

## THE EXPERIENCE OF WRITING: AUTHORITY, AUTHORITIES AND WOMEN IN CHAUCER

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The use of "auctores" as the unquestionable authority, hence a source of authentication, is a structural necessity in Medieval Literature. Often the "auctores" are conjured to help the individual author reinforce his authority. The current author is a co-builder; he contributes to the dissemination of the "sentence" of the past and collaborates with the past authors to keep the "doctrine" or the "sentence" intact. A fourteenth century compiler reveals the use of the authority of others in such a context:

"And thaughe y take the wordes of other men, y make hit myne that y proferre other while of the sentence of olde men by my wordes, vsenge the auctores whom I schalle wryte in the begynnenge of the booke as a schelde and defense ageyne men mevenge contrarious thynges."<sup>1</sup>

Although with less clarity and certainty as to their use, Chaucer, too, makes the authorities an essential part of his writing. In the defence of the narrator against the accusations of the God of Love in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator's trespass is presented to be repeating "what so myn auctore mente" (F 470)<sup>2</sup>. The narrator pleads not guilty for saying what he, in actuality, is not saying. References to "auctoritas" are at the heart of the *Canterbury Tales*, where the tale-telling game necessitates acknowledgement of authors. The Clerk is conscientious in identifying and acknowledging the "auctor" of his story as Petrarch (CT, 31-38). The man of Law, in acknowledging Chaucer as an "auctor", cannot find anything to add to

(1) Higden, Ralph *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden: Monachi Cestrensis together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*. Ed. Churchill Babington, B.D., F.L.S. Vol I (London: Longman, 1865); p. 21.

(2) The references to Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

his "matter" (MLT 31-38). The implication is that of a harmonious relationship between the "auctores" and their mediators or continuators. However, authority in Chaucer is a highly suggestive word. It often involves authorial control; it is associated with power and privilege of possessing voice. Instead of being employed as a means of securing belief and manipulating the reader's response to the story, authority in Chaucer is used to illustrate its metamorphic impact on the fictional representation. This paper is an attempt to examine the implications of the right to authority in the representation of Alcione in the *Book of the Duchess*.

Chronologically positioned, Alcione stands at the beginning of Chaucer's career as a poet. Still, Alcione and the Wife of Bath share something vital in common: the former has an unassuming claim to authority, the latter shouts her right to authority "from the roofs' tops". The militant and radically revolutionary Wife of Bath initiates her defense against the misogynistic view of women by establishing a paradigm that privileges "experience" against "authority": "Experience, though noon auctoritee/Were in this world, is right ynogh for me./ To speke of wo that is in marriage." (WBP 1-3). We grant her the right, as she has been married five times. Usually interpreted as a Chaucerian opposition between authority and experience, Wife's paradigm, in fact, rather than opposing the "woe that is in marriage" endorses it, albeit on different grounds. Speaking towards the same end, i.e. there is woe in marriage, the Wife subverts the agent of authority. Her paradigm tends to promote personal experience as the authoritative voice to comment on the phenomenon, and thereby discards the authority of "auctores"<sup>3</sup>. It addresses the pertinent grounds for fictional truth by linking interpretation and authority in heir bearing on the conventionalised orthodox views<sup>4</sup>. The paradigm of opposition takes on more when the Wife moves on to the problem of textual authorisation. She challenges:

Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?  
By God, if women hadde writen stories,  
As clerkes han writen hire oratories,  
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse  
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse." (892-96)

(3) The Wife of Bath's indisputable authority is well documented by Helen Cooper 'The Shape-Shiftings of the Wife of Bath, 1395-1670', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 168-184.

(4) Knapp, Peggy A. 'Alcoun of Bathie and the Reappropriation of Tradition', *Chaucer Review*, 24:1 (1989), 45-52.

Wife's is an opposition indeed. However, it is an opposition expressed through a necessary claim to authority. "If wommen hadde written stories..." If women had the power, they would have written a Wife's Book of Wicked Husbands, for instance. Hence, instead of presenting the issue for discussion individually, the Wife would have authorities do the battle. The Wife's paradigm therefore does not take issue with authority, it rather foregrounds its absence from the site of women hence the blatant subjectivity of any kind of authority in that context.

So, who painted the lion? Chaucer cites some more "authorities" to this question. In his preoccupation with authority, this is a question that prevails in his poetry, in his acknowledgements of the authorities and in his use of old books. In the dream poems, Chaucer strategically avoids a binary opposition between authority and experience as in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. The narrator is engaged in the question of belief in old books:

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle  
That ther ys joy in hevenc and payne in helle  
And I a corde wel that yt ys so;  
But, natheles, yet wot I wel also  
That ther nis noon dwelving in this contree  
That eyther hath in hevenc or helle ybe  
Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen  
But as he herd seyd or founde it written  
For by assay ther may no man it prove,  
But God forbede but men shulde leve  
Wel more thing then men han seen with yel  
Men shal not wenen every thing a lye  
But yf himself yt seeth or elles dooth;  
For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,  
Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee.  
Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all, pardee!

[F 1-16]

The narrator is questioning, if not doubting, the authority of the old books<sup>5</sup>. Still it is the void of authority (there we han noon other preve) that makes him drop the question as soon as he picks it up. The possibilities can be multiplied. If it was possible to visit Hell or Heaven; if it was possible to substitute Bernard the Monk.

The narrator's questioning establishes the importance of authority. Authority is important not only to challenge or negate other authorities

(5) Even when we take the narrator's comments as qualified agreement, there still is the installed doubt which reshapes the authority procured by the books.

but also to enable the coexistence of plurality of views. Chaucer inscribes this awareness in his dream poetry through representations of women. He makes the question of authority a central element in his "rewritings" of women. The problematic nature of women and fictional creations of women are confronted in a predominantly literary environment which is formed of an interaction between reading and writing<sup>6</sup>. The predream discussion topics often suggest an involvement with the question of authority, but significantly locate that authority in the books rather than assigning it to the narrator, who occupies the position of the author of the poem.

The narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* reads an old book which he observes was written to be read and kept in mind. This book of ancient origin not only determines the nature of the following dream experience<sup>7</sup> but also allows an interaction between the subject and object of the story contained therein. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, too, the books are the source of new knowledge :

"For out of olde felde, as man seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,  
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,  
Commeth al this newe science that man lere" (22-25)

It is in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* that the question of authority is problematised to the extent of endorsing and negating the truth of this "olde wyse". While the dream poems develop within the complex circuit of tradition, innovation and the problem of belief in the final poetic product, Chaucer focuses his poetic efforts on the exploration of implications of authority. Such an endeavour involves but nevertheless goes beyond the "auctoritas" topos which Chaucer employs not to fortify the authority of his poem but to send the reader in search of a reason for the reliability of it. The *Troilus and Criseyde* serves as an ample example. The narrator of the *Troilus* undertakes a retelling of an ancient love story for the sentence of which he takes no responsibility. The reader is to believe the narrator's story but will not attempt to negotiate the terms of its creation or the resolution of the story because the narrator is merely a mediator of a story, not the

(6) The intertextuality of Chaucer's dream poems is now a given of Chaucer criticism. A recent acknowledgement of this position as a constructive element of Chaucer's poetry is Robert Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) p.xi.

(7) The unacknowledged position on the relation between dream and the predream is that the Black Knight's experience of loss and grief is a conscious extension (on the part of the writer) of what the narrator reads prior to his dream.

creator of it. In a similar way, the narrator in the *House of Fame* refers the reader to Virgil and Ovid for the Dido story, multiplying rather than attempting to reduce the number of authorities<sup>8</sup>.

Evidently, there are rather important differences between the narrator's renunciation of authority for the composition of his poem and the Wife's sidelining of authority for her self-definition as a woman. While the narrator as author is displacing the individual's role by locating the authority of his narration in an outside agent, the Wife is working for a counter movement which claims the authority for the individual. Ultimately, however, both the narrator's reliance on old books in composing poetry and the Wife's challenge to the authority of books indicate that Chaucer's consideration of the authority is much more complex than to be formulated into a dichotomy of authority and experience.

The centrality of authority in fictional creation or fictional representation is evident in Chaucer's location of his women characters in books. Considering the Wife of Bath's rejection of authority of the conventionalised and, in her opinion, biased representations of women, it is clear what Wife's rejection is based on a diagnosis that the representations cannot be taken as representation of truth about women simply because they are the product of a group of like-minded men. As such, their uniformity actually signals suppression of a counter view. The Wife particularises the counter view as the unexpressed view of women and hints at deployment of this unused force for defaming men. But the implications of the paradigm "Who painted the lion?" are significantly deeper when considered in the wider context of Chaucer's preoccupation with authority. Chaucer centralises authority as the agent which temporarily fixates and stabilises the poetic representation.

Not all women in Chaucer are as verbal as the Wife of Bath about the role of authority as a force that controls and alters the fictional representation. Yet, women in Chaucer illustrate the dynamics of authority and experience on several levels. The generic transformation of the Dido episode is instructive, and the significant reductivism operative in the Ceyx and Alcione story is telling in that the respective stories of Dido and Alcione suggest the interrelation between text and

(8) See Robert Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) p.86 for a formulation of reader/author cooperation for proliferation of the fictional product.

women and women and authority (as embodied and exercised by women).

In the story of Ceyx and Alcione, Chaucer's recognition of authority in fictional creation is manifest in the particular representation of Alcione as a woman who interacts with the authorities of her world in an individual way. Alcione's individual handling of authority frees the story from its original context and alters Alcione's representation.

Chaucer situates the Ceyx and Alcione story at the beginning of the *Book of the Duchess*. The concern of the *Book of the Duchess* has been considered to be consolation of John of Gaunt, realised through the interrelation of love, death and sorrow experienced by Alcione, the narrator and the Black Knight<sup>9</sup>. Structurally, the story of Alcione stands as a self-contained piece and has been considered an independent poem<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, modern interpretations of the poem consider the Ceyx and Alcione story thematically and structurally relevant to the unifying subject of the *Book of the Duchess* as a whole. The concern for a unifying thematic link between the almost independent pre-dream reading and the dream proper emphasises Chaucer's use of the story as a narrative device, a mode of usage employed by Machaut, and recognises Alcione's role in relation to her resemblance to the narrator or the Black Knight, all three sharing and experiencing grief and loss<sup>11</sup>.

The Ceyx and Alcione story is a story within a story. It is also a representative example of Chaucer's method of incorporating the past into the present. It provides an old book, and old story, and a woman known through the story. Through the woman character, it explores

(9) See Robert B. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) p. 62. For a similar view see John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 72-73. The view of resemblance between the Knight's situation and Alcione's needs not be challenged, for they speak to each other across the narrator's story. A direct correlation is suggested by Clemen: "Just as Halycone was comforted by the appearance of her husband in a dream, the Knight was comforted by recalling his dead wife to mind as he told his own story". *Chaucer's Early Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1963) p.31.

(10) The structural independence of the story is noted by Robert Jordan who identifies in it a thematic relevance to the dream content. See *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) p.74.

(11) James Wimsatt proposes an indebtedness to the *Aeneid* and the *Roman de la Rose* along with the commonly recognised *Metamorphoses* and Machaut's *Le Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse*. See 'The Sources of Chaucer's Ceyx and Alcione', *Medium Aevum*, 36 (1967), 231-41. See also James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of the Book of the Duchess* (Chapel Hill: The University of the North Carolina Press, 1968); B.A. Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982).

the interrelation between the old book, the old story and the woman. Chaucer does not specify his source of the story. While scholarship acknowledges the *Metamorphoses* as Chaucer's main source, it tends to favour Machaut's use of the story as a structural instrument of entrance into his poem as a more likely precedent for Chaucer's specific use of the story. Consideration of the story as a significant structural and thematic component, however, fails to recognise Chaucer's engagement with Alcione and her navigations through a world of authorities.

While freeing the story from its original implications, in the story of Ceyx and Alcione, Chaucer focuses on Alcione and makes her story and her reaction to the compelling forces of her world reflect a battle of poetic forces on the poetic subject. Implications of the authority originate from Ovid's story, where the authority is ever-present but is sidelined by the emphasis on the mutual love of Ceyx and Alcione. Ovid's story is a story of love, death and suffering, but it is also a story of power and subjection<sup>12</sup>. In Ovid, the element of power derives largely from the background of love brought to an immature end by uncontrollable forces. Alcione stands at the center of this complex interaction of power and subjection, and is the one who is constantly subjugated by it until, and including, her metamorphosis at the end. Although it has a direct effect on her life, she is constantly kept at the periphery of the main action.

In Ovid, the forces that direct the narrative are beyond Alcione's control. Alcione tries twice, both out of concern for her husband's safety, to stop what later proves to be inevitable, but her protestations are to no avail. Alcione "the faithful" bursts into tears when Ceyx tells her about his planned journey, and protests "Where is that care for me, that used to come before everything else?"<sup>13</sup> Ceyx by no means denies his love for her but is bound with higher responsibilities. A typical duty versus love situation. Alcione temporarily takes her husband as the authoritative agent in their lives and tries to prevent the anticipated threat to their happiness by stopping him from going. While this is typical of Alcione, a figure of anguish, jealousy and love, who is

(12) The stories of Pyramus and Thisbe, Cephalus and Procris and Philemon and Baucis, which revolve around error, jealousy and devotion are among the narratives of mutual love. On the Ceyx and Alcione story in Ovid, see A.H.F. Griffin, "The Ceyx Legend in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, *Classical Quarterly*, 31: 1 (1981), 147-154.

(13) For the references to Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes. (London: Penguin Books, 1955) is used.

nevertheless driven to use such tactics out of frustration, Ceyx's unbroken resolution indicates a paradoxical negation of Alcione's standpoint. Ceyx does not possess power, either. Together with the power, the pending threat lies elsewhere. In the *Metamorphoses* the gods are the active agents of power. They control and direct the lives of the individuals by means of reward or punishment. They provide and alternately withhold information. Ceyx's brother is turned into a hawk as a result of his sorrow for his daughter's punishment by gods. Peleus seeks refuge in Ceyx's country because he has committed homicide and is exiled from his home country. Peleus' herd are attacked by a wolf sent by gods to punish Peleus.

Alcione's first appearance is when the god-offender Peleus' sheep are attacked by a wolf (which Peleus recognises as an act of divine punishment) and Ceyx offers to go to his help. The sign of danger alarms Alcione for she is overwhelmed by the concern for her husband's safety. She beseeches him not to go so that by saving his life he could save hers. Anticipation of potential death, then, introduces Alcione into the story as a person who is aware of the superior powers and the necessity of avoiding involvement with them. Her efforts to stop Ceyx from going show also that Alcione recognises the power relation in her world. In the lower sphere, the world of mortals, she is supplicant to her husband. She does not take an effective active part, but she uses the means available to her as a "faithful" wife. Tearful and anguished on account of her husband's safety, Alcione's first appearance marks a pervasive patterning of power and submission. Alcione's intervention from the point of submissive character produces a significant result. Temporarily, Ceyx is safe; however not as a result of Alcione's pleas, but because Peleus declines Ceyx's offer for help. The higher sphere, the supernatural domain, enters the narrative as a force directly relevant to Ceyx and Alcione story when Ceyx reveals his plan to go to consult the oracle about the loss of his brother. Alcione, similar to her reaction to the first threat to her husband's safety, is alarmed by the plan because she anticipates at once that both her husband and she will be at the mercy of powers which they cannot control. She particularises this awareness into the power of the sea, the potential for storm and death, and presents it as a powerful threat to their autonomy, their oneness in love. It is the powerlessness of both that Alcione focuses on. Even the God of Winds, her father, cannot control the self-motivated winds. The unknown realm of future is approximated by the evaluation of the present conditions. The



source of information and the control over Ceyx's future lie elsewhere, in the world of supernatural powers. Fortune demands that Ceyx die, the winds oblige and bring about the storm. Alcione cannot dissuade her husband from his goal and Ceyx's sense of duty compels him to submit to his fortune.

Still, if a potential source for the possible reversal of the events is sought, it must be Ceyx himself. The chance of making a choice is open to Ceyx, though his chance too is limited by his responsibilities and loyalties. This limited say makes Ceyx relatively more powerful compared to Alcione. He initiates the action, whereas Alcione tries to stop what she sees as inevitable to happen. Once her attempts fail, Alcione becomes more passive and resigns to her assigned function in the story. She waits. Ceyx departs, assuring his wife of his speedy return, and Alcione is left with her memories, hopes and longing for Ceyx's safe return which never happens. Ceyx's delay in homecoming, on the other hand, does not affect Alcione's primary situation in the story. She continues in her routine, preparing for Ceyx's return and praying that "he might prefer no other woman to herself."

Alcione is presented not only as the faithful wife, inactive and patient, once her correspondence with Ceyx is no more possible, but also as oblivious of the facts of the story. In her total submission to authority, the gods to whom she prays for Ceyx's return, lies also a trust. By recognising the power lying in the supernatural realm, she credits her subjection with the capacity to earn protection. In this context, Juno's decision to send her a "true" dream serves as a final touch of demonstration of Alcione's subjection to the authority of gods and the designed course of the story. The ending of the story in the transformation of the loving couple into sea birds finalises the power of external forces. Juno sends knowledge of her husband's death to Alcione and Alcione wishes to join her husband in death. The gods interfere and the reunion takes place, not in death but in a new life as birds<sup>14</sup>.

Alcione, in this frame, is a woman of no self-authority. Her bond with her husband, loving and dear though it is, forces her to submit to the decisions first of her husband and then of the gods. In her own

(14) See A.H.F. Griffin, "The Ceyx Legend in Ovid: *Metamorphoses* Book XI" *Classical Quarterly*, 31:1 (1981), 147-54. For Chaucer's alterations to the story see E. Firley Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929) pp. 3-12.

life, she is a helpless spectator. Driven by necessity and feeling for her husband, her eventual attempt at a limited control, through suicide, is prevented by the powers that, from the beginning, planned and staged the story.

The Ceyx and Alcione episode has a defining significance in Chaucer. It has been generally accepted that Chaucer's use of the Ceyx and Alcione story indicates an engagement with the problem of fictional creation. As Robert Burlin notes, the narrator is "literally 'using' a work of fiction."<sup>15</sup> The work of fiction is the story of Ceyx and Alcione, and criticism tends to correlate the theme of the Ceyx and Alcione story with the theme pursued and explored in the dream proper, where the Knight is encouraged to speak of his love and lady. Robert W. Hanning locates the twin concerns of the *Book of the Duchess*, "the nature of poetry and the problem of grief", in the Ceyx and Alcione story "where these two thematic interests first intersect and identify themselves."<sup>16</sup> The function of the story as a structural and thematic "catalyst"<sup>17</sup> is considered to be implied through Alcione. Burlin contends, "it is for Alcione to introduce into the poem the concept of love between husband and wife that is deep and passionate. The quality of her love provides a dramatic and thematic link with the situation of the Black Knight."<sup>18</sup>

A different context can be suggested for the correlation between the Knight's and Alcione's narratives. It is important to note that Chaucer's engagement with the story foregrounds and confirms a tradition of textual and oral transmission. The Ceyx and Alcione story is a mediated fictional story. It is a "fable", chosen from a book that contains many others written and preserved by poets. Chaucer stresses the oldness and the otherness of the book :

(15) *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.59. However, Burlin associates this concern with the creation of a poem that originates from the narrator's reading and resituates its relevance to the dream proper.

(16) 'Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*', in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. A. Leigh Arrathoon, (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press, 1986), 121-164, pp. 133-134.

(17) Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid', p.134.

(18) *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.62. For a similar view see John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 72-73.

And in this bok were written fables  
That clerkes had in olde tyme,  
And other poets, put in rime  
To rede and for to be in minde

While men loved the lawe of kinde (51-56),<sup>19</sup>

yet he stresses the textual life of the "fables", too. The mention of the origins pertains primarily to the "book of fables" and defines the existential conditions of each story therein. The Ceyx and Alcione story originally belongs to different times, "olde tyme". Yet the poets have written and mediated the story for the benefit of posterity. "Ceyx and Alcione" is a story selected from a collection of old material: "Among al this I fond a tale" (59) The narrator reads the tale. It is primarily a text. The narrator reads about a king who dies. He also reads about a queen who also dies but stays in the narrator's memory the next day all day long: "Such sorowe this lady to her tok" (95) and "I, that made this book" (96). The lady inhabits the textual world of a book and is evidently significant in the textual world of another book. The mediation obvious in the preservation of the "old book" pertains to the lady, too. There is a text being written, and it is closely associated with the text read. Somewhere in between the text read and the text written is Alcione and her story. Alcione's sorrow pervades the "book made", but nonetheless has autonomy. The significance of Ceyx and Alcione story lies in its suggestive creativity. Unlike Machaut's lover, Chaucer's narrator fails to identify with Alcione's sorrow or love. Significantly, reading Alcione's "tale/That me thoughte a wonder thing" (60-61) leads to creation of another tale, another book. The narrator makes use of Alcione's narrative strategy (her prayer to Juno) to set himself free from the intellectual and emotional paralysis that turtis him into a "mased flying" (12); he prays to Juno for sleep, falls asleep, dreams and "makes the book". The new book, like the book of fables that stimulated its formation, contains independent stories: Ceyx and Alcione and the Black Knight and Lady White and the framing story of the narrator's insomnia and its creative consequences. Therefore, the Ceyx and Alcione story is central to the creation of the poem that the narrator owns as his own, but when the narrator wakes up from his poetic vision, he is still holding the Ceyx and Alcione story in his hand. The story has its own life; the narrator's use of it as a

[19] Fyler, in his discussion of the episode in *Chaucer and Ovid*, discerns a contrast between the age of gold "when men loved the law of kinde" and the age of iron, or the present age. He further suggests that both the narrator and the Knight are historically displaced for they yearn for an age that is past and gone. Obviously, there is an emphatic recognition of the past in the description of the book read by the narrator. However, I tend to think that while entering into present through poems, past serves as a creative stimulant not as a philosophical contrast.

reader/author facilitates access to another book, the book of the Black Knight. Like Alcione, the Knight is grieved due to loss of his spouse. Moreover, like Alcione's, the Knight's "sorrowful imagination" is activated to produce a story. The narrator's role in the action of the poem that he "makes" is primarily to read. He reads two stories in the *Book of the Duchess*. Both stories concern love, loss and grief, and both are creations of individual "authors". More importantly, both stories create and maintain an image of woman without which the poetic nature of the enterprise cannot be maintained. The image of woman created in the Ceyx and Alcione story is largely dependent on the reversal of Alcione's situation in the formation and mediation of the text. The Black Knight, drawing on an established tradition of love poetry, offers a portrait of his lady. The privilege of authorial standpoint is entertained by the Knight, and his lady is treated as the symbol of ideal femininity which is negotiated and stabilised through the use of allegiance to Love.

Evidently, acknowledging the textual autonomy of the story of the Ceyx and Alcione draws attention to the origins of its formation. Chaucer provides the "old book frame" without mentioning the actual sources. That is mainly because, in the Ceyx and Alcione story, the concern is the act of creation and the process in which the use of individual authority closely aligns with utilisation of other authorities for narrative closure. Chaucer demonstrates the process of poetic creation through Alcione. Nevertheless, in the described old book there lies also an invitation for an inquiry into the textual sources of the story. Chaucer's version of the story compares in several respects to Ovid's. He acknowledges his debt to the book he reads. He retains the essential theme of love and sorrow<sup>20</sup>. However, in the *Book of the Duchess*, love and sorrow do not pacify the heroine. On the contrary, Alcione's love and consequent sorrow are indicated to be the forces which move Alcione to the center of the story as the protagonist who activates the potential forces and alters the course of events.

In retelling the story of Ceyx and Alcione, Chaucer focuses on Alcione and makes her story and her reaction to the compelling forces of her world reflect a battle of poetic forces on the poetic subject. To this effect, Chaucer engages with the story in detail after Ceyx is out of the scene and Alcione is in a position to exercise her potential power to take control.

(20) See Robert W. Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*', p. 130.

Machaut, too, uses Ovid's *Ceyx and Alcione* story in one of his love narratives. Machaut's version has been recognised as the precedent for Chaucer's manipulative use of *Ceyx and Alcione*. The incentive in Machaut is to make a story serve the larger theme of the poem. The powerlessness of Alcione and the dealings of authorities are considerably subsumed in Machaut's version of the story. In Machaut, the element of power is recognised in relation to a particular effect. The point seized by Machaut is that Alcione's ignorance of her husband's death arouses pity in Juno, who activates Morpheus and ensures that Alcione knows the truth through a dream. Granting the dream induces sleep as well as communication with the lover. Machaut's lover needs both. Machaut, therefore, retains the element of power in the figure of Morpheus and transposes it for an effect of authority in the lover's dream. Alcione is a figure of empathy for the lover because of the similarity of their loveless situation. The story itself is an effective narrative instrument that ultimately resolves the lover's dilemma. However, essentially, Alcione's status is kept as it is in Ovid. The change effected by Machaut on the story of *Ceyx and Alcione* is exemplary. Echoed by Chaucer's description of Alcione as the "best wife that beareth life", Machaut, in using the story as an exemplum, deliberately preempts any possibility for indication of the individuality of the heroine. As in Ovid, in Machaut what happens to Alcione takes on more importance compared to why it happens to her. Or rather, in Machaut, through the particularisation of the meaning of the story to a dream earned by true love, Alcione is made to serve as a model for the lovers. The lover explicitly compares his situation to that of Alcione, and, wishes for the dream as a reward. Unlike Chaucer who returns the reader to the origins of narrative control, Machaut's acknowledgement of the story of *Ceyx and Alcione* as material borrowed from another author stresses its functionality within the main narrative. In Chaucer's version Alcione refuses to become a stereotype, a signified that can be used as a signifier by an authority. Instead of using the story as an exemplum, either for the love situation or the poem that follows the reading of the story, Chaucer returns us to the conditions of its formation. The control exercised by Alcione is minimal and subject to removal of certain contributory elements of the story. However, when Chaucer makes Alcione story illustrate the manipulative nature of fictional truth through reversal of authority, he selects Alcione's relation to that story as a focal point.

The power structure is rather complex in Chaucer. The story

recounted from another author suggests the recognition of the authority of the "old book" in which it is found. Chaucer interweaves the indications of authority of the original and mediator and the changes they imply in the story of Alcione. The story is told summarily and with considerable omissions of significant parts in Ovid. The major omission is the metamorphosis which seals the story, in Ovid and Machaut, as a story of true love and loss rewarded and compensated by supernatural intervention.

Chaucer comprises into fourteen lines the large background of Ovid's story where Alcione's relation to her husband and her powerlessness in the face of pending disaster are brought in to prepare for the deserved metamorphosis at the end. Instead of the helplessness and subjection fundamental to characterisation of Alcione in Ovid, Chaucer shifts the paradigm from the negative and passive to the positive and active. The excision and suppression of the details of the old story create space for the transformation of Alcione's character and facilitates a course of action for her.

The shift from King Ceyx to Alcione introduces the search for individual authority. Alcione is in search of control over the action of the story. As the narrator insists in lines 80-100, this wife is deeply concerned about her husband and sorrowful that he has not returned at the arranged time. However, her response to her husband's absence is far from being contained in the home where she was left.

The first reaction to the pattern of the old story is in Alcione's refusal to play the part of a romance heroine. Her situation resembles that of a romance woman left behind by her questing knight<sup>21</sup>. She is supposed to wait and submit to the consequences of her husband's absence. Typicality of this situation is crucial to thematic priorities of the *Franklin's Tale*. Unlike Dorigen of *The Franklin's Tale*, however, Chaucer's Alcione sets about improving this situation. When her husband's return does not take place, Alcione takes the initiative and sends a search party for him. It is at this point that Alcione is actively trying to take control of her story. She is already transposed from subjection to the status of not only participant, but also of creator. The move is from the object to the status of the subject of the story. The concern is what happened to Ceyx, and Alcione is not the passive recipient of knowledge. She seeks to know before she is allowed to know. Search for her husband might bear two consequences for the

(21) Cf Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer*, p.75.

story: Ceyx is found and returns home safely, thus Alcione's story ends happily. The other option is the feared death of Ceyx. In either case, however, a definitive result will help Alcione decide on her next move. The search fails to produce a definitive result. Alcione is still in the dark about the outcome of the events which happen outside her control. This temporarily removes Alcione from the domain of power, or at least brings the activity to a halt. On the other hand, failure of finding Ceyx compels Alcione to seek other means and makes the rather complex relation between authority and the individual be accommodated in the rest of the story.

Taking the position of active agent for the outcome of the story, Alcione fails without collaboration with other authorities. She seeks knowledge but the knowledge sought lies beyond her reach. Her experience, the individual initiative to find Ceyx, needs the "old books out of which comes the new knowledge". So, she resorts to Juno, the highest authority both in the story and in the resolution that follows. In Ovid's story, Juno sends Alcione a dream so that the story can come to an end, so that Ceyx can be identified as dead and Alcione's confusion about the course of events can be corrected. In Chaucer, Alcione exercises a power of necessitated choice to continue the story:

Ne she koude no reed but oon  
But down on knees she sat anon  
.....  
'A, mercy, swete lady dere!  
Quod she to Juno, hir goddesse,  
'Helpe me out of thys distresce.' (106-106;108-110)

In seeking Juno's help, Alcione also sets down her terms of collaboration. She wishes to see Ceyx and know what has become of him in a dream that will signify the truth. It is the truth she is seeking, truth of her husband's end. As indicated above, whether Ceyx is dead or alive will have a considerable effect on Alcione's story. She seeks in the authority of Juno a narrative element, a "certeyn thing", to borrow a term from the *Parliament of Fowls*. Juno already knows that certain thing. She also has the power to disclose it to Alcione. Alcione as the suppliant cannot enter the position of holding that kind of power but she can utilise the "material", the information, the knowledge that Juno as the authority holds in her possession. In return, she vows allegiance to Juno. She indicates her part in the action as one of subservience and subjection. If Juno sends her news of Ceyx, Alcione

"shal make yow sacrifice, / And hooly youres become I shal/With good wille, body, herte, and al;" (114-16). Juno, surely, is her goddess, as the narrator makes clear at an earlier point. It is possible to take Alcione's subjection to Juno as natural rather than contractual. This question arises because Chaucer, by omitting Ovidian background to the story, eliminates the power structure that informs and controls the story, too. When the overt implications of power and Alcione's subjection to authority in Ovid is removed, introduction of Juno serves as "no reed but oon". On the other hand, it is evident that Alcione offers to give up her sovereignty, her independent authority, in exchange of superior knowledge only temporarily. Although, in Chaucer's version, Ceyx's disappearance provides Alcione with a problem that she has to solve both for the sake of the story and for herself as an autonomous being, at this point in the story it seems Alcione is defeated by the circumstances and is forced to surrender her claim to power and authority.

Juno grants the dream; Alcione does not question its reliability. Devised in minute detail by her, the dream is in fact part of the machinery that continues the story. In other words, Alcione's subjection to a higher authority enables her to regain and maintain hers. The dream is moving. Morpheus, appearing in the image of Ceyx speaks the end of the story:

My swete wyf,  
Awake! Let be your sorwful lyf,  
For in your sorwe ther lyth no red:  
For, certes, swete, I am but ded,  
Ye shul me never on lyve yse.  
But, goode swete herte, that ye  
Bury my body, for such a tyde  
Ye mowe hyt fynde the see beynde:  
And farewel, swete, my worldes blysses!  
I praye God youre sorwe lyse:  
To lytel whileoure blysses lasteth! (201-211)

Ceyx's speech answers the questions that maintained Alcione's presence as an authority in the story. The search for a beloved husband enables Alcione to write a story of devotion and control, obliges her to utilise extrinsic power but ends in an inevitable death. There is nothing beyond death. Ceyx advises "Let be your sorrowful life, I am but ded." (204). The source of activity, the source of power is gone. The story ends in the confirmation of death. Alcione, like the



narrator who is saddened by the story all day the next day, has nothing more but the sorrow. She is assigned obligations during her search for the certainty of the news. Burying Ceyx's body and continuing her subjection to Juno as she has promised as a condition for gaining knowledge. However, the story is at an end for Alcione. Ceyx is dead. The story is over. The contract is over.

Alcione's autonomy is under her own control even when she offers it to Juno. The superior authority is allowed in only in so far as it facilitates Alcione's progress towards conclusion. Therefore, when the story is over for Alcione, an Ovidian metamorphosis is not possible. It seems that omission of final intervention by the gods is consequent to Alcione's conduct in Chaucer's telling and bears significantly on the problem of authority in the story. Alcione does not call upon the authorities any more and disposes the author in her own way. She dies "within the thridde morwe."

Alcione's use of authority for the definition of her own role within her own story does not change the "sentence" of the old book in that love and death as happenings controlled by authorities are not dispelled. However, the shift in authorial position causes a radical alteration in the structure of the story and the position and presentation of its heroine. The ascension to power transforms Alcione from the passive to active, changes her story from one of subjection, suffering and ignorance to one of quest for knowledge, autonomy and creation. Taken as an integral part of the textual becoming or fictional creation, the radical change in Alcione's situation in relation to power is the experience of writing.

Alcione's experience of writing exemplifies the important role authority plays in Chaucer's work. It further illustrates the implications of the pervasive engagement with authority of the narrator and the narrator-pilgrims as a transforming agent in fictional representation. It seems that authority does not hold conclusive power in Chaucer's use of "auctores" for creative purposes. However, individual authority cooperates with the established authority for possible new perspectives.