EPIC CHARACTERISTICS IN

CHAUCER'S TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Rita Dodd Saylors

January 1969

477807

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Jack E. Dodson, who willingly served on a thesis committee outside his department; to Dr. M. Louise Nugent, who, through her knowledge of Aristotle and Dante, offered particular assistance; and, especially, to my advisor, Dr. Jesse D. Hartley, Jr., who suggested this topic of study and who provided continuous advice and direction. Thanks are due, above all, to my husband, James A. Saylors, and to the other members of my family, who repeatedly offered help and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

For the past several decades, the generic classification of Chaucer's
Troilus and Criseyde has been argued by many critics, who have presented
evidence in support of their contentions that the poem possesses
important characteristics of the novel, the romance, tragedy, or drama.
Possible similarities between Troilus and Criseyde and the epic genre,
however, have received comparatively little attention.

The historical method is one way to determine the presence of
epic characteristics in Troilus and Criseyde. Therefore, it is
profitable to study the poem in terms of ancient and medieval critical
writings which were known in the middle ages. Some of these major
critical writings contain remarks about Homeric, Virgilian, and "high"
poetry which may be considered relevant to epic criticism. These remarks,
for the most part, touch upon only superficial elements in epic and
indicate that the classical epic tradition had declined by Chaucer's
time. Therefore, only limited critical information about the character-
istics of epic poetry was available to Chaucer.

A study of Troilus and Criseyde shows that it possesses most of
the characteristics of Homeric, Virgilian, and "high" poetry which
were mentioned in the critical writings. It is apparent, therefore,
that Chaucer elevated his treatment of the story that he borrowed from
Boccaccio to the level of the highest poetry known to his age. In so
doing, he made Troilus and Criseyde similar to medieval interpretations
of epic poetry.

In terms of definitions and comments by twentieth-century critics of epic poetry, however, <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> cannot be labeled an epic poem. <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> is similar to epic in elaborateness of style, in thematic significance, in structure, in the nature of the hero and his enemies, and in the historical significance and vastness of its over-all setting. It lacks, however, several common epic characteristics: an emphasis on adventure or heroic action, national significance, supernatural machinery, and catalogues of armies or warriors. It is perhaps because <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> lacks these important epic characteristics that its relationship to the epic genre has largely been ignored. However, the presence of even a few epic characteristics, along with the presence of characteristics of other genres, indicates that <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> is a poem of great variety and complexity.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the problems in regard
to characteristics encountered in any attempt to classify Chaucer's
Troilus and Criseyde as a particular genre, especially as an epic poem.
No attempt, however, is made to label the poem as a specific genre.
This study has been limited, for it is recognized that a thorough
investigation of Troilus and Criseyde as an epic is beyond the range
of a master's thesis. A complete study of Troilus and Criseyde as an
epic should include an effort to determine what Chaucer could have
known about epic poetry. To reach such a decision, one should study
the critical writings and the epic poems which Chaucer could have known.
The epic characteristics gathered from these writings could then be
applied to Troilus and Criseyde as a basis for deciding whether Troilus
may be considered a medieval epic. Another aim of a complete study
of Troilus and Criseyde as an epic should be to determine correspondences
between Troilus and descriptions of epic poetry in subsequent criticism.
It would, thus, be necessary to survey epic criticism from Chaucer's
time to the present in order to arrive at a complete collection of
epic characteristics which could be applied to Troilus. Finally,
comparisons should be made between Troilus and Criseyde and epic poetry
of all languages. Because a complete study of this subject would be
extremely long and difficult, it is necessary to establish limits for
this thesis. Therefore, I have only two aims: to learn whether
Troilus and Criseyde corresponds to descriptions of Homeric, Virgilian,
and "high" poetry in some major classical and medieval critical

writings, and to examine Troilus and Criseyde in the light of some
major twentieth-century epic criticism in order to determine whether
the poem can be called an epic or if it has certain epic features,
according to modern definitions of the term.

From a survey of classical and medieval critical writings,
certain ones have been found to contain remarks about Homer, Virgil,
or "high" poetry. Except for Aristotle, none of the critics
surveyed uses the term "epic," but some of their remarks relate to
twentieth-century definitions of the term. Although it is not possible
from this survey to determine whether Troilus and Criseyde may be
considered a medieval epic, some conclusions can be reached about
whether Troilus possesses the features of Homeric, Virgilian, or "high"
poetry upon which these writers commented.

To my knowledge, only two studies of epic features in Troilus
and Criseyde have been done: "Troilus and Criseyde as an Epos,"
a thesis by S. M. Tucker, and "Elements of Epic Grandeur in the
'Troilus,'" by Daniel Boughner. Tucker's study is chiefly a comparison
of Troilus and Criseyde to Aristotle's Poetics, and Boughner's article
is primarily a discussion of Chaucer's use of certain epic conventions.
Since only these epic features in the poem have been studied, this
thesis seems justified. It is hoped that this study may contribute
to efforts to assign a genre to Troilus and Criseyde and to an
appreciation of the richness and complexity of the poem.

CHAPTER ONE

A SURVEY OF GENERIC CRITICISM ON TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

The generic classification of Troilus and Criseyde has been the

subject of considerable critical comment. Some critics have affixed

a label, such as "romance," "tragedy," "drama," or "novel," to

Troilus and Criseyde, and a greater number have cited characteristics

associated with certain genres in the poem. No consensus has

developed; rather, the tendency recently has been either to abandon

the question or to consider the poem as a form unto itself. Sanford

B. Meech shares the opinion of other recent critics[1] when he concludes

that

> Possessed of both derivative and anticipative
> qualities, the poem is sui generis, we must
> conclude, in its combination of all these.[2]

Charles Muscatine also argues that "because of its particular range

of style," Troilus and Criseyde is a genre unto itself.[3] Although

such a view may be the logical conclusion of a study of the diverse

labels applied to the poem, contributions to an understanding and an

appreciation of the poem may still be made by generic studies, for

the evidence gathered to support each generic classification shows

the poem to be varied and complex.

Near the beginning of this century, several critics first called

Troilus and Criseyde a novel, and later critics supplied some support

for this view. In 1905 J. L. Lowes, almost in passing, called the

poem "a full-fledged modern 'problem novel,'"[4] and three years later

W. P. Ker made a similar comment. Ker saw in the poem a portrayal

of reality:

> What Cervantes and what Fielding did was done
> first by Chaucer; and this was the invention
> of a kind of story in which life might be
> represented no longer in a conventional or
> abstract manner, or with sentiment and pathos
> instead of drama, but with characters adapting
> themselves to different circumstances, no
> longer obviously breathed upon by the master
> of the show to convey his own ideas, but moving
> freely and talking like men and women.[5]

In accordance, however, with those who see the poem as beyond
classification, Ker concludes his discussion of Troilus and Criseyde
with this sentence: "It /Troilus/ is the freedom of the imagination,
beyond all the limits of partial and conventional forms."[6] In 1915
Kittredge concluded that Troilus and Criseyde is "a new thing," an
"elaborate psychological novel, instinct with humor, and pathos,
and passion, and human nature."[7]

More detailed discussion of Troilus and Criseyde as a novel
has been provided by two later critics, John Speirs and A. C. Spearing.
To Speirs, Troilus is a "dramatic-poetic novel" because of Chaucer's
preoccupations with the "theme of the individual's relation to the
society in which he lives," and because of the "clash of character
and the conflict of interests," and the realistic characterization.[8]
Using E. M. Forster's definition of a novel as a "fictitious prose
work over 50,000 words" and the definition appearing in the Concise
Oxford Dictionary (a "'fictitious prose narrative of sufficient length
to fill one or more volumes portraying characters and actions
representative of real life in continuous plot'"),[9] Spearing shows
the ways in which Troilus and Criseyde differs from the kind of work

3

these definitions indicate. First, <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> cannot be considered fictitious because the Troilus story was considered historical by Chaucer and his public.[10] Second, by using rime royal Chaucer "formalized" the subject matter, making his treatment considerably different from that of a novel written in prose.[11] After pointing out these differences, however, Spearing says that those who refer to the poem as a novel are on the right track, because <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> possesses "lifelikeness," the "quality most people look for in a novel."[12]

Troilus and Criseyde has been called a romance by several critics. Daniel Boughner, for one, concludes his study of some epic features in <u>Troilus</u> with this sentence:

> A narrative that had been a young man's vehicle of intense but personal appeal has become in Chaucer's handling a high romance of universal appeal, ennobled by certain epic features, which depicts and interprets one of the central human experiences.[13]

Two other recent critics have labelled <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> as romance without elaboration: G. T. Shepherd says that the poem is "the stuff of romance in every way,"[14] and Paull F. Baum calls it "a kind of medieval romance with an antique backdrop."[15] On the basis of certain remarks about the common features of romance, however, <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> is unlike romance in some ways. Possibly Martin Day's list of the common characteristics of medieval romance may best serve as guidelines for the term "romance:"

> 1. Narrative of heroic adventure, usually a string of episodes not too closely related.

2. Type characters rather than individualized
   portraits. One knight is pretty much cut
   from the same armor as the next knight.
   A lovely damsel in distress is picturesquely
   immured in a forbidding castle by a foul
   villain.

3. Prevalence of the Quest theme. Possibly an
   unacknowledged heir seeking his throne, or
   a knight searching for the Holy Grail.

4. Highly imaginative encounters with extra-
   ordinary personages in fantastic settings.
   As the centuries progressed, romancers had
   to spice up their accounts with ever
   mounting marvels--many-armed giants, mythical
   animals, and enchanted forests and castles.

5. Extensive Christian references, though
   sometimes merely conventionally super-
   imposed.

6. Love interest, which eventually resulted
   in the modern association of romance with
   a love affair. The courtly love convention,
   so prevalent in the romance, originated
   in eleventh-century Provence (southern France).
   It showed a veneration of women which was stimu-
   lated by the medieval cult of the Virgin.

7. Idealized concept of a medieval knight.
   The perfect knight, existing in Chaucer's
   Canterbury Tales but seldom in real life,
   is portrayed as strong and courageous,
   like the epic hero, but also as virtuous,
   moral, piously Christian, modest and
   altruistic.

8. The usual metrical romance ranged from
   1000 to 6000 lines and employed octo-
   syllabic couplets or a stanza of 6, 8,
   or 12 lines.[16]

Troilus and Criseyde does not contain all these characteristics. The

main action is the suffering of Troilus; the plot is unified and,

therefore, contains no unrelated episodes. The major characters,

especially Criseyde and Pandarus, are highly individualized.

Troilus, however, may be considered an idealized medieval knight.

Dodd shows that Troilus possesses the virtues which were "conven-

tionally required of a knight and a lover:"

> By common consent, then, Troilus is known for
> "trouthe," "alle gentilesse," "wysdom," "honour,"
> "fredom," "worthinesse," "prowesse in war" and
> "courtesye". . . . The same qualities are
> attributed in almost identical terms, to the
> model knight of the Prologue to the Canterbury
> Tales.[17]

Furthermore, the poem contains no "encounters with extraordinary

personages." Troilus and Criseyde also is unlike romance in length

and in stanza form, for it consists of 8239 lines, and seven-line

decasyllabic stanzas. Furthermore, another critic, Donald S. Sands,

observes that romance is not tragic,[18] and Troilus and Criseyde, of

course, has a tragic ending. It seems, then, that Troilus and Criseyde

is unlike romance in some important ways.

In the most exhaustive study of the poem as a romance, however,

Karl Young suggests that Chaucer brought the material of Boccaccio's

Il Filostrato, Chaucer's major source, close to the romance. The

following details are some of the romantic departures from Il

Filostrato which Young discusses: (1) Chaucer's withdrawal of

"the obtrusive presence of the author,"[19] (2) Chaucer's removal of

the "impression of actual contemporary life" of Il Filostrato,[20]

(3) the removal of sensuality in the heroine, "which is alien to

the manners of romance,"[21] (4) the substitution of "a long and beau-

tiful episode" for Boccaccio's "coarse recital" of the consummation

scene.[22] At the end of his discussion of these details from Troilus

and <u>Criseyde</u>, Young concludes that

> From the considerations advanced thus far it
> seems fairly clear that, in substantial
> measure, Chaucer deliberately departed from
> the <u>Filostrato</u>, not in the direction of
> ordinary life and modernity but backward
> into the region of romance.[23]

It seems that <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> has some of the features of

medieval romances, but that it has important differences as well.

While some critics, thus, view <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> in terms

of the novel or of romance, T. R. Price considers it similar to

a drama. He finds that the narrative may be divided into a series

of fifty scenes.[24] Each stage of the progress, he says, "is

attained as a result of the action of mind on mind through dialogue."[25]

The fifty scenes of the narrative form the "five parts of the dramatic

scheme:"

> There is, in 266 lines, the protasis of the drama,
> with introduction of Troilus and Criseyde and full
> indication of the dramatic passion. There is then,
> in 5,486 lines, the fully developed epistasis,
> extending from the brilliant scene in the temple,
> as opening of the action, up to the beginning
> of the climax-scene itself. Next, in 619 lines,
> there is the scene of climax and the complete
> solution of the dramatic problem. As a result,
> in 1,820 verses there is the fourth stage of
> action, the seduction of Criseyde by Diomede
> and the death of Troilus. Last of all, as
> the closing stage of action, in 50 lines, there
> is that lovely scene in which the soul of Troilus,
> taken from earth into the paradise of brave and
> faithful warriors, looks down with scorn upon
> the baseness of the earthly life.[26]

Far greater attention, by greater numbers of critics, has

been devoted to the consideration of <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> as a

tragedy. Professor Curry begins his study of the concept of destiny

in the poem by calling <u>Troilus</u> a "tragedy, strongly deterministic

in tone."[27]   Curry concludes that the poem stands spiritually midway

between Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy:

> In other words, in Greek tragedy the emphasis
> is put upon the mystery of those powers which
> force men to destruction; in Shakespeare the
> emphasis is laid upon the fact that a man is
> the architect of his own fortunes. Now Chaucer,
> in the <u>Troilus</u>, has placed approximately equal
> stress upon the external and internal sources
> of human happiness and misery.[28]

Helen Corsa also sees the poem as a tragedy, but for somewhat different

reasons.   What makes the poem tragic, she says, is

> Chaucer's insight into the nature of human
> blindness, his awareness of the sometimes
> impenetrable curtain that lies between the
> known and the unknown, his understanding of
> the complicated inter-relationships of the
> human world. . . .[29]

To Willard Farnham, "Chaucer's <u>Troilus</u> is a new high order for the

middle ages in presentation of tragedy as narrative."[30] And H. R.

Patch argues that the plot presents a "magnificent situation in terms

of human weakness."[31] Finally, D. W. Robertson, Jr., concludes that the

tragedy of Troilus is "the tragedy of every mortal sinner." Troilus

subjects himself to Fortune, Robertson explains, by allowing himself

to be overcome by the physical attractions of Criseyde, and then falls

after the manner of Adam.[32]

Chaucer himself refers to his poem as a tragedy in Book V:

> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
> But subgit be to alle poesye;
> And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace. (1786-92)

Chaucer defines tragedy in the Monk's Prologue:

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie,
> Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly. (1973-77)

Concerning this passage, Robinson says:

> In fact the terms 'tragedy' and 'comedy' in
> medieval literature have reference chiefly
> to writing in epic or narrative form rather
> than in dramatic. Thus Chaucer calls his
> Troilus a tragedy (V, 1786), and Dante's great
> poem, which begins in Hell and ends in Heaven,
> is known as the Divine Comedy.[33]

In the lines following those quoted from the Monk's Prologue,

Chaucer comments on the forms of tragedy:

> And they been versified communely
> Of six feet, which men clepen exametron.
> In prose eek been endited many oon,
> And eek in meetre, in many a sondry wyse.
> Lo, this declaryng oghte ynough to suffise. (1978-82)

About Chaucer's use of the word "exametron" (hexameter), Robinson says:

> Since the Aeneid, the Thebaid, and the Pharsalia
> were all reckoned tragedies in this looser sense
> of the term, Chaucer may have had them particular-
> ly in mind.[34]

Apparently, then, tragedy was considered a major element in different

kinds of narrative poetry and not necessarily a genre unto itself.

Chaucer's reference to Troilus and Criseyde as a tragedy, then, does

not appear to be a generic classification.

To my knowledge, only two studies of Troilus and Criseyde in

connection with epic poetry have been made, a thesis by S. M. Tucker

and an article by Daniel Boughner. Tucker's thesis is chiefly a

study of Troilus and Criseyde as an Aristotelian epic and concludes

with these words:

> Though epic in theme, in unity of action, in
> constituent parts, in range of interests, in
> universality of character treatment, it is
> yet forever debarred from claiming some very
> essential epic features. The Poet's attitude,
> the enormous amount of purely subjective matter,
> the analysis of internal action--all this is quite
> foreign to the epic scope.[35]

For reasons stated in the beginning of Chapter Three, Tucker's

analyses of Aristotle's Poetics and Troilus and Criseyde will not be

used here.[36] Boughner concentrates on only three epic features in

Troilus and Criseyde (proems, invocations, and classical allusions),

which he calls "elements of epic grandeur."[37] Since, to my knowledge,

only these aspects of the possible epic nature of Troilus and Criseyde

have been studied, such a thesis as this seems justified.

NOTES

1. A view similar to that of Meech is treated at some length in a dissertation by Louis F. Thompson ("Artistry in _Troilus and Criseyde_," _Dissertation Abstracts_, XX, 1771). James L. Shanley concurs with this view in "The 'Troilus' and Christian Love," _Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism_, ed. Edward Wagenknecht (New York, 1959), p. 386.

2. Sanford B. Meech, _Design in Chaucer's "Troilus"_ (Syracuse, 1959), p. vii.

3. Charles Muscatine, _Chaucer and the French Tradition_ (Berkeley, 1957), p. 132.

4. John Livingston Lowes, "The Prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women,'" _PMLA_, XX (1905), 821.

5. _Epic and Romance_ (London, 1908), p. 367-8. In a later work, _Form and Style in Poetry_, ed. R. W. Chambers (London, 1928), p. 78-9, Ker comments further on the realistic scene in the poem.

6. Ker, p. 370.

7. George Lyman Kittredge, _Chaucer and his Poetry_ (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), p. 110-12. Albert Baugh, in "Fifty Years of Chaucer Scholarship," _Speculum_, XXVI (1951), 666, agrees with Kittredge, although he also praises Karl Young's article on _Troilus and Criseyde_ as romance.

8. John Speirs, _Chaucer the Maker_ (London, 1951), p. 202.

9. A. C. Spearing, _Criticism and Medieval Poetry_ (London, 1964), p. 96.

10. Spearing, p. 98.

11. _Ibid._

12. Spearing, p. 99.

13. Daniel Boughner, "Elements of Epic Grandeur in the 'Troilus,'" _ELH_, VI (1939), p. 210.

14. G. T. Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," _Chaucer and Chaucerians_, ed. D. S. Brewer (University, Alabama, 1966), p. 65.

15. Paull F. Baum, _Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation_ (Durham, North Carolina, 1958), p. 114.

16. Martin S. Day, <u>History of English Literature to 1660</u> (Garden City, New York, 1963), pp. 45-46.

17. William George Dodd, <u>Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower</u> (Boston, 1913), pp. 139-40.

18. Donald S. Sands, <u>Middle English Verse Romances</u> (New York, 1966), p. 6.

19. Karl Young, "Chaucer's <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> as Romance," <u>PMLA</u> LVII (1938), 41.

20. Young, p. 42.

21. Young, p. 44.

22. Young, p. 45.

23. Young, p. 46.

24. T. R. Price, "A Study of Chaucer's Method of Narrative Construction," <u>PMLA</u>, XI (1896), 313.

25. Price, p. 314.

26. Price, p. 321-22.

27. Walter Clyde Curry, "Destiny in Chaucer's <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>," <u>Chaucer Criticism</u>, II, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 34.

28. Curry, p. 66.

29. Helen Corsa, <u>Chaucer, Poet of Mirth and Morality</u> (University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), p. 41. This view is shared by Gordon Hall Gerould (<u>Chaucerian Essays</u>, Princeton, 1952, p. 84).

30. Willard Farnham, <u>The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy</u> (Berkeley, 1936), p. 137-8.

31. Harold Rollin Patch, <u>On Rereading Chaucer</u> (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 57.

32. D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy," <u>Chaucer Criticism</u>, II, eds. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1961), p. 96-97.

33. Fred N. Robinson, ed. <u>The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer</u> (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 746.

34. <u>Ibid.</u>

12

35. Samuel Marion Tucker, "Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde' as an Epos," Unpublished Master's Thesis, (Columbia University, 1901), unpaged.

36. p. 33.

37. Boughner, p. 209.

CHAPTER TWO

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL CRITICISM
ON HOMERIC, VIRGILIAN, AND "HIGH" POETRY

The historical method is one way to determine the existence of
epic characteristics in Troilus and Criseyde. As will be shown later,
Troilus does not contain all the features of modern definitions of
epic. However, similarities are found between Troilus and statements
which relate to epic poetry, as viewed today, in ancient and medieval
critical writings. A survey of these critical treatises is undertaken
in this chapter.

The ancient and medieval critical writings which have been found
to contain comments that are relevant to epic, as the term is under-
stood today, include the following: Aristotle's Poetics, Horace's
Ars Poetica, Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory, Macrobius's Saturnalia,
Servius's Commentary on Virgil, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria Nova,
Matthieu of Vendome's Ars Versificatoria, Evrard's Laborintus, Gervais's
Ars Versificaria, John of Garland's Poetria, and Dante's De Vulgari
Eloquentia. Only critical writings will be examined in this study;
the epics themselves are but reference points used by critics. Since
Comparetti says that "Homer was a name and nothing more" in the middle
ages,[1] the Iliad and Odyssey will not be considered in this survey.
Also, in order to limit this study, other ancient and medieval epics
will not be included. The practice of epic poets throughout the
centuries no doubt influenced the formation of concepts about epic
poetry, but any examination of epic practice is beyond the scope of
this study.

Aristotle's <u>Poetics</u> had only limited influence in the middle ages,[2]

but there are indications that Chaucer could have known a paraphrase

of it. Gerald Else lists

> four independent witnesses to the <u>Poetics</u> text:
> A, <u>Parisinus graecus 1741</u>, tenth or eleventh
> century; B, <u>Riccardianus 46</u>, twelfth century;
> Lat., represented by <u>Etonensis 129</u> and <u>Toletanus</u>
> <u>47.10</u>: A. D. 1278 . . . ; Ar., <u>Paris. gr. arab.</u>
> <u>2346</u>, tenth century. . . .[3]

The <u>Poetics</u> was known most, however, in a Latin translation by Herman

the German completed at Toledo in 1256 of an Arabic paraphrase by

Averroes.[4] This version is contained in the last leaves in the

catalog of the manuscripts at Eton and

> appears to have been written down not much before
> or after AD 1300 and had as appears from certain
> of its errors at least one Latin predecessor.[5]

Hultzen shows that Roger Bacon (1214? - 1294) knew Herman's version

of the <u>Poetics</u>,[6] and adds that the 1501 edition of Walter Burley's

commentaries on Aristotle contains a reference to the <u>Poetics</u> (probably

Herman the German's translation). Burley, who lived from 1275-1345,[7]

was a "reputed fellow of Merton College, Oxford," and "is said to have

been a tutor to the Black Prince."[8] Furthermore, Burley "is said to

have written 130 treatises on Aristotle alone."[9] Chaucer's "close

association" with the household of Edward III,[10] father of the Black

Prince, might have provided contact with Burley or his works. Further-

more, since Chaucer's writings contain six references to Aristotle,[11]

it is possible that Chaucer was acquainted with the <u>Poetics</u>.

The <u>Poetics</u>[12] contains the most detailed description of epic of

any of the writings which will be examined. Aristotle describes four

major types of poetry and distinguishes one from the other in three

respects: "the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation,

being in each case distinct."[13] Epic, he finds, uses the medium of

hexameter verse[14] to imitate the higher types of character (the

objects) in the narrative manner.[15] Aristotle goes beyond this

definition by comparing epic poetry and tragedy, thereby revealing a

detailed epic theory.

To Aristotle epic is similar to tragedy in several ways. Its

plot should be constructed on dramatic principles, i.e., "it should

have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a

beginning, a middle, and an end."[16] A plot constructed on dramatic

principles will "resemble a single and coherent picture of a living

being, and produce the pleasure proper to it."[17] In this context,

Aristotle praises the Iliad and Odyssey because each furnishes "the

subject of one tragedy, or, at most, two."[18] In the commentary on

these remarks about epic plot, Butcher says that dramatic action is

"that which springs out of and reflects character."[19] Butcher believes,

however, that epic can also have "action which rests upon forces

outside itself."[20]

Aristotle further believes that epic should have as many "kinds"[21]

as tragedy: "it must be simple, or complex, or 'ethical,' or

'pathetic.'"[22] In an earlier passage, Aristotle differentiates between

the four kinds of tragedy in this way:

> There are four kinds of Tragedy, the Complex,
> depending entirely on Reversal of the Situation
> and Recognition; the Pathetic (where the motive
> is passion),--such as the tragedies on Ajax and
> Ixion; the Ethical (where the motives are
> ethical),--such as the Phthiotides and the
> Peleus. The fourth kind is the Simple.[23]

Aristotle defines the simple plot as "an action which is one and continuous," in which "change of fortune takes place without Reversal of the Situation and without Recognition."[24] In a complex action, he continues, "the change is accompanied by such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both," and arises from the "internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action."[25] The Homeric epics furnish models of Aristotle's theory of "kinds:"

> In all these respects Homer is our earliest
> and sufficient model. Indeed each of his
> poems has a twofold character. The Iliad
> is at once simple and "pathetic," and the
> Odyssey complex (for Recognition scenes run
> through it), and at the same time "ethical."[26]

The "parts" of an epic poem also are those of a tragedy: "The parts also, with the exception of song and spectacle are the same."[27] In an earlier section, Aristotle names the six "parts" of a tragedy:

> Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts,
> which parts determine its quality--namely,
> Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle,
> Song.[28]

Thus, epic poetry is similar to tragedy because it has a dramatic plot, and because it may have as many "kinds" and "parts" as tragedy.

Aristotle believes that epic differs from tragedy in several ways: first, in the scale on which it is constructed. Because of its narrative form, epic can enlarge its dimensions by presenting many events, thereby adding mass and dignity:

> Epic poetry has, however, a great--a special--
> capacity for enlarging its dimensions, and we
> can see the reason. In Tragedy we cannot
> imitate several lines of actions carried on

> at one and the same time; we must confine
> ourselves to the action on the stage and
> the part taken by the players. But in epic
> poetry, owing to the narrative form, many
> events simultaneously transacted can be
> presented; and these, if relevant to the
> subject, add mass and dignity to the poem.
> The Epic has here an advantage, and one that
> conduces to grandeur of effect, to diverting
> the mind of the hearer, and relieving the
> story with varying episodes.[29]

The structure of epic, therefore, is different from that of tragedy,

although the plot centers around one action, as stated earlier:

". . . by an Epic structure I mean one with a multiplicity of plots. . . .

In the Epic poem, owing to its length, each part assumes its proper

magnitude."[30] Elaborating on epic unity within such a structure,

Aristotle says that Homer

> never attempts to make the whole war of Troy the subject
> of his poem, though that war had a beginning and an
> end. . . . As it is, he detaches a single portion,
> and admits as episodes many events from the general
> story of the war--such as the Catalogue of the
> ships and others--thus diversifying the poem.[31]

Furthermore, Aristotle believes that epic differs from tragedy also

in its use of the heroic metre:

> As for the metre, the heroic measure has proved
> its fitness by the test of experience. . . . For
> of all measures the heroic is the stateliest and
> the most massive. . . .[32]

In the scope of the irrational, as well, epic differs from tragedy. As

an example of the irrational in epic, Aristotle cites the pursuit of

Hector,

> which would be ludicrous if placed upon the
> stage--the Greeks standing still and not
> joining in the pursuit, and Achilles waving
> them back.[33]

Concerning the role of the epic narrator, Aristotle says that "the poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator."[34] Aristotle cites the practice of Homer, who introduces the characters briefly and then allows each to develop an individual personality.

In summary, this definition emerges from Aristotle's remarks on epic poetry: an epic is a narrative poem written in the heroic metre in imitation of characters of the higher type. Its subject is one, complete action, which must be simple or complex, ethical or pathetic, and which is embellished by digressions from the main action. Character and action should be derived dramatically, with the epic poet speaking as little as possible in his own person. Although it is unlikely that Chaucer knew Aristotle's epic theory in such detail, Troilus and Criseyde, as will be shown later, meets most of Aristotle's epic requirements.

From the body of Roman criticism only fragmentary contributions to epic theory survive. According to Gayley and Kurtz, Roman epic criticism consists primarily of

> brief criticisms of style, adulation of Homer,
> fragmentary remarks on the character of epic,
> repetitions of the Alexandrian canon of epic
> poets, verbal interpretations and commentaries
> on the text of Virgil.[35]

Of these extant works, Horace's Ars Poetica[36] contains the largest contribution.

Horace's theory of poetry is based on imitation of models: "If I have not the ability and skill to adhere to these well-defined functions and styles of poetic forms, why should I be hailed as a

poet?"[37] Horace further says that invention is difficult and should be

consistent within itself. "It is better for you," he says, "to be

putting a Trojan tale into dramatic form than that you should be first

in the field with a theme hitherto unknown and unsung."[38] About Homer,

who appears to be the chief model of an epic poet (though Horace does

not call him such), Horace says only that "Homer showed us in what metre

the exploits of kings and commanders and the miseries of war were to be

recorded."[39]

In the _Institutes of Oratory_, which was written in the century

following the composition of _Ars Poetica_, Quintilian emphasizes

rhetoric and oratory in the poetry of Homer.[40] Once more rated the

greatest of the Greek poets, Homer is praised for being

> copious and concise, pleasing and forcible;
> admirable at one time for exhuberance, and
> at another for brevity; eminent not only for
> poetic, but for oratorical excellence.[41]

Furthermore, Quintilian considers Homer to be the originator of the laws

of oratorical _exordia_; "his openings render the reader well-affected

towards him" by invoking the goddesses who preside over poets, by

setting forth the grandeur of the subject, and by giving a brief and

comprehensive view of it.[42] Quintilian says that Homer also illustrates

the precepts of rhetoric through his similes, amplifications, illustra-

tions, digressions, indications, and proofs of things.[43] It seems

that to Quintilian, as to the medieval rhetoricians, poetry, rhetoric,

and oratory are only different means of using words artistically.

Although Quintilian does not use the word "epic," perhaps he would

distinguish epic from other kinds of poetry mainly by its peculiar
rhetorical flourishes.

After the decline of the Empire, epic criticism appeared within
Virgilian commentary. Criticism of the Aeneid in the early centuries
produced only illustrations of points of technical interest, such as
figures.[44] With Macrobius and Servius (both of the fourth century),
however, began the criticism which showed that Virgil was a learned
poet and a master of technique who obeyed the laws of rhetoric.[45]
According to the quotations and paraphrases in Saintsbury's summaries,
neither commentator calls Virgil an epic poet.[46] In the Saturnalia
Macrobius emphasizes Virgil's command of rhetoric and even judges
Virgil no less orator than poet; but he also finds theology, allegory,
and universal knowledge in the Aeneid.[47] Curtius suggests that
Macrobius views Virgil primarily as a theologian whose poetry may be
interpreted for its didactic content by allegorical exegesis.[48] This
interpretation, according to Atkins, subsequently entered into the
medieval conception of poetry.[49]

Although Servius assumes the same point of view as Macrobius in
his Commentary on Virgil, he mentions specific characteristics.[50] The
Aeneid, he says, is heroic because it is written in heroic metre and
because it contains a mixture of divine and human things, of truth and
fiction:

> "For Aeneas really did come to Italy, but
> clearly the poet made it up when he represented
> Venus speaking to Jupiter, or the mission of
> Mercury."[51]

Servius also mentions the "'mixed'" action of the Aeneid (i.e.,

"'sometimes the poet speaks in his own person and sometimes introduces others speaking'") and the "'grandiloquent'" style, which is characterized by lofty phrase and noble sentiment.[52] Virgil's first intention, Servius believes, was to imitate Homer, a belief which recalls Horace's theory of the imitation of models.

Although these comments by Servius are brief and superficial, they are more detailed and complete than anything found between the fourth century and Chaucer's lifetime. (However, a brief statement by Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) is equally significant. In Etymologiae he defines heroic verse as "that which narrates the deeds of brave men.")[53] Interpretations which are similar to those of Macrobius and Servius are found in the commentaries of two twelfth-century writers, John of Salisbury and Bernard Silvester. John of Salisbury accepted the allegorical interpretation of the Aeneid,[54] and Bernard Silvester considered Virgil as a philosopher of the nature of human life.[55] In addition, Bernard recommended Virgil's writings as models for learning the art of adornment of words, and for human conduct through his examples of right action.[56] There is no way to know whether Chaucer accepted this interpretation of the Aeneid, but it could well have formed part of his concept of an epic poem, as he perhaps knew of the writings of Salisbury and Silvester.

Although the medieval treatises on poetic and rhetoric would seem to be obvious sources of medieval epic theory, they contain nothing specifically about epic, but contain doctrines about the nature of the highest types of poetry. The doctrines of the medieval theoreticians

may be traced to the fusion of poetic, rhetoric, and grammar that

occurred in the writings of Hellenistic authors (which is discussed

in detail by Jane Baltzell),[57] a phenomenon which affected poetic

theory for centuries. In the schools of the Roman empire, poetry

was part of the curricula of grammar and metrics.[58] The close rela-

tionship between poetry, rhetoric, and grammar during the Roman period

is seen also in the treatises of Horace and Quintilian. However,

the vitality of the Roman rhetorical poetic declined by the fifth

century.[59] In Domenico Comparetti's words:

> All that remained of classical rhetoric,
> properly speaking, was the configuration,
> the terminology, certain definitions, and
> especially that part relating to tropes
> and figures which had already in ancient times
> formed the connecting link between rhetoric
> and grammar, the former thereby becoming as
> it were a sort of appendix to the latter.[60]

After Horace's Ars Poetica, to my knowledge, there is no treatise,

except for Dante's De Vulgari Eloquentia, which treats poetry as a

discipline apart from rhetoric or grammar until after the lifetime

of Chaucer.

The major rhetorical treatises of the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries--Poetria Nova by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Ars Versificatoria

by Matthieu of Vendome, Laborintus by Evrard, Ars Versificaria by

Gervais, and Poetria by John of Garland--are on the order of technical

handbooks.[61] Atkins finds that the treatises deal primarily with

> formal and superficial considerations that
> have little to do with the essence of
> poetic art, . . . the different ways of
> opening a poem, the methods of dilating and
> abbreviating expression, and the proper use
> of ornaments of style.[62]

However, the treatises are not without teachings which might relate
to epic composition. The doctrines of the three kinds and the three
styles, which survived early origins,[63] also had a place in medieval
poetics and relate somewhat to epic theory. From Hellenistic poetic
developed the doctrine of the three kinds, which held that poetry
should be treated under three main categories:

> the narrative, as represented by Virgil's Georgics,
> the dramatic, consisting of tragedies and comedies,
> and the mixed or epic kind, of which Virgil's
> Aenead was quoted as an example.[64]

These categories apparently depended on the amount of personal utterance
by the poet,[65] and represent a move away from Aristotle's theory (i.e.,
that epic narrative does not permit personal utterances by the poet).
The three styles--"high," "middle," and "low"--were differentiated
according to kinds of ornamentation. Atkins explains:

> The "high" style, for instance, was employed
> in treating lofty themes, and with it were
> associated ten tropes, known as "difficult
> ornaments". . . . With the "middle" and "low"
> styles, on the other hand, which treated of
> commonplace matters, went the more mechanical
> devices, the so-called "easy ornaments."[66]

Dante made an important contribution to poetic theory during the
middle ages in his De Vulgari Eloquentia, which contains a description
of the highest kind of poetry.[67] Dante develops his theory by
proceeding logically from his conclusion that the vernacular is the
most illustrious of languages to his examination of the types of
literature worthy of treatment in the vernacular. Only the best
subjects, he reasons, are worthy of being handled by the vernacular:

> Wherefore these three things, namely, safety,
> love, and virtue, appear to be those capital

>matters which ought to be treated of supremely,
>I mean the things which are most important in
>respect of them, as prowess in arms, the fire of
>love, and the direction of the will.[68]

Dante names poems written on each of these subjects: "Bertran de

Born on Arms, Arnaut Daniel on Love, Giraut de Borneil on Righteousness,

Cino of Pistoja on Love, his friend on Righteousness."[69] In the notes

accompanying this section, righteousness is equated with virtue.[70]

Dante's trio of worthy subjects, then, are those of the highest poetry.

Dante's examination of form is less specific. He examines canzoni,

ballate, and the sonnet and finds canzoni to be the noblest form of

poetry.[71] Canzoni is superior because "though whatever we write in

verse in a canzone, the canzoni (technically so called) have alone

acquired this name." "Moreover," he says, ". . . canzoni produce by

themselves the whole effect they ought to produce;" and "canzoni bring

more /honour/ to their authors than ballate."[72] He claims further that

"the whole of the art is embraced in canzoni alone."[73] Therefore, the

canzoni alone "is fitted for the highest vernacular."[74]

The tragic style is highest, Dante continues, and is found "when

the stateliness of the lines as well as the loftiness of the construction

and the excellence of the words agree with the weight of the subject."[75]

The meaning of "tragic" may be clarified by line 113 in Book XX of the

Inferno, where Dante has Virgil call the Aeneid "high tragedy."[76] "This,"

says Curtius, "can refer only to its style," because

>if its action is taken into account, the Aeneid
>would have to be called a comedy. The antique
>system of poetic genres had, in the millenium
>before Dante, disintegrated until it was un-
>recognizable and incomprehensible.[77]

Dante defines tragedy and comedy in a letter to Can Grande Della Scala:

> . . . tragedy in the beginning is good to look
> upon and quiet, in its end or exit is fetid and
> horrible. . . . Comedy, however, at the beginning
> deals with the harsh aspect of some affair, but
> its matter terminates prosperously. . . . Likewise
> the two differ in their mode of speaking: tragedy
> speaks in an elevated and sublime fashion, but
> comedy in a lowly and humble way. . . .[78]

Dante's poetic theory includes, then, treatment of the subject,
the form, and the style of the highest poetry. To summarize, Dante
says that the poetry worthy of the "illustrious vernacular" treats
"prowess in arms, the fire of love, and the direction of the will" in
the form of the canzoni using the tragic style.

From the investigation conducted during this study, these writings--
Aristotle's Poetics, Horace's Ars Poetica, Quintilian's Institutes of
Oratory, the major Virgilian Commentaries, the major medieval rhetorical
treatises, and Dante's De Vulgari Eloquentia--appear to be important
sources of whatever concepts about epic poetry existed during Chaucer's
lifetime.[79] Aside from the Poetics, which must be treated separately
since it had little influence in the middle ages, the writings
discussed reflect the decline in the classical epic tradition. Horace
mentioned only the subject, meter, and openings of Homer's poetry;
Quintilian emphasized only the illustrations of rhetoric and oratory.
Macrobius found theology, allegory, and universal knowledge in the
Aeneid; his findings are significant, but the Aeneid contains much more.
Servius cited as characteristics of heroic narrative only epic meter
and the mixture of the divine and human and of truth and fiction. He
anticipated the medieval theoreticians by defining the action of the

Aeneid as "mixed" and the style as "grandiloquent." According to the medieval rhetoricians, by inference, epic was simply a "mixed" narrative on a lofty theme written in the high style. And, finally, Dante considered the highest poetry, which perhaps included epic, to be that which treats safety, love, or virtue in the tragic style expressed in vernacular. Medieval concepts about epic poetry were likely, in part, composites of these characteristics, with the treatises by the medieval rhetoricians having the most influence. Since Chaucer could have known, to varying degrees, all the works discussed, it seems that within them may lie his concept of the nature of an epic poem.

NOTES

1. Domenico Comparetti, Virgil in the Middle Ages, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (New York, 1929), p. 168.

2. Bernard Weinberg, "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle," Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature, ed. Elder Olson (Chicago, 1965), p. 192.

3. Gerald Else, Aristotle: "Poetics" (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967), p. 11-12.

4. J. E. Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship from the Sixth Century B. C. to the End of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1903), p. 569.

5. Edgar Lobel, The Medieval Latin "Poetics" (Oxford, 1932), p. 309.

6. Lee S. Hultzen, "Aristotle's 'Rhetoric' in England before 1660" (unpublished dissertation, Cornell, 1932), p. 57.

7. Hultzen, p. 67-8.

8. Hultzen, p. 67.

9. Ibid.

10. F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston, 1957), p. xxvi.

11. John S. P. Tatlock and Arthur G. Kennedy, A Concordance to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and to the Romaunt of the Rose (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1963), p. 41.

12. S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a Critical Text and Translation of "The Poetics" (n.p., 1951).

13. Butcher, p. 7.

14. Butcher, p. 7-9.

15. Butcher, p. 13.

16. Butcher, p. 89.

17. Ibid.

18. Butcher, p. 91.

19. Butcher, p. 354.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, 1941), p. 1481. The Bywater translation printed here contains "species" instead of "kinds."

22. Butcher, p. 91. Bywater's translation contains a different reading here: "Besides this, Epic poetry must divide into the same species as Tragedy; it must be either simple or complex, a story of character or one of suffering." p. 1481.

23. Butcher, p. 65-67.

24. Butcher, p. 39.

25. Butcher, p. 39-41.

26. Butcher, p. 91.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Butcher, p. 25.

29. Butcher, p. 91-93.

30. Butcher, p. 67.

31. Butcher, p. 89. Aristotle indicates that in tragedy episodes are units of the main action. In one such statement, he says, "The episode is the entire part of a tragedy which is between complete choric songs." (p. 43) Elsewhere he implies that episodes are acts: "The additions to the number of 'episodes' or acts, and the other accessories of which tradition tells, must be taken as already described. . . ." (p. 19) However, Aristotle says of "epeisodic" plots and actions: "Of all plots and actions, the epeisodic are the worst. I call a plot 'epeisodic' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence." (p. 37-39)

32. Butcher, p. 93. In paraphrasing part of this passage, J. W. H. Atkins substitutes "hexameter" for "heroic." *Literary Criticism in Antiquity*, I (Gloucester, Mass., 1961), p. 100.

33. Butcher, p. 95.

34. Butcher, p. 93.

35. C. M. Gayley and B. J. Kurtz, Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism: Lyric, Epic and Allied Forms of Poetry (Boston, 1920), p. 73.

36. Horace, "On the Art of Poetry," Classical Literary Criticism, ed. T. S. Dorsch (Baltimore, 1965). Dorsch says that the date of "Art of Poetry" is thought to be some time between 12 and 8 B. C. (p. 21).

37. Horace, p. 82.

38. Horace, p. 81.

39. Horace, p. 83.

40. Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory, Trans. Rev. John Selby Watson (London, 1910-13).

41. Quintilian, p. 256.

42. Quintilian, p. 257.

43. Ibid.

44. J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase (Cambridge, 1943), p. 33.

45. Atkins, p. 33-34.

46. George Saintsbury, History of Criticism, I (London, 1949), p. 332-335. Since no English translation of these works by Macrobius and Servius exists, I have relied on this summary by Saintsbury.

47. Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard Trask (New York, 1953), p. 445.

48. Ibid.

49. Atkins, p. 22-23.

50. Saintsbury, p. 335.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Gayley and Kurtz, p. 518.

54. Sandys, p. 633-634.

55. Richard McKeon, "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century," in Crane, p. 305.

56. Ibid.

57. Jane Baltzell, "An Explanation of Medieval Poetic with Special Reference to Chaucer," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of California at Berkeley, 1965), p. 38-46.

58. Curtius, p. 147.

59. Hultzen, p. 3.

60. Comparetti, p. 131-2.

61. Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400) (New York, 1928), p. 184. Since English translations of these works are unavailable, I have relied on summaries by Baldwin, p. 184-188, and by Saintsbury, p. 408-415.

62. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, p. 99. This estimate is similar to those of Baldwin, p. 184-188, Saintsbury, chapter 1, and Raby, p. 122-5. (History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages /Oxford, 1953/).

63. Atkins, p. 31.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Atkins, p. 108.

67. Dante Alighieri, "De Vulgari Eloquentia," The Latin Works of Dante Alighieri (London, 1904). Saintsbury says that "De Vulgari Eloquentia" was written during the opening years of the fourteenth century.

68. Dante, p. 71.

69. Dante, p. 71-72.

70. Dante, p. 73-74.

71. Dante, p. 74-76.

72. Dante, p. 75.

73. Dante, p. 76.

74. Dante, p. 77.

75. Dante, p. 79.

76. Dante, The Divine Comedy, II, trans. Louis Biancolli (New York, 1966), unpaged.

77. Curtius, p. 358.

78. Dante Alighieri, "Letter to Can Grande Della Scala," Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (New York, 1940), p. 202-4.

79. Another likely source, Longinus's "On the Sublime," disappeared soon after it was written, according to Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present (New York, 1966), p. 76.

CHAPTER THREE

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL CRITICISM AND TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

In Chapter Two it was shown that those aspects of ancient and
medieval criticism which can be related to epic, as the term is under-
stood today, touch upon only superficial elements in epic. As shown
earlier, the decline of the classical epic tradition occurred in part,
at least, because the Aeneid received allegorical interpretations
and because the commentators on epic (or its closest equivalent,
"high poetry") emphasized rhetoric. In spite of the limited nature
of the statements cited in Chapter Two (with the exception of
Aristotle), it seems that a study of possible relationships between
these statements and Troilus and Criseyde could add to an understanding
and appreciation of the poem. Through such a study, it is hoped that
some conclusions can be reached about the presence of epic character-
istics in Troilus and Criseyde. The purpose of Chapter Three,
therefore, is to determine whether Troilus and Criseyde has character-
istics which are relevant to comments by ancient and medieval critics
about the works of Homer, or Virgil, or "high poetry."

Possible similarities between Troilus and the Poetics must be
considered separately since the Poetics was almost completely unknown
in the middle ages. Since Chaucer may have had access to a paraphrase,
it is worthwhile to determine if Troilus meets Aristotle's standards.
If so, one may then conjecture that Chaucer imitated Aristotle's
concept of an epic poem when he reshaped the matter of Troy. A study
of Troilus and Criseyde as an Aristotelian epic was done in 1901 by
S. M. Tucker, but an independent analysis of the Poetics appears here.

Subsequent scholarship contradicts some of Tucker's findings. He

says, for example, that there is no supernatural element in Troilus

and Criseyde. Admittedly, supernatural machinery is not present in

Troilus and Criseyde, but other types of supernatural elements do

appear. For example, divine destiny is most important in bringing

about the action of the poem. However, the role of destiny in the

poem will be discussed later. Also, certain interpretations, such

as the one which finds "episodes" in epic to mean vital parts of the

story rather than digressions, seem unsupported by Aristotle's text.

As shown in the text and note 31 of Chapter Two, Aristotle's comments

concerning episodes in epic and in tragedy have different meanings.

Aristotle cites Homer's catalogue of ships as an example of an

episode in epic,[1] but he says that in tragedy episodes are "acts."[2]

It seems, therefore, that in an epic episodes have an embellishing

function,[3] while in tragedy, episodes may be considered as units

of the main action. Furthermore, Tucker devotes most of the analysis

of Troilus to showing similarities with later epics, such as Orlando

Furioso and Gerusalemme Liberata. For these reasons, therefore,

Tucker's analysis will not be used.

As shown earlier,[4] Aristotle distinguishes epic poetry from

tragedy, comedy, and dithyrambic poetry by its "medium," "object,"

and "mode" of imitation:[5] epic uses the medium of hexameter in

imitation of the higher types of character in the narrative mode.

Investigation into whether Troilus and Criseyde meets Aristotle's

standards will begin with this definition.

Troilus and Criseyde is not written, of course, in hexameter.
However, its verse form, rime royal, is highly praised in some of the
studies of prosody. Saintsbury calls it "the great Rhyme-royal . . .
which long held the premier place among our stanza forms."[6] To Paul
Fussell, Jr., rime royal is "capable of great unity" and is "associated
with the narration of high and noble matters."[7] Hamer says of rime royal:

> It is the stanza par excellence for story telling, and
> the greater part of its history belongs to the great
> leisurely days of the verse narrative. . . . it has
> amplitude, and at the same time a certain clinching
> finality given by the final couplet, which keeps the poet
> in mind of his thread, and generally advances the story
> one step, after six lines of description or expiation. . . .
> It is not too long for a speech, nor too short for a set
> description or simile.[8]

Upon consideration of these descriptions of the merits of rime royal,
it appears that Chaucer's meter is well-suited to narrative purposes.
In quality it may, therefore, be equal to hexameter.

Consistent with Aristotle's requirement, the object of imitation
in Troilus and Criseyde is the higher type of character. Troilus,
the central character, is "kyng Priamus sone of Troye" (I, 2) and
the leader of a group of knights:

> This Troilus, as he was wont to gide
> His yonge knyghts, lad hem up and down
> In thilke large temple on every side, (I, 183-5).

The other major characters also are aristocratic. Chaucer emphasizes
Troilus's high rank in the portion of the scene at Deiphoebus's house
which occurs at the end of Book II (1555-end). Troilus is shown here
as a member of an aristocratic circle which includes Helen and Hector.
They all praise Troilus:

> . . . and up with pris hym reise
> A thousand fold yet heigher than the sonne:
> "He is, he kan, that fewe lordes konne." (II, 1585-1587)

In the descriptio in Book V (827-40) Troilus's greatness is emphasized.

> And Troilus wel woxen was in highte,
> And complet formed by proporcioun
> So wel that kynde it nought amenden myghte;
> Yong, fressh, strong, and hardy as lyoun;
> Trewe as stiel in ech condicioun;
> Oon of the beste entecched creature
> That is, or shal, whil that the world may dure.
>
> And certeynly in storye it is yfounde,
> That Troilus was nevere unto no wight,
> As in his tyme, in no degree secounde
> In durryng don that longeth to a knyght.
> Al myghte a geant passen hym of myght,
> His herte ay with the first and with the beste
> Stood paregal, to durre don that hym leste.

Some of Troilus's other attributes will be mentioned in Chapter Four

in connection with some of the twentieth-century statements about

epic heroes.

Troilus and Criseyde is written, of course, in the narrative

mode, the final item of Aristotle's definition. At times the narrator

speaks, and at times the characters speak for themselves, a method

which is consistent with Aristotle's only requirement concerning the

nature of the narrative mode. The epic poet, Aristotle says, should

speak as little as possible in his own person,[9] because, as he earlier

states, the plot must be constructed dramatically and must have for

its subject "a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning,

a middle, and an end."[10] The narrator of Troilus has quite a large

role, but the progress of the main action occurs in a series of

scenes in which the characters speak in their own persons. Most

of the scenes consist of soliloquies or of conversation between two
or more persons. T. R. Price finds fifty scenes in the poem, of which
thirty-two are dialogues, nine are soliloquies, two are trio-scenes,
and seven are group scenes.[11] "Each stage of the progress," Price
adds, "is attained as result of the action of mind on mind through
dialogue."[12] The narrator, then, has little to do with the progress
of the main action, the love affair. As the love affair is a single
action, with "a beginning, a middle, and an end," the plot has unity.

Consistent with Aristotle's requirements concerning the nature
of the narrative mode, Chaucer removed the narrator from the progress
of the main action. In this respect, Chaucer deviates from Il
Filostrato, his major source. Boccaccio indicates his personal
interest in his narrative in the introduction:

> And therefore in his person and his fortunes
> I found most happily a frame for my ideas;
> and afterwards, in light rhyme and in my
> Florentine idiom, in a very moving style,
> I set down his sorrows and my own as well.
> And putting my sorrows into song, now at
> this time and now at that, I have found a
> great relief, as at the outset was my
> expectation.[13]

Chaucer's narrator characterizes himself as a servant of love in
Book I, l. 15, but he removes himself from personal involvement in
love in the following line ("Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse").
Concerning the difference in attitude of the two narrators, Payne says:

> he /Boccaccio/ continues to weave into and around
> the narrative a ground of expressive and evaluative
> language which makes of the whole a sustained
> personal lyric. Chaucer intrudes upon the action
> of his poem for exactly opposite reasons: to

> remain constantly between the reader and the action,
> objectifying it for him and eliciting from him
> an attitude toward it. Boccaccio's conception
> of his subject is as a more or less allegorical
> device upon which he can impose as ultimate
> substance his own emotions. Chaucer--and here
> is a key to the whole difference between the
> two poems--re-emphasizes an old narrative in
> order to point out in it particular aspects of
> the truths it may exemplify, and he begins by
> separating himself sharply and completely from
> the action and all the characters in it.[14]

However, at various times the narrator expresses sympathy for the
characters: for example, at the beginning of Book I, he entreats
lovers to have pity on Troilus in his "unsely aventure." (22-51)
Chaucer indicates that he is writing partly from compassion:

> 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. (47-51)

Never, however, does Chaucer identify with any of the characters or
lose his objectivity.

The narrator does not impede the action of Troilus and Criseyde;
rather, he supplements the narrative through his many functions.
Meech has catalogued these functions concisely: the narrator, he
says, supplies "further reportage of the thought, speech or writing
of the characters . . . /and/ transitions from one utterance, or one
event, to another. . . ."[15] He also describes "details of physical
appearance and dress, of stage business and settings, and of times
of day and year. . . ."[16] Meech adds the following comment on the
narrator's functions:

> He establishes the chronology of sequences as if
> he were a meticulous historian. And he dwells
> on the planets in their courses, their influences,
> the seasonal and diurnal appearances effected
> by their rotation, and the inexorable passage
> of time for enforcement of moods or concepts.
> He plots motion as carefully as time, following
> the actors from place to place in Troy and from room
> to room indoors, without ever losing them in
> undefined space as his original sometimes did.[17]

The narrator's comments on all these subjects reflect the progress

of the action. In this role, Boughner sees him in a "position of

ironic detachment," acting as "a kind of tragic chorus:"

> Many of his moralizing comments are of this
> sort, interpreting the conduct and emotions of
> his actors and pointing his lesson. Thus, he
> studiously corrects the impression that
> Criseyde's was a 'sodeyn love,' (II, 666-79)
> or he summarizes the status of the action,
> or turns, profoundly moved at the end, in
> lines adapted from the Paradiso (III, 491-511)
> to sublime invocation of the blessed trinity.[18]

During the ascending action, (Books I-III) the narrator's comments

relate mostly to love, but in the descending phase (Books IV and V)

he reflects Troilus's thought often by concerning himself with divine

causation. The proems to Books I through IV (Book V has no proem)

show this function of the narrator most clearly. (The proems are

discussed on p. 53-55.)

One of the narrator's functions, marking the passage of time,

is done with special care. Troilus first sees Criseyde in April

(I, 156). Later in Book I, the narrator indicates the passage of

time:

> So muche, day by day, his owene thought,
> For lust to hire, gan quiken and encresse, (442-3).

In May Pandarus begins to arrange the love affair (II, 50, 72). An astronomical reference in Book III, ll. 624-5 ("The bente moone with hire hornes pale,/Saturne, and Jove, in Cancro joyned were.") indicates another date in May, probably of the following year, according to Robinson's note on the passage. Another astronomical reference occurs at the opening of Book IV:

> Liggyng in oost, as I have seyd er this,
> The Grekys stronge aboute Troie town,
> Byfel that, whan that Phebus shynyng is
> Upon the brest of Hercules lyoun,
> That Ector, with ful many a bold baroun,
> Caste on a day with Grekes for to fighte,
> As he was wont, to greve hem what he myghte. (29-35)

According to Robinson's note, these lines suggest a date during the last of July or the first part of August.[19] When Book V opens, it is spring again (8-14), the third spring of the love affair:

> The gold-ytressed Phebus heighe on-lofte
> Thries hadde alle with his bemes clene
> The snowes molte, and Zepherus as ofte
> Ibrought ayeyn the tendre leves grene,
> Syn that the sone of Ecuba the queene
> Bigan to love hire first for whom his sorwe
> Was al, that she departe sholde a-morwe.

Thus, the action of the story extends over three years. The time seems carefully planned, for each book contains a reference to a date.

From the above comments on the narrator (which, however, do not exhaust all aspects of his role), it is apparent that he has important functions that complement the action. Each of these functions occurs outside the major scenes in which the main action progresses. It appears, therefore, that Chaucer's narrator does not violate the requirement of Aristotle.

In terms of Aristotle's theory of "kinds," the plot of Troilus and Criseyde is complex and pathetic. As quoted earlier, Aristotle says that complex plots "depend entirely on Reversal of the Situation and Recognition." [20] Reversal and Recognition occur in the plot of Troilus and Criseyde. The expectations of the lovers are reversed when Criseyde is forced to go to the Greek camp (IV, 145-147), and again when she finds that she lacks the strength to carry out her plans to return to Troy (V, 1023-1029). Recognition occurs when Troilus sees Criseyde's brooch pinned on the cloak torn from Diomede (V, 1653-1663), an event which leads to the remaining action--Troilus's renewed efforts on the battlefield and his death. In Butcher's translation, Aristotle says that "the motive is passion" in a pathetic plot.[21] (Bywater uses "suffering" instead of "passion.")[22] The plot of Troilus seems pathetic because at the outset Chaucer says that he intends to tell of the "double sorwe" of Troilus (I, 1). Troilus's actions throughout the narrative are motivated by the sorrow that evolves from his love. Furthermore, Troilus contains the four "parts" of an epic poem--plot, character, diction, and thought--[23] which are also the parts of a tragedy.[24]

As shown in Chapter Two, Aristotle describes epic structure as consisting of a "multiplicity of plots."[25] As an example of epic structure, he cites the practice of Homer:

> /Homer/ never attempts to make the whole war of
> Troy the subject of his poem, though that war
> had a beginning and an end.. . . As it is, he
> detaches a single portion, and admits as episodes
> many events from the general story of the war--

such as the Catalogue of the ships and others--
thus diversifying the poem."[26]

Troilus and Criseyde does not contain a "multiplicity of plots,"

but it contains a number of philosophical monologues and lyrical

interludes which appear to be similar, in that they are detached

from the main action, to such episodes as Homer's catalogue of

ships. Payne lists ten major philosophical and lyrical speeches:

    I.   400-34:   first canticus Troili
   II.   827-75:   Antigone's song
  III.   1422-42:   Criseyde's aubade
  III.   1450-70:   Troilus's answering aubade
  III.   1702-8:   Troilus's second aubade
  III.   1744-71:   Troilus's hymn to love
   IV.   958-1082: Troilus's predestination soliloquy
    V.   218-45:   Troilus's plaint, "Wher is myn owene
                        lady, lief and deere"
    V.   540-53:   Troilus's plaint to the empty palace
    V.   638-58:   second canticus Troili[27]

These speeches serve one of the functions of episodes, according to

Butcher's definition of the term in his commentary. In his words,

episodes are "embellishing and retarding incidents by which the

denoument is delayed and the mental strain relieved."[28]

In summary, Troilus and Criseyde meets most of Aristotle's

requirements about epic. In the poem Chaucer imitates the higher

types of character in the narrative mode through the medium of rime

royal (which may be a worthy substitute for hexameter). The plot has

a "beginning, a middle and an end," and the poem contains the four

"parts" of an epic poem and two of the four "kinds" of epic. In

structure and in the amount of speaking done by the narrator, however,

Troilus and Criseyde is somewhat dissimilar to Aristotle's description

of epic. The poem does not contain a "multiplicity of plots," but it has a number of philosophical and lyrical speeches which are detached from the main action. The narrator perhaps has too large a role, but he seems not to interfere with the dramatic nature of the action.

In the remainder of this chapter, statements in the critical writings will be discussed according to subject. If the writings were discussed individually, considerable repetition would occur. Three of the writers mentioned in Chapter Two--Horace, Isidore of Seville, and Dante--comment on the subject of "Homeric," "heroic," or "high" poetry. Horace says, "Homer showed us in what metre the exploits of kinds and commanders and the miseries of war were to be recorded."[29] Isidore of Seville in Etymologiae defines heroic verse as that which narrates the deeds of brave men.[30] And in De Vulgari Eloquentia Dante says that the subjects which should be treated of supremely (he does not mention epic by name) are "prowess in arms, the fire of love, and the direction of the will."[31] In themselves, courageous exploits, the subject named by all three sources, do not constitute the main subject of Troilus and Criseyde. Troilus's deeds in battle are important, however, in characterizing him as a worthy knight, and repeated references to battles connect the destiny of Troilus and Criseyde to the destiny of Troy. From time to time Troilus's exploits on the battlefield are mentioned. In Book I a long passage about Troilus's actions in the field occurs:

> And yet was he, where so men wente or riden,
> Founde oon the beste, and lengest tyme abiden
> Ther peril was, and dide ek swich travaille
> In armes, that to thynke it was merveille.

> But for non hate he to the Grekes hadde,
> Ne also for the rescous of the town,
> Ne made hym thus in armes for to madde,
> But only, lo, for this conclusioun:
> To liken hire the bet for his renoun.
> Fro day to day in armes so he spedde,
> That the Grekes as the deth him dredde. (473-483)

Again at the end of Book I, Troilus recovers from his agony long

enough to return to the field.

> But Troilus lay tho no lenger down,
> But up anon upon his stede bay,
> And in the feld he pleyde the leoun;
> Wo was that Grek that with hym mette a-day! (1072-1075)

In Book II Troilus rides by Criseyde's window on his return from

battle, and the ensuing description is highly visual:

> This Troilus sat on his baye steede,
> Al armed, save his hed, ful richely;
> And wownded was his hors, and gan to blede,
> On which he rood a pas ful softely.
> But swich a knyghtly sighte, trewely,
> As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,
> To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille.
>
> So lik a man of armes and a knyght
> He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse;
> For bothe he hadde a body and a myght
> To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse;
> And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,
> So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he,
> It was an heven upon hym for to see.
>
> His helm tohewen was in twenty places,
> That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde;
> His sheeld todasshed was with swerdes and maces,
> In which men myght many an arwe fynde
> That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rynde;
> And ay the peple cryde, "Here cometh oure joye,
> And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!" (II, 624-644)

Again, in Book III, Chaucer emphasizes Troilus's prowess in arms:

> In alle nedes, for the townes werre,
> He was, and ay, the first in armes dyght,
> And certeynly, but if that bokes erre,

> Save Ector most ydred of any wight;
> And this encrees of hardynesse and myght
> Com hym of love, his ladies thank to wynne,
> That altered his spirit so withinne. (1772-1778)

Book IV contains a description of some actual fighting, although

Troilus is not mentioned.

> The longe day, with speres sharpe igrounde,
> With arwes, dartes, swerdes, maces felle,
> They fighte and bringen hors and man to grounde,
> And with hire axes out the braynes quelle. (43-46)

After seeing Criseyde's brooch, Troilus returns once more in despair

and anger to the battlefield (V, 1751-1767), and, finally, he is

killed by Achilles (1800-1806). Thus, Chaucer mentions the war in

each book. Except in Book IV, Chaucer also emphasizes Troilus's

bravery. To be sure, Chaucer's subject is the man rather than the

arms.

> And if I hadde ytaken for to write
> The armes of this ilke worthi man,
> Than wolde ich of his batailles endite;
> But for that I to writen first bigan
> Of his love, I have seyd as I kan,--
> His worthi dedes, whoso list hem heere,
> Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere-- (V, 1765-1771).

The passages concerning warfare quoted or cited here form only a

small part of the narrative, but they serve to connect the narrative

to the war. Concerning Chaucer's handling of the war, G. T. Shepherd

says:

> There is no interest at all in violence in
> Troilus and Criseyde. Permanent war swallows
> Troilus very quietly in the end. In fourteenth-
> century England war was too ordinary for noisy
> demonstrations . . . Troilus and Criseyde reflects
> and accept this tedious insistence.[32]

Love, the second of Dante's worthy subjects, is treated in depth

in Troilus and Criseyde. The details of the love affair are essentially

the same as those in Il Filostrato, except for a few changes. Criseyde

is won less easily than Criseida, Boccaccio's heroine. The schemes of

Pandarus, in part, bring about her gradual surrender. During the

first conversation with Criseyde, Pandarus takes advantage of Criseyde's

natural curiosity by telling her immediately that he brings good

news.

> "As evere thrive I," quod this Pandarus,
> "Yet koude I telle a thyng to doon yow pleye."
> "Now, uncle deere," quod she, "telle it us
> For Goddes love; is than th'assege aweye?
> I am of Grekes so fered that I deye."
> "Nay, nay," quod he, "as evere mote I thryve,
> It is a thing wel bet than swyche fyve."   (II, 120-126)

When Criseyde inquires about Hector, Pandarus uses the opportunity

to mention Troilus and praises him out of all proportion to the

context of the conversation.

> "Ful wel, I thonk it God," quod Pandarus,
> "Save in his arm he hath a litel wownde;
> And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,
> The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,
> In whom that alle vertu list habounde,
> As alle trouth and alle gentilesse,
> Wisdom, honour, fredom, and worthinesse."   (155-161)

Without revealing his news, Pandarus says he must leave and thereby

forces Criseyde to ask him to stay. She must finally show her

curiosity by saying, "Shall I nat witen what ye mene of this?" (226)

Thus she concedes, and Pandarus has won the first round, as he wins

them all. In each of his conversations with Criseyde, Pandarus uses

devious means as well as powerful arguments to increase her interest

in Troilus. To the events of Il Filostrato Chaucer also added the
scene at Deiphoebus's house in which Criseyde agrees only to accept
Troilus into her service (II, 1555-1750 and III, 50-226). In another
deviation from Il Filostrato, Pandarus, and not Criseyde, arranges
the first nocturnal meeting. In Il Filostrato Criseida plans her
first meeting with Troilo to coincide with the departure of the other
people in her house who will be attending a festival.[33] In Troilus,
however, Pandarus invites Criseyde to dine with him on a cloudy,
moonless night and assures her that Troilus is out of town (III, 548-574).
After dinner he insists that she stay the night and later arranges
for Troilus to enter her room through a trap-door. With comic
machinations he puts Troilus into her bed, and with one last wile
removes the light. (III, 694-1141) Later Chaucer suspends the
narrative with an occupatio, a technique of abbreviation: "But soth
is, though I kan nat tellen al, / As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,"
(1324-1325). Thereby, the consummation is handled more delicately
(and more humorously) than it is handled in Il Filostrato, where the
lovers simply meet and begin their love-making.[34]

The implications of love are far greater in Troilus than in
Il Filostrato, however. The third book opens with an invocation to
Venus, who signifies not only the pagan deity and the planet, but
also the force which unifies the universe. In the first stanza Venus
is addressed first as planet, then as goddess:

> O blisful light, of which the bemes clere
> Adorneth al the thridde heven faire!
> O sonnes lief, O Joves doughter deere,
> Plesance of love, O goodly debonaire,

> In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire!
> O verray cause of heele and of gladnesse,
> Iheryed be thy myght and thi goodnesse! (1-7)

In the second stanza Venus symbolizes the principle which regulates the universe, the love of God.

> In hevene and helle, in erthe and salte see
> Is felt thi myght, if that I wel descerne;
> As man, brid, best, fissh, herbe, and grene tree
> Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne.
> God loveth, and to love wol nought werne;
> And in this world no lyves creature
> Withouten love is worth, or may endure. (8-14)

Later, in two speeches by Troilus, Chaucer expands this idea. In lines 1744-1764 Troilus calls love the force which binds the elements, the planets, and the nations in stable harmony. Earlier, as Troilus held Criseyde in his arms for the first time, he named benign love, the "holy bond of thynges," as the force which brought him to joy (1254-74), suggesting, as Curry shows, that Nature-as-destiny, which administers God's will, ultimately caused the consummation of the love affair.[35] Thus, the love of Troilus and Criseyde is a manifestation of the love of God: in Preston's words, Chaucer placed the emotions of the lovers "in a perspective of infinity."[36]

Chaucer also amplified the material of Il Filostrato by philosophizing and (according to some interpretations, among them those of Robertson, Shanley, and Denomy) Christianizing the narrative, thereby treating the third of Dante's trio of worthy subjects, virtue, or the direction of the will. Il Filostrato is without philosophical overtones: I find only these references: two references to fortune in Canto I,[37] Troilo's complaint against fortune[38] and Criseida's

complaint and plan to vanquish fortune in Canto IV,[39] and the narrator's

statements in Canto VIII that fortune now loves Diomede and that Fortune

had decreed that neither Troilus nor Diomede "should fall by the

other's hand."[40] Authority for Chaucer's philosophical amplifications

may be found in Macrobius's theological-allegorical interpretation of

the Aeneid, in which he emphasizes intellectual content.[41] By treating

philosophical and religious subjects in his narrative, Chaucer deepened

the significance of the story of the lovers as it came to him from

Boccaccio and thereby raised his creation to the level of "high poetry."

The philosophical overtones of the poem are largely Boethian;

the most significant philosophical speeches have parallels in the

Consolation of Philosophy, which are cited in Robinson's notes to each

passage. The speeches are these: the debate between Troilus and

Pandarus about Fortune (I, 837-54), Criseyde's complaint against

"fals felicitee," (III, 813-36), Troilus's praise of love, (III, 1744-71),

and Troilus's long soliloquy on predestination (IV, 953-1085). These

speeches, and other minor ones, add great depth of meaning to the

poem by making it relevant to universal human concerns. According

to Corsa, the poem "encompasses a view" that "sees the finite and the

infinite, the timeless and the timed."[42] Stroud brings further insight

into the philosophical meaning of Troilus and Criseyde. He compares

the action to a "philosophical quest of universal and timeless

dimensions," since "all men dwell in a beseiged Troy."[43] According

to Stroud's view, Troilus represents Boethius; Criseyde represents

the human felicity of which Troilus must be deprived; and the narrative

is an allegorical presentation, without the aid of Philosophy, of the
quest of the Consolation of Philosophy. The quest ends only after
Troilus's death, when he learns that "youth should avoid the Wheel of
Fortune by loving only the Savior."[44] In another allegorical
interpretation, Corsa suggests that

> the figure of Philosophy is Chaucer, the narrator;
> that Boethius, the questioner, who is also the
> representative of man protesting his human condition
> is Troilus; and Fortune is Fortune in the poem,
> "off stage," yet dominant in the mind of the
> hero. The poem, Troilus and Criseyde, is the
> poetical-dramatic illustration of what the
> Consolation is all about.[45]

By heightening the philosophical implications of the poem in these
ways, Chaucer made it compare favorably to Dante's description of
the highest poetry, on a level, in Boughner's words, with

> those supreme poems in which tragedy is interpreted
> in the light of moral values that give human
> beings an anchor of hope in a world of bitterness
> and insecurity.[46]

In addition to their being Boethian, the philosophical issues of
Troilus and Criseyde are ultimately Christian ones. Curry shows that
the action is presided over by a "complex and inescapable destiny,"[47]
"the disposition and ordinance inherent in movable things by which
Providence knits all things together in their respective orders."[48]
Destiny, therefore, is one of the successive stages of action by
which God's plan is administered. Chaucer insists, says Curry, that
the fortunes of Troilus and Criseyde are caused by Nature-as-destiny
and hence by God.[49] Robertson carries this interpretation further
by suggesting that the real tragedy of the poem is Troilus' subjugation

of himself to destinal forces by making false choices. Fortune was
regarded in the middle ages, says Robertson, as the force to which
people became subject when they loved the "uncertain and transitory
rewards of the world."[50] Therefore, Troilus lost his free will when
he placed his trust in sexual love. Robertson finds parallels here
with the "three stages of the tropological fall of Adam:" "the
temptation of the senses, the corruption of the lower reason in
pleasurable thought, and the final corruption of the higher reason."[51]
The theme of Troilus and Criseyde, according to this interpretation,
is the "tragedy of every mortal sinner." Although Robertson admits
that his reading is incomplete,[52] it is cited here to show that
Christian elements can be found throughout the narrative.

The most overtly Christian element in Troilus and Criseyde, of
course, is the epilog. Here Chaucer calls upon lovers to renounce
the world for Christ and asserts the insufficiency of pagan gods
and the wretchedness of those who indulge their worldly appetites
(V, 1835-1855). Although the epilog is not consistent with the tone
of the narrative, Robinson seems right in saying that it is not
necessary to find any deep conflict between the two.[53] According
to Robertson's interpretation, the epilog is consistent with the
allegorical meaning of the story. Similarly, Shanley maintains that
the epilog is implicit in the whole poem.[54] What Chaucer did, he
says, was to

> recast a narrative poem . . . in the light of an
> entirely new set of values, determined not only
> by this world and man's life in it but by the
> eternal as well.[55]

The reason for Troilus's woe, then, is his placing "hope for perfect happiness in that which by its nature was temporary, imperfect, and inevitably insufficient."[56] According to Owen, however, Chaucer's manuscript revisions show that the epilog is probably not a repudiation of the morality of the narrative.[57] "That Chaucer should be strengthening both these irreconcilables in his revisions shows," says Owen, "that for Chaucer, both were valid, though irreconcilable."[58] Owen's findings support the view of Father Denomy, who finds two moralities involved: that of the romance itself ("according to which love is irrestible and ennobling"), and that of Chaucer and his world, "for whom courtly love was immoral and heretical."[59] Since courtly love had been condemned in 1277 by Archbishop Stephen Tempier at Paris, Denomy thinks that Chaucer wrote the epilog to protect himself against blame, perhaps official.[60]

By adding these philosophical and religious amplifications, Chaucer elevated his treatment of the Troilus story to "high poetry." In the process, he dealt with those issues which Tillyard called the ones of primary concern to his age and the essential subject of medieval epic. Tillyard argues that the "accepted unconscious metaphysic" must be the ground of epic. In the middle ages, Tillyard says, the "unconscious metaphysic" was no longer "heroic human action" but "an ideal of holiness."[61] The "essential subject" of the medieval epic, therefore, is the "earthly pilgrimage leading to salvation and a higher life."[62] Although Tillyard believes Chaucer to be primarily a comic writer and Troilus to be lacking seriousness,[63] the poem contains philosophical and religious depths that allow it

to fulfill Tillyard's epic function of expressing the concerns the
middle ages took most seriously. In so doing, Chaucer was consistent
with the theological-allegorical view of the Aeneid and with Dante's
trio of worthy subjects.

As shown earlier, Servius names specific characteristics of the
Aeneid: heroic metre, mixture of divine and human elements and of
truth and fiction, "mixed" action, and "grandiloquent" style. Whether
or not through design, Troilus and Criseyde contains most of these
characteristics. By "heroic metre" Servius probably meant the Latin
hexameter line. As mentioned earlier, however, Saintsbury says that
rime royal "long held the premier place among our stanza forms."[64]
And Fussell finds that rime royal is "associated with the narration
of high and noble matters."[65] Rime royal may have had equal rank,
then, to that of hexameter. Servius's second characteristic, mixture
of the divine and human, appears in plot motivation. Calchas
consults the oracle of Apollo as well as his own calculations before
he leaves Troy (I, 71-72); Criseyde's decision as well as the
propitious position of the planets cause her to love Troilus. The
action is consistently motivated by character, although the plot
shows the working out of destiny. According to Robertson, the lovers
fulfill their destinies through the free choices they make.[66] The
narrative clearly is "mixed:" the poet speaks (in the role of
narrator), and the characters speak for themselves. Later, in the
medieval rhetorical treatises discussed in Chapter Two, this epic
characteristic was part of the doctrine of the three kinds.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Servius found the "grandiloquent" style to be characteristic of the Aeneid. Similarly, the medieval rhetoricians cited earlier said that "high" style should be used to treat lofty themes. Servius found lofty phrase and noble sentiment to be characteristic of the "grandiloquent" style, and the rhetoricians defined "high" style as that which is used to treat lofty themes, through using the most difficult ornaments. Chaucer begins his narrative by setting forth the final situation, an artificial method characteristic of the high style:[67]

> The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
> That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
> In lovynge, how his aventures fellen
> Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
> My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.   (I, 1-5)

Setting forth the final situation was one of several artificial openings which Chaucer could have chosen. In Manly's words:

> Artificial beginnings consisted either of those which
> plunge in medias res or set forth a final situation
> before narrating the events that led up to and pro-
> duced it, or of those in which a sententia (that is,
> a generalization or proverb) is elaborated as an
> introduction, or an exemplum (that is, a similar case)
> is briefly handled for the same purpose.[68]

Furthermore, each book is introduced by proems (except for Book V, which has no proem) and invocations. At the beginning of each book Chaucer invokes the aid of appropriate divine figures: in Book I his helper is the Fury Tisiphone _Thesiphone_, "Sorwynge evere yn peyne." (9) Book II opens with an invocation to Cleo, "Muse of history:"[69]

> 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;
> Me nedeth here noon other art to use.
> Forwhi to every lovere I me excuse,
> That of no sentement I this endite,
> But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.   (8-14)

In Book III Chaucer prays to Venus and to Calliope (1-49). The

reference to Calliope, according to Boughner, suggests that Chaucer

"was rising to a higher level of composition."[70] Book IV opens with

an invocation to the Furies and to cruel Mars:

> O ye Herynes, Nyghtes doughtren thre,
> That endeles compleignen evere in pyne,
> Megera, Alete, and ek Thesiphone;
> Thow cruel Mars ek, fader to Quyryne,
> This ilke ferthe book me helpeth fyne,
> So that the losse of lyf and love yfeere
> Of Troilus be fully shewed heere.   (22-28)

And in Book V Chaucer's divine aids are the Fates who carry out the

determined destiny of Troilus:

> Aprochen gan the fatal destyne
> That Joves hath in disposicioun,
> And to yow, angry Parcas, sustren thre,
> Committeth, to don execucioun;
> For which Criseyde moste out of the town,
> And Troilus shal dwellen forth in pyne
> Til Lachesis his thred no lenger twyne.   (1-8)

Boughner suggests that the invocations, which are devices of classical

epic, lend "epic dignity" to the narrative.[71]

The proems anticipate the matter of each book by announcing the

subject and establishing the mood. The proem to the first book (1-56)

announces the theme, the "double sorwe" of Troilus, establishes the

framework of courtly love, and characterizes the narrator as an

outsider who is unpleasing to the God of Love. In the proem to

Book II Troilus is compared to a boat coming out of a tempest (1-8).

Robinson calls this passage "almost surely a resemblance of Dante,

Purgatorio, I, 1-3."[72] In the proem to Book III the happiness of

the lovers is anticipated. (1-49) In Boughner's words, this proem

"indicates the heightened emotional content and the deepened
philosophical import of the poem."[73] The proem of Book IV announces
Troilus's woe, and anticipates his long speech about cruel Fortune.
(1-21) Book V has no such proem; after two stanzas, one invoking the
Fates and the other establishing the time, the narrator begins the
story once again. These formal aspects of the narrative, in addition
to being decorative, emphasize the action, add to the sense of fate,
and provide unity.

With certain rhetorical techniques, Chaucer developed the
narrative. By using the devices of abbreviatio and amplificatio,[74]
he expanded some sections and shortened others. A technique of
abbreviatio, the occupatio, is used to suspend the narrative of the
consummation scene, as mentioned earlier, and Pandarus uses an
occupatio in Book III, ll. 295-301:

> "And nere it that I wilne as now t'abregge
> Diffusioun of speche, I koude almoost
> A thousand olde stories the allegge
> Of wommen lost through fals and foles bost.
> Proverbs kanst thiself ynowe and woost,
> Ayeins that vice, for to ben a labbe,
> Al seyde men soth as often as they gabbe. . . ."

Abbreviatio is perhaps less important in the poem than amplificatio,
of which there are more examples. Three important figures of
amplificatio used in the poem are descriptio, exclamatio, and
sententia. Through the device of descriptio, formal portraits of
the characters are given. According to Boughner,

> Since the essential function /of the descriptio/
> was to award praise or blame, it had two parts,
> the physical comprising a treatment of each
> feature including the brows and the interval
> that separates them, and the moral.[75]

Criseyde's is the first portrait given:

> She nas nat with the leste of hire stature,
> But alle hire lymes so wel answerynge
> Weren to wommanhod, that creature
> Was nevere lasse mannyssh in semynge.
> And ek the pure wise of hire mevynge
> Shewed wel that men myght in hire gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse. (I, 281-287)

In Book V descriptios of Diomede, Criseyde, and Troilus interrupt

the narrative.

> This Diomede, as bokes us declare,
> Was in his nedes prest and corageous,
> With sterne vois and myghty lymes square,
> Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous
> Of dedes, like his fader Tideus.
> And som men seyn he was of tonge large;
> And heir he was of Calydoigne and Arge. (799-805)

This is the only formal protrait given of Diomede. Tatlock says that

it helps to show "why what must happen did happen."[76] A descriptio

of Criseyde follows. In similar fashion, it enumerates her physical

characteristics along with her traits of mind.

> Criseyde mene was of hire stature,
> Therto of shap, of face, ans ek of cheere,
> Ther myghte ben no fairer creature.
> And ofte tyme this was hire manere,
> To gon ytressed with hire heres clere
> Doun by hire coler at hire bak byhynde,
> Which with a thred of gold she wolde bynde.
>
> And, save hire browes joyneden yfere,
> Ther nas no lak, in aught I kan espien.
> But for to speken of hire eyen cleere,
> Lo, trewely, they writen that hire syen,
> That Paradis stood formed in hire yen.
> And with hire riche beaute evere more
> Strof love in hire ay, which of hem was more.

> She sobre was, ek symple, and wys withal,
> The best ynorisshed ek that myghte be,
> And goodly of hire speche in general,
> Charitable, estatlich, lusty, and fre;
> Ne nevere mo ne lakked hire pite;
> Tendre-herted, slydynge of corage;
> But trewely, I kan nat telle hire age. (806-826)

Besides containing a lovely picture, this descriptio helps to explain

why Criseyde deserts Troilus: she is "Tendre-herted, slydynge of

corage." The final descriptio in this passage is a portrait of

Troilus:

> And Troilus wel woxen was in highte,
> And complet formed by proporcioun
> So wel that kynde it nought amenden myghte;
> Yong, fressh, strong, and hardy as lyoun;
> Trewe as stiel in ech condicioun;
> Oon of the best entecched creature
> That is, or shal, whil that the world may dure. (827-833)

Chaucer describes April and May in the formal manner also. The

first appears in Book I, ll. 155-158:

> And so bifel, whan comen was the tyme .
> Of Aperil, whan clothed is the mede
> With newe grene, of lusty Veer the pryme,
> And swote smellen floures white and rede,

Chaucer describes May in Book II, ll. 50-53:

> In May, that moder is of monthes glade,
> That fresshe floures, blew and white and rede,
> Ben quike agayn, that wynter dede made,
> And ful of bawme is fletyng every mede;

Another device of amplificatio, the exclamatio, is found most

often in Troilus' speeches. During the consummation scene he

cries out in praise of Cupid and Venus and Hymen (III, 1254-7)

> Than seyde he thus, "O Love, O Charite!
> Thi moder ek, Citherea the swete,
> After thiself next heried be she,
> Venus mene I, the wel-willy planete! . . ."

As dawn approaches, Troilus's exclamation changes to one of distress:

> "O cruel day, accusour of joie
> That nyght and love han stole and faste iwryen,
> Acorsed be thi comyng into Troye,
> For every bore that hath oon of thi bryghte yen! . . ."
> (1450-53)

His many exclamations of sorrow and despair are recorded in Books
IV and V as he suffers from the loss of Criseyde. In contrast to
Troilus, Pandarus is the speaker of sententiae, another division of
amplificatio. In Book I, ll. 622-44, Chaucer packs ten sententiae
into twenty-one lines, each supporting Pandarus's contention that one
who has known failure in love is well qualified to guide the love
affair of another. Every major speech that Pandarus delivers
contains sententiae; they are his most characteristic utterance,
entirely appropriate to his somewhat pedantic tendencies. Part of
the long passage in Book I is here quoted in illustration:

> "A wheston is no kervyng instrument,
> But yet it maketh sharppe kervyng tolis.
> And there thow woost that I have aught myswent,
> Eschuw thow that, for swich thing to the scole is;
> Thus often wise men ben war by foolys.
> If thow do so, thi wit is wel bewared;
> By his contrarie is every thyng declared. . . ."
> (631-637)

Thus, through his use of proems, invocations, and rhetorical devices,
Chaucer elevated his narrative to the level of the "high poetry"
described by the rhetoricians.

The examination of Troilus and Criseyde in this chapter shows
that certain similarities are found with statements about Homeric,
Virgilian, or "high poetry" in ancient and medieval critical writings.
Troilus and Criseyde meets most of Aristotle's requirements; it

appears different from Aristotle's description of epic only in metre, in the amount of speech by the poet in his own person, and in the absence of a "multiplicity of plots." The subjects named by Horace, Isidore of Seville, and Dante are treated in _Troilus and Criseyde_. It contains the characteristics, except for the hexameter, which Servius mentioned, as well as the rhetorical ornamentation characteristic of the "high" style, which the medieval rhetoricians described. From an examination of _Troilus and Criseyde_ in the light of these critical writings, it becomes apparent that Chaucer elevated the story which he borrowed from Boccaccio to the level of the highest poetry known to his age. In so doing, he made _Troilus and Criseyde_ similar to ancient and medieval interpretations of epic poetry.

NOTES

1. Butcher, op. cit., p. 89.

2. Butcher, p. 19.

3. Butcher, p. 91-93.

4. p. 14-15.

5. Butcher, p. 7.

6. George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody, I (New York, 1961), p. 150.

7. Paul Fussell, Jr., Poetic Meter and Poetic Forms (New York, 1966), p. 156.

8. Enid Hamer, The Metres of English Poetry (London, 1930), p. 152.

9. Butcher, p. 93.

10. Butcher, p. 89.

11. Price, op. cit., p. 313-315.

12. Price, p. 314.

13. Giovanni Boccaccio, "Il Filostrato," The Story of Troilus, ed. R. K. Gordon (New York, 1964), p. 28-29.

14. Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetic (New Haven, 1963), p. 176-177.

15. Meech, op. cit., p. 12.

16. Ibid.

17. Meech, p. 13.

18. Boughner, op. cit., p. 209.

19. Robinson, p. 827.

20. Butcher, p. 91.

21. Butcher, p. 67.

22. Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater, The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), p. 1473.

23. Butcher, p. 25.

24. Butcher, p. 91.

25. Butcher, p. 67.

26. Butcher, p. 89.

27. Payne, p. 185.

28. Butcher, p. 286.

29. Horace, op. cit., p. 81.

30. Gayley and Kurtz, op. cit., p. 518.

31. Dante, op. cit., p. 71.

32. G. T. Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer and Chaucerians, ed. D. S. Brewer, p. 69.

33. Boccaccio, p. 57.

34. Boccaccio, p. 61-62.

35. W. A. Curry, op. cit., p. 264.

36. Raymond Preston, Chaucer (London, 1952), p. 59.

37. Boccaccio, p. 25, 28.

38. Boccaccio, p. 73-75.

39. Boccaccio, p. 81-83, 88.

40. Boccaccio, p. 124.

41. p. 20.

42. Helen Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1964), p. 41.

43. Theodore Stroud, "Boethius' Influence on Chaucer's Troilus," Chaucer Criticism, II, eds. Schoeck and Taylor, p. 133.

44. Stroud, p. 122-35.

45. Corsa, p. 41-42.

46. Boughner, p. 209.

47. Curry, p. 241.

48. Curry, p. 243.

49. Curry, p. 250.

50. D. W. Robertson, Jr., op. cit., p. 88-89.

51. Robertson, p. 97.

52. Robertson, p. 95.

53. Robinson, p. 389.

54. James L. Shanley, "The 'Troilus' and Christian Love," Chaucer Criticism, II, p. 136-146.

55. Shanley, p. 137.

56. Ibid.

57. Charles A. Owen, Jr., "The Significance of Chaucer's Revisions of Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer Criticism, II, p. 160-166.

58. Owen, p. 163.

59. Denomy, "The Two Moralities of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer Criticism, II, p. 147-59.

60. Denomy, p. 159.

61. Tillyard, The English Epic and its Background (London, 1954), p. 113.

62. Tillyard, p. 131.

63. Tillyard, p. 149-150.

64. Saintsbury, p. 150.

65. Fussell, p. 156.

66. Robertson, p. 114.

67. J. M. Manly, "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," Chaucer Criticism, I, p. 274.

68. Ibid.

69. Robinson, p. 818.

70. Boughner, p. 206.

71. Ibid.

72. Robinson, p. 818.

73. Boughner, p. 206. Boughner cites the proems as elements of epic dignity, as well.

74. The rhetorical terms used here are defined by Herbert David Rix in Rhetoric in Spenser's Poetry, The Pennsylvania State College Studies, No. 7 (State College, 1940). p. 19-61.

75. Boughner, p. 201.

76. J. S. P. Tatlock, The Mind and Art of Chaucer (Syracuse University Press, 1950), p. 41.

CHAPTER FOUR

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE
AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY DEFINITIONS OF EPIC POETRY

As shown in Chapter Three, Troilus and Criseyde is similar to
descriptions of Homeric, Virgilian, or "high" poetry in some of the
ancient and medieval critical writings. It seems profitable also to
apply some twentieth-century definitions of epic poetry to Troilus
and Criseyde, in order to learn if the poem can be called an epic,
according, at least, to some twentieth-century interpretations of
the term. A study such as this, it is hoped, will contribute to
efforts toward generic classification of the poem.

As a point of departure, a definition of epic poetry, which has
been derived from Kemp Malone's article in Shipley's Dictionary of
World Literature,[1] from Thrall and Hibbard,[2] and from several
twentieth-century studies of epic,[3] is offered here: Epic is a long
narrative poem in an elevated, figurative style, which presents
"adventures, exploits, and sufferings,"[4] which form a unified whole,
of a great hero of "national or international importance, and of
great historical or legendary significance."[5] The elements of this
basic definition--style, subject (and theme), structure, and character--
as well as some common characteristics, will be elaborated upon in
the course of this chapter and applied to Troilus and Criseyde.

Details about the nature of the "elevated, figurative" style of
epic have been given by several critics, among them Kemp Malone, who
lists as recurrent elements of epic diction "static epithets, circum-
locutions (the Gc. /Germanic/ kenning), recurrent formulas. . . ."[6]

Among other descriptions of epic style or its parts are those of

Abercrombie ("as lofty and elaborate as the poet can compass"),[7]

Dixon ("a style commensurate with the lordliness of its theme, which

tends . . . to sustain and embellish its subject by means of episode

and amplification"),[8] Thrall and Hibbard ("a style of sustained

elevation and grand simplicity"),[9] Clark ("epic must use figurative

language, not necessarily formal similes; epithets will constitute

figurative language"),[10] and Greene (epic imagery is expansive; "it

refuses to be hemmed in--in time as well as space").[11]

A complete analysis of the style of Troilus and Criseyde is

beyond the limits of this study. However, certain comments can be

made about some of its stylistic elements. In terms of Malone's list

of the elements of diction in oral epics, I find only limited use of

"static epithets" (such as "swifte Fame" in Book IV, 659) and no

examples of "circumlocutions" or "recurrent formulas." As shown in

Chapter Three, the style of Troilus and Criseyde measures up to such

labels as "lofty" and "elaborate" in terms of some of the medieval

rhetorical treatises. The presence of figurative language also

makes the style of the poem "elaborate." Images of light, Shepherd

finds, carry "much of the meaning of the poem. . . ." As an example,

he cites

> the recurring opposition of light and dark, day
> and night, which often marks changes in gradient
> of the narration. The accounts of vigils and
> daybreaks, of Pandarus first setting out on his
> mission while the small birds sing in a May sunrise,
> of the midnight darkness when the lovers come together
> and Pandarus withdraws the little lamp, of Troilus

watching at the city-gate till daylight has
completely gone, owe a great part of their
effectiveness to the unobtrusive use of highly
affective symbols.[12]

In addition to the images of light which Shepherd named, is an abundance

of fire images. In the first passage in which the narrator comments

on Troilus's new love for Criseyde (I, 435-504), images of fire are

used four times:

In hym ne deyned spare blood roial
The fyr of love . . .   (435-6)

Forth ful ofte, his hote fir to cesse, (445)

For ay the ner the fir, the hotter is, (449)

Of other siknesse, lest men of hym wende
That the hote fir of love hym brende, (489-90)

Later, in a complaint, Troilus compares his predicament to that of

snow in fire:

Thi lady is, as frost in wynter moon,
And thow fordon, as snow in fire is spone. (I, 524-5)

In Book IV Troilus compares his separation from Criseyde to the

quenching of a light:

"Stonden for nought, and wepen out youre sighte,
Syn she is quenched, that wont was yow to lighte?" (312-13)

Nature metaphors form another large group. Some of them occur during

the first meeting of Troilus and Criseyde: the lovers are compared

to "wodebynde" entwining the tree (III, 1230-32); Criseyde is said to

be similar to a nightingale that begins her song anew once her fear

is gone (III, 1233-39). In Book IV Troilus is compared to a tree in

winter:

And as in wynter leves ben biraft,
Ech after other, til the trees be bare,

> So that ther nys but bark and braunche ilaft,
> Lith Troilus, byraft of ech welfare,
> Ibounden in the blake bark of care,
> Disposed wood out of his wit to breyde,
> So sore hym sat the chaungynge of Criseyde. (225-231)

Later in that book, Criseyde compares herself to a fish without

water (765) and to a rootless plant (770). These examples of figura-

tive language, as well as many others in the poem, and the rhetorical

devices listed in Chapter Three, add poetic complexity to the narrative

and serve to embellish it.

Among some of the twentieth-century critics of the epic form, there

is diversity of opinion about epic subject and theme, within, however,

general agreement with Kemp Malone's statement that the main themes

of epic are "adventures, exploits and sufferings, of princes and their

followers, on battlefields or in courts. . . ."[13] It is easy, because

of this variety of comment, to understand why Dixon concluded that no

firm principle regarding choice of subject has been established.[14] Some

critics specify violent action as the subject of epic. For instance,

to Greene epic action "must be dangerous" and "must involve a test."[15]

And Bowra finds that epic deals with events which come from a life of

action, "especially of violent action such as war."[16] Other critics

describe epic subjects in less specific terms; some of them appear

to subscribe to Hegel's generalization that epic deals with "'the life

of a nation, or the history of an epoch, and the totality of the

beliefs of a people.'"[17] Clark, for one, says that the best subjects

are "national and untouched" and have to do with civilization.[18]

Similarly, in Gayley's words, "the theme involves the political or

religious interests of a people or of mankind."[19] The most thorough-
going follower of Hegel, it seems, is Abercrombie, who theorizes about
a metaphysical epic subject. The epic poet, he explains, uses a story
"which has been absorbed into the prevailing consciousness of his
people," usually one of the past, the materials of which have an
"air of actuality," and will come "profoundly out of human experience."[20]
Through his handling of this story, the epic poet "symbolizes whatever
sense of the significance of life he feels acting as the "unconscious
metaphysic of the age."[21] In a view similar to Abercrombie's, Routh
suggests that the form and substance of epic vary according to the
spiritual problem of the age.[22] He asks,

> Can we not find a second narrative poem, sufficiently
> akin to Homer in spirit to be called an epic but
> one which makes a fresh advance into the realms of
> sentiment and imagination?[23]

Gilbert Murray's view on epic subject are much the same as Routh's,
except for an emphasis on the individual. "The great poetry of the
world," he says, "especially the poetry of the classical tradition,
is ultimately about the human soul; and not about its mere fortunes,
but its doings."[24] Perhaps Clark postulates the loftiest aim for epic:
it "must satisfy the grand emotions of the soul."[25] Related to these
comments about epic subject and theme are certain statements about
the significance of epic. Clark calls epic a "tale of dignity;"[26]
Bowra describes the events as "grand and important."[27] In Dixon's
words, the central idea of epic is "human dignity and nobility," and
the events of epic "enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement
and in the dignity and nobility of man."[28]

As shown in Chapter Two, descriptions of the war or references to Troilus's role therein are found in each of the five books of Troilus and Criseyde. However, the war never intrudes into the main action of the poem (until Troilus's death at the hand of Achilles), which, as Chaucer announces in the first line, is the double sorrow of Troilus. The subject of Troilus and Criseyde is not "violent action" or "adventure" or "exploits," and therefore is not consistent with the requirements of Malone (except for "sufferings"), or of Greene, or Bowra. Neither, it seems, does the subject have to do with civilization, although, according to Robertson's, Shanley's, and Denomy's interpretations, which were presented in Chapter Three, the poem is concerned with the "religious interests of a people," in Gayley's phrase. The interpretations (which were discussed in Chapter Three) of Corsa and Stroud, who see Troilus and Criseyde as a philosophical quest, are consistent with the epic requirements of Murray and Clark. Furthermore, the philosophical amplifications noted in Chapter Three extend the range of the action and the significance of the theme. Only in its philosophical and religious implications, then, does Troilus and Criseyde seem to have thematic significance of epic proportions.

As suggested in the definition of epic in the second paragraph of this chapter, unity is emphasized by most of the critics who have been consulted during this study. Conway, for example, says that the story of epic must not be broken.[29] Within the unified structure of epic, however, many critics find the presence of episodes, which serve to amplify and embellish the action. Dixon goes so far as to suggest

that "the art of the epic poet is the art of deliberate amplification."
In order to achieve amplification, the epic poet introduces "subsidiary
characters, diverse minor incidents, variety of episodes, and romantic
charm of scenery."[30] Thus, epic "achieves elevation by the mass or
volume of its interests."[31] In Northrup Frye's view, the episodic
structure of epic arises from its encyclopedic form:

> In encyclopedic forms, such as the epic and its
> congeners, we see how the conventional themes,
> around which lyrics cluster, reappear as episodes
> of a longer story.[32]

To Clark, the episode is a feature of epic leisureliness. "The
ramifications of a long action," he explains, "will bring the reader
into touch with much that is subordinate in tone, with much that is
ordinary."[33] Several critics, however, insist that episodes should
not be digressions. In Clark's words, again, episodes should be in
"fulfilment of the real necessities of a genuine story," rather than
"pure play of the fancy."[34] Similarly, Conway believes that episodes
should "all contribute to the central current" of the story, i.e.,
should serve to vary, and not to break, the story.[35] Goodman's position
is perhaps the most extreme, for he finds episodes to be partial actions
of the main action, arranged to lead up to the final tragic episode.[36]

Goodman's statement also describes the structure of Troilus and
Criseyde. The main action, the progress of the love affair, consists
of a series of actions, arranged according to the principle of cause
and effect, which lead to the final tragic episode. Book I introduces
the major plot elements and establishes the initial situation. In the
ninth stanza the story of Troilus is connected to the fate of Troy,

placing the story in an imposing historical-legendary context. Calkas
is introduced in the next stanza. Significantly, he is the first
character to be presented in detail, perhaps because he acts as an
agent of Fate in complicating the plot. In stanza 13 another element
is introduced which has later importance--public opinion. In line 85
Chaucer says that the "noyse up ros" against Calkas and his kin. Later
the people demand that Criseyde be traded for Antenor (IV, 183). In the
first scene, Troilus laughs at the mournful lovers, thus mocking the
god of Love and causing Cupid to retalliate angrily by wounding Troilus
with one of his arrows (183-210). Later, the first scene between
Pandarus and Troilus establishes the role Pandarus will play in
arranging the love affair. He eagerly anticipates the fun, and the
narrator's comment that Pandarus is making a plan (1070-1071) fore-
shadows the whole pattern of intrigue in books two and three.

Book II contains the events, which are brought about by the machina-
tions of Pandarus, the instrument of Fate, that lead eventually to the
consummation of the love. Only gradually is Criseyde brought to the
decision to accept the service of Troilus. In the first scene between
Pandarus and Criseyde, which was analyzed in a different context in Chapter
Three, Pandarus manages to cause Criseyde to be interested in learning more
about Troilus. Criseyde is not the puppet of Pandarus, however. She
plays his game well and decides to accept the service of Troilus. Early
in Book II her character plays a part in bringing about the love affair,
and she reveals those traits which help to explain her later betrayal.
When Pandarus says that he will die if she spurns Troilus, she is moved

by fear and concern for her reputation to yield to his wishes. When

Pandarus threatens to take his own life, Criseyde thinks:

> And if this man sle here hymself, allas!
> In my presence, it wol be no solas.
> What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat saye:
> It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie." (459-461)

A few lines earlier the narrator says that "she was the fearfullest

wight/that myghte be. . . ." (450-51) Later it is fear for her safety

and concern for her reputation which keep her from running away with

Troilus and from returning to him once she has entered the Greek camp.

Another part of Criseyde's character which helps to cause later events

is revealed after Pandarus leaves. Witnessing the procession in which

Troilus is riding, she is moved by passion, divinely caused though it

may be (596-665). After letting the scene below her window "so softe

in her herte synke," Criseyde says, "'Who yaf me drynke?'" (650-51).

After the procession passes by, Criseyde reveals the logical and

practical parts of her nature which also contribute to her acceptance

of Troilus's love. She considers all the arguments in the matter, the

advantages as well as the disadvantages, of entering into a love affair,

but reaches no decision yet (694-812). As if to show her emotional

nature, Chaucer follows this self-debate with the garden scene (813-910),

in which the setting and Antigone's hymn to love influence Criseyde's

mood. Later a nightingale sings under her chamber wall, and she dreams

of an eagle who exchanges her heart for that of another (918-931). All

of these events predispose Criseyde to be receptive to love and prepare

her to accept an alliance with Troilus when they meet later at

Deiphoebus's house.

The first nocturnal meeting of the lovers in Book III occurs only after a long series of preparatory events: Criseyde first agrees to a liaison; the lovers speak from time to time and exchange letters; Pandarus arranges a dinner party on a moonless night when rain can be expected and contrives to get Troilus into Criseyde's room and into her bed. Book III also contains references to aspects of Criseyde's character which help to explain her later behavior. The narrator says that she feels Troilus to be a "wal of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce," and that now she "was namore afered" (480-82). Perhaps Troilus relieved the fear caused by her somewhat precarious position in Troy, and perhaps Diomede relieved a similar fear later.

In Books IV and V the inevitable outcome of the love affair is presented. Although the events in these books are predestined, Chaucer provided motivation for them in the three previous books. Throughout the narrative the lovers are caught in the fall of Troy and, specifically, in the schemes of Calkas. Furthermore, Criseyde's character makes the separation inevitable: were she not fearful, concerned for her reputation, and too confident of her ability to outwit her father, she might have consented to run away with Troilus. However, when the separation comes, she is too weak for the test, and Diomede wins her promise of friendship almost immediately. Afraid to leave the Greek camp and aware of her precarious situation, she accepts the love and protection of Diomede.

In the first scene in Book IV, Calkas persuades the Greeks to trade Antenor for Criseyde (64-133). In the following scene Priam holds

Parliament in session to decide the Trojan response (141-217). Troilus
is present and proceeds to his chamber where he delivers a long complaint
to Fortune. Shortly, Pandarus enters, and in the ensuing scene Troilus's
idealism and sincerity become most apparent (353-658). In the next
scene Criseyde learns about the exchange from some visitors, and in
subsequent scenes Pandarus serves as intermediary once again. Finally,
Criseyde and Troilus meet, and Criseyde persuades Troilus to accept her
plan to outwit her father.

In Book V the fated outcome occurs swiftly in a progression of
scenes: the exchange is made; Diomede delivers his first speech;
Pandarus and Troilus ride by Criseyde's empty house; Diomede delivers
his second speech, and Criseyde begins to accept his love; Pandarus
and Troilus watch for Criseyde's arrival at the gate; Troilus dreams
of Criseyde in the arms of a boar; Troilus sees Criseyde's brooch on
the sleeve torn from Diomede; Troilus returns to the battle; he is
killed, and his spirit ascends to the eighth sphere. The main action
of the narrative, then, consists of these scenes, all of which are
arranged according to cause and effect and lead directly to the tragic
outcome. The plot of Troilus and Criseyde, therefore, can accurately
be called a "unified whole." Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Three,
the plot is embellished and amplified by philosophical monologues and
lyric interludes which serve the function of episodes.

A number of characteristics of the epic hero have been offered by vari-
ous critics. For example, Goodman thinks the epic hero should possess "some
habitual virtue."[37] Clark elaborates upon the relationships of the epic hero

to his peers: the epic hero ranks first among his peers and acts as

"an individual agent." However, he is not an "isolated unit in an

empty world:" he has co-workers to conduct the action in which he

is engaged[38] and foes who are worthy of him.[39] Furthermore, in

performing his action, the epic hero is not overshadowed by the gods.[40]

His actions are awesome: in Greene's words,

> The epic replaces divine worship with humanistic
> awe. . . . Epic awe springs from the realization
> that a man can commit an extraordinary act
> while still remaining limited.[41]

Bowra says something similar about epic humanism; "its events

enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the

dignity and nobility of man."[42] Ker considers the drama of the

characters to be the life of epic. He explains that

> the heroes do not derive their magnificence
> from the scenery, the properties, and the
> author's rhetoric, but contrariwise: the
> dramatic force and self-consistence of the
> dramatis personae give poetic value to any
> accessories of scenery or sentiment which
> may be required by the action.[43]

In the Iliad, he adds,

> It is the debate among the characters, and not
> the onset of Hera and Athena in the chariot
> of Heaven, that gives its greatest power. . . .[44]

Troilus is similar, in varying degrees, to these descriptions of

the epic hero. He does possess, it seems, "habitual virtue." In

Book II Pandarus enumerates Troilus's virtues:

> "In whom alle virtue list habounde,
> As alle Trouth and alle gentilesse,
> Wisdom, honour, fredom and worthinesse." (159-61)

The praises of his peers which are offered during the scene at
Deiphoebus's house rise "A thousand fold yet heigher than the sonne."
(II, 1586) However, the virtues of Troilus are those of the courtly
lover. Dodd says,

> By common consent then, Troilus is known for . . .
> such virtues, in short, as were conventionally
> required of a knight and a lover. The same
> qualities are attributed, in almost identical
> terms, to the model knight of the Prologue to
> the Canterbury Tales.[45]

In Book IV, however, Troilus's virtues seem to be more than conventions.
Here he shows the genuineness of his nobility. He is unselfish: his
first thought throughout the book is about maintaining Criseyde's
safety and honor. Near the end of Book IV Troilus agrees to Criseyde's
plan so that her honor might not be endangered. Also, he will do
nothing without her assent. When Pandarus suggests that he find
someone else to love, Troilus replies:

> "She that I serve, iwis, what so thow seye,
> To whom myn herte enhabit is by right,
> Shal han me holly hires til that I deye.
> For, Pandarus, syn I have trouthe hire hight,
> I wol nat ben untrewe for no wight;
> But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve,
> And nevere other creature serve." (442-448)

Considering, then, Troilus's virtue, his nobility, and his prowess on
the battlefield (which have been discussed in Chapter Three), Troilus
merits the term "great." And as a personage of the Trojan war, he
has "legendary significance" and "national importance."

   Troilus has co-workers, but they are not emphasized. In Book I
he is shown as the leader of a group of knights (183-4), and in Book IV
"many a bold baroun" fight the Greeks (33). Although Troilus is

always brave and skillful in battle, he is second to Ector, who leads

the Trojans. Therefore, consistent with Malone's description, Troilus

is not "a solitary mountain in a plain of mediocrity."[46] The Greeks,

of course, are worthy opponents for Troilus and the Trojans. Indeed,

Achilles kills both Ector and Troilus. In the descriptio in Book V,

Diomede is described as a worthy foe:

> This Diomede, as bokes us declare,
> Was in his nedes prest and corageous,
> With sterne vois and myghty lymes square,
> Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous
> Of dedes, lik his fader Tideus. (799-803)

In terms of its hero and his opponents, then, Troilus and Criseyde

may be viewed as an epic. Troilus possesses the character of an epic

hero, but his position as a courtly lover causes him to appear weak and

passive. Meech comments on Troilus's seemingly contradictory

characteristics:

> When in arms, he is more impressive than Mars
> and, in bed, dominant, as the male is supposed
> to be, once he is assured of his position.
> Before that, however, he is put in the quasi-
> comic situations of addressing his mistress from
> a pretended sickbed and of being thrown in-
> sensible into her bed by Pandarus. Highs and lows
> in his appearances on stage bring out the ambivalence
> of love--excellent, it can be inferred, because
> cherished by so knightly a figure, suspect
> because stripping him willy-nilly of his dignity
> and happiness.[47]

Since Troilus is placed in such comic situations and since most of the

narrative is devoted exclusively to his sufferings instead of to his

actions, Troilus's heroic nature seems often to recede to the background.

One of the general characteristics of epic, according to Malone[48]

and to Thrall and Hibbard,[49] is vastness of setting. To Thrall and

Hibbard, the setting may cover "great nations, the world, the universe."[50] Chaucer appropriated a vast setting of international scope when he used the materials of the story of Troy. Most of the events of Troilus and Criseyde, however, occur within smaller boundaries--the palaces of Troilus, Pandarus, Criseyde, and Deiphoebus, and Parliament. Only in Book V, when Criseyde goes to the Greek camp, is the setting expanded. Malone adds that "a setting historical but remote in time or place is a mark of epic."[51] The story of Troy had historical significance for Chaucer's audience, because the Trojans were considered the ancestors of the peoples of Europe.[52]

According to Thrall and Hibbard, the most common epic conventions are the following:

> the poet opens by stating his theme, invokes a
> Muse to inspire and instruct him, and opens his
> narrative in medias res--in the middle of things--
> giving the necessary exposition in later portions
> of the epic; he includes catalogues of warriors,
> ships, armies; he gives extended speeches by the
> main characters; and he makes frequent use of
> the epic simile.[53]

Troilus and Criseyde contains some, but not all, of these conventions. As mentioned earlier, Chaucer begins the narrative by announcing the theme:

> The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
> That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
> In lovynge, how his aventures fellen
> Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
> My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye. (I, 1-5)

In the next six lines, Chaucer invokes the aid of the Fury Thesiphone:

> Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite
> This woful vers, that wepen as I write.

> To the clepe I, thow goddesse of torment,
> Thow cruwel Furie, sorwynge evere yn peyne,
> Help me that am the sorwful instrument,
> That helpeth loveres, as I kan, to pleyne.   (I, 6-11)

Chaucer opens each of the remaining books, also, by announcing the subject and invoking the aid of an appropriate divine figure. In one respect, Chaucer begins Troilus in medias res, for the narrative starts in the middle of the Trojan war. However, the love affair is presented from its beginnings. In Book I, lines 57-64, Chaucer provides the necessary background about the war:

> It is wel wist how that the Grekes, stronge
> In armes, with a thousand shippes, wente
> To Troiewardes, and the cite longe
> Assegeden, neigh ten yer er they stente,
> And in diverse wise and oon entente,
> The ravysshyng to wreken of Eleyne,
> To Paris don, they wroughten al hir payne.

Chaucer includes no catalogues of warriors, ships, or armies. As shown earlier, however, the characters deliver numerous formal speeches. And finally, Chaucer appears to make no use of the epic simile.

In terms of these definitions and comments by twentieth-century critics of epic poetry, Troilus and Criseyde possesses epic characteristics but cannot be labeled an epic. The poem lacks several common epic characteristics--the elements of epic diction, an emphasis on violent action, the use of catalogues and epic similes. However, Troilus and Criseyde is similar to epic in elaborateness of style, in thematic significance, in structure, in the nature of the hero and his enemies, and in the historical significance and vastness of its overall setting.

In conclusion, Troilus and Criseyde cannot be labeled an epic according to the twentieth-century sense of the term. However, Troilus

and Criseyde possesses many of the characteristics of Homeric, Virgilian,
and "high" poetry which are contained in the major ancient and medieval
criticism. Since all these writings were known, in varying degrees,
in the middle ages, the presence of these characteristics in Troilus
and Criseyde indicates that Chaucer elevated his poem to the level of
the highest poetry known to his age and that, in so doing, he perhaps
intended Troilus and Criseyde to be an epic.

NOTES

1. Kemp Malone, "Epic Poetry," Dictionary of World Literature, ed., Joseph T. Shipley (Paterson, New Jersey, 1962), p. 139-140.

2. William F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1960), p. 174-175.

3. To be cited individually later.

4. Malone, p. 140.

5. Thrall and Hibbard, p. 174.

6. Malone, p. 140.

7. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Epic (London, 1914), p. 39.

8. W. M. Dixon, English Epic and Heroic Poetry, (London, 1912), p. 24.

9. Thrall and Hibbard, p. 175.

10. John Clark, A History of Epic Poetry (Edinburg, 1900), p. 71.

11. Thomas M. Greene, The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 9.

12. Shepherd, "'Troilus and Criseyde,'" Chaucer and Chaucerians, op. cit., p. 83.

13. Malone, p. 140.

14. Dixon, p. 3.

15. Greene, p. 15.

16. Cecil Maurice Bowra, Heroic Poetry (London, 1952), p. 20-21.

17. Philo M. Buck, Literary Criticism: A Study of Values in Literature (New York and London, 1930), p. 364.

18. Clark, p. 48.

19. Gayley and Kurtz, op. cit., p. xciv-xcv.

20. Abercrombie, p. 39.

21. Ibid.

22. Harold Victor Routh, God, Man, and Epic Poetry: A Study in Comparative Literature (Cambridge, 1927), p. 123.

23. Routh, p. 2.

24. Gilbert Murray, The Classical Tradition (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), p. 185.

25. Clark, p. 31.

26. Clark, p. 1.

27. Bowra, p. 20.

28. Dixon, p. 1.

29. R. S. Conway, Harvard Lectures on the Vergilian Age (Cambridge, 1928), p. 133.

30. Dixon, p. 22-23.

31. Clark, p. 23.

32. Northrup Frye, "Theory of Genres," Perspectives on Epic, op. cit., p. 119.

33. Clark, p. 75.

34. Clark, p. 32.

35. Conway, p. 133.

36. Paul Goodman, "Epical Actions," Perspectives on Epic, op. cit., p. 121-9.

37. Goodman, p. 122.

38. Clark, p. 15.

39. Malone, p. 139.

40. Clark, p. 68.

41. Greene, p. 14-15.

42. Bowra, p. 1.

43. W. P. Ker, op. cit., p. 19-20.

44. Ker, p. 19.

83

45. William G. Dodd, <u>Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower.</u> Harvard Studies in English, I (Boston, 1913), p. 139-40.

46. Malone, p. 139.

47. Sanford B. Meech, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 13-14.

48. Malone, p. 139.

49. Thrall and Hibbard, p. 175.

50. <u>Ibid.</u>

51. Malone, p. 139.

52. R. K. Gordon, ed., <u>The Story of Troilus,</u> <u>op. cit.</u>, p. xi.

53. Thrall and Hibbard, p. 175.

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