'Going through all these things twice': the repeated phrase and the refrain in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

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Abstract: Geoffrey Chaucer's (1343–1400) repeated phrases are a conundrum. Nancy Mason Bradbury has referred to them as 'formulas'; Derek Brewer has described Chaucer's poems as having a 'traditional formulaic style'. But why would a literate poet make use of a device that tends to be associated with orality? This paper offers an alternative comparandum for Chaucer's repeated phrases: the refrain. As well as writing narrative poetry, Chaucer acknowledges at the end of *The Canterbury tales* that during his career he has written 'many a song and many a leccherous lay' ('many a song and many a lascivious ditty'). Few of these songs survive, but one in particular—a ballade known as 'To Rosemounde'—shows Chaucer to have a keen facility with the paradoxical potential of the refrain. 'To Rosemounde' survives in only one manuscript copy, paired with Chaucer's narrative poem *Troilus and Criseyde*. This manuscript pairing, and Chaucer's frequent presentation of *Troilus and Criseyde* itself as a 'song', invites a comparison of the poem's repeated phrases to the refrains of a song lyric. In *Troilus*, phrases that are repeated at crucial moments—such as 'I can no more' and 'without more'—emulate refrains by holding repetition and closure in an unstable synthesis.

Keywords: aurality, formula, narrative, refrain, repetition, song

Introduction

Why would a literate poet use formulae? If a poem is composed in performance, flexible compositional building blocks are useful for the performer; if the poem is performed from memory, formulaic phrases are helpful mnemonically. But there is no evidence to suggest that Geoffrey Chaucer's (1343–1400) poetry was composed in performance or recited from memory. And yet, Chaucer frequently employs repeated phrases in his narrative poetry. There are three interconnected reasons for this. Firstly, Chaucer's repeated phrases are calculated to be effective in the context of contemporary reading practices. The most popular mode of experiencing a text in late-fourteenth-century England was 'public reading', a reading practice in which a written text was read aloud to a listening audience (Coleman 1997: 144). In this context of aural reception, repeated phrases would have been an effective device for drawing the audience's attention to important moments and recurring themes. Secondly, Chaucer's repeated phrases respond to the Middle English romance tradition, in which repeated phrases are often used. As Nancy Mason Bradbury (1998: 185) points out, '*Troilus and Criseyde* [a narrative poem written by Chaucer in the 1380s] actually shares some formulas with the traditional ballads'.[1] There is compelling evidence to suggest that the anonymous narrative works of this romance tradition were transmitted through a mixture of writing and memorial performance (see Putter 2012: 347–8; McGillivray 1990). In this context, repeated phrases may have been effective both in helping the memorial performer memorize the text, and in helping the listening audience follow the narrative and thematic development of the story. Chaucer's narrative works often adapt the idiom of this romance tradition: Derek Brewer (1987: 87) writes of Chaucer's mastery of a 'traditional formulaic style', particularly in his earlier works. For instance, Chaucer follows the penchant of Middle English romance for employing repeated phrases that indicate a desire to be brief.[2] But Chaucer does more than simply emulate this tradition. His use of repeated phrases—particularly in his narrative poem *Troilus and Criseyde*—cannot be understood as mere 'oral residue', to borrow Walter J. Ong's term (1965: 145). Instead, his strategies betray a virtuosic attentiveness to the affordances of repeated phrases.

'Repeated phrase' is an awkward term, but its neutrality is useful in the Chaucerian context. The word 'formula' is hard to detach entirely from the Parry-Lord theory: to describe

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[1] On the dating of *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Windeatt (1992: 3–11).

[2] For instance, in *Amis and Amiloun*, an anonymous 2500-line romance present in various versions in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English manuscripts, brevity formulae including the words 'withouten' ('without') and 'duelling' ('delay'), like 'Withouten more duelling' ('Without more delay'), are employed five times (318, 496, 673, 1818, 1959), while formulae that contain the words 'without(en)' ('without') and 'delay', like 'Withouten more delay' ('Without more delay'), are employed eight times (267, 387, 902, 1146, 1242, 2127, 2295, 2457). For the text of *Amis and Amiloun*, I follow Foster (2007).

Chaucer's repeated phrases as 'formulae' would risk glossing over the crucial differences between Chaucer's repeated phrases and those of the Homeric poems. First, the term 'formula' is associated with solutions to the exigencies of composition in performance. Chaucer did not have to meet these exigencies. Second, formulae are expected to appear at certain points in a poetic line: in his classic (if contested) formulation, Milman Parry (1971: 272) defines the Homeric formula as 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea'.[3] Chaucer's repeated phrases can occur anywhere in the line, in part because Chaucer's decasyllable is more flexible than Homer's dactylic hexameter.[4] Third, Homeric formulae occur far more frequently than do Chaucerian repeated phrases. Finally, I argue that Chaucer's repeated phrases— especially in *Troilus and Criseyde*—have a function akin to that of refrains in songs and lyric poems. Despite being a narrative poem, *Troilus* includes four inset song lyrics and 'a lyric disposition that troubles the idea that the lyric interventions are distinct shifts in literary mode' (Robertson 2018: 178). The narrative *I* of *Troilus* three times suggests that the poem can be 'sung' as well as 'read' or 'written' (4.799; 5.1059; 5.1797).[5] By presenting *Troilus* itself as a 'song' (2.56; 3.1814), I suggest that Chaucer invites the audience to understand the poem's repeated phrases as equivalent to the refrains of a song lyric.[6] Below, I will attempt to elucidate the peculiar paradoxes of the refrain as a mode of repetition, before examining Chaucer's incorporation of these paradoxes into his use of repeated phrases in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

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[3]   Elsewhere in this issue, James Parkhouse outlines the influence of Milman Parry and A.B. Lord on this way of understanding the term 'formula', and refers to other, more capacious definitions of the term by scholars working on other verse traditions, notably the Old English verse tradition. I do not mean to deny the validity and usefulness of this mode of understanding formulae from the perspective of different verse traditions: however, to use the term 'formula' in the less closely related case of Chaucer would obscure more than it elucidates.

[4]   In this sense, Chaucer differs from the Middle English romance tradition mentioned above. In the anonymous romance *Amis and Amiloun*, for instance, phrases including the words 'without' and delay', like 'Withouten more delay' ('Without more delay'), are used almost exclusively at the end of the line (if they are not occupying the whole of a line), so that 'delay' can be a rhyme word. Chaucer does not consistently use his repeated phrases in this way.

[5]   I prefer the term 'narrative *I*' to 'narrator' because the latter has novelistic associations, not least that of the 'unreliable narrator', while the former highlights the inhabitability of the *I* by the public reader. See Spearing (2005: 87–95; 2014: 11–13).

[6]   Ardis Butterfield, writing of refrains in early thirteenth century French poetry, declares that 'refrains bear an intriguingly disruptive relation to the concept of genre' (2003: 75). There are notable differences between this context and late fourteenth century England: for instance, unlike in Chaucer's period, some thirteenth century French narrative poems contain refrains. Nevertheless, the aptness of Butterfield's conclusions to Chaucer's period might encourage further, transtemporal investigation of this role of refrains in troubling the concept of genre.

Refrains (the end ... again)

Although refrains are associated with song lyrics and lyric poetry, the word 'refrain' occurs in English for the first time in a narrative poem: *Troilus and Criseyde.* The context of the word's use is telling: Chaucer treats the refrain as a site of contradiction. At the end of Book Two (of the five 'books' that structure *Troilus*'s 8239 lines), Troilus's brother Deiphebus is hosting friends and family at his house for dinner. Troilus has fallen ill and is recuperating in one of Deiphebus's bedrooms. Deiphebus is therefore caught between the duty of entertaining his guests and his worry for his brother's wellbeing (2.1569–75):[7]

> Gret honour did hem Deiphebus, certeyn,
> And fedde hem wel with al that myghte like,
> But euere mo, "allas," was his refreyn,
> "My goode brother, Troilus, the syke,
> Lith ʒet"—and therwithal he gan to sike;
> And after that he peyned hym to glade
> Hem as he myghte and cheere good he made.

> Deiphebus did them great honour, certainly, and fed them well with all that might be pleasing, but ever more, his refrain was "Alas, my good brother Troilus, the sick, is still lying down"—and thereupon, he began to sigh; and after that he took pains to gladden them as well as he could, and he made good cheer.

Chaucer does not present Deiphebus's 'refrain' as a mere summary of his feelings. Instead, it occupies an uneasy place at the centre of a circular stanza. The stanza's opening and closing pairs of lines detail Deiphebus's attempts to entertain his guests. In the central three lines of the stanza, the narrative *I* uses the adversative 'but' to shift the focus to Deiphebus's anxious 'refrain', which undermines and complicates his attempts to be a cheerful host. Chaucer thus presents Deiphebus's refrain as a focal point of the synthesis of contradictory impulses.

Refrains are inherently paradoxical. They have two core characteristics: they typically come at the end of stanzas, and they are repeated. These characteristics are in tension with one another: by coming at the end of stanzas, refrains are apt to suggest closure; by being repeated and repeatable, refrains are apt to undermine this sense of finality. Refrains suggest repetition through closure, and suggest closure through repetition. Chaucer's vision of the paradoxical affordances of the refrain becomes clearer in the light of his use of

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[7] For the text of *Troilus*, I follow Windeatt (1984). All translations in this article are my own.

the device in his song lyrics. Although Chaucer claims to have written 'many a song and many a leccherous lay' ('many a song and many a lascivious ditty', *Canterbury tales* X (I) 1086), few of these works survive.[8] One of them, known as 'To Rosemounde', survives in only one manuscript copy, appended to a manuscript that otherwise contains only *Troilus and Criseyde* (BodL MS Rawlinson Poetry 163). 'To Rosemounde' is a ballade: a French 'forme fixe' ('fixed form') made up of three eight-line stanzas which each follow the same rhyme scheme and end with a refrain. Though no musical notation is included in the manuscript, 'To Rosemounde' could have been sung to the tunes of other ballades, such as those written by the French poet-composer Guillaume de Machaut (1300–1377), a major influence on Chaucer.[9] The refrain of 'To Rosemounde' bears comparison with Deiphebus's 'refrain' in that it undermines what is said in the preceding seven lines of each stanza. The lyric is addressed to the beloved 'Rosemounde': the speaker declares that she is 'of al beaute shryne / As fer as cercled is the mapamounde' ('the shrine of all beauty, as far as the map of the world is circled', 1–2). The beloved is thus imagined in terms of circularity: her beauty cannot be circumscribed; the speaker's devotion is endless like a circle. The inexhaustibility of the speaker's suffering is highlighted at the beginning of the second stanza: 'For thogh I wepe of teres ful a tyne / Yet may that wo myn herte nat confounde', ('For even if I weep a barrelful of tears, that sorrow still cannot destroy my heart', 9–10). The repeated rhyme scheme and recurring refrain conspire to confirm this sense of endlessness: the refrain does not offer summary or closure, but paradox. In it, the speaker declares that they will continue to love and praise the beloved 'Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce' ('Even though you have no intercourse with me', 8, 16, 24).[10] The paradox centres around persuasion: 'To Rosemounde' is the speaker's attempt to persuade Rosemounde to recognise the purity of their devotion, and to requite their love. But the song's main strategy of persuasion is to highlight the impossibility of persuading Rosemounde, who is the archetypally aloof and unattainable beloved of fin'amor (or 'courtly love') lyric. Levels of address are crucial here: the less persuaded the imagined listener (Rosemounde) is, the more persuaded the song's audience is of the purity of the speaker's devotion. By playing with this distinction between the experiences of the actual and imagined listeners, Chaucer produces a song that is persuasive precisely by being unpersuasive. Chaucer's refrain puts paradox at the heart of the lyric, indicating that the speaker will continue to attempt to praise the beloved and express their devotion to her, despite the futility of doing so. The finality of this futility and the endlessness of the speaker's devotion are caught in a feedback loop of mutual reinforcement. Chaucer's refrain is at the core of this paradoxical synthesis of finality and

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[8]   For the text of all of Chaucer's works other than *Troilus*, I follow Benson, Barney, et al. (1998).

[9]   Nigel Wilkins shows that 'To Rosemounde' can be set to the tune of a ballade by the Franco-Flemish composer Jacob Senleches, Chaucer's contemporary (1995: 192–4). For more on Chaucer's complex relationship with contemporary French poetry and music, see Wimsatt (1993).

[10] 'Daliaunce', which I imperfectly translate as 'intercourse', is a polyvalent term suggesting amorous play, whether verbal or sexual.

endless repetition.

To appreciate the dynamics of this synthesis, we are as apt to turn to the songwriter Bob Dylan (1941–) as to the orally-derived poetry of Homer.[11] The refrain of one Dylan song in particular—'Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis blues again', released in 1966—helps elucidate the paradoxical potential of the refrain:

> Oh, Mama, can this really be the end
> To be stuck inside of Mobile
> With the Memphis blues again[12]

Each instance of this refrain suggests the possibility of finality ('the end'), before this possibility is undermined by the evocation of repetition: 'again'. 'The end' and 'again' are bound in an uneasy rhyme. This paradox is present also in the song's verses: at the end of the ninth and final verse, the lyric *I* describes themself

> Waiting to find out what price
> You have to pay to get out of
> Going through all these things twice

The refrain is thus the linchpin of a paradox around which the song rotates: a longing for closure that only begets repetition. After the ninth refrain, the song does indeed end—but it remains on the circular vinyl, caught in a loop of possible endings and endless repetitions.[13] *Troilus* presents itself as being caught in a similar loop: the narrative centres around repetition. Its first words are 'The double sorwe of Troilus' ('The double sorrow of Troilus', 1.1), a programmatic phrase repeated at the end of the proem (1.54). Troilus's sorrow is 'double' in that it happens twice: first, he falls in love with Criseyde, and—convinced that she will not requite his love—descends into a suicidal despair. Happily, he is proven wrong when she falls in love with him; unhappily, the lovers are separated by a misfortune, and when Criseyde falls in love with someone else, Troilus descends once more into a suicidal despair. Chaucer presents this repetition in terms of the rotation of the wheel of fortune: at first the happy prince is affixed to the wheel's summit, but its spinning plunges him into his first despair, before his affair with Criseyde restores him to happiness. The wheel rolls forward again, and the love affair ends: he goes 'ffro wo to wele, and after out of ioie' ('from woe to happiness, and afterwards, out of joy', 1.4), ultimately being 'from [For-

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[11] In an article concerned with literacy and orality, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that much scholarly work has focused on the oral aspects of Bob Dylan's work: for instance, his mode of singing (Daley 2007; Negus 2007), his debt to American Indian folklore (Désveaux 2007) and his debt to folk song traditions (Portelli 2022).

[12] For the text of 'Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis blues again' (© 1966 by Dwarf Music; renewed 1994 by Dwarf Music), I follow Dylan (2016).

[13] It may be counterargued that Dylan's song was not intended primarily for dissemination on vinyl. This argument may hold for other of Dylan's songs, but Dylan's first live performance of 'Memphis blues again' was not until April 1976, almost ten years after it was released on the *Blonde on blonde* album in June 1966.

tune's] whiel y-throwe' ('thrown from Fortune's wheel', 4.6). Dylan spins on the circular vinyl; Troilus spins on fortune's wheel. If for Dylan the linchpin of this spinning is his refrain, it is Chaucer's repeated phrases that are the linchpin around which the wheel of fortune turns in *Troilus*. At key moments in the narrative, Chaucer employs phrases that include negations of the word 'more': 'there is no more to say', 'I can no more', 'without more', for example. Chaucer's 'more' phrases perform a paradoxical function that can be likened to that of a refrain. Though they lack the structural consistency of refrains (being dotted through the narrative, at various points in the stanza and at various points in the line), they are nonetheless employed by characters and the narrative *I* at crucial points in the story. Like refrains, 'more' phrases employ repetition to gesture to the possibility of an ending. The refrain of 'To Rosemounde' responds to the endless circularity of the speaker's devotion; the 'more' phrases of Troilus respond to the circularity of its plot.

Beginnings that promise endings

By tracking the developments in Chaucer's use of 'more' phrases over the course of the poem, I hope to demonstrate the dynamic flexibility of Chaucer's handling of this device.[14] The first 'more' phrase in *Troilus*, coming in the poem's first passage of dialogue, threatens to end the story before it has really begun. Pandarus, Troilus's friend and Criseyde's uncle, comes to Troilus's bedchamber to find Troilus lamenting and praying for death. Pandarus asks Troilus what the matter is, but Troilus insists that he is beyond help (1.571–4):

> … for the loue of god, at my preying,
> Go hennes awey, for certes my deyinge
> Wol the disese and I mot nedes deye;
> Therfore go wey, ther is na more to seye.

> For the love of God, listen to my request and leave this place, for certainly my death will upset you—and I must inevitably die. So go away—there is no more to say.

The phrase 'there is no more to say' is used here to assert the finality of Troilus's argument. By the end of the scene, however, Pandarus has transformed Troilus's perspective, and with it, the flavour of the 'more' phrase he employs. After Pandarus promises Troilus that he will convince Criseyde to requite Troilus's love, Troilus uses another 'more' phrase to gesture to the ineffability of his gratitude (1.1051–54):

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[14] For this conception of flexibility and dynamism in the handling of repeated phrases and other orally-derived elements, I am indebted to Adrian Kelly's work on the Homeric epics. See, for instance, Kelly (2007).

> Now, Pandare, I kan namore seye,
> But thow wis, thow woost, thow maist, thow art al.
> Mi lif, my deth, hol in thyn honde I leye;
> Help now!

> Now, Pandarus, I can say no more except that you, wise man, you know, you
> can, you are everything. My life, my death, I lay wholly in your hands. Help,
> now!

The argumentative 'more' phrase 'there is no more to say' has transmuted into the modally-inflected, expressive 'more' phrase 'I can no more say'. The focus has thus shifted from the limits of argument to the limits of expression. At first, Troilus had used a 'more' phrase to close down Pandarus's attempts to help; by the end of the scene, Troilus is using a 'more' phrase to spur Pandarus on. Similar protean shifts of emphasis and implication are the hallmark of Chaucer's use of 'more' phrases in *Troilus*: the phrases toy with the possibility of different narrative trajectories that have different end-points. The phrases are focal points of possibility. They are apt in a narrative that hinges on the extremity of the protagonists' feelings and the zero-sum nature of its situations: either Pandarus helps Troilus, ending his sorrow, or he dies. Both uses of 'more' phrases in this scene, in their own way, raise the spectre of finality: could this really be the end?[15]

The opening scene of dialogue between Troilus and Pandarus is programmatic in the presentation of these phrases, setting up two poles of their possible usage: the argumentative use (in which the speaker asserts the finality of their argument) and the expressive use (in which the speaker gestures to the ineffability of their feelings). In Book Two, Pandarus begins a programme of persuasion in an attempt to save his friend's life. His use of 'more' phrases in this book blurs the line between their argumentative and expressive uses. At the beginning of Book Two, Pandarus goes to the house of Criseyde, his niece. When conveying the urgency of Troilus's situation to Criseyde, Pandarus employs another 'more' phrase (2.319–22):

> The noble Troilus, so loueth the,
> That, but ӡe helpe, it wol his bane be.
> Lo, here is al—what sholde I moore sey?
> Do what ӡow lest to make hym lyue or dey.

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[15] This spectre of finality is merely a spectre, of course: the audience knows from the proem that the story will not end until Criseyde abandons Troilus, and Troilus dies (1.56). Nonetheless, Chaucer employs these phrases to repeatedly raise the problem and possibility of closure, much as the refrain of a lyric suggests finality both by ending the stanza, and by being a pre-iteration (as it were) of the refrain with which the lyric will end.

> But if ȝe late hym deyen, I wol sterue.

> The noble Troilus loves you so much that it will be the death of him unless you
> help. Look, that is all there is to it—what more should I say? Do as you wish,
> to make him live or die. But if you let him die, I will die.

Pandarus's use of the phrase 'what more should I say?', in this context, combines the argumentative and expressive uses of 'more' phrases. Pandarus uses the phrase to convey both the finality of his argument (a stark choice between life and death) and the desperation of his own feelings: unless Criseyde helps, both he and Troilus will die. Pandarus goes on to claim that Criseyde need only show Troilus 'bettre chiere' ('kinder treatment', 2.360) and 'moore feste' ('more welcome', 2.361) to save their lives. He uses a phrase much like a 'more' phrase to insist that Criseyde will be required to do no more than this: 'this al and som' ('this is everything and more', i.e. 'this is the whole matter', 2.363).[16] The phrase gestures towards the possibility of finality: if Criseyde assents, Pandarus will request no more of her. These 'more' phrases thus offer Criseyde a stark choice between two ends: either the death of her uncle and a Trojan prince, or her uncle never requesting more of her in future.

As Book Two proceeds, 'more' phrases chart the gradual escalation of Pandarus's demands on his niece: Pandarus uses the phrases to promise an end that is constantly receding. Criseyde reluctantly accedes to her uncle's initial demands, on the condition that Pandarus 'no-thyng elles requere' ('ask nothing more of me', 2.473). Any sense of final resolution is short-lived, however: upon hearing the good news, Troilus asks Pandarus to see her 'aȝein' ('again', 2.984). Pandarus thus returns the next day with a letter from Troilus, prompting an angry response from Criseyde. Central to her retort is a repurposing of the 'more' phrase Pandarus had earlier used to sway her (2.1130, 1132–4):

> scrit ne bille ...
> Ne brynge me noon; and also, vncle deere,
> To myn estat haue more rewarde, I preye,
> Than to his lust—what sholde I more seye?

> Don't bring me any writings or letters. And also, dear uncle, have more regard,
> I pray, to my condition than to his lust—what more should I say?

Pandarus had used this phrase to insist on the urgency of Criseyde showing favour to Troilus; Criseyde's repurposing of the phrase captures her exasperation at her uncle's failure to consider the urgency of his niece's 'estat' ('condition', 2.1133). Criseyde is a widow,

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[16] The latter is Windeatt's gloss (1984: 168).

and her father recently defected to the invading Greek army: she is therefore vulnerable to attacks from her many public enemies in Troy. Carrying out a love affair with one of the king's sons would be fraught with risk. Criseyde artfully redeploys Pandarus's 'more' phrase to draw attention to his oversight. In each of its uses, this 'more' phrase gestures to a dire end-result: Troilus's death from amorous despair, or a disaster befalling Criseyde. The doubling of this phrase thus paints this moment of decision as fraught with perilous possibilities.

Pandarus again prevails upon Criseyde to give in to his demands, but the end he promises continues to recede. Troilus is spurred on by receiving Criseyde's reply: he 'gan to desiren moore' ('began to desire more', 2.1339). Pandarus, at Troilus's urging, sets in motion a scheme to force Criseyde to meet Troilus in person. On the pretence that he is seeking protection for Criseyde in the face of imagined legal jeopardy, Pandarus persuades Troilus's brother Deiphebus to invite Troilus, Criseyde and others to his house. Pandarus's request to Deiphebus is capped by the argumentative 'more' phrase 'withouten more speche' ('without any more speech', 2.1420–1), to which Deiphebus replies (2.1425–6),

> "Than nedeth," quod Deiphebus, "hardyly,
> Namore to speke ..."

"Then there is certainly", said Deiphebus, "no need to speak any more ..."

The final resolution of the problem (whether the invented one of Criseyde's legal jeopardy or the real problem of Troilus's desire) is presented as the end-goal of these 'more' phrases: in fact, Pandarus is not resolving Troilus's desire, but stoking it, and repeatedly raising the stakes of the affair. By arranging for Criseyde to meet Troilus in Deiphebus's house, he is putting their incipient affair at risk of discovery. In Book Two, Chaucer's 'more' phrases chart Pandarus's repeated overstepping of lines that he had earlier drawn.

The wheel's summit

At the beginning of Book Three, Troilus suggests that closure may finally have been achieved. He employs an expressive 'more' phrase to thank Pandarus for his help in uniting him with Criseyde (3.390–2):

> I kan namore but that I wol the serue
> Right as thi sclaue, whider so thow wende,
> ffor euere more vn-to my lyues ende.

I can no more, except that I will serve you, just as your slave, wherever you

> may go, forevermore, until the end of my life.

This 'more' phrase recalls the phrase Troilus had used in Book One to beg his friend to help him ('I kan namore seye', 1.1051). It therefore produces a sense of closure: Troilus's earlier phrase underpinned his plea for help; this phrase expresses his gratitude to Pandarus for successfully helping him. But this suggestion of closure is (again) short-lived: having met her in person, Troilus develops a desire to spend a night with Criseyde. Pandarus therefore develops yet another stratagem. In the narration of this stratagem, Chaucer experiments with having the narrative *I* voice their own 'more' phrases for the first time in the poem. In the space of less than one hundred and fifty lines, the narrative *I* employs four 'more' phrases to indicate that they are impatient for the protagonists' love to be consummated. These phrases might aptly be understood as belonging to a third category of 'more' phrase, in addition to argumentative and expressive 'more' phrases. We might call them narrative 'more' phrases, because their primary effect is to produce a sense of accelerating narrative momentum, as the narrative *I* grasps after closure. The first of these narrative 'more' phrases comes at the very beginning of the narration of Pandarus's scheme, when the narrative *I* declares (3.547–8, 552):

> Now is ther litel more forto doone,
> But Pandare vp and, shortly forto seyne...
> He streght o morwe vn-to his Nece wente

> Now there is little more to do, but Pandarus *up* and, to say it briefly, in the morning he went straight to his niece.

The pair of brevity phrases in these first two lines ('Now there is little more to do' and 'to say it briefly') paint the narrative *I* as impatient for Pandarus's stratagem to succeed. The concise, imperative force of 'Pandare vp' ('Pandarus *up*', 3.548) suggests that the narrative *I* plays the role of puppet master: it is as if they are commanding Pandarus to hurry out of bed and enact his stratagem. At the close of the first leg of Pandarus's mission, in which Pandarus convinces Criseyde to come to his house for dinner, the narrative *I* impatiently fast-forwards the story with a 'more' phrase (3.593–5):

> what sholde I more telle?
> Whan al was wel, he roos and took his leue;
> And she to soper com when it was eue.

> What more should I tell? When all was well, he rose and took his leave. And she came to supper in the evening.

Once their supper is concluded, and Pandarus has convinced Criseyde to stay the night, the narrative *I* employs another 'more' phrase (3.673–6):

> Ther nys no more, but here-after soone,
> The voyde dronke, and trauers drawe anon,
> Gan euery wight ...
>   ...out of the chambre gon

> There is no more, but soon hereafter, with the parting drink drunk and the partition curtains drawn, everybody started ... to go out of the chamber.

Here, the narrative *I* produces a sense of impatience by coupling the 'more' phrase 'ther nys no more' with the pair of passive past participles 'dronke' ('drunk') and 'drawe' ('drawn', 3.674). Not only do the participles present these actions as having already taken place, but they also elide the actor: their concision, like that of 'Pandare vp' ('Pandarus *up*', 3.548), carries an imperative force, as if the scene were being hastily readied and cleared for the lovers' rendezvous. Two stanzas later, another 'more' phrase caps a depiction of people having gone to bed (3.687–91):

> So whan that she was in the closet leyd,
> And alle hire wommen forth by ordinaunce
> Abedde weren, ther as I haue seyde,
> Ther was nomore to skippen nor to traunce,
> But boden go to bedde, with meschaunce ...

> So when she was laid in the bedchamber—and all her women were in bed, in due order, where I have said—there was no more skipping or prancing, but commanding, 'Go to bed, curse you!'

Again, this passage portrays a rapid succession of actions in impersonal terms. First there is the passive construction of the phrase 'she was in the closet leyd' ('she was laid in the bed-chamber', 3.687), before the 'more' phrase 'Ther was nomore to skippen nor to traunce ...' ('there was no more skipping or prancing', 3.690), employing infinitive phrases in another passive construction to elide the agency of the figures in the scene. Any lingering figures are berated by an unspecified voice ('boden go to bedde, with meschaunce', 'commanding, "Go to bed, curse you!"', 3.691) that is elided with the impatient voice of the narrative *I* themself. Through this series of narrative 'more' phrases in quick succession (within a passage of less than one hundred and fifty lines), Chaucer produces a sense of the narrative *I* grasping after a point of closure which is repeatedly deferred.

Once the protagonists' love is consummated, Chaucer shifts from narrative 'more' phrases to expressive 'more' phrases, through which the characters and the narrative *I* suggest that the extent of their satisfaction is beyond expression. The first of these expressive 'more' phrases comes in the voice of the narrative *I*, when Troilus is holding Criseyde for the first time (3.1191–7):

> What myghte or may the sely larke seye,
> Whan that the sperhauk hath it in his foot?
> I kan namore, but of thise ilke tweye –
> To whom this tale sucre be or soot –
> Though that I tarie a ȝer, som tyme I moot,
> After myn auctour, tellen hire gladnesse,
> As wel as I haue told hire heuynesse.

What can or may the innocent lark say when the sparrowhawk has it in his foot? I can no more, but of this same pair—to whom this tale be sugar or soot— even if I tarry a year, sometime I must, according to my authoritative source, tell their gladness, as well as I have told their sadness.

In the narrative 'more' phrases that came earlier in Book Three, there was an elision of the desires of the scheming Pandarus and the narrative *I*'s desire for closure and consummation. Through this expressive 'more' phrase, too, the narrative *I* imagines themself entangled in the feelings of the characters. The metaphor of the speechless 'sely larke' ('innocent lark', 3.1191) seems at first to refer not to the narrative *I* but to Criseyde, who is in Troilus's arms: he is represented by 'the sperhauk' (3.1192). Immediately after this simile, however, the narrative *I* uses a 'more' phrase ('I can no more') to direct the audience's attention to their own speechlessness. Criseyde is ravished by Troilus; the narrative *I* is ravished by the narrative: both are left incapable of speech. Thus, in Book Three Chaucer uses both narrative 'more' phrases and expressive 'more' phrases to elide the feelings of characters and those of the narrative *I*. For the narrative *I*, as for the characters, these phrases strain towards the finality of the lovers' consummation.

Book Three proceeds with a series of expressive 'more' phrases, producing the effect of an iterative attempt to grasp at closure at this moment of happiness. One might compare it to a series of perfect cadences that somehow fail to bring about the end of a symphony. Less than a hundred lines after the metaphor of the sparrowhawk come a pair of expressive uses of the 'more' phrase 'I can no more': one in the voice of Troilus, one in that of the narrative *I*. First, Troilus is so overcome with bliss that 'what to don for ioie vnnethe he wiste' ('he was so joyful that he hardly knew what to do', 3.1253). He addresses Love, ending his speech with an expressive 'more' phrase (3.1273–4):

> I kan namore, but laude and reuerence
> Be to thy bounte and thyn excellence.

I can no more, but praise and reverence be to your generosity and your excel-lence.

After this, the narrative *I* employs the same 'more' phrase to evoke Criseyde's bliss (3.1310–14):

> Of hire delit or ioies oon the leeste
> Were impossible to my wit to seye;
> But iuggeth ȝe that han ben at the feste
> Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye.
> I kan namore ...

Of the very least of their delight or their joys, it would be impossible for my wit to speak. But judge, all of you who have been at the feast of such gladness—if they wish to play. I can no more ...

Finally, at the close of the book, the narrative *I* follows Troilus in using the same 'more' phrase when addressing love, here in the persons of Venus and Cupid (3.1812–13):

> I kan namore, but syn that ȝe wol wende,
> ȝe heried ben for ay with-outen ende.

I can no more, but since you will leave, may you be praised forever, without end.

'Without end': with this phrase, the narrative *I* attempts to overcome ineffability by ges-turing to eternal repetitions of praise. 'Ende' ('end') is ominously rhymed with 'wende' ('leave'): Venus and Cupid are about to abandon the protagonists. The ending of Book Three gestures to the tantalizing possibility of this being the end of the poem: a comic end, in which Troilus's problem has been resolved, and in which the narrative *I* is so over-come with joy for the lovers that they are ultimately left speechless. The next (and final) stanza of Book Three further encourages the audience to consider this as a possible point of closure. The narrative *I* declares that they have 'seyd fully in my songe / Theffect and ioie of Troilus seruise. ('said fully in my song the culmination and good fortune of Troilus's service', 3.1814–15).

Death by a thousand conclusions

But Book Four interrupts this illusion of closure. It begins with the adversative 'But' and announces an intention to 'fully show' Troilus's 'losse of lyf and loue y-feere' ('loss of both life and love', 4.27). This repetition of 'fully' indicates to the audience that the closure at the end of Book Three was provisional: it marked the close of Troilus's first sorrow, but only the prelude to his second one. Book Four begins with a focus on the image of the wheel of fortune, which is about to 'throwe' ('throw') Troilus and 'sette vp' ('set up') the Greek soldier Diomede (Criseyde's next lover) in his place (4.6, 4.11). This circular motion of fortune is matched by the sense that Book Four's beginning is a re-enactment of Book One, not only in terms of plot and setting, but also in terms of the use of 'more' phrases. After learning that Criseyde is to be handed over to the Greek army, Troilus collapses alone in his bedchamber, where Pandarus comes to find him. Together again in Troilus's room, Troilus and Pandarus are rendered 'specheles' ('speechless') by this misfortune: 'That neither myghte o word for sorwe seye' ('Such that neither could say a single word, due to their sorrow', 4.370–1). Finally, Troilus speaks, his first words an argumentative 'more' phrase that attempts to preclude any attempt at consolation: 'Lo, Pandare, I am ded with-outen more' ('Lo, Pandarus, I am dead, without more', 4.376). As in Book One, Troilus uses an argumentative 'more' phrase to insist on the inevitability of his death. Pandarus, again, makes a lengthy attempt to console him, but Troilus remains unconsoled, replying with another argumentative 'more' phrase: 'nought worth is al thi red ... With-outen wordes mo I wol be ded' ('all your advice is worth nothing ... Without any more words, I will be dead', 4.498–500). Troilus's rebuttal succeeds at first in leaving Pandarus speechless—'Pandarus gan holde his tunge stille' ('Pandarus began to hold his tongue still', 4.521)—but (4.523–5)

> thus thought he at the laste:
> "What, parde, rather than my felawe deye,
> Yet shal I som-what more vn-to hym seye"

this is what he thought in the end: "What, by God, rather than my friend dying,
I shall again say something more to him."

This thought, by contrast with the implication of Troilus's 'more' phrase, implies that saying 'more' can avert the misfortune of Troilus's death, just as it did in Book One.

Argumentative 'more' phrases are equally crucial to Troilus's attempt to persuade Criseyde not to leave Troy. As Pandarus had in Book Two, Troilus uses a 'more' phrase to urge Criseyde to save his life: 'if ȝe gon, as I haue told ȝow ȝore, / So thenk I nam but ded, with-oute more' ('If you go, as I have told you before, then think of me as nothing but dead,

without more', 4.1497–8). But whereas in Book Two 'more' phrases mark key moments in Troilus's ascent from despair to hope—from the bottom of fortune's wheel towards its summit—in Book Four 'more' phrases chart Troilus's descent into despair. Unlike those of Book Two, Troilus's argumentative 'more' phrase proves useless in convincing Criseyde. To capture Troilus's despairing reaction to this, the narrative *I* employs the same 'more' phrase (4.1699–1701):

> For whan he saugh that she ne myghte dwelle,
> Which that his soule out of his herte rente,
> With-outen more out of the chaumbre he wente.

For when he saw that she could not stay—which tore his soul out of his heart— without more, he went out of the chamber.

These are the final lines of Book Four. The echoic use of the phrase 'without more' evokes the possibility of closure, encouraging the audience to countenance the possibility that this is the final low point of Troilus's despair.

But this distinction is reserved for the final scene of dialogue in the poem, when Troilus and Pandarus meet for a last time in Troilus's bedchamber. After learning of his betrayal by Criseyde, Troilus goes home, sends for Pandarus, and cries out 'after deth, with-outen wordes moore' ('for death, without any more words', 5.1672). For a third time, Troilus forestalls Pandarus's attempts to comfort him, again using a 'more' phrase (5.1716–18):

> certeynly, with-outen moore speche,
> ffrom hennes-forth as ferforth as I may,
> Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche

And certainly, without any more speech, from henceforth as far as I can, I will seek my own death in arms.

Aptly, these lines come in Troilus's final stanza of speech in the poem, before he does indeed die in battle. At first, Troilus's words leave Pandarus speechless: 'As stille as ston; a word ne kowde he seye' ('As still as stone; he could not say a word', 5.1729). Eventually, Pandarus manages to deliver an uncharacteristically short, thirteen-line speech, which opens and closes in capitulation (5.1731, 1743):

> My brother deer, I may do the namore.
> ... I kan namore seye.

My dear brother, I can do no more for you ... I can say no more.

These are the final words of any character in the poem. On the surface, they appear like any other 'more' phrases, but the way Pandarus uses them is extraordinary. Until this point, 'more' phrases have an optative force. They lend momentum to the narrative and urge it towards an end: argumentative 'more' phrases strain to drive arguments to a successful conclusion; expressive 'more' phrases strain to gesture successfully to a feeling; narrative 'more' phrases will the narrative towards its conclusion. By contrast, Pandarus uses 'more' phrases in his final speech simply to acknowledge that an end has been reached. Refrains hold closure and repetition in an unstable synthesis, such that 'To Rosemounde' and 'Memphis blues again' end with an intimation of endlessness. But a narrative—no matter how song-like—has to end somewhere.[17]

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the paradoxical logic of the refrain is recast for narrative purposes. Chaucer's 'more' phrases are the linchpin around which the narrative spins, negotiating iterability and the yearning for closure, whether it be argumentative closure, expressive closure, or narrative closure. *Troilus* does not mark the beginning or the end of Chaucer's use of 'more' phrases: he uses similar phrases in his earlier works, and he goes on to employ them in *The legend of good women* and *The Canterbury tales*. Also, the monk John Lydgate (1370–1451), a poet of the generation after Chaucer, enthusiastically adopts Chaucer's 'more' phrases: he uses them especially to conclude stories, and in the context of declaring that he finds 'no more' information on a certain subject in one of his written sources.[18] But *Troilus* is unique in its use of 'more' phrases as a refrain-like device, holding the narrative in a dynamic equilibrium between song and story, writing and oral performance, ending and endlessness.

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[17] After Pandarus's speech, the narrative *I* produces other kinds of closure: offering some morals of the story before saying farewell to the book and speculating about its future reception and performance (5.1779–98); describing Troilus's death (5.1806), his ascent through the heavenly spheres (5.1807–20), and the moment he realizes the vanity of human existence (5.1821–5); listing further morals of the story (5.1828–55); and directing the book to John Gower (1330–1408) and Ralph Strode (fl. 1350–1400) for correction (5.1856–9), before closing with a prayer (5.1863–9).

[18] See for instance *The fall of princes* 2.2226, 8.2226, 9.1534, 9.1564; *Troy book* 5.377, 5.1432, 5.1460, 5.2730. In *The fall of princes*, Lydgate also uses 'more' phrases to signal disgust (4.2396, 9.1519) and pity (2.2140, 3.3263, 6.245, 7.460, 8.230), and when discussing fortune (1.1507, 3.2714–15). For the text of *The fall of princes*, I follow Bergen (1924–1927). For the text of *Troy book*, I follow Bergen (1906–1935).

Acknowledgements

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