Dame Sirith: Complexity and Sophistication as a Model for Chaucerian Tales

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I. Introduction

In a popular narrative, a story-teller's intention of guiding his audience to the confirmation of the messages announced in a tale is also reflected in the presentation of events. The story-line of a popular tale is so simple and economical that a gap between an "outer story" and an "inner meaning" seldom exists. This means that a popular one can be characterized as a tight fit of story closure and thematic closure; a popular narrative primarily consisting of bare essential story-line does not create the effects of "the openness of text" and of "the multiplicity of voices." The popular tale-teller's interest in the unfolding of the action and the categorical presentation of events discourages too elaborate or abstract analyses of meaning. At the same time, the theme of a tale is not a symbolic or abstract one for which a reader's keen intelligence should be exerted, but is the one which is made evident in the causal sequence of events, events

emphasized by a story-teller's reliance on the techniques of repetition and variation. Accordingly, the reader is likely to be more passive in ferreting out the meaning of a tale. The reader simply follows the story-teller's guidance and shows an affirmative nod to the story-teller and his story without much questioning.

In contrast to the simple-conscious narrative like a popular romance, study of *Dame Sirith* shows the differences between the action-dominated world of a popular narrative and an artistic sophistication of plot akin to that of Chaucerian tales. The sophistication lies largely with the manipulation of layered voices and narrative techniques, creating, in effect, quite a different sense of style and character. Unlike the typical styles of linearity and monologic discourse in the English popular tales in which a single truth (or meaning) is presented to an audience by an omniscient narrator, the stylistics of *Dame Sirith* are closely akin to those of Chaucer in terms of the complexity and subtlety of a narrative style. In addition, *Dame Sirith* is like a Chaucerian tale in that, as in a popular narrative, the meaning of a tale cannot be found by simply following a story-teller's guidance. This English fabliau requires, as in the Chaucerian tales, that a reader should actively mine the narrative disjunctures for meaning or decide upon a truth through the questionable authenticity of multiple voices (or perspectives). Moreover, *Dame Sirith* is a representative text which clearly reflects the Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony in conjunction with a rich and vibrant characterization, a characterization created in the reader's mind. The tale arrests its audience by its vividness and strangeness, and thus leaves an audience's mind in active thought.

In this paper, I will examine *Dame Sirith* at the three levels — a text (structure and character), a texture (discourse or narration), and a context (readership) in order to search the relationship between the effects created by a narrator's manipulation of a text, a texture and a reader's

response. It is clear that the fabliau stylistics of *Dame Sirith* come closer to explaining the complexity and sophistication of some portions of Chaucerian narrative in terms of structure, character, narrative voice, and style, and, in particular, the importance of a reader's role, though *Dame Sirith* is the nascent form of the fabliau.

Ⅱ. Character and Narrative Devices beyond English Popular Narratives

Structurally, the Middle English popular tales commonly reflect the cyclical movement of human life: home-leaving, wandering, and homecoming. Or to put it another way, this structure reflects the basic human impulse, when confronted with the matter of complication, to struggle, escape, and rest peacefully. As a tale, however, *Dame Sirith* does not squarely fit with this pattern. It functions differently. The fabliau deals only with a moment of life; but though curtailed in terms of plot, such momentous dealings may well be structurally complex. It is this capacity for condensed complexity that made the genre so appealing to Chaucer. In the case of *Dame Sirith*, the plot divides into three sections – a beginning (the clash of two distinct moral dispositions between Margery and Willikin), a middle (Sirith's attempt to bridge the gap in the moral concept by her convincing histrionics), and an end (the reconciliation of the two different concepts of morality). It contains the development of Willikin's emotional instincts, that is, it moves from beginning with Willikin's depression as a result of Margery's rebuttal of his love to the exercising of some ingenuity in seeking the assistance of the "doctor," then the recovery of hope as she applies her remedy and ending with his emotional gratification through the successful mediations of Sirith.

Especially, when applying Vladmir Propp's functional scheme to Dame Sirith for the detailed analysis of the structure, the tale can be divided as follows:

* Initial situation: A clerk called Willikin is in love with a merchant's wife named Margery. (1-148)
  1. *Absentation*: The merchant is away at a fair in Boston in Lincolnshire.
  4. *Reconnaissance*: Willikin pays a visit to Margery the wife and confesses his love toward her. (149-296)
  9. *Lack or insufficiency*: Margery rejects him.
  10. *Beginning of counteraction*: On the advice of a friend, he visits Dame Sirith.
  11. *Provision or receipt of a magical agent*: Sirith agrees to help him to gain Margery's love for a promised reward. In order to play a trick on Margery, Sirith smears pepper and mustard in her dog's eyes, which begin to run as the dog weeps. (297-408)
  12. *Spatial transference*: Sirith goes to see Margery with her unhappy dog and pretends to be distressed herself before Margery.
  13. *Struggle*: Sirith explains to Margery why she is sad, offering the story about the metamorphosis of her daughter into a bitch, because of her rebuttal of the clerk's advance.
  14. *Victory*: Margery, realizing the similarity between her case and the case of Sirith's daughter (a. k. a. bitch), is afraid of the possible canine consequence, and she asks Sirith to bring Willikin to her. (409-50)
  16 and 20: *Return* and "*Wedding*": Willikin is brought and the secretive union of Willikin and Margery is made.

In the above analysis, we can realize very easily that there are more functions which do not occur rather than there are functions which do. But one functional event does not come immediately after another; *Dame Sirith* is not offered to us in a linear and straight forward sequence, as in a popular narrative. Fabliau is a more complex genre – still "folk" in its effect, but literary in its economy. Similar to the Chaucerian narratives, the

tale is framed by a delayed narrative movement as the characters dilate verbally upon their emotional and ethical situations. Dame Sirith's dilations are particularly convoluted. This means that, compared with the loose construction of a popular tale without the dilatory materials which impede the progress of action, the structure of *Dame Sirith* functions to enact a pattern of delay and to entice a reader's critical and subjective response to the events.

Except for the "problem-solving" structure of *Dame Sirith*, the other narrative techniques employed, such as structure and characterization which prevents us from labeling the characters as good or bad, are distinct from those of the popular narratives. The manipulation of narrative skills makes the narrator's intention for an audience quite different from a narrator of a popular tale whose aim lies in driving an audience simply to accept his authority and the messages given by him without question. The story-teller of *Dame Sirith* successfully integrates the components of a tale — character, voice, and the narrative devices — in accordance with his own ends of eschewing his vantage point to guide his reader and, instead, inviting his reader to interpret the tale.

Before examining the characters of *Dame Sirith* in detail, narratologists' sharp distinction between *actants* and *characters* may be helpful at this point in our analysis. According to their argument, the general and abstract term, *actants*, refers to "a class of actors that share a certain characteristic quality" without consideration of psychological essence, and they have an "identical relation to the aspect of *telos* [goal]" (Bal 21). On the contrary, *characters* are the actors with distinctive human characteristics. In short, while an *actant* is, in Bal's words, "a structural position" who is named by his/her function or role as a *hero*, a *villain*, a *donor* or a *helper* (79), a *character* is an individual who cannot be accounted for by his function in the strict sense on account of individual traits of the character.[1] Seymour

Chatman states that "the *actantial* model minimizes not only idiosyncrasy, but also complexity of character, that is the indeterminacy arising from a multiplicity of traits in a behavior" (64).

These *actants* merely function to carry out what the narrator undertakes them to perform for the progression of the events and the final teleology of the tale. They are the puppets or what Bakhtin calls the "pretenders" manipulated by the narrator.[2] Their attributes (or characteristics) are not "made" in the course of the events, but are "given" or "planned" by a narrator from the outset. The narrator of a Middle English popular tale as the "ultimate semantic authority" retains full control over the work and never allows the *actants* to exercise their own psychological essence until the moment when the narrator wins his foreseen result. In other words, in the action-dominated works like the Middle English popular tales, a narrator has created his characters, knows their psychology better than his characters ever could, and even knows their fate. Moreover, readers are wiser than the characters themselves because the narrator gives them clues to each character's personality and thus shapes our expectations.

Moreover, as another characteristic concerning character, the principle of contrast is of fundamental importance in a popular Middle English tale. We have assumed the tales to have, in Frye's terms, "the polarizing and

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1) *The actants* in Propp's study are merely the products of their functions, as manifested in his observation: "functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, *independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled*" [italics are mine]; see Propp 21.

2) According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the pretender tries to live as the theorists of ethical "norms" say we all should live, by simply performing or failing to perform abstract demands. The pretender, Bakhtin further says, lives "representatively" and "ritualistically." Such a life is one "washed from all sides by the waves of an endless, empty potentiality:" See *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* in the 1984-85 issue of *Filosofiia I sotsiologiia nauki I tekhniki*, a year book of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, trans. Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 120-21.

separating of a world above and a world below" in our analyses of the plot-episodes (150). The heroes and villains of the tales exist primarily to symbolize a contrast between two worlds. Although each tale may contain more than two characters, they are potentially classified into two sets — the group of protagonist and that of antagonist — since the various members of each tale are the variants of one of the two competing principals. In the popular tales from the *Gesta Romanorum* as well as in the Middle English metrical romances like *King Horn*, we can make a division of two camps without complication, the camp which can be qualified as "good" and that qualified as "bad," according to the characters' role in relation to the hero/ine. At the same time, the narrative treatment of characters, in a popular narrative, is summary rather than descriptive. The narrator does not extend his knowledge from actions to motivations. By eliminating the concern for motives, a popular narrative strictly focuses on the unfolding of dramatic events through the functional characters. Accordingly, the audience's perspective on the characters in a popular narrative is also limited and, furthermore, the audience cannot exercise their own will in comprehending the traits of the characters unrevealed by the narrator.

However, the characters of *Dame Sirith* is totally different from those of the popular narratives explained the above. First of all, it is impossible to find the "polarization" of the two worlds — the idyllic and the night world — which is commonly observed in the Middle English tales, since the characters of *Dame Sirith* are not given ethical ratings according to the usual moral dichotomies. Though it appears that, unlike the characters in the popular narratives, the characters in the tale are all faulty and bad from the moral point of view, their ambiguity and in determinacy prevent us from labelling them simply as good or bad. Together with the difficulty of categorizing the characters into the dichotomous types of morality,

Dame Sirith reveals that, unlike a hero/ine in a typical popular narrative, the *donor* (Sirith), instead of the *hero* (Willikin), performs the hero's task of searching to obtain his desired object (Margery). In short, though they are lacking in the complex and individual interest of a thoroughly understood character, Sirith, Margery, and Willikin are something more than a typical and stereotyped go-between, a clerk, and a house-wife. Moreover, the true identity of each character as a figure of indeterminacy is not stated or pre-established by the narrator.

The mode of presenting characters in *Dame Sirith* is in direct contrast to that of a popular narrative; it is closer to that of some sophisticated narratives like Chaucer's tales. The narrator's direct statements on the characters are reduced and our knowledge about them is derived through the narrator's elaborate descriptions of the characters or through the dialogues between the characters. In *Dame Sirith*, a reader's judgment of the characters, as in a popular narrative, comes not from the narrator's direct statements, but from the reader's empathetic exploration of the characters' psychological and emotional depth. The focus of *Dame Sirith* is not so much on the action as on the emotions which motivate the entire story. Moreover, the narrator's interest lies in the psychological and emotional reality which is created not through the direct address, but through narrative.

In addition, the point of view used in *Dame Sirith* is personal. The narrator of *Dame Sirith* does not control the knowledge on the characters and the events through his omniscience, but he allows the readers to exercise their creativity in understanding the tale. The narrator of *Dame Sirith* to some degree creates an effect of distancing between himself and the audience through the shift of the narrative perspective, and it liberates the audience from the authorial view point of the narrator. Furthermore, we can even find the complexity of the Bakhtinian effect of "dialogic" in

Dame Sirith. Gradually, the voice of a reader in a popular tale sympathetically responds to the emotions which a protagonist voices and a reader's emotion eventually comes to be in accord with that of a protagonist. And a narrator in a popular tale through emotional appeals continually manipulates the reader's responses and produces a defined emotional response in the audience. However, the reader in *Dame Sirith* is confronted, in the guise of a character's first person speech, with a "dialogical" plurality or a "polyphony" of discourse.

   The narrator of *Dame Sirith*, who sets the stage for the advancement of the events, is not foreordained to win his expected outcome, nor does he lead his readers to know in advance what will happen. With the minimalization of the narrator's role, the three characters identify themselves by their style and language used in their "dialogical" interactions with each other. The narrator of *Dame Sirith* prepares the stage for the meeting of two characters at the outset of the tale and then immediately disappears (1-24). Right after the narrator's introductory remarks and his brief stage-direction, the first meeting of Willikin and Margery is made. Willikin reveals the secrecy of his love toward Margery (67-72) and begs her compliance (85-90). As the response to Willikin's courtly plea, Margery states that she loves her lord and spouse (91), whom she considers a "curteis mon and hende,/And mon of pris" (119-20). She gives a flat refusal to Willikin's wooing by asserting:

> And ich am wif boþe god and trewe;
> Trewer womon ne mai no mon cnowe
>   Þen ich am,
> Þilke time ne shal neuer bitide
>   Þat mon for wouing ne þoru prude
> Shal do me sham. (121-26)

Nevertheless, Willikin's desperate wooing for Margery's love is continued (127-32). Considering Margery's protestation of faith and obedience to her husband as if she were the guardian of morality sanctioned by the Church, little can we expect that she would change her mind so quickly and so easily toward the end of the poem. Given the genre, we might expect change but are given no clue as to how those changes will come out. The only clue to her moral mobility lies in the genre itself — the fabliau, where rapid reversals endow expectations. It might be proper to qualify Margery as "ambiguous" and even "puzzling" as in the case of Chaucer's Criseyde, though she, unlike Chaucer's characters, such as the Wife of Bath and Criseyde, shows little promise for detailed character analysis in terms of ambiguity and complexity in psychology and behavior.

The unpredictability of Margery's characteristics and her actions is also shown in the other two characters — Willikin and Sirith. Willikin, speaking the high flown, courtly language of love in the beginning section of the tale, is described as an amorous and courteous young fellow. From the point of meeting Sirith, Willikin's noble sentiments are changed into lustful designs on Margery. His lovesick desire culminates at the end of the tale, as he tells Sirith (433-38). Above all, the *tour de force* of the tale lies in Sirith's ingenuity. In the meeting of Sirith and Willikin, when the latter states his condition, disguised in his refined style of courtly love, Sirith pretends to be shocked by his lustful purpose and reacts as a good Christian citizen (193-216).

However, when Willikin finally promises her to keep a secret from an ecclesiastical court and to offer a bribe, she immediately shifts from a saint to a merchant and begins preparing the trick on Margery. By the end, she behaves like a procuress who is the master of lying and dissimulation. Sirith's gradual revelation of herself through her own words reaches the

high point in her response to Willikin's telling her to go away and leave him alone with Margery (439–44). The final words which the author has to say are narrated through Sirith's mouth at the very close of the poem (445–50).

It is through the irony of the situation that the narrator not only conveys the sense of humor to the reader, but, to a certain extent, foils the reader's attempt to predict the traits of the characters and the progression of the events in advance. Though Margery among the characters is the least developed, all three characters in *Dame Sirith* have, as Robert Lewis points out, "a three dimensional quality" (248). They are not simply *actants*. That is, their characterizations are less "given" or "predetermined" by the narrator from the outset of the tale, than they are "constructed" through their own words and interactions. The characterizations of *Dame Sirith* are consonant with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "unfinalizability": "Personality is not subordinate to (that is, it resists) objectified cognition and reveals itself only freely and dialogically (as thou for I)" (*Problems* 298). Bakhtin's argument that a character is all "given," but a personality is always being "created" holds true to *Dame Sirith*, though she nonetheless is more or less a stock character. In this sense, she, Willikin, and Margery do exemplify the narrative direction the later poets like Chaucer will take in the shaping of his fabliau.

Ⅲ. Discourse Qualities and Readership

Besides in characterization, *Dame Sirith* presents the differences in comparison with the Middle English popular tales in the dimension of what Roland Barthes assumes as the highest level in a three-level hierarchy of narrative structure, *narration*, or, as Todorov calls it, *discourse*. *Dame*

Sirith invites the audience to a dialogic reading on two levels. First, the final words given to Sirith by the author (or the narrator) evoke the atmosphere of "unfinalizability" which is one of the major Bakhtinian concepts. Second, the texture of voices in *Dame Sirith* provides rich examples illustrative of Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony. According to Bakhtin, all speech utterances are heteroglot and polyphonic in that they partake of "different-languages" and resonate with "many-voices." Heteroglossia and polyphony are the base conditions "governing the operation of meaning in any utterance" (*Dialogic* 429). More in detail, the genre of novel, Bakhtin emphasizes, stages dialogues between and among languages; that is, the novel is more vocally complex than the tale:

> The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language — that is, it refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages — all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," … The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought; it is a consciousness manifesting itself in the midst of social languages. (*Dialogic* 366-67)

Much more importantly, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia means that there are always many different ways of speaking, many "languages," reflecting the diversity of social experience, ideologies, and values.

What is vital in the Bakhtinian concept of language and narratives is that the languages should be viewed from each other's perspectives, that they should be "hybridized" so that an "interminable" dialogue is created among them. Bakhtin, however, does not think of heteroglossia by itself as the sufficient condition for a novel. The concept of dialogization or polyphony should be fused with heteroglossia for the true novel. In a word, for Bakhtin heteroglossia without double-voicing is essentially individual and a failure itself. Bakhtin maintains that polyphony is inherent in all its words or forms: "Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (*Dialogic* 293). To summarize Bakhtin's lengthy discussion of the voices in all utterances, we can make the following version of the chart (*Bakhtin* 147):

Discourse Chart

I. Single-Voiced Words
　A. "Words of the first type": Direct, unmediated discourse
　B. "Words of the second type": Objectified discourse (of a represented person)

II. Double-Voiced Words: "Words of the third type"
　A. Passive double-voiced words
　　1. Unidirectional passive double-voiced words (such as stylization)
　　2. Varidirectional passive double-voiced words (such as parody)
　B. Active double-voiced words.

In the final chapter of his book on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin refers to double-voiced discourse as the true hero of his discussion among the various examples of discourse charted above (*Problems* 185).

Before entering into the discussion of *Dame Sirith* in terms of Bakhtin's

theoretical concepts mentioned above, I want to bring my attention first to
the narrative characteristics of the popular tales and their effect on the
readership. Following Mieke Bal's way of analyzing a narrative, we can
observe a switch in the tales which commonly occurs from an external
focalizor (the voice of a narrator) to an internal one (that of the
characters), since the most predominant form of the embedded sentences
in the tales is the dialogue (100−114). Undeniably, the dialogues
embedded in the tales render the functional events of the tales more vivid
and immediate. Considering the languages which are used by the characters
in the tales in the light of the given styles, the syntactic forms and even
the grammatical norms, we can conclude that the popular tales like those
of *Gesta Romanorum* and the Middle English romance like *King Horn* are
less constructed by heteroglossia by which the characters are constituted
as individuals than characters in more novelistic narratives. To put this
another way, the characters of the tales as the functional participants are
fixed and finalized at the outset of the tales by the omniscient narrator.
Furthermore, this implies that the English popular tales heavily depend on
the "informants" given, immediately comprehensible and explicit rather than
on the "indices" inferred and implicit in the style or the diction of their
own words.3) Accordingly, the role of a reader in the monologic style of
narrative is to accept the idea or messages conveyed through the mouth of
a narrator without question and to show a perfect agreement with a
narrator's opinion.

　　Though we hear the multiple voices within an authorial voice in the

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3) Roland Barthes makes the division of the major integrative functions,
corresponding to kernels (functions), into *indices* and *informants*. According to
Barthes, the former are always inferred, implicit, in need of decipherment,
dependent upon our ability to sense character or atmosphere through the
features of his/her language, where as the latter are given, explicit and
referable: see Barthes, *Image−Music−Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York:
Noonday, 1973), 91−7.

popular tales, the tale does not constitute the effect of what Bakhtin terms the "dialogic" in that the messages or emotions which the characters voice are what the narrator has previously intended. Accordingly the audience is not also given the creativity in understanding the tale, but is required to follow the story-line guided by the narrator. But *Dame Sirith* more clearly shows the examples of heteroglossia and polyphony. More specifically, while the Middle English popular narratives operate with the limited perspective of a narrator and thus allow the audience less creativity, *Dame Sirith*, like some sophisticated tales like Chaucerian ones, is so thought-provoking that it invites a reader to interpret the tale in a subjective way. As in the Chaucerian narratives, *Dame Sirith* as a dialogic text demands the reader's subjective judgment in sorting out the multiple voices on an event or a character and discovering the genuine authorial voice. The examples of heteroglossia and polyphony in *Dame Sirith* are evident at the level of the character's discourse and of the narrator's discourse. As briefly sketched in the explanation of characters in the tale, the characters in *Dame Sirith* are of a combination of stock character in the tales of a fabliau mode and individualized character, whose attributes, motives, and disposition are gradually revealed through his own words and his speech style. The languages used by each character are so various and peculiar both in diction and syntax that the reader can categorize none of the characters in the traditional mold of characterization.

First, a typical character of the fabliau romance, the clerk (Willikin), is developed into an unique individual in the course of events. His language at the scene of meeting Margery for the first time is always courteous and formal in the tradition of *amour courtoise* in order to gain her love. On the other hand, Margery, pretending herself to be a faithful and virtuous wife, speaks a plainer language. Moreover, the style of language employed by these two characters does not continue persistently up to the end of the

tale. Willikin in the interview with Sirith deserts his high flown, courtly language of love and becomes thoroughly villainous. In the final scene, his villainous design and words are revealed, as he tells Sirith "Þou most gange awai,/Wile ich and hoe shulen plaie"(437-38). What is most striking in the language of *Dame Sirith* is Sirith's style of language and her change of language-style for the fulfillment of her goal. When she first meets Willikin, she appears to be a holy woman imbued with the spirit of Christianity by saying the Paternoster and Creed.

However, she instantaneously changes her style of language as soon as her gain is made clear, thus revealing her secular disposition which coincides with Willikin's lovelorn desire for Margery. At the end of the tale, the style of her final words as a procuress marks a wide discrepancy from that of her words used in her first meeting with Willikin:

> Goddot so I wille:
> And loke þat þou hire tille,
>   And strek out hire þes.
> God 3eue þe muchel kare,
> 3eif þat þou hire spare,
>   Þe wile þou mid hire bes.
>
> And wose is onwis,
> And for non pris
>   Ne con geten his leuemon,
> I shal, for mi mede,
> Garen him to spede,
>   For ful wel I con. (439-50)

As in the case of Willikin, Sirith's alteration of language style from the courtly and artificial language to the colloquial and realistic one not only provides a reader with a sense of humor, but it also serves to offer to a

stock character in the tale of a fabliau mode the human-like image of an unique individual.

Together with the various languagednesses, Bakhtin's dialogical "double-voicing" is evidently shown not only in the peculiar single voice by the character without merging or synthesis of any two voices, but also in the narrator's position and his stylistic devices. As we have seen in the Bakhtinian discourse types summarized as a chart by Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, Bakhtin understands that all discourses virtually consist of two kinds of double-voiced or dialogized discourse--passive and active double voiced discourse (polemic). He subdivides passive double-voiced discourse into unidirectional (narrator's narration and stylization) and varidirectional (parody) once again. Above all, the discourse of *Dame Sirith* corresponds both to the category of active double-voiced discourse and to that of varidirectional passive double-voiced discourse. Bakhtin regards the active double-voiced discourse (hidden polemic) as the most important one. The peculiar feature of this fabliau is in its use of direct speech and of dramatic dialogues between the characters.

Of the 450 lines in the poem 397 are direct speech. I do not say, however, that the narrator's voice of subjectivity and value-judgment is not involved in the tale or in the direct speeches. As the narrator of *Dame Sirith* abandons the omniscient position to guide the audience in a specific way which he has pre-ordained, likewise, Chaucer eschews a narrator's authorial role as a guide to a single truth. In general, the narrator of *Dame Sirith* serves not only as an impersonal presenter of events at the beginning of the tale, but also as a figure of expositor whose function it is to explain or link the transitions of events throughout the tale. As manifested in the fact that the final words of the tale which are to be spoken by the narrator are given to Sirith, the narrator in *Dame Sirith* is clearly contrasted with the omniscient narrators of the English popular

tales. With the least minimalization of the narrator's voice, the dialogical interactions between the characters do not attempt to drive the tale to the unified or single logic of truth. Moreover, the dialogized polemic between the characters in *Dame Sirith* prevents a reader from predicting what is to happen and from making a judgment on a character. Even we as readers feel the tale is still open and something is still going on without a sense of finalization. In short, compared with the English popular narratives, *Dame Sirith*, similar to the Chaucerian tales, more clearly reveals the effects of, to borrow the Bakhtinian terms, "unfinalizability" and "dialogic." These effects function to encourage a reader's active role in interpreting the tale, not depending on the narrator's information, but on the reader's own judgment.

Unlike the popular tales with simple and straightforward narrative line, Bakhtin's varidirectional double-voiced discourse is also found in the narrator's employment of irony and parody in *Dame Sirith*. Bakhtin's term, "varidirectional," means that the semantic intention of the original voice and that of the authorial voice are moving in opposite directions. In a parodic discourse, the author injects an opposing semantic intention, one that is moving in a direction opposite that of the original intention. As Chaucer parodies the style and plot motifs of the metrical romance in the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, *Dame Sirith* in the genre of fabliau parodies the courtly language of love.[4] To put this another way, a gap exists between the character's true intention (*insidedness*) and his use of stylistic words (*outsidedness*). For Chaucer, meaning or truth is not exposed to a reader on a surface level, but a reader himself should grope through the veil of an "outer story" for its "inner meaning." Similarly, *Dame Sirith* demands a reader's active role in filling in the gap between the "outer story" and the "inner meaning." Willikin's courtly language of love and Sirith's language

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4) For further study of *Dame Sirith* in terms of the parody of romance, see Robert Lewis, 241-55.

style of piety against their vulgar and secular disposition prove true to this case.

For Bakhtin irony is also analogous to parodic discourse because, in a similar manner, the direction of the second authorial voice is different from that of the original voice or intention. From this Bakhtinian perspective, *Dame Sirith* is so constructed with the dramatic and verbal ironies performed by the characters as to provide a sense of humor to a reader. Moreover, it offers to the reader a sense of unpredictability. From the beginning section of the tale, the author seems intent on qualifying Margery's role as the representative of a moral order and Willikin's role as a dandy young fellow. But their drastic transformation into a lecherous wife and a lustful clerk in the progression of events puzzles and somewhat surprises the reader. Sirith also does not make an exception to this case.

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Abstract

Dame Sirith: Complexity and Sophistication as a Model for Chaucerian Tales

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Compared with the complexity and the sophistication of *Dame Sirith* and the Chaucerian tales, the stylistic tendency of linearity and straight forwardness in a popular narrative allows the audience less creativity in the reading of the tale; since the meaning or the truth in the narrative is simply given through the narrator's direct voice or his manipulation of the characters' voices by his intention. In addition, the meaning or the truth of a narrative is clear and prescribed in that the conflict is the archetypal battle between good and evil, and good triumphs over evil. What is required of an audience in a popular narrative is to accept the authority of narrator and the story told by him without question. The presentation of events, characters, the narrative styles, and the plot are all integrated to the narrator's end of monopolizing the meaning of a tale.

Contrary to a popular narrative, the narrative stylistics of *Dame Sirith* in conjunction with characterization are integrated in accordance with the effect of creating the gap between the "outer story" and the "inner meaning." The artistic sophistication of *Dame Sirith* requires more intelligence and critical judgment to fill in the gap from a reader. The narrator of *Dame Sirith* does not provide the reader with the explicit guidance or any direct statement. The narrator, eschewing his position of omniscience, permits his characters to reveal their own voices respectively, and he lets a reader seek out and decide upon the truth or

authenticity of the multiple perspectives the characters voice. In this regard, the effects produced by the tale-telling artistry of the *Dame Sirith*-narrator and the reader's response are incipiently akin to those in the Chaucerian narrative.

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