The difficulties of a synchronic approach to genre are well exemplified by Chaucer's <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>. A modern attempt to delineate romance as a genre would find the poem in many ways a typical work, dealing as it does with courtly love and knightly war. But it is so atypical in important ways that its status as a romance has been denied (Strohm 357). The narrator calls the poem a "tragedye" (5. 1786). I will be exploring the way the Chaucer's use of tragedy in a romance blurs the generic boundaries until a decision on genre becomes possible only within a diachronic approach.

Attempts at dogmatic genre for <u>Troilus</u> in a synchronic sense have produced wildly varying opinions. <u>Troilus</u> is "neither romaunce nor storie, but tragedie" (Strohm 357), "the stuff of romance in every sense of the word" (Shepherd 65), and even "is and is not a tragedy; it is and is not a comedy" (Brewer 95). Tragedy has been seen as antithetical to and incompatible with romance. In Jauss' classification of medieval literature as epic/romance/novella, tragedy is assigned not to romance but to novella (87). Hume insists on a happy ending for romance:

> Romance dips into a realm full of tragic possibilities. It is romance's nature to wrest success from this material, tragedy's to show its failure. (143)

While such contentions can and have been argued by "grete clerkes many" (4. 968) attempts to nail <u>Troilus</u> to one genre lead to exasperated statements such as "either all of Chaucer's narratives are romances ... or the Chaucer canon contains no such genre as romance" (Jordan 233). Approaches which emphasise the changes Chaucer is constructing upon the received genres provide more complete and satisfying expositions on the work's type. Clough's presentation of <u>Troilus</u> as a combination of a full length tragic romance with a formal Boethian tragedy to create a new type which she calls a "romance tragedy"(213) is an example of a successful attempt to introduce diachronic principles into the generic aspects of <u>Troilus</u>. There is a process visible in <u>Troilus</u> in which character

becomes relevant, tragedy moving and comedy integral, all occurring within romance, a genre not noted for such attributes.

Chaucer comes to the romance late in its gestation. He mostly ignores the largest corpus of romance available to him in the Arthurian materials, very likely as part of a shift in community taste (Dean 129).   His oblique nods to the genre in The Canterbury Tales do not indicate a great reverence for the genre especially "The Tale of Sir Thopas" and "The Squire's Tale", neither of which he allows the dignity of an ending. Chaucer refuses to take romance seriously in the form to which it had become ossified, leading Spearing to suggest that "Chaucer despised the romances" (35). Jauss notes:

> If a text simply reproduces the elements of a generic structure, only plugs some other material into the preserved model of representation, and merely takes over the received topics and metaphorics, it constitutes that stereotypical kind of literature into which ... successful genres ... soon sink. (89)

The romance which could be despised by Chaucer is such a beast. For a work as enormous and serious as Troilus, Chaucer doesn't reproduce or merely parody an outdated genre, but with his gift for characterisation, comedy and realism, he transforms the genre and repolishes romance to its Chretien-like gleam.

Fowler states that the values inherent in a work are an important determining factor in its genre (66).   The rules and values of the romance tradition are working in Troilus and are used to develop it as a tragedy. The ancient models for tragedy did not use love as the mainstay of their plots (Auebach 141). Chaucer uses the expectations of love from romance as the fuel for his tragic plot. The "irresistibility of love" (Denomy 151) felt by Troilus impels him to his tragic end. The secrecy required of courtly love (Dodd 5), justifies Troilus' inability to go public and prevent Criseyde's exchange. Robertson's rather unfair allegation that Criseyde really only wants "maistrie" over

men (104) is in the spirit of the ideals of courtly love in which "the lady occupies

a position of exalted superiority in respect to the lover" (Dodd 8).

Such a treatment of Criseyde which is totally in keeping with the traditional

Criseyde character (Mieszkowski 73) seems unfair in Troilus because Chaucer has

changed the rules. While depending on the conventions of romance, his

incorporation of elements of De Casibus tragedy allows a treatment of Criseyde in

which there is an antifeminist factor from tragedy and both the idealised heroine

and the scheming woman from romance (Clough 220). In short he allows a

complexity of character which defies the narrow confines expected of the "loose

woman" type of the Criseyde tradition (Mieszkowski 73).

The treatment of all the characters Chaucer has thrown back to Troy

involves less of the fairy tale coincidence expected in romance, but also, despite

Troilus' grumblings, less of the reliance on fate alone which would be typical of a

pure tragedy. Approaching tragedy through romance involves a "more conscious

search for human explanation," so that "our awareness of the human drama

coexists with our sense of fate, but is not destroyed by it" (Clough 218).

Character only becomes important when it makes a difference to the outcome and

in Troilus it undoubtedly does. The relative realism compared to traditional

romance also plays a part here. The loss of the "fantastic devices" (Spearing 39)

increases involvement with character and therefore possibility for engagement

with the tragedy. The historicity of the material, being a "true" story available in

full in extant works, adds to the realism (Benson 133-4). Vinaver notes

concerning Malory that he achieves a deeper tragedy than his French sources

because of the "beginnings of realistic motivation through character," but also

because:

> The change from the cyclic romance to a narrative
> intelligible without reference to anything that lies beyond it
> and unrelated to any wider scheme of things brings with it a

new sense of the tragic; the very restriction of the field of
vision heralds the advent of tragedy as an essentially
modern form. (136)

As the heroes of the romances step down from their exalted heights to reveal

human frailty and foibles, the loss of magic is compensated for by greater

involvement by the reader and greater possibility for tragedy. By taking only the

story of Troilus and Criseyde out of the Troy material, Chaucer focuses in on his

targets then adds the depth of character to the players, so that when he pans back

to reveal the doom of Troy, the parallel destiny of the lovers adds greater intensity

to the portrayal.

With less emphasis on magic and chance to propel the plot, Chaucer

paradoxically uses comedy to impel Troilus towards tragedy. The existence of a

genre of "tragicomedy" has been denied for the medieval world (Clough 219),

however there is no Troilus without Pandarus. It is as if instead of the tales of the

Miller and the Reeve following and puncturing the solemnity of the "Knights

Tale", Chaucer has allowed the fabliaux to crash tackle the romance, not just to

relieve the tedium but to propel the plot. In the Canterbury Tales the most

"modern", accessible and human tales are the fabliaux. The introduction of such a

flavour to the elevated style of a romance is part of the genre evolving and

broadening its range. The conventions of romantic love are taken to such

extremes by Chaucer that Troilus is never going to get beyond swooning without

the intervention of Pandarus. The comic figure of Pandarus with his basic

obsession with food and sex (David 91) seems to have little to gain from the

adventure, but the poem gains by the action he catalyses and the revelation of

character by contrast and interaction with Pandarus. We learn of Criseyde's range

of emotional possibilities as much from her play with Pandarus as her ecstasy with

Troilus. The comic effect of Pandarus' use of proverbs which contradict each

other depending on the circumstances, is another comic aspect of his character

which has tragic overtones in that "events that mock their wisdom and activity overtake them" (Benson 140). Even Pandarus eventually runs out of proverbs and gives up on Troilus.

The death of Troilus is problematic for the romance genre. While death of the hero is not uncommon in romance there is generally a sense in which it has sacrificial or ennobling and in some sense preserving the happy ending (Hume 142). Troilus' death, however, is hardly messianic, does not affirm his cause and cosmic laughter is not happy in any usual sense. His death is a reward for true love, which fits a romance ideal, but the spin Chaucer imparts upon this, is that in this universe love does not transcend death but rather is mocked (Clough 220). The inconclusive nature of the ending is an admission that neat endings are not what life is about (McAlpine 244) and that this poem has something to do with emotions and feelings that occur in real life; a rather modern, novelistic feat.

Chaucer "belongs ... to the middle ages but he can often seem uncannily `modern' " (Thwaites 15). Even when working in the romance genre his inclination towards character and humanity undermines the elevated style and opens up possibilities for tragedy to be affecting within a romance frame work. When looked at as part of the process from romance to novel or modern drama, the need for a neat generic label becomes a meaningless abstraction, and a distraction from the achievement of the poet.

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