

THE GENEALOGICAL ALLEGORY
OF LITERARY TRADITION
IN CHAUCER'S WORKS

by

Kaitlyn Polly, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
May 2018

Committee Members:

Leah Schwebel, Chair

Susan Morrison

Dickie Heaberlin

COPYRIGHT

by

Kaitlyn Polly

2018

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work I, Kaitlyn Polly, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Leah Schwebel for her extensive help on this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Susan Morrison and Dr. Dickie Heaberlin for their participation on my thesis committee and for their insightful suggestions and recommendations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. FAMILY TRADITIONS: ALLEGORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LITERARY LINEAGE IN PETRARCH'S <i>TALE OF GRISELDA</i> AND CHAUCEER'S <i>CLERK'S TALE</i>	8
III. CHILDLESS FATHERS: THE UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL FOR LITERARY OFFSPRING IN CHAUCEER'S <i>MERCHANT'S TALE</i> AND <i>PARDONER'S PROLOGUE AND TALE</i>	30
IV. THE SINS OF THE FATHER: TRACES OF THEBAN LOVE IN CHAUCEER'S <i>TROILUS AND CRISEYDE</i>	73
WORKS CITED	112

I. INTRODUCTION

“I pray to God, yeve hym confusioun

That first thee broghte unto religioun!

Thou woldest han been a tredefowel aright,

Haddestow as greet a leeve as thou hast might

To parfoune al thy lust in engendrure,

Thou haddest bigeten ful many a creature.” (*Monk’s Prologue*, 1943-48)¹

In Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, the Host praises the Monk for his masculinity, which the Host associates with the potential for virility. However, the Monk seems to understand a double layer of meaning in this praise, and seventeen textual “offspring” later, the Host is all too ready to denounce the Monk’s attempt at literary fatherhood as “nat worth a boterflye” (*Nun’s Priest’s Prologue*, 2790). Following the Monk’s aborted attempt, the Nun’s Priest tells a tale that is considered both entertaining and morally edifying, after which he receives the praise originally given to the Monk: the praise of fatherhood. In fact, whereas the Monk is told he should have had one “hen,” the Nun’s Priest so far exceeds the Monk in his tale that he is told he should have had “hennes . . . moo than seven tymes seventene”; that is, literally seven times the number of offspring as the Monk (*Nun’s Priest Tale*, 3453-54). In this instance, the Nun’s Priest “quites” the Monk first with his tale and then by arrogating to himself the Host’s praise of the Monk’s virility, two elements that, upon closer inspection, appear to be intertwined in telling ways. Here as well as in other places, Chaucer allegorically equates fatherhood with the production of tales or texts and provides a view of literary tradition from a genealogical

¹ All references to Chaucer’s literary works throughout this work are taken from: *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.

perspective as played out allegorically by the familial relationships in his works. It is this allegorical connection between the biological and literary genealogies in Chaucer's works that I propose to investigate. Exploring the *Clerk's Tale*, the *Merchant's Tale*, the *Pardoner's Tale*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, I will argue that Chaucer uses the concepts of biological genealogy and familial relationships both to represent and to explain literary lineage, especially as it pertains to his own place within literary tradition.

In *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, Carolyn Dinshaw lays out the primary foundational concept of the first two chapters of my argument. As she explains, "[t]ranslation takes place on a feminine body . . .," and authorship and interpretation are masculine practices (133). Yet this allegorical interpretation is not in and of itself original to Dinshaw. Rather, Dinshaw builds her discussion on a long tradition of the allegorical interpretation of masculine literary activity and feminine texts that predates the Middle Ages and has been employed throughout history by writers such as Dante, Jerome, Richard of Bury, and Alain de Lillie, and Chaucer himself alludes to this traditional allegory in "Chaucer's Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn."² With this allegorical connection in mind, Dinshaw argues that Chaucer implies certain consequences as the results of figuring certain literary activities as masculine or feminine.³ Dinshaw insists that in Chaucer's literary works, "literary representation is understood in terms of the body – the body as it enters into social interactions, as it functions in social organization, as it is assigned gender value in the transactions that constitute social structure" (15). She therefore focuses largely on examining the allegorical body of the woman/text itself, including the ways the "text" is figured as feminine, dressed and undressed, passed among male

² See Dinshaw, especially 3-27

³ See Dinshaw, especially 3-27 and 132-155

translators, and either allowed or denied subjectivity.⁴ Whereas Dinshaw has established and analyzed Chaucer's exploration of gendered literary practices in terms of the masculine author and feminine text, I will seek to add to her discussion by considering this allegory in a specifically genealogical light. Rather than exploring the wider social implications of what it means to consider certain literary activities as either masculine or feminine, as Dinshaw does, I will argue that Chaucer uses the allegory of masculine authorship and feminine texts to illustrate the dynamics of literary lineage in light of the family dynamics in three of his tales – the *Clerk's Tale*, the *Merchant's Tale*, and the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*. I suggest that, in these tales, Chaucer uses the masculine-author/feminine-text allegory to represent successful, and unsuccessful, authorship, in which a successful translator is one who not only translates his text but also inserts himself into a literary lineage, produces new translations and literary heirs, and embodies an understanding of the workings of literary tradition. I argue that if the women of the tales can indeed be viewed as “texts” acted upon by their male “translators,” then the production of biological offspring in these tales may correspondingly be understood as the perpetuation of a literary lineage – successful authors (husbands) and their texts (wives) produce new texts (daughters) and literary heirs (sons). Whereas Dinshaw maintains that the gendered roles of author and text can be taken up by members of either sex, though unequally, I will consider the potential ramifications of this nontraditional gendering of subjects specifically as it pertains to genealogy and, allegorically, literary lineage.

In my first chapter, I argue that while the main characters of the *Clerk's Tale*, Walter and Griselda, can be read allegorically as figures in an author-text relationship, as

⁴ See Dinshaw, especially 3-27 and 132-155

proposed by Dinshaw and others scholars, this allegory actually extends beyond their relationship and encompasses the span of generations found in the tale, from Griselda's father, Janicula, to Walter's and Griselda's children and, presumably, the generations to come. In particular, the family dynamics of Walter's relationship with his father-in-law and his own wife reflect the apparent dynamics between Chaucer and his literary predecessors, Petrarch and Boccaccio. More generally, the relationship between Walter and Griselda and their children illustrates the abstract dynamics of literary tradition through the biological and socially understood image of genealogy.

In Chapter Two, I consider the ways in which Chaucer uses the biological "fruitlessness" in the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* to represent the potential for literary fruitlessness. I will analyze both of these tales in their own respects but also in light of the previous discussion of the *Clerk's Tale*, as these tales allow us to consider the allegory of the woman-as-text/man-as-author paradigm from different angles. Whereas I argue in Chapter One that the *Clerk's Tale* illustrates a sort of "proper order" of biological and literary genealogy, by examining the failed potential for offspring found in both of these tales, particularly in January's failed attempt to produce an heir and in the characterization of the Pardoner himself, I will explore the possibility that the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* offer examples of the course of procreation, both biological and literary, gone awry. As such, these tales illustrate the textual terminus that awaits unsuccessful translators.

In Chapter Three, I analyze Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* from the standpoint that this work offers a genealogical allegory for literary tradition, but I will not directly apply the man-as-author/woman-as-text allegory used in my first two chapters. Rather, I

will explore the historical genealogy of Thebes and Troy and the human relationships therein as far as they pertain to this historical genealogy in order to demonstrate an allegory for the specific literary tradition within which Chaucer produces *Troilus and Criseyde*. As in my first two chapters, I consider the ways in which Chaucer uses familial relationships to allegorize the dynamics of literary tradition, but I demonstrate that the range of Chaucer's genealogical allegory extends beyond his descriptions of individual families and encompasses a greater scope of familial and genealogical relationships, including historical genealogy. To build my argument, I will address the critical scholarship surrounding the numerous allusions to Thebes in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Many scholars have searched Chaucer's poem and catalogued a wide array of Theban allusions, from direct references to Theban history to subtle indicators of a shared historical lineage. This Theban influence on Chaucer's Troy has been assessed in a number of ways. Dominique Battles, for example, considers how Chaucer's Trojan characters fail to "read" their own doom in the prophetic fate of Thebes.⁵ David Anderson argues that Chaucer uses allusion to the Theban war "in satirical counterpoint to the main action of the *Troilus*" (109). And Paul Clogan claims that the Theban scenes in Chaucer's poem "provide an ominous background to the narrative of *Troilus*" (167). Prominent among scholars who have analyzed Chaucer's use of Thebes in his story of Troy is Lee Patterson, whose argument in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* has influenced scholars' interpretations of the Theban connection to Troy since its publication. In this work, Patterson demonstrates that Chaucer's Troy is not only informed by its historical lineage with Thebes but is in fact recursively determined by the fate of its genealogical forerunner – the fall of Thebes, at least for Chaucer, is the

⁵ See Battles, especially 119-23.

motivating force behind the fall of Troy in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Patterson therefore argues that Chaucer portrays Troy's inherent connection to Thebes in order to demonstrate the recursiveness of historical tragedy as it was understood in the Middle Ages.⁶

Since the publication of *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, many scholars have understood the fall of Thebes as a harbinger of the fall of Troy, however, no scholar has yet analyzed Chaucer's Troy from the perspective of the unnatural familial relationships – a notoriously Theban element – that permeate and guide its storyline. The story of Thebes is infamous for the unnatural familial relationships that mark its history, especially the patricide and incest of Oedipus and the fratricide of Eteocles and Polynices that brought on the war of the Seven Against Thebes, and I argue that traces of these unnatural relationships can be found in *Troilus and Criseyde*. In this chapter, I will examine the specific way in which Chaucer uses Thebes as a genealogical model to indicate the perversion of Troy in terms of the familial relationships of the Trojans. Although the story of Troy is not explicitly a tale of unnatural familial relationships, I argue that Chaucer weaves this Theban element into the story of *Troilus and Criseyde*, at least symbolically, in order to suggest unnatural familial relationships as a defining link between the two cities and thus to emphasize the perversion of these relationships as a crucial factor in the fall of Troy. By analyzing Chaucer's allusions to Thebes in the text, and by examining Chaucer's indication of unnatural familial relationships in Troy, I will demonstrate an allegorical connection between the historical genealogy of the cities, the human genealogies therein, and literary genealogy. While I agree with Patterson that the fate of Troy is revealed in the history of Thebes as a part of their historical genealogy, I

⁶ See Patterson, especially 98 and 136.

further argue that, in Chaucer's narrative of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the human relationships within Troy have a causal relationship, allegorically, with the fall of the city, as they demonstrate not only Troy's place in a historical lineage with Thebes but also Troy's active participation in the behavioral habits of that lineage. Furthermore, I analyze the ways in which Chaucer approaches the literary lineage within which he tells his story and the allegorical implications of the characters' unnatural relationships and recursive genealogies on the tale's literary lineage. Finally, I consider the implications of these allegorical connections in terms of understanding Chaucer's perception of the literary tradition of Thebes and Troy – a tradition I suggest Chaucer views as recursive itself – and his place therein.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I explore Chaucer's use of biological and literary genealogy in his works, by which process I demonstrate allegorical connections between the two. These connections provide a new way of understanding Chaucer's thoughts on, and interpretation of, literary lineages and his role therein. Chaucer is known as the father of English poetry,⁷ and this is indeed an apt description of his influence on English literary tradition. Yet to view Chaucer strictly in terms of his contributions to English poetry – as a literary father – is to neglect his role as a literary son in a lineage that stretches back across generations of great authors and winds its way through Latin, French, and Italian before engendering Chaucer as a literary heir.

⁷ See Yiavis 20; Spearing 20-35.

II. FAMILY TRADITIONS: ALLEGORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LITERARY LINEAGE IN PETRARCH'S *TALE OF GRISELDA* AND CHAUCEER'S *CLERK'S TALE*

Two prominent strands of analysis surrounding literary scholars' treatment of Petrarch's *Tale of Griselda* and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* include the concept of lineage, especially in regard to medieval understandings and debates of the topic, and the concept of translation in terms of both the translation of the tale itself and of Griselda as an allegorical representation of a text.⁸ Though with some exceptions, these topics have typically been approached independent of one another as two separate issues.⁹ The issue of lineage and the necessary production of a proper heir in order to propagate a worthy lineage is indeed prevalent within the tale, with the impetus for the plot being people's fear that their ruler will die with no appropriate heir to continue his lineage. A number of critics who have focused on the issue of lineage in the tale have done so primarily in regard to motherhood and medieval conceptions of biological bloodlines within the context of a predominantly patrilineal society.¹⁰ As for those scholars whose arguments focus on allegorical translation, their analyses tend to focus on the treatment of women or on an understanding of Griselda's translation principally as an allegory for the translation of the tale at hand, with Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer as the key players.¹¹ I propose, however, that there is yet a fuller understanding of the workings and dynamics of literary tradition and literary lineage overall to be reaped from the tale, both in its essence and

⁸ For background on the "Griselda as allegorical text" analysis, see Dinshaw 132-155; also see Dinshaw 3-27 for background on the allegorical interpretation of the masculine-author/feminine-text throughout history

⁹ For an exception, see Leah Schwebel, "Redressing Griselda"

¹⁰ For two examples, see Florschuetz; Perez, Maria Beatriz Hernandez.

¹¹ For examples, see Dinshaw; Schwebel "Redressing Griselda"

particularly in Petrarch's and Chaucer's translations of it. While each of the above-mentioned perspectives offers important insights into their respective topics, by fusing the analytical approaches of biological lineage and allegorical translation, it becomes clear that the tale addresses yet another form of lineage to be found just below the surface of the text; that is, literary lineage. Building my argument on Dinshaw's theory that, in Chaucer's works, "[t]ranslation takes place on a feminine body . . ." and that authorship and interpretation are masculine practices, I will argue that this allegory can be extended to encompass the entire family unit, its individual members, and their interactions with one another in order to develop an allegorical and, specifically, genealogical understanding of literary lineage (133).

Dinshaw analyzes several of Chaucer's works from the perspective that "literary activity as it is represented in Chaucer is always . . . a gendered activity; it is an activity that is represented in terms of relationships between people and that expresses larger principles of social organization and social power" (15). Reading the *Clerk's Tale* under the premise that the text can be considered feminine, while the acts of literary interpretation and translation can be considered masculine, Dinshaw explores the implications of allegorically reading Walter as a literary translator of Griselda, his text, especially in terms of the dressing and undressing of her body and the level of subjectivity and power she is afforded in the tale.¹² She argues that "the Clerk's performance is a further expression of the Wife of Bath's point that there are real and poignant consequences for women of conceiving of literary activity as a masculine enterprise that is dependent on the occlusion of female desire" (134). To this end, Dinshaw is concerned with the social consequences of the masculine-author/feminine-

¹² See Dinshaw Chapter 5

text allegory, as she argues that in this allegorical representation of a woman as a text, women's experience is neglected.¹³

Building on Dinshaw's theory that Walter and Griselda can be read allegorically as author and text, respectively, I will extend this allegory not only beyond these two characters to include Janicula and the children of Walter and Griselda but also beyond an isolated analysis of the author-text dynamic. That is, I will analyze Walter's treatment of his "text" not only within the confines of their specific relationship but also in terms of their participation in a literary lineage that predates Walter's translation of Griselda and, as demonstrated at the end of the tale, extends to posterity. Rather than analyzing the social implications of gendered literary activity, as Dinshaw does, I am concerned with the possibility that this tale illustrates Chaucer's view of literary lineage and his place therein. After all, throughout his literary career, Chaucer seems to have been incredibly mindful of the need to insert himself, and securely entwine himself, within an established literary tradition. Leah Schwebel has already analyzed Chaucer's use of the Griselda story in light of its historical use by Boccaccio and Petrarch as a means of "graft[ing] his name onto a pre-established genealogy of poets from the position of an outsider" ("Redressing Griselda" 287). Thus, in addition to being considered in terms of its relevance to the concept of biological lineage, this tale has also been understood through the manner in which Chaucer may have translated the story as a means of establishing himself in the literary lineage of Boccaccio and Petrarch. I suggest, therefore, that when applied to the span of generations in the tale, the masculine-author/feminine-text allegory takes on new meaning as an allegory of not only literary translation but, moreover, literary translation as it is carried out within a literary lineage. I will thus argue that this

¹³ See Dinshaw citation, especially Chapter 5

tale illustrates the dynamics of literary lineage as exemplified by the dynamics of family interactions and human genealogy.

Whereas many scholars begin their arguments with an analysis of Walter and Griselda's relationship, where the main action of the tale begins, I suggest that a more appropriate starting point for the current argument may be found where the lineage within the tale begins – that is, with Janicula. If Griselda is the text, then the necessary implication is that her father is her original author, a connection that, when carried over from a biological reading to an allegorical one, has a number of consequences. In the *Clerk's Tale*, Walter tells Griselda that their son must be dispensed with because the people do not want a ruler of "the blood of Janicle" (*Clerk* IV.631-33). Referring to these lines in terms of biological bloodlines, Florschuetz suggests, "Walter does not identify Griselda herself as the genealogical contaminant, but rather her father, Janicula. Walter's son, the product of his blood transmitted through Griselda's body, becomes instead Janicula's child" (Florschuetz 41). Applying this analysis to an allegorical reading of the tale, although the son is no doubt of Walter's blood, by insinuating that he nevertheless must surely carry traces of the blood of his maternal grandfather, the author of the original text, it is suggested that by producing literary offspring, an author's literary bloodline will be carried forth through his text in some degree, even when the blood of a new author is added to the mix through translation. Thus, in a way, any new translation of a text is indeed a descendent of the original author, and hence, the hope of literary tradition, the preservation of those within the tradition, is fulfilled.

While Florschuetz argues that Walter views Janicula's blood as a contaminant to his offspring, her interpretation does not take into account the entirety of the tale. As it is,

Walter only pretends to denounce his son on the grounds of Janicula's bloodline being carried on within him. By the end of the tale, Walter reveals that he is not concerned by the possibility of any presence of Janicula's blood in his own son, as he reinstates his son to his position as Walter's rightful heir. This lack of concern on Walter's part necessitates that either he does not believe in the possibility of Janicula's blood having been transmitted through Griselda's participation in the production of the son or he accepts the influence of Janicula's bloodline in his own son as a simple fact of the matter.

Allegorically, then, Walter as a translator either views his literary offspring as completely his own creation or as the product of both his efforts and the efforts of those who came before him. As to which of these possibilities Walter affirms, the answer may be found at the end of the tale when he brings Janicula to live in the palace for the remainder of his life. By raising Janicula out of poverty and establishing him in a place of honor, Walter appears to respect Janicula in a way that suggests he recognizes that his lineage, like a literary lineage, is intrinsically linked to both his predecessors and their works.

Going back even further than Chaucer in the literary history of the Griselda tale, it seems that the potential allusions to the translation allegory were not lost on Petrarch (the Clerk's purported source for this tale [*Clerk* 26-33]), and he appears to have been apt to exploit these allusions in his translation of the tale. Petrarch himself translated the Griselda tale – his *Insignis Obedientia* – from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a collection of tales written in the Italian vernacular. While in Boccaccio's version of the tale, Gualtieri (Walter) informs Griselda's father that he intends to marry the peasant's daughter

pending her answers to his questions,¹⁴ Petrarch's translation alters this moment in a significant way. In Petrarch's translation, Walter takes Janicula aside, lowers his voice, and tells him:

“I know that I am dear to you. I have known you for my faithful liegeman, and I believe you wish whatever suits my pleasure. One thing in particular, however, I should like to know: whether you would take me, whom you have as your master, for a son-in-law, giving me your daughter as a wife?” (“The Story of Griselda” 381)

Walter's attitude of superiority in this instance, masked by a guise of humility and amity with Janicula, reflects Petrarch's own tone in a letter to Boccaccio accompanying his translation of the tale, in which he asserts – in patronizing fashion – that he trusts Boccaccio will no doubt be grateful for his efforts in translating the tale out of the plain Italian vernacular and into the more erudite language of Latin: “I sincerely trust that it will gratify you that I have of my own free-will undertaken to translate your work . . . which I was induced to do in this instance by my partiality for you and for the story” (“Two Letters to Boccaccio” 389). Petrarch, furthermore, assures Boccaccio that the latter will retain all credit for the tale despite his supposed improvements to it.¹⁵ As Schwebel argues, however, Petrarch's letter is characterized by a “playful irony” because his translation of the tale into Latin subversively undercuts the original purpose of Boccaccio's work, which was intended to serve as a “serious response to Dante's plea for eloquent works *in the vernacular* . . . [emphasis added]” (“Redressing Griselda” 275;

¹⁴ Petrarch, Francis. “The Story of Griselda.” *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson, Norton, 2005, pp. 378-388.

¹⁵ Petrarch, Francis. “Two Letters to Boccaccio.” *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson, Norton, 2005, pp. 388-391.

276). Thus, by asserting that he has improved Boccaccio's text – by turning it into the opposite of what he knew Boccaccio intended it to be – and by claiming that all credit for the Latin translation is reverted to Boccaccio, Petrarch mocks Boccaccio's attempt to situate himself as a serious vernacular author. By comparing Petrarch's letters to Boccaccio to his actual translation of the tale, it seems evident that Petrarch was aware of at least some of the potential allegorical elements to be found in the tale in regard to his own translation of Boccaccio's text. Just as he emphasizes that Walter is the noble master humbling himself to wed Janicula's poor daughter and raise her up to a life of "swich riches," Petrarch's letter demonstrates that he figures himself a skilled translator who humbles himself in deigning to metaphorically marry Boccaccio's vernacular work by translating it into the "richesse" of Latin (*Clerk* 385).

Chaucer seems to have picked up on Petrarch's allegorical representation of the "redressed" Griselda as standing in for the text itself. As Dinshaw points out, "[the Clerk] creates a parallel between the two translators, Walter and Petrarch – Walter, who translates Griselda 'in swich riches,' and Petrarch, specialist in 'rethorike,' who translates the tale into 'heigh stile.'" (148). In light of what was likely Petrarch's understanding of the story's potential for an allegorical reading on translation, Walter's insistence on Janicula's presence and approval of Griselda's vows of obedience takes on a new level of meaning. As Maria Perez points out, "when addressing Janicula, Walter keeps a softening tone that cannot hide that there is only one possible answer for the future father-in-law. He stresses the idea of the poor man's serfdom" (Perez 274). This is the same method Petrarch employs in his letters when essentially asking Boccaccio to be, at least in this particular instance, his literary father-in-law. By having Walter ensure that

Janicula, the original “author” of the text, approves of the marriage and bears witness to Griselda’s vows with no vocal objection, Petrarch paints a picture of what he may have predicted to be Boccaccio’s passive consent, by virtue of silence, to his “superior’s” appropriation and translation of Boccaccio’s literary offspring, though of course Boccaccio, like Janicula, must have surely had no real say in the matter. However, Petrarch’s use and exploitation of the family dynamic in the tale to tease Boccaccio ultimately has a still greater range of significance. Janicula’s approval of the marriage, whether coerced or not, is representative of the need for an author in a literary tradition to claim this same supposed “approval” of his translation in order to validate his work as a text worthy of following in the lineage.

Although his successors regarded Chaucer as the father of English poetry,¹⁶ there remains some question as to whether he saw himself that way, or even if he perceived of his own literary predecessors as metaphorical fathers of texts. Kostas Yiavis, for example, argues that in Chaucer’s literary works, there is a “strand . . . [of] a depreciation of the figure of the father . . . as a literary precursor,” and he offers as one potential reason that in some of Chaucer’s works, “the substitution of the due deference to his literary fathers with a playful attitude seems to be a token of a new conception of literature” (13; 20). However, it is arguable that Chaucer, by subversively altering his sources’ works, in fact honors them as his literary “fathers” by engaging in the same methods of translation they have previously employed upon their sources. Just as Petrarch subverts Boccaccio’s attempt to establish himself as a serious vernacular author while simultaneously propagating Boccaccio’s literary lineage, so too does Chaucer join

¹⁶ See Yiavis 20; Spearing 20-35.

in on the “family tradition” of subversively calling out his predecessors while unavoidably honoring them by perpetuating their legacies.

Although Janicula and Walter are the primary “translators” in the tale, and they, along with Griselda, are typically the predominant focus of many scholars’ arguments concerning this tale, the importance of Walter’s and Griselda’s children, and first and foremost of their son, must not be overlooked. Although the son has no active agency in the action of the tale’s primary plot, the sheer demand for his existence is, nonetheless, the primary objective that sets the entire plot in motion, as Walter’s subjects’ request that the marquis marry stems from their greatest fear:

“For if it so bifelle, as God forbede,
That thurgh youre deeth youre lyne sholde slake,
And that a straunge successour sholde take
Your heritage, O wo were us alyve!
Wherefore we pray you hastily to wyve” (*Clerk* IV.136-40).

To the people, the disruption of Walter’s lineage would be disastrous. Even though the focus of the bulk of the tale does revolve around Walter’s testing of Griselda and Griselda’s reactions to each trial, behind these tests runs the ever present consciousness of Walter’s need for a legitimate heir to carry on his lineage. Therefore, even as Griselda’s reinstatement as Walter’s wife may be viewed as the climax of the tale, it is crucial to recognize that, through Griselda’s reinstatement, her children, and thus Walter’s heir, are also restored to their rightful roles within the family. Despite Griselda’s individual significance in the tale, it is in fact the restoration of her son to his role as

Walter's heir that ultimately satisfies the tale's initial crisis and fills in the final gap to bring the tale full-circle.

Although the son's role as Walter's heir is not the most prominent aspect of the tale, it is clear that Chaucer did specifically, though subtly, underscore this matter. In a translation of Petrarch's *Insignis Obedientia*, when the children's identities are revealed, Walter tells Griselda, "'This maiden . . . is your daughter; and he, who is thought to be my kinsman, is your son'" ("The Story of Griselda" 387). In Chaucer's translation of Petrarch's tale, however, the focus is shifted, as Walter says, "'This is thy doghter . . . that oother faithfully / Shal be myn heir, as I have ay disposed'" (*Clerk* IV.1066-67). While Walter's words concerning the identity of the daughter are translated almost exactly, the language used to describe the son is significantly altered. In these lines, Chaucer stresses a particular emphasis on the son's specific role as Walter's heir. Whereas at this point the daughter is described as just that, Griselda's daughter, the son is identified as Walter's natural and intended successor.

Approaching Chaucer's specific emphasis on the son as Walter's heir, it is important to recall the necessity of the production of an heir in order to perpetuate a lineage of any sort. As previously mentioned, the entire purpose of Walter's marriage is to quell his subjects' fears that his lineage will be broken by his lack of an heir. This demand upon Walter to marry for the sake of producing a genealogical heir would have been, at the least, an understandable proposition for Chaucer's contemporary audience. As Angela Florschuetz points out, "one of the major priorities of aristocratic marriage in the Middle Ages . . . [was] the production of an heir" (32-33). In the midst of this social pressure to produce a biological heir, Chaucer, as an author, seems to have been highly

aware of the need to produce a literary heir in order to keep his own legacy intact. It may at first seem counter-intuitive that an author would seek a replacement for himself, but, as demonstrated in the *Clerk's Tale*, the natural succession of authors in a literary tradition is the only means for true immortality of a sort. Although an individual author cannot live forever, his legacy can be preserved by the continuation of his literary lineage. This preservation is achieved once the individual author becomes entrenched in a literary tradition, but a necessary consequence of this is that the tradition becomes the priority above and before the individual. Florschuetz describes this phenomenon in genealogical terms when she claims that "it is in his production of an heir . . . that Walter will cease embodying his line entirely; in other words, Walter must reproduce his line in order to prove his continuity with it, yet by doing so, he passes on the task of embodying the line and its future in his son" (Florschuetz 36). In the same way, an author becomes immortalized by his position in a literary tradition, but the necessary consequence of that position is continuous succession. Considering the proposed allegorical reading, the son's natural and even hoped for succession of his father parallels the author's, and in this case Chaucer's, understanding that succession is natural and even favorable.

Additionally, Chaucer's Clerk's description of Walter's son's marriage, somewhat altered from the Petrarchan version, simultaneously condemns Walter's treatment of his wife as archaic and expresses the sense that the marquis's son, though he no doubt continues his father's heritage, does so in a way much more appropriate and fitting for his own time in history. The Clerk achieves this sense by claiming:

"His sone succedeth in his heritage
In reste and pees, after his fader day,

And fortunat was eek in mariage,
Al putte he nat his wyf in greet assay.
This world is nat so strong, it is no nay,
As it hath been in olde tymes yoore,
And herkneth what this auctour seith therfoore” (*Clerk* IV.1137-41).

Chaucer’s translation of this particular part of the tale seems to offer a critique and denunciation of Petrarch, along with further implications concerning the rights of literary heirs and the nature of literary tradition. As Schwebel points out, through the Clerk’s reminders that both Petrarch and Griselda are long dead, Chaucer declares “Petrarch and his Griselda obsolete” (“Redressing Griselda” 297). By referring to the lifetime of Walter as “olde tymes yoore,” Chaucer strengthens this notion that Petrarch, along with his particular translation of Griselda, is outdated and thus no longer the authoritative translation of the tale. Yet by reminding the reader of Petrarch’s obsolete antiquity within the immediate context of Walter’s son’s newer, and arguably more agreeable, “translation” of his own wife, Chaucer also suggests the right – indeed the necessity – of literary heirs to cast off the burden of strict adherence to their outmoded predecessors in order to adapt their translations to fit their own time and to meet the needs of their own literary agendas. In the envoy at the end of the tale, the Clerk essentially mirrors Walter’s son’s adapted form of marriage by revising Petrarch’s proposed moral of Griselda’s story and instead imposing his own voice, and by extension Chaucer’s voice, as the new authority on the tale.

Though Chaucer may not have intended his readers to nurture a sympathetic view of Walter, he nevertheless specifies that the marquis’s son carries on his father’s heritage.

Considering the Clerk's frequent interjections on the unjust cruelty of Walter's tests of Griselda, such as when he says, "But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit / To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede" (*Clerk* IV.460-61), combined with his ultimate denouncement of Walter's outdated ways, it would at first appear that Chaucer offers an attack directly on Petrarch seemingly aimed at destroying Petrarch's credibility as a translator altogether. Indeed, as Shawn Normandin points out, Chaucer omits Petrarch's illogical justification for his moral gloss in the envoy, "[b]ut since the Clerk indicates that his tale derives from Petrarch (IV 26–31), and since the Clerk cites him again as the author of the gloss (IV 1147– 1148), the brief syntactic disturbance may signal that there is something wrong with Petrarch" (Normandin 219). Yet although Chaucer does discredit Petrarch as an individual translator, he accedes that despite his faults, Petrarch's heritage, like Walter's, is still maintained due to his place within a literary lineage. In this way, Chaucer effectively indicates the power of literary tradition by demonstrating that regardless of Walter's cruelty or Petrarch's now dismantled translation, the legacies of both men have been immortalized by their mere positions within an established lineage and by their ability to produce an heir. After all, through the very act of translating Petrarch's work, irrespective of his specific treatment of this work, Chaucer claims for himself the role of a literary heir to Petrarch, and through Chaucer's translation, Petrarch's legacy, as does Boccaccio's, remains alive. Thus, if Petrarch casts Boccaccio as the poor Janicula and embodies himself in the noble Walter, Chaucer claims for himself the role of the son, who, having married, is sure to perpetuate the lineage by becoming a father himself. By inserting himself into an established literary tradition, Chaucer both assumes for himself

the right to be considered an appropriate heir to his literary predecessors and entreats future authors to perform the same function for him.

If Griselda can be understood as a representation of the text due to her female body, then there is another character in the tale whose female body must also be read along these same interpretive lines: Griselda's daughter. As a female, the daughter may also be read as a representation of a text, especially since she is not given any name or even a chance to speak, thus confining her role in the tale to the mere presence, absence, and finally the return of her physical body to the palace. The only truly defining aspects of the daughter's character are found in her relationship to her mother and father. The daughter is the literal product of the union between her parents, and therefore, by analogy, she is the metaphorical product of the union between the original female "text" and a new male translator of that text.

In light of the daughter's role as the new textual offspring of Griselda and Walter, it becomes even more significant that she, rather than another woman, is the proposed usurper of Griselda's station. Walter, as a powerful marquis, could have chosen nearly any woman to play the part of his supposed new bride and simply had the children brought back in secret. However, Walter's choice of his own daughter as his "bride" demonstrates the relationship between an original text and its literary progeny. The daughter, as a new "text" that has been spawned from Griselda, becomes the "text" that will ultimately replace Griselda and usurp her role. Tellingly, despite the people's love for Griselda, once they have seen her daughter and "the sighte / Of hire array, so richely biseye" (*Clerk* IV.983-84), they are quick to accept the daughter as an appropriate replacement for Griselda, as the Clerk says:

“For she is fairer, as they deemen alle,
Than is Grisilde, and moore tendre of age,
And fairer fruyt bitwene hem sholde falle,
And moore plesant, for hire heigh lynage . . .” (*Clerk* IV.988-991)

In effect, the new, fairer “text” is acclaimed by the people as being even greater than the original “text” and therefore capable of producing even greater offspring due to her “heigh lynage.” Yet what the people do not realize is that the new marchioness’s lineage includes Griselda, the one being replaced. The daughter, as fair as she may be, would literally not exist if Griselda had not come first and, moreover, if the union of Griselda and Walter had not occurred. Likewise, in terms of literary progeny, no matter how great a new text may be, it nonetheless owes its very existence to the original text and the interplay of a new author or translator with that text. Additionally, since the daughter is considered to be greater than Griselda, it is logical to assume that her higher quality is the result of Walter’s role in her production. While Griselda is considered highly, Walter’s contribution to her existing substance is what results in a daughter who surpasses even her mother in quality. By emphasizing the point that the new “text” is of even higher quality than the original “text,” Chaucer stresses the importance of the translator in both continually renewing the literary lineage and improving upon the existing literary parentage.

While Petrarch’s translation of the tale does include the crowd’s approval of Griselda’s daughter as a suitable replacement for her, and Boccaccio’s version of the tale does not mention this at all, only Chaucer’s translation of the Griselda story includes an explicit criticism of the fickle crowds as “stormy peple! Unsad and evere untrewē! / Ay

undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane!” (*Clerk* IV.995-96). Through this criticism, Chaucer draws attention to the apparent arbitrariness of the people’s praises, for as they acclaim Griselda’s daughter for her “heigh lynage” based entirely on appearance and rumor, they demonstrate their own ignorance of her true origins in the humble predecessor they now renounce. Indeed, their only knowledge of the girl comes from the rumors they have heard about her, and these rumors have been commissioned by Walter himself in order to afford his new “bride” an aura of great dignity and station, as evidenced when he asks his sister’s husband:

To bryngen hoom agayn his children two

In honorable estaat al openly.

But o thing he hym preyede outrely,

That he to no wight, though men wolde enquire,

Sholde nat telle whos children that they were . . . (*Clerk* IV.766-70)

Walter’s promotion of an adulatory view of his new bride, paired with his simultaneous refusal to name the true parentage of the girl, is reminiscent of Chaucer’s own authorial practice of praising his literary sources while refusing to name his direct sources or even offering false sources. Examples of Chaucer’s use of this practice have been previously discussed by critics such as Schwebel, who mentions “Chaucer’s history of repeatedly refusing to credit Boccaccio with anything,” and Yiavis, who refers to the example of “the notorious Lollius, Chaucer’s fictitious authority for his ‘*Trojan Matter*’” (“Redressing Griselda” 274; Yiavis 20). Through the crowd’s unquestioning acceptance and praise of the daughter as a girl presumed to be of exceptional origin, Chaucer demonstrates the usefulness of this tactic in the tale by having Walter effectively conceal

his new bride's original source, Griselda, and, by extension, her original "author," Janicula.

In this tale, however, the truth does not lie hidden forever. After proving beyond a doubt Griselda's true worth, Walter reveals the real origin of the children and reinstates Griselda to her position as his wife. Just as Janicula, through his "text," is eventually revealed in the tale as the original source of the new "text," so too did Chaucer most likely expect his true sources to eventually be known, for as Schwebel claims, Chaucer seems to have been preoccupied, at least somewhat, with how he would "be perceived by posterity in relation to a larger literary tradition" ("Redressing Griselda" 287). By positioning himself within this literary tradition, Chaucer both pays his respects to his literary predecessors by further memorializing their works and gives his own literary works greater credibility and a greater potential for longevity by staking a claim in an established literary lineage. Chaucer demonstrates this power of literary lineage at the conclusion of the *Clerk's Tale* by placing all of the characters in their "rightful" places. Griselda, as the original wife / text, is reinstated as Walter's wife, redressed according to the dignity of her station, and "honored as hire oghte" (*Clerk* IV.1120). Additionally, in a tale in which lineage is so prominent, it can hardly be doubted that the value of Griselda's children, once revealed, would give her all the more glory for having begotten such worthy offspring. At the same time, her daughter is revealed to be the child of a woman who has proven her "feith and . . . benyngnytee, / As wel as evere womman was, assayed, / In greet estat and povreliche arrayed" (*Clerk* IV.1053-55). Whereas earlier in the tale Walter claims that he must get rid of his daughter because of Griselda's low status, now that Griselda has proven her worth and is again in a position of honor, her daughter

shares in her mother's acclaim just as before she was forced to share in her mother's supposed shame.

By comparing Griselda to her unidentified daughter, the crowds draw a direct connection between the two women that establishes a new convention of usurpation; one woman, or text, is considered fit to replace another solely based on the merit of the new woman or text. Based on the crowd's assertions, it is justifiable to conjecture that, should the process of the tale be repeated, the daughter's daughter, if sufficiently "fairer" than the original daughter, would again be accepted by the people as an appropriate usurper of the role as Walter's wife. However, though his subjects are ignorant of his new bride's origins, Walter knows her parentage, and as such, to actually take her for his wife would be a conscious act of incest. Therefore, despite the crowd's assertions that the daughter is better than Griselda, it would be inherently wrong, on a biological level if nothing else, for Walter to marry her. In the end, rather than usurp her mother's role, the daughter is returned to her proper station, while Griselda is allowed to maintain her position of honor. The concern at hand can be described as the worry that a new and "improved" translation of a text has the power to usurp the role of the original text, especially when the texts' audiences are ignorant of the inherent connection between the two. Ultimately, however, it is not proper for a new text to entirely displace its literary predecessor. Just as the bloodline of the original author is traceable in each new translation of a text, thus affording the original author a measure of honor and the promise of immortality, as previously discussed, so too does the original text deserve to be recognized and honored for its merit and immortalized in its position within the literary tradition. Just as Griselda

and her daughter each come to be honored alongside the other, so too should a text within a literary lineage come to be honored alongside the texts that precede it in the lineage.

Having looked at most of the family's roles in the proposed allegory, I turn now to Griselda herself, the locus of the translation allegory. Although a literary lineage is actively carried on by literary "heirs" becoming translators themselves, the role of the original text and each of its translations is not to be discounted. In the tale, there is a significant focus on the role, and truly the necessity, of the body of the text in the process of producing offspring, a point even Walter recognizes and accepts. For example, when Walter reveals the children's identities, he specifically claims the son as his own heir, as previously discussed, but he also adds, "'Thou bare hym in thy body trewely,'" an addition specific to Chaucer's translation of the tale (*Clerk* IV.1068). This alteration emphasizes that the son, the very heir to Walter's heritage, has "trewely" been nurtured within, and produced from, Griselda's body; there is no doubt that she has been fundamental in producing Walter's heir. Working within the context of the proposed allegorical reading in which Griselda's body is representative of the text, the necessary implication of this statement is that the son, who is the heir to Walter's literary lineage as a translator, is the progeny not only of the male translator he succeeds but also of the feminine text his predecessor has translated. In other words, each new translator in a literary lineage is formed and fashioned by both his literary predecessors and by the texts they have produced. When we apply this to authors in general, all authors in a literary lineage, including Chaucer, are therefore the product of the union between a text and its translator, for the two are conclusively entwined within the literary tradition. An author

cannot claim to follow in the line of a literary predecessor without simultaneously admitting the influence of the predecessor's text upon his own.

In addition, there is some discussion among scholars concerning the value of Griselda in relation to her translation.¹⁷ Though some scholars argue that Griselda's translation is strictly confined to her change of clothes, while the essence and value of her body remain unchanged,¹⁸ I suggest that when considering the allegory from the perspective of lineage and Griselda's familial role, one instance in the tale counters this argument. Carolyn Dinshaw recognizes that Griselda's true value is to be found in her body and is "not in the least tied to or dependent on her clothing" (142). However, Griselda's translation, though clearly tied to and represented by her change of clothes, is not entirely encompassed by her vestments but also affects her body. When Griselda is informed that she is to be "translated" back into her rude vestments and must return to her father's house with only what she brought to the palace, she reminds Walter of the one thing she brought that she cannot take back with her: her "maydenhede," which she "broghte, and noght agayn [she] bere" (*Clerk* IV.883-84). Griselda uses the loss of her virginity as a bargaining chip for a single smock, yet this smock, however plain, was given to her by Walter and is, therefore, a visible trace of her translation that will indeed go forth with her. However, while the smock visually represents the irrevocable nature of translation, it is primarily what she hides beneath the garment, "thilke wombe in which [Walter's] children leye," that is what has been truly changed about Griselda through her "translation" (*Clerk* IV.877).

¹⁷ For examples, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), 132-155; and Leah Schwebel, "Redressing Griselda: Restoration Through Translation In The Clerk's Tale," *The Chaucer Review* 47.3 (2013): 274-299.

¹⁸ See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), 132-155.

By the loss of her virginity and the fact that she has conceived and given birth to two children, Griselda's body will not, and cannot, ever be the same as it was before her marriage. That is not to say that her value has in any way been detracted from by her pregnancies, but rather that she has in fact been enhanced in significance, for though her body was always of value, without Walter, her translator, her significance would have died with her in her father's house. It is by the production of offspring that Griselda, like Walter, will live on through her children. Allegorically, then, it can be inferred that though a text may have value on its own, it is through the creation of literary offspring that a text becomes immortalized alongside its author. Furthermore, Griselda's acknowledgement that her body has been forever changed demonstrates the irreversible effects of translation upon a text. Regardless of her clothes, Griselda's body has in fact taken on a greater significance as the mother of her children, whether they are dead or alive, and even a papal bull cannot reverse this. In the same way, despite how many times a text may be translated back and forth between languages and authors, the effects of translation, and thereby literary lineage, cannot be revoked. The history of this tale demonstrates as much, for after being "married" by Petrarch and "bearing" Chaucer as a literary heir, Boccaccio's Griselda story can never again be solely his.

Whereas many scholars have based their analyses of the Griselda story by focusing almost entirely on Griselda, Walter, and even Janicula, I argue that the entire family, including the children and the family system as a self-perpetuating unit, are invaluable in understanding the dynamics of literary tradition. The way in which lineage is represented in the tale from a biological standpoint lends itself to an allegorical reading of literary lineage, the basis of a literary tradition. Though many of these allegorical

elements are ingrained in the essence of the tale, Petrarch's and Chaucer's specific translations demonstrate an awareness of the tale's allegorical potential, and because each exploits this potential for his own purposes, we as readers can come to a fuller understanding of the individual authors and their conceptions of literary tradition by looking for traces of these elements, and the ways in which each has manipulated them, in their works.

III. CHILDLESS FATHERS: THE UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL FOR LITERARY OFFSPRING IN CHAUCER'S *MERCHANT'S TALE* AND *PARDONER'S PROLOGUE AND TALE*

Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* and *Pardoner's Tale* are overtly conspicuous in their negation of procreative potential. The plotline in the *Merchant's Tale* is motivated, at least in part, by January's purported desire for children, specifically in their role as heirs to his lineage, yet the tale ends with the distinct absence of any offspring, highlighted by January's stroking of May's presumably empty womb at the conclusion of the tale (*Merchant* 2414). The *Pardoner's Tale* does not directly engage with the subject of procreation, yet the glaring absence of women, the inversion of motherhood, and the presentation of meaningless death as the culmination of life all point to an underlying repudiation of marriage and procreation. Additionally, the Pardoner's very characterization as a person of ambiguous sexuality implicitly raises the question of the Pardoner's (in)ability – or (un)willingness – to marry or procreate. To understand the implications of this biological barrenness, I will turn to Carolyn Dinshaw and Stephen Kruger, both of whom examine texts and literary activity as being allegorically represented by the human body, gender, and sexuality.¹⁹ Kruger focuses on the Pardoner's ability – or inability – to generate spiritual meaning from the literal letter of the text. Dinshaw argues that, in Chaucer's poetry, literary translation is a masculine act performed on the feminine body of the text.²⁰ Building on these analyses, I will extend the metaphor of females as literary texts acted upon by their male translators to include

¹⁹ See Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. Also see: Kruger, Steven F. "Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*." *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Thomas C. Stillinger, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 150-172.

²⁰ See Dinshaw (133).

the unexplored allegorical implications of biological offspring as textual translations and literary heirs. In doing so, I suggest that the production of offspring in Chaucer's poetry may be allegorically understood as the perpetuation of a literary lineage. As such, January's and the Pardoner's lack of procreation can be read as not only a biological, but also a textual, terminus, for neither is successful in producing an heir of either sort. By examining the subjects of marriage and lineage in these tales, along with their unfulfilled potential for offspring, and by comparing each to the *Clerk's Tale*, I uncover an allegorical explanation for why Walter is successful in perpetuating a lineage but January and the Pardoner are not.

1. The *Merchant's Tale*

As previously noted, Dinshaw builds upon the historical tradition of viewing literary activity as masculine and literary texts as feminine. She insists that in Chaucer's literary works, "literary representation is understood in terms of the body – the body as it enters into social interactions, as it functions in social organization, as it is assigned gender value in the transactions that constitute social structure" (15). Dinshaw, therefore, focuses largely on examining the allegorical body of the woman/text itself, including the ways the "text" is figured as feminine, dressed and undressed, passed among male translators, and either allowed or denied subjectivity.²¹ I will add to Dinshaw's discussion by considering this allegory in a specifically genealogical light, in which a successful translator is one who not only translates his text but also inserts himself into a literary lineage, produces literary heirs, and embodies an understanding of the workings of literary tradition.

²¹ See Dinshaw, especially pages 3-27.

Although Dinshaw does not specifically address the *Merchant's Tale* in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, her argument on the allegorical significance of gendered literary activity can be used to shed new light on this tale, especially when comparing it to the *Clerk's Tale*, which Dinshaw does discuss.²² Unlike January and the Pardoner, Walter successfully translates his "text," Griselda, and perpetuates his biological, as well as literary, lineage.²³ In order to determine an allegorical explanation for why January and the Pardoner are unsuccessful at propagating a (literary) lineage, I will compare each potential translator to Walter and examine the similarities and differences to be found in their treatment of the subjects of marriage, women (i.e. texts), and lineage. Using Dinshaw's theory on feminine texts/masculine translators as the foundation of this chapter, I will explore the possibility that the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Prologue* and *Tale* offer examples of the course of procreation, both biological and literary, gone awry.

It is only fitting that the *Merchant's Tale*, which is told immediately after, and as a direct reaction to, the *Clerk's Tale*,²⁴ should engage similar questions of lineage and

²² See Dinshaw Chapter 5.

²³ In Chapter One, I read the *Clerk's Tale* as illustrating a sort of "proper order" of biological and literary genealogy. Walter successfully proves his wife's obedience to him and perpetuates his biological lineage. Within the man-as-author/woman-as-text allegory, Walter thus succeeds as a translator of his "text," Griselda, by proving his text's obedience and perpetuating his literary lineage through their offspring.

²⁴ There are a number of manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* that diverge on the order of the tales. Of the two most widely accepted and most authoritative manuscripts of the *Tales*, only the Ellesmere manuscript places the *Merchant's Tale* directly after the *Clerk's Tale*. The Hengwrt manuscript places the *Clerk's Tale* after the *Merchant's Tale*, the *Franklin's Tale*, and then the *Second Nun's Tale*. For the sake of argument, I will assume that the order of the Ellesmere manuscript is authoritative and represents Chaucer's intended tale order. While there is debate among scholars as to the appropriate order of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Merchant's Prologue* reiterates the Clerk's envoy's own wording, which suggests that even if the two tales do not follow in the same order as represented in the Ellesmere manuscript, they are nevertheless "quitting," or responding, to one another. Additionally, the structure and theme of these two tales mirror each other, so even if they were not intended to fall side by side in the overall *Canterbury Tales*, these tales nonetheless respond to one another by offering alternative outcomes to the same basic storyline. For examples of the debate on the order of the *Canterbury Tales*, see: Cohen, Edward S. "The Sequence of the 'Canterbury Tales.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1974, pp. 190–195. *JSTOR*,

translation. In fact, the *Merchant's Prologue* picks up right where the *Envoy* to the *Clerk's Tale* leaves off: right after the *Envoy* encourages women to let their husbands “wepe, and wrynge, and waille,” the Merchant asserts that “[w]epynge and waylynge” are something he knows well enough, especially in regard to marriage (*Clerk* 1211-12; *Merchant* 1213-14). Both tales center on a rich man who marries a poor woman, attempts to exercise absolute control over her, and declares offspring as one of the primary outcomes of the marriage. Thus, just as Walter is Griselda’s “translator,” so too can January be read as the author or translator of May, the “text” he marries. Yet, despite its similar setup, the outcome of this tale is quite different from that of the *Clerk's Tale*. Unlike Walter, January fails to propagate his genetic line and--in a tale concerned with authorial as well as biological proliferation--literary lineage.

Much of the scholarly criticism on the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Merchant's Tale* has focused on Walter’s and January’s functions as (notoriously bad) husbands and even, in Walter’s case, as a failed God-figure. Barrie Ruth Straus claims that Walter “reveals that the nature of social fatherhood consists in the prerogative of the father to use and abuse women and children, treating both as his property, with which he can do anything he likes,” and Cathy Hume notes that “Walter’s demands on Griselda’s obedience . . . are portrayed in such a way as to make them especially sinister and chilling” (Straus 129; Hume 49). Robert J. Kloss argues that January’s behavior in marriage is “repulsive and ridiculous” because it is “based upon an infantile . . . conception of what woman is meant

www.jstor.org/stable/25093302; Horobin, Simon. “Additional 35286 and the Order of the ‘Canterbury Tales.’” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1997, pp. 272–278. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25095979; Spencer, Matthew, et al. “Analyzing the Order of Items in Manuscripts of ‘The Canterbury Tales.’” *Computers and the Humanities*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2003, pp. 97–109. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30204882; Wilson, James H. “The Pardoner and the Second Nun: A Defense of the Bradshaw Order.” *Neophilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin De La Societe Neophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society*, vol. 74, 1973, pp. 292-296, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43342825.

to do and to be . . . an exclusive source of instant, total gratification of all physical and emotional needs” (66). Analyzing the Merchant’s semantic choice of “a wedded man” in referring to January rather than the term “housbonde,” with its associated connotations of serving a wife, Natalie Hanna argues that January believes “that his wife should serve him with little concern for his role in the partnership. Januarie does not express any interest in being a “housbonde” but only to be wedded” (69). Yet perhaps Chaucer intended these tales to be read not only literally or as spiritual allegory but rather as allegorical representations of author-text interactions. If we think of Walter and January as translators first and as husbands second, their differing levels of success in propagating a lineage can be explained by the way each treats his allegorical “text” and his own place within a literary lineage. By reading these men as either successes or failures in terms of their progeny (or lack thereof) rather than in terms of their treatment of their literal wives, I provide a reading of both tales as an allegory of textual production between author (man) and text (woman).

Scholars have long identified the role biological genealogy plays in the *Merchant’s Tale*. Alcuin Blamires, for example, argues that the “vocabulary of tree trunk or stem (*stok*), of branching, and fruition, had been entrenched in cultural perception of genealogy” and thus that the pear tree episode is meant to illustrate the defiling of January’s genealogical family tree (111; 114-15). Carol Heffernan, on the other hand, explores the possibility of irony in the fact that May’s infidelity occurs in a pear tree, because “among the substances traditionally used by early doctors to prevent conception was the pear” (31-32). Additionally, in his discussion on the effects of enforcing enclosures in the tale, John Zedolik points out that “if May is pregnant by Damyan,

control of the old man's estate will pass to the young adulterers' progeny, thus eliminating January's control of his future through his own biological child – who might never in fact exist – if May and Damyan continue copulating" (503). These arguments offer a sampling of critics' debates on the subject of genealogy in the tale and suggest that genealogy is a recognizable theme of the tale in some form or another.

While these critics have explored the question of biological progeny, or lack thereof, in the tale, I suggest that for Chaucer, genealogy and "fruit" have a textual import as well. One way Chaucer appears to allude to the connection between biological and literary offspring is through his use of the term "laurer," or laurel, in the *Merchant's Tale*. The first mention of the laurel tree is found when January defends his procreative abilities to his friends as he says, "Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene / As laurer thurgh the yeer" (*Merchant* 1465-66). Richard Neuse argues that "January's curious, wavering conception of himself as blossoming tree and evergreen laurel invokes the seasonal theme . . . and reinforces the idea that for him marriage represents a refuge from time, old age, and death" (118). This interpretation of January's use of botanical metaphors is no doubt of value to an overall interpretation of the text. Yet while January is in one sense referring to the botanical properties of this plant as an evergreen, the specific use of the laurel tree as opposed to any other evergreen carries the additional symbolic weight of the laurel's use as the emblematic crown of the poet laureate. In fact, a closer analysis of the laurel's symbolic significance in literature provides a crucial perspective on Chaucer's use of this symbol in the present tale. In *Paradiso*, Dante writes, "O good Apollo, for this last labor make me / such a vessel of your power as you require to / bestow the beloved laurel" and, shortly after, "O divine power, if you lend so much of yourself to / me that I

may make manifest the shadow of the blessed / kingdom that is stamped within my head,
 / you will see me come to the foot of your beloved / tree, and crown myself with the
 leaves of which the / subject and you will make me worthy” (Dante I.13-15; I.22-27).
 Dante thus announces that upon finishing his poem, he will take the liberty of claiming
 the crown of the laurel for himself as a sign of his poetic success. In *The House of Fame*,
 Chaucer makes use of Dante’s formula when he writes, “And yif, devyne vertu, thou /
 Wille helpe me to shewe now / That in myn hed ymarked ys – / Loo, that is for to menen
 this, / The Hous of Fame for to descryve – / Thou shalt se me go as blyve / Unto the nexte
 laure y see, / And kysse yt, for hyt is thy tree” (*House of Fame* III.1101-1108). Just as
 Dante calls upon divine authority to aid him in describing the glories of the Kingdom of
 Heaven as best as he can so that he may claim the crown of the laurel, so too does
 Chaucer seek divine aid in completing his work so that he may at the very least be found
 worthy to kiss the laurel tree. Chaucer, however, substitutes the subject of Heaven, the
 soul’s eternal dwelling place, with the House of Fame, a place where fame is the measure
 of eternity. This substitution in Dante’s formula suggests that Chaucer views fame with
 the same reverence Dante has for Heaven, thus replacing the Christian spiritual ideal of
 eternity with a more secular ideal of immortality, and for Chaucer, this immortality is
 gained through literary success.²⁵ As I suggest, Chaucer uses the laurel as a metaphor for
 January’s virility in this tale, drawing a direct correlation between biological procreativity
 and literary success.

²⁵ For further discussion on Chaucer’s understanding of literary fame as a form of immortality, see
 Spearing pages 2 and 8. Spearing discusses the attitude toward poetic vocation and achievement in
 Renaissance Italy, as detailed by Petrarch’s oration after his laureation: “the highest aspiration for a man of
 letters must be to make himself worthy of glory and thus to gain immortality for his name . . . The poet
 was, potentially, an inspired prophet, and his work brought undying fame, a secular immortality, to himself
 and to his subject-matter” (2). On page 8, Spearing discusses the influence this Italian Renaissance thinking
 toward the vocation of poet had on Chaucer and his works.

But Chaucer's botanical symbolism does not end with his invocation of the laurel tree. He also draws a symbolic connection between the two things most near and dear to January's heart: his wife and his garden. The Merchant claims that "[s]o fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon" and that even Priapus, the god of gardens, could not tell the beauty of January's garden (*Merchant* 2030). Nor is this the first instance in this tale of hyperbolic language of a splendor beyond telling. Earlier in the tale, at the wedding feast, the Merchant describes May's appearance by saying, "Queene Ester looked nevere with swich an ye / On Assuer, so meke a look hath she. / I may yow nat devyse al hir beautee" (*Merchant* 1744-46). The similarity between the descriptions of a beauty beyond words, and beyond even the reach of the supposed "authorities" on each subject, draws a connection between May and the garden. Furthermore, May and the garden are the two things January is most desperate to keep all to himself, and they are also the two things Damyan violates despite January's claim to exclusivity. In light of the symbolic comparison between May and the garden, some of the other instances of garden imagery in the work become quite telling in regards to January's true view of biological genealogy and, in turn, Chaucer's view of literary genealogy. Perhaps foremost among these instances is January's comment that "whan a man is oold and hoor; / Thanne is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor" (*Merchant* 1269-70). If the garden is indeed symbolic of May, then it would stand to reason, and fit nicely with January's purported hopes for offspring, that in addition to providing him pleasure, May should be expected to bear children or, in metaphorical terms, fruit. Yet January considers May herself, rather than any possible future offspring, to be his "fruit." As Paul A. Olson claims, "January's love of May . . . is the love of possession not as one among many goods but as the highest good" (208). In

allegorical terms, then, January is like an author who considers his text to be both the means and the end to fame, the eternity of the literary soul. He has, at this point in the tale, become so focused on his personal pleasure with his “text” that he has seemingly forgotten his aspirations toward literary fatherhood.

In the beginning of the tale, when January calls together a group of counselors to discuss his plan to marry, he makes clear that he is thinking about his own future and the future of his legacy, both of which he hopes to aid through the production of an heir. He begins his speech by saying, “‘Freendes, I am hoor and oold, / And almost, God woot, on my pittes brynke; / Upon my soule somewhat moste I thynke’” (*Merchant* 1400-02). In this moment, January claims his reasoning toward marriage is based on his recognition of his impending demise and his concerns about the eternal state of his soul. This sense of “eternity,” from an allegorical perspective, can be equated with a poet’s sense of posterity,²⁶ as revealed by January’s association with the laurel tree as discussed above. I suggest that Chaucer chooses to leave January’s marriage childless and unsuccessful while both Walter’s marriage and his lineage thrive, despite the fact that both men are rather unsavory husbands, as a way of illustrating just what it means to be successful translator: Walter carefully inserts himself into his literary lineage, establishes his authority over his text, and allows both his text and his readers (i.e. his subjects) to do his talking for him when it comes to praise. In all of these areas, January fails as a translator.

So why exactly does Chaucer create such differing outcomes of these two marriages? We must look first to each man’s justification for marriage for the answer to this question. Initially, the Clerk considers Walter’s greatest fault to be “that he considered nought / In tyme comynge what myghte hym bityde, / But on his lust present

²⁶ See Spearing, especially pages 2 and 8.

was al his thought, / As for to hauke and hunte on every syde. / Wel ny alle othere cures leet he slyde, / And eek he nolde – and that as worst of alle – / Wedde no wyf, for noght that may bifalle” (*Clerk* 78-84). Yet Walter is so beloved by his subjects that they coerce him into taking a wife for the sake of the continuation of his lineage. Although Walter is not pleased with the prospect of marriage, he is nonetheless willing to sacrifice his personal “liberte” in order to appease his subjects with the propagation of his lineage (*Clerk* 145). This, of course, is their primary rationale behind asking him to marry:

“Delivere us out of al this bisy drede, / And taak a wyf, for hye Goddes sake! / For if it so bifelle, as God forbede, / That thurgh youre deeth youre lyne sholde slake, / And that a staunge successour sholde take / Your heritage, O wo were us alyve! / Wherefore we pray you hastily to wyve” (*Clerk* 134-140). When Walter chooses Griselda, moreover, he does so “noght with wantown looking of folye” but rather with commendation for her “wommanhede” and her “vertu” (*Clerk* 236; 239; 240). By choosing a wife based on womanliness and virtue rather than beauty or age, Walter reveals that his choice of wife is not based on the purpose of mere sexual pleasure, but rather to some other end.

While at first January also claims the production of offspring as one of his primary purposes for marriage, the purity of this intent is somewhat muddled by his obvious desire to obtain sexual and domestic pleasures from his marriage as well as offspring. It is clear that, within January’s mindset, marriage is meant to provide earthly bliss and pleasure, for he proclaims that “wedlok is so esy and so clene, / That in this world it is a paradys” (*Merchant* 1264-65). Joseph Mogan observes that January’s sexual lust is his “controlling motive for seeking a wife,” a point he makes by virtue of January’s own proclamation that, were he not sexually pleased by his wife, he would be

forced to commit adultery. Furthermore, whereas Walter chooses a wife from low degree who excels in virtue, January justifies his choice of a woman of “smal degree” by claiming that she has sufficient “yowthe” and “beautee” (*Merchant* 1625; 1626). With this choice, he reveals his own selfish, and more importantly, transient, desires in marriage: he craves pleasure in the here and now rather than being satisfied with the eternal benefits of propagating a lineage. In fact, while January mentions his desire for offspring several times in the tale, these remarks are confined almost entirely to the beginning of the story. After January’s wedding to May, he ceases speaking of children and focuses on the aspects of pleasure, fidelity, and control in his marriage.

From a literal standpoint, January’s desire for immediate pleasure and his lack of focus on the production of offspring do not reasonably explain his failure to produce offspring. If we consider propagation as textual as well as biological, however, this failure makes sense along different lines. Chaucer himself wrote with posterity in mind, as seen in his efforts to insert himself into literary lineages and in his subtle invitations to future authors to follow in his literary footsteps and thus solidify his place in literary tradition.²⁷ Though surely not denying any of the immediate benefits of authorship, it can be conjectured, albeit cautiously, that Chaucer was more closely focused on the long-lasting fame to be gained through his literary works. If this is the case, then by considering the tale as an allegory of textual production, January’s failure at fatherhood can be more easily understood. If January were to be a successful father/author figure, such as Chaucer may have pictured himself, then his focus would be on the propagation of his lineage, regardless of the daily pleasures or trials to be found in his marriage/literary work. January’s problem is not that he obtains pleasure from his

²⁷ See Schwebel “Literary Patricide,” especially page 160.

marriage but rather that base pleasure has become the goal of his marriage. In the same way, it is not wrong for an author to reap daily rewards for his work, but to make these daily rewards the ultimate goal of literary work undercuts Chaucer's efforts at achieving lasting fame through his works. The fact that January remains childless for the duration of the tale may reveal Chaucer's unwillingness to attribute a successful lineage to one who does not truly care about the lasting fame a lineage provides.

January attempts to disguise his narcissism by arguing that men should take a wife "[b]y cause of levelful procreacioun / Of children to th'onour of God above" (*Merchant* 1448-49). He claims that his desire to be married stems from a desire to honor God by producing children. However, he quickly reveals the self-centered motives behind his so-called religious devotion: he makes clear that his sudden inclinations toward marriage are for the sake of his own soul, for he has recognized in his old age that he is running out of time to save himself. Additionally, the fact that he worries about his soul making it to Heaven because marriage would be "hevene in erthe" undercuts his reasoning that the production of children for the honor of God is a worthy enough cause for marriage (*Merchant* 1647). By the expression of this worry, January reveals that his purposes for marriage are indeed selfish, for if procreation for the honor of God was his real reason for marriage, then the fulfillment of this goal alone would be for him a satisfactory end. Rather, he is focused on how his marriage will best serve him in every way, and it is this narcissistic focus on the self as an individual that is one of January's downfalls in his role as a husband and in his allegorical role as an author. As discussed in Chapter One, to achieve lasting fame, an author must always put the lineage, rather than

himself, first. January, unlike Walter, fails in this regard and is accordingly denied the continuation of his lineage.

Aside from the men's underlying reasons for marriage, the differences between Walter's and January's actual decisions to marry have important implications. Walter is so highly praised by his subjects that he is ultimately coerced into marrying for the sake of maintaining his bloodline for their benefit. January, on the other hand, exalts himself and declares his own need for an heir. When considering these two characters in light of Chaucer's own claims to fame, it appears that the poet aligns himself more with Walter than January, for Chaucer clearly understood the power of letting others speak on his behalf, even if these "others" were his own characters. For example, in the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale*, the Man of Law refers to the supposed scope of Chaucer's literary work when he says, "I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn / That Chaucer . . . / Hath seyde hem in swich Englissh as he kan of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man . . . / For he hath toold of loveris up and down / Mo than Ovide made of mencion / In his Epistoles, that been ful olde. / What sholde I tellen hem, syn they been tolde?" (*Man of Law* 46-56). Though Chaucer is of course the ultimate author of these words, the fact that they are casually thrown out by a character, instead of by Chaucer directly, gives them the appearance of authenticity rather than narcissism. Furthermore, in what may very well be an attempt to downplay any appearances of self-exaltation, the pilgrim Chaucer is not only mocked for his physical appearance and shyness and admits that he only has one tale to tell, but he is furthermore degraded as a poet when the Host interrupts his *Tale of Sir Thopas* on the basis that it "is nat worth a toord" (*Thopas* 930). Chaucer thus crafts an image of himself as one who humbly downplays his own literary abilities while

simultaneously demonstrating that it is the praise of others that validates him as an author worthy of fame. When analyzing Walter and January in this light, it becomes clear that Walter is allowed a successful marriage in part because it has been demanded of him by his subjects; that is, he is exalted by others. As for January, Chaucer offers his fruitless marriage to May as a caution to those poets and translators who would prefer to openly and blatantly exalt themselves.

Beyond the characters' motivations for marriage, January differs from Walter in his treatment of his wife. Both men desperately crave a wife who will be perfectly obedient and conform to her husband's will, but they go about the matter in different ways. First, Walter secures Griselda's oath of obedience as a condition for their marriage rather than as an implied mandatory consequence of it. Before proclaiming Griselda to his subjects as his chosen bride, Walter lays out his conditions for marriage:

“I seye this: be ye redy with good herte

To al my lust, and that I frely may,

As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,

And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?

And eek whan I sey ‘ye,’ ne sey nat ‘nay,’

Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?

Swere this, and heere I swere oure alliance.” (*Clerk* 351-57)

Only once Griselda agrees to these terms in full does Walter proclaim that they shall be married. Later on, he chooses to enact a test upon his wife's obedience, and in doing so, he allows her to prove herself as she may for better or worse through both her words and her actions. Griselda's responses to these tests have produced a wide array of arguments

on her character. Various critics have analyzed Griselda through the lens of what they consider to be her silence in the face of Walter's cruel testing and have considered multiple explanations for her seemingly excessive level of assent to Walter's will. Gail Ashton suggests that Griselda's patience and silence "provides an opportunity for the secret nurturing of a hidden masked self . . . [and that] [t]he womanly ideal embodied in Griselda's virtue enables her to undermine masculine power represented by her husband Walter" (232-33). Elaine Tuttle Hansen also considers Griselda's silence to be a form of subversive power.²⁸ Linda Georgianna argues that Griselda's assent is of a numinous nature – that is, it "lies beyond the rational" in that it is determined by "the imponderable gap between divine and human, inspiring feelings of awe, dread, and absolute dependency" on the god-figure of Walter (805).²⁹ Still others attribute Griselda's assent to her subordinate position within her feudal relationship with Walter.³⁰

I suggest, however, that Griselda is in fact allowed a voice, though perhaps not the voice of subversive feminine power and subjectivity hoped for by many critics. Indeed, each of Walter's tests is met not with his wife's silence but rather with her ready acquiescence. She chooses to vocally affirm and reaffirm Walter's decisions every step of the way. Many critics, such as those listed above, consider Griselda's external vocal conformity to be, in effect, a silencing of her inner will. Yet, in terms of the present allegorical argument, Griselda's personal dispositions do not actually matter, for she always acts and appears in accordance with her spoken words. What does matter is the

²⁸ Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. "The Powers of Silence: The Case of the Clerk's Griselda." *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Thomas C. Stillinger, G.K. Hall, 1988, pp. 133-149.

²⁹ Georgianna is partly paraphrasing: Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Nonrational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. 1917. Trans. Jown W. Harvey. 2nd ed. London, 1950.

³⁰ For examples, see Georgianna 798; Morse 73; and McCall 262-63.

image Walter manages to craft of Griselda; even though he may be pulling all the strings, what is important is that Griselda appears, at least on the surface, to act and speak of her own volition and thus prove her own worth, as a text should do. After all, from the outset of their marriage, Walter makes it clear that he is concerned not with Griselda's inner feelings but with her outward appearance of obedience and conformity. As part of his conditions for marriage, she is "nevere . . . to grucche" his lusts, whatever they may be, and when he says "'ye,'" she is never to say "'nay, . . . / Neither by word ne frownyng contenance'" (*Clerk* 354; 355-56). Walter demands that Griselda promise to *appear*, in word and in action, to conform to his will, and his tests, while cruel and sadistic from a literal standpoint, are centered on this promise of maintaining appearances (For example, after their daughter is taken away, Walter "gooth he ful faste ymaginyng / If by his wyves cheere he myghte se, / Or by hire word aperceyve, that she / Were chaunged; but he nevere hire koude fynde / But evere in oon ylike sad and kynde" [*Clerk* 598-602]). If Griselda can indeed be read as Walter's allegorical "text," then what really matters in terms of his success as a translator is the *appearance* that his text conforms to his will. Although it cannot be said that such testing makes Walter a good husband, he nonetheless allows Griselda to prove her own value. By doing so, Walter allows his "text" to speak for itself and, in turn, to confer honor back onto him. The great power of this is seen at the end of the *Clerk's Tale* when Griselda, after enduring years of relentless and cruel testing by her husband, has her children returned to her and says to Walter, "'Grauntmercy, lord, God thanke it yow . . . / That ye han saved me my children deere! / Now rekke I nevere to been deed right here; / Sith I stonde in youre love and in youre grace, / No fors of deeth, ne whan my spirit pace'" (*Clerk* 1088-92). Despite anything

Walter has done previously in the tale, Griselda is allowed a voice, and her final testimony is that her husband is a “benyngne fader” (*Clerk* 1097). Thus, even though the reader knows better than to think too highly of Walter, Griselda’s words still ring of praise for her husband as the tale tapers off with descriptions of the success of Walter’s lineage.

January, on the other hand, is determined to control his wife/text in every sense, regardless of her personal dispositions, even to the point of using physical force and restraining her at his side. In contrast to Walter, January does not ask for May’s obedience prior to marriage. Instead, he assumes her obedience and conformity to his will when he says, “But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye, / Right as men may warm wex with handes plye” (*Merchant* 1429-30). Holly A. Crocker alludes to this attitude of overbearing attempts at masculine dominance when she notes that every male character in the *Merchant’s Tale*, and the Merchant himself, “assumes that his version of feminine identity actually shapes female conduct” (181). By assuming and demanding, rather than requesting, May’s obedience, January attempts to impose an impossible level of control over her according to his will instead of allowing her to prove her own worth. As John Zedolik argues, January’s attempt to impose “unreasonable enclosures” on May might be precisely what prompts her to break away from him, and “despite remaining his wife, [she] very well might permanently live beyond his control” as a result (503). Having attempted to establish absolute control over his “text,” January ironically loses all control over her.

A further problem with January’s demands for obedience without consent is evidenced by May’s reactions to her husband. Unlike Griselda, May’s voice is stifled in

regards to her husband, as even the Merchant notes, “God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte” after her wedding night, and later on, when January demands sex, the Merchant claims he will not disclose “wheither hire thoughte it paradys or helle” (*Merchant* 1851; 1964). In the absence of May’s voice regarding her thoughts of her husband, the reader is left with only January’s own claims of worth, which the narrator casts as parodic to say the least: “‘Allas! O tendre creature, / Now wolde God ye myghte wel endure / Al my corage, it is so sharp and keene! / I am agast ye shul it nat susteene. / But God forbade that I dide al my myght!’” (*Merchant* 1757–61). As Tison Pugh suggests, although “[o]stensibly expressing concern for May, January’s words instead narcissistically trumpet his virility” (485). As the character best positioned to comment on January’s virility in bed, May’s lack of consensus with her husband’s inner boasts, as “[s]he preyseth nat his pleyying worth a bene,” along with the very image of “[t]he slake skyn aboute his nekke shak[ing]” as he croaks out a song the morning after their wedding night, suggests a strong irony in January’s claims to sexual virility (*Merchant* 1854; 1849). This irony reflects Pugh’s conclusion that “May’s silence during sex with her groom ironically accentuates the power of silence to speak” (487). Allegorically, the effect of January’s self-proclamation of sexual vigor and prowess would be the same as an author who wrote or translated a text and proceeded to acclaim himself despite the work’s failure to reflect any skill or merit on his part, for his “text” literally has no words.

Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that the first time May’s words are presented in the tale is after Damyan has written to her of his love and requested her favor upon him, for by doing so he has asked for, rather than demanded, her love in return. Presented with this chance to make her own choice, May’s voice is finally heard: “‘Certeyn,’ thoughte

she, ‘whom that this thing displease / I rekke noght, for heere I hym assure / To love hym best of any creature’” (*Merchant* 1982-84). Having made her decision, May writes Damyan a letter “[i]n which she graunteth hym hire verray grace,” thus giving him a level of consent she never grants to January (*Merchant* 1997). Later, May speaks out loud in the garden in response to January’s entreaty for obedience and fidelity. Vocally, May responds as a faithful wife, but her words are subverted by her actions – immediately after her speech, she signals her lover to climb the pear tree. By this point, it no longer matters how well January’s “text” may appear to praise him, for May has already vocalized her approval of an alternative suitor, and her actions illustrate that she has decided not to grant her husband the submission of her will that he craves.³¹

Additionally, the fact that January is not only cuckolded but also swayed by May’s explanation of the affair casts him into the position of one who is not fit to wield the level of power and control he so ardently attributes to himself in the beginning of the tale. As a result, January’s “text” confers no title of merit upon him and he loses his claim as the unattested father of any children May might bear, which, allegorically, would have been his claim to fame through a literary lineage. In fact, at the end of the tale, when January finally seems to recall his original desire for offspring, his stroking of May’s womb immediately after her intercourse with Damyan is ironic, for although he is still hopeful that she may provide him an heir, the reader is now aware that any children her womb may nurture might well be Damyan’s progeny. If so, Damyan’s cuckolding will have been two-fold, for he will have taken May’s fidelity to January and supplanted his own offspring as January’s heir.

³¹ For further discussion on the subject of May’s agency, see Parry 133-67.

Unlike Walter, who does not seem worried about sharing Griselda with anyone, January is obsessed with the idea that his wife may belong to another. In fact, after January has gone blind, this worry is explicitly stated by the Merchant as such:

. . . [January] wolde fayn

That som man bothe hire and hym had slayn.

For neither after his deeth nor in his lyf

Ne wolde he that she were love ne wyf,

But evere lyve as wydwe in clothes blake . . . (*Merchant* 2075-79)

January is determined that May, and possibly of greater value to him, her body, will always belong solely to him. Ironically, this obsession runs counter to the hope for both biological and literary offspring. If May were to become pregnant, any children she might bear would share in her body as they were nurtured within her womb. Thus, January would lose his claim as sole beneficiary of her body by having to share it with her children. May's children would also be created from the very physicality of her body and would therefore share her biology for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, in order to continue the success of the lineage, January's and May's children would need to go on to marry and produce offspring of their own, but in doing so, the essence and value of May's body that is inscribed within them would necessarily be shared and translated among even more people. The same is true for literary "bodies" and lineages. When a text produces "offspring," those offspring exhibit a share in the body of the text. For example, when Chaucer's Clerk tells his tale, he does not start from scratch but rather draws upon the body of text that is already present for the tale of Griselda. His use of the pre-existing body of the text is what denotes his participation in a literary lineage, and if

any future “offspring” are to result from Chaucer’s version of the tale, then they must follow from the body of the text he has provided. Therefore, if January truly desires sole claim to May and her body for the entire span of her life, then children would be an encumbrance to his wishes. Although this point is at odds with January’s proclaimed hope for children, it is important to remember that, as noted above, he ceases speaking of children from his wedding until the end of the tale. Quite the opposite, in the descriptions of his thoughts toward, and interactions with, May, January appears to care almost exclusively about taking his own pleasures with her and ensuring her fidelity. January’s obsessive need to keep his wife—his “text”—all to himself precludes any potential for literary heirs, as the production of literary “offspring” requires that an author be willing to relinquish absolute claim to the body of his text.

Another crucial difference between Walter and January is each man’s treatment of his “text’s” lineage prior to his own involvement in that lineage. In the *Clerk’s Tale*, Griselda’s father, Janicula, plays an important role in the tale as the origin of Griselda herself and, furthermore, as someone to be honored for such a role. Walter’s ultimate honoring of Janicula exemplifies the necessary recognition and honoring of literary predecessors within a literary lineage. Even while Walter hopes to improve upon Janicula’s “text” by translating Griselda from a life of poverty to a life of riches, he nonetheless recognizes Janicula’s role in the life of Griselda and thus in the propagation of his own lineage. Moreover, Walter is meticulous about ensuring that he has Janicula’s consent, at least in appearance, for his translation of Griselda in order to further emphasize his right to marry her.

January, on the other hand, works against any possible traces of his “text’s” participation in a lineage prior to his marriage. In fact, even January’s vehement determination to marry a young wife rather than a widow is indicative of his desperate need for absolute control and ownership over her. As Natalie Hanna points out, widows in medieval society had greater status and power than virgins due to the economic and social benefits gained from their late husbands, and because “Januarie is interested only in marrying a woman he can control . . . a widow with greater social rights or financial independence is not desirable” (64-65). While this point no doubt alludes to the actual social standards of the Middle Ages, interestingly the same principle can be applied to a literary “widow.” A text that has been previously “married,” or translated, would indeed carry certain connections to its previous translator, but regardless of any value these connections may hold, January refuses them in his “translation” of May. More importantly, neither January nor the Merchant directly mention May’s parentage at all other than to say that she comes from “smal degree” (*Merchant* 1625). Considering the similar framework of the two tales, the distinct absence of May’s lineage, and thus of January’s “literary” predecessors, becomes not only noticeable but prominent in a comparison of the tales. Walter is intentional in formally and publicly recognizing his “text’s” lineage and ensuring that there is no doubt that he has the blessing of his “text’s” original author to “translate” her. January, however, acts almost as though he has chosen his “text” from some nameless void, for he makes no direct mention of her parentage, much less ensures that her parents’ blessing upon their marriage is publicly recognized.

For his part, Walter capitalizes on Griselda’s lineage, using her poor father to his advantage by repeatedly pointing out how much he has done for her. When he

approaches Griselda about sacrificing their daughter, for example, he begins by saying, ““Griselde, this present dignitee, / In which that I have put yow, as I trowe, / Maketh yow nat foryetful for to be / That I yow took in povre estaat ful lowe, / For any wele ye moot youreselven knowe”” (*Clerk* 470-74). January, on the other hand, dismisses May’s lineage as unimportant. Unlike Walter, who uses his role in Griselda’s “translation” to a higher status as a reminder that she is indebted to him, January hopes to play purely on May’s affections when he says, ““For Goddes sake, thenk how I thee chees, / Noght for no coveitise, doutelees, / But oonly for the love I had to thee”” (*Merchant* 2165-67). The problem here for January is that May clearly does not feel the same love for him. Although January does bring up the inheritance of his estate soon afterward, May is already in the midst of a plan that will presumably allow her to have her lover and maintain an image of faithfulness to her blind husband.

Having compared Walter’s and January’s respective approaches to their wives’ (texts’) lineages, we can find similarities and differences between each man’s approach and Chaucer’s own practices concerning his literary lineages. While Chaucer did participate in a tradition of the erasure of his immediate sources, he made sure that his place within the lineage was recognizable and in doing so solidified the fame of his “erased” sources.³² I argue that Walter reiterates this practice. He, like Chaucer, focuses largely on the need to establish his authority beyond a doubt by keeping up appearances. Walter acknowledges Janicula’s authority over Griselda when he asks for the old man’s permission to marry Griselda. Then, once Griselda has been “translated,” her poor heritage is almost entirely effaced:

To every wight she woxen is so deere

³² See Schwebel “Literary Patricide”

And worshipful that folk ther she was bore,
And from hire birthe knewe hire yeer by yeere,
Unnethe trowed they – but dorste hand swore –
That to Janicle, of which I spak bifore,
She doghter were, for, as by conjecture,
Hem thought she was another creature. (*Clerk* 400-06).

Finally, after Griselda and their children are each reinstated within the family, Walter establishes a place of honor for Janicula, though, tellingly, Janicula is not called by name: “His *wyves fader* in his court he kepeth, / Til that the soule out of his body crepeth [emphasis added]” (*Clerk* 1133-34). Walter thus establishes his authority over his “text” by ensuring that he has the formal approval of his “text’s” lineage. Once his authority is established, the identity of his “text’s” source becomes somewhat obscured as merely his “wyves fader” rather than as a character in his own right. In this way, Janicula’s aged presence in Walter’s court signifies the indirect honoring of one’s literary sources, a practice in which Chaucer was well-versed.

January, on the other hand, is so obsessed with having sole claim to May that he seeks to craft the image that he is the original progenitor of the entire lineage by erasing any traces of May’s previous familial connections rather than attempting to insert himself into an established literary tradition. This total erasure of his sources disregards any power to be claimed from the lineage he enters and thus weakens his attempts to produce a lineage of his own precisely because he has eroded the hereditary foundation of his “text” by refusing to recognize it. Whereas Chaucer seems to invite future authors to continue the tradition of the erasure of immediate sources in a lineage, if future

translators were to follow in January's tradition then he would have inadvertently set up a precedent for his own removal from the lineage of any offspring he may produce.

The narrator of the *Clerk's Tale* and the narrator of the *Merchant's Tale* foreshadow Walter and January, respectively, with regard to their citation of sources. The Clerk makes sure his audience is fully aware to whom his tale is attributed, just as Walter makes it well-known that he accepts and honors Janicula as the "source" of Griselda. In contrast, the Host, having heard the Merchant tell of his own woes in marriage, requests, "'Syn ye knowen of that art / Ful hertely I pray yow telle us part'" (*Merchant* 1241-42). Although the Merchant claims he will not tell a tale of his marriage, he does agree to the Host's request and thus tells a tale apparently born of his knowledge on the sorrows of marriage in general. By the paralleling of behaviors between the narrators and their characters, this foreshadowing reinforces the allegorical connection between those who tell literary tales, the Clerk and the Merchant, and the men of the tales who marry and attempt to achieve fatherhood, whether successfully or not. The Merchant's proclivity to tell a tale attributed to his own experience and knowledge in direct reaction to the Clerk's translation of a tale with a known history represents a shift from an emphasis on lineage, both within and outside of the tale, to an emphasis on narcissistic pride. It is in effect January's modeling of his behavior on the Merchant's narcissism that contributes to his failure to propagate a lineage. Just as the Merchant chooses to tell a tale that fully adheres to his own views on marriage, so too does January desire to marry a woman on whom he can impose total control, the consequences of which are demonstrated by the many failures of his marriage.

By thus analyzing the *Merchant's Tale* as an allegory of textual production and literary lineage and by contrasting January's failures with Walter's successes, I argue that this tale takes on new meaning as an exemplum of the possible pitfalls of literary translation. Walter, unlike January, signifies a translator who is successful not only because he has translated ("married") a text, which any man could do, but because he has done so properly, in a way that allows his text to confer honor upon him. As a result, Chaucer attributes to Walter "proof" of his literary success by allowing him to engender a literary heir to carry on his legacy. On the other hand, through January's failed performance as a husband and his unfulfilled potential as a father, Chaucer may suggest that not all who attempt a poetic translation are fit to propagate a literary lineage and achieve lasting fame.

2. The *Pardoner's Tale*

The *Pardoner's Tale* likewise offers a sense of deviation from an acceptable course of perpetuating a biological or literary lineage, though in quite a different way from that of the *Merchant's Tale* or the *Clerk's Tale*. Whereas January uses the institution of marriage in an attempt to produce an heir, but fails as a progenitor, Chaucer's Pardoner does not seem to care at all for the continuation of his lineage, a point emphasized by the total lack of women in his tale. The Pardoner tells a tale that, in and of itself, does not seem to vex any of his fellow pilgrims. Nevertheless, the Pardoner himself provokes friction among them, and particularly with the Host at the conclusion of his tale. This friction is not the result of poor literary progeny but rather of the fracture between who the Pardoner is expected to be and who he actually is, from his physical

anatomy to the ways in which he carries out his religious duties. Many scholars have attempted to explain this friction. Steven Kruger, for example, strives to present a more fully developed “historical understanding of the late-medieval construction of male homosexuality and of homophobia” and how the effects of this construction are intertwined with views of literary activity in the Middle Ages (120). For A. Leigh DeNeef, this friction is the result of the other pilgrims’ “inability to separate the immorality of the man from the morality of his sermon” (86). Finally, Richard E Zeikowitz suggests that “the Pardoner’s altercation with the Host, Harry Bailey, reveals how queer power disarms heteronormativity” (55).

Kruger and Dinshaw in particular provide a foundation for reading the Pardoner as a sexually ambiguous character whose sexuality can be read both allegorically and literally.

Kruger notes that, in literature in the Middle Ages:

The barrenness of perverse sexuality, and particularly homosexual activity, is here affiliated with a linguistic barrenness, with the inability to produce the "fruyt" of meaning, and with an unproductive entrapment in the "chaff" of ungrammatical, nonsensical language. Like others (for instance, Jews and heretics) who are seen as unable properly to orchestrate meaning in texts – to move from the literal "chaff" to the spiritual "fruyt" – those practicing "sodomy" are strongly associated with the body rather than the spirit, and with bodies debased particularly by their conversion of the masculine to the feminine . . . (127-128).

Kruger here and elsewhere focuses on the allegorical “barrenness” of the Pardoner in terms of the medieval literary perspective that “perverse sexuality” is indicative of an

inability to produce spiritual meaning beyond the literal letter of the text. Kruger looks at the ways in which the Pardoner challenges the “dominant heterosexual paradigms” of medieval society, particularly in regard to literature and the production of meaning, and he determines that Chaucer may consider the Pardoner “threatening to the heterosexual model of writing and reading so central to medieval culture” (137; 138). But, at the same time, Kruger determines that the Pardoner nonetheless “reveals the artificiality, the unnatural and violent constructedness, of heterosexual paradigms” (138). Carolyn Dinshaw addresses the Pardoner in a similar way, by considering his sexuality as an implicit factor in his ability, or inability, to generate meaning through the text.³³ The Pardoner challenges the “patriarchal . . . [and] *heterosexual* hermeneutic” by which Dinshaw argues that the acts of writing/interpreting are masculine practices that occur on the surface of a feminine body.³⁴ Finally, Dinshaw suggests that the characterization of the Pardoner offers a possible glimpse of Chaucer’s attempt to move in a new direction in literary hermeneutics:

With [the Pardoner’s] unclassifiable body beyond gender as we know it in androcentric culture, he suggests the possibility of a poetics based not on such mediations as gender and language but, perhaps, on something unmediated” . . . “[and] [t]his is perhaps the direction in which Chaucer’s poetics finally turned, away from a poetics that engages with the fallible, mediate letter of human language and the gendered human body. (182; 183).

Though indebted to Kruger’s and Dinshaw’s arguments, my argument builds on their discussions by considering the allegorical implications of the Pardoner’s sexuality

³³ See Dinshaw Chapter 6.

³⁴ See Dinshaw Chapter 6.

on a different level – that is, the level of literary lineage as opposed to literary meaning. I propose that, for Chaucer, literary success is not determined solely by the ability to produce meaning in a text (though I do not entirely discount that as a factor of success). Literary success in Chaucer's works appears to be determined in large part by the ability of a translator to insert himself into a literary lineage and to further propagate that lineage by "marrying" a literary text and engendering literary heirs in order to ensure his own lasting fame. As such, not only the male author but also the feminine text and the "offspring" of that text – or lack thereof, in this case – must be considered. I will not attempt to definitively place the Pardoner as either heterosexual or homosexual; instead, I will seek to demonstrate that the very uncertainty of his sexuality problematizes any attempt at textual engendering. As I will argue, Chaucer seems to have emphasized a translator's need to maintain an *appearance* of literary authority and fruitfulness as allegorized by the *appearance* of biological fatherhood, or at least of the possibility for fatherhood. The Pardoner, despite any level of actual literary skill, is thus excluded from the paradigm of literary success because his ambiguity does not allow us to definitively place him as an allegorical father or even, being a feminized male, as an allegorical text.

Although the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* does not appear at first to be about lineage of any sort, much less literary lineage, Chaucer nonetheless raises the subject in several ways. The first of these ways is introduced by the Pardoner himself. As he suggests, upon coming to a new place, the Pardoner proves his authority by pointing to his papal lineage of sorts. He claims:

"First I pronounce whenes that I come,
And thane my bulles shewe I, alle and some.

Oure lige lordes seel on my patente,
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be se boold, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
To saffron with my predicacioun,
And for to stire hem to devocioun” (*Pardoner* 335-346).

It is telling that the Pardoner’s first order of business in any new place is to show his papal bull as proof of an authority that is traceable back through an authoritative lineage that reaches all the way to the pope. The Pardoner thus displays an awareness of the importance of establishing authority within this religious lineage in order to successfully carry out his own personal agenda. Without this authority, the Pardoner’s moral tales and injunctions to repentance through his pardon would likely be met with skepticism and possibly even outrage. With the authority of his religious lineage proven, however, the Pardoner is free from being disturbed in his work by anyone, even others within the same overarching lineage, such as a priest. As if his appeal to authority through the pope were not enough, the Pardoner invokes the power of cardinals, patriarchs, and bishops of the Church. In fact, the Pardoner is obsessed with the need to refer to all of those within his religious lineage, and to the works they have accomplished, as a means of justifying his own sermons and the authority with which he speaks them. To further emphasize his

reliance upon his lineage, the Pardoner adds a few words or phrases in Latin, proving to his listeners the ultimate and indisputable source of his teachings: Holy Scripture. Therefore, although the Pardoner may at first appear to be one of the least concerned of the pilgrims in regard to the concept of lineage, he demonstrates his profound awareness of the power a lineage offers and of the need for it to claim authoritative power for himself. He understands that once he has proven his authority through his religious lineage, he is free to add in his own bits and pieces of teaching and even “[promise] more than his institutional role can deliver,”³⁵ all with little to no backlash or resistance from the people to whom he preaches. In this way, the Pardoner’s use of the sources of his authority as a means of justifying his own deeds in the public eye mirrors Chaucer’s own methods, for Chaucer frequently relies on his sources, and thus on his literary lineage, to lend credibility to his literary works.

Yet while Chaucer is keen to capitalize on the fame and status of well-known authors such as “Fraunceys Petrak” and “Ovyde,” his citation of these authors is often ironic in that he makes use of the fame of their names while contradicting the essence of their works (*Clerk’s Prologue* 31; *Legend of Good Women* 1367). In fact, of Chaucer’s many “sources” for his works, perhaps one of the most notable is one that likely never existed: Lollius. In Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, he cites “myn auctour called Lollius” as the original source for his tale and claims to relate the story “as telleth Lollius,” but there is no definitive evidence to suggest Lollius actually existed (*Troilus* I.394;

³⁵ Rabiee, Robert Yusef. "Rhetoric of Hypocrisy: The Pardoner's Reproduction in His Critics." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 43, 2012, pp. 88. *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/cjm.2012.0080.

V.1653).³⁶ Chaucer seems to have made up this source as a means of appearing to establish himself within a respectable literary lineage. Therefore, if the Pardoner does indeed mirror Chaucer in his reliance upon his sources to establish his claim to authority, then there is another crucial factor to analyze when considering the Pardoner's claim to authority through his religious lineage: the potential that his claim to authority may be fake. After all, the Pardoner is by no means subtle about the truth behind his phony "relics;" his religious zeal is clearly no more than an act; and as he is hinted to be a possible eunuch,³⁷ even his anatomy must fall under scrutiny. It seems that the Pardoner's entire characterization is intended to highlight the fact that nearly everything about him is a façade and that he is not to be trusted. As Yusef Robert Rabiee puts it, "we forget the Tale's message and focus instead on the immediate pleasure of being conned, and the continuing pleasure of evaluating just how we were conned" (81). In light of his propensity toward creating, and even embodying, falsehoods, we must question what other misrepresentations the Pardoner may be propagating and consider the possibility that even the Pardoner's so-called papal seal, and thus his claim to authority, may be a forgery. In fact, it is not too wild a conjecture to wonder whether Chaucer may have even intended his readers to question the validity of the Pardoner's claim to authority since the Pardoner is such a false, conniving character.

Whether or not the Pardoner's authority is valid, however, is not the primary concern of this analysis, though I bring it up as a means of demonstrating that it is

³⁶ There is some debate as to Lollius's existence. On this point, I agree with Yiavis, who refers to "the notorious Lollius, Chaucer's fictitious authority for his '*Trojan Matter*'" (20). Schwebel also notes the likelihood that Chaucer invents Lollius to craft an image of greater authenticity ("Literary Patricide" 139). For an alternative view, see Pratt (183-87).

³⁷ See Footnote for line 691 in: Chaucer, Geoffrey. "General Prologue." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, p. 34.

questionable. I suggest that Chaucer wants readers to raise the question of whether or not we can trust the Pardoner's claims, and in this regard, what matters is the very uncertainty of his authority, for this uncertainty offers the reader a shadow of Chaucer's literary methods. Furthermore, if Chaucer does intend the Pardoner to reflect his own use of literary sources and authority, then the *Pardoner's Tale* may offer a unique insight into Chaucer's view of his own literary works. As some scholars have noted, the *Pardoner's Tale* evokes a consideration of whether or not an immoral person can tell a moral tale,³⁸ and in my view, the answer appears to be, "yes." The Pardoner's tale remains moral regardless of whether or not his authority is legitimate or he has ulterior motives for his preaching and regardless of whether or not the other pilgrims accept its morality. We may extend this parallel to the poet's own writing: Chaucer may be using the Pardoner to hint that even if his own "sources" are not always legitimate, the value of his work is not diminished, but rather only its perceived value. Whether Lollius did or did not exist, and whether or not Chaucer is always faithful to his so-called sources, what matters is that Chaucer understood and respected the importance and power of inheriting authority through a lineage and knew that authority only matters so long as it appears legitimate. The Pardoner knows this well: he exploits his perceived authority to "wynne" personal gain, as he himself claims, "[f]or myn entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothyng for correccioun of synne" (*Pardoner* 403-04). His implementation of this method, however, is only partial. His failure to propagate a literary lineage is demonstrated by the lack of women, marriage, or offspring in his tale, by his own sexually ambiguous characterization, and by his indifferent attitude towards the future.

³⁸ For examples, see Kruger 133; Also see DeNeef 86.

The lack of women in the *Pardoner's Tale* is a noticeable absence. In this tale, the few women mentioned, in addition to being mere archetypes of women rather than actual characters, are portrayed as tools for evil, for the Pardoner describes them as “the verray develes officeres / To kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye” (*Pardoner* 480-81). In this tale, women are viewed as mere objects of desire rather than as viable partners in marriage or as potential mothers. It would at first appear that the Pardoner's concern with lineage in his prologue has not seeped into his tale under the same genealogical allegory that is the focus of this discussion, for the lack of women characters obviously means a lack of any biological lineage in the tale. However, it is precisely this lack of a biological lineage in the tale that points back to the proposed allegory and reveals a previously unexplored side to it.

In the tale, the main characters are three men who lack a proper understanding of death, and in their ignorance they vow to destroy this greatest of enemies as such:

““Herkneth, felawes, we thre been al ones;

Lat ech of us holde up his hand til oother,

And ech of us bicomem otheres brother,

And we wol sleen this false traytour Deeth”” (*Pardoner* 696-99).

Despite the fervor these men initially display in their quest, they are ultimately unsuccessful, for death cannot be killed or avoided, a fact of which the Pardoner is aware. Yet because he reflects Chaucer's apparent understanding of the power of a lineage, it is possible that the Pardoner is also aware that a lineage offers a certain means of defeating, rather than destroying, death. As pointed out in Chapter One, Chaucer seems to have had a keen understanding that the production of an heir, whether biological or literary, is what

allows a man to establish for himself a legacy that outlasts even death. Thus, while there is no way to destroy death itself, the production or perpetuation of a lineage does offer a means by which to subvert the absolute power of death, or at least to outrun it.

While the lack of any mention of the three men in the *Pardoner's Tale* having wives or children can be brushed aside as unimportant, the absence of women characters is a more noticeable deficiency. This lack of women in the tale takes on a particular significance in light of the men's vows of brotherhood quoted above. When declaring brotherhood, the first man declares, "'we thre been al ones,'" signifying a particularly intimate union between them. In fact, the language of this union is strikingly similar to the language Chaucer uses elsewhere to describe marriage, such as in the *Merchant's Tale* when he writes, "O flessch they been, and o fleesh, as I gesse, / Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse" (*Merchant* 1335-36). The "oneness" that characterizes marriage is here applied to the men's vows of brotherhood, a detail that perhaps reveals the Pardoner's greater awareness of the need for a lineage in order to defeat death. Kruger notes that although the destabilization of sworn brotherhood is typical in Chaucer's works, it is usually the result of competition between the sworn brothers with regard to heterosexual attraction.³⁹ Of course, this is not the case in the *Pardoner's Tale*, in which the men betray their "brothers" over gold rather than over a woman. Yet, as Kruger argues, the scene of the rioters' deaths is not devoid of sexual implications, but this "violent parody of sexual intercourse . . . leads not to renewed life . . . but rather to a stark and sterile death," which Kruger claims re-invokes "the medieval homophobic construction of male homosexuality" in which homosexuality is associated with an inability to read beyond the literal letter of the text (130-131). By recalling the sense of

³⁹ See Kruger 129-130

intimate oneness found in marriage vows yet replacing them with vows of brotherhood, the Pardoner may be purposely subverting the model of the family and setting the men up for failure before their quest even begins. Having chosen the “wrong” type of vows for this particular job, the men of the tale cannot succeed in defeating death, because to do so requires the feminine text, which is excluded from the tale.

In order to better understand the Pardoner’s treatment of familial lineage, or the lack thereof, in the tale, it is important to consider the subjects of family, procreation, and eternity within his own life. The very nature of the Pardoner’s character resists any tendency toward marriage and the production of biological offspring. As noted above, in the *General Prologue*, the narrator describes the Pardoner by saying, “I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare,” which suggests he is likely a eunuch and/or homosexual (*General Prologue*, 691).⁴⁰ If this description of the Pardoner is correct, then he is either physically incapable of producing offspring or sexually disinclined to do so according to the traditional model of the family unit. While many scholars have focused on the Pardoner’s sexuality as a means of expressing power, queerness, or so forth,⁴¹ one factor often overlooked in these discussions of sexuality is the Pardoner’s ability, or inability, to produce biological offspring. In light of the congruency between the men’s vows of brotherhood and marriage vows and of the notable lack of women in the Pardoner’s tale, as discussed above, it is only fitting that the Pardoner’s sexuality be analyzed from a familial and genealogical perspective.

⁴⁰ See Footnote for line 691 in: Chaucer, Geoffrey. “General Prologue.” *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, p. 34.

⁴¹ For examples, see: Kruger; Zeikowitz, who argues that there is power in the Pardoner’s queerness; Frantzen, especially page 144, for a discussion of the Pardoner’s freedom and power as a result of standing outside the limits of male and female; Reed, who discusses the fear generated by the Pardoner’s abjection.

Although we cannot ever know with certainty whether the Pardoner is a eunuch or homosexual, what we do know is that sexual ambiguity, and as noted earlier, ambiguity in general, is integral to the Pardoner's characterization. I propose that the point of the Pardoner's sexual ambiguity is to make the reader question him, especially with regard to his potential for producing offspring. If the Pardoner had been presented as a heterosexual man, or even explicitly as a homosexual man or eunuch, the reader could assume the Pardoner's potential for offspring and the question would never be asked. By making the Pardoner sexually ambiguous, however, and by presenting that ambiguity in such an unknowable way, Chaucer raises the question of the Pardoner's ability to produce a biological lineage. Dinshaw is "concerned with masculine and feminine as roles, positions, functions that can be taken up, occupied, or performed by either sex, male or female (although not with equal ease or investment . . .)" (9).⁴² Without discounting her claim, I would like to consider the ramifications of the Pardoner's sexual ambiguity and nontraditional gendering in light of my argument that Chaucer represents participation in a literary lineage as something allegorically related to biological fatherhood in this text. As Dinshaw puts it, the Pardoner is essentially a "not-not-man," for "[i]f he is neither man nor not-man, his identity is constituted by a negation of, or alienation from, the Same *and* the Other in androcentric culture" (158). Taken at the allegorical level, the Pardoner is not a proper translator – that is, a literary father – or a text itself. Once again, the ambiguity of the Pardoner results in his categorization as one who is indefinable, and yet it is this very ambiguity that drives readers and scholars to take a second or even third look at the Pardoner in the ever-present hope that he must be definable. As discussed

⁴² Dinshaw's treatment of "masculine" and "feminine" as roles or functions is discussed throughout *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*.

previously, Chaucer places great emphasis on the appearance of having authority – in Walter’s and January’s marriages, in the Pardoner’s religious lineage, and in a literary lineage – regardless of actual authority, for there is power in appearances. If the Pardoner does not maintain the appearance of having his religious authority, then the power of his religious lineage becomes nonexistent. Likewise, because his appearance as a potential father is questionable, so too is his authority as a father-figure – both biological and literary – uncertain. I propose that Chaucer raises the question of the Pardoner’s sexuality not so much to suggest that an absolute answer is obtainable but rather to make the reader question the Pardoner’s capability to produce a literary lineage by raising the question of his ability to produce a biological lineage. Although the Pardoner can, as Dinshaw claims, perform either the masculine or feminine gender role, if he is sexually incapable of producing offspring, then his preferred gender does not change his (in)ability to propagate a lineage.⁴³

There is the question to consider of whether or not the Pardoner’s sexual ambiguity should be regarded as a help or a hindrance to him. Richard Zeikowitz argues that “the Pardoner evidently has symbolic sexual power which is all the more threatening because it is elusive and non-normative” and that “the Pardoner is not defeated as most critics choose to believe,” but rather, the Pardoner is victorious in “unnerve[ing] the Host” despite falling silent after the Host’s angry outburst (70; 71-72). It may perhaps be true that Chaucer intends the Pardoner to exemplify a certain hidden power in this scene by merit of his ambiguous sexuality. Yet even if this is the case, the result of the

⁴³ Dinshaw’s discussion on the Pardoner is largely concerned with Chaucer’s treatment of gender in relation to human language and the gendered acts of reading and writing. My discussion focuses more on Chaucer’s potential use of a direct allegorical representation of genealogies, in which the factors of biological sex and the physical ability to produce biological offspring do play a crucial role.

encounter is ultimately the silencing of the Pardoner. Indeed, as Zeikowitz notes earlier in his discussion, “the Pardoner wields enormous power of speech” (61). Thus, when the narrator relates that the Pardoner “answerde nat a word” to the Host’s outburst, his speech is cut off, at least for the moment, and his power is figuratively set aside and then overshadowed by the Knight’s authority (*Pardoner* 956). Therefore, even if the Pardoner does represent the possibility of power and authority outside of the established social models of heteronormativity and, by extension, the traditional family model, his silencing makes it clear that his fellow pilgrims will not tolerate his unconventionality. In this regard, Chaucer may possibly feel empathy for the Pardoner’s situation, though his allegorical rather than sexual one. If Chaucer does indeed use the family model to allegorize literary translation, then any “literary” power the sexually ambiguous Pardoner possesses represents the possibility of successfully producing literary works outside of the established paradigm of medieval literary tradition. Although Chaucer works within the scope of this medieval literary paradigm to ensure his lasting fame, it is not too wild a conjecture to suggest that he would prefer to be free from the encumbering parameters of literary translation and literary lineage by which he was bound, much as the Pardoner attempts to be free from the bounds of heteronormative society. Yet if this is the case, Chaucer apparently accepts the necessity of playing by the strictures of a literary lineage, for despite the Pardoner’s efforts, he is nonetheless silenced by the Host’s remarks.

While the Pardoner’s sexual ambiguity calls into question his physical ability to produce offspring, it is his attitude toward the future that more fully defies any potential tendency towards biological or, allegorically speaking, literary fatherhood. Despite his understanding of the power of a lineage, the Pardoner shows little to no desire to develop

that power beyond how it serves him in the present moment. He is happy to exploit his place in an authoritative religious lineage for his daily pleasure, but he displays no concern with furthering that lineage to propagate his fame or to secure any sort of lasting reward. In fact, he explicitly states the purpose of his moral tales when he says, “‘For myn entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothyng for correccioun of synne’” (*Pardoner* 403-04). For the Pardoner, the future and the ability to have an impact on the future are not important; all he cares about is “winning” for his personal gain in the present moment. Furthermore, after he completes his tale, the Pardoner does not care about the other pilgrims’ reception of the tale as a literary piece. Rather, he considers the tale to have been a tool that he hopes will have made the other pilgrims willing and eager to pay for his pardon or buy his fake relics. In fact, the Pardoner’s attitude toward his relics further reveals his views on eternity. D. Vance Smith notes that “[t]he Pardoner’s Tale is framed by encounters with relics, objects that embody . . . the possibility that something continues beyond death” (133).⁴⁴ Yet by declaring his relics counterfeits but attempting to sell them anyway, the Pardoner reveals his disregard not only for the institution of relics but also for the eternal life they signify. By boasting that he sells fake relics for tangible monetary gain, he suggests that although he believes the promise of infinite reward *could* be false, the pleasures of finite goods are tangible and therefore *certainly* real, and this is where his faith lies. From the Pardoner’s point of view, his tale, like his relics, serves its purpose only as far as it can serve his “purse” among a given group of people and at a particular time. Thus, the Pardoner is too focused on the present to care about perpetuating a lineage of any sort. In light of the physical, social, and even

⁴⁴ Smith further argues that the Pardoner’s attempts to sell his relics despite having declared them counterfeits brings up the ontological question of our ability to understand infinitude within “the limits of finite objects”

allegorical obstacles the Pardoner faces in regards to propagating a lineage of any sort, his lack of concern for the future may be an outward expression of his understanding and acceptance of the fact that when he dies, he will leave no lineage behind.

To emphasize the Pardoner's attitude toward life, death, and the future, let us turn to one last example from his tale that illustrates the Pardoner's view of the futility of life due to the inevitability of death. Just as Chaucer uses garden imagery in the *Merchant's Tale* to illustrate the fruitlessness of January's marriage, he likewise uses the perversion of nature to emphasize the fruitlessness within the *Pardoner's Tale* through the image of a barren Mother Earth. Soon after beginning their quest for Death, the three rioters meet an old man who laments that death has eluded him. He claims that he walks the earth as a wretch and says, "'on the ground, which is my moodres gate, / I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late, / And seye 'Leeve mooder, leet me in! . . . / Mooder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste / That in my chambre longe tyme hath be, / Ye, for an heyre clowt to wrappe me!'" (Pardoner 729-36). Whereas a mother is typically a source of life, the old man in the tale inverts this image by begging Mother Earth for death. The man cries out for his mother in a pitiful and almost infantile manner as he begs for her embrace and knocks insistently upon her "gate." He does so, however, not as a child calling out for nurturing but as an enfeebled old wretch seeking solace in death. It is in this way that the Pardoner illustrates the figure of a mother, not as one from whom life springs forth but rather as one who claims her children only once they have succumbed to their inevitable death. In relation to this, Gudrun Richardson views the old man's calling out to Mother Earth as a rejection of the Virgin Mary – a mother who helps guide her children to eternal life – instead preferring death as the only viable resolution, which Richardson suggests

represents the hopes of the sinful Pardoner who rejects God because he believes he is beyond the possibility of redemption.⁴⁵ While I have reservations about assigning the Pardoner's rejection of God to an overwhelming sense of guilt (I would suggest either sheer disbelief or infatuation with earthly pleasures and instant gratification as his motivation), I agree with Richardson that the old man rejects the Virgin Mary and the eternal life associated with her intercession. The old man's lamentations, and his choice of mother, discourage a view of human existence that is linear, in which an individual's significance stretches beyond oneself into future generations and even into eternal life. On the contrary, the old man's hope to return to his "mother" presents a view of life as a futile cycle in which children are born only to ultimately return to their "mother" through death. To emphasize the futility of this cycle, the tale culminates in an abundance of meaningless deaths as the three sworn brothers are each reclaimed by their "mother." As Dinshaw notes, "everyone and everything [in the tale] is consumed in the turns of the narrative, either dying or fading out" (180). With this view of motherhood and human life, the Pardoner's shirking of piety for the sake of pleasure makes logical sense. After all, if life is indeed a futile cycle that culminates in nothing more than death for everyone, then he is justified in his selfish ways. This view, however, is not consistent with Chaucer's treatment of literary translation, in which the perpetuation of a lineage necessitates a belief in a text's value that extends beyond an individual translator's earthly existence.

By applying Dinshaw's reading of the woman as the allegorical text and the man as the author inscribing his "gloss" on her body to the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Tale*, in which heirs are either absent or illegitimate, I have considered the

⁴⁵ See Richardson 327-31.

allegorical implications of procreation in relation to literary lineages. While other critics have focused on the successes or failures of Walter, January, and the Pardoner in terms of their human nature, I have suggested that by thinking of each as an allegorical author, their levels of success can ultimately be measured by their (literary) offspring, or lack thereof, as a sign of their propagation of a (literary) lineage. In this light, January's and the Pardoner's failure to produce literary translations and literary heirs in the form of offspring can be read as a textual terminus: their literary legacies are cut off just as their biological lineages will cease to exist when they die. The absence of textual "fruit" in the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Tale* constitutes each man's failure as an impotent author – a failure that can only lead to the death of a lineage.

IV. THE SINS OF THE FATHER: TRACES OF THEBAN LOVE IN CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

Since the publication of *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, scholars have understood Chaucer's Troy as a reflection of Thebes and the fall of both the ancient city and Troilus himself as the direct result of the recursiveness of historical tragedy.⁴⁶ While we have explored Troy as a second Thebes, however, no scholar has heretofore analyzed the influence of Thebes on Troy from the perspective of Thebes's most infamous aspect – that is, the unnatural familial relationships that permeate and guide its storyline. From Oedipus's incestuous marriage to his own mother to the fratricide of the feuding brothers Eteocles and Polynices, Thebes is indelibly marked by unnatural family relationships, each of which contribute to the downfall of the city. While the Troy story is not explicitly concerned with unnatural familial relationships, I argue that in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer carries over the inherently abberative quality of Theban familial relationships, weaving the element of unnatural familial relationships into the fabric of the story of Troy and emphasizes it as a crucial factor in the fate of the city. In doing so, Chaucer crafts a tale that suggests these unnatural relationships as one of the defining links between Theban and Trojan history, especially in regard to the downfalls of both cities.

Beginning with the unnatural ravishing of Helen and then continuing with the complicated implications of symbolic incest and sworn brotherhood, Troy indeed follows in its forerunner's footsteps and suffers the consequences. Troilus himself draws this direct connection for us when he compares himself to Oedipus, as he claims, ““But ende I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse / My sorwful lif, and dyen in distresse”” (*Troilus* IV.300-

⁴⁶ I will be referring to Lee Patterson's *Chaucer and the Subject of History* throughout this discussion. Further details of his argument that pertain to my discussion will be provided in the next section of this chapter.

01). Thus, while Patterson argues that Troy must fall because it follows in the same recursive historical line as Thebes, I propose that, in Chaucer's translation, this recursive line is demonstrated and further emphasized by the fact that the inhabitants of Troy actively participate in perpetuating a tradition of unnatural familial relationships as found in their city's genealogical forerunner. I further argue that Chaucer uses the recursiveness of his characters' genealogies to illustrate his own authorial struggles with the "recursiveness" of literary tradition.

In my first two chapters, I discussed the allegorical implications of each tale on a character-by-character basis – e.g. Griselda signifies the text, Walter signifies the author – and primarily focus on the significance of biological offspring, or the lack thereof, within each tale as the allegorical equivalent of literary success. The form of this chapter differs from the previous two in that I intend to analyze the broader historical genealogy of Thebes and Troy in terms of how they are affected by the familial relationships within each city. Looking at Chaucer's allusions to Thebes in the text, I will demonstrate an allegorical connection between the historical genealogy of the cities, the human genealogies therein, and literary genealogy. While I agree with Patterson that the fate of Troy is revealed in the history of Thebes as a part of their historical genealogy, I will further argue that, in Chaucer's narrative of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the human relationships within Troy have a causal relationship with the fall of the city, at least allegorically. In order to support this argument, I will demonstrate the ways in which Chaucer interweaves the subject of unnatural relationships into the fabric of the story, including the sexual objectification and mistreatment of women, the "brother/sister" relationship of Troilus and Criseyde, the excessive swearing of brotherhood between

Troilus and Pandarus, and Pandarus's vicarious involvement in the lovers' relationship. These relationships, I argue, recall the depraved history of Thebes and situate the city of Troy more securely within Thebes' historical lineage through the actions of its inhabitants. Thus, I will argue that Chaucer does not merely illustrate the recursive nature of history in his work but also seeks, allegorically, to provide a reason for this circularity of events among Thebes and Troy. I will show that, just as Thebes is doomed to fall, so too is Troilus and Criseyde's relationship doomed to fail because of their participation in the same unnaturalness that characterizes Theban relationships. I will then analyze the ways in which Chaucer as the narrator approaches the literary lineage within which he tells his story and the allegorical implications of the characters' unnatural relationships and recursive genealogies on the tale's literary lineage.⁴⁷ Finally, I will consider the implications of these allegorical connections in terms of understanding Chaucer's perception of literary tradition and his place therein. As Chaucer's Troy cannot escape the recursive historical lineage of Thebes, and his characters cannot escape their own recursive biological genealogies, so too is Chaucer bound by the recursiveness of literary tradition.

1. The Recursive History of Thebes and Troy

Before discussing the recursive incest in Thebes and Troy, I will briefly summarize Patterson's argument on these two cities. In *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, Patterson notes that "the Thebes story functioned in medieval historiography

⁴⁷ For further discussion on the narrator and narratorial voice in *Troilus and Criseyde*, see: Donaldson, E. Talbot. "Criseide and Her Narrator." *Speaking of Chaucer*. Labyrinth Press, 1970, pp. 65-83. For my purposes, I will observe no crucial distinction between Chaucer and his narrator.

primarily as a prefiguration of Troy,” and he addresses the medieval historical mindset in which “the historical process gives way to reveal an underlying recursiveness, a circularity that calls into question all merely historical beginnings and endings” (98). With regard to *Troilus and Criseyde* specifically, Patterson argues that the fall of Thebes, at least for Chaucer, is the motivating force behind the fall of Troy due to the circularity that dominates historical lineages in the Middle Ages. He contends that Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* is an attempt to investigate “this central dilemma of the medieval historical consciousness,” and Patterson’s conclusion in this regard is that “[i]t is . . . the recursive *shape* of Theban history, and its devastating effect upon the claim to linearity implicit in the assertion of Trojan foundation and the *translatio imperii* that follows from it, that is invoked by the Theban allusions” (98; 136). That is, Patterson claims that the fate of Troy is compelled by the recursive nature of historical lineages rather than being merited by the Trojan’s own actions. Furthermore, he argues that Chaucer’s narrative “not only refuses to draw any straightforward causal connections between Troilus’s failed love and the fall of Troy, but seems to imply that there is no connection between these two events at all” (107). Patterson is quite right that Troilus’s failed love affair does not appear, on a literal level, to determine the course of Troy’s downfall. Yet for Chaucer, Troilus represents the city in miniature—his love affair (and in particular its failure) is a synecdoche for the fall of the city. In this respect, Chaucer treats his love affair not only literally but also allegorically as a reflection of Theban – that is, incestuous – love. It is on this allegorical level that the incestuous love affair gone awry does indeed exhibit a causal relationship with the fall of Troy, as it is part of Troy’s circular reenactment of Thebes. While Chaucer does illustrate the recursive nature of history in his work,⁴⁸ he

⁴⁸ In this study, Patterson uses “history” to mean “both the persistent presence of the past and the pressure

further applies this principle of inevitable circularity as a defining factor in the human lineages of his characters and, allegorically, in literary tradition.

As critics have long documented, there are substantial allusions to Thebes throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁴⁹ These allusions illustrate the intrinsic connection between Troy and Thebes and point to the recursive lineage of the two cities. At the same time, Chaucer uses these allusions in ways that connect the historical genealogy of the two cities with the human genealogies and relationships that are played out in the text. Perhaps the clearest way in which Chaucer illustrates the connection between the recursive history of Thebes and Troy and the subject of human genealogy is through Cassandra's explication of Troilus's dream of the boar in Book V. As Paul Clogan notes, this dream explication provides a key allusion to Thebes as a precursor of Troy, for Cassandra reveals the truth to Troilus "in the wider context of the Theban legend to impress upon him the idea of destiny as revealed in the tragic deaths of Theban princes" (182). Yet her explanation does not only allude to the connections between Troy and Thebes but also presents the link between the cities from a genealogical perspective. While Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* contains Troilus's dream of the boar-as-Diomedes, his work does not include this explanation of why Diomedes is represented by a boar or of his family's connection to Thebes. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, Chaucer adds a rather detailed explanation of the dream. Cassandra does not simply state that the boar is the symbol of Diomedes's family. Instead, she tells Troilus that if he wishes to understand his dream, he "most a few of olde stories heere." She then proceeds to trace the

of social realities" (11).

⁴⁹ Section 1 of this chapter will address two specific connections between Thebes and Troy in *Troilus and Criseyde*. For more examples of the connections between Thebes and Troy, see Anderson; Clogan; and Battles.

genealogical line of descent from Meleager to Tydeus to Diomedes (*Troilus* V.1459). Chaucer's insertion of this explanation stresses Diomedes's genealogical, rather than individual, identity and thus indicates that Diomedes's personal identity is superseded by his family lineage. By intertwining Diomedes's genealogical identity with this crucial allusion to the connections between Thebes and Troy, Chaucer not only reminds the reader to consider the story of Troy within the context of its historical connections with Thebes but does so in a way that specifically frames these connections as genealogical rather than merely historical. That is, Chaucer provides this Theban allusion through the lens of Diomedes's genealogy, thus demonstrating that the connection between Thebes and Troy can be traced not only through medieval historical perception but specifically through this particular genealogy of men. David Anderson notes that "[t]he lapse of time between the Theban and Trojan wars was fixed, in an approximate fashion, by classical Latin literature itself, in which there are numerous references to the genealogies of the warriors at Thebes that had sons and grandsons at Troy" and that Chaucer underscores the temporal proximity of the two stories by stressing Diomedes's genealogical identity as the "son of Tydeus," who participated in the siege of Thebes (125). Indeed, in addition to providing an allusion to Thebes, Cassandra's explanation reframes the narrative in that it shifts the focus from the grand historical lineage of the cities to the biological lineages of two generations of men. That is not to say that Chaucer denies the recursive nature of history; on the contrary, he uses Theban/Trojan history to demonstrate this circularity and then proceeds to apply this recursive nature to the human lineages of his work.

To illustrate this point, I will turn to one of the first and most explicit allusions to Thebes. In Book Two, Pandarus comes upon Criseyde sitting in a garden, listening to the story of Thebes:

Whan he was come unto his neces place,
“Wher is my lady?” to hire folk quod he;
And they hym tolde, and he forth in gan pace,
And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste. (*Troilus* II.78-84)

The precise text she attends to has provoked some degree of scholarly debate, yet many critics have pointed out that by hearing about Thebes, Criseyde is effectively learning about her own fate. Alain Renoir argues, for example, that the book Criseyde is listening to could be the French *Roman de Thebes*, which includes the tale of the fall of Troy.⁵⁰ Thus, it is possible that “the story to which Criseyde has been listening is written in a book that also contains the story of her own life” (Renoir 16).⁵¹ Yet even if the fall of Troy itself is not included in Criseyde’s book, the tale of Thebes still offers a foreshadowing of the fate of Troy, as Dominique Battles explains:

The fundamental relationship between Thebes and Troy that medieval poets and readers insist upon . . . concerns prophecy. If, as St. Augustine argues, all earthly cities follow the same cycle of rise and decline, thus offering different versions of the same story, then the fate of one city prophecies the future fate of another city .

⁵⁰ See Renoir 15-16.

⁵¹ There is some debate on which version of the story of Thebes Criseyde is actually reading. For a brief synopsis of this debate, see Schwebel “What’s in Criseyde’s Book?”

. . This assumption underlies the medieval tradition of Thebes and Troy, so that medieval poets used the destruction of Thebes to prophecy the destruction of Troy. (116)

It can therefore be conjectured that, in some way or another, the book *Criseyde* is listening to contains her own fate and the fate of her city and could provide the characters of *Troilus and Criseyde* a means of circumventing their own participation in a historical lineage of destruction. Battles argues that there are several levels on which “the Theban legend fails to provide an adequate and viable prophecy of doom to the characters in Chaucer’s narrative of Troy,” and these are, in short, “text, reading environment, reader and interpretation” (123).⁵² Yet regardless of whether or not *Criseyde* could interpret the fate of Troy from the story of Thebes, Chaucer makes it clear that she is not given the opportunity to do so. It is precisely at the moment when *Criseyde* is enveloped in the tale of Thebes that Pandarus first approaches her to reveal *Troilus*’s love for her and to begin the process of wooing her. Rather than allowing his niece the possibility of interpreting and possibly altering her own fate, Pandarus implores *Criseyde* to “[d]o wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,” effectively dismissing the subject of Thebes from her consideration (*Troilus* II.111). Although his characters may be incapable of discerning their fate as prophesied in the fate of Thebes, Chaucer himself is not, nor does he expect his readers to be. The moment *Criseyde* sets down the story of Thebes to entertain her uncle is precisely the moment at which she becomes part of the very narrative she dismisses, as she is introduced to her role in Thebes’s historical lineage of unnatural relationships through what I will shortly argue to be a symbolically incestuous relationship with *Troilus*. Through the timing of these two events – *Criseyde*’s reading of

⁵² For a more detailed discussion of Battles’ argument, see Battles 119-23.

the story of Thebes and Pandarus's arrival to gain her approval of Troilus – Chaucer thus picks up the narrative of Thebes's historical lineage right where it leaves off. By showing that Criseyde becomes intertwined in a relationship that indicates the continuing legacy of Thebes even as she supposedly sets the story aside, Chaucer stresses the continuity of Thebes' historical lineage in the story of Troy.

2. Unnatural Familial Relationships

Medieval readers were thus preconditioned to consider Thebes as a prefiguration of Troy due to the common medieval perspective on history, in which “all earthly cities follow the same cycle of rise and decline, thus offering different versions of the same story,” an “assumption [that] underlies the medieval tradition of Thebes and Troy” (Battles 116). “The histories of Thebes and Troy were woven together prophetically by means of shared choreography and staging in certain key scenes” (117).⁵³ There are, however, a number of specific instances in *Troilus and Criseyde* in which Chaucer further points to an inherent connection between the familial relationships found within the two cities. These instances of unnatural relationships recall the incestuous history of Thebes and more closely align the two stories in a way that reaches beyond the political or social aspects of the cities and into the very bodies of those who live within them. In this way, the history of Thebes is inscribed in both the literal bodies of the characters and in the allegorical body of the text by merit of the unnatural familial relationships that mark both tales.

⁵³ Battles 117 provides a few examples of these similar plot points between the two stories; Lee Patterson also discusses Thebes' role as a prefiguration of Troy: see especially Patterson 98-99.

From the beginning of the poem, Chaucer emphasizes that unnatural relationships motivate the siege against Troy. After the introductory stanzas in Book One, the narrator begins his story by reiterating for the reader the aberrant relationship that sparks the siege of Troy in the first place: Paris's "ravysshynge . . . of Eleyne" (*Troilus* I.62). While the rape of Helen is not unique to Chaucer's translation of the story of Troy, Chaucer particularly emphasizes the unnaturalness of Helen's situation throughout the story, never allowing the reader to become comfortable with her place in Trojan society. He does this in part through the repeated sexual objectification of Helen by both Troilus and Pandarus. When Troilus is reluctant to divulge the name of the woman he is in love with in Book I, Pandarus claims, "'Ne, by my trouthe, I kepe nat restreyne / The fro thi love, theigh that it were Eleyne / That is thi brother wif, if ich it wiste'" (*Troilus* I.676-78). In this statement, Pandarus openly admits that he would willingly aid Troilus in adultery and incest with his brother's wife. Indeed, Pandarus shows no qualms about the horrors of Theban love. Later on, apparently forgetting that Helen is not only married but is his own brother's wife, Troilus offers Pandarus his "'faire suster Polixene, / Cassandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape'" as recompense for helping him woo Criseyde (*Troilus* III.409-10). In these instances, both Pandarus and Troilus exhibit no qualms at the thought of the implied incest between a brother-in-law and sister-in-law or at what would most likely be another rape of Helen. Both men assume the right to treat Helen as a mere sexual object for the taking by anyone she may happen to please, ignoring both her marital status and any level of kinship bond shared with her. By suggesting the rape and trading of Helen over and over among different men, Chaucer does not allow his reader to become complacent with Helen's place in Troy but rather continuously calls closer attention to

the ongoing sexual depravity of the Trojans. In this way, Pandarus's and Troilus's repeated suggestion of further exploiting Helen reinforce the discernable connections between the ravishing of a woman and the ultimate devastation of Troy and, by extension, the connection between Troy and Thebes. The fate of Troy is recursive inasmuch as the unnatural behavior of the city's inhabitants is recursive, especially with regard to their familial relationships.

While the ravishing of Helen is the initial event that brings about the Greeks' besiegement of Troy, it is by no means the only unnatural relationship in Troy that marks its connection to Thebes. Indeed, Chaucer repeatedly suggests that the relationship between Pandarus and Troilus is one of "brotherhood." Even without the Theban precedent, brotherhood throughout Chaucer's works tends to be problematic. The swearing of brotherhood, in particular, does not typically bode well for those involved. In the *Knight's Tale*, for example, Palamon tells Arcite that he is "'thy cosyn and thy brother / Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother, / That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne, / Til that the deth departe shal us tweyne'" (*Knight* 1131-1134). Yet their bonds of brotherhood are dissolved under the weight of their rivalry over Emily, and they become mortal enemies willing to fight each other to the death. In the *Friar's Tale*, the Summoner meets a literal fiend and the two swear brotherhood to each other as such: "Everych in ootheres hand his trouthe leith, / For to be sworne bretheren til they deye" (*Friar* 1404-05). After this vow, the Friar emphasizes the brotherhood between the two exponentially, as the Summoner and the fiend call each other "brother" seventeen times in the tale. At the end of the tale, however, the fiend calls the Summoner "brother" in preparation to drag his "[b]ody and soule" down to hell: "'Now, brother . . . be nat wroth;

/ Thy body and this panne been myne by right. / Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonight”
(*Friar* 1634-36; 1640). Finally, the *Pardoner’s Tale* offers a particularly grisly example of sworn brotherhood gone awry. The Pardoner tells his listeners that “[t]ogidres han thise thre [rioters] hir trouthes plight / To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother, / As though he were his owene ybore brother” (*Pardoner* 702-04). Not long after these vows, the three men murder each other for no reason other than greed, and all three of the “brothers” are left dead beneath a tree.

What is already a problematic relationship between sworn “brothers” becomes exponentially more troubled in Theban Troy, in which the memory of the bloody war fought between two brothers is still fresh (indeed, Chaucer reminds us that Diomedes is the direct descendent of one of the seven against Thebes). In the last book of the *Thebaid*, Statius recounts the final battle between Eteocles and Polynices as a perversion of their familial bond:

Each brother sought – and loved – the other’s blood,
and each ignored his own. At last the exile,
whose rage was stronger and who thought his cause
had greater justice, rushed, and he struck deep:
he shoved his sword inside his brother’s body
where tapered links of steel exposed his groin.

.....

Soon his limbs weakened; soon he understood
his wound’s extent and, feeling ill, breathed hard.
His enemy, however, did not spare him,

even as he drew back, but loudly taunted

.....

And so those wretches dueled. A little life

was yet remaining in the evil king, but he

was weary; he could not stand up much longer,

yet even as he died, he planned a final

fraud – so he fell.

.....

[Polynices] spoke, and he moved forward, and his armor –

he even wished to strip his brother's armor,

as if to ornament his homeland's altars.

Eteocles, however, still had strength –

enough to satisfy his rage and vengeance –

and when he felt the other lean above him,

he raised his sword in secret, supplemented

his failing force with hate and – pleased by his

destiny – stabbed his brother through the heart.

.....

[Polynices] fell. His heavy armor smote his brother. (*Thebaid* XI.536-73)⁵⁴

Chaucer uses the fratricidal feuding of Troy's genealogical forerunner looming over the story to shape our interpretation of the "brotherhood" between Pandarus and

⁵⁴ Line numbers are approximate. Charles Stanley Ross, the translator of this edition of Statius's *Thebaid*, indicates in his "Notes" on page 355 that his line numbers refer to the original Latin text; therefore, the line numbers he provides do not align precisely with his English translation of the poem. The quoted passage can be found on pages 317-18 of Ross's translation: Statius, Publius Papinius. *The Thebaid*. Translated by Charles Stanley Ross, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Troilus. Throughout the story, Troilus and Pandarus constantly refer to each other as “brother” and swear their loyalty to one another, such as when Troilus swears to Pandarus, ““al myghte I now for the / A thousand tymes on a morwe sterve. / I kan namore, but that I wol the serve / Right as thi sclave, whider so thow wende, / For evere more, unto my lyves ende”” (*Troilus* III.388-92). This oath prefigures Troilus’s nearly identical oath to Criseyde not many lines later, ““Syn God hath wrought me for I shall yow serve – / As thus I mene: he wol ye be my steere, / To do me lyve, if that yow liste, or sterve – / So techeth me how that I may disserve”” (*Troilus* III.1290-93). Troilus’s vows of service to the point of death are made to both Criseyde and Pandarus. He thus swears the same level of loyalty to his sworn brother as to his lover. Yet he does not appear to swear to his biological family such a high degree of service, nor does he, as a prince of Troy, put his subjects above his own personal feelings, as can easily be seen when he suggests abandoning the city for the sake of saving his relationship.

Furthermore, it is the exceedingly intimate level of their brotherly relationship that provides cause for questioning. Pandarus emphasizes the degree of their relationship when he tells Troilus, ““For the have I bigonne a gamen pleye / Which that I nevere do shal eft for other, / Although he were a thousand fold my brother”” (*Troilus* III.250-52). In this statement, Pandarus lifts Troilus up to a status above and beyond what even he would consider normal for biological brothers. The impact of this elevation in brotherly status is that the bond of sworn brotherhood overpowers the bonds of biological family relationships, thus creating an unnatural disparity in favor of unnatural, rather than natural, family relationships. This impact is best illustrated when Pandarus admits:

‘But wo is me, that I, that cause al this,

May thynken that she is my nece deere,
And I hire em, and traitour ek yfeere!
And were it wist that I, thorough my engyn,
Hadde in my nece yput this fantasie,
To doon thi lust and holly to ben thyn,
Whi, al the world upon it wolde crie,
And seyn that I the werste trecherie
Dide in this cas . . .’ (*Troilus* III.271-79)

Pandarus recognizes that he has been a traitor to his own blood relative for the sake of a sworn brother. Though he beseeches privacy in the affair for the sake of all involved, including Criseyde, however, he does not repent for his disloyalty to his own biological niece.

Although not literal in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the theme of incest underlies much of the main action in Chaucer’s poem. Indeed, because of the poem’s roots in Thebes, even the suggestion of incest is enough to recall the incestuous history of Thebes. Chaucer, moreover, exploits this Theban subtext to problematize his characters’ relationships. Criseyde, for example, announces initially that she sees Troilus as no more than a brother: “She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde / In love; but as his suster, hym to plese, / She wolde fayn to doon his herte an ese” (*Troilus* II.1222-25). While she does eventually pledge her love to Troilus, and begins a sexual relationship with him, the memory of her thinking of Troilus as a brother lingers. While the two are not, in fact, related by blood, Criseyde’s vow to treat him as though she were his sister looms over their relationship, and further dooms it. Because Chaucer has specifically crafted this

image of kinship between them, it is as *though* they are brother and sister, even if they are not.

In fact, Chaucer directs our attention to the theme of incest from the very beginning of the lovers' relationship. The morning of Pandarus's "errand" of informing Criseyde of Troilus's love for her begins with a reference to another story of incest:

The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,
Whan morwen com, gan make hir waymentynge,
Whi she forshapen was; and evere lay
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
Til she so neigh hym made hir cheterynge
How Tereus gan forth hir suster take,
That with the noyse of hir he gan awake,
And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,
Remembryng hym his erand was to doone . . . (*Troilus* II.64-72)

Pandarus is literally awoken and reminded of his task by Procne's song of lamentation over the incestuous rape of her sister. By introducing the scene of Pandarus's "errand" with a mention of Procne, Chaucer alerts the reader to the suggestion of incest in relation to Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. Moreover, Chaucer reminds the reader once again of the looming shadow of incest by bookending this encounter between Pandarus and Criseyde with a possible nod to Procne's sister, Philomela, who was raped by her brother-in-law. As Criseyde lies in bed, burdened with Pandarus's news and confused as to how she should proceed, she is lulled to sleep by a nightingale, the bird into which Philomela was transformed. Chaucer thus frames this crucial encounter in the tale with references to

a story of incest, suggesting that so too shall Troilus and Criseyde's relationship be marked by the stain of incest.

Further enhancing the incestuous overtones of their relationship is Pandarus, who, though Criseyde's uncle and ward, continually swears brotherhood with her lover. Indeed, Pandarus in general transgresses the boundaries of relationships. In the first place, he has an extreme level of involvement in Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. From the time he discovers Troilus's secret of love, he entwines himself in their affair. In fact, when he discovers that Troilus is in love, he chides his friend for not telling him sooner and seeking his advice, for as he claims, "myn avys anoon may helpen *us* [emphasis added]" (*Troilus* I.620). In this statement, Pandarus instantly binds himself to Troilus as one who intends to share in the benefits of his friend's love affair. Later in the conversation, Pandarus's inclusion of himself in the relationship is further illustrated when he vows to help Troilus gain Criseyde's affection and says that by doing so, "*we* may ben gladed *alle thre* [emphasis added]" (*Troilus* I.994).

Throughout the tale, Pandarus involvement in the lovers' relationship does not fade; rather, he becomes more and more deeply involved in the affair. Pandarus insists upon being the one to arrange the relationship in the first place, and when Troilus objects that he might not be the best person for the job, Pandarus tells Troilus not to doubt him and says, "'[s]o lat m'alone, and it shal be thi beste'" (*Troilus* I.1028). This is just the first example of many in which Pandarus essentially tells Troilus to take a back seat in the instigation and maintenance of his own relationship so that Pandarus, rather than the lovers themselves, can take the lead and pull all of the strings. Over the course of the story, Pandarus is the one who manipulates Criseyde into pledging her love to Troilus,

carries love letters back and forth between the two, arranges the lovers' secret meetings at his own house, and, rather than stepping back once the relationship has begun, "to quike alwey the fir, / [he] [w]as evere ylike prest and diligent" (*Troilus* III.484-85). Despite his claims that he is merely helping his friend, Pandarus's level of interest in the lovers' relationship, and his obsessive need to be intertwined in and in control of the relationship, perhaps signals something more going on, at least within his own mind.

As Troilus notes early on in the tale, and as Criseyde later teases him for, Pandarus is always seeking love but constantly failing in his efforts. With this knowledge in mind, Pandarus's entwining of himself in Troilus and Criseyde's relationship to such an intimate degree takes on a new, and disturbing, significance. Based on Pandarus's involvement in the relationship and on his notable insistence upon grouping himself in with the lovers and reaping the benefits of their affair, it is not only possible but probable that Pandarus is vicariously living out his own desire for love through Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. For example, when Criseyde first goes to dinner at Pandarus's house in Book III, Chaucer notes that despite the pleasant feast, "Pandarus, if goodly hadde he myght, / He wolde han hyed hire to bedde fayn" (*Troilus* III.654-55). Although it can be argued that Pandarus is merely trying to help his friend, his very eagerness for the consummation of their relationship is still excessive, especially considering that Criseyde is not just any woman but his own niece. Later, once Criseyde is finally in bed and Pandarus comes to her bedroom to convince her to speak with Troilus, he eases her worry of being alone with Troilus by saying, "I wol myself be with yow al this nyght," and so he is (*Troilus* III.914). This promise, though perhaps consoling at first, becomes more and more peculiar as the night wears on and the lovers not only speak of their love

but consummate it with Pandarus always close by. When in the midst of their intercourse Troilus says to Criseyde, “now is ther but we tweyne,” he seemingly forgets that Pandarus is not too far away from the pair (*Troilus* III. 1207). Thus, even though Pandarus is not a literal participant in the lovers’ sexual union, he is nonetheless a persistent presence in the background of even their most intimate relations. Consequently, the possibility that he relishes the lovers’ relationship beyond what would be appropriate for a mere third-party observer must be considered. Tison Pugh has an interesting perspective on this, as he suggests the possibility that Pandarus may be homosexual and that, “since Pandarus’s own affections are so intimately intermingled with Troilus’s, we sense that the love between Troilus and Criseyde serves as a proxy for Pandarus’s paradoxically unified and triangulated love for Troilus” (“Queer Pandarus” 28). Though I do not agree with this reading of Pandarus, Pugh’s suggestion nonetheless points to the idea that Pandarus is indeed invested in the lovers’ relationship for his own sexual satisfaction, if only lived out vicariously.

In Book IV, moreover, after the court rules to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, Pandarus says, ““Who wolde have wend that in so litel a throwe / Fortune *oure joie* wold han overthrowe? [emphasis added]”” (*Troilus* IV.384-85). While Pandarus surely does care for his friend’s woes, he also cares for his own, which do indeed include the separation of the lovers he has worked so hard to bring together. It could be conjectured that he simply grieves the loss of his niece, but this possibility is quickly discounted when he attempts to console Troilus by reminding him that the town is full of other women: ““If she be lost, we shal recovere an other”” (*Troilus* IV.406). Rather than mourning the loss of his niece, he appears to care more for the lovers’ relationship itself and is thus

quick to suggest a replacement. It would seem that Pandarus is simply desperate for Troilus to love any woman so that he himself may continue to live vicariously through his friend's relationships.

If Pandarus's involvement in the lovers' relationship is indeed motivated by such reasons, then the incestuous complications of his involvement become pronounced in two specific ways. First, Pandarus now vicariously "loves" the same woman as his sworn brother, which can only lead to trouble. Second, the woman Pandarus "loves" is his own niece. This brings us to the most controversial point concerning Pandarus's intimate relationship with his niece. A number of critics, including E. Talbot Donaldson, George Kane,⁵⁵ and Evan Carton, have argued that the scene of the morning following Criseyde's first sexual union with Troilus possibly contains an act of literal incest when Pandarus reaches under the sheets for Criseyde, thrusts his arm under her neck, and the two "gan to pleye" (*Troilus* III.1578).⁵⁶ Donaldson claims that "the scene of Pandarus' visit to Criseyde's bedside after Troilus has departed is not without a hint of prurience."⁵⁷ John M. Hill claims that to suppose an incestuous rape in this scene "overplays both the scene's erotic humor as it unfolds and Pandarus's clear intent since the end of Book 1" (109). What these critics, and even the critics who argue for the presence of incest in this scene, fail to recognize, however, is the presence of implied incest throughout the entire

⁵⁵ Examples of Donaldson's and Kane's contributions to this discussion can be found in: apRoberts, Robert P. "A Contribution to the Thirteenth Labour: Purging the *Troilus* of Incest." *Essays on English and American Literature And a Sheaf of Poems*, edited by J. Bakker et al., Rodopi, 1987, pp. 11-25.

⁵⁶ For further discussion on the critical argument of incest in this scene, including the controversial stanzas, and for a partial list of critics who support this argument, including Donaldson and Kane, see apRoberts, For additional discussion, see Stroud; Rushton.

⁵⁷ As quoted in Donaldson's *Chaucer's Poetry* in apRoberts's *A Contribution to the Thirteenth Labour: Purging the Troilus of Incest* pg. 12). Cf. Robert P. apRoberts and T. A. Stroud, who argue vehemently against the possibility of incest in this scene. apRoberts lays out a list of "incompatibilities" that supposedly deny the possibility of incest between Pandarus and Criseyde, and Stroud dismisses the argument for this incest as "weak" (apRoberts 17; Stroud 17).

tale and, moreover, the symbolic value of this implied incest in connecting the story of Troy to the story of Thebes. To this extent, it does not so much matter whether Criseyde and Pandarus have sexual relations in this scene or not, because the Theban backdrop of this scene forces us to recognize the incestuous overtones in Pandarus's liberal touching of his grown niece. Chaucer in this regard seems to suggest the possibility that incest *could* occur rather than that it *does* occur.

This "incest," symbolic though it may be, is visible throughout the poem, particularly in Pandarus's inappropriate physical touching of both Troilus and Criseyde. In addition to Pandarus's participation in nearly every aspect of the lovers' relationship, he goes as far as to perform a physical display of just how involved he intends to be in the affair when he tells Criseyde, "'But for al that ever I may deserve, / Refuse it naught,' quod he, and hente hire faste, / And in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste" (*Troilus* II.1153-55). In this moment, Pandarus literally forces Troilus's love, as detailed in the letter, upon his niece, but he does so in a very intimate way; that is, he puts his hand down his niece's shirt in the name of Troilus's love. Jennifer Summit notes that in this scene "the letter becomes an instrument of Pandarus's sexual coercion," and John M. Hill notes that Pandarus's thrusting of the letter into Criseyde's bosom is "a strong, even sexualized move" (Summit 222; Hill 87).⁵⁸ Furthermore, when Troilus swoons on his first night spent with Criseyde, it is Pandarus who not only "into bed hym caste" but even "of he rente al to his bare sherte" (*Troilus* III.1097; 1099). Pandarus's physical touching

⁵⁸ Although both of these critics identify this particular instance as being sexualized, this does not mean they both agree on the above discussion concerning the possibility of Pandarus and Criseyde have sex with each other. Jennifer Summit claims that what happens in that morning scene is ambiguous but that "[w]hatever happens, Pandarus's actions in the bedroom seem coextensive with all the elements of sexual coercion in which his relationship with Criseyde has been framed" (231). John M. Hill explicitly doubts that incest occurs in this scene (109).

of Troilus and Criseyde here is not merely suggestive of sexual overtones. Indeed, he physically thrusts the lovers together and takes it upon himself to undress Troilus. He is not only a passive observer of the lovers' consummation but also an active participant, leading both lovers to their sexual union.

In several other instances in the poem, Pandarus's physical proximity to Criseyde, in conjunction with certain disconcerting remarks, provide an image of an uncle who is perhaps too loving with his niece. When Pandarus first invites Criseyde to his house for dinner, his manner undergoes an abrupt shift from lighthearted playfulness to domineering and threatening:

Whan he was com, he gan anon to pleye

As he was wont, and of himself to jape;

And finally he swor and gan hire seye,

By this and that, *she sholde hym nought escape,*

Ne lenger don hym *after hire to cape;*

But certynly she moste, by hire leve,

Come soupen in his hous with hym at eve . . . [emphasis added]" (*Troilus* III.554-560)

In the footnotes of the *Riverside Chaucer*, the editor, Stephen Barney, translates "after hire to cape" as "hunt (gape) after her."⁵⁹ The image Pandarus provides is one in which he, a predator of sorts, has been hunting his prey, Criseyde, and he stresses that she will not escape him. Criseyde laughs, but her laugh perhaps signals an underlying uneasiness at the proposition, for she makes a "faste excuse" as to why she cannot go to dinner (*Troilus*

⁵⁹ See footnote for line 558 in: Chaucer, Geoffrey. "Troilus and Criseyde." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 473-585.

561). Pandarus, however, dismisses her excuses and tells her that she *will* come to dinner, “[o]r elles, softe he swor hire in hire ere, / He nolde nevere comen ther she were” (*Troilus* 566-67). Pandarus’s whispering of this threat in Criseyde’s ear provides a chilling image of intimate control over his niece in which he manipulates her through both physical proximity and bonds of kinship.

Indeed, Pandarus frequently exploits his kinship with Criseyde by playing upon her familial devotion to himself in order to manipulate her feelings towards Troilus. When Pandarus first tells Criseyde of Troilus’s love, he threatens her with the guilt of knowing that if she refuses Troilus, she will in turn cause not only his death but also the death of her uncle (*Troilus* II.323-29). (And again, in the context of Theban Troy, it is no small matter to have familial blood on your hands.) When Pandarus delivers Troilus’s letter to Criseyde, he beseeches her to take the letter not for love of Troilus but out of her sense of duty to, and love for, him as her uncle. By thus leveraging Criseyde’s love for himself, her blood relative, in order to force her into loving Troilus, Pandarus further plays with the boundaries of what may be considered incest, as he forces Criseyde to associate the decision to love her uncle as something inseparable from the decision to accept a lover. It is questionable whether Troilus is the one who actually wins Criseyde’s heart, for in reality he acts as little more than a puppet under the direction of Pandarus. This raises the question of for whom Criseyde really falls: Troilus the man or Troilus the façade wrought by her own uncle.

In order to better understand the full impact of Theban incest in the work, let us return to the direct comparison Troilus makes between himself and Oedipus. In Book Four, having discovered that his lover will be traded to the Greeks, Troilus laments his

loss and claims, ““But ende I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse / My sorwful lif, and dyen in distresse”” (*Troilus* IV.300-01). Julia Ebel suggests that the true connection between Troilus and Oedipus is “an inability to discern: to see in the largest sense” and that “Chaucer embellishes the implicit equation between seeing and rationality by making the comparison between Troilus and another exemplar of passionate blindness, namely Oedipus” (18). This analysis, while helpful in establishing a connection between Oedipal blindness and Troilus’s blindness to his own fate, nonetheless overlooks the cause of Oedipus’s blindness in the first place: at the discovery of his own incest, he stabs himself in the eyes. In regards to this, Patterson argues that “[t]he sharp disparity between Troilus’s infatuation with Criseyde and Oedipus’s criminal lust for his mother cannot be overridden in the quest for common denominators, nor does Trojan society present anything equivalent to the catalogue of horrors of Theban history” (Patterson 136). While this statement may be true of the Troy story on a literal level, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer specifically incorporates the Theban element of incest into a story that is otherwise non-incestuous, and this addition should not be overlooked. By weaving incest into the narrative, Chaucer implies that Troilus does indeed share in Oedipus’s sin of incest, for to truly compare Troilus’s “blindness” to that of Oedipus, the underlying implication of this comparison is that Troilus has similarly warranted his “blindness.” Though it may be argued that Troilus’s incest is only symbolic and therefore not the same as literal incest, it must be noted that so too is his blindness only symbolic, and thus his punishment fits his offense. Thus, I would argue that Chaucer’s purpose in drawing this comparison is not only to recall the recursive nature of history through this Theban

allusion but furthermore to point to incest, and unnatural familial relationships in general, as a defining connection between Thebes and Troy within this recursive pattern.

3. Family Traditions

While Patterson considers the recursive nature of the Troy story as a whole, as far as I have seen, no critics discuss the recursive nature of individual characters' biological lineages in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Yet Chaucer enhances our sense of this recursiveness on a human level by emphasizing certain characters' biological genealogies and suggesting that, despite any potential attempts to define themselves, ultimately each character is defined by, and bound to, his or her biological lineage. The fact that this recursiveness is played out on a human level demonstrates the pervasiveness of recursive historical lineages. By illustrating this recursive nature in a specifically genealogical way, that is, Chaucer draws special attention to the influence of genealogy on the individual and, allegorically, on a literary translator.

The character who mostly clearly conforms to the recursive fate of his genealogical identity is Diomedes. As noted above in the discussion on Cassandra's dream explication, Diomedes *is* his lineage. Although the poem does not provide an extensive look into Diomedes's inner life, he does not appear, at least on the surface, to struggle against the recursiveness of his lineage. Rather, he embraces and perpetuates his family legacy through his actions. Just as his father, Tydeus, participated in the siege of Thebes, so too does Diomedes participate in the siege of Troy, the historical descendent of Thebes.

Criseyde, too, is defined by her father's treachery. Though she resists the relegation of her identity to her lineage, she is ultimately unsuccessful. At the beginning

of the story, Criseyde is first identified in terms of her relationship to her father, and her state in the city is determined not by her own merits but by her father's actions: "Nowe hadde Calkas left in this meschaunce, / Al unwist of this false and wikked dede, / His doughter, which that was in gret penaunce" (*Troilus* I.92-94). At this point in the tale, not only is Criseyde defined by her lineage, but she also suffers for her father's deeds as though they were her own. Furthermore, when Criseyde seeks to disclaim culpability for her father's treason, Hector does free her from this particular blame, but he does not grant her a full disconnect from her biological lineage. Rather, he tells her that "'al th'onour that men may don yow have, / As ferforth as youre fader dwelled here, / Ye shul have'" (*Troilus* I.120-22). Instead of declaring Criseyde's honor by her merit alone, Hector's statement makes it clear that while Criseyde is to be granted a certain amount of distancing from her father, she is still irrevocably tied to her parent, as the honor he grants her is no more than a restoration to the honor she previously had under her father's name. In the end, regardless of her own will and desires or of her love affair with Troilus, Criseyde once again becomes defined by her relation to her father, as the townspeople "made this tale al newe, / How Calkas doughter, with hire brighte hewe, / At parlement, withouten wordes more, / Ygraunted was in chaunge of Antenore" (*Troilus* IV.662-65). This is the first time since her initial appearance in Book I that Criseyde's identity is defined in the text by her relation to her father, and thus her venture into the Greek camp marks not only her physical return to her father but also her inevitable return to the lineage she cannot deny. Criseyde lives up to her lineage in action as well as name, for just as her father betrays Troy in favor of the Greeks earlier in the poem, Criseyde now follows in her father's footsteps by betraying Troilus in favor of a new Greek lover.

Criseyde's choice of Diomedes over Troilus may represent a return to her maternal lineage as well. David Anderson traces Criseyde's maternal genealogy back to Greece through her mother, Argive, who he argues is the same Argive of the Greek city Argos and whom Cassandra mentions is the widow of Polynices (126-29).⁶⁰ If Anderson is correct, then Criseyde's mother was a Greek woman who was originally married to a Greek man – in particular, a prince of Thebes – and later married a Trojan after the demise of her first husband and the fall of Thebes. It is only fitting, then, that Criseyde, a Trojan woman who was originally married to a Trojan man, now submits herself to a Greek man in the looming wake of the fall of Troy, Thebes's historical descendant.

The circumstances of Criseyde's return to her biological lineage shed light on Troy's participation in its Theban inheritance. When the Greek ambassadors request Criseyde in exchange for Antenor, Hector declares that in Troy, "[w]e usen here no wommen for to selle," indicating the trading of women as though they were mere property or prisoners as something immoral or unnatural (*Troilus* IV.182). Just as Criseyde attempts to resist her biological lineage, Hector here attempts to free his city from its historical, depraved lineage as a descendent of Thebes. Hector's injunction, however, is voted down by the Trojan parliament, for which choice the narrator faults the Trojans themselves for their downfall: "For cloude of errour let hem to discerne / What best is. And lo, here ensample as yerne: / This folk desiren now deliveraunce / Of Antenor, that brought hem to meschaunce, / For he was after traitour to the town / Of Troye" (*Troilus* IV.200-05). This episode is presented almost as a sort of last chance for

⁶⁰ For David Anderson's full argument, see Anderson, David. "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1982, pp. 109-133. *Project Muse*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.1982.0004>; For further discussion on Criseyde's lineage, see Battles pg. 123-27.

the Trojans to make the right, moral, non-Theban choice, but like Criseyde, they inevitably fail. By choosing to sell a woman as property, the Trojans exhibit an unnatural treatment of women that hearkens back to the very ravishing of Helen, which is the cause of their troubles. In doing so, they affirm their rightful place in the lineage of Thebes and seal their own fate.

Like his lover and romantic rival, Troilus is bound to his lineage, as illustrated throughout the work. Book One of the poem opens with the lines: “The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen, / That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye” (*Troilus* I.1-2). These are the first lines in which the narrator introduces Troilus to the reader, and he chooses to do so in terms of his biological genealogy and royal lineage. Later on, when Pandarus first approaches Criseyde about the subject of Troilus’s love, he uses Criseyde’s query about Hector, Troilus’s brother, as a fitting segue into the subject, and he does so by equating the two men as he says, ““And ek his fresshe brother Troilus, / The wise, worthi Ector the secounde”” (*Troilus* II.157-58). In this instance, Pandarus literally fuses Troilus’s identity with that of his brother to the point that he becomes a mere “second” of his brother. These examples help illustrate the way in which Troilus’s identity is intertwined with his lineage. Yet, like Criseyde, Troilus attempts to resist the fate of his lineage when he suggests that he and Criseyde run away from Troy together. In rejecting his role as a prince of Troy and choosing his lover over his city, Troilus attempts to redefine himself according to his personal feelings rather than his lineage. He is thwarted in this attempt, however, when Criseyde points out that his plan would result in the potential loss of the city and in the definite loss of their respective reputations. In the wake of Criseyde’s betrayal, Troilus struggles internally as he tries to reconcile the truth he refuses to admit

with his persistent hope that Criseyde is still faithful to him. Having worked so hard to redefine himself as a lover, he is unable to come to terms with the fact that he is irrevocably and above all a prince. In the end, Troilus's death should come as no surprise, for as a prince of Troy, his identity and his fate are entwined with the fate of the city. If Hector is the exception to the rule of Trojans who behave like Thebans, then Troilus is the posterchild for his city's recursive Theban lineage. As I have demonstrated, Troilus participates in the sexual objectification of Helen, the excessive swearing of brotherhood with Pandarus, and implied incest with Criseyde. Troilus cannot escape his fate as a prince of Troy at least in part because he so perfectly exemplifies Troy's Theban lineage. Troilus must die because Troy must fall, as predetermined by its place in a historical lineage with Thebes. Just as Criseyde and Diomedes succumb to the predetermined fates of their respective lineages, so too must Troilus yield to his own ill-fated lineage.

4. Chaucer's Authorial Struggle

Just as Troilus and Criseyde attempt to define themselves apart from their genealogical identities, so too does the narrator struggle with his authorial lineage and the predetermined nature of his subject matter. Jennifer Campbell notes that "[t]here is a sense in this poem of what [she] would call narrative compulsion, of a story that must be told, disagreeable as it is" (343). Although Campbell does not name it directly, this "narrative compulsion" bespeaks the recursive nature of literary tradition. Chaucer is compelled to tell the story according to his sources, despite any desires to the contrary. Evan Carton sums up this view by saying that "[t]he equivalent of predestination, for the narrator, is the text of his 'auctour'" (58). Yet although Chaucer struggles with the

literary predestination of his work, he does not give in entirely to the pressure of his sources. Indeed, Campbell argues that the narrator gives Criseyde an unprecedented point of view in the tale as a means of “overthrow[ing] the authority of those old sources in order to establish himself as a new authority in control of both Criseyde and his audience” (Campbell 346). Thus, while the narrator does suffer from the narrative compulsion of telling a tale that already has an established ending, he nonetheless pushes back against the restraints of his literary lineage by undercutting his sources’ authority.

Throughout the work, the narrator frequently alludes to his sources, but he fluctuates on his faithfulness to them. At certain times, he defers responsibility for his work entirely to his sources, such as when he claims, “I nyl have neither thank ne blame / Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely, / Disblameth me if any word be lame, / For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I” (*Troilus* II.15-18). In moments such as these, the narrator purposely tells the reader that he is not in control of the story and thus not responsible for any part of it. In doing so, he emphasizes the point that the storyline of his work has already been set regardless of his own authorial inclinations. Yet, at other times in the poem, Chaucer denies the overarching authority of his sources by refusing to accept their conclusions as indisputable and instead asserting his own opinions. For example, when he writes about Criseyde’s betrayal as he “fynde[s] ek in stories elleswhere,” he makes it clear that “[m]en seyn – *I not* – that she yaf hym hire herte [emphasis added]” (*Troilus* V.1044; 1050). By asserting that his sources do not reflect his own views, the narrator distances himself from his sources and indicates his resistance to being constrained by them.

There are also instances in the poem when the narrator subtly reveals that he desires to know more of the story than what his sources contain. He does so through suggestive hints at unknown details intended to spike the reader's curiosity while simultaneously denying the satisfaction of a definite answer. One such example is when he casually asserts, "But wheither that she children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught, therefore I late it goon" (*Troilus* I.132-33). Another example can be found when the narrator writes, "But trewely, how longe it was bytwene / That she forsok hym for this Diomedes, / Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene. / Take every man now to his bokes heede, / He shal no terme fynden, out of drede" (*Troilus* V.1086-90). Dinshaw asserts that these uncertain details are "provocative, suggestive, perhaps even mildly titillating: the presence of the unknown . . . is not disruptive of the incipient love affair or the narrative but is itself generative, exciting" (41). While I agree that these details are suggestive and generative, and indeed that Chaucer intended them to be so, I find that they do not flow seamlessly into the narrative or go unnoticed. Rather, I would argue that it is precisely their disruptiveness that allows these uncertainties to be generative, as they catch the reader's eye as something somewhat out of place and therefore spark the imagination. For although the narrator claims he will let the question go without further inquiry, the simple fact that he even brought up this otherwise unwarranted aspect of Criseyde's characterization at all results in the unsteady of the supposedly solid ground of his literary sources. These lines, though brief, disrupt the flow of the storyline just enough to provide a quick mental jolt that forces the reader to question the potential hidden complexity of a rather well-known story. These instances of unresolved conjecturing imply both that the narrator himself is intrigued by the possibility of

knowing more of the story and that he recognizes and begrudgingly accepts the literary restrictions imposed upon him by the limitations of his sources. In this way, the narrator is able to maintain an image of faithfulness to his sources yet still opens up new pathways of consideration for his readers and, potentially, for future translators of his work. Moreover, the narrator thus exposes a problem inherent in literary translation: the stunted creative development of literary works due the recycling of stories.

As demonstrated by the examples above, the friction between the narrator and his sources is prevalent throughout the work. The narrator at times appears to struggle with the demands of literary tradition, yet he nonetheless succumbs overall to the weight of his text's literary lineage. One passage in particular that expresses the narrator's authorial dilemma in *Troilus and Criseyde* is found in Book IV, when the narrator laments the course of action he must relate and admits that he is nonetheless bound by his sources to relate it as such. Yet it is also clear that he still strives to resist the total constraint of following his literary predecessors:

“For which myn herte right now gynneth blede,
And now my penne, allas, with which I write,
Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite.
For how Criseyde Troilus forsook –
Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde –
Moot hennesforth ben matere of my book,
As writen folk thorough which it is in mynde.
Allas, that they sholde evere cause fynde
To speke hire harm! And if they on hire lye,

Iwis, hemself sholde han the vilanye . . .” (*Troilus* IV.12-21)

In this passage, the narrator reveals that he is reluctant to write of Criseyde’s betrayal, but this reluctance goes deeper than a simple unwillingness to shame a fictional character. His desire to go against his sources in this instance is so great that he depicts a vivid image of himself with a bleeding heart and a pen that “quaketh for drede,” thus illustrating an authorial struggle that does not merely agitate his mind but is so strong that it actually affects him in a violently physical way. Such is the narrator’s reluctance to blindly plod along in the footsteps of his literary predecessors and to perpetuate a literary lineage stunted by a lack of renewal and literary exploration. Unlike the “folk thorough which [the story] is in mynde,” the narrator wishes to explore the possibilities of the story, including the possibility that Criseyde may be much more complex than she has been portrayed by her previous translators. Despite these concerns, the narrator nonetheless does what he must and relates the events of the tale as found in his sources, as he recognizes the restrictions of working within a literary lineage. Regardless of his desire to break away from the constraints of his literary lineage, the narrator finds himself, like *Troilus* and Criseyde, bound to fulfill the fate of his lineage in translating the entirety of the story. In fact, *Troilus*’s Boethian lament can be read as the narrator’s own lament about not being able to control the story,⁶¹ for just as the fall of Troy is predetermined by the fall of Thebes, Chaucer’s literary tale of Troy is already predetermined by its literary forerunners, as evidenced by the narrator’s frequent references to his sources and his insistence that he must tell the story as it has previously been told.

⁶¹ *Troilus*’s Boethian lament is found in Book Four, lines 958-1082.

Yet although the narrator does remain largely faithful to previous versions of the story, at least in terms of plot, he does claim a few small victories toward making the story “new” and, to some degree, his own. As Matthew Giancarlo has noted, “[t]here are . . . endings to spare” in *Troilus and Criseyde* (256). In one of these endings, the narrator directs his work to “[g]o, litel bok” and “kis the steppes” of the great authors who have come before him (*Troilus* V.1786; 1791). With this statement, the narrator is participating in a tradition of authorial usurpation that establishes his place within a literary lineage.⁶² This is not, however, the final ending of the work. Having announced his claim to a place in this literary lineage and paying homage to his literary predecessors, the narrator has fulfilled his obligation to literary tradition but still has more to say. He goes on to include an extended ending not found in Statius’s or Boccaccio’s translations of the tale in which Troilus ascends “[u]p to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere” and comes to see worldly things as “vanite” (*Troilus* V.1809; 1817). In this extended ending, Troilus is finally freed from the constraints of the world and his place therein, and at the same time his literary legacy is somewhat freed from the constraints of the literary lineage of his story. Chaucer can still claim the fulfillment of his obligations to his literary lineage, as his Troilus has indeed undergone all of the events found in the previous translations of the story, but he now offers Troilus the opportunity to literally and figuratively ascend above his life and his story, scorn the vanity of the world and his life therein, and laugh at that temporal part of his existence.

⁶² Leah Schwebel argues that by directing his book “to kiss the steps of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius (V.1786-92), [Chaucer] unceremoniously oust[s] Boccaccio from his own line-up of authors to make room for the exiled ‘Stace,’ meanwhile usurping Boccaccio’s post as the ‘sixth of six’ poets” (“Literary Patricide” 160).

In the last stanza, immediately following Troilus's ascent into the eighth sphere, the narrator repeats the phrase "[s]wich fyn" five times, describing the end of Troilus, his "worthynesse," his "noblesse," and so on, and he concludes the stanza by summing up the entire poem as such: "And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde, / As I have told, and in this wise he deyde" (*Troilus* V.1829; 1831; 1833-34). This stanza emphasizes the point that Troilus has indeed met his end in every way, suggesting a sense of finality in regard to both his person and his story. From here, the narrator shifts his focus and spends the next two stanzas imploring his readers to turn to the Christian God for true fulfillment, followed by a stanza denouncing all things pagan:

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!

Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!

Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!

Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille

Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!

Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche

In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche" (*Troilus* V.1849-55)

The first four of these statements are explicitly denunciatory. The narrator denounces the "corsed olde rites" of the pagans, describes their gods as "rascaille," points out the failures of those gods, and considers worldly appetites "wrecched." The fifth statement, taken on its own, at first seems almost out of place, as it does not evoke such negative connotations, for the narrator simply calls attention to the form of ancient clerks' poetry. Yet this statement is linked to the first four both by its inclusion in the same stanza and by its continuation of the "[l]o here" pattern and sentence structure. The inclusion of this

statement as such marks it as a continuation of the same denunciatory spirit as the first four and suggests that the narrator wishes to cast this “forme” of poetry aside along with the pagan gods. In light of this, his plea to Jesus Christ for blessings, regardless of his possible religious sincerity, can be read as a play for literary authority. As Chaucer wrote for a primarily Christian audience, he could be almost assured that his readers would agree with him that paganism, and all things associated with it, were unquestionably inferior to Christianity and all things Christian.⁶³ By ending his poem by acclaiming the Christian God as the standard of all things good and true, and by at least presenting himself to be subservient to God, the narrator associates both himself and his work with Christianity rather than the paganism in which this story is founded. Thus, by having just thrown paganism and its associated poetry out the window, the narrator can easily appeal to his Christian audience as the new and, to a Christian audience arguably better, authority on the story of Troilus and Criseyde.

Yet despite Chaucer’s attempts to break free of the recursiveness of literary tradition, the outcome of his poem suggests the futility of such a hope. Criseyde, after being convinced that Troy is doomed to fall, chooses a Greek man over a Trojan, potentially as a means of ensuring her own welfare among the Greeks.⁶⁴ In shifting her allegiance, it would at first seem as though Criseyde is freed from the fate of Troy, as she is allowed to live on beyond the fall of her native city. Yet Chaucer treats the topic of recursive circularity in this poem not only on a broad, historical level but also on a deeply

⁶³ Matthew Giancarlo argues that “Troilus’s new vision is overtly figured as both arising from, and definitively concluding, his prior perspective. The equally disquieting dismissals of the narrator then recapitulate the same maneuver by referring to their source in the socially and spiritually transcendent notions of love and divinity that the ‘pagan’ text has presented . . . in order to conclude and replace them with the Christian perspective that is their definitive end” (258).

⁶⁴ For an example of this argument, see Campbell 356.

human level. The recursive fate of Troy is not tied merely to the city; rather, it is inscribed in the physical bodies of the Trojans, and as such, Criseyde carries within her physical self the recursive fate of Troy. Thus, when Criseyde accepts Diomedes as her new lover after he has already beseeched her, ““that ye me wolde as youre *brother* trete [emphasis added],”” it becomes clear that while Criseyde may indeed live on beyond the fall of the city, so too will the cycle of unnatural familial relationships live on through her beyond the story of Troy (*Troilus* V.134).⁶⁵ By extension, Chaucer perhaps suggests that so too will the literary incest of the story be carried on through the translations to come.

Ironically, Chaucer’s ultimate submission to his literary lineage is solidified by the very element of his poem that at first seems to allow him to rise above literary recursiveness: Troilus’s ascent into the eighth sphere. This alternate ending for Troilus, while original in the context of the story of Troilus and Criseyde, is not original in its premise. Chaucer in fact borrows this ending from Boccaccio’s own Theban poem, the *Teseida*.⁶⁶ Developed primarily from Statius’s *Thebaid*, this work recounts the story of two Theban princes and their love for the same woman, reconstructing the two murderous brothers as amorous rivals. By supplying an alternate ending for the story but using an ending that points directly back to Thebes, and to Theban fratricide specifically, Chaucer hints at the inevitability of the recursive nature of literary tradition. Even as he attempts to break free, he is inevitably drawn back into the circularity of his literary lineage, and backwards, from Troy to Thebes. Furthermore, the fact that Chaucer clearly uses Boccaccio’s work as a primary source but does not acknowledge him among his sources

⁶⁵ If David Anderson’s argument about Criseyde’s mother is correct, then Criseyde and Diomedes’s relationship is actually incestuous. Diomedes’s father, Tydeus, was married to Argia’s (Argyve’s) sister, making Criseyde and Diomedes first cousins.

⁶⁶ See Patterson 133

indicates a continuance of not only Theban fratricide but of Oedipal patricide as well. Schwebel argues that this very erasure of a poet's sources signifies the poet's participation in a "tradition of authorial usurpation practiced by the Latin epicists, to develop an epic genealogy for their poems" ("Literary Patricide" 140). She traces "this Oedipal series of erasures and un-erasures, of literary patricides and poetic resurrections" through several generations of Chaucer's literary genealogy ("Literary Patricide" 141):

There is a distinct progression from Statius, who presents Virgil as his superior in the *Thebaid* yet implies his own equivalence in the *Silvae*; to Boccaccio, who names Statius as the exemplary poet of arms in the *Filocolo* only to omit all mention of him in the *Teseida*; to Chaucer, who sustains his erasure of Boccaccio throughout his poems, despite relying on him repeatedly as his principal source ("Literary Patricide" 153).

Chaucer's literary successors recognized this tradition of erasure and implemented it themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of literary patricide. Daniel T. Kline explores John Lydgate's use of this tradition in *The Siege of Thebes*, in which, "[t]o overcome the 'anxiety of influence' of 'father Chaucer' whose narrative, whose law, has already proleptically shaped him, Lydgate's strategy is at once deferential, honoring Chaucer, and hostile, appropriating the unfinished *Canterbury Tales* with his own Oedipal tale of mimetic rivalry, violent desire, and illegitimate lineage" (217).⁶⁷ By participating in this tradition of Oedipal literary patricide, then, Chaucer ties himself even more securely to the literary lineage of his work and, moreover, approves a template for literary usurpation by which he expects future authors to perpetuate his own Oedipal lineage. Chaucer's

⁶⁷ For additional discussion on the Oedipal treatment of Chaucer by his successors, including a brief discussion of Harold Bloom's argument on the Oedipal relationship between authors, see Spearing, especially 20-35.

Troy is a city marked by the fratricide, incest, and otherwise unnatural relationships of its genealogical forerunner, Thebes; likewise, his literary work is a reflection of what he points out as the flaws and shortcomings of his literary predecessors. Yet, as demonstrated by his characters' perpetuation of their respective lineages, Chaucer makes clear that, despite his sources' shortcomings, he either cannot or will not escape the cycle of recursive literary tradition.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, David. "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1982, pp. 109-133. *Project Muse*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.1982.0004>.
- apRoberts, Robert P. "A Contribution to the Thirteenth Labour: Purging the *Troilus* of Incest." *Essays on English and American Literature And a Sheaf of Poems*, edited by J. Bakker et al., Rodopi, 1987, pp. 11-25.
- Ashton, Gail. "Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the 'Clerk's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1998, pp. 232–238. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25096014.
- Battles, Dominique. *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes : History and Narrative in the of Roman De Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate*. New York : Routledge, 2004.
- Blamires, Alcuin. "May in January's Tree: Genealogical Configuration in the *Merchant's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2010, pp. 106–117. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/chaucerrev.45.1.0106.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. "From the Decameron, Tenth Day, Tenth Tale." *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson, Norton, 2005, 370-378.
- Campbell, Jennifer. "Figuring Criseyde's Entente: Authority, Narrative, and Chaucer's Use of History." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1993, pp. 342–358. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25095814.

- Carton, Evan. "Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus' Bed and Chaucer's Art." *PMLA*, vol. 94, no. 1, 1979, pp. 47-61. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/461800.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Clerk's Prologue and Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 137-153.
- . "General Prologue." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 23-36.
- . "The House of Fame." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 347-373.
- . "The Friar's Prologue and Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 122-128.
- . "The Knight's Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 37-66.
- . "The Merchant's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 153-168.
- . "The Monk's Prologue and Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 240-252.
- . "The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 252-261.
- . "The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 194-202.
- . "The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 212-217.

- . "Troilus and Criseyde." *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987, pp. 473-585.
- Clogan, Paul. "The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*." *Medievalia et humanistica*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1984, pp. 168-185.
- Cohen, Edward S. "The Sequence of the 'Canterbury Tales.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1974, pp. 190-195. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25093302.
- Crocker, Holly A. "Performative Passivity and Fantasies of Masculinity in the 'Merchant's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2003, pp. 178-198. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25094244.
- Dante, Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 3: Paradiso*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- DeNeef, A. Leigh. "Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale' and the Irony of Misinterpretation." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1973, pp. 85-96. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30225517.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Donaldson, E. Talbot. "Criseide and Her Narrator." *Speaking of Chaucer*. Labyrinth Press, 1970, pp. 65-83.
- Ebel, Julia. "Troilus and Oedipus: The Genealogy of an Image." *English Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1974, pp. 15-21. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138387408597599>.

- Florschuetz, Angela. "'A Mooder He Hath, but Fader Hath He Noon:' Constructions of Genealogy in the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Man of Law's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review: A Journal Of Medieval Studies And Literary Criticism*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2009, pp. 25-60. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25642130.
- Frantzen, Allen J. "'The Pardoner's Tale', the Pervert, and the Price of Order in Chaucer's World." *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, edited by Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing, Indiana UP, 1994, pp. 131-147.
- Georgianna, Linda. "The Clerk's Tale and the Grammar of Assent." *Speculum*, vol. 70, no. 4, 1995, pp. 793–821. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2865344.
- Giancarlo, Matthew. "The Structure of Fate and the Devising of History in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 26, 2004, pp. 227-266. *Project Muse*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.2004.0000>.
- Hanna, Natalie. "'To Take a Wyf': Marriage, Status, and Moral Conduct in 'The Merchant's Tale'." *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2016, pp. 61-74.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. "The Powers of Silence: The Case of the Clerk's Griselda." *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Thomas C. Stillinger, G.K. Hall, 1988, pp. 133-149.
- Heffernan, Carol Falvo. "Contraception and the Pear Tree Episode of Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale.'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 94, no. 1, 1995, pp. 31–41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27711097.
- Hill, John M. "Avuncular Form and Pandarus's Several Embassies." *Varieties of Love, Friendship, and Community*, Lexington Books, 73-114.

- Horobin, Simon. "Additional 35286 and the Order of the 'Canterbury Tales.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1997, pp. 272–278. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25095979.
- Hume, Cathy. "'Humble Servant to Your Worthynesse': The Clerk's Tale." *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage*, vol. 3, Boydell and Brewer, 2012, pp. 49–68. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1x71mj.7.
- Neuse, Richard. "Marriage and the Question of Allegory in the 'Merchant's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1989, pp. 115–131. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25094110.
- Kline, Daniel T. "Father Chaucer and the 'Siege of Thebes': Literary Paternity, Aggressive Deference, and the Prologue to Lydgate's Oedipal Canterbury Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1999, pp. 217–235. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25096088.
- Kloss, Robert J. "Chaucer's 'the Merchant's Tale': Tender Youth and Stooping Age." *American Imago*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1974, pp. 65. *ProQuest*, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/1289746727?accountid=5683>.
- Kruger, Steven F. "Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*." *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Thomas C. Stillinger, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 150–172.
- McCall, John P. "The *Clerk's Tale* and the Theme of Obedience." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1 September 1966, pp. 260–269. *Duke University Press*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-27-3-260>.

- Morse, Charlotte E. "Critical Approaches to the *Clerk's Tale*." *Chaucer's Religious Tales*, edited by C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson, D.S. Brewer, 1990, pp. 71-83.
- Normandin, Shawn. "From Error To Anacoluthon: The Moral Of The Clerk's Tale." *Notes And Queries*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2015, pp. 218-219. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi: <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.1093/notesj/gjv063>.
- Olson, Paul A. "Chaucer's Merchant and January's 'Hevene in Erthe Heere.'" *ELH*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1961, pp. 203–214. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2872065.
- Parry, Joseph D. "Interpreting Female Agency and Responsibility in the Miller's Tale and the Merchant's Tale." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 2, 2001, pp. 133-167.
- Patterson, Lee. *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Perez, Maria Beatriz Hernandez. "Griselda's Heritage: Ancestral Family Bonds in the *Clerk's Tale*." *Traditions and Innovations: Commemorating Forty Years of English Studies at ULL (1962-2003)*, edited by Manuel Brito and Juan Ignacio Oliva, RCEI, 2004, pp. 273-280.
- Petrarch, Francis. "The Story of Griselda." *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson, Norton, 2005, pp. 378-388.
- . "Two Letters to Boccacio." *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson, Norton, 2005, pp. 388-391.

- Pugh, Tison. "Gender, Vulgarity, and the Phantom Debates of Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 114, no. 3, 2017, pp. 473-496. *Project Muse*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2017.0017>.
- . "Queer Pandarus? Silence and Sexual Ambiguity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2001, pp. 17-35. *Literature Resource Center*, <http://link.galegroup.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/apps/doc/A92907172/LitRC?u=txshracd2550&sid=LitRC&xid=47a83c0a>.
- Pratt, Robert Armstrong. "A Note on Chaucer's Lollius." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 65, no. 3, Mar. 1950, pp. 183-87. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2909000.
- Rabiee, Robert Yusef. "Rhetoric of Hypocrisy: The Pardoner's Reproduction in His Critics." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 43, 2012, pp. 79-94. *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/cjm.2012.0080.
- Reed, Shannon. "Who Is Afraid of the Pardoner?" *Journal X: A Journal in Culture and Criticism*, vol. 5, no 1-2, 2000-2001, pp. 109-116.
- Renoir, Alain. "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde, and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony." *Studia Neophilologica*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1960, pp. 14-17. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi: [10.1080/00393276008587202](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393276008587202).
- Richardson, Gudrun. "The Old Man in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale: An Interpretative Study of His Identity and Meaning." *Neophilologus*, vol. 87, no. 2, Apr. 2003, pp. 323-337.

- Rushton, Cory James. "The Awful Passion of Pandarus." *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, edited by Amanda Hopkins et al., NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2014, pp. 147–160. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt5vj80b.13.
- Schwebel, Leah. "Redressing Griselda: Restoration Through Translation In The Clerk's Tale." *The Chaucer Review: A Journal Of Medieval Studies And Literary Criticism*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2013, pp. 274-299. *MLA International Bibliography*. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/chaucerrev.47.3.0274.
- . "The Legend of Thebes and Literary Patricide in Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Statius." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 36, 2014, pp. 139-168. *Project Muse*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.2014.0028>.
- . "What's in Criseyde's Book?" Forthcoming in *The Chaucer Review*.
- Smith, D. Vance. "Death and Texts: Finitude Before Form." *Minnesota Review: A Journal of Committed Writing*, vol. 80, 2013, pp. 131-144. *Duke University Press*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00265667-2018432>.
- Spearing, A.C. "Renaissance Chaucer and Father Chaucer." *English: Journal of the English Association*, vol. 34, no. 148, 1 March 1985, pp. 1-38. *Oxford Academic*, doi: <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.1093/english/34.148.1>.
- Spencer, Matthew, et al. "Analyzing the Order of Items in Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales.'" *Computers and the Humanities*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2003, pp. 97–109. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30204882.
- Statius, Publius Papinius. *The Thebaid*. Translated by Charles Stanley Ross, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

- Stroud, T. A. "The Palinode, the Narrator, and Pandarus's Alleged Incest." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1992, pp. 16–30. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25094221.
- Strous, Barrie Ruth. "Reframing the Violence of the Father: Reverse Oedipal Fantasies in Chaucer's Clerk's, Man of Law's, and Prioress's Tales." *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, edited by Eve Salisbury et al., UP of Florida, 2002, pp. 122-38.
- Summit, Jennifer. "Troilus and Criseyde." *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, edited by Seth Lerer, Yale University Press, 2006, 213-242.
- Wilson, James H. "The Pardoner and the Second Nun: A Defense of the Bradshaw Order." *Neophilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin De La Societe Neophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society*, vol. 74, 1973, pp. 292-296, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43342825.
- Yiavis, Kostas. "Chaucer and the Death of the Father as a Figure of Authority." *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 9.1 (2001): 13-29. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.
- Zedolik, John. "'The Gardyn Is Enclosed Al About': The Inversion of Exclusivity in the 'Merchant's Tale.'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 112, no. 3, 2015, pp. 490–503. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43921935.
- Zeikowitz, Richard E. "Silenced But Not Stifled: The Disruptive Queer Power of Chaucer's Pardoner." *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 82, no. 1, 2002, pp. *DalSpace*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/63463>.