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Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde": Some Implications of the Oral Mode.

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CHAUCER'S TROILUS AND CRISEYDE: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE ORAL MODE

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Merrell Audy Knighten, Jr.
B.A., Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, 1967
M.A., Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, 1969
December, 1975
For

Merrell A. Knighten

Father, Teacher, Gentleman
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ABSTRACT

Much attention has been given to the English oral tradition and to the features of that tradition, including formulaic structures, addresses to the audience, religious frames, and clear transitions. Such features have been clearly defined and demonstrated by Parry, Lord, Crosby, Magoun, and other students of the oral tradition. These critics, however, have concentrated upon oral literature, literature created as it is delivered; thus, in applying the standards of the oral tradition to late medieval writers such as Chaucer, such critics as Crosby and Wilson have slighted a crucial distinction. Chaucer's works might more correctly be called aural in that they were created in advance and then delivered, rather than in the intensely pressured style of oral literature.

This distinction in creative modes produces noticeable differences in the works resulting from each mode. While both oral and aural literature share the features of clear transitions, religious frames, addresses to the audience, and compartmentalization, oral literature is always formulaic and frequently digressive, while aural literature is never formulaic and is considerably less digressive.

An examination of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde reveals Chaucer's response to the standard features of his mode. Particularly noteworthy is the poet's combination of religious frames with transitional techniques, modifying the standard medieval feature of religious framing with the addition of classical elements to enhance the work.
This use of classical patterns is most distinctive in the Troilus, however, in the poet's adaptation of the tools of classical rhetoric to satisfy the necessities of the aural mode. Particularly for the necessity of repeated thematic stress in aural literature, Chaucer makes use of classical rhetorical techniques to satisfy his needs.
CHAPTER I
SOME DISTINCTIONS IN THE ORAL MODE

The frontispiece of the Corpus Christi manuscript of Troilus and Criseyde bears a woodcut of the poet in a garden, reading aloud to a group of courtiers. This pleasant scene, suggesting as it does the warmth and intimacy of a personal communion between poet and audience, provides a visual demonstration of the state of "publishing" in Chaucer's age. As Bertrand H. Bronson notes in his essay "Chaucer's Art in Relation to His Audience," the conditions of the age "make it virtually certain that Chaucer was in the habit of reading his poems to groups of his friends and courtly acquaintances."¹ This assumption of oral presentation is based on a considerable body of diverse evidence, including historical accounts of the period, such graphic arts as the woodcut noted above, and an abundance of internal evidence. The fact of oral presentation, therefore, is now, with certain important exceptions, so widely and casually accepted that the implications of such presentation are often ignored. There have been, of course, many studies of the evidence of the oral mode in Chaucer's work, but these studies have most often concerned themselves with the proof of oral presentation, rather than the results, or, when going beyond this

¹In Five Studies in Literature, University of California Publications in English, 8 (1940), 5. Hereafter cited as "Chaucer's Art."
proof, have become absorbed with admiration of the sound of the language, historical analysis of the references to various personalities of the audience, or other such elements that while interesting are largely superficial, secondary to the substance of the work.  

Further, after a period of interest in oral literature spurred in large part by the work of Milman Parry and his student Albert Bates Lord on Homeric poetry and modern folk-singers, a number of more recent critics have begun to question the importance of oral considerations in discussions of Chaucer's works. Though the theory of oral presentation is generally accepted, certain objections have been raised. Robert O. Payne, for instance, suggests that modern critics have sometimes been too easily trapped by the ease and specificity with which Chaucer's poetry suggests an interested, aware, and sensitive group of immediate respondents, and have concluded that Chaucer must have read it aloud before a select court circle. Yet Troilus and Criseyde expresses certain concerns about its own preservation, extending at least its ambitions for an audience far beyond any fourteenth-century court circle.

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2 For a review of such articles and the trends suggested, see Michael Curschman, "Oral Poetry in Medieval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research," Speculum, 42 (1967), 36-45.

Payne specifically attacks the probability of Chauferian oral delivery in his comment on Chaucer's frequent addresses to his audience: "These remarks . . . are almost never so phrased as to imply unequivocally a physically present listening audience . . . ."^4

Such comments do not, of course necessarily insist that Chaucer's work was never oral. They do, however, question the importance of oral delivery and therefore seem to demand consideration. It seems worthwhile, then, to review the evidence in favor of oral delivery in Chaucer and consider the implications of such a method of publication.

The graphic evidence of oral delivery noted in the Corpus Christi woodcut is convincing of itself. Such evidence, frequently dating from the period depicted, exists in paintings, woodcuts, tapestries, and other pictorial representations of the Middle Ages. The Corpus Christi manuscript, a copy of Troilus and Criseyde now residing at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, is generally dated sometime in the quarter century following Chaucer's death in 1400. Thus, deriving from a period in close approximation to the poet, the portrayal can be assumed to depict a reasonably true-to-life situation. An excellent full-color representation of the woodcut accompanies Margaret Calway's authoritative April, 1949 article in Modern Language Review. The

^4The Key of Remembrance, p. 178.
portrait depicts, in vivid color and considerable detail, the poet reading in a garden to a mixed group of courtiers and assorted nobility, with another group in the background making its way toward an elaborate castle. As Galway notes,

There is no mistaking the figure in the right centre of the frontispiece, a little isolated and not a little exalted by means of his wooden pulpit; this is the author of the Troilus, about the time of its completion.

Galway's interest, both in this article and in an earlier article also accompanied by a reproduction of the frontispiece, suggests concern primarily with such questions as the identities of the various members of the audience, the implications of their presence, and the symbolism of the group in the background. Most important, however, is the incident the scene depicts. As Galway notes in her 1949 article, page 161, this representation, in its concrete depiction of oral delivery, is "... potentially as helpful to students of Chaucer as de Witt's sketch of an Elizabethan stage to students of Shakespeare." It is demonstrable evidence of an assumption that scholars have followed with considerable productivity, that, as Galway concludes on page 168, "As he composed these lines the poet doubtless foresaw himself reciting them."

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Thus the implications of such evidence can hardly be denied. Whether or not Chaucer intended his work for an audience of future generations, the immediate concern was its presentation before a live audience of personal acquaintances and court notables. This, in turn, as Galway suggests, "... typifies the shaping mould into which medieval court literature was poured."^7

Just as convincing, of course, are the many historical accounts of the period, including the scop tradition, the many accounts of oral reading in public for a variety of reasons,^8 and the primary limitation that the printing press was not invented until some years after Chaucer's death and did not produce a considerable body of printed texts for some years after that. Throughout the Middle Ages, therefore, the only method of disseminating manuscripts was through tedious, careful, time-consuming hand-copying of the sort that produced the many illuminated manuscripts so often admired for their detailed intricacy. Such manuscripts, the products of weeks and months of labor by trained artisans,

7"Troilus Frontispiece," p. 177.

8These accounts of oral readings have been presented by a number of scholars. See George P. Wilson, "Chaucer and Oral Reading," South Atlantic Quarterly, 25 (1926), 283-299. Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," Speculum, 11 (1936), 88-110, provides several examples of such readings. This article will hereafter be cited as "Oral Delivery." Similarly, Brenda . Stockwell's unpublished dissertation, Techniques of Aural Poetry in the Middle English Lyric, Louisiana State University, 1972, pp. 31-34, provides a concise summary. All three of these summaries provide a list of further sources for accounts of oral reading in the Middle Ages.
were of necessity relatively few in relation to demand. Even for the wealthy, then, written versions of any particular work were expensive and often little available.\(^9\)

Thus, historians and other students of the period have found and recorded many evidences of the frequency of public oral presentation. Ruth Crosby concludes, therefore, that "In the Middle Ages the masses of the people read by means of the ear rather than the eye, by hearing others read or recite rather than by reading to themselves."\(^{10}\)

This quality of almost total oral presentation continued, Crosby suggests (p. 94), "... until the invention of printing made possible the rapid multiplication of books ... ."

Beyond the graphic and historical certainties of oral presentation, there is yet a third area of evidence familiar to any student of medieval literature, the pervasive internal references suggestive of a speaker-audience situation. These references abound throughout Chaucer's works and can be divided generally into three types, each of which provides convincing evidence that the artist had in mind the probability of oral delivery.

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\(^9\)This shortage of books has been equated with almost-universal illiteracy. Beverly Boyd, however, cites a number of recent discussions of this issue and notes that "... literacy was much more prevalent than was once supposed." See Chaucer and the Medieval Book (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1973), p. 103.

\(^{10}\)"Oral Delivery," p. 88.
First, we find in Chaucer many references to an actual, concrete, present audience. Such references often take the form of asides to the audience, commenting on the story, its lesson, its probability, or on the ineptitude of the speaker in that sort of self-effacement well known to Chaucer. In The House of Fame, for instance, lines 1299-1300, the poet hurries from a passage he fears will bore his audience: "Hyt nedeth noght yow more to tellen/ To make yow to longe duellen." The reference to duellen, "to tarry," "to remain," implies, then, a restive audience; however, such a line might conceivably be intended for a reader. We should notice, then, such other lines as occur, for instance, in the opening of Troilus: "My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye." (I,5) Similarly, in Book II, lines 29ff, the poet says,

And forthi if it happe in any wyse,  
That here be any lovere in this place  
That herkneth, as the storie wol devise,  
How Troilus com to his lady grace,  
And thenketh, "so nold I nat love purchace,"  
Or wondreth on his speche or his doynge,  
I noot; but it is me no wonderynge.

Such instances, in their use of "in this place," "herkneth," and "parte fro ye," seem to insist on a speaker-audience situation. Similarly, the reference to "herkneth," "listen," introduces the second

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type of internal evidence suggestive of oral presentation, the use of
words particularly indicative of speaking and hearing, rather than
writing and reading. That this is not a casual blurring of terminol-
ogy is made quite clear in the opening of the Parliament of Fowls,
line 16: "On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde." Of books in private,
then, Chaucer reads, but to his audience, he has told, has spoken.
In similar constructions, the poet often mentions speaking and telling
and hearing. "But wherfore that I speke al this?" he asks in line 17
of the Parliament of Fowls, and in the proem introducing Book II of
the House of Fame, he asks for help "To tellen al my drem arygth"
(527).

It is particularly notable that a clear distinction can be
made between the poet's use of such terms in his own person and that
of his character. In the prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, for
instance (715-719), the yeoman says

    Now wolde God my wit myghte suffise
    To tellen al that longeth to that art!
    But natheless yow wol I tellen part.
    Syn that my lord is goon, I wol nat spare;
    Swich thyng as that I knowe, I wol declare.

The use of tellen, declare, and yow in this construction is
part of a dramatic situation presented by the poet and bears no evi-
dence that the poet himself is speaking. When, however, in the General
Prologue the poet addresses his own audience, the implications are con-
siderably different, and the reader now and the listener in Chaucer's
audience can easily recognize that the poet speaks in his own person
in 715ff:
Now have I tolled yow soothly, in a clause,
... But now is tyme to yow for to telle
How that we baren us that ilke nyght,
Whan we were in that hostelrie alyght;
And after wol I telle of our viage
And al the remenaunt of oure pilgrimage.
But first I pray yow, of youre curteysye,
That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes properly.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot rehearse as ny as evere he kan ... .

This passage, shot through as it is with references to telling or speaking and to a visible, concrete yow, the audience before the speaker, demonstrates clearly the first two types of internal evidence in support of oral presentation and leads further into the third, the reference within the work to a speaker telling a story to a live audience.

This third group, a body of references to the story-teller himself, is again present quite frequently in Chaucer. Beyond the obvious instance of the Canterbury Tales, where there is some excuse for such a presentation, there is, for instance, the example within the tales themselves, as Crosby notes, wherein the Wife of Bath becomes incensed with a husband for his persistent reading aloud to her. "Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his heres," she says (721), and "Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,/ Of Hercules and of his Dianyre

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..." (724-725) Again, Crosby notes in the same place the example in Troilus when Pandarus "Herden a mayden reden hem the geste/ Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste..." (11,83-84) To such examples might be added the lines at the beginning (509-511) of Book II of the House of Fame:

Now herkeneth, every maner man
That Englissh understonde kan,
And listeneth of my drem to lere.

These lines, in their reference to hearing and to the live, present, listening audience, seem definitive evidence. Finally, and perhaps most clearly demonstrative of the certainty of live presentation, Chaucer himself gives clear notice of his intention in the beginning of The Romaunt of the Rose, 31-40:

Now this drem wol I ryme aright
To make your hertes gaye and lyght,
For Love it prayeth, and also
Commaundeth me that it be so.
And if there any aske me,
Whether that it be he or she,
How this book, the which is here,
Shall hade, that I rede you here:
It is the Romance of the Rose,
In which al the art of love I close.

It seems easily demonstrable, then, that whatever other ends the poet had in mind for his works, they were constructed with an immediate probability of oral presentation. Certain critics, however, while admitting the fact of oral presentation, have yet denied its importance to the modern audience. Paul F. Baum puts the case quite bluntly: "Geoffrey Chaucer reading aloud to certain groups in the late fourteenth century is for us a fiction; what remains is Geoffrey Chaucer addressing
us from the printed page."13 This comment, particularly in that it de­
rives from a respected Chaucerian, demands careful consideration; it
implies, without equivocation, that no matter what the original circum­
stances might have been, our modern treatment of Chaucer can be per­
tinent only when it deals with Chaucer in the "literary" sense of a
printed text.

In a recent work, Dieter Mehl repeats much the same charge,
coming to an even more serious conclusion:

Many recent critics have rightly insisted
on the fact that Chaucer's poetry was
written for a live audience, not for the
study, and that this must have very defi­
nite consequences for our way of under­
standing these poems.

... this particular audience at the
court of Richard II is, for us, only a
piece of historical fiction. Whatever
reality it may have had for Chaucer, for
us it can never be more than an abstract
reconstruction which does not really
affect our experience when we read Chaucer.14

Each of these critics, for separate reasons and to some extent
separate conclusions, would deny the importance of any consideration
of the conditions of the original presentation. The implication, thus,
is that since few today hear Chaucer read extensively and since in any

13Paul F. Baum, Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation (Durham,

14 "The Audience of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," in
Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honor of Rossell Hope Robbins.
ed. by Beryl Rowland (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1974),
p. 173.
case the original audience is lost to us, along with their reactions, their tastes, their individual foibles, since most of us now spend our time almost exclusively with the printed page, analysis of Chaucer's works should remain essentially "literary" in that it centers on what is said, rather than the implications of the original presentation. Particularly in Mehl, there is the implication that the conditions of the original presentation cannot affect our understanding and it is therefore useless to bother.

One answer to such charges, logically, lies in the Bronson essay quoted earlier. If, Bronson suggests, Chaucer habitually read his poems to a live audience of friends and courtly associates, this fact must inevitably have shaped the final product:

He could not, if he would, have ignored the fact as he wrote. He could not have kept the thought out of his mind, while he worked, that this passage which he was now composing he would in all probability be reading before certain individuals not many days hence . . . .

One might suggest, then, that if the conditions of the original publication invariably shaped the product, consideration of the original situation is imperative, even at the cost, as Mehl implies, of considerable effort. The implication of Bronson's comment is that writing for communication through the printed page puts a certain distance between the poet and his audience. Such communication is less personal, less intimate, less likely, then, to have the touch of warm correspondence that a discussion between friends face-to-face is likely to have.

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15"Chaucer's Art," p. 5.
Wilson suggests, for instance, that much of the "lively style" so common to Chaucer is the result of this atmosphere of personal contact between the poet and his audience.\textsuperscript{16}

Further, poetry orally composed and/or orally delivered has certain qualities of its own, qualities more concretely visible than "lively style" which must be explained and can be explained only in terms of the original presentation and the necessities enforced by that presentation. An understanding of Chaucer's verse, then, recognizing its oral nature, must of necessity consider the features common to such presentation.

These characteristics have to a large extent been defined, categorized, and exemplified by a series of studies. These studies have, in examining a number of medieval and premedieval works, outlined the characteristics of oral poetry and demonstrated the existence of such features in a variety of English and Continental oral poems.

Most clearly indicative of orally composed poetry, of course, is the formulaic nature of such verse. Necessitated by the conditions of composition, the rapid, almost extemporaneous movement of the verse, such formulae are inevitably present in the oral work. Francis P. Magoun, in a Speculum essay on the "Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," largely based on the analyses of Parry and

\textsuperscript{16}"Chaucer and Oral Reading," p. 298.
Lord, describes this element of oral poetry and notes the conclusions that might logically be drawn:

... the characteristic feature of orally composed poetry is its totally formulaic character. From this a second point emerged, namely, that the recurrence in a given poem of an appreciable number of formulas or formulaic phrases brands the latter as oral, just as a lack of such repetitions marks a poem as composed in the lettered tradition. Oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is never formulaic, though lettered poets occasionally consciously repeat themselves... 18

Magoun's thesis is based, of course, on the "urgency" of oral poetry; the oral poet, in composing his work before an audience, has no time for lengthy thought in his creation. Rather, facing a situation in which he must produce line upon line in a situation approaching the extemporaneous, the poet relies upon a standardized pattern to provide for the necessities of the moment. Lord describes the process:

The singer's problem is to construct one line after another very rapidly. The need for the "next" line is upon him even before he utters the final syllable of a line. There is urgency. 19


18 Francis P. Magoun, Jr., in Speculum, 28 (1953), 446-447.

19 The Singer of Tales, p. 54.
Such a technique does not imply that the singer is creating his story "cold," that he is composing entirely without preparation; rather, he is most frequently dealing with a familiar narrative, one well known and thus rehearsed in a sense, or, if he presents a new tale, he has planned its basic elements in advance.

The extemporaneous quality, the element of immediate creativity, lies in the presentation itself, in the arrangement of the narrative and the choice of combination of phrases. This artistic creativity, the expression of perhaps thousands of lines in a demanding metrical framework, produces in itself a demanding art form. As Lord notes, the oral poet must face the necessity of verbalizing line after line, without pause for thought, metrically satisfactory, and yet expressive of the content of his tale. In the face of these requirements, the singer/poet is forced to rely on a mechanism developed over the course of many years to meet these demands for generations of singers, the formula:

... how does the oral poet meet the need of the requirements of rapid composition without the aid of writing and without memorizing a fixed form? His tradition comes to the rescue. Other singers have met the same need, and over many generations there have been developed many phrases which express in the several rhythmic patterns the ideas most common in the poetry. These are the formulas ... .

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20 The Singer of Tales, p. 22.
The qualities of these formulae have been debated by a number of critics. Their existence as a crucial part of the singer's "word-hoard" is generally recognized, but their specific nature is not so clearly established. Parry speaks in terms of "fixed phrases," implying a vast stock of invariable thought-units expressed in a specific, unchanging combination: "... he makes his verses by choosing from a vast number of fixed phrases which he has heard in the poems of other poets."21

This is the formula in its most simplistic and yet most demanding sense, suggesting as it does a lengthy stock of set phrases which the singer must be able to call to mind in a moment. Lord, however, implies another sort of formula, less rigid, implying a changeable pattern rather than the certainty of a fixed phrase:

"The speaker of this language the patterns of oral narrative verse, once he has mastered it, does not move any more mechanically within it than we do in ordinary speech. ... He does not "memorize" formulas any more than we as children "memorize" language."22

This stress on learning as opposed to memorizing increases the complexity of the formula, allowing it to vary to adapt to changing demands as does the structure of language itself, yet to an extent it decreases the effort implied of the singer in allowing a choice of patterns within the phrase. "The patterns are many," Lord continues on page 43, "and their complexity is great, so that there are

22 The Singer of Tales, p. 36.
few new words that cannot be poured into them." This view of the
formula has gained a generally widespread acceptance. R. F. Lawrence,
for instance, suggests that "The formula was thus not a simple phrasal
repetition: it was capable of variation within a system..."²³

With the formulaic nature of oral poetry so clearly estab­
lished, it is to be expected that efforts have been made to identify
formulaic features in Chaucer's works. Ruth Crosby, in the Chaucer
article mentioned earlier, gives the subject a thorough treatment,
identifying a variety of stock repetitions: "'On (or upon) a day'
occurs about fifty-three times; 'so befel' or 'so hit befel' about
'nirty times . . . ," concluding that Chaucer was "influenced in his
choice of words by the popular tendency of his day, a tendency to
repetition of conventional words and phrases, which was fostered by
the custom of oral delivery."²⁴ It is interesting to note that Crosby
goes so far as to count stock phrases and other such repetitions, yet
seems reluctant, quite correctly, to assign formulaic characteristics
to the poet, concluding (p. 422) that "On the whole, Chaucer uses set
formulas sparingly."

A second identifiable feature of oral poetry, again detailed
by Crosby, is frequency of direct address to the audience. Repeatedly,

²³"The Formulaic Theory and its Application to English
Alliterative Poetry," in Essays on Style and Language, ed. by
the oral poet will appeal specifically to the audience, asking its attention or making some reference to a specific listener. Crosby notes, for instance, these appeals for attention and the necessity, in an oral presentation, for such an appeal:

When we consider the circumstances under which such recitations took place---after feasts when the guests were all talking at once, for example---we see the reason for such a custom of address. It was necessary for the story-teller to ask that all noise come to an end and that attention be given to him. His tale would be told in vain unless he made such a request. Direct address to an audience is then the surest evidence of the intention of oral delivery.  

Such appeals for attention are not frequent in Chaucer's work, indicating perhaps more contemporary respect for the poet than for most oral poets, but they do exist; we might return, for instance, to the lines from The House of Fame already cited: "Now herkeneth, every maner man/That Englishh understonde kan/And listeneth of my drem to lere."

Crosby defines yet a third marked trait of oral poetry, the persistent use of religious beginnings and closings. "Either before or after the usual call for attention the poet invokes a blessing upon the company before him, and he usually closes with a benediction." This feature is frequent in Chaucer, perhaps the best-known example being the Retraction at the end of the Canterbury Tales. Indeed, the

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convention was apparently so thoroughly accepted and understood by Chaucer's audience that the poet could modify it, deriving a mild humor as in the invocation to The House of Fame (66-69):

    But at my gynnynge, trusteth wel,  
    I wol make invocacion,  
    With special devocion,  
    Unto the god of slep anoon.

A fourth distinctive feature of oral poetry, defined clearly by Lord, is frequency of digression. Since the oral poet composes before a live audience, with the general plan of his work in mind but not a set pattern of its presentation, with the capability, further, of judging his audience's reactions, its interest in any particular detail, there exists the probability of unplanned movement away from the central line of the story, embellishing at will or pausing for a related tale if the audience seems interested:

    In building a large theme the poet has a plan of it in his mind beyond the bare necessities of narrative... he knows where he is going. As in the adding of one line to another, so in the adding of one element in a theme to another, the singer can stop and fondly dwell upon any single item without losing a sense of the whole. The style allows comfortably for digression or for enrichment.27

Fifth, there is in oral poetry a consistent pattern of clear, even obvious transitional devices, lines or phrases intended to move

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27 The Singer of Tales, p. 92.
the listener from one point in the narrative, from one scene or character, to another. We can find a number of these obvious transitions in Chaucer's works, for instance the lines in *Troilus and Criseyde* when the poet directs his audience from one scene to another: "Now lat hem rede, and torne we anon/ To Pandarus. . . ." (II, 1709-1710)

Crosby describes the necessity of these clear transitions: such transitions, she notes, are "... a necessary accompaniment of work to be orally delivered. . . . The mediaeval listeners could not glance back a few pages if they lost track of the story for a moment."²⁸

Finally, there is in oral poetry, perhaps as a combination of some of the features noted above, what Wilson has called a "lively style." This quality, difficult to define precisely, refers to the intimacy of such verse, the ability of the poet to respond to the audience much as a modern speaker, for instance, grows warmer with a receptive, friendly audience, resulting in a casual looseness of tone, a warmth reflected in such little joking asides as Chaucer's lines in *The House of Fame*, 1341-1349:

Loo! how shulde I now telle al thys?
Ne of the halle eke what nede is
To tellen yow that every wal
Of hit, and flor, and roof, and al
Was plated half a foote thikke
Of Gold, and that nas nothyng wikke,
But, for to prove in alle wyse,
Asyny as ducat in Venyse,
Of which to lite al in my pouche is?

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We might note further such pointed references to the audience's reactions as we find in *Troilus*, II, 666ff:

> Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
> "This was a sodeyn love; how myght it be
> That she so lightly loved Troilus,
> Right for the firste syghte, ye, parde?"
> Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe!
> For every thyng, a gynnyng hath it nede
> Er al be wrought, withowten any drede.

It is easily demonstrable, then, that orally composed poetry has a number of specific distinguishing features. It is formulaic.

It includes frequent addresses to the audience. It often bears religious introductions and closings. It has obvious transitions. It is susceptible to digression, and it has a "lively style." On the basis of these criteria, several critics have approached Chaucer's works in terms of their oral qualities, and the results, most frequently, have been an affirmation of their oral nature.

It is at this point, however, that an important distinction in the nature of "oral" literature must be made: that distinction between literature orally composed, in the sense of the folk songs Parry and Lord examined, the works of a singer creating as he delivers, and literature composed in advance, carefully forethought, and delivered orally. This distinction is clearly noted in the Stockwell dissertation cited earlier: "Such literature, written down but designed for oral presentation before an audience of listeners, has throughout this study been termed 'aural' poetry to distinguish it from the orally-composed, orally presented literature of an earlier
It is the first group, oral poetry as opposed to aural, to which most of the studies cited are devoted. Chaucer, however, quite clearly is an aural poet. As Kellogg and Scholes note in The Nature of Narrative, "Such works as The Knight's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde are written compositions in the full modern sense."

This distinction, then, poses a crucial question: how fully do the identified features of the first group describe the characteristics of the second? The importance of this distinction, and the care that should be taken in applying it, is noticeable in even a brief survey of the listed criteria. It might be argued, for instance, that applying the question of formulae to Chaucer is worse than useless; it is misleading. Though there have been suggestions of a "transitional" style incorporating features of both oral and "literary" poetry, and though both Lord and Crosby admit the possibility of certain formulaic remnants in a written composition, the fact remains that a writer, working in his leisure without the pressure of a listening audience awaiting the next line, is not faced

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29 Techniques of Aural Poetry in the Middle English Lyric, p. 20.


31 See, for example, Lawrence's "The Formulaic Theory and its Application to English Alliterative Poetry," p. 174.

32 "Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery," p. 422, and The Singer of Tales, p. 130.
with the need for formulae. While the writer may use stock phrases for convenience or because his audience enjoys the familiar, he is under no particular pressure to do so, and this modification of circumstances inevitably produces an altered style. Lord argues that "The written technique . . . is not compatible with the oral technique, and the two could not possibly combine to form another, a third, a 'transitional' technique."33

Further, it has been argued quite convincingly that the usefulness of these criteria has reached a literary "dead end." Michael Curschmann, in a survey of recent trends, argues that

Unfortunately these methods provide a certain temptation to mechanical analysis: one breaks down passages of Anglo-Saxon or, as has more recently been done, Old Spanish and Old Saxon poetry into "formulas" and formula systems, only to find once more that they were "composed orally." 34

If this is the case, then an attempt to turn the directions of analysis of oral literature might well be productive.

It might be noted, third, that many of the criteria listed are not so totally limited to oral poetry as are formulae. One need only glance, for instance, at Tristram Shandy, an indisputably "literary" work, for examples of addresses to the audience and "lively style."

33The Singer of Tales, p. 129.

"Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it," Tristram says, and a few pages later, "--But pray, Sir, what was your father doing all December--January, and February?--Why, Madam,—he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica."35

Such considerations do not, of course, preclude the possibility of meaningful examination of Chaucer's work as oral literature. They do, however, stress the importance of careful selection of criteria and considered application of them. First, consideration should be given, in an application of oral criteria to Chaucer's work, to identification of those traits of oral literature that are also distinctive and, perhaps more important, necessary in an aural work. Second, if such features of necessity can be identified, we might consider how Chaucer, in a written composition such as Troilus and Criseyde, deals with the demands of a listening audience.

An examination, then, of medieval works heretofore identified simply as "oral" should produce a list of criteria similar to that already cited; if, however, these criteria are then examined in terms of their origin, in terms of their usefulness either to the singer or to the audience or both, then some worthwhile distinctions might be made, these distinctions producing a list of features appropriate to the aural work. These features identified, it should then

be possible, in a thorough examination of *Troilus and Criseyde*, to
determine Chaucer's response to the necessities of his mode.
CHAPTER II

BEOWULF AND LA CHANSON DE ROLAND: TWICE-TOLD TALES

It has been demonstrated that oral poetry consistently includes certain identifiable traits: formulae, addresses to the audience, religious beginnings and endings, obvious transitions, and a susceptibility to digression. Analysis of these and other traits, however, and of works bearing these features, has in the past tended toward a certain similarity of treatment and of conclusion that works bearing several or all of these features, particularly formulae, are oral in origin. Curschmann, as was noted earlier, argues convincingly that such analysis tends to be "mechanical," ultimately limited in scope and in the conclusions drawn.

As one method of escape from this dead end, it has been argued that a distinction should be drawn between oral and aural literature and, that distinction having been made, criteria for aural literature more accurately determined. Such a list of criteria, of course, might eventually lead to the same mechanistic conclusions as noted before; it should be possible, however, once these features of aural literature are suitably identified and the necessities of oral presentation as opposed to oral creation are understood, to determine, in examining such a work as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, the poet's response to the necessities of his mode and thus evaluate an aspect of the poet's art not yet clearly discussed.

In preparing such an analysis, I have examined two works in some detail, Beowulf and La Chanson de Roland, in hopes of determining
a satisfactory list of aural features. Both works, it might be noted, are generally accepted as oral in origin, as opposed to literary; however, a variety of critics have disputed the origin of the present manuscripts, arguing that one or the other is essentially literary, composed by a scribe "pen in hand," rather than by an oral singer. We might notice, for example, Paul F. Baum's comment that Beowulf is "most unsuited for oral recitation."\(^1\)

Such arguments, rather than detracting from the usefulness of the works as models for analysis, enhance the opportunity for constructive study, for it can be demonstrated that many of the features the critics have noted are in fact elements arising from the oral situation rather than detracting from the possibility of such an origin. As such, these features thus become linked with the oral mode and identifiable as a part of that mode. Such traits identified, it should then become possible, in considering the necessities demanded by the circumstances of the oral or aural poet's mode, to distinguish and separately approach the features of oral and aural poetry.

Such a study might logically begin with the familiar, easily identifiable oral features of Beowulf. It would seem, in light of the evidence presented in recent years, that the issue of Beowulf's

\(^1\)"The Beowulf Poet," Philological Quarterly, 39 (1960), 398.
composition should by now have been clearly resolved in favor of oral composition and presentation. The evidence presented by such noted scholars as Parry, Lord, Magoun, Crosby, Whitelock, and Creed appears conclusively to defend a theory of oral composition, and the student of *Beowulf* might therefore conclude that the poem was both composed and delivered before a live audience.

As the earlier Baum quotation suggests, however, the issue has not been so clearly resolved. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, for instance, insists that *Beowulf* is a literary composition, created "pen in hand" rather than orally. The general trend of this school of thought, oddly enough, is to admit that *Beowulf* has an oral background even while denying its oral composition, and thus the issue has grown increasingly complex. In summary, the theory of oral composition, while defended by the scop tradition itself, the formulaic nature of the poem demonstrated conclusively by Magoun, and the nature of the audience depicted by Whitelock, has been attacked on the bases of structure, length, and style.

It would be well, then, before embarking upon an extension of an already confused argument, to examine briefly what has been

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done before. First, the tradition of the scop has always been foremost in the defense of a theory of oral composition. The nature of the scop, to entertain the guests in the banquet hall with an oral presentation of an extemporaneous nature has been fully documented and is paralleled by the oral singers of the Lord analysis noted earlier. We see in Beowulf itself a detailed description of the activity of the scop as he sings in celebration of Beowulf's victory over Grendel:

Hwilum cyninges þegn,  
guma gilphæden, gidda gemynndig,  
sē ðe ealfeal ðealgesegena  
worn gemunde, word ðeper fand  
sōde gebunden; secg eft ongan  
sið Bēowulfes snyttrum styrian,  
ond on spēd wrecan spel gerāde,  
wordum wrixlan; wēlhwylc gecwæð  
þæt hē fram sigemundesecgan hyrde  
ellendædum, uncēpes fela  
Wælsinges gewin, wide sīðas,  
Þa ra þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston,  
faþhēe ond fyrena, búton Fitela mid hine,  
þonne hē swulces hwæt secgan wolde,  
eām his nefan, swā hīe ðæ wārgon  
æt niða gehwām nydgesteallan.4

Much has been made of this aspect of the poem, and it is well to note that as the scop sings Beowulf's praises on the ride back from the mere, he fashions the old story of Sigemund into a newly relevant praise of Beowulf. This is clearly composition extempore, the poet calling on his stock of well-known tales to fashion something new.

4Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Co., 1922), 11. 867-882. All further citations from Beowulf are from this edition and are cited in the text.
Nor is support of the scop tradition lacking in other Old English verse. _Widsith_, it has been widely noted, fully details the function of the scop as an entertainer, his livelihood dependent on the favor of his lord and his ability to please that lord with the verses he sings.

Thus the scop tradition provides in itself a clear defense of the oral composition of Beowulf, and it is worth noting that even the opponents of the theory do not deny the importance of the oral tradition. Baum, for instance, notes that

> A poem assumes readers, but since in the eighth century the Beowulf poet could hardly expect any considerable number of readers... it is usually taken for granted that the Beowulf poet cast himself in the role of a scop and... recited his poem to a group.5

Careful attention should be given to the lack of a literate audience Baum mentions, since this lack in itself gave rise to the necessity of the scop and thus appears to argue conclusively the theory of oral presentation, if not oral composition.

Of even greater importance is the oral-formulaic character of the poem demonstrated by Magoun. In the essay cited earlier, Magoun examines the first few lines of Beowulf in considerable detail and charts their formulaic nature. The result is clear evidence that the poet composed from a supply of ready-made phrases, calling upon such

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stock phrases as needed and returning to them as necessary. The singer, Magoun notes, "must and does call upon ready-made language, upon a vast reservoir of formulas filling just measures of verse."6

The importance of Magoun's demonstration of the formulaic nature of Beowulf should be immediately obvious. Magoun continues, in the same article (pp. 446-447), to note that

.. the recurrence in a given poem of an appreciable number of formulas or formulaic phrases brands the latter as oral, just as a lack of such repetitions marks a poem as composed in a lettered tradition. Oral poetry... is composed entirely of formulas... while lettered poetry is never formulaic... .

Thus, if we accept Magoun's insistence that formulaic poetry must arise from oral composition, Beowulf, in its consistent use of formulae, must demonstrably be the result of oral composition. This point, however, has been much belabored; it is enough to note that not everyone has accepted Magoun's conclusions, even though Robert P. Creed, in his essay "The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem," has demonstrated that a poem can be composed entirely from a stock of memorized formulae.7

Magoun's theory of formulaic composition is reflected by Klaeber in what amounts to a summary of the third group of arguments

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6"Oral-Formulaic Character," p. 446.
7In ELH, 26 (1959), 445-454.
in favor of oral composition, those devoted to the style and structure of the poem.

Apart from the matter of formulas, there are not wanting reminders of a primitive or, perhaps, "natural" method of expression suggesting the manner of conversational talk or recitation before a crowd of listeners... [italics mine] the free and easy use of personal pronouns... the sudden change of subject... the exclamatory element... the fondness for repetition... the jerky movement...

Thus Klaeber too appears to support a theory of oral composition, and his comments are particularly notable in that, for Klaeber, the style and the structure of the poem are indicative of oral composition.

The distinctive feature of Klaeber's mention of style and structure is that it is precisely these features that have been the target of those who would deny the oral nature of the work. A concise presentation of the arguments opposing oral composition appears in Baum's essay "The Beowulf Poet." Among other arguments, Baum notes as particularly decisive the length of the poem, the abrupt and incomplete digressions and allusions, and what he considers the digressive style and contorted structure of the poem; his examination of Beowulf leads him to conclude that the poet "adopted a tense crowded style and a convoluted method of narration most unsuited to oral recitation, and if he looked for an audience of listeners he was extraordinarily, not to say stubbornly, sanguine."  

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8Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, p. lxxvii.
These objections could perhaps be more clearly defined. The length of the poem, a little over three thousand lines, is clearly in excess of what we might expect a festive, perhaps drunken and noisy audience to endure. As Lord notes,

The singer has to contend with an audience that is coming and going, greeting newcomers, saying farewells to early leavers; a newcomer with special news or gossip may interrupt the singing for some time, perhaps even stopping it entirely.10

If we propose, instead of one lengthy sitting, three separate sittings for the poem, we are faced with the possibility of a varied and forgetful audience, probably containing new listeners or listeners who have forgotten much of what went on before. Thus Baum's objections might appear at least superficially valid.

Further, the poem is admittedly and obviously allusive and digressive, and these allusions and digressions are frequently abrupt and incomplete. The modern audience is often left wondering, teased by the vague allusion or irritated by the distraction. We need only examine the references, never fully explained, to the feud that eventually destroyed Heorot to note such allusive, teasing incompleteness. Again, therefore, Baum's objections appear to have some basis in fact.

Finally, Baum's references to the "tense crowded style" and "convoluted" narration are deserving of some attention. The style

10The Singer of Tales, p. 14.
of the poem is indeed often crowded, hurrying over some events, linger ing on others, speeding up, then lapsing to a leisurely pace, and the narrative is quite obviously contorted, leaping ahead and doubling back over ground already covered.

Taken cumulatively, therefore, the arguments against oral composition and presentation appear to have some weight, and Baum's conclusion suggests a theory of composition far distinct from the oral. For the usual theory of oral composition, Baum concludes (pp. 394-395), we must accept a group he considers highly unlikely:

a group . . . sufficiently familiar with Geatish and Swedish feuds and legends and sagas . . . to be able to absorb easily and with pleasure the poet's somewhat abrupt allusions . . . a group capable of the concentrated attention necessary to follow, while listening, a narrative as involved and often circuitous, in a style as compressed and often cryptic, as that of Beowulf . . . nimble-minded enough, while listening to, say, three sequences of about 1000 lines each, to pick up and drop at need the several allusions . . . without losing the main pattern . . .

Baum therefore seems to suggest that Beowulf is not fit for oral presentation (and perhaps not even for written presentation), but is rather intended for the small, uniquely talented group of readers capable of the mental gymnastics he feels necessary for a full appreciation of the poem.

Thus the scop tradition, the formulaic nature of the work, and, for some at least, the structure of the poem support a theory of oral composition. Conversely, the length, allusive nature, style, and structure of the work are cited as evidence that the poem is
essentially "literary" or written in its composition, and the problem therefore grows increasingly complex.

It might be suggested, however, that the issue is only superficially difficult, and that Baum is unduly harsh in his examination of the poem. Far from denying the oral composition of the poem, an examination of the structure of Beowulf, in particular the function of repetition, should suggest, first, that the length of the poem is not the problem it appears to be; second, many of the allusions and digressions in themselves serve a repetitive function that benefits both the poem itself and a theory of oral composition; third, the structure of the poem, particularly in its "convoluted" quality, supports rather than denies the theory of oral composition and delivery.

Such repetition is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Beowulf, and it might profitably be argued that this repetition serves not only the traditional functions, but also a function deriving directly from the oral nature of the work. It seems almost redundant, of course, to note that there is an abundance of repetition in Beowulf. Even a brief glance at the poem will reveal a profusion of repetitions varying in form from the myriad variations, the half-line appositive phrases, to lengthy hundred-line summaries of what has gone before. Nor have these many repetitions escaped the notice of the critics, and a massive variety of critical studies have arisen to deal with the problems of the repetitions. One need only glance, for instance, at the
chapter on variation in Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur's *The Art of Beowulf* to gain an appreciation of the complexity and importance of variation in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Others, notably Ruth Crosby and Francis P. Magoun in the essays already cited and in Magoun's "Bede's Story of Caedmon," have dealt with the minor repetitions to be found in *Beowulf*. Indeed, it is from the studies of Magoun that the importance of the repetition of certain formulas has been understood in light of its support of the theory of oral composition of *Beowulf*. Thus the shorter repetitions in *Beowulf*, the variations and formulaic phrases, have not gone wanting for critical commentary.

Nor, it will be noted further, have critics slighted the longer repetitions, the continued references to what has gone before or to material that at first seems "outside" the narrative, the many digressions. As these repetitions, in particular the longer summaries of past action, involve the structure of the poem, sometimes twisting that structure upon itself, doubling and redoubling, they have drawn considerable critical commentary, and much of it critical in the pejorative sense, as the Baum essay noted earlier.

A further examination of the function of repetition in the poem, however, would suggest that such critics have overlooked or denied a fundamental part of the nature of this repetition. In short, rather than denying oral composition, much of the repetition in *Beowulf* arises as a result of oral composition and is directly expressive of the particular needs of a work composed and delivered orally. Seen
in this light, much of the "involved and circuitous" nature of the poem is explained, and the contorted path of the narrative thus becomes more necessity than defect.

In support of this proposal, it is necessary to examine at least a few representative samples of repetition in regard to their contributions to the poem. What, we should ask in looking at each repetition, does this contribute to the poem? Is this necessary, or is the poet wandering pointlessly? If the answer is the latter, then Baum's objections would appear valid. If, however, the repetition supports the poem, if it serves a useful function, then we must put aside the complaints of a tortured narrative.

In making such an examination, it will be useful, though obviously to some extent artificial, to sort the repetitions under study into three loose and sometimes overlapping groups. First, we should note the minor repetitions, including variations, the gefraen formulae, and certain transitional phrases, for instance "________ spoke, son of _________." The second group includes narrative repetition, summaries of action that has gone before, particularly the lengthy summations introducing the second and third episodes. Finally, the third group is composed of those repetitions we might label thematic. This third group, which includes many of the digressions of which so many have complained, repeats and stresses the central theme
of the poem, the behavior and bearing of the noble warrior and the temporal nature of success.11

In each of the groupings noted above, the functions of the repetitions included vary according to the demands of the moment and of the nature of that particular repetition. This is expectable and need not detract from the common factor seen in at least some of the repetitions of each group—that the repetition in some way serves the needs of a live audience hearing the performance rather than reading a description of it.

The first group, for instance, the minor repetitions, caters specifically to the demands of a live audience in at least two of its repetitions. This group includes variations, the gefraegn formulae, and the repetitive transitional phrases. Of variation, "a double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words,"12 so much has been said that little needs to be added. We are introduced to variation in the first lines of Beowulf, and the technique is applied constantly throughout the poem. In lines 1-3, for instance, we note an immediate application of the technique:

11There have been, of course, other interpretations of the theme of this work. The interpretation suggested above, however, is generally accepted, and at any rate the existence of other interpretations does not invalidate the theory that the digressions may extend the theme.

12The Art of Beowulf, p. 40.
Hwæt, wē Gār-Dena in gēardagum,
þēodcyninga þrym gefrūnοn,
hu þā æþelingas ellen fremedon!

Of the purpose of this repetitive technique, aside from its obvious poetic attractiveness, Brodeur theorizes, especially in the instances of three-fold variation, the creation of "a sense of deep emotional tension . . . the variation conveys and emphasizes the exceptional dramatic height and tension of the situation." (p. 45)

It will be noted, then, that variation, the first of the minor forms of repetition under study, appears to have little import in the consideration of oral composition in that it may be explained in terms of serving a need beyond the immediate metrical demands of the moment. It might easily be argued, however, that the stock phrases naturally involved in the technique of variation are direct support of Magoun's theory of oral-formulaic composition, and indeed Creed notes that the schematized pattern of variation "suggests that the singer of Beowulf did not need to pause . . . to consider what word to put next. His diction . . . did his thinking for him." 13

We are concerned, however, with the interplay between the poet and his audience and the demand such a live audience would make on the poem. As part of this interplay, we should note, as Klaeber has pointed out, that "Of special interest are the gefrægn formulas, which unmistakably point to the 'preliterary' stage of poetry . . . ." 14


14Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, pp. lxvi-lxvii.
Klaeber goes on to suggest that such formalae are used to introduce poems, to point out progress in the narrative, to add emphasis, and to add variety. Two aspects of this formula are of particular interest. First, the formula itself, which indicates the passage of knowledge through the spoken word, is obviously more than a mere holdover from a former time. It suggests, through its frequency of occurrence, that such oral transmission of tales still goes on. Thus we have an immediate suggestion of oral presentation of the poem, and the implications suggested by the use of this formula may be added to the body of evidence.

Of even more specific interest, however, in the use of the gefraen formulae is their use as transitions, noted in Klaeber's comments above and already discussed as a feature of oral presentation. There are many transitional phrases in Beowulf, most notably those indicating that a speech is about to begin; line 1383, for instance, states that "Bēowulf mægelode, bearn Ecgþēowes." Such transitions, particularly in the "________spoke, son of _________" pattern, permeate the poem, and Crosby notes the quality of such obvious transitions:

The mediaeval poet believed in clear transitions, which left no doubt in his listeners' minds as to what they had just heard and what they were about to hear. As a rule the lines of transition were nearly identical... the obvious transition... is a necessary accompaniment of a work to be orally delivered.15

It appears conclusive, therefore, that the frequently repeated transitional phrases arise directly from the needs of a live audience. Such an audience, it might be further noted, would not be offended by such an obvious transitional device. Crosby continues (p. 107) that "Just as today we are less offended by a bald transition when we are listening to a sermon or a lecture than when we are reading... so it must have been in the Middle Ages."

The second class of repetitions, narrative repetitions, is deserving of extended commentary. It will be noted, first, that not all narrative repetitions are necessarily related to the needs of a live audience, even though these repetitions are necessary and effective in their own manner. Lines 702-703, 710-711, and 720, for example, thrice repeat the coming of Grendel to Heorot, where Beowulf lies waiting:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Cōm on wānre niht} & \\
\text{sceadugenga.} & \\
\text{Dā cōm of mōre} & \text{under misthleopum} \\
\text{Grendel gongan, Godes yrre bær.} & \\
\text{Cōm pā to recede} & \text{rinc sīðian} \\
\text{drēamum bedæled.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

The effect of these plot repetitions, instead of being annoyingly repetitive, is one of dramatic intensity. Brodeur notes that this three-fold repetition is "a hair-raising description of death on the march."\textsuperscript{16} The effect, with each repeated mention of Grendel's approach,

\textsuperscript{16}The Art of Beowulf, p. 90.
is an increased emotional tension in the audience, whether that audience be listeners or readers. Thus at least some of the repetition in Beowulf has no bearing on the present thesis; this does not, however, deny to that repetition its effectiveness.

There are many narrative repetitions, however, and among them are many repetitions, frequently only two or three lines in length, that return again and again to past action or comments. Only a few of these will suffice as examples. Grendel, for instance, is introduced to the audience in lines 86-89 and later in lines 100ff.

First a brief reference is made; then, a few lines later, a fuller explanation follows. Again, lines 438-439 clearly express Beowulf's intent to struggle barehanded with Grendel, and lines 679ff stress this intent even more fully. Similarly, lines 817-818 describe Beowulf's success in tearing away Grendel's arm, and lines 970-973 fully detail this exploit. The first of these repetitions introduces a character; the second expresses an intent; the third repeats an action. The pattern in each, however, is similar: first a brief comment, then a fuller development. What function, then, does such an obviously deliberate pattern serve?

An answer to this question must take into consideration the nature of any live audience. Such a group inevitably bears certain
characteristics, among them the fact that individual members of the audience will become distracted, turn aside for a moment, pause to reflect over a good line or whisper to a neighbor. The effect in each case, to a greater or lesser degree, is the same: invariably, because the presentation is oral and thus continually moving, the listener cannot, if he becomes distracted for a moment, turn back to see what he has missed; inevitably, therefore, the audience will miss a part of what is being said.

The instability of the audience requires a marked degree of concentration on the part of the singer in order that he may sing at all; it also tests to the utmost his dramatic ability and his narrative skill in keeping the audience as attentive as possible. Thus a large part of the repetition in Beowulf can be explained in light of this sometimes-inattentive nature of any live audience. The audience will invariably miss a part of what is going on, and it is essential that important aspects of the poem be repeated. As Crosby notes in her discussions of the medieval audience,

The medieval listeners could not glance back a few pages if they lost track of the story for a moment. They must then have been grateful for the often recurring lines that told them just what had happened and what was coming next.

17The Singer of Tales, p. 16.
How, then, does this apply to the minor repetitions noted above? In effect, they become no longer minor, but key elements of the story. In the first repetition, we are introduced to a central character, one about whom much of the next few hundred lines will revolve; as a part of this character development, "the evil spirit... who lived in darkness" in lines 86-87 becomes "a fiend of hell, the wrathful spirit" in lines 100-101. Thus a crucial character is first mentioned, in terms sufficiently specific to gain the attention of those of the audience who may have wandered, and then he is re-introduced in a fuller, more exacting description.

Similarly, Beowulf's intention to fight Grendel barehanded, announced briefly in lines 438-439, is later more fully described. Again, the crucial nature of this intention is important to the poem. Both for dramatic effect and for the respect such a titanic struggle will bring to Beowulf, it is essential that the audience understand the approaching battle, and thus the poet repeats Beowulf's intent.

Finally, the result of that struggle is noted again and again: "Apart broke the sinews, the bones burst." (817-818) Again, the method of Beowulf's victory is stressed. Grendel's defeat is to take on an increasing importance in the elaboration of Beowulf's power and character, and it is essential to the audience's understanding. In each of these instances, therefore, the poet is not merely elaborating pointlessly while he thinks of something new to say. He understands his audience; he is playing to it, and he insures, with each forward movement of the narrative, that the audience understands fully what has gone before.
Finally, a third sort of narrative repetition must be considered, that of the long narrative summaries at the beginnings of the second and third episodes of the poem. Lines 1265-1276 and 1334 contain concise summaries, brief though they may be, of the Grendel episode. Similarly, lines 1888-2151, which constitute Beowulf's report to Hygelac, again present a summary, this time in great detail, of what has gone on in the first two episodes. The importance of such summaries becomes clear as we consider the implications of the poem's considerable length. Too long for one comfortable hearing, the poem could more reasonably be delivered in episodes, as Whitelock suggests:

I do not consider the length of Beowulf an insuperable obstacle to the view that it was intended for oral recital. It could easily have been delivered in three settings. It is perhaps not by accident that the second episode, the fight with Grendel's mother, begins with a neat synopsis of what has gone before; this may be intended to inform newcomers and remind the previous audience of what has happened in the first part. The third episode, the dragon fight, is intelligible by itself.19

If, then, we propose that Beowulf was delivered in three settings, which, by the way, removes the earlier objections to its length, we may interpret these long summaries as the necessary reminders to the audience of what has happened on the nights before. In the first instance, the struggle with Grendel's mother is intelligible only in the light of the struggle with Grendel in the first episode.

19The Audience of Beowulf, p. 20.
The poet therefore reminds his audience of the earlier events; they cannot turn back a few pages, so he does it for them. Erich Auerbach defines the technique precisely:

Time and again there is a new start; every resumption is complete in itself and independent; the next is simply juxtaposed to it, and the relation between the two is often left hanging. . . . a listener arriving in the course of the recitation receives a coherent impression.

It is interesting to note that Whitelock, as have others, assumes that the third episode begins roughly at line 2200, as Beowulf becomes king and the dragon interest begins. After specifically supporting the repetition as a necessary device for understanding the second episode, she rather lamely concludes that the third episode is intelligible in itself; perhaps it is, but this leaves us with a disturbing discontinuity, a lack of artistic balance, between the first two episodes and the third. The episodes of Grendel and his dam are closely linked, while the third appears to be linked to the first two by only a few lines and one continuing character.

The issue becomes much clearer, however, if we assume that the third episode of the poem, and the third night's sitting, begins with the return of Beowulf to Hygelac's court. Then, instead of the report Beowulf gives of his adventures in lines 2000-2160 being a rather lengthy trailer to action we have just heard, it becomes a recapitulation of the first two episodes, bringing the third night's

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audience up to date and refreshing their memories of what has hap­pened. The report is full and explicit, with a profusion of detail; again, the poet caters to the needs of his audience. As the scop approaches the third section of the poem, a brief summary is insufficient; it may be assumed, first, that there are more in the audience who missed one or the other of the preceding episodes, and second, that all of the audience could by now benefit from a detailed sum­mary.

It may be argued, therefore, that the narrative summaries, both in the shorter transitional phrases and in the longer summarizing elements, specifically derive from the needs of a live audience. The shorter elements, in their provision of clear transitions and the longer sections, in their repetition of crucial action, all arise from the necessity of a clear and understandable oral presentation.

The third group of repetitions, finally, is composed of what might be called thematic repetitions, repetitions designed to give stress to the themes of the work. In Beowulf, such thematic stress is carried heavily by situational repetitions, elements which seem only slightly relevant to the central narrative but which repeat in some way the ideas of that narrative. These "digressions," it will be remembered, have been the target of some considerable criticism in that they seem to lead away from the central thread of the poem and thus to delay the progression of the narrative. An examination of three widely separated digressions, however, will suggest, first, that these digressions are particularly relevant to the poem in their expression of a pertinent situation and
therefore extend the structure rather than departing from it, and second, although the digressions are on widely differing topics, they each express an element of repetition that reinforces the theme.

In reference to these digressions, Klaeber notes that "What the singers and hearers all delighted in was the warlike ideals of the race, the momentous situations that bring out a man's character."21 We might examine, then, the story of Sigemund told in lines 874ff. In brief detail, the story of his encounter with the dragon is related. Of particular interest is the fact that Sigemund's courage and ability are repeatedly stressed, and in this we see, as was suggested earlier, the theme of the proper bearing of the noble warrior. Scholes and Kellogg note that "another characteristic of oral narrative is consistency in the thematic significance of motifs and plots . . . made possible by traditional topoi and myths . . . which simultaneously govern a story's representation of actuality and its illustration of ideas."22 Thus it should be noted that the story of Sigemund is directly related to Beowulf's battle with Grendel and later with the dragon, and thus the story is, rather than digressive and apart from the narrative, an extension of the theme the narrative develops. Further, as Sigemund defeated the dragon with a sword, the story immediately boosts the audience's respect for Beowulf's success with his bare

21 Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, p. xxix.
22 The Nature of Narrative, p. 51.
hands, and again this apparent digression actually furthers the development of the poem.

Later, when Beowulf has returned from his victorious struggle with Grendel's dam, Hrothgar wisely tempers his pride with a lengthy 'digression' on the troubles of Heremod, lines 1709-1722. Again, though the story is entirely different from that of Sigemund, we see a concern with the proper bearing of a lord; in this case, the instance is that of a bad lord, one who "nallas bēagas geaf Denum eftor dōme. . . ." (1719-1720) Hrothgar concludes, in lines 1722-1723, with an admonishment to Beowulf to conduct himself properly, learning "manly virtue." "Bū þē lær be þon, gumcyste ongit!" Again the digression, rather than departing from the narrative, becomes a clear expression of the theme, and again the repetitive function dwells on those elements, as it did in the narrative elements discussed earlier, that are considered crucial for an understanding of what is going on: "... a contrast... between noble, disinterested deeds for the good of the human race and actions of violence and passion, arising from divided loyalties, or, worse still, from ambition and treachery" and "... the temporal nature of all earthly success." The poet insures that his audience follows, even though he may have to walk the same road again and again to gain such assurance.

\[23\] The Audience of Beowulf, pp. 97-98.
Finally, we note that repetition arises again in Wiglaf's report to the cowardly thanes, and again the repetition is thematic in its function. In lines 2864-2891, Wiglaf berates the thanes who deserted Beowulf, contrasting their lord's generosity and kindness with their poor repayment for his leadership. Wiglaf, of course, is in a comfortable position to do this, for he has defended his lord. Again, what seems a lengthy lingering over a point is in actuality a repetition of the theme. Wiglaf, by word and deed, demonstrates the proper behavior of a noble warrior; his companions do not.

Thus it may be demonstrated that just as the minor variations and repetitions serve a specific function, just as the narrative repetitions serve a purpose, the digressions of the work, in their thematic repetition, stress to the audience, in a manner sometimes subtle and sometimes rather blunt, such key points as the poet feels are necessary for a full comprehension of the implications of the poem.

What, then, has become of the objections to the theory of oral presentation? Professor Baum, for instance, complains of the "involved and circuitous" narrative. It has been demonstrated, though, that this circuitous narrative is circuitous in one direction—forward. Where the narrative pauses, where it doubles on itself, where it appears to return, it is in fact only recovering such crucial information as the poet deems necessary for the full understanding of the audience; therefore the structure insists, if it is to be at all logical, on an oral presentation, rather than denying such a technique.
Second, Baum suggests that the audience must be willing to "pick up and drop at need the several allusions . . . without losing the main pattern. . . ." Again, this seems too strong; the allusions, instead of departing from the main pattern, simply reinforce that pattern. Further, that the allusions seem vague is almost certainly because of our distance from them. As Whitelock suggests, such allusions were almost certainly no mystery to the original audience:

An ignorant audience might not only fail to see the bearing of the several detached allusions, but might well fail to connect them with one another, separated as they are by stretches of text dwelling with other matters. A well-informed audience would call to mind the whole tale at each reference to it.24

Thus the audience does not need to return to the central theme, for it was never away from that theme; similarly, it does not need to struggle to grasp complex allusions, for such allusions were no more mysterious to the original audience than an allusion to World War II might be to a modern audience.

Finally, it is suggested that the audience, if such an audience ever existed, must be capable of extended "concentrated attention." Such a statement appears, in light of the evidence presented, the sheerest fantasy. Concentrated attention is not needed for an understanding of Beowulf. Understanding the nature of a live audience, the poet returns again and again to the central elements; it

24The Audience of Beowulf, p. 34.
might be argued that everything of any importance is presented at least twice and usually more often. Indeed, one might suggest that only haphazard attention is needed to achieve a fairly complete understanding of both narrative and theme.

It is demonstrable, then, that Beowulf exhibits a clearly identifiable group of features intended to serve the needs of an oral poet and a listening audience. To what extent, however, do these features exist in La Chanson de Roland? Indeed, can we expect any similarity at all between two such clearly diverse poems as the Old English folk-tale and the Old French epic?

Part of the problem arises from the nebulousness of Roland's origins. T. Atkinson Jenkins, in the introduction to his 1924 edition of the poem, spends several pages speculating on the work's origin and enumerating the varied theories of its creation, the identity of the mysterious Turoldus, and the probable date. He notes, for instance, the varied theories that the work was written to inspire crusaders, or to celebrate the wedding of Bohemond, Prince of Antioch, to Constance, daughter of Philip I, or as an exercise in piety by a discouraged cleric, concluding, appropriately enough (p. lxviii), that "unfortunately, concrete evidence, one way or the other, is absolutely lacking."

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Many of these theories dwell in large part on the French cantilenes, short lyrics, speculating that a collection of such lyrics could over the years develop into a larger work such as the Roland. Pierre le Gentil suggests the possibility of such a creative process:

... the results, reflecting national reactions to contemporary events, were lyric in form and epic in subject: short songs, fragmentary and impassioned, called cantilenes. When united and organized around a central theme or character so as to form long, continuous narratives, they became the chansons de geste.26

Michael Curschman, however, notes that recent criticism has stressed a more "literary" approach, arguing for one reason of another that for the Roland it is "necessary to assume an originally written text."27 Such an assumption is particularly interesting in that the formulaic nature of the work is argued in conjunction with its written composition. Such a combination, clearly in conflict with the distinctions made by Parry, is accommodated by Stephen G. Nichols' suggestion that the Roland was, in its present form, created by "someone trained in the oral tradition who may have used the relative leisure of a written composition to order the elements of the poem."28 Such a theory,


based as it is on the probability of a multitude of legends about Roland and a similar multitude of prior songs, seems most attractive. From such an assumption, and even from most of the other theories concerning the creation of the work, two conclusions may be drawn. First, the poem in its present form was created as a written work, probably as a compilation and arrangement of a series of short works bearing oral features. Second, the intention, for the same reasons noted earlier, was for oral presentation. Thus the Chanson de Roland is an aural work and may be examined as such.

In light of this aural nature, it seems odd that the existence of formulae in the poem is so easily demonstrable; still, the Nichols study already cited exemplifies several such constructions in a consistent pattern throughout the poem. Nichols points out, for instance, one "discourse introduction" formula, dist Blancandrins, which "occurs six times in the first 500 lines of the poem, but the formulaic system itself (dist and a name/title/noun of three syllables in the nominative case) occurs forty times in the first 2000 lines of the poem."29 Similarly, just as Crosby earlier noted the frequent use of oaths and asseverations,30 Nichols demonstrates the use of such "swearing formulae" in the Roland: such phrases, for instance, as "Dist Blancandrins: 'Par ceste meie destre, E par la barbe'"31 occur

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31 La Chanson de Roland, 11. 47-48.
frequently and are, according to Nichols, "swearing formulas in which the speaker swears by his beard, by a saint, or . . . by his right hand." \(^{32}\) Nichols continues his analysis of formulae in the Roland at some length, concluding (p. 20) that "Over fifty percent, or one out of every two lines begins with a formula."

If the Roland is indeed an aural work, this predominance of oral constructions seems contradictory. As Lord notes, "What is important is not the oral performance but rather the composition during oral performance." \(^{33}\) It is this oral composition, as has been noted, that necessitates formulae, and an aural work should not demonstrate such constructions so clearly. If, however, the present version of the work was constructed, as Nichols suggests, by an artist who "used the relative leisure of a written composition to order the work," then an explanation appears: the poet of the Oxford Roland was more arranger than creator; he "ordered" the poem, taking verses created by oral poets and using them, much of the language still intact, to construct the longer poem now in existence. Of this ordering, more will be said later; it is enough, for now, to note the possibility of such a combination as here exists.


\(^{33}\) The Singer of Tales, p. 5.
It will be noted, further, that the Roland bears none of the casual, chatty addresses to the audience demonstrated in other works. In the first lines, for instance, where we might expect calls for attention or addresses to the audience, we find instead a concise, almost abrupt beginning:

Charles li reis, nostre emperedre magnes,
Set anz toz pleins at estët en Espaigne,
Tres qu'en la mer conquist la tere altaigne. 11. 1-3

This concise, abrupt style continues throughout the poem; nowhere is there the slightest mention made of the audience or to the audience other than such references as the "our king" noted above. There is, of course, an explanation for such formality. La Chanson de Roland is an epic poem, done in epic style and thus with the elevation and formality customary to such a work. "We find in the Roland the direct and straightforward style of a poet anxious only to deliver his message: we find also an exceptional refinement and elevation of tone. . . . Plebeian psychology, so prominent in many of the later epics, is absent here. . . ."34 Jenkins' comment here reflects a somewhat snobbish air that would almost certainly look askance on Chaucer's easy familiarity; however, it seems appropriate to the Roland. We might compare the opening lines noted above, for instance, with the opening of The Legend of Good Women, lines 1-11:

34La Chanson de Roland, p. xxxvii.
A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
That there ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
And I acorde wel that it ys so;
But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
That ther is noon dwellyng in this contree,
That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
But as he hath herd seyd, or founde it writen;
For by assay ther may no man it preve.
But God forbede but men shulde leve
Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!

The frequent references to self, to men in general, and to the audience in this opening set a tone of intimacy that is wholly lacking in the Roland. Thus in this case the tone of closeness and familiarity demonstrable in Chaucer is lacking: the Roland poet chooses consciously to elevate his work, to remove the intimacy normally felt in an oral presentation.

The Roland does, however, demonstrate other characteristics of aural presentation. Crosby's stress ("Oral Delivery," p. 108) on religious beginnings and endings, for instance, is here vindicated. The Roland is permeated throughout, of course, with the theme of Christianity in conflict with paganism:

... the story is not merely a history of treason and defeat, nor the story of a war between two kings, it is the battle of Christianity against paganism with Charles as the symbol of Christianity, while Baligant ... represents the evils opposed to Christianity.35

35"Formulaic Diction and Thematic Composition," p. 27.
Even with this permeation, however, it is notable that the first laisse and the last demonstrate clearly this stress on religion. The first laisse, lines 7-8, notes that Charles is in conflict with "Li reis Marsilies la tient, ki Deu nen aimet, / Mahomet sert ed Apollin reclaimet..." Similarly, the last laisse, in its stress on new Christian duties for the weary Charles, continues the theme of crusading Christianity:

Sainz Gabriël de part Deu il vint,dire:
"Charles, somon les oz de ton emprie, Par force iras en la tere de Bire; Reis, Viviën si soccoras en Imphe A la citée que palen ont asise: Li chrestiën te relaiment e criént." 11. 3993-3998

While neither of these laisses is precisely an invocation nor a benediction in the traditional sense, each fulfills the quality noted by Crosby of providing a religious frame to the work. Further, the last laisse is particularly important in that it stresses for the audience a major quality of the Roland: though the work bears his name, Roland himself is secondary to the major themes, the Christian elements centering around Charles. This recognition is particularly important in the understanding it brings to Roland's death and the manner of that death.

Further, there is in the Roland a consistent pattern of clear transitions between laisses, shifting scenes, and movements from character to character. There is, for instance, the use of the Aoî marker

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36 The laisse form is derived from the French cantilene, a short lyric or narrative poem originally coherent individually but here woven into a larger framework. A fuller explanation of this development will be provided later.
at the end of over half the laisses. Jenkins notes that the intention of this notation is to "indicate that the end of the laisse has ar-
vived." 37 A written notation, however, would logically be of little use to a listening audience unless that marker carries some meaning pertinent to the sound. Though Jenkins notes some dispute over the function of the marker,38 his conclusion is that the term is used as a note to the singer, indicating that particular stress is given to the lines thus marked: ". . . the copyist may thus have anticipated the crescendo or forte of modern music."

Similarly, the dist expressions in the Roland appear to serve a transitional function comparable to the gefraegn and mapelode formulae in Beowulf. Occurring in situations where a new speaker appears, such expressions mark an easily noticeable movement from character to character. Such expressions occur frequently in Beowulf, as, Béowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþowes:/ 'Geþenc nū, se māra mağa Healfdenes . . . ." (11. 1473-1474) Similarly, such shifts in the Roland are usually marked by dist expressions. We might notice, for example, the movement from the archbishop to the pagans in the ending of Laisse CLVIII and the beginning of CLIX, 2144-2147:

37La Chanson de Roland, p. 4n.
38Jenkins notes suggestions that the term is "an exclamation," "a refrain," and even "a wild war-cry."
Dist l'arcevesques: "Fel sei ki n'i ferrat! Charles repai greť ki bien vos vengerat."

Diënt paien: Si mare fumes net!
Com pesmes jorz nos est hui ajornez!"

A further part of the poet's transitional technique is the use of repetitions to achieve unity in the series of laisses. It must be remembered that the Roland is composed of a series of short poems, these shorter pieces probably deriving from the cantilene form. These cantilenes, as noted earlier, arose individually, so the theory goes, and were only gradually evolved into longer works. Le Gentile outlines this process of development:

They were constantly renewed and augmented, and soon made way for episodic poems devoted, for example, to the capture of the Nobles, the death of Basan and Basile, the siege of Carcassonne. Thus, bit by bit, a vast body of material evolved from which a final effort of organization and synthesis produced the form we know today, made famous by the various extant versions of the Chanson de Roland. 39

The crucial words in this theory are episodic, organization, and synthesis. The cantilene is by its brief nature fragmented and individual; even though arranged, organized, into a series of laisses, the individual nature of the pieces remains and thus must undergo a synthesis into an united whole. As Nichols suggests, (p. 11) "Ultimately, of course, the poet's task is to compose not only a series of individual laisses but to unify these..." To provide this

39The Chanson de Roland, p. 56.
unity, it is not enough for the poet/arranger simply to string his laisses in a row. "To adapt the laisse, which was probably lyric in origin and early use, to continuous narrative, was a task not without its difficulties." Thus the poet's problem is to separate the pieces into coherent parts conducive to an audience's easy grasp, into easily digestible units, yet maintain the thread of thought, of central thesis development, the sense of unity throughout the whole.

This unity is achieved through a variety of techniques. First, just as the dist expressions and other such frequent repetitions serve as transitional devices, they may also serve, in their frequency of occurrence, as linkages. Nichols argues, in the same place, that "The poet has achieved a satisfactory sense of continuity by repetitions of phrases such as Qu' i enveierons?" Yet a further device, Nichols suggests, is in the music accompanying the performance, the repetition of the same tune in succeeding laisses providing continuity: "... the chanson was characterized by a tune which followed the laisse and which was probably repeated in each laisse."

A broader sort of repetition noted by Nichols a little later is idea patterns. "... sentences are related one to another by a

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40 La Chanson de Roland, p. cxliv.
repetition of the last idea in the preceding sentence. . . ." and " . . . the laisses are frequently related in the same way. . . ."41 Such a repeating pattern is demonstrated, for instance, in Laisses CXLIX and CL, 2021-2026:

Morz est li quens que plus ne se demoret.
Roqlanz li ber lo ploret si l doloseet:
Ja mais en tere n'odreiz plus dolent home.

Li quens Roqlanz, quant mort vit son ami
Gesir adenz, a la tere son vis,
Molt dolcement a regreter lo prist.

Beowulf demonstrates, as was noted earlier, a pattern of minor repetitions which serve to provide unity through the whole work, and the Roland displays a similar use of repetition. In Beowulf, however, the problem of unity was complicated by the frequent digressions, but the Roland shows a singular lack of such digressions. The course of the action goes forward and backward and occasionally dwells on the same spot, but there is none of the sideways movement so common in Beowulf.42 Such a lack is of course difficult to exemplify, but it is worthwhile to note the Auerbach analysis just cited. Instead of the frequent wandering to the side noted in Beowulf, Auerbach notes in the Roland " . . . a kind of repeated resumption of the same situation in consecutive laisses, in a manner which at first leaves the reader in doubt as to whether he is confronted with a new scene or

41"Formulaic Diction and Thematic Composition," p. 17.
42Mimesis, p. 103.
a complementary treatment of the first...." This repetition of situation, of course, has already been noted; it serves, first, as a device for thematic stress, much as we have seen it in Beowulf. Second, as just noted, such repetition serves in the Roland as a means of unification, of linking the string of laisses into a united whole.

There is, of course, a certain logic in the digressive nature of Beowulf and the more direct, unvarying direction of the Roland. The oral singer, as noted earlier, is capable of judging his audience's reactions to any particular part of a story, its interest in hearing peripheral elements, its willingness to pause for a related but hardly progressive element. He can therefore safely digress and does so whenever he feels it appropriate. The aural poet, though, while he is more capable of planning ahead in his leisure, comes to his performance in the fixed format of the pages before him. He is thus less likely to digress, and therefore we can expect less digression in an aural work than in an oral.

Conversely, however, the Roland demonstrates a considerably greater degree of compartmentalization than Beowulf. This compartmentalization is most obvious, of course, in the laisse format arising from the lyric style. The effect of this series of laisses is that of a string of individual scenes, again noted by Auerbach: "...it strings independent pictures together like beads...."
completely independent and self-contained scenes result." Each laisse, therefore, is a coherent, distinguishable unit, the first line frequently stating a premise that the rest of the laisse develops. We might examine in its entirety, for example, Laisse CLIX:

Diënt paien: "Sì mare fumes neţ! Com pesmes jorz nos est hui ajornez! Perduţ avom noz seignors e noz pers, Charles repaiître oţ sa grant ost, li ber; De cels de Françe oţom les graisles clers, Grant est la noise de Monjoie escriţer, Li quens Roqlanz est de tant grant fiertét. Ja n'iert vêncuz por nul home chârnel. Lançons a lui pues si-l laissons ester."
Ed il si firent darz e wigres asez, Espiez e lances e múserez empennez. L'esçut Roqlanz ont frait'ed estroët, E son osberc rompuţ e desmailét Mais enz e-l cors ne-l ont mie adesét. Veillantif on en .xxx lius nafrêt, Desoz lo conte si-l i ont mort geté. Paien s'en fuient pues si-l laissent ester: Li quens Roqlanz i est a piêt remês. Aoi.

In the first line, the pagans exclaim sharply that they are miserably unfortunate or unlucky. The next few lines relate several of the ways they are unfortunate, including the loss of their leaders, the oncoming Franks, and the fact that they have not yet been able to kill Roland. They then try once more to kill Roland, this time throwing their spears at him, but they succeed only in killing his horse. Thus still unlucky, they flee, leaving Roland standing.

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43Mimesis, p. 103.
Further, in an effect similar to the couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, the final line of a \textit{laisse} frequently has a summing-up or concluding effect, emphasizing the idea of the \textit{laisse}. The technique is noticeable in the \textit{laisse} just cited; the final line, emphasizing the idea of the pagans' misfortune, stresses that Roland is still alive, once more able to stand and face the enemy; even throwing spears from a distance, they are unable to kill him and are threatened by him. Lord, dealing with other works, found a similar concluding process; he notes that "... the singer... usually signals the end of a theme by a significant or culminating point. ... The singer's mind is orderly."\textsuperscript{44} Orderly too, we might add, is the presentation handed to the audience: discreet, coherent units, each with its memorable tag in understandable form, a format particularly suited to the needs of a listening audience.

The purpose in these compartmentalizing techniques, of course, is much the same as the larger units and many repetitions in Beowulf. Considering the varied, fluctuating nature of the audience, the aural poet presents his work in coherent, self-contained units, each understandable in itself. We might note Auerbach's comment, cited earlier (\textit{Mimesis}, p. 105), that "... a listener arriving in the course of the recitation receives a coherent impression."

\textsuperscript{44}The Singer of Tales, p. 92.
Related to this compartmentalization, to the fluctuating nature of the audience and to the attempt at unity demonstrated by the minor repetitions is a larger sort of structural division blended into thematic repetition. The framing quality of the beginning and ending of the Roland, bracketing the work within a religious framework, has already been noted. Within this frame, however, the Roland is segmented into a series of major sections, each section bearing a repetition of the main theme. These major sections are marked by a particular sort of situational repetition, the council. Nichols suggests that "... the poet needed some means of initiating action. This the tradition provided in the form of the council."45 An examination of the poem reveals that the council in each case serves three functions: to mark the boundaries of a section, to initiate the action that follows, and to restate the theme. This technique of structural division is discussed at length by Nichols and need only be summarized here.

First, the beginning of the poem is marked by two major councils in which the two leaders, pagan and Christian, receive advice from their followers. In a considerable sense, then, these councils are expository, developmental in nature. The first council begins

45 "Formulaic Diction and Thematic Composition," p. 29.
in Laisse II and offers first exposition of the immediate situation and then a pleas for advice, continuing through Laisse VI:

"Odez, seignors, quels pecchiez nos encombret!
Li emperedre Charles de France dolce
En cest pais nos est venuz confondre;
Jo nen ai ost qui bataille li doneç,
Nen ai tel gent ki la soe derompet.
Conseillez mei come mi save home,
Si'm guarissez e de mort e de honte." 11. 15-20

Similarly, Laisses XII-XXVI describe the Christian council, introduce the conflict between Roland and Ganelon, and, with the dropping of the glove, forebode the coming disaster. It is particularly obvious at this point that the council and the attendant action are used to prepare the audience for the action to come; aside from the plans made in the council, Ganelon's dropping of the glove suggests to the audience, as to the figures in the work itself, an evil omen:

Li emperedre li tent son guant lo destre
Mais li quens Guenles iloec ne volsist estre:
Quant lo dut prendre si li chadiç a tere.
Dient Franciçs: "Deus! que poigraç ço estre?
De cest message nos avendraç grant perte." 11. 331-335.

This pattern of councils marking major divisions and thematic stress continues with the third major council, Laisses LIVff, upon Ganelon's reporting from Saragossa. This council demonstrates to the listener Ganelon's duplicity and marks the choice of Roland for the rearguard, a crucial stage of development:

Guenles i vint, li fel, li parjurez,
Par grant veisdie commenceç a parler. 11. 674-675

"Seignors barons," dist l'emperegre Charles,
"Vedez les porz e les destreiz passages:
Kar me jugiez ki iert en riegreuarde."
Fuenles respont: "Roçlanz, cist miens fillastre:
N'avez baron de si grant vasselage." 11. 740-744
Again, we see in these scenes a thematic stress, the evil of the pagans and the betrayers of the Christians, and a preparation for action to come. Yet another council is demonstrated in Laisses CXCIff, when the pagan Emir Baligant is introduced. The method of introduction and the descriptive details are such that this council further emphasizes the theme, as we note in lines 2681-2684:

"En France irai por Charle guerreier:
S'en ma merci, ne se colzt a mes piez
E ne guerpisset la lei de christiens,
Jo li toldrai la corone de l chief."

Though the sense of division is not so clear, the discussion between Roland and Oliver in Laisses LXXXII-LXXXVIII, in which the two attempt to resolve the question of calling for help, provides a form of minor council and develops yet further an element of the theme. Oliver urges Roland to call for aid, but Roland, in his pride, is reluctant to do so; his crucial decision at this stage again marks a turning point and determines the course of the action that follows—his eventual destruction. It is too strong, of course, to imply that Roland's pride destroys him; this destruction is the result of the Christian-pagan conflict and the evil of Ganelon. It might well be suggested, however, that self-pride, an unchristian trait, contributes to his destruction. Roland's eventual change of mind, then, would demonstrate a growth in him. At first, "Oliver is worried about the fate of the rear-guard, while Roland is concerned with their honor."46

46"Formulaic Diction and Thematic Composition," p. 37.
In his development, though, Roland comes to understand that the conflict embodies larger forces than just his reputation: it symbolizes the struggle of the forces of good and evil.

Finally, the council beginning in Laisse CCLXX is called to determine Ganelon's fate and set the stage for the trial by combat, the final thematic stress on the conflict between righteous Christianity and its betrayer, Ganelon. Charles calls together his barons and requests their aid in judgment:

"Seignors barons," dist Charlemagnes reis,
"De Guenelon car me jugiez lo dreit.
Il fuţ en l'ost tresqu'en Espaigne oţ mei
Si m tolit .xx milie de mes Franceis,
E mon nevot que ja mais ne vêgreiz,
Eç Olivier lo prot e lo corteis,
Les .xii. pers aţ traditţ por aveir." 11. 3750-3756

In such councils, then, beyond their consistent function of setting the stage for the action that follows and thus marking the major divisions of the poem, there is consistently a repetition of the major themes of the work. Nichols suggests that "... the council is an essential theme in the Chanson de Roland, and ... it is traditional and formulaic."47 Here, of course, the term formulaic is used in the sense of a motif, a repeated situational device.

It seems possible at this point to draw a series of conclusions concerning the distinctions between oral and aural literature. The two genres have, of course, many features in common;

47"Formulaic Diction and Thematic Composition," p. 35.
they are both concerned with communication to a live, present audience through the spoken word, and thus share many techniques. The two genres are created, however, under different conditions, one in the pressure of a performance situation and one in the comparative leisure of writing, and therefore there are notable distinctions.

It should be noted, first, that the features of both forms may be determined in light of necessity, the demands forced upon the poet by his situation. Logically, features arising from demand, from necessity, will be invariable, while features arising from convenience may well be variable. We might notice, in this light, that oral literature, shaped in large part by the needs of the poet, is invariably formulaic; aural literature, where there is no need for formulae, is not formulaic, though it may contain repeated expressions or remnants from earlier versions of the work.

Arising from the needs of the audience, on the other hand, is the clearly compartmented nature of both aural and oral literature. Both the oral and the aural poet present their works in a series of coherent, individual units or episodes, each unit suitable for understanding individually or in the text of a larger work. Further, both forms will show clear transitions between these units, such clarity of movement designed to insure the audience's understanding.

Similarly, both genres may make use of religious beginnings and endings, framing the work in a context suitable to contemporary
mores. It seems logical here to suggest that such a feature is one of convenience, arising from social convention rather than literary necessity. Similarly, though both forms may use addresses to the audience and choose language suggesting hearing and speaking rather than reading and writing, such features seem to arise not from necessity but from conveniences and thus, while definitely identifiable features of oral or aural literature, are not necessary to either genre.

More distinguishable, and again arising from necessity, is the feature of digression. While the oral work may well be digressive, as the singer is able to judge his situation and modify it, the aural poet is fixed as he approaches his performance, is limited to some extent by what he has written, and thus is less likely to digress. This feature is particularly important in that it affects the structure of the work as a whole.

Finally, as a part of their compartmentalization and the accompanying clear transitions and as a requirement of the audience, both oral and aural literature make use of a variety of repetitions as unifying and developing features. These repetitions include minor repetitions such as formulae and major repetitions, including narrative, structural, situational, and thematic repetition, this last encompassing narrative, situational, and structural repetition and continuing to other techniques to develop and stress the theme, as for instance the councils in Roland, which are essentially situational repetitions used thematically.
As noted in the beginning of this chapter, much of the critical commentary on oral literature has tended toward the mechanistic, toward examination of relatively superficial features. It should now be possible, in considering the identifiable characteristics of aural poetry and in considering these features in light of necessity rather than as accompanying conveniences, to go beyond such superficiality in examining Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Noting the features of aural literature—the necessities of compartmentalization, clear transitions, lack of digression, the various repetitions, and the conveniences of repeated expressions, of religious frames, of addresses to the audience and the use of language suggestive of the spoken word—it should then be possible to understand the poet's response to his mode more clearly.
CHAPTER III

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE: THE AURAL MODE

Ruth Crosby's 1938 Speculum article "Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery" remains an authoritative discussion of the influence upon the poet of the oral tradition and the demonstration of this influence in his work. Dealing primarily with The Canterbury Tales but also with Troilus and Criseyde and several of the lesser works, Crosby details in considerable depth the features of the oral tradition and the traits of that tradition demonstrated in Chaucer. Specifically, Crosby notes in Chaucer's works the existence of religious frames, addresses to the audience, formulaic expressions, language suggestive of hearing and speaking, and the bald transitions so obvious in oral literature.

Further, Crosby discusses in this landmark article a series of conclusions concerning Chaucer's use of these traits, noting, for instance, that in many respects Chaucer's use of such techniques was little more than a standardized employment of a somewhat mechanistic form: "In writing for the many who would hear as well as for the few who would read, he was simply following the custom of his fellows." Crosby concludes, finally, that Chaucer's facility in the use of oral techniques arises from his familiarity with French and English romance poets, and particularly from experience in hearing oral performances of these romances, suggesting that "... it is inevitable that much of his knowledge of popular

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1"Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery," p. 431.
Crosby's study of the poet's use of oral delivery is therefore detailed and in most respects precise. It should be noted, however, that the article might be supplemented in at least two respects. First, Crosby fails to distinguish clearly between earlier oral works, composed as they were performed and thus oral in the most accurate sense of the term, and aural literature, the genre of Chaucer's work. The result of this blurring of the forms is inevitably an application of standards not quite as appropriate as they might be. We may note, for instance, that Crosby at one point occupies herself in a search for formulaic expressions in Chaucer's work. Remembering Magoun's assertion that lettered poetry is never formulaic, it is not surprising that Crosby is forced to conclude, rather lamely, that "On the whole Chaucer uses set formulas sparingly."2 It would be surprising indeed, and force a complete reworking of the theory, if Chaucer did show extensive use of formulae.

Second, it should be noted that Crosby gives no attention at all to the technique of thematic repetition in Chaucer, even though, as demonstrated earlier, such repetitions are pervasive in both oral and aural literature. As noted earlier, a work delivered orally, whether the origin of the work is oral or aural, is likely to provide extensive repetition of major elements, including frequent stress on theme. It is particularly

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interesting to note, in conjunction with this stress, that Crosby does touch on an element closely allied with thematic stress without fully noting its implications: Chaucer's use of classical rhetoric. She mentions that "... he combined with the devices of the classical rhetoricians those characteristics which had their origin in the technique developed through the centuries by the professional minstrels..." (pp. 431-432) Crosby's citation of the use of rhetorical techniques, however, is limited to Chaucer's use of such techniques as introductory and transitional devices.³ It will be argued later that the poet's use of rhetorical techniques extends into yet another area relevant to the aural mode.

Thus it seems arguable that a further examination of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, with particular attention to the features of aural literature and the circumstances producing these features, might prove useful. It has been noted earlier that aural literature bears two groupings of features, those arising from convenience and those arising from necessity. Features of convenience are used to satisfy social mores, to create a mood of receptivity for the presentation, and for other such reasons useful but not essential. These features include religious frames, addresses to the audience, repeated expressions, and language suggestive of hearing and speaking. Features of necessity, however, arise from the demands of presentation, from the requirements of a listening audience. They include compartmentalization, clear transitions, lack of digression, and a variety of minor and major repetitions.

³See pp. 426-430 for a full discussion.
As a convenience of organization, then, it will be useful to consider, first, how the *Troilus* demonstrates aural features of convenience, where they occur and how Chaucer's use of them contributes to the work. Second, we might consider the features of necessity, where they occur and how the poet accommodates himself to them.

This consideration is based, of course, on acceptance of the *Troilus* as an aural work, a work of written composition intended for oral presentation before a live audience. Sufficient reason for such acceptance has already been offered, but it should be noted that certain features of the work itself and some recent commentary have combined to blur the issue at least slightly. Payne's comments that Chaucer's references to the audience "... are almost never so phrased as to imply unequivocally a physically present listening audience..." have already been cited (p. 3). We might note also Mehl's insistence that such references are 'fossilized' remains of tradition, used by Chaucer to achieve intimacy with his readers, rather than evidence of live presentation.4

At least partially inspiring such interpretations, of course, is the mixture of language within Chaucer's work indicative of the transitional period within which he worked. Within the space of a few lines in the beginning of the work, for instance, we note the use of language indicating both speaking and writing (I, 1-7):

4"The Audience of Chaucer's *Troilus* and *Criseyde,*" p. 174.
The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
in loyynge, how his aventure fellen
Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.
Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite
This wofil vers, that wepen as I write.

Thus in a few lines the reader faces a mention of telling, a perhaps neutral word that could imply either speaking or writing, followed by a reference to parting "fro ye," an implication of a live audience which suggests that the earlier tellen means in this case speaking, followed finally by the unequivocal "I write," implying a written production. Such a mixture continues throughout the Troilus, the poet sometimes using language indicative of speaking and listening and sometimes making reference to reading and to books, implying a "literary" approach. Book I, lines 30 and 52, for instance, state specifically that the audience is hearing: ". . . as ye may after here. . ." and "Now herkneth with a good entencium." Other lines in the opening pages, however, deal specifically with a reading audience: "I rede it naught. . ." (I, 133) and "Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write." (I, 147) Such lines seem undoubtedly to refer to readers, not listeners. Such a combination of terminology continues throughout the work. We might note, for instance, the lines in IV, 799-808:

How myghte it evere yred ben or ysonge,
The pleynyte that she made in hire destresse?
I not; but, as for me, my litel tonge,
If I discryven wolde hire hevynesse,
It sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse
Than that it was, and childishly deface
Hire heigh compleynpte, and therefore ich it pace.
Pandare, which that sent from Troilus
Was to Criseyde--as ye han herd devyse. . . .
Such a mixture of terminology has naturally served to spur suggestions that Chaucer's work is "literary" in the sense of being a written production intended for an audience of readers. Such an approach, however, is too extreme in that it fails to fully consider either the "publishing" conditions of the Middle Ages or the technique of the aural mode. First, as has been noted earlier, books were at that time rare but hardly nonexistent. Chaucer mentions owning books himself, and Beverly Boyd notes that by this period possession of books was extending beyond the church and the universities: "Aristocrats and wealthy burgesses were acquiring vernacular books in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and from sources that were secular." Thus it was not beyond possibility for Chaucer's audience to have access to books; still, for the reasons cited earlier of difficulty in reproduction, books remained in relative scarcity; Boyd continues (p. 93) that "... the English were still a people relatively bookless..." Thus it seems plausible that Chaucer's audience could have been familiar with books, at least enough so to read upon occasion, yet still have more experience with aural presentation.

Second, such interpretations of the mixture of language in the Troilus do not fully take into account the nature of aural literature itself. Since the work is a written composition, it may well include references to writing; however, since it is to be delivered orally, it

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5Chaucer and the Medieval Book, p. 92.
may also contain mention of speaking or telling. Such a combination, then, need not seem unusual.

With these distinctions understood, then, it seems possible to return to the application of aural standards to the *Troilus* without further questioning the validity of those standards. This application, it will be remembered, can be grouped into two sections, those features of convenience that are expectable in that they aid in some way the presentation and those features of necessity that are demanded by the needs of the listening audience.

One of these features of convenience is the presence of religious frames. Beginning and ending the work on a religious note is, in the context of medieval cultural patterns, an acceptable and even necessary obedience to the mores of the period. Certainly Chaucer was aware of this pattern. Crosby notes that the poet uses such a frame even in situations where it is not logically consistent, as in the ending of the Prologue to the *Summoner's Tale*: "God save yow alle, save this cursed Frere!" Though the Summoner's comment is hardly a benediction in the usual sense of the term, it does satisfy the requirement of a religious frame. As Crosby notes, "The fact that Chaucer represents even the coarsest of his pilgrims as ending their tales with such a benediction shows that he knew it was recognized as the proper procedure."  

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Thus it is evident that Chaucer makes use of this aural technique in other works. We need only glance at the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde* to notice again the use of a religious framework; combining the techniques of classical invocations to the appropriate god or goddess and of appeal to the Christian God, the poet extends the opening frame into a dual approach:

> Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite
> Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write. 1, 6-7
> And ek for me preieth to God so dere. . . . I, 32

This technique of introductory invocation continues throughout the *Troilus*, though the pattern is not rigid. Book II, for instance, opens with a plea to Cleo, but there is no opening prayer to the Christian God:

> 0 lady myn, that called art Cleo,
> Thow be my speed fro this forth, and my Muse,
> To ryme wel this book til I have do. II, 8-10

The concluding frame to Book II is brief, no more than a concluding comment that Troilus is appealing to God and a question: "O myghty God, what shal he seye?" (II, 1757)

The technique continues with the opening to Book III; after an introductory appeal to "Joves doughter deere," (III, 3) the poet concludes the introductory section by an appeal to God: "To which gladnesse, who nede hath, God hym brynge!" (III, 49) The ending of this book, however, has no particular attempt to provide a benediction, nor do Books I and IV. Thus, while the opening of each book includes some sort of invocation, the religious framework is not strictly applied internally. Such looseness demonstrates clearly the quality of this particular aural feature, that it is a matter of convenience for the
poet, to be used or discarded at will. It may be concluded that the opening invocations serve a purpose for the poet, perhaps in that the audience expects them and thus needs them as a signal that the action is about to begin (as will be discussed in the following comments on transition techniques), while the closing benedictions are perhaps less useful and are therefore optional.

Thus internal divisions are ended with or without benedictions as is convenient for the poet. Custom required, though, a more formal attention to the ending of Book V, since it is also the ending of the work as a whole. Thus, the closing ascension of Troilus to Heaven that has occasioned so much critical commentary becomes more understandable. It would of course be overreaching to ascribe this controversial section entirely to mere attention to cultural formality, though such a custom might well play a part in the closing action. It is enough to note, rather, that the last lines of the work are a benediction in the formal sense and thus satisfy the custom of religious framing:

And to that sothefast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye,
And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye:
Thou oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,
Uncircumscript, and al maist circumscribe,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,
So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.
Amen.

V, 1860-1870

Such a closing, then, completes the religious framework of the Troilus and satisfies the requirements of tradition noted earlier.
Just as noticeable, and again a feature of the oral and the aural traditions, are the frequent addresses to the audience occurring in the *Troilus*. It may be admitted, as Payne suggests, that references to the *ye* so often addressed do not in themselves provide definitive evidence of an actually present listening audience. Three types of evidence, however, lend themselves to such an interpretation. First, the very frequency of such addresses encourages belief in the listening audience. Second, the atmosphere and tone of the addresses is suggestive of a present audience interacting with the poet. Finally, the frequency with which such addresses are linked with another aural feature, references to hearing and speaking, is in itself suggestive of a live audience of listeners. An examination of Book I of the *Troilus* should demonstrate the effectiveness of these arguments; references to the audience are frequent:

> My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye. I, 5

> But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,  
> If any drope of pyte in yow be,  
> Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse  
> That ye han felt, and on the adversite  
> Of othere folk, and thynketh how that ye  
> Han felt that Love dorste yow displesye,  
> Or ye han wonne hym with to gret an ese.

> And preieth for hem that ben in the cas  
> Of Troilus, as ye may after here. . . . I, 22-30

It might be argued that the reference noted above to "parte fro ye" should in itself be strongly suggestive of the aural mode and a clear feature of such a form of presentation. In addition, however, we might note the tone of the friendly admonition to the audience cited in lines 22-30. This quality of tone is particularly important to the success of the work, as was pointed out by Sister Francis Covella in a recent article:
In every verbal structure, the relationship between the person speaking (voice) and the person spoken to (addressee) is an important aspect of meaning. The palpable effect of this relationship, its "tone," is an index of the quality and intensity of the speaker's attitude toward his audience. ... the attitude of the speaker to what he is saying is also conditioned, at least partially, by anticipation of audience response.

... Much of the verbal irony in the Troilus grows out of the tensions which exist between the speaker and his audience.7

The features of this tone of intimacy have been discussed earlier, of course, in Chapter I. It is enough, at this time, to repeat that the intimacy so characteristic of the aural work is a major feature of the success of such a work, and Chaucer thus takes every opportunity to enhance such intimacy through his addresses to the audience. These addresses continue throughout Book I:

Now Herkneth with a good entencioun,  
For now wil I gon streght to my matere,  
In which ye may the double sorwes here. . . . 1, 52-54

But how this town com to destruccion  
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle;  
For it were here a long digression  
Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle. 1, 141-144

Forthye ensample taketh of this man,
Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle,
To scornen Love, which that so soone kan
The fredom of youre hertes to hym thralle. I, 232-235

And therefore I yow rede
To folowen hym that so wel kan yow lede. I, 450

This, trowe I, knoweth al this compaignye. I, 450

Now lat us stynte of Troilus a stounde.... I, 1086

The list above concludes the addresses to the audience in Book I of the Troilus. It will be noted that such addresses fall into different types, including specific admonitions to members of the audience, casual mentions of the audience's presence as in the "ye may the double sorwes here," and such passing references that might apply equally well to a reading audience, as the "lat us stynte of Troilus...." This last line, it might be added, makes use of a well-known technique of audience involvement, the "us" identifying the speaker with his audience and thus achieving an intimacy with it. The frequency of the addresses to the audience also seems to bear comment in that in the space of 1092 lines the poet makes mention of this audience on no less than nine separate occasions. This frequency, it might be suggested, is much greater than we might expect in the usual "literary" work, the exceptions such as Tristram Shandy notwithstanding. Thus frequency of address to the audience, a trait of convenience in aural literature, is clearly demonstrated in the Troilus. Finally, the combination of this feature with references to the audience's hearing and listening again seems indicative of the aural work.

A brief scanning of the rest of the Troilus suggests that this frequency is not diminished in the books following Book I:
And forthi if it happe in any wyse,  
That here be any lovere in this place  
That herkneth, as the storied wol devise. . . . II, 29-31

For myne wordes, heere and every part,  
I speke hem alle under correccioun  
Of yow that felyng han in loves art,  
And putte it al in youre discrecioun  
To encresse or maken dymynuccioun  
Of my langage, and that I yow biseche. III, 1331-1335

As ye han herd devyse. . . . IV, 807

And this commeveth me  
To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye,  
Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye! V, 1783-1785

In conjunction with this sampling of addresses to the audience throughout the Troilus, we might notice the lines in Book V that seem to point particularly to the audience with which the poet is concerned:

Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe,  
And every gentil womman, what she be,  
That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,  
That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.  
Ye may hire giltes in other bokes se;  
And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,  
Penelopees trouthe and good Alcestes. V, 1772-1778

Of these lines, Sister Covella, whose comments on the nature of tone were cited earlier, suggests:

Chaucer, the court poet, is here addressing the ladies of the court. The address is more direct than it has ever been before; the intimacy of tone suggests that the audience is actually present. This stanza is important not only because it identifies the audience... but also because it defines Chaucer's peculiar relation to that audience.8

It may be seen, then, that the uses in Troilus of addresses to the audience are multiple: in addition to creating an intimacy of tone

suggestive of aural verse, these addresses help to interpret the work and even to define the poet's relationship to his audience. Further, as noted, the frequent combination of these addresses with references to speaking and telling and hearing demonstrate the poet's use of the standard features of aural literature.

Beyond the features already noted, there is yet one further aspect of aural techniques of convenience, the use of repeated expressions. An examination of the Troilus will yield an abundance of such expressions. The phrase "shortly for to seyne," for example, occurs twice in the space of lines 1115-1156 of Book III and again in line 1009 of Book V. Similarly, the phrases "I yow devyse" or "I shal yow devyse" occur repeatedly throughout the work, as in lines 238 and 259 of Book IV. Crosby suggests, quite appropriately, that such lines "... can hardly be considered as formulas."^9 The distinction, of course, is that for the oral poet formulae are a necessity, a memorized phrase pulled as necessary from a stock of such set phrasings; for the aural poet, however, there is no such necessity for immediate production, and the repeated phrases are chosen for their convenience, for their facility in achieving a specific effect. As Crosby notes, "These phrases appeal rather to that fondness of the popular audience... for hearing things said in a familiar way."^10 Thus, while repeated expressions,

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^10"Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," p. 102.
another convenience of aural technique, do appear in the *Troilus*, it is important to distinguish them from the formulae of the oral work.

It is demonstrable, then, that the *Troilus* exhibits all of the features of convenience in aural literature. How Chaucer adapts to the necessities of aural literature, however, is another matter. These necessities, it will be remembered, include compartmentalization, clear transitions, lack of digression, and thematic repetition. In the case of each, there is none of the freedom of choice demonstrated in the features of convenience. In short, these features will be present in the successful aural work; the poet has no choice. As noted earlier, they are necessitated by the requirements of the audience, by the unvarying needs of achieving a complete, understandable, attractive presentation. We might note, for instance, that the necessity for compartmentalization has been cited, somewhat indirectly, as the reason for Chaucer's preference for shorter works:

> It is hardly open to question that external circumstances are largely responsible for Chaucer's characteristic failure to carry his longer works to completion. The immediate necessity for him was, obviously, to finish pieces of moderate length, which might be heard at a single sitting.11

As was demonstrated in the discussion of *Beowulf* earlier, the requirements of the audience demand a presentation that can be completed in one "sitting" or that can be divided logically over multiple sittings. If the latter

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course is taken, the problems of transitions from section to section and of maintaining unity of the whole are multiplied. We might then return briefly to Lord's comment, cited earlier: "... it is the length of a song which is most affected by the audience's restlessness."\(^\text{12}\)

It is apparent, then, that an aural work must be relatively brief in its entirety, capable of presentation in an hour or two or three, or must be susceptible to internal division and accompanied by transitions suitable for uniting a presentation spaced over several sittings. The Troilus, Chaucer's longest completed work, is obviously too long for presentation as a single unit. "Efforts like that of the late Stanley P. Chase of Bowdoin College, who, during the 1930's and 1940's, used to conduct a one-day reading of the Troilus aloud, would seem to be rare.\(^\text{13}\)

The reason for this rarity is self-evident: it is of course possible to read the Troilus in one day, but the attractiveness and thus the effectiveness of such a presentation is questionable. It seems likely that such a long sitting would leave even a dedicated audience restless and inattentive in the late stages, much less an audience of courtly listeners, occupied with other affairs and seeking primarily an entertainment, not a scholarly exercise.

\(^{12}\)The Singer of Tales, p. 16.

Thus, as Bronson continues, "... it was expedient for Chaucer to plan the sort of structure which could be composed of small and self-contained units." The Troilus is therefore divided into five books, numbering 1092, 1757, 1820, 1701, and 1869 lines respectively. Each of these, it might be speculated, is suitable for one "sitting" of the poem. Though the books are longer than the three thousand-line sittings theorized for Beowulf, none are beyond the range of a comfortable presentation. Thus, while the entire length of the Troilus is beyond acceptable limits for an aural presentation, the work is compartmentalized into workable units and one of the necessities of aural literature is satisfied.

In conjunction with this compartmentalization, the necessity for providing transitions between the separate presentations has already been noted. This quality of clear transition, again, is a distinctive feature of aural literature. The listening audience, it will be remembered from the discussion of Beowulf, is more in need of clear transitions, both between sections and internally, than is a reader. Unlike the reader, a listener cannot flip back a page or two if he loses track of the movement of the work. As Bronson notes, Chaucer gives considerable attention to providing such transitions:

Another point of oral, as opposed to written, technique is Chaucer's handling of the transitions in his narratives. A good lecturer will set up frequent signposts pointing to the right, to the left, or straight ahead, to prevent any of his hearers from losing the path of his discourse. Chaucer turns his corners with the same obvious clarity.15

14"Chaucer's Art in Relation to his Audience," p. 20.
How the poet constructs such transitions is a matter of some interest, for here we find a guideline for approaching other aspects of Chaucer's response to the demands of his genre. In providing his transitions, Chaucer makes use, it might be argued, of prosecutio, the classical rhetorician's tool. Daniel C. Boughner defines prosecutio as the process of transition from one part of the poem to another and notes that usually in classical rhetoric such a movement is clearly and formally marked, frequently by a proem or other such distinctive indication.16

It can readily be demonstrated that Chaucer makes use of such a technique. Proems, brief introductions or prefaces, occur in every book of the Troilus, particularly in the form of invocations or apostrophes, and more comment will follow on such devices. For now, however, the immediate interest should be in further consideration of this suggestion of Chaucer's use of the tools of rhetoric as a part of his response to the aural mode.

Interest in Chaucer's use of formal rhetoric has arisen again and again in recent years, such criticism ranging from praise to emphatic criticism in the pejorative sense. It might be well, then, to examine at this point a few of the approaches that have been taken to Chaucer's rhetoric. Particularly in recent years, there has been a shift in interest away from the mechanical and superficial techniques of rhetoric and toward a consideration of the results of that rhetoric and its implications in the study of Chaucer's art.

16 "Elements of Epic Grandeur in the Troilus," English Literary History, 6 (1939), 200.
In a definitive work in the field, J. M. Manly's "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," we find what amounts to a condemnation of the artificially and restrictiveness of rhetorical technique. Manly asserts that the development of Chaucer's art was, in effect,

... a process of gradual release from the astonishingly artificial and sophisticated art with which he began and the gradual replacement of formal rhetorical devices by methods of composition based upon close observation of life...

We have therefore a suggestion in Manly that the devices of rhetoric were in reality a hindrance to Chaucer, or at least a restricting boundary with which he did away as his talent increased. Manly concerns himself with tabulating the percentages of rhetorical devices in Chaucer's poetry and notes that, at least in the Canterbury Tales, the frequency of such devices ranges from almost 100 per cent to almost zero. The point of such a tabulation, however, arises in the fact that even in the face of Manly's suggestions, some of the best of the tales are those which are replete with rhetorical devices. This, Manly admits, "is a puzzle that demands investigation." Thus Manly concerns himself not only with counting the devices in Chaucer's poetry, but with the impact of those devices; for Manly, Chaucer's greatness arises in his ability to escape from the restrictions of rhetoric and to mold that rhetoric to his own purposes; he suggests (p. 18) that

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18 "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," p. 16.
he came more and more to make only a
dramatic use of these rhetorical elements. . .
to put them into the mouths of his dramatis
personae and to use only such as might fittingly
be uttered by them.

In a similar manner, Charles Sears Baldwin's study of rhetoric
in Chaucer suggests that Chaucer's success in poetry arose from his
bending and shaping the rhetorical pattern, rather than slavishly fol-
lowing that pattern. Indeed, Baldwin is sharply critical of the com-
bination of poetry and rhetoric. He insists (p. 295) that "A rhetori-
cated poetic. . .is always a perversion." It is not surprising, in
light of this strong criticism of the effect of rhetoric on poetry,
that Baldwin finds Chaucer's value in the poet's movement away from
highly rhetorical poetry.

More recently, however, an interest has arisen in the success
of Chaucer within the rhetorical pattern. Could it be, for instance,
that while still operating within the restrictions and conventions of
rhetoric, the poet used those devices in a manner beyond their
original scope? The Boughner article cited earlier seems to sup-
port such a speculation. Boughner examines the many rhetorical
devices in the poem, admits their conventionality, and yet suggests
that here Chaucer subordinates such figures to a deeper considera-
tion of style, and it is in this style that Chaucer elevates the

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19 Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (New York: The Macmillan
Company, 1928).
poem. This elevated style, Boughner insists, alters the entire tone of the poem in such a manner that the result is "... a high romance of universal appeal, ennobled by certain epic features."20

Robert O. Payne, finally, looks beyond the enumeration of rhetorical devices in an effort to examine the acceptance in Chaucer of the scholastic ideals of the nature and function of poetry. Payne's Key of Remembrance is yet another crucially important milestone in the field of Chaucerian criticism; it has been cited previously in this work and will be discussed again later.

Thus it is clear that Chaucer's use of rhetoric has stirred a considerable critical interest. "That Chaucer was no untaught phenomenon," George Lyman Kittredge suggests, "but had studied rhetoric to good purpose, should be obvious to the most precipitate of readers."21 It is indeed beyond dispute that Chaucer was familiar with the techniques of rhetoric and used those techniques again and again throughout his works. "It is certain," Kittredge continues (p. 13), "... that he often embellished his writing, consciously and deliberately, with 'flowers' or 'colors.'"

It might further be noted that the persistence of rhetorical patterns in Chaucer's poetry is not a discovery of modern scholars.

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Payne notes that "Chaucer praised Petrarch, and was in turn praised by Deschamps and Lydgate, as a great 'rhetor.'"\(^{22}\)

James J. Murphy, in a further study of the use of rhetorical techniques displayed in Chaucer's poetry, lists forty-three specific lines of verse and sixty-six words in prose in which Chaucer specifically refers to rhetorical technique.\(^{23}\) It seems obvious, then, that Chaucer was familiar with the art of rhetoric, had a practicing poet's interest in the art, and used his knowledge, as Kittredge suggests, "to good purpose." Such a conclusion, however, leaves undefined the nature of that rhetoric, whether, for instance, it was the classical rhetoric of antiquity or a medievalized version, and the extent of the poet's schooling in the art.

Some of these questions are answered in Baldwin's *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*, already cited; assuming, then, that a coherent theory of rhetoric existed in Chaucer's period, we are left to question the assumption of Chaucer's "schooling" in such a theory. Are we to accept, for instance, J. M. Manly's suggestion that ". . . the formal study of rhetoric. . . was included in his academic curriculum, as one of the Seven Arts. . . "?\(^{24}\) This would of course be

\(^{22}\) The Key of Remembrance, p. 39.


\(^{24}\) "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," p. 6.
a convenient assumption, but we should also notice Murphy's assertion, in the essay cited earlier, that Chaucer's schooling in the art of rhetoric arose from his reading of French authors (p. 9).

Finally, we are faced with Payne's assertion that no matter what Chaucer's education in rhetoric or how he received it, the actual application of that idealized theory was almost impossibly difficult:

The new dimension in Chaucer's own perspective, then, is his constant awareness that mortal men... really cannot do what the rhetorical poetic required of them, although what it required of them is surely to be taken as the ideal.25

We are faced, then, with three questions in this consideration of Chaucer's use of rhetoric and through that rhetoric his response to the aural mode. First, what was the poet's preparation in this rhetoric? Second, what was medieval rhetoric "ideally" to be? Finally, how did the poet use this rhetoric to answer his needs?

The traditional theory of Chaucer's schooling in rhetoric is that the poet received specific training as a part of his school courses:

The ancient tradition that he was educated, in part at any rate, in the law school of the Inner Temple has recently been shown to be possible, if

25The Key of Remembrance, p. 52.
not highly probable. . . . What more likely than
that the formal study of rhetoric not only was
included in his academic training. . . but also
occupied much of his thought and reflection in
maturer years?26

This theory of Chaucer's education in the techniques of rhetoric has
continued to be popular, and it is of course convenient to accept
such an assumption. Such a theory easily explains Chaucer's fami-
liarity with rhetorical technique and likewise provides an explana-
tion for a deeper concern that has been much evident in recent cri-
ticism, the interest in Chaucer's acceptance of the scholastic theory
of art.

Aside from formal education, we may of course speculate that
Chaucer was familiar with the treatises of such rhetoricians as Matthieu
de Vendome and Geoffroi de Vinsauf, and perhaps even the earlier work
of Cicero or Horace. Certainly we have evidence that Chaucer was fami-
liar with at least Gaufred, as he called him, and there appears little
evidence to eliminate the possibility that the poet, even if he lacked
formal schooling in rhetoric, might well have read and studied the
work of many rhetoricians.

The possibility has arisen, however, that Chaucer's rhetoric
may be derived neither from formal schooling nor extensive study of

26 James J. Murphy, "The Earliest Teaching of Rhetoric at
the classical rhetoricians. Murphy's article cited earlier, "The Earliest Teaching of Rhetoric at Oxford," argues strongly that school courses in rhetoric were not instituted until the early part of the fifteenth century; Murphy continues this argument in another article, his 1964 essay "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians":

There is very little evidence of an active rhetorical tradition in fourteenth-century England. Neither educational records, library catalogues, nor literary allusions provide any reason for believing that rhetoric in any of its forms played a vital part in English cultural life during Chaucer's lifetime. . . .

Murphy suggests another possibility, that some of the functions of rhetoric were available to Chaucer as a part of the art of grammatica, a standard part of his schooling. Murphy therefore proposes (p. 4) that "... there might be some reason for supposing that Chaucer and his contemporaries may have participated in a 'grammatical' rather than a 'rhetorical' tradition." He goes on to suggest (p. 17) that of the many rhetorical devices Chaucer uses, "... he could have found... all or most of them in the ordinary grammatical textbook."

A further possibility arises in the suggestion that Chaucer gained his rhetorical technique through his reading of French authors, and Murphy is supported in this speculation by Benjamin S. Harrison's examination of The Book of the Duchess. Harrison notes, for instance,

that the rhetorical device of the dream element is absent in the manuals of rhetoric, but occurs frequently in the French tradition and notably in the *Roman de la Rose.* 28

It would seem reasonable to suggest, finally, that the existence of one source should not exclude the possibility of others. Chaucer's study of grammar texts and his reading of French poetry do not, for instance, eliminate the possibility that he was familiar with other studies of rhetoric. Even denying a formal education in rhetoric does not mean that the poet's knowledge of these techniques was superficial.

Beyond this understanding of the possibilities for Chaucer's education in rhetoric, we are faced with a dual problem: precisely what was the theory of rhetoric in the Middle Ages, and how did Chaucer apply these techniques in his own work?

The clearest definitions are to be found in the works of Baldwin and Payne, and yet it is notable that no single, concise theory of medieval rhetoric can be precisely defined. Baldwin notes that "Rhetoric is conceived by Aristotle as the art of giving effectiveness to truth." 29 Such a definition might suffice as a preliminary indication of the proper function of rhetoric, but Baldwin

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29 *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic,* p. 3.
notes also (p. 3) that the earlier and later sophists looked upon
the art of rhetoric as "the art of giving effectiveness to the speaker."
This approach, we might note, is of course applicable to both oral and
aural poetry. The aural poet, facing the necessity of speaking effec-
tively to a live audience, might well find the rhetor's tools comfort-
able. The problem arises here in the distinction between rhetoric
serving truth and serving the speaker. To be sure, that speaker might
well be serving truth; it is just as possible, however, that he is
not. Thus the multiple definitions of rhetoric become incompatible.
Baldwin continues, in the same place, "Aristotle amply vindicated
rhetoric... He established its theory. But this theory was
oftener accepted than followed."

A further confusion arises in the fact that for Aristotle,
rhetoric and poetic were different functions:

Rhetoric was, for Aristotle, an art which had
its scientific counterpart in dialectic; its
function was in public debate and its legiti-
mate effect, persuasion to action... 
Poetry... moved men not to action, but
to joy, fear, pity, contemplation... 30

It should not seem unlikely, however, that the tools of the first
might be adapted--as they were--to the needs of the second in order
to better move men to "joy, fear, pity, contemplation."

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30 The Key of Remembrance, p. 37.
Thus questions concerning the nature of rhetoric have always existed; these questions are not, however, insoluble. Payne notes that Aristotle repeatedly points out that "... in matters of style, rhetoric and poetic have much in common." This similarity in style was enough, apparently, to encourage a further blend in the separate functions of rhetoric and poetic to the extent that, as Payne continues (p. 33), "Rhetorica and poetry have become practically equivalent in the thirteenth century."

Though there was continued confusion, in the intervening centuries between Aristotle and the medieval scholastics, concerning the distinguishing characteristics of rhetoric, poetic, and indeed even grammatica, a consistent definition of medieval rhetoric can and has been formulated. This definition can be and has been derived, Payne suggests, primarily from examination and collation of four separate treatises.31

Such a definition of medieval rhetorical-poetic would of necessity be divided into two parts: the techniques of rhetoric and the ends those techniques are expected to achieve. Of the function of rhetoric, first, it is interesting to note that Aristotle's concern that rhetoric should serve truth has survived the passage of time. Payne notes that for the medieval rhetorician the concern

31 The Key of Remembrance, p. 12.
is that poetic should be aimed "... to cause an emotional accept-
tance of reasonable truths." It is the poet's function, then, to persuade, and to do so through the particular tools at his disposal—the tools of language, of emotion, of color. This understanding of medieval poetic theory is crucial in at least two respects: first, if we are to argue that Chaucer demonstrates an acceptance of the medieval theory of rhetorical function, it is necessary that we understand that function; second, the techniques used to achieve this function would logically be those best equipped to do so. For the medieval rhetorician, then, the function of the poet, in its simplest sense, was the attractive repetition and presentation of the same truths that might elsewhere be argued in a more logical fashion. The poet is expected, simply, to do with emotion what the logician does with reason. The poet was not, in addition, expected to take liberties with those truths. Rather, he was expected to act within a set and organized framework. "Law, not license," Kittredge insists, "was the watchword of the medieval writer." Along with this stress on law, we might remember the consistent attention to orderly, clearly defined presentation, with precisely marked sections and clear transitions, so obvious in the Troilus. Perhaps Payne best sums up the theorized function of medieval rhetoric:

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33 Chaucer and His Poetry, p. 12.
Poetry as an art must remain, as long as the framework of medieval belief stood, a process of arousing favorable response to a fittingly dignified statement of pre-existing truths.  

In dealing with the techniques used to achieve these ends, some attention should be given first to the broad divisions of style. Florence Teager notes that although classical doctrine recognized three styles, *gravis*, *mediocris*, and *attenuata*, based on the quality of the ornamentation, the medieval rhetoricians formulated a distinct hierarchy of "colors" for use in the high, low, and middle styles. 

In the same place, Teager suggests that the difficulty of the particular color in use determines the resulting style:

The doctrine taught that a writer must use high style for high matter, employing the so-called difficult ornaments for high style, chiefly the mechanical or facile ones for low style. High style might include the facile ornaments as well as the difficult ones, but the low style practically excluded the tropes.

The "colors" of medieval rhetoric are discussed at some length by Manly, who notes that since the medieval writer deals almost exclusively with already-familiar subjects, his initial problem is one of amplification or abbreviation. Thus in describing the techniques of the medieval rhetorician, Manly deals

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34 The *Key of Remembrance*, p. 46.


primarily with those techniques and "colors" concerned with amplification and abbreviation. Of these, a brief survey of the principle techniques will be useful, particularly in that it will be noted that such techniques are often used in the Troilus to satisfy the aural necessities.

The process of prosecutio mentioned earlier, transition from one part of a poem to another, is clearly relevant to Chaucer's response to the need in aural literature for clear denotation of shifts in the poem. Such transitions can be divided into two types, the larger transitions providing linkage from one section or book to another and the smaller transitions denoting the movement from character to character of situation to situation within each book.

For the larger of these groups, it may be argued that the poet uses the proems, the introductory sections of each book, to prepare the audience for the material to come. It will be remembered that in Beowulf a pattern of summing-up of previous episodes preceded each new section of the poem, thus preparing listeners for new material and providing smooth movement into the new episode. Similarly, Chaucer frequently uses the introductory invocations or apostrophes, again rhetorical techniques used here as prosecutio, to set the stage for coming events. "... it is better, Chaucer believes, to tell your audience, at starting, the objective of your journey together--especially if the way is long."37 We might notice, as an example,

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the apostrophe to Venus in the opening of Book III, a part of which follows:

O blissful light, of which the bemes clere
Adorneth al the thrilde heven faire!
O sonnes lief, O Joves daughtre deere,
Plesance of love, O Goodly debonaire.
In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire!
O veray cause of heele and of gladnesse,
Theryed be thy myght and thi goodnesse:

In hevene and helle, in erthe and salte see
Is felt thi myght, if that I wel descerne;
As man, brid, best, fissh, herbe, and grene treee
Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne.
God loveth, and to love wol nought werne;
And in this world no lyves creature
Withouten love is worth, or may endure.  III, 1-14

An invocation to Venus is fitting, of course, for Troilus deals with love, but Allen C. Koretsky suggests that this invocation is especially noteworthy, for "Book III in particular describes the noble felicities of sexual love." The apostrophe serves a particularly useful introductory function, then, at this point, in particular providing a transitional device and pulling the audience into Book III with a foreshadowing of its content.

The shorter transitions, marking movement from scene to scene or from character to character, are likewise clearly distinguishable in the Troilus; the poet never allows his audience to be in doubt as to who is speaking or what the situation is:

Now lat us stynte of Troilus a throwe,  
That rideth forth, and lat us torne faste  
Unto Criseyde, that heng hire hed ful lowe. . . . II, 687-689

Now torne we ayeyn to Troilus. . . . III, 1584

Now lat hem rede, and torne we anon  
To Pandarus, that gan ful faste prye. . . . III, 1709, 1710

Similarly, the poet frequently sets up for the audience what Bronson calls a "signpost," marking the nature or subject matter of the material to follow:

And how they wroughte, I shal yow tellen soon. IV, 1127

Thus it is evident that Chaucer attends fully to the aural necessity of clear transitions. Further, his response is often in terms of classical rhetorical technique, thus blending the rhetoric of Rome with the patterns of the English oral tradition.

Of the techniques of abbreviation, the form occupatio is worthy of particular notice. In essence, occupatio may be defined as the refusal to describe or narrate; thus it becomes a special aid in excising a part of the source work a writer may wish to delete or feels is no longer applicable. Of more immediate concern, however, is the function to which occupatio is put in the Troilus. Time and again, we notice the poet hurrying over a part of the work, moving ahead directly and eliminating possible side-paths. We have already noted the frequency of the expression "shortly for to seyne." Such a phrase, indicative of the poet's fear of boring his audience and of his own impatience to get on with the relevant action, is indicative in general of the poet's
attitude toward digression. A few scattered examples should amply demonstrate this trait:

But how this town com to destruccion
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle;
For it were here a long digression
Fro my materere, and yow to long to dwelle. I, 141-144

What sholde I make of this a long sermoun? II, 1299

What nedeth yow to tellen al the cheere
That Deiphebus unto his brother made,
Or his accesse, or his sikliche manere,
How men gan hym with clothes for to lade,
When he was leyd, and how men wolde hym glade? II, 1541-1545

But al passe I, lest ye to longe dwelle;
For for ofyn is al that evere I telle. II, 1595-1596

What shold I lenger in this tale tarien? II, 1622

Withouten more, shortly for to seyne,
He most obeye unto his lady heste. III, 1156-1157

Resoun wol nought that I speke of slep,
For it acordeth nought to my materere. III, 1408-1410

I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye. III, 1576

How myghte it evere yred ben or ysonge,
The pleynte that she made in hire destresse?
I not; but as for me, my litel tonge,
If I discryven wolde hire heynnesse,
It sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse. . . . IV, 799-804

And shortly, lest that ye my tale breke. . . . V, 1032

Repeatedly in the examples cited, Chaucer passes hurriedly over material unnecessary to his story, even slighting some episodes that might contribute—as, for instance, Criseyde's sorrow. This impatience is reflective of, first, recognition of the staying power of the audience, and, second, the consistent lack of digression typical of the aural work. This impatience, this refusal to digress,
has occasioned considerable critical comment, as, for instance, Bronson's suggestion:

... it is likely that in the matter of prolixity Chaucer's own instincts chimed with those of his audience. There are signs enough in his work that he was temperamentally not devoid of a certain nervous impatience. He himself liked to get ahead without much delay and circumstance.

In essence, then, occupation here becomes a tool not so much of classical rhetoric as of the aural mode.

It was mentioned earlier that the rhetor-poet's concern will be either with amplification or with abbreviation. Abbreviation, it has been noted, is pertinent to Chaucer's lack of digression, but amplification is deserving of more extended comment in that it applies most fully to the poet's development of his theme. It will be remembered that aural poetry consistently displays a pattern of thematic repetition, both minor and major stress on theme. In other works examined, this thematic stress is carried by narrative and situational repetition. In Beowulf, for instance, there is repeated narrative repetition as the singer returns again and again to summarize events already past. Similarly, the pattern of situational repetition is quite evident, as the many digressions parallel the themes of the main story-line. In the Troilus, however, there is little or no narrative repetition. Chaucer simply does not return to retell events already past. Neither is there any clear pattern of situational repetition; the

poet's strict adherence to his central story, his refusal to digress, does not admit it. How, then, does the poet develop the pattern of thematic stress so necessary to the aural mode? Again, at least part of the answer to this problem lies in the poet's use of rhetorical techniques, including the tools of amplification.

Among these techniques of amplification is *sententia*, the epigram or proverb. As might be expected, such a prosaic and conventionalized device easily becomes a dry, dead thing, better put in the mouths of bores than in a viable work; Shakespeare's Polonius comes immediately to mind.

It might be argued, however, that Chaucer makes of the *sententia* a capable tool, particularly in its minor function as a theme repetition, and thus escapes what might otherwise have been a trap. As one example, we might note the proverb of Book I, 841-849, which ends with the words "For if hire whiel stynte any thyng to torne/ Than cessed she Fortune anon to be." Payne notes that although this proverb promises eventual success to Troilus in its reference to the continual turn of the wheel, and thus fulfills the immediate purpose of the *sententia*, it goes ever further: if Troilus had listened closely, he would have been aware of the certainty that such success would not last.40 Thus

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the device serves a function beyond the immediate convention in that it is expanded to include Chaucer's theme of the brevity of earthly love.

In another example of the use of *sententia*, Payne notes that as hope dims for Troilus in the last two books, Pandarus increases in the frequency of his use of this device. In one respect, we might argue, the purpose of these proverbs is to cheer Troilus, and thus they appear little more than conventional. Payne, however, suggests that they "remind us of the relationships between man, woman, and Fortune which the poem illustrates." (p. 210) We might notice, for instance, Pandarus' lines in IV, 414-416: "And ek, as writ Zanzis, that was ful wys,/ 'The newe love out chaceth oft the old';/ And upon newe cas lith newe avys." Thus again the rhetorical convention moves beyond its initial limitations and becomes a method thematic stress, filling the need for the aural mode.

Another technique of expansion, the apostrophe, was noted earlier as an introductory device. Of these apostrophes, Koretsky suggests that "Apostrophes do not advance the action; rather they delay it."\(^4\)\footnote{"The Use of the Apostrophe in *Troilus* and *Crisseyde*," p. 243.} This comment seems strongly similar to the complaints
that the digressions in Beowulf delayed the action. Again, it is arguable that what appears to be a delaying movement actually furthers the progress of the theme:

In Troilus and Criseyde, it is the system of lyric and apostrophe, set within the structure of the narrative proper, which provides the openings through which Chaucer may move outward from the action into a larger evaluation.42

The functions of these lyrics need careful consideration. We have noted that in the aural work thematic stress occurs through a variety of minor and major repetitions. The minor stresses in the Troilus have been noted; it might well be argued at this point that a major thematic stress is developed through the lyrics Payne notes above. Payne isolates a group of ten lyrics, listed below, which, considered in light of the aural necessities, seem to bear particular significance:

I, 400-434 canticus Troili
II, 827-875 Antigone's song
III, 1422-1442 Criseyde's aubade
III, 1450-1470 Troilus' answering aubade
III, 1702-1708 Criseyde's aubade
III, 1744-1771 Troilus' hymn to Love
IV, 958-1082 Troilus' predestination soliloquy
V, 218-245 Troilus' plaint, "Wher is myn owene lady"
V, 540-553 Troilus' plaint to the empty palace
V, 638-658 second canticus Troili

Payne notes that each of these ten lyrics comes at a major point in the action, in each case accompanying a crucial development in the story.43 Such a pattern is obviously too consistent

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42 The Key of Remembrance, p. 184.
43 The Key of Remembrance, p. 184.
to be coincidental; it might be suggested, rather, that such lyrics
provide the thematic repetition and stress of key points common to
the aural mode. An examination of the lyrics seems clearly to sup­
port this assumption.

The first *canticus* Troili, for instance, occurring in lines
400-434 of Book I, reads in part:

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym, may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.

And if that at myn owne lust I brenne,
From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
If harm agree me, wherto pleyne I thenne?
I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte.
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
Al stereless withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Alas! what is this wondre maladie?
For hete of cold, for cold of hete, I dye. 1, 400-420

This lyric comes close after Troilus first sights Criseyde and thus
summarizes his suddenly smitten condition, his puzzlement with the
nature of love. Particularly in line 401, Chaucer poses a problem
for the rest of the poem. What is the nature of love, its qualities
and effects? A bit further, lines 419-420, Troilus repeats the ques­
tion and summarizes his immediate quandary. Thus, in the space of a
few compact lines, and combined with the sort of characterizing that
aids in developing the struggle of the poem, Chaucer stresses for the audience the immediate events and the direction of the material to come.

A similar effective use of the lyric is demonstrated by Criseyde's aubade, III, 1422-1442, and Troilus' reply. The two lovers have just achieved the consummation of their passion, and, knowing nothing of the misfortune yet awaiting them, lament the necessity of parting for the day:

"Myn hertes lif, my trist, and my pleasaunce,
That I was born, alas, what me is wo,
That day of us moot make disseveraunce!" III, 1422-1424

And ek the sonne, Titan, gan he chide,
And seyde, "0 fool, wel may men the dispise,
That hast the dawyng al nyght by thi syde,
And suffrest hire so soone up fro the rise,
For to disese loveris in this wyse. III, 1464-1468

In such lament, of course, the two lovers reaffirm their joy and love, but it might be argued that the major thrust of these lyrics is the ironic counterpoint they provide in light of the future events. The fullest degree of this irony is seen only later, when the two face not a brief day's parting, but eternal separation, and the triviality of their earlier lament becomes apparent.

This irony in retrospect is also developed in Troilus' hymn to Love in III, 1744-1771, a part of which follows:

"Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,
Love, that his hestes hath in hevenes hye,
Love, that with an holsom alliaunce
Halt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye,
Love, that knetteth lawe of compaignie,
And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,
Bynd this acord, that I have told and telle.
"That that the world with feith, which that stable,
Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge,
That elementz that ben so discordable
Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,
That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,
And that the mone hath lordshipe over the nyghtes--
Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!"

III, 1744-1757 (italics mine)

This joyful praise, in itself a summary of the mood of the poem at this particular moment, again rings hollowly as events develop, and thus again becomes a thematic stress culminating in the concluding events of the poem.

In Book V, some of the irony of the earlier events has become apparent in the wake of Criseyde's departure and her seeming slowness in returning. Troilus' lyric in lines 540-553 stresses the mood of tense, troubled doubt appropriate for this stage of the poem:

Then seide he thus: "O paleys desolat,
O hous of houses whilom best ihight,
O paleys empty and disconsolate,
O thow lanterne of which queynt is the light,
O paleys, whilom day, that now art nyght,
Wel oughtestow to falle, and I to dye,
Syn she is went that wont was us to gye!

"O paleis, whilom crowne of houses alle,
Enlumyned with sonne of alle blisse:
O ryng, fro which the ruby is out falle,
O cause of wo, that cause hast ben of lisse:
Yet, syn I may no bet, fayn wolde I kisse
Thy colde dores, dorste I for this route;
And farwel shryne, of which the seynt is oute!"

The culmination of this irony and the final use of lyric to summarize situation and stress theme occurs in the second canticus Troili, lines 638-658 of Book V. From his earlier state of glory, Troilus has proceeded to a state of being "evere derk in torment..." Thus again
Chaucer pauses to stress the theme, here the trivial brevity of earthly love, while yet continuing the action of the poem.

Of these lyrics, Payne suggests that "Taken as a group apart from their individual contexts these ten lyrics constitute a kind of distillation of the emotional progress of the poem. . . ." In this Chaucer's artistry can be seen at its fullest. In the face of the aural necessity of thematic repetition, the poet weaves such repetition into his work, utilizing a pattern of lyrics that repeatedly bear the burden of theme, yet in doing so continue the action of the story. The sophistication of this technique, and indeed all of Chaucer's use of rhetoric to satisfy the audience's needs, can be seen in a comparison with the digressive style of the oral work—for instance, the theme-bearing repetitions that have drawn so much criticism for Beowulf.

Thus it appears evident that Chaucer responds capably to the aural mode, providing for his audience both the conveniences and the necessities of attractive presentation. In his use of rhetorical techniques to achieve these ends, the poet blends the classical modes with the newer patterns of the English tradition.

\[\text{44 The Key of Remembrance, p. 186.}\]
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Some insights appear, once they are stated, to be so obvious as to create a sort of blindness, a tendency to ignore the fundamental in search of the obscure. Bertrand Bronson describes one of them as follows:

In a world of printed books the enjoyment of literature has become for most people a solitary form of pleasure. We are accustomed to gather our impressions of an author through the silent and conventional symbols of type. . . . Before the invention of printing, however, the situation was reversed. It is worthwhile, in reading the work of an early poet like Chaucer, to readjust our point of view to that older habit of communication.¹

This study has attempted to follow Bronson's advice about point of view. When Chaucer is examined in light of the conditions of his "publishing," some conclusions appear obvious; these conclusions have been reached in a variety of studies already cited. Such investigations, however, have in general approached Chaucer's works with a slightly different set of criteria than has been offered here, and the results have thus been appreciably different.

As has already been noted in this study, earlier investigations of the oral qualities of Chaucer's works can be divided, with a few exceptions, into two groups. First, such critics as Ruth

Crosby and George Wilson, regarding the poet as an extension of the English oral tradition, have concerned themselves with proving the existence of that tradition and identifying its features. Second, more recent critics, including Robert O. Payne and Dieter Mehl, have denied either Chaucer's participation in the oral tradition or the importance of this form of "publishing."

One of the conclusions of this study is that both groups pay insufficient attention to important aspects of Chaucer's technique. First, Chaucer is not an oral poet in the meaning of the term popularized by Parry, Lord, Magoun, Creed, and most other students of the oral tradition. Creating his works in the relative leisure of the written form and delivering them orally, the poet thus utilizes a technique apart from the oral tradition, a technique that has here been called aural. Second, those critics who deny the importance of Chaucer's form of publication clearly slight the effects such a manner of delivery must impose on the style of the work. Such a form of delivery must inevitably shape the final product, for the poet is limited in certain respects by the needs of his audience and must certainly be aware of those limitations.

To a great extent, the earlier studies just cited have approached both oral and aural literature in search of the features identifiably present, attempting to formulate justifications for these features after they were identified. In general, the technique here has been somewhat the reverse in that, approaching Chaucer from the viewpoint suggested by Bronson, I have attempted to identify
first the needs of a listening audience and a poet writing for spoken delivery, and then have examined the Troilus in an attempt to determine the poet's accommodation of these needs.

The results are those enumerated in the earlier parts of this study. An audience of listeners demands certain approaches from the speaker, whether he is an oral or an aural poet. First, the poet must compartmentalize his work into a series of coherent units, each unit suitable for understanding individually and in the context of a larger work. In providing such compartmentalization, the poet recognizes the time limitations imposed by his audience's patience. He thus breaks the work into discreet units, each unit capable of presentation within a time span satisfactory to the audience.

As a result of this compartmentalization, the poet must then provide clear transitions between the units, often offering at the start of the work a summary of what has gone before or a summation of the situation. He recognizes, as Whitelock has pointed out, the need to "... inform newcomers and remind the previous audience of what has happened..."² Similarly, the poet will provide internal transitions, clearly denoting movement from character to

²The Audience of Beowulf, p. 20.
character or scene to scene. Such obvious transitions are present in each of the works examined in this paper, as a reference to Chapters II and III will demonstrate.

Further, both the oral and the aural poet consistently provide a clear pattern of thematic repetition. We notice in Beowulf, for instance, again and again the stress on the qualities of the noble warrior; similarly, we note in the Roland a recurring development of the Christian-pagan struggle. Of this pattern of thematic repetition, Auerbach argues that "Varied repetition of the same theme is a technique stemming from medieval Latin poetics, which in turn draws it from antique rhetoric. . . ." 3

Accompanying this list of required features in both oral and aural poetry are a number of features of convenience less than necessary but attractive to a listening audience. Clearly defined by Crosby and cited earlier in this work, these features include repeated expressions, religious frames, addresses to the audience, and the casual intimacy of most spoken works.

Another of the conclusions of this study arises from consideration of this list of features. Students of Beowulf have long puzzled over the poem's digressive and repetitious quality. It has been suggested, of course, that the digressions of the poem are not

3 Mimesis, p. 105.
really digressive in that they continue the pattern of thematic stress noted earlier, and this study supports that theory. Further, I have suggested a modification of the traditional three-part division of the work. Earlier studies have generally divided the second and third episodes approximately at line 2200, as Beowulf becomes king and the dragon story begins. Such a division, however, fails to provide the introductory summary of previous action so common to the oral or aural poet's transitional technique. If, however, the division between the second and third episodes occurs about line 2000, beginning with the return of Beowulf to Hygelac's court, the account Beowulf gives of his adventures becomes a recapitulation of the first two episodes, bringing the audience up to date and thus providing a suitable response to the need for an effective transition.

It is obvious, therefore, that close attention to the needs of the audience provides a useful tool in the analysis of either oral or aural poetry. In those features arising from such needs, oral and aural poetry are similar. The distinction between the two forms and the most obvious differences arise from the demands on the poet each form makes.

First, as has been noted, oral poetry is inevitably formulaic. Considering the conditions of its creation, the necessity of producing line after line of metrically acceptable verse without pause for deliberation, it cannot be otherwise. Aural poetry, however, has no
need for such formulae; composed at leisure, it may include repeated
expressions as a convenience, but such repetitions are not formulae
in the traditional meaning of the term.

Similarly, as a result of his mode of creation, the oral
poet often digresses, moving from topic to topic as he estimates his
audience's reactions. Because he creates as he delivers, the oral
poet is able to judge his listeners' response and interest in any
particular topic as he touches upon it. The aural poet, however,
has no such flexibility. The form of his work is fixed in advance
from the poet's evaluation of the audience's interest. Once fixed,
the form is relatively rigid and therefore less prone to digression
than oral poetry.

With these features of aural poetry identified, the major
effort of this study has been to examine Chaucer's Troilus and
Criseyde in search of the poet's response to the necessities of
his mode. An evaluation of each feature demonstrates that the
poet repeatedly makes a virtue of necessity, transforming stock
patterns into a carefully interwoven framework blending elements
of the English oral tradition with the tools of classical rhetoric
to enhance the poem.

It has been argued, first, that Chaucer adjusts compe-
tently to the features of convenience, particularly in two aspects.
The mood of intimacy his addresses to the audience create contri-
butes, particularly in the admonishments to lovers, to the develop-
ment of the theme throughout the poem. Similarly, the poet's use
of religious frames is interwoven with figures from classical mythology; in the choice of these figures and in the ending frame for Book V, Chaucer again develops his theme, first with the attention to romantic love and eventually with the result of that love.

This combination of religious frames with transitional techniques thus elevates the Troilus, satisfying the necessity of clear movement and providing the thematic stress common to aural literature. Particularly in this last element, the necessity of thematic stress, Chaucer extends the earlier English modes of narrative and situational technique demonstrated in Beowulf into a more sophisticated style, rhetorical thematic repetition. This insight into Chaucer's technique clearly supports Curschmann's contention that "... evaluation of individual achievement and meaning should concentrate on the use of units larger than single words or phrases."4 Curschmann's argument, essentially, is that analysis of spoken literature has for too long concentrated on phrase-counting and linguistic analysis. Such analysis has been undeniably productive, but the result is that the larger elements of structure have been too much ignored.

It is possible, then, to argue that some further attention to the structures of aural literature, with the revised criteria offered here as guides, might well be productive. Such an

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analysis of the *Canterbury Tales*, for instance, would be challenging, particularly since the unfinished state of the work adds complexity to structural analysis. Some aspects of such an analysis, of course, are rather obvious and have already been well covered. The transitional techniques of the individual prologues, the compartmented nature of the separate tales, each suitable for one day's presentation--these things have been widely discussed. The overall framing of the work, however, and the quality of thematic stress, while treated to some extent already, are still open to discussion and analysis in the light of aural criteria. Nor, finally, is the application of aural criteria limited to Chaucer. Chaucer's age was a transitional period, and this period, covering the movement from strictly oral literature to the printed text, is relatively lengthy and should include many writers worthy of such attention.
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APPENDIX

MODERNIZATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Beowulf

11. 1-3  Lo, of the Spear-Danes of old
         We have heard much of their fame and glory,
         Their great kings and warlike deeds.

11. 86-89  Then a powerful demon who lived in darkness
           Endured it angrily, impatiently,
           That he heard each day the joy
           Loud in the hall.

11. 100-105  ... until a fiend of hell
             Began his evil crimes. This wrathful
             Spirit was called Grendel, a demon grim
             who held the marshlands,
             Fen and fastness.

11. 702-703  Then through the gloom of night
             Crept the walker of darkness.

11. 710-711  From the wastelands, under cover of darkness
             Grendel came, the accursed of God.

11. 720-721  He came to the hall of the wandering warriors,
             Of joy depriving them.

11. 867-882  Now and again a king's thane.
             A good singer mindful of sagas,
             Wove a song in proper words
             Singing the story of Beowulf's victory,
             Chanting the tale in skillful verse.
             All the songs he had heard
             He sang of Sigemund's glory
             Stories of the forgotten Walsings,
             Of their great rovings and wars,
             Strife and fighting unknown to men
             Except to Fitela, that he told
             To his nephew when they were companions,
             The time of the bitter strife.
11. 1719-1720 ... did not give rings
To Danes after glory.

11. 1722-1723 ... learn from this act,
See the virtue.

La Chanson de Roland

11. 1-3 Charles the king, our great emperor,
Has been for seven full years in Spain.
He has conquered the land from sea to mountains.

11. 15-21 "Hear me, lords, we are in great danger;
The emperor Charles of gentle France
Has come here for our great misfortune;
I have no host to meet him in battle,
Nor power to shatter his power.
Speak, give me your council;
Defend me from this death and shame.

11. 331-335 The emperor holds out his right-hand glove,
But Count Ganelon wished to be elsewhere,
And when taking it let it fall to earth.
Said the Frenchmen: "God! What does this mean?
This is an omen of great misfortune."

11. 674-675 Ganelon comes, the false one, the perjurer,
And with great polish begins to speak.

11. 740-744 "Lord Barons," said the Emperor Charles,
"Look at this land and these straight passages;
Judge for me whom I will place in the rearguard."
Ganelon replied: "Roland, this stepson of mine;
No baron like him you have in your service."

11. 2021-2026 Dead is the count, who could endure no more
The baron Roland weeps for him and mourns;
On earth you'll never see a sadder man.

The count Roland, when he sees his dead friend
Lying face down upon the ground
Quite softly says farewell to him.
Says the archbishop: "Damn him who won't fight hard! When Charles returns, he'll avenge us well."

Said the pagans: "We were doomed from birth! A bitter day has come for us today! We have lost all of our lords and peers, Charles is returning with his great host, We hear the clear-voiced calls of the French, Great is the sound of the battle-cry 'Monjoy.' Count Roland is so fierce No mortal man can ever defeat him. Let us throw our spears and let him be." They hurl at him a shower of spears, Feathered arrows, lances, darts That pierced his shield and burst it And ripped his hauberk, cutting off its mail, But not a one went into his body. They wounded Veillantif in thirty places, Under the count they killed him. The pagans take flight then and let him alone; Count Roland is still upon his feet.

"I'll go into France to fight with Charles; If he won't beg mercy at my feet And turn his back upon the Christian law, I shall take the crown off his head."

"Lord barons," says Charles the king, "Judge Ganelon for me with righteousness. He went with me among my host to Spain, And lost for me twenty thousand of my French, And my nephew whom you never more will see, And Oliver the brave and courteous. The dozen peers he has betrayed for gain.

Saint Gabriel came down from God to say: "Charles, summon up the armies of your empire, For you must invade the land of Bire, And there give succor to Vivien at Imphe, The city that the pagans have besieged; The Christians there call and cry out for you."
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