval Christian author transcends the sadness of his fiction’s worldly sense of what is tragic and intervenes suddenly, not unlike the Christian creator who was thought to interrupt the existing ordo in the case of miracles.\(^{3}\) The poet positions himself above the breathing human passions of the pagan characters, the unreliable narrator, and that narrator’s invented source, Lollius, and parallels himself thus with the ‘steedfast Crist’ (V, 1860) and ‘the Lord’ (V, 1862), who—\(^{3}\)Unciumscriptum, and al maist circumscrive’ (V, 1865)—rules supreme over the existing ordo.\(^{3}\) As in his ‘Reractatio’ in the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer’s Christian ending of Troilus and Criseyde closely connects orthodox Christianity and artistic intention. In the ‘Reractatio’, in a tongue-in-cheek statement which repeats the titles of all the texts for which he asks forgiveness, Chaucer subtly demonstrates his pride in his most demanding artistic creations as an ‘auctour’.\(^{3}\) At the end of Troilus and Criseyde, he denounces \"the forme of olde clerks speche \"In poeetic, if ye hire bokes seche!\" (V, 1854-5). Directly after this warning to stay away from searching the informing principles of those ‘olde bokes’, Chaucer situates his dedication of his own book to ‘moral Gower, ‘philosophical Strode’ (V, 1856-7), and ‘Crist’ (V, 1860), presumably three authorities who would have known immediately that the search for Lollius or his book would indeed lead nowhere. Gower and Strode, at least as well educated and knowledgeable about the matter of Troy as Chaucer was, must have recognized behind the invention of this ‘auctour’ Lollius their friend’s own \"elvish countenancce’ (Canterbury Tales, VII, 703), his playful hint at his own absolute powers of free literary creation. ‘Verismilindize […] by means of an ancient and well-accredited device\(^{34}\) may indeed have been one of Chaucer’s intentions causing the inclusion of Lollius’ name in his fiction as far as his general audience was concerned. With his immediate circle of friends, actual readers of his written texts, however, Lollius underlines a parody of a confining tradition which obliged medieval authors (judged from a post-medieval point of view) to hide their own artistic light under the bushel and to go along with the predestined storylines of the proverbial olde bookes. Gower and Strode were aware of Chaucer’s actual sources and that what was happening on the level of the story was dependent on an only partially motivated decision of the author, who used, changed, amplified, named and invented entirely arbitrarily if and when he willed to do so.\(^{35}\) Chaucer is not yet capable of presenting himself wholeheartedly in the role of the omnipotent and arbitrary author of his own text as, for example, Rabelais does, who feels entirely free of any constraints that are prior to his original literary creation and who—in a more immediately palpable parallel with the omnipotent divine creator—stilizes himself as the \textit{prima causa} efficiens who reenacts the creation of a completely contingent literary universe.\(^{36}\) However, Chaucer, participat-

\(^{3}\)At this moment in the text, the pagan tragedy is transformed by the omnipotent Christian author who for whom all tragedy was comprised in Chaucer’s tragedy. For Chaucer, this is not only an act of faith but his final demonstration of his pious adua over his literary creation. On the impossibility of tragedy in the Middle Ages, cf. Erich Auerbach, \\textit{Mimesis: Deragogische Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur} (Bemer und Munich: Franck, 3rd ed. 1964), 296, and Rolf Breuer, ‘Christian Tragedy! Tragedy of Christianity’, in Uwe Bölker, Manfred Markus, and Rainer Schüwerling (eds.), \textit{The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Medieval English Literature and its Tradition—A Festschrift for Karl Heinz Giller} (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), 183-95.

\(^{31}\)Robert M. Jordan, ‘The Narrator of Chaucer’s Troilus’, English Literary History, 22 (1958), 237-37, who also sees a shift in the narrator’s ideology from internal character to historical author in the so-called ‘Epilogue’. I disagree, however, with Jordan’s suggestion that the narrator suffers from a simple-mindedness toward the world of his tale. He sees him least as involved with his female as with his male protagonist.

\(^{32}\)See Howard, Chaucer, 501-2, about Chaucer’s retraction at the end of the Canterbury Tales: ‘We may see him here faltering, in a moment of confusion, possibly fear. He has, in his last line, one eye on God and the other on posterity, one on salvation and the other on fame. The contradictions in the passage are not different from the contradictions in all his writings: with his ironic self-effacement he turns to meet his Maker, carefully reminding the reader of the exact titles of those works he would “retract”, by which he means to indicate his own best intentions in reading them; and they are the works for which, six centuries later, we do remember him. [...] The belief in

\(^{33}\)Kinngham, ‘Chaucer’s Lollus’, 39.

\(^{34}\)See Karl Taylor, Chaucer Revises the Divine Comedy (Stanford, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 227, and Winstead Wetherbee, Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on ‘Troilus and Criseyde’ (Baton, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 25, who indicate that the poet’s use of Lollius may represent the partial and ambiguous transmission of the classics through the tradition of the commentary.
ing in the paradoxically revolutionary potential of late-medieval nominalist thought for his artistic enterprise, experiments toward such an early modern concept of authorship and fiction. While his general audience was made to believe the intuitive cognition of a non-existent (i.e., the creation of the linguistically authenticated apprehension of Lollius as a physically real master source), his informed readers must have recognized the invention and parodic insertion of Lollius as representing the most manifest verbal marker of their friend’s growing self-consciousness as an author.\(^{36}\)

\(^{36}\)Cf. Langer, Divine and Poetic Freedom, especially 102-10. It is important to note the difference between personalist analogy, which guaranteed the intimate connection between visible and invisible, and postpersonalist analogy (God/Author) which signals the separation between the metaphysical and the human realm and can be seen to exemplify what Blumenberg (see note 34) called a “restless taking stock of the world” in late-medieval and early modern times.

\(^{37}\)I have carefully chosen the phrasing “was made to believe” in this sentence to conform with Ockham’s own problem in his Quodlibeta IV q. 14. There, he makes it clear that God cannot create the actual perceptual apprehension of a non-existent in human beings; he can only create the belief or conviction that something absent is present. In the earlier Conscientia on the Sensum he had upheld a more radical position; see the concise discussion of this problem by Kurt Flech, Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter: Von Augustin zu Machiavelli (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988), 452.

\(^{38}\)Cf. Tim William Machan, “Robert Hennyson and Father Answ: Authority in the Moral Fables”, Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 12 (1990), 214: “Writing at the end of the fifteenth century and in a tradition of vernacular self-consciousness established by Chaucer, Hennyson evidently had very forward-looking conceptions of himself as a poet and of the potential for authoritative utterance in the vernacular; but at the same time he lacked cultural validation of these conceptions. Cf. also Fichte, ‘Ques vaist giff all that Chaucer waist was true’, 63, who calls Troilus and Criseyde a ‘comedy of asuctorius’ in which Chaucer ‘hideth behind a false authority in order to tell his own version of the Troilus story’, and Paul Mertens-Fonck, ‘The Canterbury Tales: New Propositions of Interpretation’, Atti della Accademia Peloritana dei Pericolanti, 69 (1993), 36-9, who discusses the poet’s freedom of decision in correspondence with Ockham’s thought—it should be noted that Chaucer’s mentioning of Lollius in the House of Fame is compatible with the postfacistastic intentions outlined above. If the House of Fame, as Hugo Lange has indicated (‘Chaucers Myr Auctor Caided Lollius’ and die Dichtung des Host of Fame’, Anglistik, 42 (1918), 345-51), was written after Troilus and Criseyde, the poet’s placing the invented asuctor among the famous authorities of Dares Phrygius, Deytys Cretensis, and Homner must have assued his circle of friends and informed readers even more. For a dissenting view which premises the House of Fame on the basis of the Lollius passages, cf. Esselmann, ‘Chaucers Haus der Fame’, 406-9.

CHAUCER’S CLERKS ANI

WILL

In relating Chaucer’s poetry to the phly, we find ourselves in a kind word that Criside uses for a dif On the one hand, Chaucer’s enj out his career, from his translation la Rose to his adaptation of Boot reason to think that he might ha discourse of his own day. Even authority of such venerable figure Boece\(^{1}\) for his excursions into the to see in these passages indirect r in time and in place—such as E Holcot, Thomas Bradwardine, o there are some very good reasons between Chaucer’s poetry and Clyde Curry cautions in his own contemporary thinkers. ‘It must poetical works first an artist arc. Moreover, while Chaucer shows beyond the Boethian passages i

\(^{1}\)All quotations from and reference: Chaucer, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (B) General Prologue, I. 741; Maudy Tale of Melibe, VII. 1345, 1376. farton’s Tale, X. 467; Wife of Bath’s Tale, III. 1168; N Women, P. 425.

\(^{2}\)Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and Noble, 2nd ed. (1960). To cite but two examples, both ‘cause final of Marimone’ (X. 941) that Troilus endures (I. 682).