ABSTRACT

WOMEN AND RHETORIC: THE ARTICULATION OF THE FEMININE IN CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN* AND *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Oxford

by Bronte Adams

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This thesis studies the ways in which female characters in Chaucer's poetry use language. Differences between feminine and masculine discourse in the *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are examined, along with factors shaping the poetic articulation of the feminine in the Middle Ages.

Part I sets out the background material which provides the context for the close readings of Parts II and III. Since the framework within which Chaucer's female characters speak is poetic, the first chapter is concerned with contemporary views about how poetic meaning is produced: what is the status of the author? How does the author read - and rewrite - his or her sources? Which rhetorical conventions govern literary representation, and how is the literary text justified?

Part I also considers why rhetoric should be an issue as regards women in the Middle Ages, and what modes of signifying are available to women in social, spiritual and literary contexts. Perspectives on appropriate female behaviour and discourse are gained through an examination of the rhetorical tradition, works of devotional and didactic instruction, and the conventions of fin'amor.

Parts II and III present a close reading of Chaucer's poetry. The readings are informed by the perspectives outlined in Part I, and by modern literary theories, and involve some assessment of the applicability of recent theory to Chaucer's poetry. The *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are both seen as vitally concerned with poetic practice and theory, and with the poetic representation of female characters. The poet's representation of the heroines in the course of the *Legend* provides a critique of the conception of poetry articulated by the god of Love in the Prologue. The hermeneutical and representational difficulties that the poet of the *Troilus* experiences with his poem are intimately linked with his treatment of Criseyde. The thesis considers the intersection between poetics and the poetic representation of the feminine.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, whose faith in me has been welcome, if not always deserved.

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ABBREVIATIONS

'Affection'	A. Minnis 'Affection and Imagination in The Cloud of Unknowing and Hilton's Scale of Perfection', *Traditio*, 39 (1983), 323-67
Authorship	A. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984)
Chaucer and Ovid	J. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven and London, 1979)
Classical Tales	L. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales. Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca and London, 1983)
EETS	Early English Text Society
'Form of Preaching'	Robert of Basevorn, 'The Form of Preaching; Forma praedicandi', trans. by L. Krul, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. by J. Murphy (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971)
Key	R. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (New Haven, 1963)
MLT	A. Minnis and A. Scott, eds, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-1375. The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1988)
"Pro Verbo"	R. Copeland, 'The Fortunes of "Non Verbum Pro Verbo": Or, why Jerome is not a Ciceronian', in *The Medieval Translator. The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. by R. Ellis, et.al. (Cambridge, 1989)
Pulpit	G. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933)
Riverside	*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. Benson, et.al. (Oxford, 1988)
'Six Characters'	M. Edwards, 'A Study of Six Characters in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, with Reference to Medieval *Scholia* on Ovid's *Heroides*', unpub. B.Litt dissertation, Oxford University, 1970

'Study'	M. Shaner, 'An Interpretive Study of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, 1973
'Theme of Imagination'	W. Wetherbee, 'The Theme of Imagination in Medieval Poetry and the Allegorical Figure "Genius", *Med et Hum*, 7 (1976), 45-64
Versification	Matthew of Vendome, *The Art of Versification*, trans. by Aubrey Galyon (Iowa, 1980)
Windeatt	*Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by B.A. Windeatt (London, 1984)

Journals

ChR	*Chaucer Review*
CL	*Comparative Literature*
ELH	*English Literary History*
ES	*English Studies*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
Med et Hum	*Medievalia et Humanistica*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
NLH	*New Literary History*
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
RES	*Review of English Studies*
SAC	*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
Spec	*Speculum*
YFS	*Yale French Studies*

Poems

CA	*Confessio Amantis*
LGW	*Legend of Good Women*
TC	*Troilus and Criseyde*

A Note on Style and Presentation

For the first citation of a book or article, full bibliographical details are provided. In subsequent references, the author's name and an abbreviated form of the title are supplied (except for those books listed in Abbreviations, above). With the exception of articles from journals, page references are preceded by the abbreviation 'p.'. The symbol '3' represents 'yogh', and þ represents 'thorn'.

INTRODUCTION

Medievalists have been reluctant to admit or entertain the value of a self-consciously feminist approach to medieval texts. Protestations of anachronism and unsympathetic impositions of modern perspectives join with a defensiveness concerning time-proven, perhaps even time-worn critical practices. A feminist reading of Chaucer's poetry is not to be equated with speculation as to what Chaucer thought about women. Neither is the impossibility of knowing Chaucer's sexual politics to be equated with a denial of the role of *intentio auctoris* in medieval texts. This thesis uses a feminist reading, in tune with contemporary literary-critical assumptions, to provide new insights into Chaucer's poetry.

The readings of Parts II and III are grounded in contemporary theories about the interpretation of literary texts, and are supplemented by more recent feminist and rhetorical theory. The rhetorical sources on which I draw include the three major medieval appropriations of classical rhetoric, the *artes praedicandi, dictaminis*, and *poetria*. Medieval commentaries on *auctores* or authoritative writers are also examined. The latter category of writings explicated a model of interpretation contemporary with Chaucer, Aristotle's four-fold theory of causality. The adoption of this model of interpretation helped bring about what Alastair Minnis has called a 'new semantics', encouraging in medieval literary commentators 'new attitudes to such matters as authorship and authority, and literary style and structure'. In place of the twelfth-century allegorists' 'extrinsic' emphasis on the divine meaning hidden deep in texts was a new concentration on the 'intrinisic' aspect, the 'divinely inspired yet supremely human beings who possessed their own literary and moral purposes and problems, their sins and their styles'.[1] The 'intrinsic' notion of how it is that

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[1] A.Minnis and A.Scott, eds, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-1375. The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1988), p.197. See also Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984), especially pp.72-3, and Minnis, 'Chaucer and Comparative Literary Theory', in *New*

meaning is produced, in stressing particular authorial and verbal structures, may be described as rhetorical.[2] This analytic model of interpretation, encompassing the three classical elements of speech making (speaker, subject, audience) was more suited to the 'medieval understanding of rhetoric as concerned with written composition rather than public oratory'.[3] Since this thesis is concerned with written texts - Chaucer's poetry - and not public oratory, the author is not a physical presence: the Chaucerian narrator is only present as inscribed in the texts. The context of written fiction problematises the classical rhetorician's notion of a *vir bonus* presiding over his subject matter, and whose personal goodness is made apparent - made present - by the virtue of his words. Modern writings on rhetoric, in contrast to the avowed confidence of medieval commentaries, tend to foreground the indeterminacy of meaning. These more recent writings are used to help explicate the assumptions underlying contemporary academic theories about the interpretation of literary texts.

The views of female subjectivity outlined in Part 1 make a connection between female sexuality and rhetorical poetics through their conception of the role of the

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Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism, ed. D.Rose (Oklahoma,1981). The distinction between 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic', as Minnis notes, 'hinged on a difference in the object of analysis'; the former was concerned with an art or science, and the latter with a particular text (*Authorship*, p.30). The terms had their origin in the rhetorical tradition (see *MLT*, p.123).

[2] The concerns of rhetoric, it should be noted, are not restricted to the esoteric study of texts. The formal study of rhetoric was incorporated into the grammar school curriculum. Buckler observes that 'by and large, the original [Ciceronian] considerations of rhetoric and its approach to questions of politics ultimately permeated all aspects of medieval thought. Thus one cannot separate rhetoric from the whole matrix of the medieval world view'; see P.Buckler, 'The Fourteenth Century Environment of Discourse: Rhetoric and Imagination in Chaucer's Audience', unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Louisville, 1986, pp.85-6. Buckler cites R.McKeon, 'Rhetoric in the Middle Ages', *Spec*, 17 (1942), 1-32.

[3] R.Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley, 1987), p.6. Jordan notes that this notion of medieval rhetoric as concerned with written rather than spoken media, a part of his conception of Chaucer's poetics as rhetorical, is an elaboration of the linkage established by R.Payne; see *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (New Haven, 1963), pp.9-59. The obvious exceptions to this generalisation, noted by Jordan, are the *artes praedicandi* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I shall consider this medieval adaptation of classical rhetorical theory below.

imagination in medieval psychology. The view that female sexuality is constant, unchanging, and 'natural', a function exclusively of biology and not of culture, is addressed in the psychoanalytic theories of the French feminists.[4] Ann Jones believes that there are two important elements to be appropriated from the French position: 'the critique of phallocentrism in all the material and ideological forms it has taken, and the call for new representations of women's consciousness'.[5] It is the first of these elements that is relevant to Part II's discussion of the *Legend of Good Women*. In this reading, I use French feminist theories in a deconstructive way: to analyse *how* the structures - aesthetic, ideological, philosophical and literary - work to oppress women, and how, on their own terms, they do *not* work, because of their own inherent, logical contradictions. To establish the operation of binary oppositions is, at one level, to theorise the relegation of women to a position of inferiority and derivativeness. It should be noted, though, that simply to overturn the oppositions, either to demonstrate male inferiority, or to celebrate images of femininity that are promulgated in male writings, is itself essentialist and self-defeating. Indeed, French feminist theory has been criticised on theoretical and political grounds for its essentialism, idealism, and for its complicity in the system of binary oppositions that it claims to attack.[6] 'There is nothing especially liberatory', Jones paraphrases Guillaumin, 'in women's claiming

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[4] I am using 'French feminists' in what has become the conventional use of the term, to refer to the broad school of which Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva and Wittig are the leading figures.

[5] A.Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'écriture feminine*', in *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. E.Showalter (1985; London, 1986), p.374.

[6] See, for instance, Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York and London, 1985), Part II, and Jones, 'Writing the Body', passim. Other feminist critics using psychoanalytic theories in their work on the construction of subjectivity do so without proposing that sexuality is an inherent or 'natural' quality. See, for example, the discussion of object-relations theory in J.K.Gardiner, 'Mind mother: psychoanalysis and feminism', in *Making a Difference. Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. G.Greene and C.Kahn (London and New York, 1985), pp.130-1. Even within the general school of psychoanalysis, one can object to the essentialist formations of female identity.

as virtues qualities that men have always found convenient'.[7] My concern, in reading Chaucer's poetry, is by necessity not with how women write themselves into a 'new consciousness'. It is not about 'women' *per se*, but about male representations of women, how women are written, and how the feminine is constructed; hence, the articulation *of* the feminine, and not female articulation.

My method is to address phallocentric representations of women on their own terms, and to establish the 'theological' structures underpinning them. Such an approach, however, is only a partial one, and it is only a starting point. In the first place, it is not a model of analysis that is imposed upon, but one which arises from the questions provoked by Chaucer's poetry. As such, it supplements the close reading of Chaucerian texts that is the most fundamental approach of this thesis. It is from the specifics of the text that the higher level of generality provided by French feminist theory derives. Whilst their theories are not always applicable,[8] it will be seen that in a defined sphere, their generalisations can lead to valuable insights. In the analysis of didactic and devotional, as well as poetic texts, for instance, insights from the French feminists help to illuminate the constraints on the female licence to speak: the subdued legitimacy of women to articulate themselves, as opposed to the more prolific articulation of the feminine through male speaking. In the second place, psychoanalysis provides, above all, a psychological model of the speaking subject. If one holds that the construction of identity is socio-historical, and not simply psychological, then the latter cannot, on its own, provide a sufficient model of analysis. As Jones puts it:

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[7] Jones, 'Writing the Body', p.371.

[8] Their theories are particularly susceptible to charges of universalising. Gender inequality, as M.Rosaldo argues, 'is shaped by a multitude of particulars, including class and culture, rather than by either bipolar or universalising solutions'. See *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. M.Erler and M.Kowaleski (Athens and London, 1988), p.4. The editors are paraphrasing Rosaldo's 'The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding', *Signs*, 5 (1980), 389-417.

> We need to know how women have come to be who they are through history, which is the history of their oppression by men and male-designed institutions. Only through an analysis of the power relationships between men and women, and practises based on that analysis, will we put an end to our oppression - and only then will we discover what women are or can be.[9]

The theories of the French feminists are seen to be more useful in examining the representation of women in the *Legend of Good Women* than they are in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The *Legend of Good Women* is underpinned by clear binary structures, and is discussed in Part II. In Part III, I move on to examine the more complex operations of institutions determining Criseyde's articulation in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The generality of transcendental signification is replaced by the specific institutions - political, social and literary - defining how and what Criseyde is able to speak.

The *Legend of Good Women* is discussed in considerable detail not only because of the subject matter indicated by the title, but also because of the lack of critical attention it has received until recently. *Troilus and Criseyde* was chosen due to its extended and sophisticated treatment of a problem crucial to feminism: how, in the face of women's evident oppression, does one account for the possibility of female complicity in that very oppression? Both poems are concerned with issues relevant to the poetic representation of women, and with more general questions of poetics. Since this thesis attempts to cover new ground, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, which have already been extensively criticised from a feminist perspective, are not considered here.[10]

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[9] Jones, 'Writing the Body', p.369.

[10] Also, one of the few articles I am aware of which has a similar interest to my own, though different in method and conclusions, treats the Wife: see Lee Patterson, '"For the Wyves love of Bathe": Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*', *Spec*, 58 (1983), 656-95. See also Louise Fradenburg, 'The Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy', *SAC*, 8 (1986), 31-58.

PART 1: *THE BACKGROUND*

The interpretation of texts is neither a passive nor an ideologically neutral process. In her article, 'A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts', Annette Kolodny makes the point that 'interpretive strategies...are learned, historically determined, and thereby necessarily gender inflected'.[1] The act of reading does not occur in a political or social vacuum, but is informed by the particular interests and historical circumstances of the reader. Central to a consideration of the poetic construction of the feminine in the Middle Ages, moreover, is the fact that poetic language itself, as well as the interpretation of poetic texts, is gender inflected. Lee Patterson examines this feature of medieval poetics in his article, 'Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution', writing that 'the language of poetry, as enacted by the poet and received by the reader, is habitually conceived in the Middle Ages in sexual, and specifically in feminine terms'.[2]

The first two sections of Chapter 1 discuss medieval notions of rhetoric, specifically with regard to written poetics rather than oratorical persuasion. Notions of rhetoric are crucial to the reading and writing of poetry, as Woods observes:

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[1] Kolodny, 'A Map for Rereading', in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. E.Showalter, (1985; London, 1986), p.47.

[2] Patterson, '"For the Wyves love of Bathe"', 659. Patterson proceeds to make the tendentious comment that 'the voice of the poet is inescapably aligned with that of women: his rhetoric is, to an important degree, always feminine'. His remark elides the fact that 'the voice of the poet' springs from a tradition of male speaking *about* women, and is far more likely to take on a male rather than a female role. A distinction needs to be made between the *devices* of poetry and how those devices are used by poets and by evidently partial male narrators. Patterson supports his claim with detailed reference to the *Romance of the Rose*, the two thirteenth-century Latin poems translated by Jean Léfèvre in the fourteenth century as *Lamentations de Matheolus* (*Liber lamentationum Matheoluli*) and the pseudo-Ovidian *La vieille* (*De vetula*) and also to Roger de Collerye's *Sermon pour une nopce*, c.1500; see 659-676. I shall discuss the linkage between poetic language and the feminine through a consideration of medieval theories of psychology, in particular the role of the imagination, in 1.III, below (i.e. Chapter 1, section III. Internal references to the thesis will be made in this way throughout).

> Rhetorical theory formed the basis of medieval training in poetic composition, as we can see from the emphasis on the rhetorical analysis of poetic texts and rhetorical exercises in early grammatical training, the survival of the most important rhetorical treatises in hundreds of manuscripts, and the identification of rhetoric with poetic in all of the medieval arts of poetry.[3]

Although it uses rhetorical strategies, poetry, unlike spoken rhetoric, deals with its subject matter in an imaginative context. It appeals, as Plato writes in the *Republic,* to the lower, less rational elements of the mind rather than to the reason. Woman, like poetry, also has this distinguishing appeal to the lower parts of man's nature. William of Conches' interpretation of the Orpheus myth so that Orpheus represented eloquence and wisdom, and Eurydice 'that natural concupiscence which is part of every one of us',[4] is indicative of this association. In the third section of Chapter 1, the linkage between rhetorical poetics and the feminine will be considered. The feminine is seen to represent both the higher and the lower impulses of man. Like the imagination, woman provides a useful starting point which becomes dispensable as man's higher impulses assert themselves. Robert Grosseteste remarked that 'without material forms and figures, and without phantasms, we shall [eventually] contemplate the divine and intellectual beings; yet we shall not be able to attain

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[3] M.Woods, 'Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and her Family', *ChR*, 20 (1985), 28.

[4] In his twelfth-century commentary on classical poetry, cited *MLT*, p.320. In his chapter on 'The Transformation of Critical Tradition: Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio', Minnis discusses the problems of interpreting poetry 'in which the love of man and woman is given a value in the literal sense of the text, a value which is lost or undermined in the allegorical interpretation'. The example he uses is that of Orpheus and Eurydice: 'what was for Ovid a moving tale of human grief and loss in love becomes, in the Boethius commentaries of William of Conches and Nicholas Trevet, a pertinent warning of the way in which the lower part of the soul, its concupiscible or affective element, is constantly striving to degrade the higher part, its reason or intellect' (p.379). It is significant that this allegorical mode of interpretation, which for the most part signifies woman in terms of inner male conflict, is by and large on the wane at the time Chaucer was writing. Different conceptions of the feminine are dealt with in a largely playful manner in the *Legend of Good Women*, a poem which has been seen as concerned with Chaucerian poetics, as I shall discuss below, in Part II.

this contemplation unless we first use both the uplifting forms and material figures'.[5] It is these 'material forms and figures, and...phantasms' which are the domain of the poetic.

Chapter 2 examines the construction of the feminine through a consideration of women as audiences of male speaking: first, in the socio-historical context of popular didactic and devotional material, and second, in the more exclusively literary context of the fin'amor tradition. These two chapters are concerned with establishing some of the issues relevant to the ways in which female characters in Chaucer's poetry use language.

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[5] From his Commentary on the "Celestial Hierarchy" of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, cited *MLT*, p.169.

Chapter 1

HOW TO SPEAK? THE SEXUALITY OF RHETORIC AND IMAGINATION

> **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lust shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Tim.4:3-4)**

I. Rhetoric

Whereas rhetoric in the classical, forensic sense exhorts the audience to a particular course of action, poetry provides a model for behaviour which may incite admiration for the moral weaknesses and faults that it represents. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle clearly divided the 'ethical' manner of forensic rhetoric from the 'emotional' manner of deliberative speeches. The former must avoid affective appeal, since 'it is not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger or envy or pity'.[1] Aristotle's *Poetics* was best known to the later Middle Ages in the form of Hermann the German's 1256 translation of Averroes' 'Middle Commentary', an interpretation of the *Poetics*.[2] In the Aristotelean scheme as presented by Hermann, rhetoric, 'which seeks to persuade and employs the enthymeme and the example' is placed above poetics, 'which has imaginative representation as its purpose and the imaginative syllogism as its device'.[3] Hermann writes that:

> Aristotle says [that] he who wishes to urge men on to imitate the virtues must occupy part of his representation with matters which induce sadness and fear and pity...in terms of poetic art, those laudatory poems are regarded as good and

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[1] *Rhetoric*, 1.I, 1354a, cited in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. J.Barnes, Bollingen Series, LXXI (New Jersey, 1984), I.2152. On this notion of rhetoric, see [Cicero], *Ad C. Herennium. De Ratione Dicendi*, trans. H.Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1954), I.ii.2: 'the task of the public speaker is to discuss capably those matters which law and custom have fixed for the uses of citizenship, and to secure as far as possible the agreement of his hearers' (p.5).

[2] See *MLT*, Chapter VII, passim., and p.277.

[3] Ibid., p.280.

> excellent which have in their composition a narration of virtues and of events which inspire sadness and fear and move men to pity or compassion.[4]

Both rhetoric and poetry have in common a desire to induce the audience to praise or blame.

By persuasion, the rhetorician must, for example, 'change the mind and heart of a wrongdoer, or...influence the decision of a judge. Hence, praise and blame are central to its operations (as Cicero makes clear in *De inventione*)'.[5] Hermann's translation begins with the statement: 'Aristotle says: Every poem, and all poetic utterance (*oratio poetica*), is either praise (*vituperatio*) or blame (*laudatio*)'.[6] Rhetoric, though, on account of its method and purpose, 'is not an adequate method of proceeding in moral matters'.[7] What is crucial to rhetoric's inadequacy and poetry's strength in dealing with moral matters is the notion of audience informing these late medieval texts:

> [Poetry] differs from rhetoric because, even though both sciences teach the pursuit of virtuous ways and the avoidance of evil ones, rhetoric lays down guidelines in relation to actions which are subject to justice, and to compulsion, but poetry in relation to actions that are more of a voluntary nature...The purpose of rhetoric is to make the opposing side abandon vice by vanquishing it. But the purpose of poetry is to win its listeners to the practice of virtue through praise and encouragement.[8]

The way in which poetry appeals to its audience is through the use of imaginative devices, heightening 'certain natural qualities relating to what is fair and what is foul, in order to condition an audience's response to whatever is thus represented'.[9] By addressing the

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[4] Chapter xiii, cited ibid., pp.304-5.

[5] Ibid., p.310, note 86. Here, because of the difficulties of the section, Minnis is paraphrasing from 'A Question on the Nature of Poetry', an anonymous Parisian commentary and gloss on the text of Hermann's translation. See G.Dahan, 'Notes et Textes sur la Poétique au Moyen Age', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*', 47 (1980), esp. 220-39.

[6] Chapter i, cited *MLT*, p.289 (it appears that the words in parenthesis have been reversed here). Minnis notes that no such statement occurs in the *Poetics* (p.282).

[7] *'A Question on the Nature of Poetry'*, cited *MLT*, p.312.

[8] 'A Question on the Nature of Poetry', cited *MLT*, pp.311-12.

[9] *MLT*, p.284.

audience's emotions rather than its reason, poetry seeks to evoke a psychological assent by moving rather than by proving.[10]

This overtly ideological conception of poetry is evident in the prescriptive poetics of Matthew of Vendome, writing about one hundred years prior to Hermann. The assumption on which his *Ars versificatoria* operates is that the purpose of description is to provoke praise or blame, and the details of description should be chosen in this light and presented accordingly.[11] Matthew gives an example of the way in which to write approvingly of women:

> Callisto is renowned for zeal with the bow
> Bright with the image of nature in bloom, rich in ancestors.

On the other hand, one might want to make disapproval apparent:

> Medea is the dregs of womanhood, the downfall of justice,
> The shame of nature, a foul plague.[12]

Poetry as an affective art is potentially dangerous in its appeal to the lower imaginative faculty at the expense of reason. To be acceptable, poetry must justify itself, and this it can do by presenting itself as an ethically viable model, encouraging a positive identification with what is good and rejection of what is not. It is therefore important to show the audience, the consumers of moral teaching, the appropriateness of particular attributes to good characters:

> Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The character before us may be say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever.[13]

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[10] The phrase is Minnis', ibid.

[11] See *The Art of Versification*, trans. A.Gaylon (Iowa, 1980). See 1.74, where Matthew refers to the twofold sphere of description, the external and the internal qualities - 'which are set forth either for praise or censure' (pp.48 ff.), and Introduction p.6.

[12] *Versification*, p.28.

[13] *Poetics*, 1454a.xv, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes (p.2327). Hermann simply writes that 'some attributes pertain and are convenient to a woman and do not pertain to a man and are not appropriate to a man' (chapter xv). Cited in *Classical and Medieval*

It is appropriate that representations of tragedy, as the form of praise, encourage a positive response to virtue. Hermann writes:

> Aristotle says...the goal of poetry is not just any sort of pleasure, but that kind of pleasure which is achieved by the arousing of the virtues through representation. This is the kind of pleasure which pertains to Tragedy.[14]

The strength of poetic discourse, though, is also its weakness. While rhetoric as persuasion encourages the audience to a particular course of action, the affective, imaginative mode of poetry means that the audience may respond in a morally incorrect manner. The possible interpretive range of poetic texts, admitting a greater potential for misreading, is much larger than it is for rhetorical persuasion.

Rhetoric, nevertheless, in ancient, medieval and modern theory, is capable of sustaining a broader meaning than the art of persuading. Like poetry it is a self-conscious art of language, employing linguistic strategies such as the figures and tropes referred to by the Franklin as the 'colours of rethoryk'. Paul de Man draws on the distinction between the two senses of rhetoric as a persuasive enterprise and as a stylistic procedure when he uses rhetoric in the sense of 'the study of tropes and figures...and not in the derived sense of comment or of eloquence or persuasion'.[15] By the Middle Ages, poetic and rhetoric were often synonymous terms,[16] and much of the discussion about poetry revolved around the appropriate use of figurative language.

An act of interpretation is implied by the figures of speech employed by rhetoric. Copeland argues that the rhetorical device of *translatio* and the process of translation are identified in the late Middle Ages, since:

> both represented a realisation (either at the local linguistic scale of metaphor or at the larger recreative scale of translation) of the hermeneutical function within the

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Literary Criticism, ed. A.Preminger, et.al. (New York, 1974), p.364.

[14] Chapter xiv, cited *MLT*, p.306.

[15] De Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979), p.6.

[16] Woods, 'Chaucer the Rhetorician', 28.

> rhetorical act of *inventio*. Thus by rhetoric, ancient and medieval, I mean...what these ideas imply...about the discovery in one's own language of the potential to interpret and redetermine meaning by transferring it to new textual configurations.[17]

The success of rhetorical persuasion rests on a convincing display of the appropriateness of style to subject matter: 'it is...important that the expression correspond to the thing. If the thing be fresh, let the style be so too; if it be dry, let the style be similar'.[18] Or, in Chaucer's words:

> Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,
> The wordes mooste be cosyn to the dede.[19]

Matthew of Vendome, in his treatise on versifying, strongly condemned the inappropriate use of words as lax expression, effecting a forced wedding of words with connotations mutually repugnant, crying out for separation and not union. Interestingly, this practice, which is seen as subversive of meaning, is associated with the feminine: 'there are...certain comic braggarts and purveyors of feminine apparel that...twist the meaning of words like this: "it is redolent of harm; he was prudent in prodigality; he is glorified by evil"'.[20] Robert of Basevorn similarly warns against the inappropriate use of language on a larger scale: 'a theme, then, is perverted by shortening, by too great a disagreement, by too violent a transfer from its proper meaning'.[21] If there is a form of linguistic essentialism in the

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[17] Copeland, 'Rhetoric and Vernacular Translation in the Middle Ages', *SAC*, 9 (1987), 43. In 'The Fortunes of "Non Verbum Pro Verbo": Or, why Jerome is not a Ciceronian", in *The Medieval Translator*, ed. R.Ellis, et.al. (Cambridge, 1989), Copeland notes that 'invention does not mean creation *ex nihilo*. It is essentially a hermeneutical process, an interpretation or thinking out of how to suit the particular conditions of public speaking to the circumstances of the case or action to be argued. The invention of arguments to suit the particular case and the particular audience is what forces each speech to be different, to be produced and received under different circumstances' (p.16).

[18] From the second-century Elementary Exercises of Hermogenes, cited in C.Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* (London, 1928), p.36; see pp.23ff.

[19] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.Benson, et.al. (Oxford, 1988), GP.741-2. All subsequent references to Chaucer's poetry, with the exception of *Troilus and Criseyde*, will be to this edition.

[20] *Versification*, 2.42 (see pp.84-5).

[21] 'The Form of Preaching; Forma praedicandi', trans. L.Kruhl, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. J.Murphy (Berkeley, 1971), p.137.

notion of decorum expressed by Robert and Matthew, it is an essentialism that exists alongside a recognition of the conventional nature of language. Rhetorical strictures concerning the inappropriate use of words point to an anxiety about breaking linguistic conventions which are accepted and perceived as morally valuable. Payne seems to have this in mind when he speaks of the 'implication in the notion of decorum that there must be a hierarchy of beauty and worth *inherent in language*, apart from the content it is meant to convey. If decorum is to have any reasonable meaning at all, it must depend on the adjustment of two different hierarchical orders, idea and language, so that they correspond precisely'.[22] Copeland discusses different views of meaning in the Middle Ages through the opposition between the Roman 'ideal of translation as a rhetorical project [which] locates the problem of signification in linguistic performance itself...[establishing] the problem of meaning as something within rather than beyond discourse', and the patristic project of locating 'signification outside the claims of either source or target language...[and] recuperating the signified beyond the accidents of human linguistic multiplicity'.[23] Poetry's use of figurative language, and the fact that the poet is only present *within* the figurative context, extend the range of interpretive possibilities that are available to the audience.

The necessity to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate figurative language was a matter of great concern to writers throughout the period. One of the central assumptions underlying the expositions of the twelfth and thirteenth-century rhetoricians about the necessary relations between style and subject matter, word and thing, is that a stable civil order presupposes a stable meaning in language, authority resting on the establishment of appropriate meanings for words. Ambiguity, equivocation and metaphor are potentially seditious of such a scheme, which 'requires the possibility of absolute knowledge, of a logos

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[22] *Key*, p.190.
[23] "Pro Verbo", p.20.

in which meaning and word coalesce as law'.[24] *Translatio* for instance, is one of the eight methods of expansion (*De delatatione sermonum*) set forth in an anonymous medieval preaching manual.[25] As a method of expansion, *translatio* bears comparison with the dilations of the sophists. The sophists' methods were often condemned as purely decorative, impeding rather than assisting narrative movement.[26] The early Aquinas held the view, which continued into the fourteenth century, that poetry employs figurative language only for the sake of pleasure and delight, unlike sacred writing, which uses such language for the sake of instruction.[27] Figurative language, however, has positive as well as negative potential. In warning that figures must be used not in a decorative but rather in an expressive sense, Quintilian wrote that there was 'no more effective method of exciting the emotions than an apt use of figures'.[28] The two rhetorical devices, *dilatio* and *translatio*, are distinguished on the grounds of utility. Figurative language is criticised only when it fails to contribute to the meaning, or 'sentence' of a work, and is regarded as useful and beneficial when appropriately used.

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[24] Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction. A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore, 1982), p.3.

[25] See Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*, p.237.

[26] See ibid., pp.17-23, 237. See also J.Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1974). Murphy writes that 'the sin of the sophist is that he denies the necessity of subject matter and believes that *forma* alone is desirable'(p.60). Jerome warns against the possible seductions of figurative writings when he says, 'I think it is well to be reminded that writings are served - in proportion - by wide diversity of rhetorical figures, so long as one does not mistake, through an unreasonable delight in the senses, the artifice of eloquence for the subject matter itself, so that, until one flees the tedium of writing, one weaves a web of errors'; *Eusibii Pamphili Chronici Canonis Latini vertit, adauxit, ad sua tempora produxit S. Eusebius Hieronymus*, ed. J.K.Fotheringham (London, 1923), p.3, 25a - p.4, 5a. Cited in "Pro Verbo", p.27.

[27] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a I, Articles 9 and 10, cited in *MLT*, p.240. The Thomistic view became part of the early humanist debate about poetry, and similar criticisms were reiterated in the fourteenth century by such writers as Giovannino of Mantua. Thomas's distinction prefigured the later defences of poetry as a divine art by Petrarch and Dante. See *MLT*, chapters IV and IX.

[28] *Institutione oratoria*, trans by H. Butler, 4 vols, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1953), IX.i.21.

Translatio is described in the *ad Herennium* as:

> when a word applying to one thing is transferred to another...[and] is used for the sake of creating a vivid mental picture...of brevity...of avoiding obscenity...of embellishment...metaphor ought to be restrained, so as to be a transition with good reason to a kindred thing, and not seen as an indiscriminate, reckless and precipitate leap to an unlike thing.[29]

Quintilian describes *translatio* as 'the commonest and by far the most beautiful of *tropes*'.

He defines a *trope*:

> Tropus est verbi vel sermonis a propria significatione in alium cum virtute mutatio.
>
> By a *trope* is meant the [skilful] alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another.[30]

Translatio is a process whereby:

> Transfertur ergo nomen aut verbum ex eo loco in quo proprium est, in eum in quo aut proprium deest aut translatum proprio melius est...autem metaphora brevior est similitudo...quod illa compatatur rei quam volumus experimere, haec pro ipsa re dicitur.
>
> a noun or verb is transferred from the place to which it properly belongs to another where there is no *literal* term or the *transferred* is better than the *literal*...On the whole metaphor is a shorter form of *similite*...in the latter we compare some object to the thing which we wish to describe whereas in the former this object is actually substituted for the thing.[31]

The value of metaphor, as an imaginative device, contains the seeds of its danger. In naming something by what it is not, metaphor breaks the law of identity between word and thing, implying difference simultaneously with identity. Words cannot embody meaning since they necessarily imply difference: they can only mark the absence of meaning, and arts whose concern is with linguistic techniques are guides on how to approach meaning in an appropriate manner. That appropriateness, however, is subject to what have been called the three 'cautionary categories' imposed by Aristotle on sophistic rhetoric: 'the mortal fallibility

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[29] [Cicero], *ad Herennium*, IV.xxxiv.45.

[30] *Inst. orat.*, VIII.vi.1; I have changed the translation from 'artistic' to 'skilful'.

[31] *Inst. orat.*, VIII.vi.5,8. Similarly, Matthew of Vendome, in *Versification*, III.10, refers to metaphor as 'the assumed transfer of the characteristics of one word to another' (p.94).

of persuaders, the dangerous volatility of emotional audiences, and the temporal corruptibility of language'.[32] The affective mode of poetry requires that interpretation cannot be directed with certainty, since there is always the danger that the imagination might overrun the reason.[33]

Rhetoric then, on its own terms, is necessarily concerned with matters of interpretation and verbal signification, the relation of style and structure (*causa formalis*) to subject matter (*causa materialis*). This sense of rhetoric is consistent with more recent formulations, such as that of Koelb, who uses the term:

> to refer to language...understood as readable under more than one interpretive convention - as well as to the activity of reading and writing such language. 'Rhetoricity' will refer to a discourse's openness to radically divergent interpretations.[34]

With the emphasis on interpretation, or the potential for misreading,[35] the audience assumes prominence. Koelb writes:

> Since the rhetoricity of texts thus resides in the degree to which potentially conflicting acts of interpretation are encouraged...rhetoric is at bottom a relational concept. Rhetoric really comes into being only in the interpretation between a text and a reader, between an utterance and its interpreter. Because the reader involved in rhetorical construction is always a writer - 'construction' being a concept that unites reading and writing - a next text necessarily results from this reading.[36]

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[32] R.Payne, 'Chaucer's Realisation of Himself as Rhetor', in *Medieval Eloquence*, ed. J.Murphy (Berkeley, 1978), p.282.

[33] I shall discuss this below, in section III.

[34] C.Koelb, *Inventions of Reading. Rhetoric and the Literary Imagination* (Ithaca, 1988), p.10.

[35] On this point, see de Man's commentary on Derrida's critique of Rousseau: 'accounting for the "rhetoricity" of its own mode, the text also postulates the necessity of its own misreading. It knows and asserts that it will be misunderstood'; *Blindness and Insight* (New York, 1971), p.136. Perhaps Chaucer was accounting for the rhetoricity of his own mode when he hoped, at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1793-9: 'And for ther is so gret diuersite/In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,/So prey I god that non myswrite the.../And red wher-so thow be or elles songe,/That thow be vnderstod, god I biseche' (V.1793-5,1797-8). All citations to the poem will be taken from *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. B.Windeatt (London, 1984). That the wish to guard against misreading is a vain one is evident in the Prologue to the *Legend*, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

[36] Koelb, *Inventions*, pp.12-13. This notion of reinvention - through translation - is discussed by Copeland in "Pro Verbo", passim. In the notion of translation articulated by the Roman rhetoricians, she notes, 'translation can virtually supplant the original as a

De Man similarly foregrounds the process of interpretation in rhetorical writing: 'and since interpretation is nothing but the possibility of error, by claiming that a certain degree of blindness is part of the specificity of all literature we reaffirm the absolute dependence of the interpretation on the text and of the text on the interpretation'.[37] Iser stresses this necessary interdependence in his 'implied reader', who:

> embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text.[38]

Such conceptions of rhetoric seem highly 'appropriate' to Chaucer's poetry. With its self-consciousness, its construction of audiences within and without individual poems, and with its narratorial posturing and linguistic playfulness, his poetry lends itself to the characterisation of rhetorical, as Robert Jordan has noted.[39] Writing of 'the impulse of rhetorical fiction to objectify, often self-consciously, the circumstances of its own utterance and thus to foreground the activity of writing', Jordan refers to Chaucer's thematic preoccupation with issues of knowledge. He states that 'in deliberately raising the question of its own validity, rhetorical narrative explores its own nature and questions its relation to truth'.[40] The *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde* both involve questions not only of how it is that rhetorical poetry produces meaning, but also how it fails to determine it. This equivocation, or unwillingness to encourage unambiguous interpretation, stands in tension with the academic notion that the purpose of poetry is to evoke direct responses of praise or blame. The hesitancy of either the *Legend of Good Women* or *Troilus and Criseyde*

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rhetorical mode. The discovery of one's own literary language through translation carries within it reinventive implications' (p.19).

[37] De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p.141.

[38] W.Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London, 1978), p.34.

[39] Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader*, p.6.

[40] Ibid., p.16.

to commit to anything but a partiality of praise and blame points to a poetic practice that seems more rhetorical than anything else.

II. Medieval Literary Theory: Causes and Effects

The fourfold Aristotelean theory of causality was current in the schools at the time of Chaucer. The theory provided commentators with a model for interpreting literary texts. It is notable for its emphasis on the human *auctor* and his verbal medium,[41] and will be convenient here in grouping those issues of poetic production and interpretation which were under contemporary discussion.[42] The four causes are closely interrelated, and many aspects which hold true for one cause apply equally well to the other three. Genre, for instance, is associated below with a work's material cause, but could also be considered under the efficient cause - how the author conceives of his or her work; the formal cause - how the work is presented in terms of style and structure; and the final cause, how a work's genre is related to its ultimate end. The causality model will not be deployed in any rigid way in the following chapters. Rather, it will be used to establish the nature of matters of interest in medieval literary theory, and the guidelines according to which a rhetorical poetics could be read and written, in order then to examine what happens to these notions in Chaucer's poetry. For instance, it is fruitful to study the activities of Chaucerian narrative personae in

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[41] See *MLT*, p.197 and chapter VI, and *Authorship*, passim. Beryl Smalley writes that the scheme of the four causes 'had the advantage of focusing attention on the author of the book and on the reasons which impelled him to write. The book ceased to be a mosaic of mysteries and was seen as the product of a human, although divinely inspired, intelligence instead. The four causes were still a pattern, which might be imposed on highly unsuitable material...but they brought the commentator considerably closer to his authors'; see *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), p.297.

[42] For instance, in relation to the concern of poetry's affective appeal to the imagination, Minnis writes that 'to a considerable extent, medieval commentators derived their standards of criticism from the psychological causes of a text ("intentionalism") and from its psychological results (its "affective" appeal to the reader)'; see Minnis, 'Chaucer and Comparative Literary Theory', p.60.

the light of discussions about *intentio auctoris*, or the effects and implications of literary editing on a poem's *causa materialis*. In other words, it is necessary to ascertain what contemporary assumptions about rhetorical theory and practice were, before approaching an understanding of how these notions are assumed, mocked or modified in Chaucer's poetry.

While a greater interest was being evinced in the 'intrinsic' aspects, and the specificities of particular texts, there was also current a debate about empiricism as a source of enquiry and knowledge. The philosophical context of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed arguments between the schools of thought referred to as 'nominalism' and 'realism'. Nominalism was at its strongest in the first half of the fourteenth century, having grown out of, and then being displaced by realism.[43] The nominalist argument, in oversimplified terms, held that abstract or 'universal' terms are only derived by way of individual instances, and have no reference other than to concrete, particular things. Knowledge could be gained through an 'inductive reasoning on the basis of experience and observation', rather than a deductive extrapolation.[44] Ockham, whose name is associated with nominalism, attacked 'the restriction of the truth value of propositions to the literal meaning of words, since it ignored the intention of the author and the use of figures of speech'.[45] Ockham demonstrates an anti-platonism in also attacking the 'reification of universal concepts, abstract nouns, or categories other than substance and quality'.[46] Chaucer's evident concern with experience and authority as two possible, and possibly conflicting sources of knowledge has been seen to be indebted to the questions raised by the

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[43] See W.Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1987), preface, xiii and p.218.

[44] Ibid., p.206. My brief references by necessity oversimplify contemporary debates about 'nominalism' and 'realism'; see Courtenay's discussion, esp. chapters 7 and 11, ibid.

[45] Ibid., p.338. Again, this tension between 'literal' or word for word interpretation, and an interpretation taking account of the 'sense' of the original text is discussed by Copeland in "Pro Verbo"; see esp. p.28.

[46] Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, p.205.

philosophical debate.[47] The Wife of Bath, for instance, polarises experience and authority as irresoluble sources of knowledge. In a less direct way, questions of authority and experience, and of general and specific, local meanings, inform both the *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The first of Aristotle's four causes, the *causa efficiens*, is that which 'effects' something, or in literary terms, which causes a work to come into physical existence; it 'consisted of motivation, the moving force which brought something from potentiality into actual being'.[48] A consequence of discussing literary texts by way of this theory of causality was a shift away from an interpretive concern with the prime mover, God, speaking through the writer, to the writer himself.[49] It seems at first glance a long way from more recent proclamations about the 'death of the author', and even the 'intentional fallacy', since the motivation and intention of the individual author becomes of paramount concern. Patterson makes the point that the modern commentator cannot ignore *intentio auctoris*, in stating that a text:

> is a function of specific human intentions, in the sense both of self-consciously maintained purposes and of impulses that may be incapable of articulation but nonetheless issue from a historical intentionality, and it is a large part of our task to understand how these intentions went into its making.[50]

Acknowledging the ultimate indeterminacy of intention, and the partial contribution of intention to the meaning of a text in any case, does not obviate the responsibility to take perceptions of intention into account:

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[47] For a brief bibliography concerning this, see L.Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales. Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca, 1983), p.28 and note 1.

[48] *Authorship*, p.28.

[49] As Minnis puts it: 'the influence of Aristotle's theory of causality as understood by late-medieval schoolmen helped to bring about a new awareness of the integrity of the individual human *auctor*'; *Authorship*, p.84.

[50] Patterson, *Negotiating the Past* (Wisconsin, 1987), p.73.

> it is quite true that specific and explicit intention can never fully govern the meaning of a text, that literature serves to constitute cultural reality in ways it can never fully know and that may run counter to its own most insistent purposes. But simply to set aside these intentions and purposes as unworthy of discussion is effectively to silence dissent.[51]

Since the audience must interpret *intentio auctoris*, it is crucial that some notion of the sincerity of the author inform the reading of his text, and this is a situation that written poetic texts render particularly complex.

The necessary sincerity of the speaker, as a part of his appeal to an audience, had been adumbrated in classical rhetorical theory. The classical rhetorical notion that the eloquent man is a good man, that words speak character, is apparent in Payne's reference to 'the true Aristotelean appeal from *ethos*, the rhetor's calculated representation of his own character as part of his material for persuasion'.[52] Indeed, it is intention that distinguishes the liar from the merely misguided, or inept, as the narrator in the *Legend* endeavours to point out. Peter Abelard's discussion of the early church fathers in the Prologue to *Sic et Non* admitted both that 'the same words have been used by different authors with different meanings',[53] and that the prophets as well as the fathers might occasionally have fallen into error. On the one hand, this makes explicit the possibility, much exploited by Chaucer, that 'authorities' exist not in absolute but in competing terms. On the other hand, it opens the way to exonerating conflicting authors in terms of intention, leading to an emphasis on the importance of establishing that intention. Abelard cites Augustine to the effect that if one speaks what one believes to be true, even if the statement then made is false, then that person is a victim rather than a perpetrator of deception, and cannot be called a liar.

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[51] Ibid., p.66.

[52] Payne, 'Chaucer's Realisation of Himself as Rhetor', p.274. Curtius notes that 'Quintilian will grant the name of orator only to the good man'; see *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W.Trask (1953; London, 1979), p.131.

[53] Cited *MLT*, p.94. I shall discuss this in more detail below.

Conversely, the person who speaks or hears with the intent to deceive, whether the consequent statement is true or false, is a liar:

> for as far as his *intention* is concerned, because he does not say what he really thinks, he does not speak the truth, even though what he says may be found to be true.[54]

In the light of such precepts, the reader's requirement to respond to the sentiments in Criseyde's final letter to Troilus, which makes clear to him 'that al is lost that he hath ben aboute' (V.1645), becomes all the more crucial:

> 3et prey ich 3ow, on yuel 3e ne take
> That it is short which that I to 3ow write...
> Thentente is al and nat the lettres space. (V.1625-6,1630)

The duty of sincere intention holds as true for the reader as the writer, who has a responsibility not to adopt a position of slavish belief in reaching an interpretation consistent with charity. Again Abelard cites Augustine's parallel between models of reading and writing: 'in reading the writings of others I adopt the same attitude as I hope to find in those who read my works'.[55] Abelard's statement that 'in reading works of this sort there must be freedom to form one's own judgement, not compulsion to believe',[56] makes a point similar to that concerning the transmission of knowledge in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, where the narrator encourages his audience:

> And to the doctryne of these olde wyse
> Yeven credence, in every *skylful* wyse. (G.19-20;my emphasis)

But if the author is deliberately attempting to deceive his audience, as poets were often charged with doing,[57] and as the Pardoner himself confesses, how can any authority remain intact? Or, to put it another way, how can one read without misreading?

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[54] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 18, cited by Abelard in the Prologue to *Sic et Non*, in *MLT*, p.95. Augustine extends this principle to poetic fables also: see *Contra mendacium*, xiii, 8.
[55] *Epistle to Fortunatianus*, cxlviii.iv.15, cited by Abelard, *Sic et Non*, in *MLT*, p.97.
[56] Ibid.
[57] See *MLT*, chapter IV.

Augustine makes a distinction between Scripture and subsequent writings. The possibility of deliberate lying must be excluded from the former, 'for if deliberate lies have been admitted into Holy Scripture, what shred of authority will they retain?':[58]

> once the possibility of deliberate deceit in a work of such pre-eminent authority has been admitted, each and every part of those books which the individual reader finds difficult in terms of faith will (by the application of that most pernicious reasoning) be put down to the intention (*consilius*) and purpose (*officium*) in the author's mind.[59]

Intentio auctoris is open to abuse not only by the speaking author but by the reading audience, and the meaning of a text thereby becomes as dependent on the reader as the writer. If the possibility of deliberate lying cannot be excluded even from the writings of the church fathers, poetic texts certainly are not immune to such charges. The verbal medium of poetic texts, like theological writings and all discursive practices, can support obscurity, apparent contradiction, and even intentional deceit: it can sustain more than one reading.[60] Abelard writes of the church fathers that:

> the greatest barrier to our understanding is the unusual style (*locutionis modus*) and the fact that very often the same words have different meanings, when one and the same word (*vox*) has been used to express now one meaning (*significatio*), now another.[61]

It is because different words can be used to signify the same thing that the rhetorical figure of metaphor (*translatio*) is possible.

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[58] *Epist.* xl.iii.3; cited *MLT*, p.98.

[59] *Epist.* xxviii.iii.3; cited ibid.

[60] See Minnis' introduction to the Prologue to *Sic et Non*, *MLT*, p.67.

[61] Cited ibid., p.87. See also Minnis' introduction, p.67. Lacan's formulation about signifiers and signifieds is similar. He locates the practice of interpretation in the fact that more than one signifier can be applied to what appears to be the same signified; conversely, the one signifier can be applied to different signifieds. An example is that two signifiers, 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' written over two doors both imply the same signified - a door that one enters, according to one's sex; or that the signifier 'Gentlemen' can be written over a door, or over a picture of men. For a more immediate pictorial explanation, see E.Wright, 'Modern Psychoanalytic Criticism', in *Modern Literary Criticism*, ed. A.Jefferson and D.Robey (1982; London, 1986) p.152.

Augustine argues that it is necessary to read in 'good faith', and in so doing, to properly designate certain writings as 'mysteries' rather than 'lies'. If such an ideological slant ('good faith') is not maintained, most writings would have to be called lies:

> if we call such things lies then all the parables and figures which signify anything whatsoever which are not to be taken in their 'proper' meaning but in them one thing is to be understood from another, will also be said to be lies...even that which is called metaphor (that is, the usurped transference of any word from its proper thing to a thing which is not proper to it) may...be called a lie.[62]

If those statements 'which signify one thing by another are related for the *purpose* of understanding truth',[63] then they are not lies. Again, intention is the principle of justification. Poetry's use of figurative language to appeal to the *affectus* of the audience, combined with the difficulty of ascertaining poets' possibly immoral intentions, exacerbates that indeterminacy of meaning which Augustine, Abelard and other theological commentators had attempted to limit.[64]

In defending poets against the charge of lying, Boccaccio uses theological arguments concerning intentionality on the part of both the reader and the writer. He claims that poetry's use of figurative language cannot be condemned, since that is the medium proper to poetry. Just as a judge's lawful visiting of capital punishment upon malefactors is not to be called homicide, or a soldier's wasting of enemy fields be called robbery, 'so also a poet, however he may sacrifice the literal truth in invention, does not incur the ignominy of a liar, since he discharges his very proper function not to deceive, but only by way of invention'.[65] The poet is justified in terms of his intention, which is not to deceive, but something else. Poetic fiction, according to Boccaccio, can have 'nothing in common with

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[62] *Contra mendacium*, cited *MLT*, p.210.

[63] Ibid; my emphasis.

[64] See Minnis' introductions to chapters III and VI in *MLT*.

[65] *The Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, Chapter xiii: 'Poets are not Liars', cited *MLT*, p.432. Boccaccio's view is in harmony with the patristic position; see "Pro Verbo", passim., esp. pp.20-3, 28-9.

any variety of falsehood, for it is not a poet's purpose to deceive anybody with his inventions'.[66] Boccaccio's own poetry, though, might be seen to interrogate this claim. The proem to *Il Filostrato*, for instance, announces the intention of the ensuing poem as a palliative to the lover in the face of his lady's absence. It also hopes to arouse in the lady some compassion for the lover-poet's sufferings. The preferred form which any such compassion might take is made clear:

> And if you are as wise as I deem you to be, you will thus be able to understand from these things how great and of what sort my desires are, what is their goal, and what beyond all else they crave, or if they deserve any pity. Now I know not if *these rhymes will so prevail as to touch your chaste mind with compassion as you read them*, but I pray Love to give them this power.[67]

It seems dangerously susceptible to the accusation of poetry being used to seduce. The situation is similar to the troubadour conceit that making poetry is a prelude to making love, since the ostensible aim is to convince the lady to love through the power of words.

That *intentio auctoris* is not something that might easily or convincingly be pronounced with certainty is made apparent in both the *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In the former, the god of Love provides a model for misreading through an interpretation of the Chaucerian *corpus* - both physical and bibliographical - so self-interested and literal-minded that it can claim that it is not an interpretation at all. Such a hermeneutical practice is denounced by his queen, Alceste, as 'tyrannical'. It also meets with the poet's defence that his intention was good, a defence which concedes what the god's attack does not: that intention is not the same thing as effect. The potential dangers of poetry arise from the fact that neither intention nor effect can be unequivocally established.

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[66] *MLT*, p.431. Boccaccio later uses Augustine's distinction between liars who 'knowingly and wilfully' deceive and those who 'have told a falsehood without knowing it' (pp.433-4).

[67] From R.K.Gordon's trans. in *The Story of Troilus* (New York, 1964), pp.29-30; my emphasis.

The reciprocity that is generated between author and audience by way of intentionality is also a feature of a text's subject matter, its *causa materialis*. This term is two-pronged, designating in the first place 'the literary materials which were the author's sources'.[68] Its second, related designation is explicated in Giovanni del Virgilio's commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when he refers to the poem's material cause or subject as 'the treatment of change in things, for instance the metamorphosis of chaos into the four elements, and the earth into men, and so on in the case of other things'.[69] A poem's material cause then, is what a poem is about, and this entails where, in literary terms, it comes from, what sources and authorities it is grounded in. The citation of authorities, in sermons for example, was traditionally conceived of as a substantiation of fact,[70] a notion to which Chaucer refers in his frequent assurances that this or that is 'as myn auctor saith'. Scepticism about such a validating procedure is adumbrated in observations made by writers such as Augustine and Abelard, who pointed out that authorities other than Scripture often exist in contradiction and competition. Even Scripture is not safe from the Wife of Bath's juxtaposition of conflicting biblical authorities, suggesting that the more specific context of Chaucer's poetry engenders an added scepticism concerning the disposition of poetic sources and subject matter. This scepticism, of course, relies on the existence of a conventional practice against which deviance is defined, on the

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[68] *MLT*, p.198.

[69] Cited ibid., p.363.

[70] See Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi*, trans. R.Parr (Wisconsin, 1968), Parr's introduction, p.15. Cf. Jesse Gellrich's comments in *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1985): 'in view of the preoccupation with validating meaning by appeal to a source [such as a] text in the hermeneutical tradition...language theory in the middle ages was fertile soil for interpretation to take root among various authors...subsequent exegesis also validates its own mode by appeal to an original text - the Bible itself, the Book in the sky, or an authoritative *auctoritas*, such as a work by Augustine' (p.122).

possibility of a practice that would *not* require scepticism as, to use Jonathan Culler's example, 'the failure to keep a promise is made possible by the institution of promising'.[71]

Certain habits of reading are called into being by a particular text, which announces by way of conventional signals that it is, for instance, a poem, that it belongs to a particular genre, such as the dream vision, and that it includes characters or events known to its audience from prior contexts. The expectations which readers bring to a literary work by virtue of its genre, subject matter and so on inform what Culler calls 'literary competence', the particular mode of reading which is aroused by the recognition of the type of work under examination:

> the operations [of reading] will...be different for different genres, and...we can say that genres are not special varieties of language but sets of expectations...By seeing literature as something animated by special sets of conventions one can attain more easily a sense of its specificity, its peculiarity, its difference...from other modes of discourse about the world.[72]

The role of a work's material cause, specifically its genre, in fostering reciprocal relations between author and reader is also discussed by Fredric Jameson, who writes that: 'genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact'.[73] Genre is merely one of the available means of calling up the relation of a particular work to the tradition of which it is a part, and of signalling its continuities and divergences from that tradition. Conte stresses the mutually informing positions of writer and reader in his argument that the author not only assumes the reader's competence, or knowledge of conventions, 'but also creates that competence in the reader who both uses and modifies the

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[71] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London, 1975), p.116.

[72] Ibid., p.129.

[73] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; London, 1983), p.106.

code. The poet's task, like that of any writer, is to invent a reader'.[74] Allusions to other works and the use of characters with prior literary histories also function in this way: Conte argues that such resonances function rhetorically, locating meaning in difference, in the space opened up between the concept and the word, and what words might signify when resurfacing in different literary contexts:

> Allusion, I suggest, functions like the trope of classical rhetoric. A rhetorical trope is usually defined as the figure created by the dislodging of a term from its old sense and its previous usage and by transferring it to a new, improper or "strange" sense and usage.[75]

At the same time as the material cause of a text is dependent on source materials it is also dependent on readers and their competence, who are, in turn, 'invented' by the text before them. When Criseyde anticipates her condemnation by posterity, for instance, she is in a sense making such a condemnation possible: an audience's response is implied in the text.

Giovanni del Virgilio might have referred to the material cause of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as inconstancy in love, and how love might remain intact or change with time. Criseyde popularly signified feminine inconstancy in love, and Troilus faithful devotion. Chaucer's treatment of this theme is significantly indebted to his principle and most direct source material, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, and proceeds by way of adaptation, departure and adherence to this model. The blatant misrepresentations of 'auctors' in Chaucer's poem suggest a further theme about the manipulation of authorities and the construction of a self-interested meaning that is explored 'internally' as a part of the meaning of the poem itself. The misrepresentations suggest also that the author's literary source materials are as vulnerable to fluctuations in meaning as is his current poem. In other words, the reading of

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[74] Segal's introduction to his trans. of Gian Biagio Conte's *Rhetoric of Imitation* (Ithaca, 1986), p.9. This is very close to Iser's notion of the implied reader; see above, section I, and Iser, *The Act of Reading*, pp.27-38, esp. p.34.

[75] Conte, *Rhetoric of Imitation*, p.23. See also Copeland, 'Rhetoric and Vernacular Translation', 74 and passim.

sources largely determines their nature and this holds as true for the characters within a poem, as models for reading and writing, as it does for reader's 'external' to the poem. Praise and blame, in such a poetics, themselves become unstable and ambiguous, particularly as they might both be seen to apply to any character at a given moment.

In the medieval *artes praedicandi*, *dictaminis*, and *versificatoria*, where speaker-audience communication was paramount, rhetorical means of ordering works were much drawn upon.[76] Just as style must fit subject matter, so must the style and structure of the work be amenable to the audience's understanding. This is particularly evident in a preaching context, since an appropriate audience response could mean the difference between salvation and damnation.[77] Catherine Cormon notes that 'medieval writers concerned with preaching skills consciously incorporated...classical ideas into their methods, so that the interaction between speaker, language, and audience formed the core of their persuasive process'.[78] The fourteenth-century *forma praedicandi* of Robert of Basevorn, observes Cormon, 'reveals the complete absorption of rhetorical principles into an audience-centred genre'.[79] The formal concession of a literary text to its audience was two-fold. In the Prologue to his Commentary on the Song of Songs in the fourteenth century, Giles of Rome wrote that:

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[76] In discussing the 'new kind of literary sensibility' that existed among theologians in the later Middle Ages, 'a sensibility based on the literal rather than on the allegorical understanding of Scripture', Minnis refers to one product of this new procedure as: 'all the discussion of how the various *formae tractandi* [part of the *causa formalis*] of Scripture cater to the various needs of individual members of the audience, thereby suiting the style to the subject in the best rhetorical manner' (*MLT*, p.206).

[77] This held true for Scriptural exegesis also, where such works were justified in terms of their efficacy in 'leading the reader to Salvation'; *Authorship*, p.29. The principle also applies outside devotional contexts, as Pandarus's self-consciously rhetorical persuasion of Criseyde to love in Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrates.

[78] Cormon, '"Whereas a man may have noon audience, Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence": Rhetorical Processes in Chaucer's Poetry', unpub. Ph.D diss., Indiana State University, 1985, p.30.

[79] Ibid.

> it has been usual to distinguish two kinds of form: the form of treatment (*forma tractandi*), which is the mode of procedure, and the form of the treatise (*forma tractatus*), which is the way in which the chapters are ordered in relation to each other.[80]

The style and ordering of a work, helping to direct audience response, also provided the means by which an author's own interpretation could be imposed on his *causa materialis*.

The *forma tractatus*, or structure of a work, owed a direct debt to classical rhetorical precept. After that of defining terms, the first duty that rhetoric imposed on a speaker was analysis - 'the art of arranging or disposing his matter in such a sequence as to lead his audience to understand and believe'.[81] One of the concerns of this disposition (*dispositio*) of materials was with the parts of speech, and the task of the first, the *exordium*, was to encourage the audience's attentiveness, friendliness and docility.[82] The same duties apply in a literary context. Bernard Silvestris's commentary on the *Aeneid* states: 'the purpose of a prologue consists entirely in gaining the goodwill of the reader or hearer, and in making him willing to learn and attentive'.[83] Koelb observes that the task of the poet, according to Horace, is:

> winning the approval and admiration of an audience whose tastes and habits of thought are well understood. The form of a literary work is determined not by the nature of the subject matter but by the expectations of the audience.[84]

Geared to audience expectations, the *forma tractatus* at the same time presents to that audience a text already constituted by an interpretive act. Chaucer's *Troilus*, for instance, although occasionally very close to the *Filostrato*, is a vastly different poem, and this is due in part to the narrative reorganisation which reduces Boccaccio's nine book poem to five

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[80] Cited *MLT*, p.246. Minnis defines the two terms respectively as the 'writer's method of treatment or procedure' and the 'arrangement or organisation of the work, the way in which the *auctor* had structured it'; *Authorship*, p.29.

[81] D.Clark, 'Rhetoric and the Literature of the English Middle Ages', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 45 (1959), 21.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Cited *MLT*, p.152.

[84] Koelb, *Inventions of Reading*, p.15.

books, where the 'rising' action is confined to the first three books, and the 'falling' action to the final two books. The structural disruptions in Book V, such as the insertion of portraits interrupting Diomede's wooing of Criseyde, anticipate the series of partial and disjointed sentiments with which the narrator attempts to conclude his poem. The disruptions are shown to be a part of the meaning of the poem, and prepare the audience's 'rhetorical expectations'[85] for the narrator's address to various subgroups within his audience, and the specific and partial meanings which they are to take away with them. That Chaucer had in mind particular audiences for the poem is indicated by his initial addresses to the lovers whose servant he is, and his ultimate addresses to 'euery lady bryght of hewe', to the '3onge, fresshe folkes, he or she', and to the Gower and Strode of the poem's closing stanzas. The different readings of the poem likely to issue from these different groups suggest that the meaning of the poem is a contingent and shifting thing. While it is true that audience expectations shape the form of a literary work, the literary work which they help determine through their literary competence and reception is itself already shaped by a set of expectations.

The form of treatment, along with the form of the treatise, was also conceived of in an audience-centred manner. The figurative language of poetry, as discussed above in section I, appealed to the *affectus* of the audience. It had long been subject to the condemnations 'that it inflames the passions of men, that poets are liars, and that poetic writings are full of falsehoods'.[86] The principle which justified a figurative use of language, made explicit in the condoning of sacred writing's use of tropes and figures, and also that of 'emotive' rhetoric, was the edification of the audience. The notion of audience not only

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[85] Buckler refers to the audience's 'rhetorical expectation' as: 'what they thought poetry was, how they felt it should be approached, what they considered to be a suitable response, what they hoped to get out of it'; 'Rhetoric and Imagination in Chaucer's Audience', p.84.

[86] *Authorship*, p.139, and pp.49-52. See also *Idea*, p.111.

justifies the form of treatment, or style of a work, but also determines it, as is implicit in Giles of Rome's commentary on the formal cause of the Song of Songs. Giles argues that the particular end (*finis*) of the Song of Songs - urging the audience to the love of God and neighbours - requires the particular mode of treatment or *forma tractandi* that is found there. Different works require different treatments not only because of variety in subject matter, but also because of the diverse responses to be evoked in the audience.

Boccaccio's solution to the problem of misleading the audience is like Augustine's: the reader's own disposition, or intention, should be sufficient to guard against misreading. The use of figurative language, far from constituting a potential danger, is poetry's great strength, allowing it to appeal to a large audience:

> Such then is the power of fiction that it pleases the unlearned by its external appearance, and exercises the minds of the learned with its hidden truth; and thus both are edified and delighted with one and the same perusal.[87]

To 'sensible men' poetic fictions and the purpose of the poet in using them should be clear. A sensible man seems to bring to his interpretation the full force of Augustinian charity: a good reader, as a good Christian, cannot be seduced or misled by poetic discourse since he is guided by his faith.[88] The problem of misreading in the Middle Ages is connected with sexuality, the *locus classicus* for which, as Patterson notes, 'is Augustine's misreading of the *Aeneid*, when he was seduced into weeping for the death of Dido while remaining unmoved by the dying of his own soul...the relationship between the lovers *in* the text becomes a warning figure for the relationship that might develop between the reader *and*

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[87] *The Geneology of the Gentile Gods*, chapter ix: 'It is rather Useful than Damnable to compose Stories', cited *MLT*, p.426.

[88] Chapter xiii: 'Poets are not Liars', cited *MLT*, p.434: 'a Christian who is of age should find no protection in ignorance of the articles of faith'. The good Christian's fine reading, in Boccaccio's formulation, is like the good rhetor's fine speaking.

the text'.[89] Boccaccio's defence fails to exonerate poetry from the blame that it is capable of promoting misreadings.

The ultimate end or objective of a work, its justification, or *causa finalis*, could be both intended by the author and beyond his vision. In the context of preaching or Scriptural exegesis, this final cause or intended good consisted in leading the reader/audience to salvation: Robert of Basevorn refers to 'conclusion' as 'a prayer ending the sermon and directing the mind to God as towards an end'.[90] In commentaries on secular *auctores*, the final cause relied on the work's philosophical or moral significance.[91] It seems no accident that the penultimate closing stanza of *Troilus and Criseyde* directs the poem to 'moral Gower' and 'philosophical Strode'. Considering the final cause of a work makes clear the interdependence of each of the four causes on each other. The selection and arrangement of materials influence and are influenced by the work's final cause at the same time as they are by the author's intention. The signification of a work is not the property of the writer, but rather is written in the reading: it holds as true for the *causa finalis* as for the preceding three causes that the meaning of a work, however provisional, is located in the intention of the audience. It is also true that the author plays a significant part in creating, or 'implying' the audience.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote that of the three elements in speech making, it was the last, the audience or person addressed, that determined the speech's end and object. The hearer was the judge. In an *accessus* to Ovid's *Heroides*, the commentator writes:

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[89] Patterson, 'Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution', 660. Patterson notes that 'this monitory theme occurs throughout the later Middle Ages: Paolo and Francesca (and Dante) relive it, Boccaccio anxiously argues against it, Chaucer - in the *House of Fame* and the *Troilus* - reenacts it' (660). He refers to *Confessions* 1.13; Dante, *Inferno* 5; Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilum* 14.18. See his note 71.

[90] 'Form of Preaching', chapter 47 (p.198).

[91] See *Authorship*, p.29.

> The usefulness or ultimate end (*finalis causa*) of the book differs according to the various intentions, depending on whether the intention is the recognition of the unchaste and foolish forms of love, or else to show how some women may be courted by letter, or how the results of living chastely may benefit us. Alternatively, the ultimate end of the book is that by commending those who engage in chaste love, he may encourage us to chaste love. Or else, having seen the advantages (*utilitas*) of lawful love and the disasters or disadvantages which result from unlawful and foolish love, we may reject and shun foolish love and adhere to lawful love.[92]

The models of love present in Ovid's *Heroides* are either to be praised and emulated, or blamed and shunned. Indeed, the reader ought not to be coy in seizing the interpretive initiative: in his commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Giovanni del Virgilio follows a citation of Eccl.47:16 with the happy thought: 'for although the words are applied to something quite different from the matter at present under discussion, yet they can be marvellously well adapted to our purpose, just as if they had been spoken in praise of Ovid'.[93] It might also be the case that the receptive reader find in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* a do-it-yourself guide to the initiation and maintenance of amorous satisfaction:

> His ultimate objective (*finalis causa*) is that...the course they should follow in a love-affair should be made clear to young men. It pertains to ethics, because it speaks of the behaviour of young girls, that is, the sort of morals they should have, and how they may be kept faithful.[94]

These explications, to greater or lesser degrees, are complicit with the notion that all poetry is written in order to praise or to blame. As Hermann the German informs his medieval audience:

> Aristotle says: Since those who make representations and likenesses have as their purpose...to urge men on to certain actions...and to dissuade them from others, it will of necessity be virtues or vices which they urge by their acts of representation. For every action and every trait of character is concerned only with one of these two, virtue or vice...And since, without exception, all comparison and representation occurs through showing what is becoming or unbecoming or base, clearly this can

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[92] Cited *MLT*, p.23.

[93] Cited ibid., p.361.

[94] Introduction to Ovid, cited ibid., p.24. It is interesting to note the equation of female morality with female sexuality, as discussed below, in 2.I.

> have no other purpose than the pursuit of what is becoming and the rejection of what is base.[95]

The final cause of a literary work, in providing models for praise or blame, is necessarily moral. The enjoyment of the audience can be an appropriate ethical response, as is apparent in Nicholas Trevet's Prologue to Seneca's *Hercules Furens*:

> the ultimate purpose (*causa finalis*) is the enjoyment (*delectatio*) of the audience, or else, in so far as there are narrated here some actions which are praiseworthy and some which deserve censure, the book can in a certain manner be placed in the category of ethics.[96]

An audience's interpretive practices, in determining the moral import or final cause of a literary work, are guided by the models for praise and blame that are present within that work. The poet in the *Legend*, for instance, denies the blame ascribed to him by the god of Love, suggesting instead that he deserves praise for his work: what Cupid reads as blame, the well-intentioned reader should see as praise:

> But trewely I wende, as in this cas,
> Naught have agilt, ne don to love trespas...
> Ne a trewe lovere oughte me nat to blame
> Though that I speke a fals lovere som shame.
> They oughte rathere with me for to holde... (G 452-3,456-8)

The *Legend of Good Women* may be regarded at one level as parodying tyrannical ascriptions - and prescriptions - of praise or blame in poetry.

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[95] Chapter ii, cited ibid., p.291.

[96] Cited ibid., p.346; as Minnis notes, Glending Olson's *Literature as Recreation in the Late Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982) demonstrates that 'medieval physicians, philosophers and poets often declared their belief that pleasure is necessary to the mind as sleep is to the body, and that the pleasures of literature can promote in us an inner harmony that fosters physical and mental health'; *MLT*, p.325.

III. Women and Imagination

Medieval theories of psychology regarded the mind as a tripartite structure with imagination at the front, receiving sensory data, reason in the middle, processing and ordering the data from the imagination, and memory at the back, storing the input of the preceding faculties.[97] It was believed that memory received and stored mental images by way of *verbal* stimuli in the same way as *visual* images, and that meaning was fully present in both and could be called up in the mind without further - verbal - mediation. Both kinds of images, verbal and visual, writes Kolve, 'can be summoned to the mind as mental pictures, without the mediation of words or of material substance, and they can be rapidly sorted, their essential likeness to other images recognised...without reference to the several distinctive modes of experience by which those diverse mental images were acquired'.[98] Like other sensory data, poetic texts, with their figurative linguistic medium, were thus held to be capable of communicating meaning directly by way of images.[99] The images provoked by words would set off a chain of mental associations, allowing the poet to call upon a reservoir of images in the mind as well as those from the visual world.[100]

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[97] See Minnis, 'Langland's Ymaginatif and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination', in *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981) and P. de Wit, 'The Visual Experience of fifteenth-century English readers', unpub. D.Phil diss., Oxford University, 1977, pp.11-12.

[98] V.A.Kolve, 'Chaucer and the Visual Arts', in *Writers and their Background. Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. D.Brewer (London, 1974), pp. 296-7. See also Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* (Stanford, 1984), p.20.

[99] See Kolve, 'Visual Arts', and also Aston's reference to language's capacity to signify directly in *Lollards and Reformers. Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984), p.104. M.Colish's *The Mirror of Language. A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven, 1968) describes the distinctively Christian motivation for 'a sign theory conceived in expressly verbal terms', preface, ix (see also vii, and chapter 1, 'St Augustine: The Expression of the Word'). Even the works of speculative grammarians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were insufficient to topple this notion. Gellrich observes of Thomas of Erfurt's fourteenth-century *Grammatica speculativa* that: 'the study of language as a phenomenon of convention, which had otherwise opposed medieval notions of the natural presence of meaning, reveals that language theory through the fourteenth century did not finally displace an archaic natural matrix'. See *Idea*, p.107 and note 35.

[100] See Buckler, 'Rhetoric and Imagination', p.153.

Figurative, or rhetorical writing was used, with varying receptions, by religious as well as lay writers. Minnis notes that 'the "affective" functions of certain types of writing, particularly styles which were rich in imagery and symbolism, were held to be of the first importance, especially in the case of the poetic books of the Bible'.[101] Poetry's use of affective images was also justifiable, since in medieval rhetorical theory, 'poetry's business was to persuade, but to persuade through the emotions aroused by figures and images rather than through the rational convictions of logic'.[102]

The rhetorical tradition supplied guidelines for the use of such figures and images. Rhetoric in the Middle Ages, like the other six liberal arts, was personified as female, and is to be found in church sculptures, murals, mosaics, manuscript miniatures, windows, altars and gravestones. Often she appears with Cicero at her feet.[103] Matthew of Vendome and Geoffrey of Vinsauf both personify the various arts and figures of speaking as female. Matthew pictures Tragedy, Comedy and Elegy following Philosophy, also female, as the four who hold sway in metrical verse.[104] Geoffrey's Poetry is female, her functions being to clothe material in words and to serve the speaker.[105] The works of Matthew and Geoffrey exhibit a popular tendency to give 'natural' attributes to nouns. The potential of both eloquence and women to move men through an appeal to the *affectus* had been adumbrated in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologia et Mercurii*, which introduced the seven liberal arts to the Middle Ages in the fifth century. Martianus's Rhetorica is a:

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[101] Minnis, 'Affection and Imagination in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*', *Traditio*, 29 (1983), 324; see also Minnis, 'Literary Theory in Discussions of *Formae Tractandi* by Medieval Theologians', *NLH*, 11 (1979), 133-45.

[102] Payne, 'Chaucer and the Art of Rhetoric', in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. B.Rowland (London, 1968), p.41.

[103] H.Caplan, 'Classical Rhetoric and the Medieval Theory of Preaching', *Classical Philology*, 28 (1933), 73.

[104] *Versification*, II.5-9 (pp.64-5).

[105] 'The New Poetics', trans. J.Kopp, in Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, p.35.

> woman of loftiest stature and great assurance...Helmeted and crowned with royal majesty, she held ready for defense or attack weapons that gleamed with the flash of lightning. Beneath her armour the vesture draped Romanwise about her shoulders glittered with various light of all *figurae*, all *schemata*; and she was cinctured with precious *colores* for jewels...For as a queen in control of all things she has shown power to move men whither she pleased.[106]

Gellrich finds in the gender of nouns 'the operation of a law of sexual difference'. He cites Thomas of Erfurt:

> 'masculine gender is the mode of signifying the thing by means of the property of acting (...*vir*). Feminine gender is the mode of signifying the thing by means of the property of being acted upon (...*mulier*).' As [writes Gellrich] a linguistic category has here changed places with, and even determined a logical one (the *modus intelligendi activi* and *passivi*), grammar is imitating nature, which is in turn imitating it.[107]

But if the relationship between grammatical gender and natural quality is reciprocal, why is Rhetoric a woman, since women are not able to practise rhetoric? And how does one account for the figuring of Reason as female, for instance in the *Romance of the Rose*, when reason was regarded as inaccessible to women?

Thomas Aquinas reiterated the popular exclusion of women from the power of reason, perceived as justifying female subjection:

> For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because naturally in man the discretion of reason predominates.[108]

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[106] Cited in Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*, pp.93-4.

[107] From *Grammativa speculativa*, Latin ed. and English trans. by G.L.Bursill-Hall (London, 1972), p.179. Cited in *Idea*, p.107.

[108] *Summa theologica*, pt.1 Question 92, Article e.2, from New York ed., (1947), cited in V.Bullough, 'Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women', *Viator*, 4 (1973), 487. Reason is associated with eloquence, a notion that may be indebted to Cicero's belief that it is eloquence that civilises society. In medieval poetics as well as theology, these notions work towards a theory of the 'fitting' silence and subjection of women: in a late thirteenth-century commentary on Boethius in which he draws on the classics, William of Aragon held that 'Eurydice is "good judgement", or "good works". She is fittingly called the wife of Orpheus because it is the function of him who is eloquent, by teaching or giving good advice, to explain good works and good judgements' (exposition of Book III, metre xii, cited *MLT*, p.333).

Joan Ferrante believes that female personifications should be seen in terms of those 'abstract concepts which are essential to man's moral and intellectual well-being - the virtues, the liberal arts, philosophy'. She observes that :

> in the battle between vices and virtues, which is central to Christian morality, both groups are female; inner conflict is seen in terms of women pulling in opposite directions, towards good or evil. In a psychomachia, man sees both his lower and his higher impulses as women.[109]

Just as reason properly orders the imagination, so does male form order female matter, a principle again articulated by Aquinas:

> in the arts the inferior art gives a disposition to the matter to which the higher art gives the form...so also the generative power of the female prepares the matter, which is then fashioned by the active power of the male.[110]

The connection between sexuality and textuality is particularly evident in Albertus Magnus' observation, following Aristotle, that while female semen 'contributed material for generation it lacked the efficient and formal cause inherent in male semen'.[111] The assumption is that female sexuality ('female semen') and creativity are derivative of and inferior to those of males. As are Erfurt's grammatical speculations and Aquinas's theology, these Aristotelean notions about female sexuality are attuned to a conjunction between the creative and the passive in medieval assumptions about women. The word 'mater' (mother) contains the root of 'materia' (matter): women are associated with matter since it is women who give birth. In his *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville compares *mulier* (woman) with *vir* (man), the latter connected with both *vis* (strength) and *virtus* (virtue):

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[109] Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York, 1975) p.2. Ferrante's terminology does not seem to adhere to the conventional practice of using 'feminine' and often 'woman' to refer to gendered categories, and 'women' as a sexual, biological category, a convention which is followed in this thesis.

[110] Aquinas, *Summa*, pt.3, Question 32, Article iv. Cited in Bullough, 'Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women', 488.

[111] Ibid., 491. See also 492-3 for further medical evidence of this point, such as the conception that women, possessing not ovaries but 'female testes', are 'simply men turned inside out'.

> Vir nuncupatus, quia maior in eo vis est quam in feminis: unde et virtus nomen accepit...Mulier vero a mollitie...ideo virtus maxima viri, mulieris minor.
>
> He is called "man" because there is greater "strength" in him than in woman: whence "virtue" takes its name...But "woman" comes from "softness"...therefore there is greater virtue in man and less in woman.[112]

In the allegorical works of the twelfth-century School of Chartres, the union of divine ideas (male seed) with matter (womb, receiver of male seed) is presented metaphorically as a sexual union. The metaphor emphasises feminine passivity, depicting women as empty vessels playing a nurturing rather than contributive function in receiving male seed in order to fulfil the function of creation.[113] Linda Lomperis's discussion of Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia* draws on this connection between poetic language and the feminine as associated creative capacities. It is significant that 'Gramision', as the place within the fabula where the creation of man finally occurs, is a locus of women, especially mothers and daughters:

> This elaborate emphasis on mothers and daughters serves to distance us from God the Father, reminding us at the same time of the specifically feminine generative capacities of Silva, and by implication, of the specifically poetic status of the cosmos that proceeds from the 'gremio Silvae'.[114]

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[112] *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, Etymologiarum sive Originum*, Libri XX, ed. W.M.Lindsay (1911; Oxford 1962), XI,ii,17-19. I have taken the citation from *Woman as Image*, p.6. Angela Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages* (Brighton, 1983), also refers to Isidore's explanation (*Etym.* IX.v.6) that Mother is the matter, Father the cause. She notes that 'this inclination towards the flesh was an indication that she was less spiritual than man' (p.19).

[113] See *Woman as Image*, p.41, and footnote 11, where she refers to medieval commentaries on Boethius, an important source for neo-Platonic images of creation in sexual terms. The terms are very similar to those used by Freud in his discussion of the biological basis for the distinction between the 'actively mobile' male sex cell and the 'immobile' ovum which 'waits passively'. See E.Wilson, 'Psychoanalysis: Psychic Law and Order?', in *Sexuality. A Reader*, ed. Feminist Review (London, 1982), p.163. The 'extrinsic' exegesis of allegory, as opposed to the 'intrinsic' commentaries of the later Middle Ages, held that the kernel of meaning, the divine intention behind the author, could be approached by removing the shell of fiction. Although the mode of literary theory to be discussed below had shifted away from the allegorical approach, these assumptions about gender enjoyed a greater longevity.

[114] Lomperis, 'Poetry of Authority and the Authority of Poetry in the Canterbury Tales', unpub. Ph.D diss., Cornell University, 1985, p.39.

A ubiquitous notion of passivity, however, lurks on the opposite side of the creative mother coin.

An interestingly literal instance of this is provided by the coinage practices of the early Roman Empire. At this time, empresses (both living and dead) were often deified, most popularly as Ceres, goddess of fertility and nurture. The point of this assimilation was to support the traditional state religion in the face of competition from foreign cults and to install women in their traditional roles of maintaining the birth rate and reflecting the qualities of their male ruler husbands. On the verso of an emperor's coin, the imprint of an empress was often shown as a personification of some quality (Justitia, Pax, Concordia etc.) which then accrued to the emperor. In this situation, women were literally objects of exchange between ruler and subject, not only exalting but providing divinity for reigning emperors.[115] The use of women as a currency on which values are inscribed in order both to deify male power and to domesticate female creative capacities reinforces the construction of the feminine as that which reflects male glory and desire, and which is itself ultimately passive.

The medieval imagination, both below and above reason, was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, if properly used, images (*imagines*) could both teach and move, exciting the receiving mind to interior adoration.[116] On the other hand, the dangers of an imagination unrestrained by the controlling power of reason were much warned against. Winthrop Wetherbee points to this dual potentiality of imagination:

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[115] See S.Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1975), chapter 8, especially pp.183-4. These personifications of empresses (Justitia, Concordia, Pax, Securitas, Fortuna) derived from the gender of the particular Latin nouns. The political importance of this power/passivity duality in the apparent exaltation of the feminine can be seen in Pomeroy's note that 'praising the female members of their family was...[a] way that men used to gain status through women'. The examples she gives include the encomium delivered by Julius Caesar in 68BC on the death of his aunt, which 'marked a turning point in his career'; see pp.182-3.

[116] See 'Affection', 361.

> At its lowest level it serves our animal nature, disrupting normal activity and distorting consciousness by its responsiveness to physical desire and sensory stimuli or exploiting memory to conjure up imaginary objects of sensual desire, often embellishing or idealising them in the process. At its highest it is...a repository of authentic wisdom through which the mind may make imaginative contact with its divine and primordial origins.[117]

The imagination, because of its necessary 'involvement with the senses', will always run the risk of 'confounding reason with carnal ecstasy'.[118] Wetherbee's discussion of poems from the *Carmina Burana* manuscript explicates the integral relation of imagination and sexuality in poetry. He refers to the close 'association between the imagination itself and the operation of sexual desire' in the 'Dum Diane vitrea', and further of the 'correlation of imagination and sexuality which underlies the poem's movement'.[119] If it is the case that through its affective, sensory mode, poetry is associated with sexuality, it is also true that women, unlike men, are represented in medieval exegesis in terms of sexuality: if the representation is positive, sexuality is effaced, and if negative, it is foregrounded. Ferrante notes that:

> With an astonishing consistency, biblical women, if they are good or potentially redeemable, are said to represent the church; if bad, they stand for the lower or weaker parts of man, for carnal desire, or inconstancy of mind. Woman, as the most obvious object of male concupiscence, is made to represent lust and thus is held responsible for it; the object of temptation becomes the cause.[120]

The emphasis on female sexuality is also present in medieval saints' lives. James Simmons observes that while for female saints sexuality is a defining aspect of sanctity, this is not the case for male saints. None of the male saints in his study of medieval hagiography are referred to outright as virgins, but are defined by their profession.[121] Ann Haskell also

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[117] 'The Theme of Imagination in Medieval Poetry and the Allegorical Figure "Genius"', *Med et Hum*, 7 (1976), 45-6.

[118] Ibid., 47. Here Wetherbee is speaking of the imagination implied by *ingenium*, a philosophical rather than spiritual faculty, which is described as a 'natural bent' of man's nature, 'ultimately oriented toward harmonious participation in the natural order' (46).

[119] Ibid., 54-5.

[120] *Woman as Image*, pp.1-2.

[121] See Simmons, 'Sancti et Sanctae: Sex-role Stereotyping in Medieval English Hagiography', unpub. Ph.D diss., University of North Dakota, 1973, esp. pp.62-3. Similarly, Katherine McMahon notes that the sexual tortures and innuendoes in female saints lives do

notes that in those works of non-allegorical secular literature concerned with moral stratification, female characters are represented in terms of sexual behaviour, whereas 'male characters might be judged in relation to the entire gamut of morality'.[122]

Appealing to the imagination through its sensual mode, the potential power of poetry and of the feminine must be bridled by the restraining influence of masculine reason. As Wetherbee writes:

> the potential value of imagination is also a potential danger. The barrier between purified *imaginatio* and spiritual vision, however imperceptible, is absolute. Reason is light, but imagination, which can never transcend its material ties as *similitudo corporis*, is shadow.[123]

Wetherbee's discussion elaborates on the connection adumbrated in Paul's epistle (above, 2 Tim.4:3-4), between reading/listening and carnality. In considering that 'the bodily appeal of the imagination may subvert reason's power', Hugh of St Victor himself uses an image for the seduction of the reason, where 'imagination adheres to reason like a fleshly body, contaminating perception with desire and debasing their natural *coaptatio*'.[124] This notion of the imagination as a potentially disruptive force is connected with representations of the feminine. Just as reason is light to imagination's shadow, so in the binary oppositions listed by the French psychoanalytic critic Hélène Cixous is 'man' and 'light' to 'woman' and 'shadow'. Man/woman is the underlying paradigm of these oppositions:

Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Head/Emotions
Culture/Nature
Day/Night

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not occur in those of their male counterparts: see her study, 'The *South English Legendary*: An Investigation and a Critical Edition of the Lives of Agnes, Scholastica, and Juliana', unpub. Ph.D diss., Northern Illinois University, 1985, p.99 and passim. See also C.Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim. The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, 1983), p.189.

[122] Haskell, 'The Portrayal of Women by Chaucer and His Ages', in *What Manner of Woman*, ed. M. Springer (Oxford, 1978), p.6.

[123] 'Theme of Imagination', 48.

[124] Cited ibid., 48.

Father/Mother
Intelligible/Sensitive
Logos/Pathos. [125]

Binary oppositions operate by way of exclusion: the latter term is presented as an inferior reflection of the first, primary term. Both imagination and the feminine are potentially disruptive forces because they constitute a threat to a structure of meaning which is obliged to present them as secondary, accidental and derivative in relation to their positive, naturally prior opposites. They must exist, as the necessary reflection and confirmation of these positive values, but in a disempowered state. For Luce Irigaray, 'woman' exists only as 'man's' negative, his reflection, and in her consequent signification of absence, is beyond representation herself - except as this 'specularized' image, implying both the mirror image given by the penetration of the male (medical) instrument into the woman's body, and the idea that it reflects (and so confirms) the subject that wields it. The construction of the subject in language is a deeply fraught procedure for woman, outside representation:

> The feminine has consequently had to be deciphered as forbidden [*interdit*], in between signs, between the realized meanings, between the lines.[126]

By contrast with fears about the potential of the feminine and the imagination to subvert masculine reason, a strand of religious imagery seems to promote a positive notion of the feminine.

In her study *Jesus as Mother*, Caroline Walker Bynum writes of contemporary Cistercian and Carthusian representations of Mary that: 'in keeping with the medieval view that women were above and below reason, she [Mary] saves her loyal favourites, even if they fail to meet the standards of contrition and penitence'.[127] In the context of the

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[125] From the trans. of *La Jeune Née* (Paris, 1975), in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by E. Marks and I. Courtivron (Brighton, 1980), cited in T.Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York, 1985), p.104.

[126] *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by C.Porter (Ithaca, 1985), p.20.

[127] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), p.137. The Carthusian imagery makes an interesting study for the later

positively perceived role of the imagination, Bynum observes that 'increasingly from the twelfth century on, we find female erotic and sexual experience used to describe the soul's union with Christ'.[128] She grounds the notion of binary oppositions historically in the imagery employed by twelfth-century Cistercian writing in sermons and treatises:

> Gentleness, compassion, tenderness, emotionality and love, nurturing and security are labelled 'feminine' or 'maternal'; authority, judgement, command, strictness and discipline are labelled 'male' or 'paternal'.[129]

Any welcoming of this apparently beneficent feminisation of religious language in the high Middle Ages should note that it originated with male rather than female writing, and was set against a simultaneous decline in the political and legal status of women, and a still prolific stream of misogynistic literature.[130] Further, these distinctly non-threatening images of God were used not to empower women in life or to improve the representation of women in literature, but to supplement an existing image of authority that was inadequate to the needs of the religious community at the time.[131] Such a usage reinforces the female term in male/female as a derivative reflection of male desires. For the religious orders of Bynum's study, sin, with a few exceptions:

> is fragmentation, rupture, assertion of one's differentness from the image of God that one is in the process of becoming. The idea of Christ as a nursing or pregnant mother is for Cistercians one among a host of images that articulate a process of

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Middle Ages, managing to combine, as Atkinson notes, 'the ancient ascetic monastic ideal with the new mystical and devotional enthusiasm of the late Middle Ages'; see *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p.151.

[128] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p.138.

[129] Ibid., p.148.

[130] See ibid., pp.142-3. As Guillaumin asks, 'how does maternal tenderness or undemanding empathy threaten a master?' (paraphrased by Jones in 'Writing the Body', p.371). It is worth making the point that the observation about the simultaneous decline in women's status does not imply that direct connections can be made between literary constructions of the feminine and the prevailing historical conditions of women at the time. In fact, the cautionary point here is twofold: first, that apparently positive representations may enshrine an underlying powerlessness, and second, that such representations in texts, religious or poetic, do not imply a positive perception of women generally.

[131] See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p.154.

> return through love of others to true dependence, a return made possible by the breaking of false dependence on the difference and otherness of the world.[132]

Either beyond the evils of worldly existence or a part of them, such principles of the feminine are merely opposite sides of the same coin. Opposed to woman the irretrievably carnal is woman the spiritual, signifier of union and nurturing.[133] Sheila Delany refers to the Christian body/soul dualism as 'an epistemological/ontological tradition in which the human subject is irreparably fragmented flesh versus spirit, man as uneasy participant in angelic and bestial realms'.[134] It is 'woman' who represents to 'man' his angelic and his bestial potential, the two broad categories of feminine representation to be considered in Chapter 2.

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[132] Ibid., pp.165-6.

[133] Ferrante finds a similar opposition in allegorical works where abstract concepts - both good and evil - are personified as female, for the purpose of facilitating an apprehension of inner, male conflicts. See above, beginning of 1.III.

[134] S.Delany *Writing Woman* (New York, 1983), p.59.

Chapter 2

HOW TO LISTEN? WOMAN AS AUDIENCE

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. (I Tim.2:12)

Poetry's reliance on affective language did not only imply a linkage with conceptions of the feminine, but also lent itself to appeal to female as well as male audiences in the later Middle Ages. To this democratising impulse of imaginative appeal was added a widespread use of the vernacular, a combination employed to particular effect in popular didactic practice. The female constituent of didactic and devotional audiences, and the nature of such material will be considered before examining the phenomenon of the female audience from the more exclusively 'literary' perspective of the fin'amor tradition.

I. Some Images of Woman

In part, the increased presence of women in audiences for didactic and devotional material was due to the new accessibility of devotional rhetoric, which of course held true for the male lay congregation also. The new accessibility was not without its tensions, as Schibanoff points out in her discussion of translations and vernacular texts. The problem, she writes, especially with the '"laicization" of Scripture was that it would make the text accessible to female readers. And these new readers, in the eyes of the clergy, presented a greater threat to Church authority than did male lay readers, for women alone were banned from teaching or preaching Holy Word'.[1] The didactic material of the time points to a concern with effective communication. There is a recognition of the usefulness of understanding psychological processes, especially an understanding grounded in sensible

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[1] S.Schibanoff, 'The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer', *SAC*, 10 (1988), 105.

things. De Wit observes that the use of *exempla*, precedents for which were provided by biblical parables, were part of this method of conveying divine wisdom by way of the corporeal: 'the world perceived by the senses could provide a way of speaking about spiritual matters to those whose minds were not spiritually inclined'.[2] The use of corporeal images helped provide a language in which access to matters divine was possible. In writing about the mystical tradition, Atkinson makes the point that 'women may have participated enthusiastically in the 'New Piety' in part simply because it was possible for them to do so'.[3] The method of appealing to the imagination rather than to the reason can be seen in Walter Hilton's use of images as devices for stirring the laity towards the devotion of higher things.[4] Richard Rolle's approach to an unlearned audience has similarities with didactic works that mention household matters in great detail, and which were seen as intended for women.[5] One such work, composed in the vernacular and forming part of the broad genre of works written by male members of the church for the edification of female members, was the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary*, probably written for a group of religious women.[6] With the exception of the *Ancrene Riwle*, observes Ann Warren, all of the significant works of this male-authored genre of spiritual and practical instruction were addressed to women who had been nuns.[7] Both the style (*causa formalis*) and the content (*causa materialis*) of the literature helped to create a context in which it was possible for women to participate in social and religious activity.[8]

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[2] De Wit, 'Visual Experience', p.12; see also p.13.

[3] Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p.162.

[4] De Wit, 'Visual Experience', p.16.

[5] Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp.144-7.

[6] Its content suggest that it was also suitable, and probably used as a reference book for parish priests and itinerant preachers who, like their audiences, were not highly educated. See McMahon, 'The *South English Legendary*', pp.69-70, and introduction.

[7] Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress: England, 1100-1500', in *Medieval Religious Women*, ed. J.Nichols and L.Shanks (Michigan, 1984), p.202.

[8] E.Power, 'The Position of Women', in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. L.Crump and E.Jacobs (Oxford, 1926) also observes that women often flocked to sermons, for

Another contributing factor to the increasing female presence was the more active civic role of women during the period, which occurred despite a decline in female legal rights. The depopulation crisis resulting from the fourteenth-century plague, continuing until the mid-fifteenth century, meant that many women, and particularly bourgeois women, were forced to take on new responsibilities in the fields, in manor administration, in business, trade, crafts and so on.[9] Power has also noted that 'the confidence reposed by husbands in the business capacity of their wives is to be found...[in] the wills and letters of the later Middle Ages'.[10] Full legal rights and obligations accrued to those women, both married and single, who belonged to the category of 'femme sole'. Such freedoms stood in marked contrast to the common law restraints on married women.[11] The new facts of existence for some women did not, however, destroy what Delany calls the 'feudal-clerical' orthodoxy on women; new social fact and obsolete attitudes existed in tandem. This situation is evident in the subject matter (or *causa materialis*) of contemporary sermons.

The new preaching of the thirteenth century was addressed to a less educated, predominantly lay audience. This is reflected in both the form and content of the new form of preaching.[12] In the centrality they accorded the audience, the *formae praedicandi* fell

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entertainment as well as instruction (p.431).

[9] See S.Foster, 'Fifteenth Century England: A Comparison of Women in Fictional and Historical Writing', unpub. Ph.D diss., Florida State University, 1983, pp.6-10. See also Delany, *Writing Woman*, chapter 2 passim, esp. pp.30-1.

[10] Power, 'Position of Women', p.419.

[11] These restraints were intended for the protection of the husband but also, Power believed, resulted in 'an effective improvement in the status of the wife' ('Position of Women', p.407). Like Delany, she also notes that the subjection of women was becoming embedded in common law and specifically marital law (ibid., p.432). For the simultaneous greater legal and economic capacities of women during this period, and the 'femme sole' see Delany, *Writing Woman*, chapter 2.

[12] David D'Avray's study of 'The Transformation of the Medieval Sermon', unpub. D.Phil diss., Oxford University, 1976, examines the new form of the sermon in the thirteenth century, adapted in form and content to a new audience. He argues that 'the revival of popular preaching was paralleled by a major change in the way sermons were put together, which amounted to the creation of a new genre. The essential characteristics of the genre were defined as rhymed divisions, and authorities to confirm each important member'

under the scope of 'deliberative rhetoric', that is, the kind of oratory concerned with persuading or dissuading in relation to a particular course of action. The function of rhetoric, then, was not to reveal truth or falsity, which for medieval theologians, following Aristotle, came properly under the scope of dialectic,[13] but to persuade hearers and recipients to meritorious conduct.[14] So important was the end or *causa finalis* - and this carried implications for literary works as well as sermons[15] - that any desire on the part of the speaker for fame or other temporal reward was 'considered a mortal sin'.[16] In the Christian rhetorical appropriation, concern for the welfare of the audience was paramount, since the speaker's end (*finis*) was not personal success but the salvation of his audience. In relation to the sex, age, rank and so on of the audience, this end had significant implications for the work's *forma tractatus*, comparable to the ancients' *dispositio* (the arrangement of materials) and *ethopoeia*, or *notatio* (decorum, the appropriateness of words and style). There was a recognition, in other words, of the necessity of adapting style to matter and to audience, the notion that different literary styles might suffice for the same end.[17] The adaptation of speech to audience implied also that the effective use of language might be different for men and for women. The new emphasis on the importance of shaping style and subject matter to audience became, in medieval sermon collections, the offering of an appropriate spirituality for the various interests represented in the Christian congregation.

(p.133). He notes that 'the vast majority of model sermons from the mid-thirteenth century are constructed according to the new form, and of these, the vast majority were intended for lay congregations' (p.126). See also his book, based in part on the thesis, *The Preaching of the Friars. Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, 1985).

[13] See Minnis, 'Literary Theory', *NLH*, 136.

[14] See 'Form of Preaching', chapter 1: 'preaching is the persuasion of the many, within a moderate length of time, to meritorious conduct', and this is distinguished from an investigation of the truth (p.120).

[15] See Minnis, 'Chaucer and Comparative Literary Theory', p.56.

[16] 'Form of Preaching', p.125.

[17] See Minnis, 'Literary Theory', *NLH*, esp. 133.

In his study of the 'new genre' of thirteenth-century preaching, d'Avray argues that the new sermon content was predominantly pastoral in character, since 'it was not so much designed to solve problems as to save souls'.[18] He refers to the popular fourteenth-century *Ad status* collection of Gilbertus de Tornaco, the method of which was to adapt an allegory to a particular *status*, such as Christ the merchant, 'who sells the robe of his flesh, dyed with his blood to buy back souls'.[19] The projected audience of the following is not difficult to surmise: 'Christ, then, is the advocate, God the Father is the judge, the trial is held on the cross, the name of the action is *petitio hereditatis*'.[20] The implication of the new style of preaching is that the successful speaker has a 'duty of care' to provide accessible interpretive steps for his particular audience.[21] General devotional principles are approached by way of specific details likely to appeal to particular audiences. Such a devotional procedure is broadly aligned with the late-medieval movement of affective lay piety in encouraging an empathetic identification with Christ in his humanity rather than emphasizing the majesty of God as final judge.[22]

Several of Gilbertus' sermons are addressed to wives (*ad coniugatas*).[23] There is some rehabilitation of the position of (married) women evident in these sermons:

> Est etiam dilectio socialis qua debent se coniuges diligere, quia pares sunt et socii.

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[18] D'Avray, 'Transformation of the Medieval Sermon', p.135.

[19] Ibid., p.174. See pp.149-174; the reference for this example is to BN Lat. 15943 fol.cxxx,va.

[20] Ibid., cited p.161.

[21] This emphasis on interpretation became increasingly important in the scriptural science of the later Middle Ages, with its concentration on 'the literal sense' in which the human author expressed himself. See above, 1.II, and *MLT*, pp.205-6.

[22] See d'Avray, 'Transformation of the Medieval Sermon', pp.172-4.

[23] D'Avray concentrates principally on those addressed to the rural nobility and upper bourgeoisie. He notes that it is clear from the rubrics and internal evidence that these sermons were directed at women (see ibid., pp.175-7). In fact, for his purposes, this rubric is the special advantage of the *Ad status* collection, which 'says clearly what social group the material was meant for' (p.150).

> There is also a kind of love founded upon partnership, and this is the love which a husband and wife owe to each other, because they are equal and partners.[24]

Gilbertus' sermon deals with four features that should accompany the married state: 'the motive for marriage should be pure, the couple should be inseparable in their affection, they should accept each other's criticisms, and their life should be holy'.[25] D'Avray sees the *dilectio socialis* as characteristic of an optimistic view of marriage in medieval sermon collections generally.[26] In their emphasis on the equality of husband and wife and the responsibilities of the husband to the wife, Gilbertus' sermons seem to take account of the higher proportion of women in the preachers' audience. Gilbertus argues:

> Quando enim pares sunt, tunc in pace vivunt, sed quando propter dotem vel aliquod temporale nupserunt, semper litigant. Unde si vis nubere, nube paris...legimus inter leges ligurgi (*sic*) quod virgines sine dote nubere iussit, ut uxores eligerentur non pecunie.
>
> For when they are equal (*pares*) then they live in peace; but when they have got married for the sake of a dowry or for something temporal they always quarrel. So if you want to get married, marry an equal...we read, among the laws of Lycurgus, that he ordered maidens to marry without dowry, so that wives would be chosen, not fortunes.[27]

A distinction is made between women and money, but women are still chosen in much the same way as other property.[28] Courtesy handbooks consistently equate women with male property, and are full of prudent advice on how a man is to choose and use a wife. In Hugh Rhodes' *boke of Nature, or Schoole of good manners*, a gentle wife is referred to as a 'bargayne'.[29] The admonition in *How the Wise Man Tau3t His Son* explicitly connects wife and property in the grappling for riches which follows a man's death:

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[24] BN Lat. 15943. Cited in ibid., p.180, d'Avray's translation.

[25] Ibid., p.184.

[26] He observes that many of the points Gilbertus makes concerning marriage are commonplaces (p.185).

[27] BN Lat. 15943, f.clxiii vb., cited ibid., p.181.

[28] It is clear that Gilbertus is arguing for a maintenance of the economic as well as sexual status quo in stressing the desirability of marrying economic equals.

[29] See Rhodes, 156, in *Early English Poems and Treatises on Manners and Morals in Olden Times*, ed. F.Furnivall, *EETS*, 32 (London, 1868), p.86.

> And he þat was not of hys kyn,
> Haþ his wijf, and al þat þere is.[30]

While the contrast of Gilbertus's sermons with the usual picture of unrelieved misogynistic invective is welcome, it is nevertheless true that what d'Avray claims to be an example of 'the equality theme', in fact persists in relegating women to the derivative:

> Unde mulier de costa viri formata est, {nec} non de capite, ut non nimis insolescat et superbiat, non de pedibus, ne maritus eam conculcet et vilipendat.
>
> Woman was made from man's rib, not from his head, so that she would not become too haughty and proud, and not from his feet, so that her husband would not treat her with contempt and disparage her.[31]

Although such sentiments served to reinforce martial and other social roles, it is significant that the presence of women was openly recognized in the form of sermons not entirely belittling or defamatory in their matter.

Typical marriage sermons of the period, nevertheless, present a more positive view of women than is apparent in much of the other literature circulating concurrently.[32] Representations of women are also prominent in the literature of satire and complaint. In this material, woman is less likely to be presented even nominally as an 'equal' than as duplicitous, disruptive, and leading men astray by the wilful exercising of her congenitally, compulsively carnal nature. Woman is described by the English author of the thirteenth-century *Speculum Laicorum*, following Vincent of Beauvais, as 'the confusion of Man, an insatiable beast, a continuous anxiety, an incessant warfare, a daily ruin, a house of tempest,

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[30] Cited in ibid, p.52, from the Lambeth MS, 853, c.1430, 130-4. Although Furnivall draws on a fifteenth-century MS, the earliest MS dates to c.1350. See D.Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower. Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Connecticut, 1983), p.63.

[31] D'Avray, 'Transformation of the Medieval Sermon', p.180. D'Avray is paraphrasing Gilbertus in the English.

[32] In this light, such sermon collections might be perceived more positively than courtesy books, directed solely towards confirming women in roles of menial obedience and anonymity. On the general comparison with other literature, see G.Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933), p.385.

a hindrance to devotion'.[33] Perverting the course of man's 'true' nature, women are seen in terms of sexual deviance and domestic conflict. Despite the recognition, or perhaps construction, of a female market for male wisdom indicated by works of didactic and devotional instruction, it is nevertheless the case that men, however wise or strong, are hopelessly vulnerable to feminine wiles:

> Who was strenger than Sampson, wyser than Salamon, holyer than David? And 3it thei were al overcomen by the queyntise and whiles of women.[34]

Like female sexuality, female language is seen as an overflowing *copia*. This is pointed out, in fine rhetorical flow, by one of the more learned men of the church. His own language generates that very sense of uncontrollable forward movement that he finds in his

> foolish woman, garrulous and vagrant, impatient of quiet, not able to keep her feet within the house, [who is now] without, now in the streets.[35]

Unclean speaking is popularly connected with carnality, as adumbrated by St Paul. The preacher finds in 'kyssynge and grypynge and beholdyng' of, as Owst says, 'the apparently harmless sort', as much evil as:

> in spekynge and in takynge hede to wyckede and unclene speches, and in other unlawesom touchynges onlyche by schrewede delectacioun, and in other lecherous fykelynges and ragynges.[36]

On the one hand, the paradigm of Eve provides a model of blame, of degenerate speaking and degenerate sexuality. The paradigm of Mary, on the other hand, provides a model of praise, of one who is modest in speech and virginal:

> Eve..bi hire *talkyng* the fend understod hire febylnes and hire *unstabilnes*, and fond therby a way to bryng hir to confusioun. Our lady seynt Mary did on an othere wyse...Sche...asked [the aungel] *discretly* that thing that she knew not hir-self. ffolow therfore our lady in *discret spekyng and heryng*, and not *cakelinge* Eve that both

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[33] From MS. Add. 11284; *Speculum Laicorum*, cap. liii, ed. J.Welter, *L'Exemplum dans la Litt. Relig. et Didact. du moyen age* (Paris, 1927), p.77, cited *Pulpit*, p.378.

[34] MS. Harl. 45, f.101b, cited *Pulpit*, p.385. Owst notes that this favourite saying of the homilist passed into other literature of the day.

[35] MS. Add. 21253, f.45b., cited ibid., p.386.

[36] MS. Bodl. 95, f.12 et seq., cited ibid., p.382.

> *spake* and *herd unwisely*...Oure lady seyn Mary...was of so *litel speche* that nowere in the gospel we fynden of hir *speche* but iiii tymes, and tho were *wordes* of gret *discrecioun* and grete myghte.[37]

The good woman is a silent woman. The want of discretion which characterises the feminine other than the chaste and wise-speaking seems the inevitable consequence of an inability to exercise the restraining power of reason. Reason, after all, is that which separates man from the beasts, allowing him to exercise rationality and recognise God as creator.[38] Unless they are mystics working towards a divine apprehension beyond the carnalities of imagination and human reason, men who do not exercise or are below the power of reason, are like beasts; if women are denied access to reason, they too must be like beasts, and denied full humanity. Owst cites the *Speculum Laicorum* author that 'there are two kinds of dogs':

> for, some are well-bred, others low-bred. The well-bred, indeed, are silent and free from guile; the low-bred are ill-tempered and fond of barking. So is it with women: the daughters of the nobles are artless, silent, and lovers of solitude; the ignoble to be sure are loud and roamers in the streets.[39]

The streets seem a popular destination for foolish and ignoble women.[40] Reason then, is the norm of behaviour, but since it is a faculty unavailable to women they are defined - derivatively - by their lack against this norm, as the faulty reflection of the masculine. Yet it is just such a reflection that confirms the inherent superiority of the masculine, since its norm is reasserted and affirmed by that which is other to it, that which depends on the norm for its existence but lacks the masculine's claims to legitimacy. If the first and *natural*

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[37] MS. Roy. 8.C.i, f.124, cited ibid., p.387, my emphasis; this, notes Owst, is largely derived from the *Ancrene Riwle* (cf. ed. Morton, King's Classics, pp.59 and 121).

[38] See E.Porter, 'Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm', in *Gower's Confessio Amantis. Responses and Reassessments*, ed. Minnis (Cambridge, 1983), p.137 and passim. This assumption was not of course restricted to religious belief: Andreas Capellanus makes the same point in a different context, claiming that men who lust indiscriminately should 'be compared to asses, for they are moved only by that low nature which shows that men are on the level of the other animals rather than by that true nature which sets us apart from all the other animals by the difference of reason'; see Capellanus, *De Arte honeste amandi*, trans. J.Parry (1941; New York, 1969), XVI, chapter 5; p.33.

[39] *Speculum Laicorum*, Cap. xxi, ed. Welter, p.33, cited *Pulpit*, p.387.

[40] See above citation from MS. Add. 21253.

'womanly virtue...is to obey', then woman's '*unnatural* condition of contrariety, or wilfulness' is, indeed, perfectly reason-able.[41]

Similarly unnatural, and similarly and ubiquitously condemned, is that reprehensible recourse of woman to finery and fashion. Criticism of this practice exhibits two consistent, related features. The first is that through enhanced personal appeal to male senses, the bedecking of the female body threatens to lead men astray from the path of righteousness. The second is that it is a wilful overreaching of what male writers, principally clerics, defined as appropriate female nature. The Dominican John Bromyard, warning against those habits associated with the month of May which threaten to undo the contrition of the Lenten period, contrasts the marching knights of Christ's army with Maytime processions. If, he believes,

> in another procession [i.e. the Maytime procession] [there] were to march the women in their wanton array, frolicking, dancing, or stepping out with their signs of levity, I do believe for certain that these latter would attract after them far more hearts and ears and eyes more readily and more intently than the former.[42]

Jones' observation about the indecency of worldly fame for women is of interest here. She notes that 'the belief that women's speech opened them to irresistable sexual temptation, that articulateness led to promiscuity, produced a related set of prohibitions against women being spoken *about*. Men's eyes and men's tongues were assumed to share the power to define and possess a feminine object'.[43] Women are defined both by and in relation to men, and this banishment from claims of full humanity is referred to by Green as 'the masculine conspiracy to exclude women from the social contract woven into the very fabric of

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[41] Owst cites the Dominican Bromyard on the 'unnatural condition' of women (*S.P.* s.v. 'Matrimonium'); see *Pulpit*, p.389; my emphasis.

[42] *S.P.* s.v. 'Bellum', cited ibid., pp.393-4. See also s.v. 'Contritio', 'Chorea' and 'Mundita'.

[43] A.Jones, 'Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric', in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. C.Heilbrun and N.Miller (New York, 1986), pp.78-9.

feudalism'.[44] In the bestial imagery for women favoured by Bromyard, and using a figure equating women with property, the Dominican warns:

> For, just as horses and pack-animals for sale are decorated, and some kind of notice is put on their head, so the Devil's pack-horses wear garlands on their heads that they may be the better and sooner sold.[45]

The Austin friar John Waldeby fears that the following of fashion is a rising above the appropriate feminine station in life. 'To put hair on the head or give a new complexion', he explains, 'is the special concern of God':

> So, when women set about adorning their own persons, by constricting themselves in tight clothing they wish to appear slender, and with artificial colours they desire to seem beautiful, thereby expressly insulting their Creator.[46]

The insult to the Creator seems closely connected with the insult to the Creator's male flock. The caricaturing of the feminine love of adornment is condemned in large part not only because of a threat to man's true nature, itself a caricature, but also because of the violation of notions of property ownership that is perceived.

This physical duplicity - woman's desire to '*seem* beautiful' through the adoption of '*artificial* colours', in much the same way as the misguided sophistic use of rhetorical 'colours' - is hardly surprising, consistent as it is with the natural feminine propensity to verbal duplicity. Woman deviates from the basic rhetorical principle that the good speaker must be a *vir bonus*, not because she is not a man, but because her sincerity of intention is not to be trusted. One popular sermon *exemplum* tells the story of a 'worthy' woman who hated a 'poor' woman, only nominally forgiving the latter when constrained to do so on Easter Day communication. The poor woman then comes to her house with gifts, and the 'worthy' woman says:

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[44] R.Green, 'Chaucer's Victimised Women', *SAC*, 10 (1988), 20.

[45] Cited *Pulpit*, p.395.

[46] *Flor. Barthol.* Cap. "De Indum", MS. Camb. Univ. Libr. Mm.ii.10, fols 85 et seq., cited ibid., p.392.

> 'Wene than that I for3ave this woman hure trespasse with myn herte as I dud with my mouthe? Naye! Than I preye god that I never take up this rush at my fote'. Than she stowped down to take it upp, and the dewell strangled hure even there.

The moral of the story is given as:

> Wherefore, 3e that make any lovedayes, loke that thei be make withowte anny feynynge, and latt the herte and the tonge acorde in hem.[47]

Either blamed for the duplicity of her speech, or praised for her lack of it, woman's licence to speak is, at best, tenuous. For whom then, is speaking - in didactic or devotional contexts - appropriate?

The Christian tradition heightened the classical imperative of the speaker's moral efficacy in relation to his audience, for the *causa finalis* was not the civil order, but salvation.[48] The classical orator was explicitly connected with the Christian preacher.[49] In chapter four of his *Forma praedicandi*, Robert of Basevorn lists the three qualities necessary to the preacher, whose authority derives from the church: he must have a good life (conscience), sufficient knowledge, and the power of legal authority. He cites Canon Law that 'no lay person or Religious, unless permitted by a Bishop or the Pope, and no woman, no matter how learned or saintly, ought to preach'.[50] The role and function of the preacher was a subject of considerable debate in the thirteenth century at the University of Paris. The three major issues around which this debate centred were identical to those set out by Robert of Basevorn in the following century: the issues of authority and authorisation

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[47] MS. Roy. 18. B.xxiii, f.71, cited ibid., 156. Owst refers to a variant of the same story in MS. Harl. 2316, f.11b.

[48] It is noteworthy that in Book IV of *De doctrina christiana* St Augustine, following Cicero, explicitly connects eloquence and wisdom. See Caplan, 'Classical Rhetoric and the Medieval Theory of Preaching', 73-96, esp. 81. See also Minnis, 'Literary Theory', *NLH*, 139.

[49] See Thomas of Salisbury, *Summa de arte praedicandi*, referred to in Cormon, 'Rhetorical Processes in Chaucer's Poetry' p.18. See also Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp.317-26.

[50] 'Form of Preaching', p.124.

of the preacher, his requisite knowledge and preparation, and his personal character and disposition.[51] The categories of people whose licence to speak was contentious included monks, laymen, women, and those of immoral character. The question of the first two categories was solved relatively easily: they could preach, subject to the Bishop's approval. The latter two categories posed more of a problem, intensified as the question was by the fact that at stake was the salvation of the faithful.

Concerning the immoral preacher, against the authority of the *Cura Pastoralis* that 'any man who keeps divine doctrine to himself is accursed' was that of St Paul: 'and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing' (1 Cor. 13:2).[52] What is at issue is really a question of interpretation. The implication is that the writer/speaker must himself or herself be interpreted as much as the subject matter: for the speaker to persuade, it is essential that the audience not only *believe* him in terms of his subject matter, but *interpret* him - in terms of personal character - correctly. The speaker must provide in his person a model for interpretation, and his person is made evident in his speech. The most favoured view in the thirteenth century appeared to be that if the immoral speaker was not required *ex officio* to preach, he should stay silent.[53] Similarly, when Patterson refers to the 'discontinuity between character and speech implicit in the paradox

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[51] See Minnis, 'Chaucer's Pardoner and the Office of Preacher', in *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, ed. P.Boitani and A.Torti (Cambridge, 1986), p.89.

[52] See ibid., p.93.

[53] Bonaventure had provided a solution to this question, via the issue of Solomon's fitness to teach: 'to the objection that Solomon actually committed sin Bonaventure answers that this does not destroy the wisdom in his teaching: the fault lies in his failure to practise what he preached'. The pertinent question seems to be whether the preacher was actually in a state of sin at the time of preaching. Minnis notes that Bonaventure's solution was 'offered often to a related problem that was hotly debated in the Parisian faculty of theology, namely, if a preacher is in a state of mortal sin does this devalue his preaching?'; see *MLT*, p.207.

of the truthful hypocrite'[54] as a discontinuity at the centre of the *Pardoner's* characterisation, he is drawing attention to the problem of reading rather than writing which the Tale raises. The Pardoner is dangerous rather than simply immoral since the pilgrims may be influenced more by him as (immoral) preacher than as purveyor of (sound) doctrine.[55] It is worth noting that the condoning or condemning of speech was a crucial activity for the church in a political and economic sense, quite apart from the spiritual well being of its members; if the office of preacher (*officium praedicatoris*) were devalued, so would be the authority of an institution whose claim to power rested upon its mediatory and absolving role *vis-a-vis* divine law. The reasons for women being enjoined to silence are disturbingly similar to those applying to the immoral/unnatural man: apart from physical inferiority (lacking the energy to sustain preaching), the arguments devolve upon women's moral inferiority - they are by nature inconstant and easily distracted from the truth, they are inferior to men and lack the necessary authority to preach, and their speech would provoke men to sin.[56] Equally pressing was the fact that if women were given greater opportunities for public speech, as a far-sighted glossator on the Manciple's Tale feared, men would lose their control over articulating the feminine. This glossator, Schibanoff observes, tells us at one point *how* to read the Tale "correctly": 'he worries not only that new female readers are more dangerous than new male readers but that new reading - uncontrolled, unglossed interpretation - may create new attitudes towards women'.[57] The assumption behind the injunction to women's silence is that female speaking is inalienably tainted by female flesh, that female sexuality, the cause of men's fall from grace, ought to be silenced and confined to male prescriptions. The censure on female speaking is biological

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[54] Patterson, 'Chaucerian Confession: Penitential Literature and the Pardoner', *Med et Hum*, 7 (1976), 162.

[55] See Minnis, 'Chaucer's Pardoner', p.111.

[56] From Henry of Ghent in *Summa quaestitionum*, 1276-1292, cited ibid.

[57] Schibanoff's reference is to the Egerton glossator; see 'The New Female Reader', 106.

rather than accidental: whereas the licence of male preachers to speak is revoked only temporarily, defined by the period during which they are actually in a state of mortal sin, for women illegitimacy of speech is a state of nature.

The question of the speaker's authority becomes more problematic in fictional texts, since the speaker lacks both the authority of the preacher's office, and the physical presence of the *vir bonus*. Poetic texts are written, not spoken, and the authorial presence is inscribed in the text rather than presiding over it. The author's rhetorical strategies involve questions of poetic signification rather than resting on the authority of an - authorised - office. The speaker as well as the text must be read, but the interpretive guidelines are less clear. The questions of authority and interpretation in contemporary preaching theory and practice are taken further and problematised in Chaucer's poetic praxis.

II. Woman as Ideal: The literature of fin'amor

The necessity to distinguish between 'fair speche' and sincerity is present in courtesy manuals as well as in the fin'amor tradition. Generally, the women who provide the audience for courtesy books are enjoined to remain at home and develop their domestic skills, instead of attending public occasions, including sermons. The need to restrict women's access to public speech is associated with the need to restrain a potentially rampant female sexuality. As Jones observes, 'the link between loose language and loose living arises from a basic association of women's bodies with their speech: a woman's accessibility to the social world beyond the household through speech was seen as intimately connected to the scandalous openness of her body'.[58] In the manual, *How the Good Wijf tau3te Hir*

[58] Jones, 'Surprising Fame', p.76.

Dou3tir, the daughter is warned against attending public events - 'as it were a strumpet or a gigggelot' - but rather to remain at home.[59] The daughter is told to beware of fair speech:

> But, dou3tir, loke þat þou be wise, & do as y þee teche,
> And trust noon bettir þan þi silf, for no fair speche.[60]

Yet the domestically centred woman would be hard-pressed to distinguish 'fair speche' from sincerity. Criseyde, for instance, appears to depend on Pandarus for much of the news outside her palace, and is interpretively ill-equipped to deal with Pandarus's eloquent onslaughts. Female reading of male words is also of concern in fin'amor literature. The fin'amor tradition, like the courtesy tradition, confuses 'natural' and gendered roles for women. On the one hand, the courtesy handbooks present a code of behaviour for women that is seen as 'naturally' feminine. On the other hand, this behaviour is something which the addressees of courtesy lessons are *taught*. Similarly, Pandarus leads Criseyde (and Troilus) through a script of courtly behaviour, and Criseyde is led to perceive in Troilus an amalgam of courtly and courtesy virtues. In Book V, she reads the same signs of courtly courtesy in Diomede that she has learnt to read in Troilus. Lacking an authority figure to guide her interpretation, Criseyde misreads Diomede's 'fair speche', which is a faithless imitation of Troilus's sincere devotion.

Woman in the fin'amor tradition is an ideal figure, perched on a pedestal far from the madding crowd of the street with its women and their vulgar finery and talking. Furthermore, she is judge, reading and assessing the male supplicant's worth, or passing sentence on his amatory proceedings and dilemmas. In common with much of the devotional, didactic and courtesy material is an emphasis on speech and interpretation, specifically male speech and female interpretation. Fin'amor, or courtly love, provides another model of women as audience of male speech.

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[59] From Lambeth MS.853, ll.81-5, cited in Furnivall, ed., *Manners and Morals*, p.40.
[60] Ll.136-7, cited in ibid., p.43.

The lengthy debate concerning fin'amor has shown that there is no evidence that the courts of love had the existence that was once claimed for them.[61] Whether or not the courts of fin'amor literature existed historically, it is undeniably the case that fin'amor writings provide an important literary source for Chaucer. The writings exhibit certain consistent features to which Chaucer patently was not immune, even in the matter of such conventions as love as a sickness, the lover's fear of losing, displeasing or proving unworthy of the beloved, his concern with eloquent expression, the need for secrecy and so on. Also evident in Chaucer's poetry are the aspects of courtly poetry which Denomy characterises as the troubadours' contribution: 'first, the ennobling nature of human love; second, the elevation of the beloved to a position superior to the lover; third, love as ever-unsatisfied, ever-increasing desire'.[62] The purpose of the following discussion will not be to add to an apparently inexhaustible debate, but to examine certain features of this literary tradition in order to see in later chapters how they fare under Chaucer's pen.

One of fin'amor's most notable features is its ability to accommodate notions about language, women and love that, because of their mutual inconsistencies, must exist in tension. Fine speaking, for instance, is seen as both the expression of *trouthe* and nobility of spirit, and as the means by which such qualities might be abused. Larry Benson makes the point that 'the eloquent expression of love is, of course, one of the main concerns of courtly speech', and explains that fin'amor is dependent on the 'formes of speche', 'since

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[61] See J.Benton, 'Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love', in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.Newman (1968; Albany, New York, 1973), and H.A.Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Ithaca, 1975). See also R.Green, 'The *Familia Regis* and the *Familia Cupidis*', in *English Court Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. V.Scattergood and J.Sherborne (London, 1983), who states quite categorically that 'no English document survives which might be taken with any confidence to support the view that actual courts of love were ever held' (p.102).

[62] See B.O'Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester, 1982), pp.11, for a listing of the traditional features of courtly love and those distinctive aspects of troubadour poetry which O'Donoghue cites in his presentation of A.J.Denomy's argument from the latter's *The Heresy of Courtly Love* (1947); see also p.2 and passim.

not only is every lover a poet, but the main characteristics of the courtly lover - his courtesy, humility, and religion of love - are expressed in speech'.[63] Yet the courtly lover's identity might more accurately be seen not as *expressed* by language, as *constructed* in it. As Vance puts it, 'speaking individuals do not appropriate courtly discourse; rather, it appropriates them'.[64] Benson himself sees a political and historical motivation for such a procedure in his discussion of the importance of the identification of love and language for the new chivalric class in the later Middle Ages,

> at a time when that class was still in the process of self-definition and the old idea that deeds rather than birth define gentility was still strong. If knights or ladies speak of love they must use the gentle language of courtly love; to do otherwise is to cease to be gentle, to become churls...For the aristocracy of Chaucer's time courtly love was the ordinary form of love because of the very nature of their language.[65]

The point he is making about the importance of available forms of expression is similar to Atkinson's explanation of the increasing numbers of women participating in the movement of affective lay piety - simply because it was possible for them to do so, because it provided a language in which their participation was possible. As Benson observes: 'for the gentle class of the time...there was no way to explain such feelings [of love] except in the language of courtly love'.[66]

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[63] Benson, 'Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages', in *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, ed. R.Yeager (Connecticut, 1984), p.243.

[64] E.Vance, *Mervelous Signals. Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, 1986), p.274.

[65] Benson, 'Courtly Love and Chivalry', p.244. See also E.Salter, 'Courts and Courtly Love', in *Literature and Western Civilisation: The Medieval World*, vol. 2, ed. D.Daiches and A.Thorlby (London, 1973), who states that 'a reading of troubadour literature makes it clear that erotic delight is celebrated as an essentially ennobling experience in a total context of generous virtues and considerations' (p.416).

[66] Benson, 'Courtly Love and Chivalry', p.245. Richard Green makes much the same point in *Poets and Princepleasers* (Toronto, 1980): 'the ability to experience elevated emotion was seen as one of the differences between gentle and churl, so that it was very much in the interests of all who pretended to gentility not to be thought incapable of love' (p.115).

It is language, as the most important among the conventions of gentle behaviour, that sets the speaker apart from churls incapable of love.[67] The notion is indebted to the rhetorical one that the good speaker is a good man. Matthew of Vendome, for instance, speaks in praise of Cartula, whose

> Style .. receives its strength from its sincerity.
> Written from the heart, his verse sparkles,
> The contents glorify the container. [68]

The implication is that the subject - Cartula - is the origin and not the effect of language, that his discourse is directly representative of his qualities as an individual subject. For Caesar too, language is an example of a personal attribute:

> Thus he spoke, unable to learn the language of a private
> Man even when he wore plebian garb.[69]

Similarly, the praise with which Guillaume de Lorris' Love rewards the lover following his submission assumes that words speak the man:

> 'Much do I love you, and I praise the speech
> That you have made; never could such response
> Come from a villainous, untutored man'.[70]

In other words, identity is spoken - constructed - in language. It cannot merely be expressed in language since the form of expression defines the qualities at issue. The trouble with this conviction, though, was that the courtly lexicon was also available to those for whom it was not appropriate: as in preaching and poetry, immoral speakers could adopt a language that obscured rather than clarified intention, or served to further immoral intention. While it might be the case that the noble cannot speak other than with civilised eloquence, it does

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[67] See Benson, 'Courtly Love and Chivalry', p.244.

[68] *Versification*, 1.54 (p.41).

[69] Ibid., 1.92. The example is taken from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, V,539. These assumptions are allied at least in part with those of Cicero's *De inventione* and the belief that it is eloquence that has civilised society and ought to be studied to enable good men to defend the state. See Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp.10-15.

[70] *Romance of the Rose*, trans. H.Robbins (New York, 1962). Old French ll.1866-8.

not seem to follow that the less noble are correspondingly restricted.[71] Again explicating this problem, Benson observes the fact that the unworthy 'could so easily use the language of courtly love was one of its problems; the noble art of love talking was all too open to abuse by clever scoundrels, such as those clerks in the fabliaux, who realised the tactical advantages of love talking to impressionable young ladies'.[72] In other words, if the language of fin'amor is appropriate to Troilus' *trouthe*, it is also open to abuse by Diomede's lack of it.

Not only notions of nobility or *trouthe*, but also the consequent processes of interpretation are then forced to accommodate an instability in the wake of this potential abuse of language. Traditionally, it is the courtly lover/poet who faces the hermeneutical problem of having to read the signs provided by his beloved. Toril Moi discusses this problem in Andreas' *De amore*:

> Desire...is not only a discursive enterprise but a hermeneutical challenge. The lover's happiness depends on his ability to decipher the lady's words and uncover their hidden meaning...the lover is in desperate need of an introduction to the art of rhetoric which might make him a professional hermeneuticist, a better reader of his lady's text...The necessity of deciphering the beloved's discourse would of course

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[71] In the light of this concern about the availability of a supposedly 'select' language to the world at large, it is interesting to note Peter Dixon's comments: 'one reason for the downfall of the whole rhetorical structure at the end of the eighteenth century was the realisation that the use of even the boldest figures is a characteristic of great poets and orators, primitive societies, and common people alike: "there is nowhere made more use of figures than in the lowest and most vulgar conversation" (Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p.30)', cited in *Rhetoric* (London, 1971), p.42.

[72] Benson, 'Courtly Love and Chivalry', p.248. Toril Moi treats this problem in the context of Andreas Capellanus and the threat posed to an upper class hegemony if the bourgeoisie were to adopt its language. She argues that 'Andreas neatly solves this problem by making his two bourgeois ladies stalwart defenders of the status quo: refusing all hope of their love to their noble suitors, their discourse eloquently demonstrates the dangers of upsetting the social order, thus obligingly helping Andreas to fend off his obvious anxieties about the potentially subversive nature of passion'. See 'Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love', in *Medieval Literature*, ed. D.Aers (Sussex, 1986), p.17.

> not be particularly painful if the lover could be reasonably sure of reaching the correct interpretation.[73]

The lover can never reach the correct interpretation, however, since he is inevitably a jealous lover, for whom 'every utterance, every event, is susceptible to different, often contradictory readings' and who is consequently bereft of 'a transcendental signified, a point at which his interpretations can come to rest'.[74] In Moi's formulation, which draws on deconstruction and psychoanalytic theory, the lover's desire is a *function* of his language.

In psychoanalytic theory, the acquisition of language is marked by an ability to distinguish between subject and object, an ability to say 'I am' (subject) and distinguish this from 'you are' (object). One is constituted as a subject when this utterance is made. The utterance marks a movement away from the pre-Oedipal Imaginary to the Symbolic order of language. Language, in other words, depends on difference rather than identity, on an acknowledgement that the world is different to, and not an extension of, one's own desires. In general terms, this movement from identity - the world as an extension of one's own desires - to difference - the world as 'other' - is analagous to the Christian myth of the fall. The divine presence in the Edenic garden, the divine *logos*, was made absent by the human assertion of difference from God's will. Identity and presence are replaced by difference and absence in the post-lapsarian world. The religious analogy is highly pertinent to an examination of the structures underpinning fin'amor. Just as humankind is unable to recapture a state of grace which can only be reinitiated by the second coming of Christ, the divine *logos*, so there can be no satisfaction of desire since 'there is no final signifier or

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[73] Ibid., p.26. Moi's point is one that holds true generally, and is not compromised by the fact, as noted by Kelly in *Love and Marriage*, that Andreas' work seems to have been less popular than was once supposed: 'striking as it is, there is little or no reference to it or use of it in the literature of succeeding generations, not only in England, where (as far as we know) Andrew was not heard of, but also in France, Italy, and Spain, where his work was known' (p.39).

[74] Moi, 'Desire in Language', pp.26, 27.

object that can *be* that which has been lost forever'.[75] Desire and language proceed from a sense of lack, in a movement from desire (signifier) to desire (signifier) in an endless process of difference and absence. The quest to achieve the beloved - to substitute her presence for her absence - is like the quest to achieve a meaning fully present in language. The love metaphors present in religious discourse, as studied by Bynum for instance, point to a similar quest. The Christian lover seeks union with an ineffable God as the courtly lover seeks union with an unattainable lady. Both desire to replace absence for presence, in a quest marked by a restlessness seeking final rest in God/beloved. The psychological model provides an explanation for the socio-historical necessity of the beloved's unattainability: if she were not unattainable, the lover would not have to produce the love poetry that validates his status as a lover. Similarly, God's ineffability is the necessary condition of his divinity, and one's own humanity.

The effect of fin'amor relations, however, is to shift the interpretive onus from lover to the beloved, from speaker to audience, since the language of the lover himself might not be a direct expression of his intentions. The lady must read the text both of her lover and of his words, and the relations between lover and beloved become implicated in the connection between sexuality and reading: if the lover is successful and the beloved is convinced by the text of his person and his poetry - if she reads him in the way he wishes to be read - she is simultaneously seduced. The hermeneutical problem facing the reader/beloved is evident in *Troilus and Criseyde*: if Troilus and Diomede both talk to Criseyde in the language of fin'amor, how is she, if circumscribed by the love conventions available to her, able to distinguish one as a true and the other as a false lover? It is because language can be abused by false sophists as well as validating the true lover that the duty of interpretation shifts from the hopeful lover to his audience.

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[75] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.101.

The putatively empowering conceptions of woman in the fin'amor tradition are notable for their reassertion of feminine passivity. Woman is the ideal inspiration of the fine lover, perceived as so noble and untarnished that the concept - or conceit - arose that 'the lady's love enhanced the *value* of her lover'.[76] The lover might increase his *valors* (value), along with his *pretz* (merit) if he is the lover of a noble woman. The lady remains a passive figure in these love proceedings: she can never gain *valors* or *pretz* since she attains them automatically through her husband.[77] Her choices, too, are limited, since her 'decisions' are dictated by a strict regime of courtly etiquette that leaves little room for a notion of female desire, merely a response to the desires of others.

In fin'amor writings, women were both judge and audience, presiding over the love etiquette and dilemmas of male lover poets. The fiction of woman's innate superiority and sense of decorum was just that, however, a fiction. Its persistence is explained by Green in terms of male self-interest: 'the polite fiction of female sovereignty could not be lightly disregarded by those who wanted to cultivate a reputation for chivalry'.[78] In noting that 'whether fact or fiction, the courts of love of Eleanor and Marie were based on the concept of a law, a *curia*',[79] Green clearly distinguishes between the fiction of female superiority and sovereignty in those courts, and the fact of women's actual, minimal influence. He uses literary evidence to indicate a prevailing belief in women's inability to judge good from bad poetry, arguing against 'the impression that the standards of literary decorum in the courts of the late middle ages were set by women'.[80]

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[76] Meg Bogin, *The Women Troubadours* (New York, 1976), p.54.
[77] See Bogin, *Women Troubadours*, pp.54-5.
[78] Green, '*Familia Regis*', pp.104-5.
[79] Ibid., p.90.
[80] Ibid., p.97. He notes also that women made up only a tiny proportion of the total household (p.98).

Since the purported subject of the love poems and problems that women were depicted as judging was whether or not ladies ought to succumb in given situations, it might be seen as logical that female figures presided over the courts of love. Green finds a different logic behind such a literary institution: 'from the notion of the ideal courtier as the perfect lover, it is but a short step to seeing the ideal court as a court of love'.[81] The position for the lover-poet is somewhat different, since his principle conquest is not sexual but linguistic. The desire to achieve the beloved is the vehicle rather than goal of his endeavours. In her article, 'Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature', Joan Ferrante observes that:

> in the *canso*, the form in which most Provençal love poetry was written, the woman never appears or speaks for herself, and is rarely even described - the poet is entirely taken up with his own fantasies.[82]

She concludes from the male lover's exploits and responses in Guiraut de Bornelh's *pastorela*, 'L'autrier lo primier jorn d'Aost', that 'it is quite clear that what he really wants is not satisfaction, but the excuse to complain about the lack of it'.[83] The speaking and controlling voice in the poetry of fin'amor is male:

> The lover sings the song; he is the lady's inferior and her adoring votive; his love inspires and refines him; above all, he is totally possessed by love...In nearly all cases it seems that the poet is more concerned with his feelings and the form he gives to his expression of them than with the object of his love in herself.[84]

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[81] Ibid., p.91.

[82] In *Women's Studies*, 11 (1984), 70.

[83] Ibid., 72.

[84] O'Donoghue, *Courtly Love Tradition*, p.5. He later remarks that 'much of the troubadour poetry...is *about* composition and its difficulties, with the love theme apparently used only as a structure to contain the discussion' (p.100). An exception to the statement that the speaking voice of fin'amor poetry is male are the female troubadours or *trobairitz*, women poets who, as Bogin notes, were virtually unheard of in the Middle Ages. Since my principal concern here is with literary influences on Chaucer, I will not be considering those writers. It is interesting to note however, that this poetry, according to Bogin, is characterised by a lesser concern with word play and the exercise of craft than male authored works, and by a lack of idealisation of love relationships, in which worship is not seen as a desirable mode; see *Women Troubadours*, p.13 and passim.

If male prowess is formal or linguistic rather than sexual in nature, it seems that what the lover sees in the beloved is less a source of amorous bliss than a reflection of his own desires, a mirroring of his potential to achieve victory over his own limitations. It is this kind of contrast between avowed selflessness in love and the achievement of self-interest by way of love that Chaucer might be seen as manipulating, in different ways, in both the *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde.*

In a commentary on Dante, Boccaccio pays heed to the seductive power of women, with a tongue-in-cheek concession to the dismissal by the ignorant of the power of poetic, as opposed to biblical texts:

> What thing can women not work in us, if they wish to, since they can achieve such great things without even trying? They have charm, beauty, and natural sexual instinct...And that this be true, let us pass over what Jove did to Europa...since as these things are poetic fictions many people of little understanding would dismiss them as fables...Was there more than one woman in the world when our first father...succumbed to her persuasions?[85]

It is inevitable that men succumb to the attractions of women, and for the poet, this submission is not only inevitable, but a validation of his identity as a poet. Boccaccio, again tongue-in-cheek, acknowledges the intimate link between making poetry and making love in tracing Dante's sexual career as he would his poetic career: the implication of his confession is that in himself, as in Dante the 'magnificent poet, lust (*lussuria*) found most ample space; and not just in his youthful years, but also in maturity'.[86] It is a sign, rather than a cause of Boccaccio's being a poet, that he like Dante, is also a lover. Woman, then, becomes a figure for the poet's pursuit of the sign, his attempt to achieve a stature that is not so much sexual as literary.

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[85] Cited *MLT*, p.503.
[86] Ibid., p.502.

PART II: THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

For wel I wot that Crist himselve telleth
That in Israel, as wyd as is the lond,
That so gret feyth in al that he ne fond,
As in a woman; and this is no lie. (1879-82)

Until recently, twentieth century criticism of the *Legend of Good Women* has been largely concerned with questions about the historical aspects of the poem: which is the revised version of the Prologue? By whom was the poem commissioned? And what historical personages are represented by Alceste and Cupid? Another dominating theme of criticism has been to attribute the 'failure' of the poem to Chaucer's boredom.[1] The received wisdom is that the poem is an unfortunate and largely unsuccessful interlude between *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales*. These studies, by and large, have little to say about the legends which follow the Prologue, an omission redressed in the only full-length studies devoted to the poem, Frank's *Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women*, Lisa Kiser's *Telling Classical Tales*, and Donald Rowe's *Through Nature to Eternity*.[2] Frank's work abandoned the dirge in favour of praise of the *Legend* as an experiment in the brief narrative mode, while Kiser believes that 'the poem was written to set forth some of Chaucer's basic views about literature: its sources, its usefulness, its forms, its audience, and

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[1] For a review of the 'bored Chaucer' school of criticism, see R.W. Frank, Jr, *Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), '[Excursus] The Legend of Chaucer's Boredom', pp.189 ff.

[2] Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales. Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca, 1983), and Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity. Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Lincoln, 1988). All these works include historiographical surveys of the criticism on the poem, and I will not duplicate their work here. The earlier work of such critics as Robert Payne, *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (New Haven, 1963) and John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, 1979), by contrast with much of the *Legend* criticism, involves close readings of the poem and, particularly in Fyler's case, with the individual legends themselves. As will be evident in the following three chapters, my own reading of the poem owes a great debt to Fyler.

its capacity to represent Christian truth...[it] is most urgently concerned with Chaucer's interest in classical narrative'.[3] Rowe's aim is to 'place the *Legend* and the *Legend*'s backgrounds against this background [of *Legend* scholarship]'.[4] However, his 'largely conservative...goal' - to reconcile the poem's 'surface contradictions under the assumption that such an understanding will essentially accord with the poet's intent'[5] - falls prey to the very practice he himself criticises several times, which is that of reading the poem according to some predetermined and distortingly applied agenda. Elaine Hansen's article, 'Irony and the Antifeminist Narrator in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', is one of the few studies attempting to read the poem from a self-conscious feminist perspective.[6]

Female characters, in the fiction of the poem, are principally involved in the first two of the three rhetorical categories of audience, subject matter and speaker. The poem, according to the god of Love, is written for a female audience that requires compensation for its existing Chaucerian literary image. The representation of women is featured as the motivation for the poem, the *causa materialis*, its subject matter, and the

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[3] Preface to *Classical Tales*, p.9.

[4] Rowe, *To Eternity*, p.14. Unfortunately, I gained access to Rowe's book too late to incorporate its findings in the following reading. Briefly, although on some specific points our readings coincide, Rowe's conclusions generally differ from my own. His mission against the 'depersonalisation and historical dislocation' of 'the day's academic fashion [of] formalist and structuralist readings' (p.6), prompts him to assert a common sense position as an escape from 'radical indeterminacy' (p.9). See, for instance, his discussion of the ironic reading of the poem by H.Goddard, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *JEGP*, 7 (1908), 87-129, and 8 (1909), 47-112 (p.9). Rowe's misconception of what he calls 'structuralist criticism', along with his own interest in using the poem as an occasion to examine the order of the medieval universe, as suggested by the title of his book, leads him to oversimplify some of the readings to which he refers in 'Backgrounds' (chapter 1).

[5] Rowe, *To Eternity*, p.14.

[6] In *JEGP*, 82 (1983), 11-31. See also S.Delany, 'Rewriting Woman Good. Gender and the Anxiety of Influence in Two Late-Medieval Texts', in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. J.Wasserman and R.Blanch (Syracuse, 1986), and P.Martin, *Chaucer's Women. Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (London, 1990). Martin devotes less than one chapter to the *Legend*, and prefaces her reading with the confession that in reading the poem, 'I become bemused and bored. I also find the world of the Legends depressing' (p.205).

causa finalis, the end to which the poem is directed: if women are encouraged, through their positive representation, to follow Love's law, they will be saved, and the law will be perpetuated. This feminine dissatisfaction is articulated by the god of Love, whose sentence of death is commuted to a literary penance - the production of a moral-poetic 'sentence' - through the intervention of his wife, Alceste. In the first place, the resulting palinode has as its subject matter (*causa materialis*) women who proved true in loving, women as objects of praise. In the second place, it must also involve men as objects of blame, men who were false lovers. Although the *Legend* is chronologically subsequent to *Troilus and Criseyde*, it will be useful to begin here, since the issues of the feminine and its poetic articulation can be brought together in a more condensed setting than in the longer poem. As I hope will become apparent in the readings of the two poems, the use of French feminist theories will also be seen as more applicable to the shorter poem.

There is a further connection between the feminine and the poetic which will be examined in Part II. The god of Love extends the notion of *utilitas* as a justifying principle of poetry to a ludicrous degree in demanding that the poet use his craft to prove the point that, in love, women are true and men are faithless. This indicates an intention not only to restrict the poet's choice, or literary licence, but also to delimit the possible sphere of signification that his work might have: women must inevitably be objects of praise, and men of blame. It corresponds to the treatment that the heroines consequently receive. Just as the poet's subject matter and his manner of treatment are predetermined, so too the heroines exhibit little in the way of choice or freedom except to fall in love with men destined to betray them, which in turn determines their signification as 'good women'. In this sense, a study of the poetics of the *Legend* has implications for a study of the feminine: the reduction of poetry to Love's manifesto here corresponds to the reduction of the feminine to the reactive and passive.

Love's command is, in effect, that the poet preach the religion of love in his verse. He abides by the courtly fiction of a female audience, and seems to take up a pro-woman position: the poet's prior works have offended women by showing them to be fickle in love. A female audience is implied both outside the poem, through the poet's reference to the courtly dispute between the followers of the flower and of the leaf, and within the Prologue, by Alceste and by the god of Love as surrogate female reader. What then, are the implications of Love's reading of poetic texts and after them, of female readers? And what are the implications for women and for poetry of the god's laying down the law on sexual and poetic levels?

Chapters four and five will examine the effect of Love's position on these issues, which attempts to control the dangerous potential of a poetics whose imaginative models are seditious of the order he wishes to uphold. Chapter three will elaborate on what that position is, contrasting Love's attitudes toward literature and literary representation with the attitudes articulated by Alceste and by the poet. In the first section of Chapter three, I shall concentrate on the representation of Alceste, and her significance for the narrator.

Chapter 3

CHALLENGING LOVE'S "SENTENCE": THE PROLOGUE

I. The Articulation of Alceste: Experience and Authority

The use of the dream vision as a *forma tractandi* (mode of treatment or didactic procedure) is seen in rhetorical terms as an appealing framework for a didactic or poetic tract. In Book 2, 'Elegance of Words', of his *Art of Versification*, Matthew of Vendome elaborates on such a mode:

> To charm my audience I have introduced a dream-vision imagined as having occurred the night before and worth relating to make them more receptive to learning by means of a pleasant story; to sharpen the attention, foster goodwill, encourage a desire to listen, avert boredom; and to whet the appetite for instruction.[1]

The dream vision was also an appropriate form for the phenomenon of the new household courtly poet who replaced the old minstrel in the courts of the later Middle Ages. Green characterises this change most significantly in terms of the shift in the relationship between author and audience. Literary etiquette meant a comparative loss of independent status in the position of the household poet, for whom it would be 'a quite unacceptable expertise, to set himself up as an authority in an arena where his audience might well regard themselves as his equals or even (since the capacity to experience love had long been regarded as an exclusively aristocratic prerogative) his superiors'.[2] The convention of the dream vision, absolving the poet from direct responsibility for the sentiments expressed therein, thus provides a suitable setting for what occurs in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, a discussion about poetics focusing on the author or speaker, the subject matter, and audience.

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[1] See *Versification*, II.1 (p.63).
[2] Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, p.112.

Chaucer begins the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* with reference to experience and authority as alternative sources of knowledge:

> A thousand sythes have I herd men telle
> That there is joye in hevene and peyne in helle,
> And I acorde wel that it be so;
> But natheles, this wot I wel also,
> That there ne is non that dwelleth in this contre
> That eyther hath in helle or hevene ybe,
> Ne may of it non other weyes witen,
> But as he hath herd seyd or founde it writen;
> For by assay there may no man it preve. (G 1-9)[3]

He has immediately set forth three sources of knowledge available to him as a fourteenth-century poet: 'as he hath herd seyd', 'as he hath...founde it writen' and 'by assay'; in other words, the oral tradition, the literary tradition and 'direct' experience.[4] Since it may express facts about knowledge which cannot be proved by direct experience, the literary tradition may be seen as a source of authority. It is 'of remembraunce the keye', the cultural memory of humankind. The familiar bookishness of the Chaucerian narrator is soon suggested:

> On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
> And in myn herte have hem in reverence. (G 30-1)

In this latest of Chaucer's dream visions,[5] though, some disruption to the naive acceptance of old books is implied. His own texts, as demonstrated in the bibliographies provided by

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[3] As far as the question of the chronology of the two Prologues is concerned, I am following the argument of J.L.Lowes and most subsequent critics, that G represents the revised version of the Prologue. See J.L.Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* considered in its Chronological Relations', *PMLA*, 20 (1905), 749-864. Consequently, most of my references will be to this version, although I have tried to consider both versions, and have used F where it serves to make the point more clearly.

[4] Although of course all experience, whether of the natural world or of written authority, is mediated, the term 'direct experience' is used for the sake of convenience to indicate the former. As Rowe notes, Gower also begins his *Confessio Amantis* 'with a discussion of the value of books in keeping the past alive' (Rowe, *To Eternity*, p.8). I shall refer to the *Confessio* in more detail in chapters 4 and 5.

[5] The most common view is that the F version of the Prologue was written around 1386, and the G version in 1394, after *Troilus* and before or during the *Tales*. It seems likely that a number of the legends had been composed earlier than either Prologue.

Alceste and Cupid, are themselves part of the literary tradition, and it may be these internal references that prompt the narrator to propose a critical reading:

> And to the doctryne of these olde wyse
> Yeven credence, in every skylful wyse. (G 19-20)

Not only his own works, but those on which he draws are bequests to the audience, to believe or to leave, or to read with a critical scepticism. This discrimination in appraising authority must come in part from a knowledge procured from experience, as experience itself is informed by the authority of books. Robert Burlin sees such a dynamic between experience and authority as characteristic of the dream vision's explorations of the capacity of the imagination:

> Recurrent in these explorations is the hypothesis that experience and authority, in the various connotations, are not mutually exclusive; as unduly polarised aspects of a single process, they are equally implicit in the act of the imaginative understanding.[6]

The implication of the narrator's musings is that the relationship between experience and authority might be reciprocal, that a reading of either one of these sources of knowledge is informed by the other.

The limitations of a knowledge gained only from books are suggested further by the power of Spring to draw the narrator away from his books: 'Farewel my stodye, as lastynge that sesoun!' (G39). His experience of the season, though, comes heavily inscribed with literary convention: the scene is a meadow in the month of May, flowers and birds abound, and, to a greater extent in the F than in the G version, he praises the object of his devotion in the terms of fin'amor. In the earlier version, he assures us that 'ther loved no wight hotter in his lyve' (F59) and implores the 'lovers that kan make of sentement' to assist in his labours.[7] The appeal to lovers to dispense some well-worn courtly clichés suggests that the narrator might not be as literal-minded about literary convention as he seems. This

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[6] Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), p.32.
[7] Similar sentiments are expressed in the G version: see ll.61 ff.

impression is strengthened by a suggestion of parody in the narrator's panegyric: his praise is directed not towards a beloved lady, but towards a flower - the daisy. He produces a string of agricultural images which verge on the farcical (G61-5, F73-7), before abruptly shifting the tone of the Prologue in the F version. He praises the daisy in what reads like a devotional lyric to the Virgin (F84-96):

> She is the clernesse and the verray lyght
> That in this derke world me wynt and ledeth... (F 84-5)

He takes care to stress the earthly aspect of the beloved, who provides a source of inspiration, both in his life and in his poetry:

> Be ye my gide and lady sovereyne!
> As to myn erthly god to yow I calle,
> Bothe in this werk and in my sorwes alle. (F 94-6)

Again abruptly, he immediately shifts back to the reflections on experience and authority with which the Prologue had begun (G81, F97). The alternation between authority and experience as sources of knowledge seems to result in narrative disjunction.

An identification between the daisy and Alceste, to which the narrator proves obtusely oblivious, is suggested by the description of Alceste at the beginning of the dream vision. The narrator dreams he is in the meadow when the god of Love appears with his queen and nineteen ladies, who in turn are followed by a number of women, each 'trewe of love' (G193). In the G version of the Prologue, the ladies sing a balade in praise of the god's queen. Although they specifically name Alceste as the object of praise, this does not succeed in assisting the narrator's identification.[8] The narrator's description of Alceste, establishing her as the personification of his beloved daisy (G146-57), draws on the French *marguerite* tradition. Froissart's *La Dit de la Marguerite* tells the story of the birth of the

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[8] In the F version, the transition to the balade is more abrupt: the narrator relates the balade, referring in the refrain to 'My lady'. Revision is suggested by the more integral relation of the balade with the rest of the Prologue in G.

daisy from the tears shed by Heres on the grave of Cephei.[9] Heres, like Alceste, was a woman true in love, and the earth opened up to receive her tears as it did for Alceste when she descended into Hades in order to prolong the life of her husband Admetus. Alceste as the personification of the daisy emblematises thematic links - of making poetry and making love, of the nature of fiction and its relations to fiction and to the world, and of feminine articulation - between the introduction, the dream vision and the *Legend* proper. The women in Love's ranks, who have not sung of Alceste in a balade in F, declare that the daisy is the emblem of all their glory: "That bereth our alder pris in figurynge!" (F298).[10] As the personification of the daisy, Alceste encompasses the narrator's devotion both to the daisy in the meadow and to his books. The relationship between experience and authority, between fiction as heritage and fiction as process, is again seen to be reciprocal; as Payne points out, '*because* it can attract him [the narrator] so powerfully, the daisy *drives him back* to his books again, seeking adequate means to praise it artfully'.[11]

Marguerite is also translated as 'pearl', a conventional symbol of purity, which points to a more religious aspect of Alceste.[12] When Love reflects on Alceste - 'But pite renneth soone in gentil herte' (F503, G491) - he recalls an earlier passage in the F Prologue. The narrator refers to the 'foweles' forgiveness of the tydif, who 'besoghte mercy of hir trespassynge' (155), observing that:

> ... Pitee, thurgh his stronge gentil myght,
> Forgaf, and made Mercy passen Ryght. (F 161-2)

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[9] See J.L.Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as related to the French *Marguerite* Poems and the *Filostrato*', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 19. See also *Chaucer and Ovid*, pp.116-9, and Rowe, *To Eternity*, pp.24-5. That Alceste is the personification of the daisy is commonly accepted; see, for instance *Classical Tales*, chapter 1.

[10] In this interpretation I follow G.L. MacAulay, 'Notes on Chaucer', *MLR*, 4 (1908-9), who reads the line not as 'that bears away the prize from us all in external beauty or figure', but 'that displays the glory of us all in a figure or emblem' (19).

[11] *Key*, p.94.

[12] See Rowe's discussion of this point in *To Eternity*, pp.34, 36, and notes 62, 63 (p.179).

Alceste appears to be associated with the New Law of mercy, displacing the god's Old Law of justice.[13] The nature of Alceste's sacrifice in her willingness to die in order that her husband might live bears comparison with Christ's sacrifice.[14] Lydgate's 'As a Mydsomer Rose', an explicitly religious lyric written about seventy years after the *Legend*, indicates the conventional context and traditional religious symbolism associated with the season of Spring and new life. It also points to the daisy's habit of closing its petals in the darkness of night, and opening them again at dawn:

> Floures open upon euery grene,
> When the larke, messager of day,
> Salueth the vprist of the sonne shene
> Moost amerously in Apryl and in May
> And Aurora, ageyn the morwe gray,
> Causith the dayseye hir crowne to vncloose,
> Worldly gladnesse is medlyd with affray,
> Al stant on chaunge, like a mydsomer roose.[15]

The parallel between between Alceste and Christ is reinforced by the theme of resurrection and religious symbolism running through the Prologue, particularly the earlier version. The poet states that he desires:

> With dredful hert and glad devocioun,
> For to ben at the resurecciouN
> Of this flour, whan that yt shulde unclose
> Agayn the sonne, that roos as red as rose. (F 109-12)

Alfred David notes that the daisy's resurrection and the rising of the sun are a 'symbolic re-enactment of Alceste's return from darkness into light'.[16] The conventions on which

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[13] See W.Dodd, *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower* (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), who states that one of Love's duties is the administration of justice (p.19). It is also noteworthy that Alceste's defence of Chaucer includes reference to Love's kingship.

[14] Fyler believes that Chaucer's identification of Alceste with *marguerite* 'gives the flower a shocking significance. For when we hear that the narrator is present at the daisy's "resurecciouN" (G110), and are reminded of the basis of Alceste's fame, we suddenly realise that she takes the place, in Cupid's religion, of Christ the Redeemer'. See *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.118.

[15] In *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, part 2, ed. H.N.MacCracken (London, 1934), 'A Mydsomer Rose', ll.17-24.

[16] David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry* (Indiana, 1976), p.44.

Chaucer draws help to illustrate the religious implications of the Prologue. Lydgate's lyric again provides an instance of the symbolic values of the sun, the rose and redness brought together in an affirmative resurrective context:

> It was the Roose of the bloody feeld,
> Roose of Iericho, that greuh in Beedlam;
> The five Roosys portrayed in the sheeld,
> Splayed in the baneer at Ierusalem.
> The sonne was clips and dirk in euery rem
> Whan Crist Ihesu five wellys lyst vncloose,
> Toward Paradys, callyed the rede strem,
> Off whos five woundys prent in your hert a roose. (113-20)

Alceste also has associations with the Virgin Mary, another archetypal figure of merciful intercession conventionally associated with the symbol of the rose. Just as the birds are saved by the regenerative power of spring after their devastation by winter, so is the poet rescued from the death sentence through the intervention of Alceste.[17]

The garden in which the poet sleeps, like the garden in which his dream vision takes place, is a highly artificial environment. It is from this environment, with its 'turves fresshe ygrave' and its strewn flowers, that the poet rises to the inspiration of the daisy and the craft of his 'makyng' (G97-101). The artificiality of the poet's boudoir-garden, from which he rises in a creative act, adumbrates the garden where his vision of Love's company takes place, bringing to mind the conventional play of secular love poetry on the connection between a garden and a woman's body.[18] The artificial garden, *hortus conclusus*, is

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[17] On the evidence of the religious diction of 'devocioun' and 'resurecciоun', and F53-4, Rowe concludes that 'as the first in the hierarchy of flowers, it contains all flowers...As an image that returns multiplicity to unity, it is a reflection of the *forma formarum*, of God as the 'idea of ideas' (Rowe, *To Eternity*, p.33). 'In short', Rowe concludes, Chaucer has shown [the daisy and Alceste] to be mutually confirming and amplifying manifestations of the universe. Together they demonstrate the order of nature, the vitality and law of the mutable' (p.37).

[18] See D. Pearsall and E. Salter, *Landscapes and Gardens of the Medieval World* (London, 1973), pp.76-118, esp. pp.105-6, p.80. See also Martin's discussion of the sacred and secular ancestry of the garden in *Chaucer's Women*, chapter 7: 'Real Women in Imaginary Gardens', passim., esp. pp.115-21.

particularly apt for the Prologue's shifting associations between profane and divine love encapsulated in the figure of Alceste, saviour, intercessor and courtly lady. The ambiguity has its scriptural source in Canticles 4:12: 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed'.[19] Evocative of both infertility ('a spring shut up', 'a fountain sealed') and fertility (the nurturing power of water, and the garden itself), the *hortus conclusus* provided a popular image of femininity as a metaphor applied to the Virgin Mary. The *hortus conclusus* image also implies the necessarily exclusive activity of both secular and divine love, exemplified clearly in the *Romance of the Rose*, where the garden's outer wall figures concepts of difficulty and rejection (Envy, Covetousness, and so on), which are excluded from the conventions of the internal domain:

> It is entirely fitting, therefore, that this garden of secular love should, like the original and remade Earthly Paradise, refuse to countenance sins against charity such as Envy, Hatred and Covetousness. The perfect lover, like the perfect Christian lover, should be magnanimous, unselfish.[20]

It is this magna nimity and unselfishness that is lacking in Cupid's competing, tyrannical theology of *cupiditas*. Carnality - whether denied or affirmed - is the central issue in the image of femininity inscribed in the *hortus conclusus*. The earthly paradise of the garden could indicate either a devotional setting, associated with the Virgin Mary, or its perversion, as that presented in the *Merchant's Tale*. Chaucer's reference to the dispute between the followers of the flower and the leaf in the Prologue also brings to mind this moral distinction between *caritas* and *cupiditas*: the frivolous and ultimately futile pursuit of pleasure exemplified in the flower (Flora) and the constancy and chastity exemplified in the leaf (Diana).[21] Two lines after the description of the poet's bed, the creative act of the

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[19] See Pearsall, *Landscapes and Gardens*, p.76.

[20] Ibid., p.84.

[21] See D.Pearsall, ed., *The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies* (Manchester, 1980), p.50.

dream vision commences. Alceste remains the figure of intercession and resolution, necessary for poetic achievement.

II. A Model for Misreading: Cupid, the god of Love

The god of Love commences the three-way discussion of poetry with a diatribe against the poet, his 'mortal fo', for discouraging recruits to his doctrine, or law. The chief force of his argument, more detailed in the G version, is that the poet has slandered, or mis-said ('misseyest') women:

> "... of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
> And hyndrest hem with thy translacyoun
> And lettest folk to han devocyoun
> To serven me, and holdest it folye
> To trust on me". (G 249-53)

His claim is that the poet has misread his old books and in misreading, has subsequently miswritten the history of women in love. The effect of the poet's work, identical in Love's terms with the poet's intention, has been to destroy faith in Love by means of the recorded faithlessness of women. As becomes clear in the course of his literary criticism, Love perceives no disjunction between intention and effect, a misperception to which both Alceste and the poet call attention.

Love's critical practice is riddled with contradictions. Implicit in his reading of love-texts, over whose signification he claims authority, is an exclusion of any interpretive process. This is a perversion of the Ciceronian conception that the subject matter of speech (*res*) is inseparable from the words (*verba*) which serve to bring it into being, that expression and thought are indivisible and transparent, and that the written text therefore requires no interpretation. He accuses the poet:

> "For in *pleyn* text, *it nedeth nat to glose*,
> Thow hast translated the Romauns of the Rose". (G 254-5;my emphasis)

Both in interpreting his previous works and in decreeing the 'effect' of his next work, the god conflates a number of assumptions about *intentio auctoris* (authorial intention) and about the *affectus* (disposition or affections)[22] of the audience. He treats his sources as unequivocal historical documents (G253-316) whose meaning is self-evident. In holding that intention and effect are identical, Loves excludes the problems of poetic effect, and so the affective and mediating role of the imagination. He assumes that poetic language is somehow a transparent window on intention, the wisdom or right intention of the poet being incarnate in the words of his text, which 'it nedeth nat to glose'. Love evidently regards the poet as a fool who is 'thereto nothyng able' (G246), a heretic for whom he must provide a fitting bibliography. In terms of Love's view of rhetoric, the poet cannot be a *vir bonus* because he has 'missaid'; it follows that any task the poet is set cannot possibly meet with success. The god of Love should be neither surprised that such an incompetent unworthy should have produced reprehensible work in the past, and nor could he reasonably expect his present command to be executed successfully.[23]

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[22] See Minnis, 'Chaucer and Comparative Literary Theory', esp. pp.60-7.

[23] If the poet is regarded only as a translator of others' works, similar problems arise. First, the translator was not regarded merely as a passive figure, but as one who ought to improve on or even compete with the original. See, for instance, Quintilian's elaboration on the Ciceronian notion of paraphrase: 'but I would not have paraphrase restrict itself to the bare interpretation of the original: its duty is rather to rival and vie with the original in the expression of the same thoughts' (*Inst. orat.* X.v.5). See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*, (Oxford, 1979), p.36. As Copeland notes, 'in the secular oratory of antiquity, and in the sacred writing of Christianity, discourse is itself constitutive of meaning. In Roman rhetoric, the rationale for an aggressive and contestatory translation against the word of the original is precisely that of reinventing the text by resignifying it, to change its language and therefore its significance. Thus for Cicero, the aim of translation is to critique - reinterpret - and thereby reconstitute the original text' ("Pro Verbo", p.31). Second, even if the contribution of the translator is ignored and the 'original' work judged, then Love's autocratic censorship is tantamount to book burning: works that are deemed unsuitable in his scheme of things are to be consigned to oblivion.

Similarly, Love's audience have no claim to any particular interpretive bias, and here, Gabriel Josipovici's remarks about Rimbaud could apply equally to Amor's fundamental misconception:

> What he desires is not communication but communion, the total and direct contact of one person with another through a language so charged that it will act without needing to pass by way of the interpreting mind at all; in other words a language that is not conventional but natural.[24]

When for instance, Cupid condemns Chaucer for having written *Troilus and Criseyde* he is perceiving, in accordance with his particular perspective, merely the fact of Criseyde's unfaithfulness. He is ignoring the Quintilian admonition that context is all important and abstractions should not be wrenched without regard for the text as a whole.[25] In so doing, he is perpetrating a *reductio ad absurdum* of the justification of poetry in terms of its utility by attempting to quell the multiplicity that interpretation explicates. Cupid's is only one reading available from a particular subject position of a poem which could equally be interpreted as a celebration of 'trouthe' in love.

Love's definition of a good woman is worthy of closer inspection. He argues that the subject matter from both the historical (Jerome, Livy and so on) and literary traditions (Ovid's works, his own literary existence as son of Venus) was not lacking for the presentation of women true in love. The clerks, for example, knew how to extract the 'corn', or appropriate morals, from their classical sources, which told of one hundred good women for every one bad:

> This knoweth God, and alle clerkes eke,
> That usen swiche materes for to seke. (G 278-9)

Cupid's repository of good women consists of women so true in love:

> That, rathere than they wolde take a newe,

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[24] Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book. A Study of Modern Fiction* (St Albans, Herts, 1973), pp.194-5.

[25] *Inst. orat.*, X.i.20.

They chose to be ded in sondry wyse,
And deiden, as the story wol devyse;
And some were brend, and some were cut the hals,
And some dreynt, for they wolden not be fals.
For alle keped they here maydenhede,
Or elles wedlok, or here widewehede.
And this thing was nat kept for holynesse,
But al for verray vertu and clennesse,
And for men schulde sette on hem no lak;
And yit they were hethene, al the pak,
That were so sore adrad of alle shame. (G 289-300)

Death before dishonour, or at least before the next lover can 'sette on hem no lak'. The important thing is to die with the feminine estate intact (294-5). In lamenting the 'wo that they endure for here trouthe' (287), Love is making explicit the essential quality of the good woman. As is apparent in the stories he cites, the point is not whether the women benefit from adherence to his law, which, consistently they seem not to do, but whether they *endure* the experience long enough to be deserted by their faithless lovers. Love's assumption that the 'pleyn text' requires no interpretation is comically undercut by his own interpretation of the texts he encourages Chaucer to pillage for tales of good women, that is, women whose 'trouthe' in love consisted of waiting decoratively for abuse and desertion, and tidily suiciding afterwards, virginity, wifehood or widowhood intact. It is this construction of a good woman that Love intends when he endorses Alceste's proposed penance. His notion of a legend of good women betrayed by false men amounts to a legend of a Criseyde faithful in love betrayed by Troilus. For Chaucer to enact successfully Love's intentions which, as we have seen, would not be possible anyway, would mean that his poem should have a significance identical to that of his previous works except that women and not men must be the losers. Love's position is complicit in an essentialism whose purported 'rewriting' of feminine representation in no way entails a breaking down of binary structures of female oppression. As such, it lends itself to the analysis of phallocentrism proposed by French feminists.

The god of Love condemns the poet's literary curriculum vitae for praising men and blaming women. The new directive to which his description must be geared is precisely the opposite: women must become objects of praise and men of blame. Such a course would presumably work to maintain the status quo of the religion of love: if women continue to indulge their propensity for martyrdom and specularization (as objects of male desire and reflections of male authority), and men for their congenital faithlessness, then Cupid's law has the promise of perpetuity. This then is the articulation assigned to women by the law of Love: an articulation which only has meaning as the specularized image of men, and which is incapable of a subjectivity independent of this reflection. Yet clearly Alceste, as the most pressing example, is not contained in such a reading; alternatively, what happens when such an interpretive framework is used to read 'auctorite'? The *Legend of Good Women* provides the site for exploring the implications for fiction and also for women of such a *utilitarian* interpretation that in the first place denies it is an interpretation at all, and in the second place is 'oute of al charite'.

What Cupid actually condemns in Chaucer is not the poet's failure to propound truth in love but his failure to present women as suitably subservient to men's desires. That his position has parallels with prevailing social attitudes outside this poem is indicated by the angry reception given to Alain Chartier's *Belle dame sans merci*. As Green notes, the outraged response to the poem did not arise from a perception of the absurdity of a lover dying from unrequited love, but from the 'impropriety of presenting a mistress so lacking in pity as to allow such a thing to happen. It is an extraordinary paradox that Chartier should have been branded as an anti-feminist for creating a heroine who asserts her right to make up her own mind'.[26] The situation of the Prologue - the poet as defendant at the court of love - stands in a particular historical tradition whereby the propriety of a poet's work is

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[26] Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, p.114.

judged by an aristocratic jury.[27] In the fiction of the Prologue, the god of Love's notion of 'defending' women is indicated by the grounds on which he condemns *Troilus and Criseyde*:

> And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste,
> That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
> That ben as trewe as ever was any steel. (F 332-4)[28]

He perceives that both Troilus and Criseyde are unlikely to attract men to Love because they exemplify undesirable results of male involvement in love. An entourage of passive women and faithless men on the other hand, would reveal the ease and pleasure which result for men who follow Love's law. But the very ambiguity of Love's words undermines his ostensible sentiment: it could equally be the men as the 'wommen' of line 333 that were 'as trewe as ever was any steel'. Love's own words demonstrate the futility of his quest to assign univocal, unambiguous meaning to texts.

In the light of this, the narrator's expression of intention at the beginning of the Prologue, in which he appears to comply with the view that a clear and direct textual meaning can be established, itself poses an interpretive problem. It is worth examining this passage in some detail. He states that:

> For myn entent is, or I fro yow fare
> The naked text in English to declare
> Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
> As auctors seyn; leveth hem if yow leste! (G 85-8)

The passage, contrary to Love's notions, is capable of sustaining more than one interpretation. First, given the narrator's other suggestions of a sceptical reading practice, this reference to a 'naked text' may be seen as an ironic adumbration of Love's position; it is, however, immediately undermined by the sentiment, 'leveth hem if yow leste'. Second,

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[27] See ibid., chapter 4: 'The Court of Cupid', esp. pp.112-3.

[28] I have chosen the F version in order to make the point more clearly, but it is also apparent in G264-6.

it serves as a reminder that interpretive practices are gender inflected; or, in the words of the Wife of Bath:

> Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
> By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (III.692-6)

Perhaps then, as a man, as a painter of lions, the narrator's own interpretive position is also sexually determined. This seems to be borne out in his treatment of his martyrs to Love, where he chooses not to take up the opportunity of calling on Alceste as an available model of female truth in love. Instead, by drawing on Love's notion of a good woman, the narrator articulates female complicity in its own oppression. The heroines reiterate patterns of feminine obedience that praise women for performing actions which insist on their passivity and abuse. At the same time, though, the narrator's ludicrous literal-mindedness in fulfilling his task in the *Legend* parodies the sexual equation Love makes between women and faithfulness, and men and faithlessness. The narrator's apparent failure to distinguish between sexual and gendered difference is a sign of the determinism and interpretive tyranny which believes in the possibility of a 'naked text'.

Alceste again proves to be the mediating force between Love and the narrator. Both Love and, apparently also the narrator, believe that the latter can produce a 'naked text', although, fatally to the argument, they disagree on what that text is. Alceste mediates for and denies the positions of both characters by showing that there can be no naked text. She is the character in the Prologue who introduces the notion of 'feigning' which criticises the literal-minded exegesis of her husband:

> "Al ne is nat gospel that is to yow pleyned;
> The god of Love hereth many a tale yfeyned". (G 326-7)

Her reference to literary patrons introduces the spectre of a self-interested audience:

> "Or hym was boden make thilke tweye

Of som persone, and durste it not withseye". (G 346-7)

Her arguments regarding the necessarily mediatory nature of both writing and reading rely not on sexual determinism, but on the observation that there are various positions available from which one reads worlds and texts. She argues not from a position of essentialism, but from a position which recognises the influence of socio-historical forces in the construction of identity.

Alceste warns the poet that right or wrong, Love will brook no opposition to his interpretation. "Lat be thyn arguynge", she tells the poet:

> "For Love ne wol nat counterpletyd be
> In ryght ne wrong; and lerne this at me!". (G 466-7)

The final phrase is ambiguous: should the poet simply take a lesson from her, or is Alceste's wry awareness of her own status as an exemplar on this score being suggested? The latter possibility is strengthened by the shrewd manner in which she avoids offending the god of Love as she both defends and condemns the poet. She has been reduced by her husband's 'praise' to an exemplar of wifely virtue, an interpretation with which she is unable to take issue: she thereby gains further exemplary status as an instance of Love's interpretive tyranny. At the same time, her articulation in the Prologue reveals the inadequacy of Love's theoretical stance. Love is not shy of pulling rank - either sexual (Alceste) or poetic (the poet) in privileging his own interpretation. In the latter case, he is distinguishing between his own superior ability to judge what is fitting to his law, and the household poet's inferior ability to judge fine love, concomitant with his inferior social standing.[29] Cupid denies the author's explicit interpretation of his own text, and is here in harmony with the medieval conception of literary criticism, which confidently adduced the intentions of individual authors, to the extent of christianizing pagan writers. Cupid sets himself up as an

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[29] See Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, Chapter 4, 'The Court of Cupid'.

overbearing critic. He provides the poet with a newly orthodox subject matter. For Cupid, life and art are directly imitative of his cupidinous reading of his experience and authority.

For Love, or Cupid, the *causa finalis* of the poet's work is the salvation of reader-recruits who will be converted to his theology, in order to guarantee the perpetuity of that theology, or law. But if the poetic text is an imitation of the world or of written texts, it is always already itself an interpretation. Cupid sets himself up as opposing reader to Chaucer, a position in which he fares second best not only because of the contradictions in his position, but also through the irony that he is contained within the poem itself, the poet's reading. Cupid is in other words a bad reader, 'oute of al charite', who sets himself up as the centre and giver of meaning while refusing to countenance the constituting interpretive process. The correct position for the audience to adopt, as explicated by Augustine and Boccaccio among others,[30] is one of 'charity', in which self-interest is not the guiding principle. There is a balance to be maintained between using a perspective of charity in reading imaginative works, and regarding such works as passive receptacles from which one may requisition meaning according to desire. St Augustine states this distinction in Christian terms in his discussion of 'charity' and 'cupidity':

> I call 'charity' that motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for his own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and one's neighbor for the sake of God; but 'cupidity' is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one's self, one's neighbor, or any corporal thing for the sake of something other than God.[31]

Cupid himself is guilty of a cupidinous reading practice in his literal-minded view of language - that words mean exactly what he wants them to mean.

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[30] See above, 1.II.

[31] *De doctrina christiana*, 3.15.23, cited in B.Huppé and D.W.Robertson, *Fruyt and Chaf* (Princeton, 1963), p.7.

Alceste is the archetype whom the poet's martyrs ostensibly must imitate. In the final section of this chapter, I shall examine her as a prototype, or test case, against which Love's literary criticism might be tested, and with which her own critical practice will be compared.

III. A Test Case

The *Legend of Good Women* provides a forum for the playing out of Cupid's reading of women's history, especially women's literary history. As self-appointed Grand Mover behind these histories, Love claims both fictional and extra-fictional hegemony. His position pretends to an eternal present consistent with his status as god of Love. His subjects - 'servauntes' - include not only the characters who figure in Chaucerian fiction, but the readers of Chaucerian texts. Divinity is claimed through the 'devocyoun' owed him by his 'servauntes' and is reaffirmed by the poet ('sire') and by Alceste's discourse on kingship. The ambition inscribed in the god of Love's position is that of attempting to corner the market on meaning; Love, the transcendental signified, controlling and making sense of the subject matter and the 'entente' of writing. His position claims to rule over the fictional text and the text of the world outside the fiction, and he fails to distinguish between the two.

Cupid shows an awareness of the demands of male courtly deference that Alceste points out, when he says:

> "That, if that I wol save my degre,
> I may, ne wol, not warne youre request.
> Al lyth in yow, doth with hym what yow leste". (G 437-9)

The grounds of his submission substantiate Green's contention that women were seen as being incapable of judging good from bad poetry;[32] that a predilection for 'routhe' rather than any ability to judge, is the redeeming quality of the feminine:[33]

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[32] Green, 'The *Familia Regis* and the *Familia Cupidis*', p.97.

[33] This, it is worth noting, is a feature of feminine behaviour that is reiterated throughout the legendary.

"But pite renneth sone in gentil herte;
That mayst thow sen, she kytheth what she is". (G 491-2)

But Cupid must appear to bow before Alceste's decision, since 'the polite fiction of female sovereignty could not be lightly disregarded by those who wanted to cultivate a reputation for chivalry'.[34] Cupid is certainly conscious of his reputation:

"For whoso yeveth a yifte, or doth a grace,
Do it by tyme, his thank is wel the more". (G 441-2)

Cupid's response is in keeping with what Green regards as the real standing of the courts of love; that rather than arenas of actual female sovereignty, they were rather 'the metaphorical expression of an aspect of courtly society'[35] which nominally deferred to women as superior beings, and which had no substantial historical existence. Cupid's deference is only nominal; he is the judge and patron of the poet's work and his sexual determinism remains uncompromised. His position presumes to dictate and control both the intention and the effect of the poetic text. In this way, what Catherine Belsey calls 'heterogeneity - the variety of points of view and temporal locations - is contained in homogeneity'.[36]

Cupid's tyrannical homogenisation is a consequence of the fact that for him, all meaning is an extension of his own desires. He can interpret written and physical texts only according to this desire. In contrast to his position, Alceste makes the first explicit statement of the possibility of complicated motives. She points out self-interest on the part of the court gossips who provide Cupid with their own readings of Chaucer's poetry:

"Al ne is nat gospel that is to yow pleyned;
The god of Love hereth many a tale yfeyned.
For in youre court is many a losengeour...
That tabouren in youre eres many a thyng
For hate, or for jelous ymagynynge". (G 326-8, 330-1)

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[34] Ibid., pp. 104-5.
[35] Ibid., p.100.
[36] Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980), p.78.

Like Cupid, they have something at stake in their readings. Or, perhaps the motive of the courtiers is not simply hate or jealousy. Perhaps they are seeking to insinuate themselves into Love's affections, or are even having a joke at the expense of their literal-minded tyrant - "And for to han with you some dalyaunce" (G332). It is because Love regards the meaning of words as self-evident, in no need of 'glose' or interpretation, that he makes a direct connection between the moral value he perceives in a fictional character and the effect of that work on the audience.[37] His perception of Criseyde's unfaithfulness entails the condemnation of the entire poem, an interpretive strategy which takes the notion of praise and blame to a ludicrous extent. Such a stand requires first that characters be either 'good' or 'bad'. It also assumes that these moral polarites have a direct effect on the audience: one will be persuaded to goodness by a 'good' character, and cannot be so persuaded by reacting negatively to a character whose actions are reprehensible. On Cupid's own terms, if the latter response were entertained, then female readers should be persuaded by Criseyde's actions not to abandon love, but to abandon *inconstancy* in love. The poverty of Love's position is the inevitable result of a view of life and literature so general that it cannot admit the specific, and realise that without the specific, the general is merely an empty shell.

The view of language implicit in Love's position depends, in Christian terms, upon an Edenic identification of being and presence, meaning as fully present in utterance. But because a consequence of the fall from divine grace requires that language become a signifying system, a means of approaching truth rather than an expression or embodiment of it, the relationship between signifier and signified is problematised. The figure of metaphor is paradigmatic of this (impossible) desire to recapture the lost *logos*. Interpretation, the very activity Love wishes to exclude, and which is explicated by Alceste, thence comes into play.

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[37] Kiser makes much the same point; see *Classical Tales*, p.77.

The issue of interpretation as arising from a breaking of the intimate bond between signifier and signified is treated in simlar terms by Abelard and Lacan.[38] Metaphor is made possible by the fact that different words can apply to the same thing. John of Salisbury believed that figurative speech allowed the exchange of qualities between words and things:

> this force of transferred meaning [in figurative language], whereby properties of things are ascribed to words, and vice versa, gives birth to a certain tolerance, which permits the use of words in varying senses.[39]

As 'a figure of speech with transferred meaning', metaphor implies that meaning is approached not by way of identity, but by way of difference.[40] What the god of Love desires in his aspirations as transcendental signified is to form a new theological canon, creating a doctrine of cupidity to usurp the Christian *caritas* as the governing mythology of meaning. Cupid(ity) would proclaim an Edenic hegemony beyond interpretation and so beyond difference, in a state akin to the pre-Oedipal Imaginary, the garden of Eden, in which 'there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence'.[41] There is no distinction, in other words, between subject and object: the physical and textual world becomes an extension of Love. There is no place for difference in Love's tyrannical scheme.

Difference, however, is a prerequisite for human identity. One is constituted as a subject - in language - by distinguishing between the 'I' of the speaker and the 'you' that is not. On this point, Belsey paraphrases Benveniste:

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[38] See above, 1.II.

[39] *Metalogicon*, trans. D.McGarry (1955; rpt. Gloucester, Mass., 1971), p.50; see *Classical Tales*, p.53.

[40] In *The Mirror of Language* Colish discusses Augustine's *signum translatum*, which 'in essence...is a nonverbal sign that is conceived in verbal terms by being treated as a metaphor, or a figure of speech with transferred meaning' (p.60). She points out that the species of metaphor which Cicero calls *aenigma* functions in this way: when 'something resembling the real word is taken, and the words that properly belong to it are then...applied metaphorically to the other thing'(*De oratore*, trans. and ed. E.Sutton and H.Rackham, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), 3.41.166-42.167). Colish notes that 'this conception of aenigma as a figured speech...was to prove extremely influential in Augustine's theory of signification' (p.18).

[41] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.99.

> it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as the 'I', as the subject of a sentence. It is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects.[42]

In this view, 'the function of language is not to communicate but to give the subject a place from which he can speak'.[43] There are many available positions from which one might speak, or, in other words, many subject positions which one might take up, according to gender, social or literary circumstance, historical context and so on. A subject's identity, therefore, is not determined solely by gender, but is 'a matrix of subject positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another'.[44] It is precisely this positionality, or at least the location of more than one mutually inconsistent positions that Love attempts to suppress in Alceste, the poet and the whole literary tradition he wishes to commandeer to his Law.

In Augustinian sign theory, where a sign signifies that which it is not (allegory), the sign is, nevertheless, necessarily inscribed with the meaning or the reality to which it refers. It signifies ultimately a point of reference - God, the Ideal - from which the existence of the sign is explained and given meaning. This is the mode of what Derrida talks of as first principles, which provide the key to meaning, and impose a 'centre' of discourse whereby the Sign gives meaning to all other signs. The centre functions as a transcendental signifier, and consequently must be beyond language and anterior to it. Cupid wishes to transcend the poetic identity by which he is constructed in order to become the origin of meaning for that very identity. His transgression is like that of Lucifer, who instead of becoming God, became his inferior opposite, the Other which is absence, as evil is the absence of good.

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[42] Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p.59. She refers to Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (Miami, 1971), p.225.

[43] E.Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* (1984; London, 1987), p.154.

[44] Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p.61.

Alceste is the *causa efficiens* of Chaucer's poem, but she is also the ostensible *causa efficiens* of Love's quest to have a legendary of 'good' women, culminating in his queen as signified, 'calandier...Of goodnesse'(G534-5). What Love desires - a linear hierarchical sequence of characters reaching its zenith in a single unambiguous signified - is an object that can never be satisfied. His theology requires the wholesale praise or blame of literary texts, rather than the extraction of local, or particular morals. His denial of the activity of interpretation is the denial of free-will. Meaning becomes predetermined rather than something to be arrived at through the process of interpretation. In seeing the coalescence of his desire and its satisfaction in the figure of the good woman Love is determining a fixed subjectivity in women, a subjectivity incapable of desire (except to carry out an inevitable destiny) because it knows no lack. He fails to distinguish between the character who speaks (for example, Criseyde) and specific utterances made by that character (Criseyde promising in her letter to return to Troilus).[45] This inability to take account of the gap between the speaker and the speaker's words is like the failure to distinguish between the source and satisfaction of desire. Cupid sees language as the satisfaction of his desire when it is in fact the source of desire. Language marks the absence or lack of the object to which it attempts to refer but can never express. In his command, Love provides the poet with an impossible task, that of presenting a final stable signified, a single, unambiguous meaning. But the successful fulfillment of Cupid's command must be endlessly deferred, because its

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[45] Relevant here is the distinction between the subject of the enunciation - the poetic personality, the subject who narrates, Wayne Booth's 'implied author' - and the subject of the utterance (*énoncé*) - including the subordinate discourses of characters and fictional narrators, the subject inscribed *in* the discourse, the subject who says 'I' and who is not the 'I' of the discourse. These terms, central to Lacan's work, are sometimes referred to as the subjects of the enunciating and of the enunciation, but to avoid confusion, I will use the former terminology. See Belsey, *Critical Practice*, pp.30-1, who refers to Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), pp.70-1, Tzvetan Todorov, 'Les Catégories du Récit Littéraire', *Communications*, 8 (1966), 146, and Todorov, 'Language and Literature', in *The Structuralist Controversy*, edited by R.Macksey and E.Donato (Baltimore and London, 1970), p.132.

achievement, the satisfaction of the object, would end desire, the end (*finis*) of which is the ultimate *causa finalis* - the realisation of Our peace in His will. Or, in Lacanian terms, death.

Although he puts it as a criticism of the presentation of love, Cupid's attack on the alleged portrayal of women's faithlessness is an attack on a situation in which women are dominant; for his interests, the ideal situation is one where women are betrayed by men, where men have the power. The martyrs of the legend, in accordance with Love's directive, are characterised by an apparently inevitable passivity and they exert no control over their destinies, except to fall in love with men whose falseness in love is apparently equally inevitable. They demonstrate 'routhe' rather than interpretive acuity. Alceste, on the other hand, signifies a heterogeneity that Love fails to contain. In the Prologue, she controls the action, rescuing the poet from Love's condemnation, suggesting a palinode, and demonstrating an awareness of her role as a literary prototype. She is not only the model of wifely virtue and merciful intercession to which Love would like to restrict her: as the subject of the utterance, she is also articulated as a p eremptory aristocratic lady of court (G465-7), as a personification (daisy) and source of inspiration, as a classical figure of mythology who undergoes stellification in Chaucer's Prologue, as a plea bargainer, and as a foil to Love as reader. She implies that what Love calls bad poetry has resulted from the very procedure which he himself orders the poet to follow in the current poem. Proceeding to make explicit the absolutism of Cupid's position, she says that a lord should:

> "... not ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye,
> That usen wilfulhed and tyrannye". (G 354-5)

Absolutism requires in the first place an identification of intention and effect; Alceste's position by contrast, recognises that texts can 'mean' independently of 'authors'. She suggests that Chaucer was not intentionally malicious, but merely inept - 'nyce' - and:

> "... wrot the Rose and ek Crisseyde

Of innocence, and nyste what he seyde". (G 344-5)

In an argument on which he himself later draws, she says that the poet's intention may not be at fault: "He may translate a thyng in no malyce" (G341). Aligning herself with the notion of a critical reading practice adumbrated at the very beginning of the Prologue, Alceste warns Love that "al ne is nat gospel that is to yow pleyned" (G326). One must read the speaker as well as the speaker's words: Love should learn to read in others the same self-interest that shapes his own perspective. She disrupts the singularity of the subject position that Love assigns to women, which is passive, unambiguous and stable: a function of the patriarchal hierarchy of the law/lore of Love. It is essential for the construction of Cupid's own subjectivity (self-meaning) that a sexually antithetical category function as his specularized image, a metaphysical category that itself signifies only absence. He wishes to read Alceste only as a Personification, the location of a given collection of traits and habits with a single identifiable signification.

Personification in the *ad Herennium* is seen as consisting in:

> cum aliqua quae non adest persona contingitur quasi adsit, aut cum res muta aut informis fit eloquens, et forma ei et oratio adtribuitur ad dignitatem adcommodata aut actio quaedem.
>
> representing an absent person as present, or in making a mute thing or one lacking form articulate, and attributing to it a definite form and a language or a certain behaviour appropriate to its character.[46]

It is interesting to consider the description of Dialogue in the *ad Herennium* - a figure which Quintilian joins with Personification - in the light of the considerable speaking space occupied by Alceste:[47]

> Sermoncinatio est cum alicui personae sermo adtribuiter et is exponitur cum ratione dignitatis.

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[46] [Cicero], *ad Herennium*, IV.lii.65-liii.66 (p.399).

[47] Her defence exceeds Cupid's in length by a third: he speaks for seventy lines (G246-316) and Alceste for one hundred and thirteen lines (G318-431).

> Dialogue consists in assigning to some person language which as set forth conforms with his character.[48]

Yet Alceste's words, her articulation through dialogue, is surely not fitting to the 'character' Love wishes to assign her, although he apparently perceives no rupture between Alceste as subject of the utterance and of the enunciation. His limited reading of Alceste as a personification draws on the very metaphorical procedures his own position denies. Kiser notes that Geoffrey of Vinsauf, instructing on the type of *translatio* whereby human qualities are transferred to things, 'clearly shows that it is a form of personification, closely related to the construction of allegorical characters'.[49] Love then, conceives of Alceste in metaphorical terms at the same time as his critical practice denies the operation of metaphor. His attempt to define and delimit Alceste's signification succeeds in doing just the opposite.

Kiser stresses the medieval rhetorical view that metaphor is not an end in itself, but must be judged by the criterion of its usefulness. It therefore should be grounded in sensible things:

> In his insistence upon nature as the source of his art Chaucer is strongly acknowledging the medieval idea that the foundations of "symbolic truths" were to be discovered in reality.[50]

By the later Middle Ages, the preeminence of metaphor in poetic texts had become a commonplace.[51] The philosophical context at the time Chaucer was writing had similar points to make about the acquisition of knowledge through 'sensible things'. Kiser writes that:

> Chaucer and his contemporaries lived in an age that began to approve of empiricism as a foundation for epistemological inquiry...earlier tendencies to seek universal a

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[48] *Ad Herennium*, IV.li.65-lii.65 (p.395).

[49] *Classical Tales*, p.54. She refers to the Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Documentum*, p.62: see her footnote 14.

[50] *Classical Tales*, p.59; see also my discussion of this above, chapter 1, esp. 1.I and 1.II.

[51] See *Classical Tales*, chapter 2, esp. pp.50-60, for a concise summary of this aspect of poetic theory. See also above, 1.I.

> priori patterns in the world were giving way to make room for serious investigations into the particularity of things.[52]

Alceste's status as the personification of the daisy is not simply a process of effacing the daisy itself: the particulars of her many associations retain their particularity.[53] At the same time though, as Kiser points out, there is 'something sacrificial about metaphors, functioning as they do primarily as vehicles for things greater than themselves'.[54] The paradigm has an obvious resonance not only for the self-sacrificing fame of the classical Alceste, but also for the martyrs of the legend. While Alceste is seen as choosing her *self*-sacrificing action, the heroines are sacrificed *by* and *for* faithless lovers, and for the poet's 'sentence' as dictated by the god of Love, the meaning he demands from the current poem. In his cupidinous desire, Love covets poetic inclusiveness and wishes to become the possessor of Chaucer's discourse, the discourse which includes Alceste as subject of the utterance and of the enunciation, the speaker who both says 'I' and who is the 'I' of the discourse. His object is to locate all women in an inevitable chain of passivity, to fix a stable and unambiguous feminine subjectivity that would apparently satisfy his desire for poetic and sexual dominion. As St Augustine imposed an artificial limit on signification by positing the end of human understanding as 'charity', in contradistinction to cupidity, so Cupid wishes to posit his perception of Alceste, and hence her role as 'kalender...To any woman that wol lover bee' (F542-3)[55] as the end to which the heroines of the legend aspire. It is a telling

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[52] Ibid., p. 28, and see above, 1.II.

[53] Judson Allen makes a similar point about the way in which typology maintains various levels of identification, while escaping metaphoric dissolution. With reference to scriptural exegesis he states: 'David is Christ; all examples of a particular sort of thing are Being itself; yet David is David all the while. Particulars are taken up into the essence of divine meaning without being destroyed as particulars; in fact, it is only by being thus taken up that the particular can most genuinely exist as particular'. *The Friar as Critic. Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Nashville, 1971), p.89.

[54] *Classical Tales*, p.57.

[55] The G version has 'calandier...Of goodnesse, for she taughte of fyn lovynge' (533-4). On 'charity' and 'cupidity', see above in this section, and *De doctrina christiana*, 3.15.23.

perversion of the notion that any exegetical interpretation that accords with the doctrine of charity is permissable.[56] Kiser contrasts the signification of Alceste with that of the god of Love in order to posit the two figures as instances of a successful and a faulty metaphor respectively: whereas Alceste's metaphoricity works on several levels, Love, according to Kiser, is 'a parody of the kind of poetic artifice that Chaucer wished to reject'.[57] In the action of the Prologue, though, the significance of the two figures arises from their relation to the poet and his literary works. They offer examples not so much of different metaphorical practices as different models of reading. Alceste's function as intercessor between the condemned poet and the king as lawgiver/judge implies a self-consciousness, an emphatically literary self-consciousness, of the author Geoffrey Chaucer and his previous works, of Dante, and of her classical poetic memory of interceding for her husband. Love reduces her poetic memory to an exemplar of feminine truth in love, a quality which Chaucer is condemned for having failed to celebrate in his previous works. Alceste's refusal to follow her husband's suggestion and succumb to a single metaphorical assignation - an exemplar of truth in love - distances her from the narrative practice Love favours. Love's model of reading also contrasts with that of the narrator and Alceste by being somewhat out of vogue with the late fourteenth-century's favouring of a more author-centred hermeneutics.[58] The shift here is away from God, speaking through the individual author, to the individual author, through whom God speaks. In this respect, it is significant that the

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[56] See Allen, *Friar as Critic*, pp.58-9.

[57] *Classical Tales*, p. 65. See her chapter 2 passim, esp. pp. 62-70. By contrast with Kiser, Rowe finds in the G version a 'harmony between Alceste and the god of Love [which] is revealed by the parallel between her red and white crown and his crowning garland of roses and lilies' (*To Eternity*, p.30); Rowe refers us to G160-1 and F227-8.

[58] See above, introduction, and 1.II.

female character Alceste can be seen as the standard of literary criticism, against which the more anachronistic position of Love is defined.[59]

While Cupid regards his model of reading the feminine as a procedure for containment, the effect may be to ensure his own, 'cupidinous' containment within the larger 'Christian' scheme. His attempted appropriation of full divinity as the transcendental signified is diminished not only by Alceste's multiple signification, but also explicitly by the poet in the Prologue, who contextualises Cupid's status in the larger scheme, responding to Alceste:

> ... "Madame, the *God above*
> Foryelde yow that ye the god of Love
> Han maked me his wrathe to foryive ..." (G 446-8;my emphasis).

For Love as the transcendental signified, literature and subjectivity are codified, discrete and functionally delimited: things which *are*, not things which happen, or are in process and can change. His exhortation to write directly of the corn ('let be the chaf, and writ wel of the corn') disregards the *process* of arriving at the kernal of meaning, through the particular rather than the general.

The antifeminist position which Love articulates insists upon the personification of women if they are to be seen in a positive light. He wishes to imprison femininity - what it is to be a good woman - in the discourse which he, as transcendental signified, controls. But his covetous quest is undermined by the text's reflexivity, emblematised in Alceste and foregrounding the traces of alterity within the poetic tradition itself. Although Love shows himself to be literal-minded in the extreme, his epistemology, and his notion of feminine virtue, in fact rest on a metaphorical basis, and it is this which questions the stable univocal meaning he proposes. The passivity of the good women called into a new literary existence

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[59] It is an interesting reversal of the mechanism, criticised by the French feminists, by which the feminine, or the term with which the feminine is allied, is defined as the secondary, derivative term of a given binary opposition - see above, introduction, and 1.III.

in order to reiterate the metaphor of virtue in love contrasts strikingly with their archetype, Alceste. Clearly there is an anomaly between the nature of Alceste's chosen action and the enforced martyrdom of the women of the *Legend*, and, equally clearly, Love is oblivious to this disparity (G538-40).

Chapter 4

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MARTYRDOM IN THE LEGENDS

The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* foregrounds the problem of reading: how should one read 'olde bokes', and how does the reading position one takes up influence the standing and effect of 'auctorites'? What (im)moral imperatives inform one's 'intention', both in reading and in writing, and how justified, and effective, is the poetic text that arises from a clear moral imperative, such as that established by Cupid in the Prologue? And what are the specific consequences of the god of Love's notions of gender and genre for the poet's literary production?

The following two chapters will consider, under various topics, the legends that follow the Prologue. In the first section of the present chapter, the awareness of their mission for posterity will be examined in the legends of Cleopatra and Thisbe. In the following section, Chaucer's manipulations of his sources in 'Hypsipile', 'Medea', 'Philomela', and 'Hypermnestra' will be studied. Chapter 5 is also grouped into two sections. The first section will study the problem of tone ('Ariadne', 'Phyllis'), and the second, the assignation of praise for the good women and blame for the faithless men that betray them ('Dido', 'Lucrece'). The legends will be considered in relation to the Prologue, and to the theories of meaning and construction of gender laid out in chapters one and two. The groupings under which the martyrs of the *Legend* are examined to some extent are artificial divisions. There is a degree of overlap in the themes focused upon in each of the sections, and a continuity in the poet's treatment of his task. For the sake of convenience and clarity, and to avoid unnecessary repetition, the legends will be treated consecutively in this way, rather than each being called up under a particular theme.

I. The Consideration of Posterity
(Cleopatra, Thisbe)

The ten heroines of the *Legend* are enlisted as *exempla* of feminine passivity. One of the most consistent features of these women is their extraordinary amenity to the task confronting the poet, as they swoon, succumb and despair with clockwork precision to the men who with apparently congenital compulsion seduce, exploit and betray them. Even more remarkable is the heroines' consciousness of their didactic mission for posterity, a self-consciousness set against the poetic memory of Alceste, herself well aware not only of her literary identity outside the Prologue, but also of the Chaucerian bibliography existing prior to the *Legend.* But just as there is a pointed gap between the predetermined suffering of the heroines and the chosen sacrifice of Alceste, so is the narrator's presentation of the martyrs at odds with the moral they conspire to articulate. Cleopatra for instance, is a mysterious choice with which to inaugurate an argument for feminine virtue in love, since her reputation deriving from both classical and medieval sources is 'invariably' subject to moral censure.[1] Her association with 'lustfulness, avarice, incest, probable murder of her brother-husband, and seduction of Julius Caesar'[2] mark her as a particularly dubious candidate for sainthood.

The narrator is obviously far more taken with Antony's military achievements, which account for a much larger proportion of the narrative, than with his love for Cleopatra.[3] After twenty-eight lines introducing Antony's military and romantic prowess, Cleopatra can hardly be blamed for failing to occupy a centre of interest when she is introduced, over a

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[1] See B.Taylor, 'The Medieval Cleopatra: The Classical and Medieval Tradition of Chaucer's Cleopatra', *JMRS*, 7 (1977), 250.

[2] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.100.

[3] Delany finds in the 'nautical imagery' conventional images 'for sexual congress'; see 'The Logic of Obscenity in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *Florilegium*, 7 (1985), 192.

quarter of the way into the legend, with the words: 'And she was fayr as is the rose in May' (613).[4] The aftermath is summarily dealt with in the next two lines:

> And, for to make shortly is the beste,
> She wax his wif, and hadde hym as hir leste. (614-5)

This description of the ensuing marriage is followed by the disastrous sea battle and joint suicide, not an alluring prospect for potential lovers. In any case, Antony's love for Cleopatra is not presented in a particularly ennobling light. The narrator seems to think that his plight is a great shame:

> But love hadde brought this man in swich a rage,
> And hym so narwe bounden in his las,
> Al for the love of Cleopataras,
> That al the world he sette as no value. (599-602)

Yet, at this early point in the narrative, it still seems important to present the male lover in a sufficiently positive light to justify feminine affections. After an unprepossessing introduction - 'And soth to seyne, Antonius was his name' (588) - the audience is assured that:

> Natheles, for sothe, this ilke senatour
> Was a ful worthy gentil werreyour,
> And of his deth it was ful gret damage. (596-8)

Later in the narrative though, the poet's praise of Antony is shown to be contingent upon sources about whose truth he cannot be certain:

> As certeynly, *but if that bokes lye*,
> He was, of persone and of gentillesse...
> Worthi to any wyght that lyven may. (609-10, 612;my emphasis)

Love, however, is the downfall of this noble warrior, both in relation to Cleopatra (599-602) and to his wife, Octavia, whom he 'lafte...falsly, or that she was war' (593), for Cleopatra.

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[4] In *Chaucer and Ovid*, Fyler notes the 'trite simile' (fair as a rose) with which Cleopatra is introduced (p.100).

Antony seems to be guilty of a kind of cupidity, since he is 'so narwe bounden' not for the sake of a higher good, classical or Christian, but for the love of another all too fallible human.

In this shortest of the legends, the narrator seems to be bearing uppermost in his mind the god of Love's brevity requirement (F576-7). Although he appears not to stint on the battle scene:

> The weddynge and the fest to devyse,
> To me, that have ytake swich empryse
> Of so many a story for to make,
> It were to longe. (616-9)

The wedding must be 'skipped' over:

> ... lest that I shulde slake
> Of thyng that bereth more effect and charge;
> For men may overlade a ship or barge. (619-21)

The concentration on the battle scene is distinguished by the type as well as the quantity of narrative devoted to it. The realistic military descriptions contrast strikingly with the highly conventional treatment of the heroine and her beau, suggesting that the poetry produced by close adherence to Love's decree lacks in vitality.[5]

After Antony has lost his 'worshipe' - it is not quite clear whether this is due to the loss of the sea battle at Actium or to the fleeing 'purpre sayl' of Cleopatra - he commits suicide. The narrator wastes little effort in evoking sympathy for his death, but deals with it speedily:

> And rof hymself anon thourghout the herte
> Or that he ferther wente out of the place. (661-2)

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[5] In so saying, I do not mean to imply sympathy with Kittredge's notion of Chaucer's progression from apprentice of 'artificial' conventional forms, through to 'realistic' originality. My point is the unimaginative way in which conventional descriptions are used here.

The moral to issue from the action of Cleopatra, who, after Antony's suicide, 'coude of Cesar have no grace' (663),[6] is the patent *non sequitur*: 'Here may ye sen of *wemen* which a trouthe' (668; my emphasis). The preceding lines, which have had nothing noticeable to do with feminine truth, are clearly inadequate and unsuitable for the moral they appear to produce. Cleopatra's farewell speech to her dead lover is undercut by the ill-timed assurance: "I men yow, Antonius, my knyght - " (684). It is not clear who else she might mean, unless it is perhaps a nostalgic reference to Octavius Caesar. Cleopatra then commits suicide not by the usual means of clasping an adder to her breast, but by leaping into a snake pit. This departure from convention appears to be another attempt to force the necessary connection between the Prologue and the individual legend: Cleopatra's suicidal dive replicates Christ's descent into hell, feminised in the Prologue into Alceste's underworld descent.[7]

By the end of the legend, the narrator seems to realise that he has failed adequately to polarise female virtue and male faithlessness. He fumbles to elect a victor in the competition for virtuous death and resolves somewhat feebly:

> Now, or I fynde a man thus trewe and stable,
> And wol for love his deth so frely take,
> I preye God let oure hedes nevere ake! (702-4)

Cleopatra, however, suffers from no such interpretive tenderness, concluding her final speech with the hope:

> " ... that shal ben wel sene,
> Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene". (694-5)

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[6] A not especially veiled reference to Cleopatra's unsuccessful attempt to seduce Octavius Caesar.

[7] The parallel between Cleopatra's new suicide, which Gower seems to imitate in *Confessio Amantis*, and Christ's descent into hell is pointed out by Kiser in *Classical Tales*, p.108.

Cleopatra appears to be more conscious of herself as an example to posterity than her fictional condition would suggest is tenable, since the conscious intent of her instruction is identical to that which has been imposed upon the narrator: that she is a woman true in love.

The legend of Cleopatra provides a potent example of Chaucer altering the familiar and clearly inappropriate character of his heroine to suit present needs. In the following legend, by contrast, he follows his source (*Metamorphoses* IV.55-166) very closely. Perhaps this adherence arises from the fact that Thisbe's traditional fame provides a more likely model for the task at hand. Lowes made the point many years ago that 'absolutely the only question which has pertinence in the premises is: How did *Chaucer and his contemporaries* regard Cleopatra, Medea, Dido, and the rest?'[8] Lowes cites Christine de Pisan, Bertrand Desmarins, Gower, Boccaccio, Froissart and Lydgate to support his contention that Chaucer and his contemporaries regarded the heroines as 'stock *exempla of fidelity in love*'.[9] More recently and more convincingly, Shaner's thesis makes a thoroughgoing analysis of medieval attitudes towards Chaucer's heroines, studying each of them individually and refraining from such all-embracing judgements as 'stock *exempla* of fidelity in love'. Shaner claims a generally favourable and sympathetic medieval attitude towards Thisbe. However, she remarks on the balanced alternations of extremes of heat and cold in the legend,[10] extremes which indicate an obsessive quality in the love of Pyramus and Thisbe:

> And bothe in love ylyke sore they brente ...
> As wry the glede, and hotter is the fyr,

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[8] J.L.Lowes, 'Is Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* a Travesty?', *JEGP*, 8 (1909), 545-5.

[9] Ibid., 546; see also 546-89. Lowes' argument is that *within* the courtly tradition, the heroines were regarded as good, since they obeyed Love's law.

[10] M. Shaner, 'An Interpretive Study of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, 1973; she cites ll.731, 735-6, 760-3, 767-8, 772, 878 as examples.

Forbede a love, and it is ten so wod. (731,735-6)

Images of male seduction and the obsessive quality of passion it evokes are indebted to Christian symbolic designations such as dark/light and heat/cold. Incontinence, akin to obsession,[11] stood in a long tradition as that which clouded man's reason, his claim to supremacy over beasts, and over women. Aristotle makes this point when he denies that 'the incontinent man [can] *know* what is right in the sense of actively contemplating it; only as a person asleep or drunk can be said to know a thing'.[12] The obsessive pursuit of the Lover in the *Romance of the Rose* bears the brunt of much of the authors' irony,[13] and the self-seeking actions of the *Legend*'s false lovers, made in Cupid's image, manifest the god's own dogmatic position. The heat and cold imagery of 'Thisbe' draws on a philosophical and literary heritage which condemned incontinence in largely religious terms: Love's religion is seen as encouraging this obsessiveness.

Although Thisbe's literary image is less damning than is Cleopatra's, it is not especially appropriate as an *exemplum* of a faithful woman deserted by a false man.[14] Nor, notes Kiser, is the subject matter of the tale adapted for the present hagiographic purposes, 'because Thisbe's experiences are not made to conform to Alceste's, nor is Pyramus drawn in such a way as to remind us of Admetus's own close escape from death'.[15] The transition from classical tale to hagiographic *exemplum* is not complete, although the poet attempts to

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[11] It is noteworthy that 'Thisbe' opens with a reference to Semiramis, whom Dante placed in the second circle of Hell, the first of the circles of incontinence. See *Inferno*, v.52-60.

[12] Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by J. Thomson (Middlesex, 1955), vii,x.

[13] See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. C.Dahlberg (New Jersey, 1971), introduction, p.10.

[14] Kiser notes that 'Thisbe's name is not often included among standard medieval catalogues of exemplary female sufferers...she does not seem to be a regular member of conventional lists designed to memorialize the names of classical women who suffered in love...Thisbe is not an automatic candidate for commemoration, because she does not illustrate the premise that women are more frequently victimized by their partners than are men' (*Classical Tales*, p.118).

[15] Ibid., p.118.

duplicate earlier themes. Phoebus and Aurora, signifying the dawning of a new day and the replacement of darkness by light, are at hand in 'Thisbe' to set the scene for the lovers to 'plyght' their 'trouthe'.[16] Such an echo of the Prologue's motif of resurrection is a sign of Cupid's theology of *cupiditas* as competing with the orthodoxy of *caritas*; it is a phenomenon which also surfaces in the competitive instincts of the heroines. Despite the efforts of Phoebus and Aurora, the obsessive nature of the lovers' passion brings about a double suicide and lamentations about the destructive effects of love. The failure of the poem to reappropriate Christian imagery to the dissident canon of *cupiditas* continues the demonstration of the shortcomings of Cupid's literary assumptions provided by Alceste and the narrator in the Prologue.

In a legend where the poet adheres so closely to his source, deviations from this source are especially noteworthy. Ovid's Thisbe takes four lines (IV.139-142) to scream, beat her breast, tear her hair, bathe Pyramus's wounds with her tears, kiss his deathly lips and call his name. In addition to these gestures, Chaucer's Thisbe in ten lines also manages to turn pale, torment herself, lie and swoon on the ground, paint herself with Pyramus's blood, mixing his blood with her complaint, and 'clyppeth...the deede cors' (876). The expansion and intensification of Thisbe's response does less to emphasise her status as a faithful lover than as an obsessive, obsessed one. Again, the narrator's heavy-handed efforts to adapt his subject matter are less than successful.

As with Cleopatra, the moral constantly drawn by the unhappy narrator is remarkable chiefly for its comic incongruity with what has preceded it. When Thisbe goes to meet Pyramus in order to elope with him, discretion advises her to keep her plans secret from her

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[16] Ovid also refers to the dawn and the sun's drying of the frosty grass (*Met.* iv.80-1), but the greater emphasis on the scene, through the personification of dawn (Aurora) and the sun (Phoebus) is Chaucer's, as is the reversal of roles: it is Aurora, not Phoebus, who dries 'the dew of herbes wete' (775).

friends. This uncharacteristically prudent action, however, seems to set off warning bells in the narrator, ever alert for an opportunity to press home his amorous equation.'Allas!', he cries:

> ... and that is routhe
> That evere woman wolde ben so trewe
> To truste man, but she the bet hym knewe. (799-80)

But this lament has nothing at all to do with Thisbe's failure to confide in her friends, and Pyramus bears no more responsibility than she does for the tragedy that results. In fact, Pyramus' main fault seems to be a 'feminine' one: he misreads the sign of Thisbe's bloody wimple, as most of the heroines misread their false lovers, and his suffering results from his readerly incompetence. Immediately after this outburst, absent from Ovid, the narrative continues without a ripple.

Echoing his Ovidian predecessor, Chaucer's Pyramus blames himself for what he supposes is his beloved's death: "...I am he that have yow slayn, allas!" (836). If there is any doubt about blame in this case of death by unpunctuality, Pyramus repeats himself in the following line: "My biddyng hath yow slayn, in this cas" (837). Pyramus's willingness to accept blame seems a lucky break for the narrator, who has had little success to date in polarising female victims and male victors. It seems odd though, for one so free with his sources not to consider editing out this willing, perhaps over-enthusiastic acceptance of guilt. A less altruistic response might have precluded a sympathy for the male lover that is not helpful to the narrator's cause.

Thisbe on the other hand, shows herself far more amenable to the moral at hand. The picture of love that emerges from her response, in an interesting deviation from its source, seems hardly likely to attract feminine recruits, or indeed, any recruits to the law of Love: "Sith love has brought us to this pitous ende" (904). The legends that follow will permit

many variations on her lament of the 'pitous ende' to which love has brought her. Thisbe prays that God:

> "... lat no gentil woman hyre assure
> To putten hire in swich an aventure". (908-9)

Thisbe is well aware aware of the competition for 'trouthe' in love:

> "But God forbede but a woman can
> Ben trewe in lovynge as a man!". (910-11)

Her sentiments are met with a disconcertingly direct echo eleven lines later as the narrator drives the point home:

> Here may ye se, what lovere so he be,
> A woman dar and can as wel as he. (922-3)

Pyramus is no more guilty than Thisbe, a detail which the narrative fails to conceal. The narrator is compelled to caution shrilly that he finds few men as true as Pyramus and anyway, Thisbe can do just as well as him.

The poet's narrative choices are seen to be extremely limited. He is forced either into drawing a completely inapt moral from his narrative, or into making observations antithetical to the presentation of the law of Love as an attractive proposition for women in providing models worthy of admiration. Although the heroines exhibit an extraordinary sympathy with their didactic function (910-11), both they and the narrator are unable to draw conclusions in favour of love (904, 908-9). If the moral predetermined by Love is so obviously inappropriate and inadequate for the fiction called into being to illustrate it, it may well be that it is inadequate also for the women inscribed therein. Cupid(ity)'s alternative canon rejects the exegetical principle of *caritas* that the particulars of allegorized fictions 'are taken up into the essence of divine meaning without being destroyed as particulars'.[17] The powerlessness of Love's position, consequent upon the poetic subversion of his overreaching

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[17] See above, 3.III, and Allen, *The Friar as Critic*, p.89.

moral, is the inevitable result of a view of life and of literature so excessively general that it denies the specificity of experience. The poet's rendition becomes a figuring of the dead end of Cupid's stricture to "Let be the chaf, and writ wel of the corn" (G529).

II. Manipulation of Sources
(Hypsipile, Medea, Philomela, Hypermnestra)

Hypsipile, queen of Lemnos, is introduced not in the royal capacity of ruling her kingdom, but 'pleying,/And, romynge on the clyves by the sea' (1469-70), 'suitably frivolous and idly waiting for some man to be shipwrecked so that she can "don him succour, as was hire usaunce"'. Hypsipile is here consumed in 'the motif of the wandering shipwrecked hero tossed by fatal waves into the ministering arms of the waiting heroine (Dido, Hypsipile, Medea, Phyllis) [which] is repeatedly used to underline the passive and compassionate role of the good woman'.[18] As Edwards' study of medieval *scholia* on Ovid's *Heroides* emphasises, actions that in the private sphere may be merely foolish become in the public sphere - women who are queens or otherwise in positions of public authority - culpable. The status of public responsibility increases the literary responsibility to encourage or discourage the audience to praise or blame. Edwards points out that those commentators who do mention Hypsipile's letter in the *Heroides* chide her 'for her foolish love, and...discourage the audience from similar mistakes'.[19] She is, in other words, not a model worthy of praise and emulation, but one to avoid.

By alternating the tone in 'Hypsipile' between ludicrous recrimination and a mechanical drone, the poet's rigid adherence to Love's command undermines both the command itself and its implications for poetic articulation. In the preamble to this legend

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[18] Hansen, 'The Antifeminist Narrator', 22, and notes 22, 26.

[19] M.Edwards, 'A Study of Six Characters in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, with Reference to Medieval *Scholia* on Ovid's *Heroides*', unpub. B.Litt diss., Oxford University, 1970, p.59.

the poet engages in a denunciation of Jason - the central figure of the two stories - of which the dominant note is an inflated indignation:

> Thow rote of false lovers, Duc Jasoun
> Thow sly devourere and confusioun
> Of gentil wemen, tendre creatures...
> Have at thee, Jason! now thyn horn is blowe!(1368-70,1383)

The horn is blown, and the hunt for more false men and true women is on. The exaggerated posturing of the narrator's 'thee', 'thow' and 'thy', the forms of which occur twenty times in the first sixteen lines, culminate in the unromantic image of Jason the greedy fox feasting on fleshly capons (1389). But a capon is a castrated cock, in a state of unnatural impotence with implications both for the 'feminisation' of Jason that occurs in this legend, and for the poetic articulation of the feminine that is at issue in the poem itself. The legend's highly abbreviated treatment of sources helps to communicate the narrator's weariness and frustration at his task. Hypsipile and Medea are incidental side-kicks to Jason's exemplary exploits:

> On Jason this ensaumple is wel ysene
> By Isiphile and Medea the quene. (1394-5)

That two female figures with separate histories are included in the one legend by virtue of their betrayal by the same man is indicative of Cupid's notion that feminine virtue depends upon women's sexual relationships with men. Hypsipile's pious intentions lack vitality (1476-8), and even the golden fleece, guarded by the somewhat lacklustre brass bull that 'spitten fyr, and moche thyng' (1433) is insufficient to revive narrative conviction. Proportionately, very little of the legend is devoted to relations between the lovers. Its effective focus is Jason.

The obvious disparities between the sources' story and the present version suggest that the narrator is forced to misread his sources in order to produce the required moral. Jason's intent in the legend, identical to Hercules', is no more complicated than Love's: 'For

to bedote this queen was here assent' (1547). The lover's union and separation - the expected focus of the story - is summarised in five lines (1559-63), and the story itself is frequently interrupted by references to the poet's much abused sources. Having explained in some detail the background to Jason's voyage, the narrator abruptly reminds the audience that there is no time to pursue the aspect of the story he has been progressing towards:

> But whoso axeth who is with hym gon,
> Lat hym go rede Argonautycon,
> For he wole telle a tale long ynough. (1456-8)

Hardly has he shifted back to the story when the audience is again jolted from the narrative, to be told:

> Al be this nat reherced of Guido,
> Yit seyth Ovyde in his Epistels so. (1464-5)

The characters, too, practice misreading, as Hypsipile, like Medea after her, misreads the text of Jason. After the fair greeting of Jason and Hercules, Hypsipile:

> ... tok hed, and knew by hyre manere,
> By hire aray, by wordes, and by chere,
> That it were gentil-men of gret degre. (1504-6)

By this stage in the legendary, the audience knows that what Hypsipile ought to be reading is the text of another faithless man, not that of Jason. The divergent perspectives of character and audience serve to distance readers from the poetic models by whom they ought to be encouraged to praise or blame. Hypsipile almost sends the narrative off in the wrong direction by inclining towards Hercules instead of Jason:

> And namely, most she spak with Ercules;
> To hym hire herte bar. (1519-20)

Hercules is, after all, both discreet ('of wordes avyse') and single ('Withouten any other affeccioun/Of love'). But Hercules, who is not the male focus of the tale, is just as false as Jason, and Chaucer's undiscriminating heroine again demonstrates an impressive capacity for misreading. A suggestion of comedy arises from the narrator's ineptitude in controlling

his supposedly exemplary narrative. The suggestion is seditious of the present task, since it complicates and detracts from clear, exemplary designations of praise for women.

Chaucer's presentation of Hypsipile fails to mention that Hypsipile had permitted the women on the island to murder the men for being false lovers; it is an odd omission given the *Legend's* terms of reference, since it also omits allusion to the queen's action in saving her father, King Thoas - in the context an action of independence and initiative. Attention is drawn to the omission in Chaucer's apparently undocumented version of events[20] by reference to the male, rather than female messenger sent to greet the Argonauts: Thoas was the only man left alive on the island after the mass slaughter. The omission emphasizes the heroine's contrast with Alceste, whose sacrifice for her husband Admetus involved an active choice of will, and whose role in her partnership with Love is not a passive one. Ovid's Hypsipile is a far more dynamic figure.[21] In her letter to Jason she exhibits sarcasm, bitterness and viciousness, and an extreme vengefulness towards Medea, another victim of men's falseness for whom Chaucer's Hypsipile, in 'hire goodnesse' feels no compassion. Ovid's Hypsipile, as Fyler observes, 'regrets that the Lemnian women did not give Jason's band a more murderous welcome'.[22] Apparently the poet is not aware of any anomaly in the cohabitation of such sentiments with Hypsipile's unquenched devotion for Jason. Almost in passing, he refers to Hypsipile's hope:

> That she, that hadde his herte yraft hire fro,
> Moste fynden hym untrewe to hir also,
> And that she moste bothe hire chyldren spylle,
> And alle tho that sufferede hym his wille.
> And trewe to Jason was she al hire lyf,
> And evere kepte hire chast, as for his wif. (1572-7)

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[20] See *Riverside*'s notes to l.1467, p.1069.
[21] See *Her.* VI, and 'Six Characters', pp.59-65.
[22] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.101.

Her letter in the legend is presented in ten lines of banal indirect speech. The narrator seems obliged to mention it, but is under no delusions about its effectiveness:

> A letter sente she to hym, certeyn,
> Which were to longe to wryten and to sen,
> And hym reprevith of his grete untrouthe,
> And preyeth him on her to have som routhe. (1564-7)

The presentation of Hypsipile's vicious desire for revenge in such inauspicious lines merely emphasises the passivity of the heroine, and the limitations of Cupid's notion of a good woman. The specific experience of Hypsipile in love, as transmitted through 'olde bokes', is reduced and not enhanced by its subordination to Cupid's general rule that women are true in love. It is because her story has no personalised or particularised immediacy but only the value of a bald statement that the affective function of the work is disconnected. Hypsipile is unable to learn from the experience of her poetic memory but persists in the literary paradigm of feminine passivity propounded by the law of Love.

Medea is perhaps the most unlikely candidate for sainthood amongst a generally unlikely compendiary. Despite the many vivid and powerful descriptions of her available to Chaucer, all the *Legend*'s audience is told is that she 'was so wis and fayr/That fayer say there nevere man with ye' (1599-1600). The hopeful retreat into the inexpressibility *topos*, 'essentially an assertion of the poet's inability to do justice to his subject',[23] is ironically appropriate for Medea. In Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, she is vengeful, ferocious, violent, and her obsessive passion is without restraint.[24] Shaner states that 'the examples of medieval reaction to Medea are negative. She is condemned as cruel and pitiless, unnatural and bloody'.[25] The poet narrates that Medea 'unwist of hire fader is...gon to

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[23] Pearsall, *Floure and Leafe*, p.71.
[24] See 'Six Characters', pp.72-5.
[25] 'Study', pp.65-6.

Tessaly' (1653-4), an unhappy detail, narratively superfluous, which brings to mind Medea's strategy of delaying paternal pursuit by scattering in her path the dismembered fragments of her murdered brother. The blundering narrator refers also to Jason's 'yonge children two', whom Medea murdered, presumably to the satisfaction of Hypsipile. The apparent motivation behind making mention of Jason's third wife, daughter of King Creon, is to emphasise Jason's falsehood; unfortunately, it also points to Medea's responsibility for the grotesque deaths of Creusa and Creon. Chaucer's sources for the story[26] all mention these crimes, as well as the hideous murder of Pelias by his daughters, engineered by Medea for the sake of her love for Jason, whose desertion Chaucer ironically denounces as poor reward:

> Ryght for hire trouthe and for hire kyndenesse,
> That lovede hym beter than hireself, I gesse. (1660-1)

Despite the distance 'Medea' has travelled from Chaucer's sources, where her love for Jason is presented as an all-consuming driving force, it is evident that her sanctity can exist only by a fundamental misconception of the nature of Alceste's devotion.

In addition to his achievement of the golden fleece, Jason was, conveniently for the poet, also presented as a type of the false lover. The poet becomes so carried away with his task of condemning this 'false fox' and 'rote of false lovers', that he makes the mistake, repeated in the course of the *Legend*, of showing that false lovers (men) have a better time in love than true lovers (women):

> But certes, it is bothe routhe and wo
> That love with false loveres werketh so;
> For they shal have wel betere love and chere
> Than he that hath abought his love ful dere,
> Or hadde in armes many a blody box. (1384-8)

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[26] Apart from *Her.* XII, and *Met.* vii.1-396, also Guido delle Colonne's *History of Troy*, Book 1. See *Riverside*, pp.1069-70.

Seduced by his own rhetoric, the narrator becomes a self-appointed spokesperson for moral rearmament: it is through his representation that Jason's true significance will be made known:

> Yif that I live, thy name shal be shove
> In English that thy sekte shal be knowe!
> Have at thee, Jason! Now thyn horn is blowe! (1381-3)

Men betray women as the narrator betrays his sources. Such a betrayal in the preamble to the legends of Hypsipile and Medea -

> For evere as tendre a capoun et the fox,
> Thow he be fals and hath the foul betrayed (1389-90) -

echoes a similar betrayal in the Prologue, where the 'smale foules.../That from the panter and the net ben skaped', denounce the sophistic betrayal of the fowler, singing of:

> The foule cherl that fro his covetyse
> Hadde hem betrayed with his sophistrye. (G 122-5)

The lovers that abuse rhetorical skills in false sophistry follow Cupid's practice in the Prologue. His decree to the poet urges the subordination of poetry - and hence 'auctorite' - to a self-interested rhetorical practice intended to manipulate an audience into a particular course of action.[27]

One of the most blatant manipulations of a source occurs at the beginning of the legend of Medea. Inverting the traditional association of women with matter, and men with form,[28] the poet applies Guido delle Colonne's remark about the salaciousness of women to Jason:

> As mater apetiteth forme alwey,

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[27] See *Classical Tales*, pp.113-5, for an interpretation which also sees Jason as a sophist.

[28] It is one type of love, for instance, which 'unites *ratio* and *subiecta*: "matter alone desires adornment, just as female desires male, and what is shapeless longs for beauty"'. See Calcidius, *Commentarius in Timaeum Platonis*, ed. J.Waszink (London, 1962), 286, p.290, translating Aristotle's *Physics*, 1.9; cited in Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1972), p.179; see also ibid., pp.178-9, and above, 1.III. None of the legend's preamble (1368-95) is in the sources; see *Riverside*, p.1069.

> And from forme into forme it passen may,
> ... Ryght so can false Jason have no pes. (1582-3, 1585)

Male desire, unable to satisfy the lack which drives it, is here congenitally bound to attach and unattach itself endlessly to female forms, which in turn, require male matter in order to achieve identification. Jason is 'feminised' in this image of him as female matter requiring male form.[29] He abuses language in a feminine manner since his speaking is tainted by the immorality that is his birthright, at least for this poem. This recalls the exclusion of women from the right to preach on the basis of their moral shortcomings.[30] The reversal of gendered roles that the narrator is obliged to employ points not only to the shortcomings of Love's literary criticism, but also, by implication, to the determination of women's speech by their sexuality.

For the purposes of his literary penance, Jason the adventuring hero must be displaced in favour of Jason the philandering sophist. The fact that Jason was not regarded solely as the latter is indicated by his roughly contemporary retelling in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.[31] Gower's Jason goes in search of the golden fleece out of curiousity and in order to increase his worship (*CA*,3280-9), not because he is manipulated into doing so by political jealousy, as is the case in the *Legend* (1396-1441). Jason's lack of heroism in the *Legend* is established systematically: it is Medea who is responsible for his winning the fleece, she who saves his life and his honour, and she who 'gat on hym a name ryght as a conquerour' (1649). In depriving Jason of any heroism, the narrator is undermining rather than furthering his own task, since the motivation for Medea's passion declines with her lover's status. In Chaucer's narrative, Medea's main incentive to fall in love with Jason seems to be the exigency of plot. The passion is shown to be all on Medea's side, unlike

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[29] See 'Six Characters', p.75.

[30] See above, 2.I.

[31] Gower's main sources were not the Chaucerian ones of Guido's *Historia destructionis Troiae* and *Her.* XII, but Benoit's *Roman de Troie*, 715-2078, and *Met.* vii. 1-424.

in the *Confessio Amantis*, where Jason is as enamoured of Medea as she is of him. The implication from Gower's text is not that Medea is a self-sacrificing martyr to love, merely that she has made a bad deal. By excising any mutuality from their love, the narrator is exaggerating the notion that it is the sexual destiny of women to love and be betrayed, and of men to betray and not to love. In accordance with Cupid's bad reading, the narrator exemplifies a bad reading of the past, of the 'olde bokes' in which the heroines appear. So too, he presents the heroines themselves as bad readers of their faithless lovers. In this way, the narrator duplicates a Cupidian hypocrisy: he models himself on Cupid by misreading and miswriting his heroines, and then by leaving - or deploying - them to suffer the consequences.

It is essential for the narrator's task that his text promote uncomplicated moral judgements. It is also necessary, in the light of Cupid's phallocentric reading practice, that women derive meaning only through male desire, and that they lack the capacity to undertake independent action. In his efforts to 'let be the chaf' and to write with brevity, the narrator ravages his sources as Love ravages the literary heritage. With dutiful and ludicrous speed, the poet accounts for Jason's nuptial oath, his successful quest for the fleece, departure from Thessaly, begetting of children, betrayal of Medea, third marriage and Medea's letter to him (1643-80). As Kiser points out, '*brevitas* turns into something more like lying, for Chaucer is forced to employ it as a device to mask those details in his sources which would complicate our moral judgements of these women and their needs and would render the narratives useless as exempla'.[32] The poet is forced into a rhetorical practice as immoral as that of his lying lover. He suggests that 'as Fortune hire oughte a foul myschaunce' (1609), Medea loves Jason. But the preceding lines have suggested that Medea's love has not had much to do with Fortune at all. Feminine impact on the narrative

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[32] *Classical Tales*, p.100.

is denied at precisely the point that should occasion it: Medea's love is beyond her control, and she cannot claim to be even a bad reader. The two conflicting readings of Medea's motivation for loving Jason - either her passion or her destiny - compromise the quest for univocal meaning.

The poet's version of Medea's letter omits the grisly confession of the *Heroides*, along with the bitterness and passion that prompt it, and includes only those sections that refer to Jason, again eroding the capacity of the feminine victim to signify herself independently of male desire. At the same time, though, the pathos of the letter is retained, and the marked tonal shift from the rest of the legend emphasises this variation in the articulation of the feminine:

> "Whi lykede me thy yelwe her to se
> More than the boundes of myn honeste?
> Why lykede me thy youthe and thy fayrnesse,
> And of thy tonge, the infynyt graciousnesse?" (1672-5)

At last, when it is too late, the newly articulate Medea seems to recognise the sophistry of her betrayer.

By the time he has reached the legend of Philomela, the narrator appears to be blunted by the heavy-handed moral he has been commanded to reiterate. This is less a tale of truth and falseness in love than one of male cruelty and domination; female vengefulness has been imperfectly disguised as ludicrous passivity. The narrator's reading of past stories evokes tears of pity and indignation which call to mind those of Augustine's reading of Dido:

> ... whan I his foule storye rede,
> Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also. (2239-40)

His tears find plentiful echoes in the course of the legend itself: Pandion 'gan wepe' at the prospect of Philomela's absence, which also evokes 'salte teres' in her, repeated when she

'wepte tenderly' at the recognition of her brother-in-law's intentions. Tereus himself appropriates the feminine rhetoric of grief, weeping 'pitously' when falsely relating Philomela's death to Procne, who is also 'in terys' before finding her sister 'wepynge' in her prison. Duplicating the tears of his characters in the larger fiction of which he is a part, the narrator reflects that stories from the past have a real effect upon posterity:

> Yit last the venym of so longe ago,
> That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde
> The storye of Tereus, of which I tolde. (2241-3)

But it is just the forcefulness and effectiveness of old stories that is destroyed by the violations he wreaks upon his sources in order to tailor them to present purposes.

The legend opens with an invocation to God as divine rhetor:

> Thow yevere of the formes, that has wrought
> This fayre world and bar it in thy thought
> Eternaly er thow thy werk began. (2228-30)

Like Geoffrey of Vinsauf's poetic architect, God as creator measures a plan in his mind prior to giving creative-poetic form to that plan.[33] The attitude informing the incipit to the legend, 'Deus dator formarum', is central to nominalist thought and contends that the giver of forms may himself be seen in those forms.[34] The necessary implication, that the particularity of things must be accepted if one is simultaneously to acknowledge the divine in them, recalls Cupid's converse attitude on this score.[35] The reference to the higher good also repeats the Prologue's diminishing contextualisation of Cupid (G446), who is, after all, only the god of Love, not the giver of forms. Philomela herself becomes a local giver of

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[33] See Geoffrey of Vinsauf, 'The New Poetics', 43-5, and below, the discussion in Chapter 6 of *TC* I.1065-71.

[34] See *Riverside*, p.1072. This Platonic idea can be found, among other places, in Boethius III.9, which Chaucer translated ("O quam perpetua" - Metrum 9): 'Thou, that art althir-fayrest, berynge the faire world in thy thought, formedest this world to the lyknesse semblable of that faire world in thy thought'. See also R.A. Peck, 'Chaucer and the Nominalist Question', *Spec*, 53 (1978), 745-60.

[35] See above, 3.III.

forms: her autobiographical tapestry is not made of pictorial but of verbal imagery (2357-8). Unlike the poet, Philomela is a giver of forms whose articulation is grounded in experience.[36] The text of the abused, partially silenced heroine interrogates the narrator's claims to authority on the subject of female subjection. In the first place, he lacks experience, and in the second place, as his own warning makes clear - 'Ye may be war of men, if that yow liste' - his authority is undermined by his status as a (false) man. The order which Love directs the poet to inscribe in his work (cupidity) is a simulation of the divine order (charity), set up not in order to praise the latter, but to compete with it.

Two types of love are depicted in 'Philomela'. The first is the familial affection of Pandion, Procne and Philomela, and the second is the animal lust of Tereus. Philomela's question just before she is 'reft...of her maydenhede' (2325): '"Where is my sister, brother Tereus" (2315), reveals that in medieval terms, Tereus was guilty not only of lust but also of incest. The type of love in which he indulges is the perversion of legitimate love, as Cupid's 'love' is a perversion of Christian *caritas*. The form imposed on the *Legend* - penitential and hagiographic - must reflect Love's alternative canon. Love's project has similarities with that of the allegorists of the twelfth century:

> The continuity and discipline of poetic form itself becomes a model of coherence which the experience of love in a given poem evokes, affirms, or ironically denies; and the concern to locate an intrinsic value in human emotion...appears as a nostalgia for lost or impossible unity, an impulse toward recovery or reform, or simple protest against the constraints imposed upon human nature by its chronic instability.[37]

It is a desire in other words for an Edenic singular subject which regards the world as an extension of itself, a Law unto itself.

Chaucer's version of 'Philomela' consistently suppresses the emotional power of the female characters in the *Metamorphoses* (vi.424-605), and as they appear in the *Confessio*

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[36] See above, 1.III for an elaboration on the medieval notion that meaning was believed to be fully present in both verbal and visual images.

[37] 'Theme of Imagination', 50.

(5551-6058). In Ovid, Procne is far less subservient than in the *Legend*, and she makes her request for a visit from her sister in direct and persuasive (*Met.*,441-6), not reported and pleading speech. More obvious as an instance of editorial violation is the omission of the sisters' grotesque revenge for Tereus's sexual and linguistic violation of Philomela, which the narrator's belated *occupatio* fails to disguise:

> And thus I late hem in here sorwe dwelle.
> The remenaunt is no charge for to telle,
> For this is al and some: thus was she served...(3282-4)

What was also 'served', of course, was the meal of Procne's and Tereus's son, Itys.[38] The comparison with Gower also makes clear what the narrator *could* have done with his material if sincerely intent on contrasting female truth in love with male falseness. In both Ovid and Gower, Procne responds to the tapestry's depiction almost immediately with thoughts of vengefulness.[39] Gower's Procne could almost be a spokesperson for Chaucer's task. She thinks of the untruth of her husband and his broken wedding vows (5814-5), that she, "his wif forsok" (5842) has "be trewe in mi degre" (5829), and:

> "That I him thus ayeinward finde
> The most untrewe and most unkinde
> That evere in ladi armes lay". (5835-7)

Chaucer's Procne, upon viewing the tapestry, is stunned into an all too typical silence: 'No word she spak, for sorwe and ek for rage' (2374). This manipulation of sources not only denies the sisters' revenge, but also omits the horror of the rape scene and the cutting out of Philomela's tongue. Given the narrator's emphasis on the effect that old stories can have on present readers, the omission seems unfortunate.

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[38] Had Chaucer not wished to recall the sister's revenge, Rowe argues, he should have ended his narrative after the rape, the end of the 'first movement' of the story (*To Eternity*, pp.73-4).

[39] See *Met.* vi.587 ff., and *CA* V.5783 ff.

Chaucer's Philomela, it appears, could probably have retained her tongue without any threat to Tereus. The contrasting speech of Gower's heroine (*CA* 5655-83), emphasising the power and impact of her verbal articulation, is powerful and moving, appropriate to a figure modelled on Alceste. While the passionate and vengeful speech of Ovid's Philomela had provoked Tereus, in fear, to cut off her tongue, Chaucer's heroine can only weep 'pitously' and cry:

> ... "Syster!" with ful loud a stevene
> And "fader dere!" and "help me, God in hevene!" (2328-9)

Her passivity is further inscribed in her articulation of fear, for which the conventional wolf-lamb metaphor is employed:

> And therewithal she wepte tenderly
> And quok for fere, pale and pitously
> Ryght as the lamb that of the wolf is biten. (2316-8)

Procne and Philomela are presented as weak, 'sely' characters with no forcefulness, who are always in tears, helpless and pathetic. Tereus is the only character who displays any force: ironically, this is the perversion of an acceptable love, as *cupiditas* is the perversion of *caritas*. The notion that a woman good in love is a woman passive in her reactions to men obviously fails to account for a figure such as Alceste. The poetic corollary is the issue of the poet's responsibility to 'auctorite' and to posterity. The literary heritage is a means of learning about the past and 'Wel more thyng than men han seyn with ye!' (G11). To reduce 'auctorite' to 'propaganda', and to present that propaganda as 'auctorite' both disregards experience as a possible source of knowledge, and distorts the remembrance of things past.

The effect of the narrator's injudicious editorial practice, as we have seen, is to reduce the capacity of the wronged women for independent action. In depriving the heroines' of the emotional forcefulness with which their poetic memories are inscribed, the narrator fails with remarkable consistency effectively to cover up the tracks of his abuse.

Hypermnestra for example, unlike most of the company she keeps in the compendiary, was perceived in a favourable light by medieval commentators: 'in contrast to the self-pitying and destructive excesses of some of the other women [her action] stands out as a brave and selfless gesture in response to the demands of duty and love'.[40] The apparent 'entente' of the poet however, leads him to deprive Hypermnestra of any positive appeal by two major departures from his sources. The first of these is an examination of her horoscope:

> The Wirdes that we clepen Destine,
> Hath shapen hire that she mot nedes be
> Pyetous, sad, wis, and trewe as stel,
> As to these wemen it acordeth wel. (2580-3)

Destiny appears to be conspiring with Cupid in the production of good women. Hypermnestra's subsequent action is explicable in terms of her stars.[41] Venus, 'who gaf hire gret beaute' (2584) combined with Jupiter to instill in her all the virtues of the courtesy tradition:[42]

> ... conscience, trouthe, and drede of shame,
> And of hyre wifhod for to kepe hire name. (2586-7)

Although Mars with equal foresight restricted Hypermnestra's competence with knives, the malign Saturn dampened her promising destiny and 'madde hire for to deyen in prisoun' (2597-8).

Chaucer's second modification is to omit mention of Hypermnesta's forty nine sisters, all of whom in accordance with the wishes of their father 'dutifully slaughtered their newlywed husbands'.[43] While Hypermnestra's unique mercy in saving her husband in the

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[40] 'Study', p.14. See also 'Six Characters', pp.108-10.

[41] Hypermnestra's horoscope is not in Chaucer's sources, and appears to be an invention of his own. See *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.107, *Classical Tales*, p.110, and Hansen, 'The Antifeminist Narrator', 23.

[42] See D. Bornstein, *Mirrors of Courtesy* (Connecticut, 1975) and *The Lady in the Tower. Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Connecticut,1983), and J. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy* (Suffolk, 1985).

[43] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.102. Chaucer appears to confuse Danaus and Aegyptus, so that Aegyptus is the father of Hypermnestra. See *Riverside*, p.1074.

Legend becomes far less remarkable, she still resists the will of her father, the gratuitously false Aegyptus (2570-1). Previous example would suggest that Aegyptus is another heinous male whose sole function is the vindication of his own falseness. It is surprising, then, to find comic elements in his dialogue with Hypermnestra. He refers to her as "my ryghte doughter, tresor of myn herte" (2628), and "myn Ypermystre, doughter dere" (2632). His intent soon becomes clear, and he uses the informal 'thow' to emphasis his superior power over his daughter:

> "That, but thow do as I shal the devyse,
> Thow shalt be ded, by hym that al hath wroughte...
> But thow consente and werke after my red". (2641-2,2645)

By comparison with what has preceded it, the speech is both comic and shocking.[44] The obstinacy of Hypermnestra's reply is similarly surprising; while maintaining the forms of submission and shaking like a leaf, she asserts her will as paramount:

> ... "Lord and fader, al youre wille
> After my myghte, God wot, I shal fulfille,
> *So be it to me no confusioun*". (2650-2;my emphasis)

Hypermnestra's refusal to carry out the will of her father is a conventional act of disobedience in medieval hagiography;[45] it would be an even more impressive defiance if Hypermnestra rather than her stars had anything to do with it. The emphasis on inescapable destiny serves to cast a ludicrous light on the biological determinism of Cupid: the female heroine is apparently chained to the inevitable dictum of her stars, as the god of Love chains the poetic text to his totalizing preconceptions about women and about fiction.

The heroines' exploits within the current text of Chaucer's *Legend* are blatantly at odds with the literary heritage against which they are significantly defined. It is precisely because of the disparity that their ubiquitous passivity in the *Legend* is called into question.

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[44] See Hansen, 'The Antifeminist Narrator', 26.

[45] See J. Simmons, 'Sancti et Sanctae: Sex-role stereotyping in Medieval English Hagiography', Ph.D., diss., University of North Dakota, 1983, p.36.

The fact that the sources on which Chaucer draws are so obviously tailored for the present purpose of the palinode suggests that the good women were once not so passive as they apparently are now. In constructing new literary identities characterised by a ludicrous inability to achieve independent action or emotional forcefulness, the poet of the *Legend* imitates a literal mindedness that allows him to obey the letter and disobey the 'sentence' of Love's command.

Chapter 5

WAYWARD WOMEN OR FAITHFUL WIVES?

The god of Love is interested in the women about whom the poet is to write only from a specific aspect of their experience in love, which will demonstrate that they are true in love. Like the heroines, the poet can simultaneously obey and disobey, affirm and negate the task set by the god of Love, by disrupting the smooth presentation of unambiguous moral *exempla*. The cyclopean plundering advocated by Love is undermined in several of the legends through a manipulation of tone. The legends become subject to what Bakhtin calls 'polyglossia', described by John Ganim to 'mean something like a situation in which the authority of a single dominant dialect or language breaks down'.[1] Ganim draws attention to Bakhtin's emphasis of the fact that '"polyglossia" should lead us to a consideration of texts not as a collection of sources or images but as embodying a set of relationships between author and audience'.[2] By encouraging various sets of positions in the audience - sympathy, antipathy, a critical awareness of his manipulation of sources, and so on - the narrator of the *Legend* breaks down the authority of a cupidinous dialect. This is particularly evident in his hagiographical treatment of classical sources.

His 'insistence on creating a clear, black-and-white opposition between the sexes, at the expense of truth to his sources and to the complexities of human character, is reminiscent of the Eagle's comic reductiveness in the *House of Fame*'. This 'hagiographical flattening and formalisation of detail', results when 'the requirements of structure force experience to fit preconceived patterns'.[3] Kiser also points out that Alceste's translation of Love's position into generic requirements entails that the poet impose 'the simple moral

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[1] John Ganim, 'Bakhtin, Chaucer, Carnival, Lent', *SAC*, Proceedings No.2 (1986), 62.
[2] Ibid., 64.
[3] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.108.

patterns of hagiographic exemplary narrative onto the subject matter of the classical *auctores*'.[4] The inadequacy of the exposition reflects the inadequacy of the motivation. While men fare better than women in emerging completely unscathed from the interlude of love in the course of their exploits,[5] they are equally subject to this flattening of character. The model presented by the poem is patently an inadequate one. If the models provided by poetry ought either to show characters as better than 'ordinary men' and therefore to be emulated, or worse, and therefore to be shunned, it would be inappropriate for men to follow these literary models. For women too, the appropriate action inspired by models of heroines deserting kingdoms, betraying families, and murdering haphazardly would be horror and rejection. Love's position is shown to be potentially self-destructive, since if these models were appropriately rejected, Love's company would dissolve.

I. Playing with tone
(Ariadne, Phyllis)

The image of women as scheming ensnarers which is suggested in 'Medea' is carried to ludicrous lengths in 'Ariadne', the heroine of which legend is hardly the image of the feminine as 'calandier...Of goodnesse' (G533-4) intended by Love. Again, the narrator is not quite successful in covering up the tracks of his source adaptations. An apparently gratuitous castigation of Mynos (1865-9) might appear justified thematically if not artistically by its merits as another good-woman false-man *exemplum* (1915,1918). But Chaucer's sources

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[4] *Classical Tales*, p.89.

[5] This is a feature of Cixous' notion of 'phallogocentrism', an order which gives rise to and maintains binary oppositions, where 'victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity; under patriarchy, the male is always the victor' (Moi's paraphrase in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.105). The entire structure of the *Legend* on the one level confirms such an order, where although signifiers battle over meaning, the masculine must ultimately achieve supremacy.

justified Mynos's rejection of one whose misdirected passion led her, like Medea, to betray both father and country, as several of the *Legend*'s other martyrs were wont to do.[6] The abuse of the literary heritage is presented as having Love's approval because it apparently produces literary examples of his general statement that in love women are 'good' and men are faithless.

Dialogue is pronounced in 'Ariadne', and is used as a comic device to belie the romantic potential of the situation.[7] Phaedra and Ariadne are calculating and business-like in their speech, while the predominant note of Theseus's conversation is flamboyant opportunism. The anti-romantic presentation begins with a description of Theseus's situation in prison (1960-2). The romance of the lovers' exchange is undercut by the channel for communication they use - a conduit from a toilet ('foreyne'). The sisters' sympathy for Theseus's plight concludes with an ironic understatement:

> A kynges sone to ben in swich prysoun,
> And ben devoured, thoughte hem gret pite. (1975-6)

Their benevolence takes a peculiarly pragmatic turn. Ariadne expresses the desire that Theseus, "this woful lordes sone", "shal ben holpen, how so that we do" (1984). Phaedra wastes no time articulating pity for Theseus's 'povre estat' but replies enthusiastically to her sister with a fully developed plan for the specific way in which they can make effective their 'routhe'. Her proviso that Theseus be stout enough to carry out her plan (1995-6,2002) is hardly the way to promote the romantic potential of the story line. She works out, down to the last detail, how Theseus is to slay the beast and find his way back through the maze.

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[6] Scylla cut off her father's talismanic lock of hair which led to the devastation of his country. Chaucer's sources for 'Ariadne' appear to be *Met.* vii. 456-458, viii 6ff.; *Her.* X; the *Ovide Moralisé*. Sources for the main narrative were perhaps a Latin version of Plutarch's *Theseus* and Boccaccio's *Genealogie Deorum*. See *Riverside*, p.1071 for the doubt about some of the sources.

[7] In 'The Antifeminist Narrator', Hansen notes 'Chaucer's tendency to deromanticize and lower the tone' where pathos is not in order (24).

Bewildered and breathless after the minute exposition of Phaedra's detailed strategy, which as Frank comments, 'might almost have come out of *Mrs Beeton's Household Management*',[8] the narrator can only ask, 'What sholde I lenger sermoun of it make?' (2025).

The romance is further disparaged by the fact that after Phaedra's thirty-nine line speech, Chaucer's Theseus addresses Ariadne and not Phaedra as "The ryght lady of my lyf" (2029). Phaedra's speech was originally Ariadne's, but neither the narrator nor Theseus is interested to make a distinction.[9] Theseus is presented as more willing for self abasement than is perhaps consistent with the status he should have in order to justify Ariadne's affections:

> "But in youre servise thus I wol endure,
> ...I wol you serve...
> ...til that myn herte sterve.
> Forsake I wol at hom myn herytage
> And...ben of youre court a page...
> And me so wel disfigure and so lowe,
> That in this world ther shal no man me knowe". (2033-7,2046-7).

However, Theseus soon suggests that with their accomplice, the gaoler, they should all return to Crete together. He rounds up his speech with a cry for mercy, which brings home the fact that his entire speech has been quite unnecessary since the two sisters had determined to save him before he even opened his mouth. Ariadne and Phaedra have set the terms of the exchange - in dialogue - and it is necessary for Theseus to participate in similar terms in order to reclaim the verbal initiative.

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[8] Frank, *Chaucer and The Legend*, p.121.

[9] See *Chaucer and Ovid*, pp.102-3 and note 13, for references to explications of this adaptation. Gower, whose version is similar to Chaucer's, does not employ this particular variation.

Ariadne decides that Theseus's obsequiousness is not socially desirable (2080-3) and attempts to bolster the image he has smeared (2084-5), rapidly proceeding to a more attractive proposition:

> "Yit were it betere that I were youre wyf,
> Syn that ye ben as gentil born as I,
> And have a reaume, nat but faste by". (2089-81)

Her confidence is strengthened by the thought, already confirmed by Theseus: 'But what is that that man nyl don for drede?'(2095). Ariadne thinks of everything, including the marriage of Phaedra with Theseus's son, obviously not a love match in view of the fact that Theseus is twenty three years old.[10] Nor is Theseus to be outdone. He swears to abide by Ariadne's proposals, speaks extravagantly of his loyalty, and rounds up with a suddenly discovered seven-year love for her. But his awareness that practical considerations require his servility far more than any gestating passion is made clear in the loaded line:

> "Now have I yow, and also have ye me". (2121)

Ariadne almost purrs at the conclusion of her successful transaction:

> This lady smyleth at his stedefastnesse ...
> And to hyre sister seyde in this manere,
> Al softely: "Now, syster myn," quod she,
> "Now be we duchesses, bothe I and ye ...
> And bothe hereafter likly to ben quenes".(2123,2125-7, 2129)

Theseus is equal to such calculations, taking care to cram the escape barge with 'his wyves tresor' and then deserting her, 'For that hire syster fayrer was than she' (2172). While the calculation exhibited by both Ariadne and Phaedra is a long way from the ludicrous passivity of several of the other martyrs, it fails to demonstrate the faithfulness that Cupid desires.

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[10] Fyler makes this point, *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.103.

Immediately after Theseus's exit with Phaedra, the narrator interrupts his bald narrative with his second perfunctory reprimand:[11]

> And to his contre-ward he sayleth blyve -
> A twenty devel-wey the wynd hym dryve! -
> And fond his fader drenched in the se.
> Me lest no more to speke of hym, parde.
> These false lovers, poysoun be here bane! (2176-80)

Abruptly, pathos predominates, and the narrative permits a sympathy with the heroine that had been lacking in the legend's earlier comic passages. The narrator retains such details as Ariadne's awakening to an empty bed and her barefoot pursuit along the sands after Theseus's ship. The alternation between Ariadne's direct speech and narrative detail in this case heightens the pathos. Ariadne cries after Theseus:

> "Where be ye, that I may nat with yow mete,
> And myghte thus with bestes ben yslayn?"
> The holwe rokkes answerde hire agayn.
> No man she saw, and yit shyned the mone,
> And hye upon a rokke she wente sone,
> And saw his barge saylynge in the se.
> Cold wex hire herte, and ryght thus seyde she:
> "Meker than ye fynde I the bestes wilde!" (2191-8)

The demands of brevity again intrude. The narrator suggests that it is his practice simply to plunder Ovid for the details, and that he has little interest in effectively communicating the suffering, synonymous with the 'trouthe' of his martyrs:

> What shulde I more telle hire compleynyng:
> It is so long, it were an hevy thyng;
> In hire Epistel Naso telleth al. (2218-20)

Ariadne's prior poetic suffering was more vociferous than submissive, and it is this disparity that helps to question her present value as a model of truth in love. The manifest variations in tone that the legend of Ariadne has supported, in altering the perspectives in which she might be viewed, point to the limitations of Cupid's views about female suffering and truth.

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[11] For the first, see ll.1954-8.

Edwards notes that the subject of medieval commentators' introductions to the *Heroides* is to point to a moral, whether the poem shows chaste or unchaste, legitimate or illegitimate, wise or foolish loves. Phyllis, another *exemplum* of abandonment of self and kingdom, illustrates a love usually characterised as unchaste, illegitimate and foolish.[12] As Edwards notes, 'she compounds sin with sin: fornication with despair with suicide'.[13] Phyllis is as inappropriate a model in love as is Demophon. The principal message of the legend seems to be that all men are faithless; that to betray women is a generic impulse to which all men are subject. They are as congenitally unable to be faithful as women are to be anything but gullible, passive and true. Demophon is :

> ... lyk his fader of face and of stature,
> And fals of love; it com of nature. (2446-7)[14]

Both experience and authority serve to instruct and inform subsequent models (2394-6), a point also made inadvertently by Phyllis in her letter to Demophon. She hopes that her experience of his faithlessness in love will shape his literary fame, as he is recorded in what will become 'olde bokes'. When her own ancestors are 'peynted', so, she hopes, will Demophon:

> That folke may rede forby as they go,
> 'Lo! this is he that with his flaterye
> Bytraised hath and don hire vilenye
> That was his trewe love in thought and dede!' (2539-42)

Demophon inherits both his looks and his generic faithlessness from his father and when Phyllis does 'chere' to the former the implication is that she is also inevitably drawn to the qualities of faithlessness included in Demophon's heritage. In much the same way, the legend of Phyllis itself is simply duplicating the previous legend of Theseus and Ariadne:

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[12] See 'Six Characters', p.98.

[13] Ibid., p.105.

[14] As Edwards notes, Demophon's real crime seems to be his parentage (ibid., p.102). His lineage is referred to several times in order to stress his hereditary falseness: see also ll.2446-7, 2462-4, 2526, 2544 and 2549.

> Ye han wel herd of Theseus devyse
> In the betraysynge of fayre Adryane...
> At shorte wordes, ryght so Demophon
> The same wey, the same path hath gon,
> That dide his false fader Theseus. (2459-60,2461-3)

Gower's Demophon by contrast, less determined by his genes, is at least permitted to sorrow over the death of Phyllis:

> His sorwe was noght tho to seche;
> He gan his Slowthe forto banne,
> Bot it was al to late thanne. (*CA*. IV.875-7)

The crime of Gower's Demophon, like that of Pyramus in the *Legend*, seems to be more one of unpunctuality than outright faithlessness.

Phyllis herself, in one of those feats of didactic proficiency that characterise the good women, helpfully points to the moral:

> To muche trusted I, wel may I pleyne,
> Upon youre lynage and youre fayre tonge,
> And on youre teres falsly out yronge. (2525-7)

If the narrator is to be quite meticulous in executing Love's command, he is himself obviously - generically - unable to pass up the chance of a possible seduction. In fulfilling his penance, he is a part of the fiction he is making, and, unable to surmount his own destiny to be faithless, pounces on the capacity of his created fiction to further his own generic lust. And why not, since feminine gullibility is equally determined. He observes that having wooed the fair princess, Demophon may:

> ...[do] with Phillis what so that hym leste,
> As wel coude I, if that me leste so,
> Tellen al his doynge to and fro. (2469-71)

'As wel coude I' could apply either to the narrator as lover (2469) or as a poet (2471), asserting his control over the text of the woman's body or the text of his fiction. A similar tension occurs at the beginning of the legend. In a particularly flagrant instance of appropriating female speech, the narrator exclaims:

"God, for his grace, fro swich oon kepe us!"
Thus may these women preyen that it here. (2401-2)

The ambiguity of the poet's role exhibits the parallel between making love and making poetry, both potentially creative processes[15] that are justified by a ubiquitous *utilitas*. The oppositions between experience and authority, 'trouthe' in love and truth in words, poetic fiction and moral *utilitas*, choice and determination, culminate in the poet's heavily invested entreaty to:

Be war, ye wemen, of youre subtyl fo...
And trusteth, as in love, no man but me. (2559,2561)

The line points to the epistemological counterpoise established by the poet, most broadly between experience and authority, which the god of Love's poverty of perception leads him to conflate. The conflation is indicative of the articulation to which Love would wish to restrict the feminine: as the literary realisation of the ease and pleasure attendant upon masculine devotees of the law of Love.

In order to 'passe shortly' when he comes to focus on his subject, the narrator deals rapidly with Demophon's wooing and desertion of Phyllis, ending with the half-hearted:

Allas! that, as the storyes us recorde,
She was hire owene deth ryght with a corde. (2484-5)[16]

The fact that Phyllis' suicide is mentioned before her letter discourages the reader from empathising with her since there is no examination of or alignment with her point of view and the mind that will decide on suicide. The heroine's letters are often associated with some form of *occupatio*, generally an inexpressibility *topos* or brevity formula.[17] The effect

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[15] See P. Neuss, 'Images of Writing and the Book in Chaucer's Poetry', *RES*, 32 (1981), 396-7.

[16] Gower's retelling of the story, by contrast with Chaucer's, spends little time on Demophon's prior adventures, and moves directly into the relationship between Phyllis and Demophon.

[17] See Pearsall, *Floure and Leafe*, pp.68-71 for a discussion of the inexpressibility *topos* and brevity formula.

of the poet's *dispositio* in 'Phyllis' can also be seen through a comparison with Gower's retelling of the same story. In the *Confessio*, Phyllis is allowed both a letter in reported speech, and a complaint in direct speech, before mention is made of her suicide.[18] The *Legend* narrator twice promises to repeat a word or two of the original epistle, emphasising the earlier text by means of *occupatio*, before he finally gets around to the letter itself. Antipathy rather than sympathy results, since the letter's futility is already apparent - Demophon has long gone. The narrator seems similarly aware of the futility of words: 'Me lyste nat...to...spende on hym a penne ful of ynke' (2490-1). To forestall any possible compassion for Phyllis's complaint, the narrator slips in a brevity formula:

> But al hire letter wryten I ne may
> By order, for it were to me a charge;
> Hire letter was ryght long and thereto large. (2513-5)

He explains his selection of the original on aesthetic grounds:

> But here and ther in rym I have it layd,
> There as me thoughte that she wel hath sayd. (2516-7)

The effect of the brevity formula here is to reinforce the dependence of feminine articulation on the selective and vested mediation of male authors, reducing the capacity of the heroines for independent action and articulation.

Letter writing is in fact a popular pastime among the heroines.[19] Most of the letters in the *Legend* are associated with some form of *occupatio*, and always arise after the heroines have been deserted. On a narrative level, this structural necessity is dictated by the source of the *Heroides*, letters written by already deserted women to their false lovers. The heroine's letter functions like apostrophe, as speech addressed to an absent or dead person

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[18] See *CA* IV.731-886

[19] Elizabeth Goldsmith writes of 'a standard *topos* of epistolary literature since Ovid - the female letter of suffering and victimisation. The association of women's writing with the love-letter genre has perhaps been the most tenacious of gender-genre connections in the history of literature'; see E.Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the Female Voice. Essays on Epistolary Literature* (London, 1979), introduction, vii.

independent of other subjects within the current fiction, and in this sense is not a dynamic or dialectical mode and does not contribute to a forward moving narrative. It is like a curse, signalling all the theologically damning despair implicit in such an articulation. With reference to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Goldsmith comments on 'the use of a love-letter exchange to represent, paradoxically, the failures of both epistolary and erotic interaction'.[20] A similar comment could be made of the letters which constitute the *Heroides*, and equally, the letters as they appear both in the *Legend* and in the final book of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The futile laments of the abandoned heroines are articulations of defeat and loss, lacking the ability to influence events, either amorous (departed lovers) or narrative (advancing the story), but are merely the final assertion of a subject position after the battle has been lost and won. The effect highlights the martyrs' contrast with Alceste, whose poetic memory indicates achievement - willingly sacrificing her life to bring about a desired end - and whose role in the Prologue saves the life of the poet and brings about the present poem. The heroine, like the speaking subject, is the one who says not 'I am' but 'I am one who has lost something'.[21] In this sense, the epistles constitute the heroines as speaking subjects, defining them against the lack signified by their false lovers. It qualifies what the theories of gender construction outlined above see as the masculine subject's delineation of self against the absence that is the feminine, the specularized Other which reflects and, by contrast, confirms masculine subjectivity.

The rhetoric of letter writing - specifically a letter of condolence - is referred to by Barthes as a procedure paradoxically entailing the suspension of sincerity in order to achieve the *effect* of sincerity. It is necessary for the writer of the condolence letter to suspend genuine feelings of sympathy - to distance himself or herself from this discourse - to cold

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[20] Ibid., introduction, ix.
[21] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.99.

bloodedly, insincerely in a sense, formulate the terms appropriate to communicate the sincerity of the emotion. This need to convey appropriately the sentiments of the sender is also emphasised in a twelfth-century anonymous *ars dictaminis*: a letter is 'a suitable arrangement of words set forth to express the intended meaning of its sender. Or in other words, a letter is a discourse composed of coherent yet distinct parts signifying fully the sentiments of its sender'.[22] Of the thirteen sections of a letter treated, the longest and most important is the Salutation, which again reflects the primacy of the audience. A salutation is 'a certain fit ordering of words effectively influencing the mind of the recipient'.[23] But of course this is precisely the element missing from the heroines' post-hoc epistles which the literary addressees never receive.

The rhetoric of gesture, similarly to the *ars dictaminis*, is also conventional, requiring the recognition that the signifying gesture is not meaningful in itself, but must be held in interpretive tandem to the emotion it is designed to evoke. Signification is dependent upon the preservation of the signifying unit which is present, and the signified concept which is absent: meaning proceeds from the interplay of presence and absence. Both Quintilian and Geoffrey of Vinsauf stress the necessary suitability of gesture to subject matter; to an extent, genre dictates gesture.[24] The use of a particular genre automatically awakens certain expectations in the reader, and there is an association between tranquility of gesture and virtue, and between violence of gesture and a nature beyond the control of reason.[25] The heroines are singularly ill-fitted for the genre of hagiography, and their glaring inability in Christian terms to exemplify strength of judgement, piety, or a single-

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[22] Anonymous of Bologna, 'The Principles of Letter Writing. Rationes Dictandi', in Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, III.1 (p.7).

[23] Ibid., V.2 (p.16).

[24] See R.Benson, *Medieval Body Language: A Study of the Use of Gesture in Chaucer's Poetry*, *Anglista*, 21 (Copenhagen, 1980), p.161.

[25] See ibid., p.27.

minded determination to serve their maker is apparent throughout the text. Only through the distorting glass of the heretical canon of *cupiditas* can these qualities be perceived in the heroines. The articulation of the feminine in these epistolary and gestural modes suggests an incapacity for action and a yoking to predetermined forms reminiscent of the actual roles of passivity articulated by the poem itself. The implication, carried to a ludicrous extent by the literal minded narrator, is that women are destined to passivity by gender and by genre.

II. Praise and Blame
(Dido and Lucrece)

The *Legend of Good Women* entails a rewriting of literary history in which moral complexity is reduced to *exempla* of praise and blame. Interpretation is effaced, since the aim of exemplary narrative is to produce and induce clear moral alignments. In such a situation, Dido is a peculiar choice for exemplary hagiography to enlist. The boundaries of praise and blame are blurred in such readings as that of Augustine, as well as in versions of the story by Virgil, Ovid and not least, the poet of the *House of Fame* and the *Legend.* Dido is perhaps the archetypal instance of the moral and poetic dilemma that the *Legend* evokes, raising questions of reading and writing that are central to medieval literary theory, and to medieval notions of poetic responsibility.

The narrator opens the legend by announcing to Virgil that he *intends* to 'folwe', as he can, 'thy lanterne'. In Dante's *Purgatorio* (I.43-6), the lantern signifies a guiding light. Statius explains how Virgil's writings led him to a belief in Christianity which Virgil was unable to experience himself: "You were like one who goes by night and carries the light behind him and profits not himself, but makes those wise who follow him".[26] In other words, although Virgil could not himself be inspired with the true faith, or fully comprehend

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[26] *The Divine Comedy - Purgatory*, trans. by C. Singleton (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970), xxii, 67-9.

his own text, he functioned as a kind of intermediary for Statius. This is like the poet's relationship with Alceste, the personification of the daisy which in the F version is:

> ... The clernesse and the verray lyght
> That in this derk world me wynt and ledeth. (F 84-5)[27]

Though not a lover himself, the narrator intends to further the cause of Love. But intention, as adumbrated in the Prologue, is not the same thing as effect, and it could be argued that the poet is as unsuccessful in furthering Love's cause as he is in following Virgil's 'lanterne'.

As was Augustine, the dreamer in the *House of Fame*, recounting the story of Dido, was beguiled into a sympathy with her apparently not intended by Virgil. His reading points to medieval commentators' concern with the issue of Virgil's objectivity, since his intended hero appeared to be Aeneas.[28] The narrator in the *Legend* follows Augustine and the poet of the *House of Fame* in seeming to be seduced by Dido's text as Dido was by Aeneas. Despite the avowed intention to follow Virgil, Dido's story in the *Legend of Good Women* is significantly indebted to her classic defence in Ovid's *Heroides* (VII). The poet, then, foregrounding the many interpretive positions encouraged by Dido's text, functions as an intermediary between Cupid and the audience, in a sense between feminine passivity and the multiplicity of interpretation, the construction of positions from which it is possible both to read and to speak. The issue of the poet's role introduces the question of his responsibility. With all the weight of 'these olde aproved storyes' (G 21) on his shoulders, the poet 'bears a moral responsibility for what he writes, even for what he copies. If he lies, knowingly or not, he is to blame for passing on to later generations a false version of the

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[27] The F version foregrounds this religious aspect more explicitly than G, where it is nevertheless present as the point of clarity to which the poet's confusion aspires.

[28] See *Chaucer and Ovid*, pp.33-9, 111-13. The following remarks are indebted to Fyler's discussion of the Dido-Aeneas historiography. On Augustine's misreading of the *Aeneid*, see above, 1.II.

past'.[29] The issue of praise or blame is thus as relevant to the poet as it is to the character Dido. Her representation and reputation are closely connected with those of the poet.

For medieval commentators, Dido was not a tragic figure in the classical sense, but a 'cause for homily to warn readers against foolish love'.[30] Her martyrdom 'is made an example not of love and fidelity but of pathetic error'.[31] The commentators generally condemned 'with varying degrees of vehemence a woman who added self-murder to concupiscence'.[32] The obsessive nature of her love is indicated:

> Of which ther gan to breden swich a fyr
> That sely Dido hath now swich desyr
> With Eneas, hire newe gest, to dele,
> That she hath lost hire hewe and ek hire hele. (1156-9)

This obsessiveness is also substantiated by her position in the second circle of hell (*Inferno* V.85) with Cleopatra and Semiramis. Her passion for 'hire newe gest' seems to derive in part from its novelty:

> And, for he was a straunger, somwhat she
> Likede hym the bet, as, God do bote,
> To som folk ofte new thyng is sote. (1075-7)[33]

Frank believes that Dido's generous gift giving, which 'continues metaphorically the process of falling in love', is an example of incident used as emblematic of other narrative concerns.[34] In Virgil, Aeneas and not Dido was noted for his generosity; this alternation is one of the several instances of undercutting Aeneas evident in the *Legend*.[35] Dido's

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[29] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.111.

[30] 'Six Characters', p.52.

[31] Ibid., p.57.

[32] 'Study', p.45.

[33] As Edwards notes, activities which are merely imprudent if private, become in a public sphere almost wicked ('Six Characters', p.53). Her discussion of Hypsipile comments that she was considered wrong and foolish to love a stranger (p.59). The same is noted for several of the *Legend*'s martyrs: see, for instance, Medea (p.73), Phyllis (p.98).

[34] Frank, *Chaucer and The Legend*, p.68.

[35] See also the narrator's qualification at ll.1072-4; and his scepticism about Aeneas's destiny to sail to Italy, ll.1286-9.

material 'largesse' seems both unselfish and indicative of her abandon to an ill-considered and obsessive passion. As with other of the *Legend*'s heroines such as Medea and Ariadne, it is Dido's foolish and misplaced desire and not Aeneas's that seems to initiate the doomed affair. The full responsibility of Dido as well as Aeneas for her foolish passion is emphasised by the writing out of all supernatural influences. The narrator coyly draws attention to his excision of the influences of the gods (Venus, Juno, Jupiter and so on) when the two lovers hide together in the cave:

> I not, with hem if there wente any mo
> The autor maketh of it no mencioun. (1227-8)

The hunt arranged by Dido is a thinly veiled pretext for hunting Aeneas:

> An huntyng wol this lusty freshe queene,
> So priketh hire this newe joly wo. (1191-2)

Dido's fondness for novelty has already been hinted at by the unsavoury reference to the fact that she 'whilom was the wif of Sytheo' (1005), drawing attention to her broken vow to be chastely faithful to his memory. Dido seems to have taken the model of a good woman a long way from that provided by Alceste.

The parallels between Alceste and Dido are emphasised in the legend. Dido, 'fayrer...than is the bryghte sonne' (1006), was held 'of alle queenes flour' (1009). The feminine predilection for 'routhe', as articulated in Alceste by the god of Love, is shared by Dido:

> Anon hire herte hath pite of his wo,
> And with that pite love com in also;
> And thus, for pite and for gentilesse,
> Refreshed moste he been of his distresse. (1078-81)

The poet's attempt to represent Dido as taking courtly 'routhe' on Aeneas is undermined by the fact that Dido has not acted in response to Aeneas's petitions, but has done everything

in her power to achieve the love of this adventuring stranger.[36] The explicitly sexual nature of her attraction[37] contrasts with the sacrificial and chosen action of Alceste. The narrator strains, unsuccessfully, to adapt Dido's motivation for present purposes. He tells us:

> That sely Dido rewede on his peyne,
> And tok hym for husbounde and becom his wyf. (1237-8)

As he makes clear though, Dido takes Aeneas as her husband in the metaphorical sense only: Dido later entreats of the soon-to-depart Aeneas:

> "Have ye nat sworn to wyve me to take?
> Allas, what woman wole ye of me make?" (1304-5)

While emotion is constitutive of Dido to a greater extent than it is in most of the legends,[38] the *force* of her emotion, which is central to the *Heroides* presentation, is constantly defused in her legend. The register of gestures available to women in love is clearly inadequate for such of the *Legend's* martyrs as Dido, and she is obliged to take on the characteristics of the male courtly lover:

> She siketh sore, and gan hyrself turmente;
> She waketh, walweth, maketh many a breyd,
> As don these lovers, as I have herd seyd. (1165-7)[39]

Female characters, including the Christ-like Alceste, are obliged to fit their experience to male forms of gestural expression, since they lack their own; their experiences are limited by the signifying opportunities available to them.

It is essential that the heroine, if she is to exemplify Cupid's law, give up, or invest her power of signification in the man who betrays her. The many queens in the compendiary

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[36] See also her words to her sister: ll.1172-7.

[37] See l.1158 where she wishes to 'dele', or have sexual intercourse with Aeneas.

[38] Frank claims that 'emotion is the heart of the poem' (*Chaucer and The Legend*, p.63).

[39] In the notes to ll.1159-67, the *Riverside* editors point out regarding Dido's 'classical symptoms of lovesickness (see KnT I.1361-76 n.)' that 'the only other female so afflicted in Chaucer's work is the sick falcon in The Squire's Tale; cf. SqT V.411-30, 472-74' (p.1068). But Derek Pearsall has drawn my attention also to Dorigen in The Franklin's Tale (see V.817-821).

undergo a change in status from royalty to subjecthood. The heroines give up their power of independent identification - their names - to the men they 'love'. Paradoxically, the good woman's good name, entirely at the disposal of the man to whom she has relinquished it, is informed by the only value in the world she hopes to maintain, and which it is her distinguishing feature to lose. The loss of name is equated with death, as the loss of the *power* to name is the death of the subject. If one has no position in relation to the discourse which names and transforms, directs and controls the world, one is without a position from which to speak, without power, and without the capacity to change one's experience. Dido explicitly connects loss of name with the loss of life, which it is the prerogative of the masculine to confer or deny:

> ... thanne wol I yeve yow leve
> To slen me with youre swerd now sone at eve!
> For thanne yit shal I deyen as youre wif. (1320-2)

Richard Green speaks of:

> the double standard by which the sworn word between man and man might be regarded as absolutely binding, whereas in affairs of the heart it became merely an expedient device to gain one's end...there can be no doubt that it is founded upon the presumption of female *altérité*. Women can be denied access to the code of honour which binds together civilized society because they are not regarded as members of that society .[40]

As in 'Phyllis', reportage of Dido's suicide precedes what the narrator presents as her letter to Aeneas. Her letter acknowledges the loss of signifying power consequent upon the loss of name:

> "But syn my name is lost thourgh you," quod she,
> "I may wel lese on yow a word or letter,
> Al be it that I shal ben nevere the better". (1361-3)

The post-hoc letter merely emphasises the futility of the feminine plight, undercutting the death that has preceded it in the narrative, since 'Dido' ends not with the spectre of the

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[40] Green, 'Chaucer's Victimized Women', *SAC*, 10 (1988), 18.

heroine's death, but with a footnote to Ovid for the interested reader to pursue. Dido is exchanged between male poets as she has been between male lovers.

The poet regrets that the heroines are not able to appropriate lessons from the poetic memory which helps to form them, of which they are a part and themselves help to form. He wishes they could apply to their own lives the knowledge procured from past example of men's faithlessness in love, as he uses experience to assess his sources:

> O sely wemen, ful of innocence...
> What maketh yow to men to truste so?
> Have ye swych routhe upon hyre feyned wo,
> And han swich olde ensaumples yow beforn?
> Se ye nat alle how they ben forsworn ...
> Ye may as wel it sen, as ye may rede. (1254,1256-9,1263)

The women of the legend are presented as bad readers, who fail to employ any critical strategies in reading their lovers. Fortunately for the narrator's execution of his task, they also fail to learn from experience. And yet in this presentation, the narrator is duplicating the hypocrisy of Cupid: modelling himself on the god, the narrator both misreads and miswrites his heroines, while blaming them for misreading and miswriting their own lives. Unlike Alceste, poetic memory for the heroines becomes a dead weight of precedent dictating a definition of goodness as an aspect of the passivity to which in poetic terms, Love wishes to reduce the imaginative function of poetry. And, unlike the narrator, Dido the good woman is unable to adopt a critical reading stance towards the man destined to betray her. The narrator's own shifting subject-positions indicate the inadequacy of Love's contention. Inscribed in the fiction as participant (performing a penance), maker (of fiction), servant (of Love) and reader (of the world and of books), the narrator is unable to execute a penance both successful and sincere, to preside in any fixed way over a text inevitably signalling its own disruptions. He has been given a licence to speak - to preach - the law of love by Cupid, which assumes that the narrator has a good life (conscience), sufficient

knowledge, and the power of legal authority.[41] Since, in Love's view, the narrator lacks these qualities, he lacks a licence to speak with authority. Love's position is itself immoral since he urges the narrator to press on regardless of his moral standing or intention. The end, or *causa finalis* of the poet's work, then, according to Love, is not salvation, not the 'charity' of a higher good, but the cupidity that will perpetuate Love's own power.

Of all the heroines selected for the compendiary, Lucrece was probably the most suitable candidate for martyrdom. She appears to have enjoyed pagan canonisation[42] as well as Christian approval: Shaner states that most medieval authors find Lucrece's 'purity unquestionable, and her iron resolve admirable [and] the conduct of her life impeccable'.[43] Further, Lucrece's fame derives from her sexual violation, a violation motivated by lust, without even the pretence of 'love', and she provides appropriate material for hagiography. Lucrece then, is as clear a cause for praise as Tarquin is for blame. The poet, however, problematises this exemplary clarity even as he assures the audience of Lucrece's virtue:

> Not only that these payens hire comende,
> But he that cleped is in oure legende
> The grete Austyn hath gret compassioun
> Of this Lucresse. (1688-91)

Although he admits sympathy for her plight, Augustine condemns Lucrece for committing suicide out of the weakness of shame.[44] Apart from that of John of Salisbury, Augustine's view expresses the only exception to Lucrece's consistently favourable reception; since she has an otherwise unblighted record, the narrator's reference to the authority of the 'grete Austyn' is difficult to reconcile with the task he has been set.

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[41] See above, 2.I.

[42] The *Riverside* editors cite Robinson 'that Ovid tells her story in the *Fasti* under the date (24 Feb.) which was commemorated as "Fuga Tarquinii Superbi." Thus she appeared to have a place on the calendar, like a Christian saint' (p.1070).

[43] 'Study', p.80.

[44] *De civitate Dei*, I.19. See *Riverside*, p.1070.

The narrator states that his 'cause' for telling 'this storye' is 'to preyse and drawe to memorye', the 'verray trewe Lucresse'. Lucrece's wifely virtue is stressed throughout the legend: she is a 'noble wif' (1719, 1786, 1873), whose tears 'embelished hire wifly chastite' (1737), and whose 'herte was so wyfly and so trewe' (1843). Her goodness is such that it seems to require no interpretation. She is a type of the 'literal' text so favoured by Cupid:

> Hyre contenaunce is to hire herte dygne,
> For they acorde bothe in dede and sygne. (1738-9)

If praise is associated with such a self-evident reading, blame on the other hand falls prey to sophistic deviousness. Tarquin is 'lyght of tonge' (1699), regarding the verbal exercise of praise as that which furthers his own desire:

> "And lat us *speke* of wyves, that is best;
> *Preyse* every man his owene as hym lest,
> And with oure *speche* lat us *ese oure herte*". (1702-4;my emphasis)

The imagery of the Prologue is echoed to reinforce the innocence and evil embodied by Lucrece and Tarquin respectively. On the morning before Tarquin accosts Lucrece 'the brid began to synge' (1757), an image of safety and innocence evoking memory of the Prologue's 'smale foules' (G118), who were more fortunate than Lucrece in escaping their transgressor, the 'foulere', that abused them with his 'sophistrye' (G125). The violent, consuming image of Tarquin's passion (1753-6) is followed by another echo of the Prologue's birds, singing a new day awake. Similarly ominous in 'Lucrece' is mention that 'Doun was the sonne, and day hath lost his lyght' (1779), in view of the Prologue's reference to the daisy as 'afered of the nyght'(G53), and closing itself to rest (G52). The parallel between Love's ravaging of the literary heritage and Tarquin's ravaging of women is evident, as is that between their views on language as something to be used in the furthering of their own desires. But it is equally evident that Lucrece's almost comatose passivity, and her lack of verbal articulation does not further, but instead deviates from the model of feminine virtue provided by Alceste in the Prologue.

Lucrece's innocence is stressed by Chaucer:

> This noble wif sat by hire beddes side
> Dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte. (1719-20)

Little does she realise that she has been invoked as a text upon which men might read feminine virtue. In Ovid and Livy, Tarquin knocks at the door prior to the rape, and is received by Lucrece, details followed by Gower. Chaucer's Tarquin, by contrast, 'ful thefly' stalks his prey by sneaking into the house after the sun has gone down 'and day hath lost his lyght'. Lucrece's status as the unsuspecting victim is thus enlisted to convey the horror of the rape scene; indeed, Tarquin appears to be quite titillated by it. It is when Tarquin puts a knife to Lucrece's throat that the narrative point of view shifts to Lucrece; before this, the narrator and Tarquin had divided up the narrative between them. When she is utterly helpless, Lucrece is given the focus of the narrative. Her helplessness is related to her lack of articulation:

> No word she spake, she hath no myght thereto,
> What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago. (1796-7)

The connection between lack of power and lack of language is repeated in 'she loste bothe at ones wit and breth' (1815). Lucrece, innocent, defenceless and devoted, is contrasted with Tarquin, aggressive, calculating and lustful, and the conventional wolf-lamb metaphor is employed (1798). The helplessness of her predicament is emphasised by the fact that her questions are not relayed by direct speech, but through narrative mediation. The force of Tarquin is emphasized by the use of direct speech which occurs before and after the narrator's disclosure of Lucrece's thoughts. The effect of all this is to reconfirm the lover-rapist-God in his position of power:

> She axeth grace, and seyth al that she can.
> "Ne wilt thow nat", quod he, this crewel man. (1804-5)

The narrative shifts back and forth - from the siege of Ardea to the home of Colatyn and Lucrece, back to the siege and to the house again - highlighting the position of Lucrece

as object of exchange between the two warriors; the rape itself was the direct result of Colatyn having to exhibit to other men the virtue of his wife. This aspect of male competition is made even more explicit in Gower's version of the story, where Colatyn and Arrons, Tarquin's son, set their wives up in open competition, observing their wives to ascertain which one appears the more devoted to her husband. The *story* of Lucrece becomes an object of exchange between source and present version, between Cupid (command) and narrator (execution), between narrator and audience. The poet thoughtfully reminds his audience that he has told the story of Lucrece:

> ... for she was of love so trewe,
> Ne in hir wille she chaunged for no newe;
> And for the stable herte, sadde and kynde,
> That in these wymmen men may alday fynde. (1874-7)

The outward signs by which she might be read are directly representative of her wifely virtue. She is a 'pleyn text' which 'it nedith nat to glose':

> And mekely she let hyre eyen falle;
> And thilke semblaunt sat hire wel withalle. (1734-5)

It is just this wifely truth that is the motivation for her exemplary death: she commits suicide so that 'hir husbonde shulde nat have the foule name' (1845). She is canonised by cupidity and condemned by charity.[45] Her decision to commit suicide arises from her role as object of exchange between husband and society, woman as reflection of man's aspirations and value.

In contrast to Alceste who was willing to die in order to alter the event of her husband's death, Lucrece commits suicide to escape the impasse in which she has been placed. The narrator's attempt to append the appropriate moral at the conclusion of the

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[45] Augustine condemns Lucrece for misunderstanding chastity as a matter of the body rather than the mind, and for a misplaced sense of worldly shame. See above, and *De civitate Dei*, I.19.

legend of Lucrece succeeds in precisely the contrary effect. He misquotes Christ's words about the Roman centurion to refer to women:[46]

> For wel I wot that Crist himselve telleth
> That in Israel, as wyd as is the lond,
> That so gret feyth in al that he ne fond,
> As in a woman; and this is no lye. (1879-82)

But of course it is a lie, 'and the realization of this by his audience should shatter the hapless narrator's moralizing'.[47] The inaptitude of the quotation is emblematic of the comparison between Alceste and the 'martyrs' who are forced into generally inappropriate models of hagiography. The comparison is the structural motivation of the poem:

> But now I charge the, upon thy lyf,
> That in thy legende thow make of this wif,
> Whan thow hast othere smale mad byfore. (G 538-40)

Love for the heroines is not an act of choice but a sphere in which to demonstrate predetermined passivity, 'natural' victimization and the loss of a space from which to articulate: 'Ther as they caste hir herte, there it dwelleth' (1878).

Critics have usually interpreted the unfinished state of the *Legend* to be conclusive evidence of Chaucer's boredom with the poem.[48] While Cupid posits the closure of the narrative in the apotheosis of Alceste (G538-40), his queen seems to take account of the endless process of writing:

> Thow shalt, whil that thow livest, yer by yere,
> The moste partye of thy tyme spende

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[46] See Matthew 7:10; Luke 7:9.

[47] 'Study', p.197.

[48] Apart from Goddard's 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', Rowe believes that his interpretation is the only one to propose that the *Legend* should be regarded as finished (*To Eternity*, p.116). I disagree with Rowe's conclusion, in relation to the *Legend*, that 'an ending which simultaneously dramatises renewed engagement with the world and a turning from it, the mind's return to the daisy and the mind's flight from God, is the quintessential ending for a medieval poem', and that 'the *Legend* provides the impetus for this realisation' (pp.122-3).

> In makynge of a gloryous legende. (G 471-3)

Alceste is to be the final example and culmination of the moral to which the lesser legends aspire (G 539-40). But the process of arriving at the final *exemplum*, Alceste, must be one of endless deferral, since Chaucer doesn't know when he will die. If he is to be absolutely faithful to his task, and the poet does seem to have a strong predilection for literal obedience, he *must* be unsuccessful; otherwise the poem would be finished before his death and the command disobeyed. The dilemma is like that of Barthes' letter of condolence writer, who can either be sincere and unsuccessful, or suspend faithfulness in order to achieve the required effect. The resistance of the text to the rigid sexual characterisations implied by Cupid also indicate the inevitable failure of the enterprise he envisages. Dido assumes the guise of the courtly lover, and Theseus hypocritically appropriates feminine tears when 'pitously he wep, and shok his hed' (2344). The narrator's misapplication of the 'mater apetiteth form alwey' paradigm identifies Jason with feminine *mater,* an association which provides an image for the poem's own inability to achieve success, since language is the source of desire, which is endless, and endlessly defers satisfaction, and meaning:

> Or as a welle that were botomles,
> Ryght so can false Jason have no pes. (1584-5)

Death is the end of desire, as the poem would ideally end with the death of the poet and the legend of Alceste as the definitive, all-encompassing *exemplum.* The impulse for the poem as explicated in the Prologue comes from the poet's perception of Alceste as merciful intermediary, saving him from Cupid's death sentence, and poetic inspiration as the personification of the daisy, the object of his devotion, and as a cause of the present poem: her importance and function for him derive from the way in which he perceives her. As the reflection of his desires she too is ultimately specularized by the poet. But the end of desire in death does not mean that the object of desire is achieved, merely that desire is no longer. This is realised in a dramatically graphic way by the ending of the poem in mid-sentence:

This tale is seyd for this conclusioun -

PART III: *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

> **"The meaning of the poem does not hinge on so fortuitous a fact as Troilus's placing his faith in the wrong woman or in a bad woman, but in the fact that he places his faith in a thing which can reflect back to him the image of that faith and yet be incapable of sustaining it".[1]**

This much cited characterisation of Troilean sorrow points to concerns which are at issue in a study of the articulation of the feminine in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Muscatine's reading of Criseyde in relation to Troilus implicitly points to the importance of forms - especially courtly forms - in the poem: the forms which Troilus's ideal devotion takes, and which pave the way for his 'joye' as well as his 'sorwe'.[2] Such a reading also insists on the derivative nature of Criseydan articulation: she exists for the playing out of Troilus's crises. Troilus looks to her for something that neither she, nor any human could provide. He looks to her for a notion of himself that transcends himself. R.A. Shoaf notes that Troilus:

> is...a falsifier because he sought his meaning in Criseyde to the exclusion of her very humanity: he did not know that she was 'slydynge of corage' precisely because he did not know *her* very well at all or, and this would be worse, if he did know this, or suspect it, then he ignored it, in favour of his ideal figment of her.[3]

Troilus equates sexual with divine love; as Gordon observes, the consummation of sexual love in Book III is identified with the Beatific Vision.[4] Criseyde's more pragmatic, less ideal love is different in kind to that of Troilus, and has different consequences, allowing for a transfer of sexual allegiance. Yet she is read within a Troilean horizon of expectations,

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[1] C.Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley, 1957), p.164.

[2] Muscatine contrasts Criseyde's 'naturalistic' representation with her 'conventional' representation, the former generally corresponding to her scenes with Pandarus, and the latter to her scenes with Troilus. He notes, for example, that 'in the great consummation scene in Book III, Criseyde is seen alternately in a naturalistic light, as she responds dramatically to Pandarus's sudden appearance, and in a conventional light, as the poet gives her nonrepresentational monologue to speak. With the ascendance of Troilus in the action she is correspondingly idealised' (ibid., p.158).

[3] Shoaf, *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word* (Oklahoma, 1983), p.148.

[4] I.Gordon, *The Double Sorrow of Troilus* (Oxford, 1970), p.40.

and this, as Criseyde perceives, will lead to her condemnation both within the poem (Pandarus) and by literary posterity (Cupid in the *Legend of Good Women*). In the extent to which she is the world of flowers that are fair and that pass, her betrayal allows for Troilus's progression beyond mutability. She is discarded - narratively - in the interests of his existential hermeneutics. Criseyde, it seems, is censured because she fails to 'cast up' her visage to the God in whose image she is made and of whom she cannot know - or to perform the pagan equivalent of this.

As a virtuous pagan, Troilus can move towards a divine apprehension because an ideal form exists for his idealisation of love. He is able to ascend to the eighth sphere and laugh at the world, whereas Criseyde is transferred to the Greek camp and turns to another male protector. The 'formes of speche' available to Criseyde are notably and demonstrably more limited than those which are available to Troilus, and work against her in a way that they do not work against him. Since her means of articulation are thus limited, so is the range of her interpretive competence. She operates within a set of expectations, and cannot effectively articulate herself outside them, a limitation she conceives of as a lack of foresight (V.746-9). Even those forms with which she has some familiarity and so perhaps some readerly control, seem, for the most part, to work against her, if working against her is seen as consistent with restricting her ability to choose. How are the 'choices' that she makes in the course of the poem constituted: to love Troilus, to leave Troy, and to turn to Diomede? What range of articulation and choice is available to her within a poem which demands her 'betrayal'?

In the context of the poem, Criseyde's articulation has a larger significance than her particular destiny. Her 'private' feminine articulation is correlated, both within the poem and within medieval theories of language and social order, to the larger 'public' history of a society. The England of the late-fourteenth century, 'nagged by an interminable war and

beset internally by social, political and religious turmoil',[5] was also the site of a nascent national identity, emerging alongside a growing vernacular. 'As is well known', writes Vance, 'the legend of Troy nourished the political identities of newly emerging European nations faced with the task of inventing their own historical past'.[6] He observes further 'that at a time when the several vernaculars of Europe had become emblems of new political entities, Chaucer's project of writing Troy's story "out of Latyn in my tonge" was no empty ideological gesture'.[7] Cicero shared with Aristotle a belief in the necessary relationship between language and politics, and that it was eloquence that had civilised society:

> ...ut existimen sapientiam sine eloquentia parum prodesse civitatibus, eloquentiam vero sine sapientia nimium obesse plerumque, prodesse numquam.
>
> wisdom without eloquence does little good for the good of states, but that eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful.[8]

As Vance notes:

> the notion that the order of discourse is the living expression of the social order was already central to a tradition of classical oratory that any poet such as Dante, Petrarch, or Chaucer knew very well...In the *De oratore*...Cicero says it is speech that has the power to unite men in a single place, to extract them from their bestial and savage condition, to bring them to civility, and to sustain laws and justice.[9]

Woman as well as language was seen as a measure of the state's health and the perceived moral degeneracy of women was closely connected with female sexuality.[10] The feminine,

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[5] Muscatine, *French Tradition*, p.128.

[6] *Mervelous Signals*, p.266.

[7] Ibid., p.267.

[8] Cicero, *De inventione*, 1.i, in *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H.M.Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1949), p.3. See also *De oratore*, 1.viii.53, and Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp.10-5.

[9] *Mervelous Signals*, p.257; Vance refers to *De oratore*, 1.viii.53.

[10] See Part I above, for a fuller discussion of the connection between female morality and female sexuality. Also see Vance *(Mervelous Signals*, p.259), who notes that St Bernard 'tended to base his understanding of the opposition between chaos and signification on his conception of women, and it all hangs on poor Eve: "She spoke but once and threw the world into disorder" (attributed to St Bernard by Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione predicatorum*, trans. Dominican students, Province of St Joseph, *Treatise on Preaching*, ed. W.M.Conlon, O.P. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1951), p.48). The thirteenth-century rhetorician John of Garland is more florid, but not less contemptuous, about female speech:

in other words, was seen as a potentially subversive force, particularly with regard to the state, and to the language that upholds it. As with the feminine, the poetic, as discussed in Chapter 1 above, was seen to embody a similar potential for corruption: the solution, according to Plato, was to ban poets from the Republic. The articulation of Criseyde, then, in a poetic context of socio-political conflict, betrayal and decay, has implications for narrative representation, and for the state of the social-linguistic order.

In the following four chapters, I shall look at how Criseyde is able to use language, and how it is used in relation to her: what are her relations with the 'formes of speche' which she exploits and which constrain her? How does she interpret and how is she interpreted? In what ways are the 'choices' she makes constructed? Chapters six and seven examine these issues in the principle public and private scenes in which Criseyde appears in the first three books of the poem, viewing her apparent and perceived autonomy against the several factors which work to determine her actions. Under 'Private Viewings' I include occasions where Criseyde is alone, or with either Pandarus or Troilus. In the final two chapters I examine the deterioration of Criseyde's control over her articulation, and the constraints increasingly determining her actions.

"In death's eternal kingdom Woman is enthroned forever; from her mouth flows gall that is taken for nectar, and kills [necat] body and soul" (*Poetria parisiana*, VII.1909-10, ed. and trans. T.Lawlor (New Haven, Conn.:Yale Univ.Press, 1974)'.

Chapter 6

PUBLIC MEETINGS

In each of the occasions considered below - Book I's festival of Palladion, Book II's dinner party at Deiphebus's palace, and the meeting at Pandarus's house in Book III - acts of betrayal or revenge significantly shape the articulation of Criseyde. In each case, Criseyde is unaware of such influences, an ignorance which allows her falsely to assume a position of confidence or power. Just as her articulation is framed by larger forces to which she is oblivious, so the narrator's telling of *Troilus and Criseyde* attempts to focus on the 'private' story of love to the exclusion of the 'public' context of political revenge that frames the love story. Vance believes that 'this suppression of the epic story of Troy in favour of the romance of Troilus stems, of course, from the narrator's own frustration and despair in affairs of the heart'.[1] The narrator is no more a disinterested translator or historian than Pandarus, another frustrated lover, is a disinterested uncle of Criseyde's or friend of Troilus's: both have a personal agenda that is traced through the events of Troilus's double sorrow. Their interests contribute to the matrix of determinants framing the articulation of Criseyde and the progression of the lover's story.

I. Palladiones feste

Troilus's double sorrow is initiated by an act of revenge on the part of the god of love. Angry and resentful at Troilus's supercilious rejection of amorous processes, the god 'shop forto ben wroken' (I.207) and shoots a retributive dart into the 'proude..pekok' Troilus. Not for the first time, the narrator declines the opportunity to relate this event to other acts of revenge framing his poem. In the first stanza of the story following the proem,

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[1] *Mervelous Signals*, p.285.

the ravishing of women is associated with military ravaging, although no connection is made with Criseyde's situation. The Greeks laid siege to Troy for ten years:

> And in diuerse wise and oon entente
> The rauysshyng to wreken of Eleyne,
> By Paris don, they wroughten al hir peyne. (I.61-3)

This context of female vulnerability in the face of male self-seeking and physical power is followed by a description of Calkas and the 'calkulynge' that will lead him out of Troy and into the Greek camp. With references to Criseyde's desertion (56), and that act of political and sexual betrayal which led to the Trojan war (62) fresh in mind, Calkas's treason resounds as one of the many acts of betrayal framing the poem. Bishop observes that:

> [the] treacherousness of [Criseyde's] environment is further emphasised by the fact that the poem's historical narrative is framed by acts of treason: not only is it preceded by Calkas's desertion, but it is followed by the treachery of Antenor...the very man for whom she was so dishonourably exchanged by the Trojan "parlement"'.[2]

Criseyde's fortunes in both loving and leaving Troilus are subject to men who betray their proper functions of paternal or political protection.

Criseyde's beauty is presented through the gazes of both the narrator and Troilus in the festival scene of Book I. The temple at which the Trojans gather in spring, 'Palladiones feste forto holde', seems to provide the occasion as much for secular as spiritual celebration. Regardless of siege and status - 'both moeste, mene, and leste' - the Trojan populus attends as one company, '3e, bothe for the seson and the feste' (168). The focus narrows from a general overview of the crowd to juxtapose studies of Troilus and Criseyde. Criseyde is the first character in the poem to be described in detail, and by contrast with Troilus, she is presented as more looked upon than looking. Her appearance pleases the crowd: 'Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees' (173). Suggesting a propensity to indulge in inordinate

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[2] I.Bishop, *Troilus and Criseyde. A Critical Study* (Bristol, 1981), p.10.

praise, the narrator attributes to the public voice the view that there was never yet so bright a star:

> As was Criseyde, as folk seyde euerichone,
> That hir behelden in hir blake wede. (I.176-7)

Troilus, on the other hand, prior to his transformation by love, is busy

> *Byholding* ay the ladies of the town
> Now here, now there, for no deuocioun
> Hadde he to non to reuen hym his reste,
> But gan to *preise* and *lakken* whom hym leste. (I.186-9;my emphasis)

Prior to suffering Love's darts, Troilus enjoys the ability to judge that is a function of his detachment from love. His reading of the crowd is like the reading of a text, from which he concludes either praise or blame. As does the narrator in the course of his increasing involvement with the poem, Troilus loses this ability to confer praise or blame as he loses his detachment.

Troilus eyes women as he might eye cattle, casting an appraising eye over the stock in the temple. In the interests of his own perceived superiority over those trapped in love's snare, Troilus not only regards the display of women arrayed before him, but watches also for the betraying looks of male lovers:

> And in his walk ful faste he gan to *wayten*
> If knyght or squyer of his compaignie
> Gan forto syke or lete his *eighen baiten*
> On any womman that he koude *espye*. (I.190-3;my emphasis)

His looking at looking, a perspective due to his detachment from love, recalls the narrator's own position as servant of the servants of love, since he 'Ne dar to loue' (16) himself. Troilus's speech further emphasises the second-hand nature of his love perception: "I haue herd told". But whereas the narrator's trepidation arises from 'myn vnliklynesse', and is associated with a desire to please and assist lovers (19-21), Troilus's dissociation manifests itself in disdain and arrogance. The act of looking, for Troilus, is presented here in a predatory light, so that the object regarded becomes something to be fed upon (192),

consumed. The power, as it does in the ideology of courtly love, apparently rests in the one beholding, judging the desirability and worth of the object framed in the vision.

Troilus now begins to command the action. While Criseyde stands at the door, 'vndre shames drede', Troilus, 'in his walk ful faste' is confident and commanding, dominating the space in the temple:

> This Troilus, as he was wont to gide
> His 3onge knyghtes, lad hem vp and down
> In thilke large temple on euery side. (I.183-5)

Troilus's explicitly masculine and military self-confidence culminates in the smug reflection that women are as disdainful as himself of lovers' woes:

> .. "god woot, she slepeth softe
> ffor loue of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte". (I.195-6)

As the poem progresses, Troilus will discover the truth of his words in a way he does not yet expect, since they accurately forecast exactly what happens to him. But if Criseyde is unaware of Troilus's devotion, she can hardly be blamed for his restless nights ('turnest ful ofte') or for her own 'softe' sleeping. The perspective is entirely that of the male lover, projecting onto the female beloved responses to which she is permitted no contribution. Troilus's direct speech continues this appropriative process. He confirms the narrative conception of objects of vision or adoration as prey, another metaphor common in courtly discourse, and the failure to secure that prey as a disempowering of the predator: 'And whan 3oure prey is lost, woo and penaunces' (201). Similarly, the narrator interrupts his story at a later stage in Book I to wonder whether Criseyde was aware of Troilus's devotion:

> But how it was, serteyn, kan I nat seye,
> If that his lady vnderstood nat this,
> Or feynede hire she nyste, on of the tweye. (I.492-4)

But of course Criseyde has no way of knowing about Troilus's love at this stage of the story. In ascribing at least the potential for volition on Criseyde's part where none could have existed, and using this volition to suggest deception ('feynede'), the narrator is building

up the category of expectations within which Criseyde is read. She is allowed to have meaning only in the way that men read her. Her physical appearance (281-5), for example, as described by the narrator:

> Shewed wel that men myghte in hire gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse. (I.286-7)

Criseyde is the product of male expectation, and her signification is reached exclusively by way of male looking and interpretation. Although, oblivious to Troilus's gaze at the temple, Criseyde appears to enjoy a position of superiority, she is framed in a larger context of domination and containment.

Criseyde, nevertheless, seems to be adept in using imaginatively the conventions which constrain her. As the overtly confident Troilus bestrides the festive spring gathering, Criseyde:

> ... stood ful lowe and stille allone,
> Byhynden other folk in litel brede. (I.178-9)

In this expansion of the *Filostrato*, Criseyde's modest and solitary stance, and her equally modest use of space, are directly contrasted with Troilus's arrogance and movement. Yet this projection of humility is problematised in the final two lines of her description in this passage; she is:

> Simple of atire and debonaire of chere,
> With ful assured lokyng and manere. (I.181-2)

Criseyde has had the experience of belonging to an institution legitimising love. She is first described by the poet as a 'widewe', and later, in the context of appealing to Hector, 'In widewes habet large of samet broun' (109). And yet while this experience indicates a knowledge lacking in Troilus, it also contributes to her position of vulnerability in Troy. Since she is a widow, the custody of her person reverts to her father, a traitor to the city. She is introduced as a victim, subject to the vengeful reactions of the Trojan population. The reactions of the Trojans take place within larger patterns of revenge framing the poem: the

Greek seige of Troy is an act of revenge aimed at securing the repossession of Menelaus's wife, and Troy itself is destined to suffer the revenge of Phoebus and Neptune against King Laomedon, who refused to pay for the building of the walls of Troy. Criseyde's vulnerability is in part a function of her lack of knowledge: it is only from the 'noise' of the town that she learns of her father's deed and the subsequent threat to her own life. She is 'Al unwist of this false and wikked dede' (93), and 'of hire life...ful sore in drede' (95).

Surrounded by traitors - her father, her compatriots, and soon, her uncle - Criseyde is isolated from a social network as a source of information, support and advice, as well as from the male protection of husband or father:

> ffor bothe a widewe was she and allone
> Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone. (I.97-8)

With no sense of inconsistency, the narrator inserts a description of Criseyde's 'aungelike beaute' between this explication of her fear and isolation, and her begging mercy of Hector for protection from the irate 'noise' of the town. Criseyde's 'in-mortal' seeming is not without suggestions of detachment and superiority:

> As doth an heuenyssh perfit creature
> That down were sent in scornynge of nature. (I.104-5)

The conceit of a woman's aloof beauty transcending mere mortal attraction is common in fin'amor poetry, and is linked with the notion of feminine superiority. But the stanza depicting Criseyde in potentially empowering terms is enclosed, or framed, by the presentation of isolation and fear (in contrast to aloofness and strength) - 'a widewe...and allone/Of any frend' - and the picture of Criseyde imploring Hector for protection.

She is enclosed, too, in an unfriendly Troy in the aftermath of her father's desertion and, as the poem proceeds, of her uncle's lack of protection. The formal constraints of the poem, enclosing descriptions of Criseyde's apparent power in a larger context of male

naming and interpretation, are like the physical constraints devolving upon a widow alone in a city at war, and in which her own citizen status is not secure. Such a contrast between nominal superiority and actual disempowerment shows up fin'amor's cult of female power for what it is: a fictional superiority operating within a sharply limited set of relations. Courtly artifices cannot exist outside this artificial sphere, as the poem makes tragically clear. With his early confidence in the literary convention of fin'amor, the narrator attempts to transform isolation, as a political and social phenomenon, into aloofness, as a personal, sexual phenomenon. The gradual undermining of narrative confidence intersects with the political betrayal of Criseyde in Book IV, where private love proves unable to survive public declaration.

Despite her 'aungelike beaute', the 'heuenyssh perfit creature' Criseyde, as the widowed daughter of a traitor, is hardly in a position to scorn or defy nature. On the contrary, surrounded by 'shame', 'falsnesse' and 'tresoun', she is constrained to direct her mortal powers in humble supplication to a surrogate male protector:

> On knes she fil biforn Ector adown
> With pitous vois, and tendrely wepynge,
> His mercy bad, hir seluen excusynge. (I.110-12)

Hector, 'pitous by nature', dispenses assurances, and Criseyde thanks him

> ... with ful humble chere,
> And after wolde, and it hadde ben his will,
> And toke hire leue, and hom, and held hir stille. (I.124-6)

Criseyde's vulnerability and confusion are conveyed by the paratactic nature of her expression in these lines. The conjunction 'and', appearing six times in three lines, links her consecutive actions, words and dispositions in a breathless chain of gratitude and humility. The confusion is extended to narrative disposition also, as the narrator moves between description ('And toke hir leue') and paraphrased speech ('and it hadde ben his wille'). This confusion of roles is also apparent in the scene itself. Criseyde, on her knees, begging mercy

of her superior, whose response is guided by his pity, is a reversal of the traditional courtly convention which depicts the male lover as inferior supplicant, relying upon the mercy of the beloved to alleviate his misery.[3] The positioning of Criseyde as humble inferior and Hector as magnanimous dispenser of pity indicate that fin'amor's unexamined contradiction of woman as objectified superior arises from a concrete set of social relations which assume and maintain female vulnerability.

Hector's assurance is not unambiguous, although Criseyde reads it as such. His pity is motivated not only by the fact that she is 'sorwfully bigon', but also 'that she was so faire a creature' (115). The question as to Criseyde's fate had she been foul rather than fair is not explored. Hector's 'goodnesse' permits him to dismiss the public threat posed to Criseyde by Calkas's treachery, and he directs her to 'Dwelleth with vs, whil 3ow good list, in Troie' (119). How ever generous Hector's offer may appear, he has nevertheless asserted a division between 'vs', rightful Trojan citizens, and '3ow', conceded right of residence. Criseyde's citizen status, derivative of her sexual relationships with men (father or husband) has been eroded by the denial of that status by her father. The identity with which she is left is granted by Hector:

> "And al honour that men may don 3ow haue,
> As ferforth as 3oure fader dwelled here,
> 3e shul haue, and 3oure body shal men saue,
> As fer as I may ought enquere or here. (I.120-3)

The foregrounding of Criseyde's humility (124) and the reference to her body (122) are Chaucer's additions, emphasising Criseyde's vulnerability in the wake of her father's ignoble desertion. The confusion between the body politic, Criseyde's citizen status, and the body personal, as sexual object, is a confusion between public and private. It is a confusion which determines Criseyde's future and destroys her reputation. The sly insertion of Hector's

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[3] This is noted by D.Aers, in *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980), p.120.

exclusion clause (123) is an ominous foreboding of his eventual inability to enforce this promise of safety. Criseyde, however, pays good heed to these undertones, taking care to maintain an otherwise unimpeachable reputation:

> And whil she was dwellynge in that cite
> Kepte hir estat, and both of 3onge and olde
> fful wel biloued, and wel men of hir tolde. (I.129-31)

Criseyde's safety, as she implicitly recognises, is contingent upon maintaining the market value of her public asset, her reputation. Her own fortunes ('and wel men of hir tolde') are linked with Fortune, and with the fortunes of a war (138-40) fought over male ownership of female bodies. Control over her destiny is in the hands of ineffectual or treacherous male protectors, and in the turning of capricious Fortune's wheel.

In the temple scene, public acknowledgement of Criseyde's 'goodly lokyng' admits:

> Nas neuere 3et seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,
> Nor vnder cloude blak so bright a sterre. (I.174-5)

Apart from the conventional courtly and religious associations of women with light, this last observation suggests the appropriation of Criseyde's very person, her body, to the interests of male representation: the 'cloude blak' image, placed between references to 'habit blak' and 'blake wede', refers to Criseyde's clothes, and 'bright a sterre', correspondingly to her body. The reference picks up the earlier, politically framed foregrounding of Criseyde's body (120-3), now situating it in terms of her sexual (marriage) and poetic (representation) relationships with men. Criseyde's public signification of her sexuality is her widow's weeds, a mark of ongoing mourning indicating sexual closure. This chaste resolve is in keeping with available models of appropriate behaviour for widows, as established in the strictures of popular behavioural manuals. The Knight of La Tour-Landry, writing at about the time of *Troilus and Criseyde's* supposed composition, refers approvingly to chaste widows:

> thei be withoute ani reproche, and aproued in thaire mariage, trew ladies, and afterwarde they leued chastely and deuoutly before God in worshipe and vnto the worlde, and refused alle vayne plesaunces...these ladyes toke none nwe husbondes for worldely loue or flesshely plesaunce.[4]

Widowly chastity is mimetic of virginal innocence, the widow having a second opportunity to imitate that original state of sexual and spiritual purity. Chastity, then, is not only a respectable social pursuit, but is the mark of widowhood's appropriate spirituality.

St Paul provides a basis for this connection between sexuality and spirituality in his presentation of marriage as an expediency, helping partners to avoid the sin of fornication. Paul's intended audience, Corinthian men, indicates that models of feminine behaviour were constructed and disseminated by men. He suggests that:

> ... to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband ...
> But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. (1Cor.7:2, 28)

Paul then elaborates on the difference between wives and virgins:

> ... The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. (1Cor.7:34)[5]

In both cases - wives or women generally - Paul is directing the concerns of women. They are to be contained within the models of charity ('the things of the lord') and cupidity ('how she may please her husband').[6] A return to the desires of the flesh is thus regarded as a

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[4] *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, ed. T.Wright, *EETS*, 33 (London, 1868), chapters cxiv, cxv, 'Examples of wives who have honoured and attended their husbands', p.156.

[5] Paul may be using 'marriage' here in a loose sense rather than specifically referring to the institution of marriage. Whether or not this is the case, the general point to be made about male control over female representation holds true.

[6] In the latter case, it is worth noting, it is specifically husbands that are at issue for women, not oneself, one's neighbour, or any corporal thing as is the case in the later, more general Augustinian injunction (*De doctrina christiana*, 3.15.23). See above, 3.II.

spiritual error, and the narrator's reiteration of Criseyde's inevitable widow's weeds seems designed to indicate her potentially laudable spirituality.

The public approval of both Criseyde's appearance (173) and, it is suggested, the virtue thence signified (174-5), also bear witness to the importance of a good reputation for women. The Knight of La Tour-Landry again is quite emphatic on this point, making the popular connection between sexuality and social 'worshipe':

> Right so it is of a good woman, that in alle places berithe a goode name of honoure and goodnesse, as she that hathe atte al tymes putte her payne in trauile to kepe her body vndefouled and in clennesse, and refused the delytes of youthe and of foule plesaunces, wherby she hathe wonne good name and moche worshipe.[7]

Criseyde's careful adherence to these courtesy precepts ensures that men speak well of her, at least temporarily:

> And whil she was dwellynge in that cite
> Kepte hir estat, and both of 3onge and olde
> fful wel biloued, and wel men of hir tolde. (I.129-31)

Her reputation, though, is dependent less on her own behaviour than of male representation. Public speech, guided by the male parliament in Book IV, exhibits the fickleness of self-interest, and Criseyde is converted from a praiseworthy member of Troy into a political pawn with no rights of citizenship. While she has little choice but to conform to male strictures of articulation in medieval Troy, her acquiescence nevertheless entails complicity with a system which denies female choice.

In the narrator's presentation, Troilus is also denied free choice. No less an authority than the 'proud Bayard' is enlisted to support the paradox of free thraldom which identifies devout love:

> "3et am I but an hors, and horses lawe
> I moot endure, and with my feres drawe". (I.223-4)

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[7] Wright, ed., *The Book of La Tour Landry*, chapter cxvi, p.157.

Horses, in accordance with their nature, must obey horse's law, and likewise, as a member of the courtly aristocracy, Troilus as newly initiated lover must obey Love's law. The appropriate action of the free will that distinguishes Troilus from Bayard, in the narrator's sermon, a seven stanza departure from his source (218-66), is to bind itself to the law of love. When Troilus is struck by Cupid's darts he is forcefully yoked into a sphere of courtly love: his experience of love is just as forcefully contained within the orthodoxy of the god of love. In the narrator's conception, Troilus's love must be enclosed within the tenets of fin'amor which provide the necessary condition for his affair with Criseyde: if the love-less prince had not suffered Cupid's vengeance, he would, in the narrator's version, never have fallen in love with Criseyde.

This framing of Troilus's story seems to do less justice to Troilus's experience than the narrator's own self-righteous position, as yet undiminished by the experience of the poem:

> O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!
> How often falleth al the effect contraire
> Of surquidrie and foul presumpcioun!
> ffor kaught is proud, and kau3t is debonaire:
> This Troilus is clomben on the staire
> And litel weneth that he moot descenden -
> But alday faileth thing that fooles wenden. (I.211-7)[8]

The narrator here suffers from the blindness he ascribes to the world of unwarranted presumption. His overweening presence has pointed similarities with Troilus's earlier arrogance, and just as Troilus had mocked the inability of lovers to learn from prior examples, so does the unplucked narrator refer to the self-evident lessons of literary history:

> That this be soth, hath preued and doth 3it;
> ffor this trowe I 3e knowen alle or some:
> Men reden nat that folk han gretter wit
> Than they that han be most with loue ynome. (I.239-42)

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[8] See R.Jordan's comments on this stanza in *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p.173.

According to Troilus, though, an inability to learn from experience is what characterises hopeless lovers. Like Troilus, the narrator requires the present experience of *Troilus and Criseyde* in order to learn from past example. Outside the experience of love himself, the narrator requires the vicarious literary experience of love to learn the lesson of his sermon. His faith in the fin'amor framework blinds him to the fact that the courtly model is inadequate, both for Troilus's love and for his own presentation. As Gordon writes, in terms of medieval philosophy of love:

> the 'partial satisfaction' found in earthly love can only be an illusory happiness (and not a finding of true 'good'), if the love has lost its true direction. All love is an 'entencioun to comen to good', but what is at issue in *Troilus and Criseyde* is whether the 'entencioun' of the lovers was blind, whether the good they were seeking was the true good. If it was not, then their love must be *cupiditas*.[9]

Christian doctrine, then, would explain Troilus's lack of free will as a consequence of cupidinous passion, rather than of charitable devotion. As Troilus's love aquires a platonic 'entencioun', and the narrator's confidence in the fin'amor framework wanes, the narrator learns that experience - of love, or of writing about love - can only be forced into preconceived patterns at great cost. *Troilus and Criseyde* becomes as much the story of the narrator's realisation of this fact, as it is the story of Troilus and Criseyde. As a Christian, the narrator must confront the dilemmas his own free will poses in the production of the present poem.

Already tensions between the conflicting systems of love - courtly, platonic and Christian - have begun to appear in the narrative. In his digressive sermon on the religion of love (218-66), the narrator observes that:

> ... loue is he that alle thing may bynde,
> ffor may no man fordon the lawe of kynde. (I.257-8)

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[9] Gordon, *Double Sorrow*, p.21.

The narrator echoes the *Gloria Patri* in presenting the glorious submission demanded by the theology of love. 'Ffor euere it was and euere it shal byfalle' that the wisest and the strongest are defeated by love: 'This was, and is, and 3et men shall it see' (245). Similar echoes have been present from the proem, where the narrator refers to himself as servant of the servants of love (15). His unprepossessing claim is, not surprisingly, double-edged; the variation of the *servus servorum* appellation, as applied to the Roman popes, points to an ambiguous status of public humility played off against undeniable power and authority. It is an ambiguity also exploited, with varying degrees of success, by the poem's other principal characters. Pandarus presents the lives of both himself and Troilus as hanging on the whim of Criseyde, who in turn is allowed by Troilus to maintain the fiction of a courtly superiority. Inserted into a frame of fin'amor relations by the narrator and by Pandarus, Troilus is presented as bereft of any choice but to serve Love. But the metaphor of Troilus's lack of choice that is sustained by the courtly system is a very different matter to the situation which pertains for Criseyde. The conceit of Cupid's darts contrasts strikingly with the material conditions which constrain Criseyde's ability to choose.

Relegating his sermon on love to a digressive 'thing collateral', the narrator examines Troilus's new immobility, as 'sodeynly he wax ther-with astoned' (274), now 'glad his hornes in-to shrink' (300). Criseyde is now the moving centre both of the narrator's vision and of Troilus's. The narrator notes 'the pure wise of hire meuynge', and similarly, Troilus 'gan forto like hire meuynge' (289). Narratorial appropriation of Troilus's response is suggested by this perceptual cloning, as Troilus echoes the narrator's vision of Criseyde. Troilus's crisis of looking ('unnethes wiste he how to loke') marks an interpretive confusion, and he leaves the temple 'nat fullich al awhaped' (316). His heart has become a text upon which Criseyde's image is imprinted (295-8), and now, more written upon than writing, Troilus must read himself as a result of this shift from external activity to an internal

hermeneutics. He must now play off his previously guileless scorn against a new awareness of his own textuality, and vulnerability to the interpretations of others. The shifting of power away from Troilus is required by the fin' amor framework to which the narrator adheres: as Arlyn Diamond notes, Troilus's 'transformation into a true lover demands the destruction of his confidence and the empowerment of the woman he desires'.[10] Troilus's solution, as 'His woo he gan dissimilen and hide' (322), is to encourage misreading (326-7). The narrator, on the other hand, still enjoying an undiminished confidence in his narrative, and in the deployment of courtly ideology, bursts out: 'Blissed be loue, that kan thus folke conuerte!' (308).

The capacity of male representation to control female destiny is indicated in the proem. In the context of an appeal to the benevolence of successful lovers, the narrator introduces the situations of the poem's four principle players: Troilus (I.29-30), the narrator himself (I.32-5), Pandarus (I.36-7) and Criseyde (I.38-9). Pandarus and Criseyde are not mentioned by name at this point, and the narrator's wish for the inclusion of Criseyde in successful lover's prayers becomes almost surreptitious:

> And ek for hem that falsly ben apeired
> Thorugh wikked tonges, be it *he or she*. (I.38-9;my emphasis).

This interpellation of Criseyde as 'falsly...apeired' is followed by a more general injunction, addressing the men in Chaucer's audience:

> And biddeth ek for hem that ben at ese ...
> And send hem myght hire ladies so to plese. (I.43,45)

A categorical statement of Criseyde's betrayal follows almost immediately: 'how that she forsook hym er she deyde' (56). The disjunction between the outright condemnation and the preceding prayers for compassion towards those who are falsely misspoken indicates at an

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[10] Diamond, 'The Politics of Love', in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. J.Wasserman and R.Blanch (Syracuse, 1986), p.97.

early stage some narrative unease in the treatment of Criseyde. This unease is also supported by the reference to the fact that Criseyde forsook Troilus, not before *he* died, but 'er *she* deyde'. The contextualising of the poem's central event in terms of Criseyde's life works against the narrator's stated purpose, since he is writing of Troilus's double sorrow, and he concludes his poem with Troilus's death. This disruption of the poem's surface is strengthened by Criseyde's command of the active form of the verb - 'she forsook' - whereas Troilus, by contrast, even in the opening lines of the poem, remains the object of the narrator's 'telling'.

Troilus's entry into the interpretive uncertainty of the courtly tradition is marked in his speech, mocking lovers:

> "In noun-certeyn ben alle 3oure obseruaunces,
> But it a sely fewe pointes be". (I.337-8)

In her discussion of Andreas's *De amore*, Moi argues that:

> If the torments of jealousy constitute, as Andreas claims, the 'very substance of love', it is because they reveal the most unspeakable secret of all: that the lover *never* knows whether he has hit upon the true reading. For the jealous lover, the world is transformed into a treacherous text full of traps.[11]

Despite his mockery of the 'ordre' of love, Troilus's responses are guided by the narrator's courtly frame. Never having experienced love before, Troilus has recourse, with the assistance of the narrator, only to preconceived forms of exhibiting his love.[12] Outside the sphere of love, the narrator uses the courtly frame, the predominant literary aristocratic

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[11] Moi, 'Desire in Language', p.26. See also my discussion of fin'amor above, 2.II.

[12] In her discussion of men marginalised in Opera, because of their colour (Othello), appearance (Rigoletto) or disposition (Falstaff), Catherine Clément makes a similar point concerning male recourse to feminine forms of suffering: '...figures of betrayed, wounded men; men who have women's troubles happen to them; men who have the status of Eve, as if they had lost their innate Adam. These men die like heroines; down on the ground they cry and moan, they lament...They partake of femininity: excluded, marked by some initial strangeness, they are doomed to their undoing'. See *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (1979), trans. by B.Wing (1988; London, 1989), p.118.

expression of love, as an interpretive key, with which he attempts to understand and contain Troilus's emotion.

The intensity of Troilus's recollections leads him to reproduce Criseyde in the mirror of his mind, where she becomes an idol whom he would be glad to serve:

> Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,
> In which he saugh al holly hire figure ...
> ... and if he dede hir cure
> To seruen hir, 3et myghte he falle in grace,
> Or ellis for oon of hire seruantes pace. (I.365-6,369-71)

Troilus's conception of Criseyde appearing in his mind's mirror is a variation of the conventional woman-as-mirror representation, and emphasises Troilus's own textuality, his image of himself as a parchment or wax receiver of Criseyde's defining impression. At the same time, though, Criseyde is framed within Troilus's mind in this image, for the purposes of his recall. Her lack of control over her representation is indicated by Troilus's conjecture on the progress of his love:

> It was to hym a right good auenture
> To loue swich oon. (I.368-9)

He begins to refine his image of Criseyde into an ideal suitable for his conception of love. Echoing the narrator's description of a 'heuenyssh perfit creature', Troilus wonders:

> "But wheither goddesse or womman, i-wis,
> She be, I not, which that 3e do me serue;
> But as hire man I wol ay lyue and sterue". (I.425-7)

His reflections preface his later aspirations towards neoplatonic idealism.

Troilus's speech, addressing himself in the second person, could easily be construed as the narrator's own bewailing. Criseyde is represented as one who 'lakked...pitee':

> "But also cold in loue towardes the
> Thi lady is as frost in wynter moone,
> And thow fordon as snow in fire is soone". (I.523-5)

The courtly notion of the lady's cruelty which permits the likening of Criseyde to cold frost not only departs from the more conventional moon-woman image (524), but also leads to

the metaphorical contradiction whereby Criseyde then becomes the fire melting Troilus-as-snow. Criseyde's several metamorphoses through these shifting metaphors are finally pulled to a halt with the entrance of the pragmatic Pandarus. Troilus's courtly swoonings are of no use if the one to whom they are directed is wholly ignorant of their existence:

> "What may she demen oother of thy deeth,
> If thow thus deye and she not why it is ...
> Thow mayst allone here wepe and crye and knele -
> But loue a womman that she woot it nought,
> And she wol quyte it that thow shalt nat fele:
> Unknow, unkist, and lost, that is vnsought". (I.799-800,806-8)

Pandarus's words, the medicine of the rhetor-physician, serve to refocus the issue of men's articulations of women, contrasting the situations of male knowing and female unknowing.

II. Deiphebus's Protection

Pandarus's manipulation of events to bring about the meeting of Criseyde and Troilus at Deiphebus's dinner is framed by acts of treason and betrayal. The fiction of 'false Poliphete' and his efforts to obtain possession of Criseyde's goods evokes her fear of Antenor and Aeneas, the eventual betrayers of Troy. Deiphebus's words, as he decides to invite Helen to the dinner, 'ffor she may leden Paris as hire leste' (II.1449), bring to mind not only the abduction of Helen as the event which led to the Trojan war, but also the theme of feminine deception. References to deception abound: Pandarus has found a manner 'of sleyghte' by which Troilus can 'coueren al thi chere' (1512), and Helen 'nolde feyne' her relations with Deiphebus, whatever they may be.[13] Pandarus does not attempt to obscure his deceptions to Troilus, instead telling him 'how that he Deiphebus gan to blende' (1496). He contrasts the situations of knowing and unknowing, inserting Troilus into a greater

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[13] On the ambiguity of their relations, see Barney's note to l.1398 in *Riverside*, p.1036, and Windeatt's note to ll.1702-8, p.241.

position of power by virtue of the knowledge he has and Deiphebus does not. Unwittingly, Deiphebus will help further Troilus's quest:

> "Now," quod Pandare, "er houres twelue,
> He shal the ese, vnwist of it hym selue". (II.1399-1400)

Pandarus encourages Troilus to enlist his genuine symptoms so that he might have "the lasse nede to countrefete" (1532), and Troilus's own capacity for self-deception flourishes under his ministrations. Pandarus directs Troilus's speech: "Now spek, now prey, now pitously compleigne" (1499). He knows that signs are open to misreading: "ffor hym men demen hoot that men seen swete" (1533). He knows, too, that the power of words lies less in their enunciation than in their interpretation (1744-50). It is for this reason that Troilus should not be concerned that by his 'cheres mosten folk aspie' (1507) the true cause of his illness. In response to the challenge, "lat se now how wel thow kanst it make" (1522), Troilus protests:

> ... "i-wis, thow nedeles
> Conseilest me that siklich I me feyne,
> ffor I am sik in ernest, douteles". (II.1527-9)

Using his own innocence as a deceptive defence, Troilus ignores the fact that he is feigning the *cause* of his sickness, if not the sickness itself, and is deceiving the brother whom he most loves, falsely using his hospitality for ends other than those of which Deiphebus is aware. In Augustinian terms, Troilus's deception is tantamount to lying, since his intention is at fault. Even though it is true that he is 'sik', he falsifies or misleads as to the cause of that sickness, and he is therefore not speaking the truth.[14]

Troilus's ambiguous position points to a further level of narrative deception. The narrator lets slip a hint of impatience at the bells of praise rung out for Troilus yet again:

> ... hym gonnen they to preyse,
> As folk don 3et whan some wight hath bygonne
> To preise a man, and vp with pris hym reise

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[14] See Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 18, and *Contra mendacium*, xiii.8.a, cited in my discussion above, 1.II.

A thousand fold 3et heigher than the sonne. (II.1583-6)[15]

The praise of Troilus, as the narrator is well aware, is compromised by the fact that Troilus is complicit in a deceit which works to his advantage and Criseyde's disadvantage. He is in possession of a knowledge that she is not, and he uses it to influence her actions. The temporary rift in the narrator's relations with Troilus is healed by the close of Book II, where the narrator fully identifies with his hero: 'O myghty god, what shal he seye?' (1757). The narrator's question, coming at the end of the book, functions as an appeal to a specific audience of lovers. He hopes for assistance to articulate in a sphere in which he lacks experience, as set forth in the very opening proem:

> And ek for me preith to god so dere
> That I haue myght to shewe in som manere
> Swich peyne and wo as loues folk endure,
> In Troilus vnsely auenture. (I.32-5).

The crisis of speech suffered by both Troilus and the narrator is presented as one and the same, since what Troilus must say is identical with what the narrator must make him say.

This engagement with Troilus's articulation continues into Book III where, at the entrance of Criseyde, the narrator exclaims in a manner that is in total sympathy with Troilus:

> But lord, so he wex sodeynliche rede,
> And sire, his lessoun that he wende konne
> To preyen hire is thorugh his wit i-ronne. (III.82-4)

Troilus's difficulties in learning the 'lessoun' (51) of love, as he wonders what he will 'sey', how he will 'pleyne', what 'cheere' he will have and what 'word is good' (52-4), suggest that his courtly articulation is not a 'natural' extension of his inner feelings, but a lesson of gendered courtly behaviour that he seeks to learn. Pandarus's tutoring role is made overt:

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[15] The narrator of the *Legend* uses a similar tone of impatience in describing Jason's praise by Hercules: 'This Ercules hath so this Jason preysed/That to the sonne he hath hym up areysed' (1524-5).

"Now spek, now prey, now pitously compleigne;
Lat nought for nyce shame or drede or slothe". (II.1499-1500)

Pandarus defines Troilus's speaking, grooming him as the courtly lover begging mercy of his lady:

"Som tyme a man mot telle his owen peyne;
Bileue it, and she shal han on the routhe". (II.1501-2)

It is difficult to say to what extent Troilus, who to Pandarus's 'reed gan al assente' (1540), tells 'his own peyne'. Rather than an inevitable or utopian expression, the form of fin'amor emerges as simply one available model of behaviour. It is a model which the narrator and Pandarus conspire to impose upon Troilus, as the actual meeting with Criseyde makes clear. While Pandarus blatantly directs the lovers script in this scene of their first meeting, the narrator's position is somewhat different. His treatment of his hero involves a self-deception that surfaces in the tension between impatience at undeserved and misguided praise on the one hand, and complete identification on the other. The knowledge that leads to this tension, and which is shared by Pandarus and Troilus, is not available to Criseyde.

Criseyde's state of unknowing is emphasised by the hunting metaphor, whereby she is the prey driven to the hunter Troilus. Indeed, the purpose of the acts of deception in which Pandarus and Troilus engage is to ambush Criseyde. Pandarus instructs Troilus:

"Lo, hold the at thi triste cloos, and I
Shal wel the deer vnto thi bowe dryue". (II.1534-5)

Pandarus announces Criseyde's imminent presence to Troilus in terms which imply her courtly, and possibly sexual commodification:[16] "God haue thi soule, i-brought haue I thi beere!" (1638). Criseyde is the courtly beloved of whom Troilus must pray for grace, as instructed by Pandarus:

"ffor in good herte it mot som routhe impresse
To here and see the giltlees in distresse". (II.1371-2)

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[16] See Barney's note to this line in *Riverside*, p.1036.

Naming her anticipated responses, Pandarus reduces Criseyde's conflict of acquiescence to personifications of feminine 'routhe' and 'daunger'. He also guides Troilus's perceptions by suggesting that Troilus himself conceives of Criseyde in this way:

> "Peraunter thynkestow: though it be so,
> That *kynde* wolde don hire to bygynne
> To haue a manere *routhe* vp-on my woo,
> Seyth *daunger*, 'nay, thow shalt me neuere wynne'". (II.1373-6)

As Wetherbee observes of lines 1371-2, Pandarus is anticipating Criseyde's 'resistance and interpreting it in terms of courtly love psychology, and imputing his line of thought to Troilus'.[17] In the way that Pandarus presents that psychology, not to acquiesce is not to be natural ('kynde'); it is not to be feminine.

Undermining the force of this notion is that fact that like Troilus, Criseyde must be led through the script of love. In a clear designation of gender roles, Pandarus asserts his right to speak of and for Criseyde, and then specifies her own articulating role. He can:

> "Reherce hire cas vnlik that she can seye;
> And after this she may hym ones preye
> To ben good lord, in short, and take hire leue". (II.1656-8)

Women as well as men are seen to be complicit in privileging male speech. Helen expresses her solicitude for Criseyde as she misreads her in the light of Pandarus's fiction:

> Eleyne, which that by the hond hire helde,
> Took first the tale and seyde, "go we blyue";
> And goodly on Criseyde she bihelde... (II.1604-6)

Helen tells Troilus that Criseyde has suffered male wrong-doing before deferring her speech to that of her social inferior, Pandarus, "that kan hire cas wel bet than I declare" (1680). In a manner which foreshadows Diomede's actions in Book V, Pandarus steers Criseyde ('ledde hire by the lappe', III.59) towards an enclosed, politically-framed setting. Once in Troilus's room, Pandarus provides an exaggerated model of 'routhe' for Criseyde to imitate -

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[17] Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets* (Ithaca, 1984), p.73.

'and Pandare wep as he to water wolde' (115) - and pushes her into responding - 'and poked euere his Nece new and newe' (116). Pandarus's manipulation of his niece directs her passive articulation. He begs her to

> "... make of this thinge an ende,
> Or sle vs both at ones, er 3e wende". (III.118-9)

If Criseyde does nothing, she will 'sle' both lover and uncle, political and paternal guardians. If she responds 'correctly', acquiescing as they desire, all can live happily. Her ostensible power over their lives or deaths is a function of her passivity rather than activity, and is appropriate to the courtly model of beloved as a fixed, stable and perfect entity.

Criseyde, nevertheless, moves in and out of fin'amor conventions. As Pandarus well knows, and as is made clear in Book II, 'honour' is a crucial Criseydan motivation. The outward sign, the public reading of honour, is reputation, and it is that which Criseyde both desires and loses in the course of the poem. She attempts to delimit her uncle's open-ended reference to her honour, beginning her acceptance speech with the proviso, "Myn honour sauf" (159), and later repeating the admonition, "And myn honour...Ay kepe". Her stipulations imply a set of relations which cannot be reconciled with traditional courtly ideology. She warns that she:

> "Ny nyl forbere, if that 3e don amys,
> To wratthe 3ow, and whil that 3e me serue,
> Chericen 3ow right after 3e disserue". (III.173-5)

Her 'wratthe' will not be that of the querulous beloved, but will arise "if that 3e don amys". Criseyde's conception of the granting and process of love bears little resemblance to Pandarus's personified depiction of a battle between Daunger and Pite, and allows for particular rather than paradigmatic love relations. Similarly, her commitment to the lover will be rooted in his action - "right after 3ow disserue" - and not simply in his courtly obedience. She assumes that the lover's 'merit' and success in love can proceed as a result of his own deserts, and not solely through the gracious condescension of the beloved. In so

saying, she emphasises a dialectical process of love, involving reciprocity rather than a one-way bestowal of pity. At the same time, she takes on platonic and courtly interpellations of woman as physician, exercising her wisdom and healing powers in order to alleviate the lover's sufferings. She reassures Troilus, "Now beth al hool, no lenger 3e ne pleyne" (168). Her articulation can be seen as the attempt to insert particular clauses into an existing charter of love she has no choice but to enter.

Criseyde's articulation is further constrained by the neoplatonic direction which, increasingly, Troilus's love begins to assume. The proem to Book III, establishing a courtly-platonic frame to the entire book,[18] is modelled on Troilo's song to Venus after his first night with Criseida, which was itself taken from Book II of the *Consolation.* Invoking Venus as muse, the poet becomes receptacle for the goddess's 'sentement':

> 3e in my naked herte sentement
> In-hielde, and do me shewe of thy swetnesse. (III.43-4)

The poet parallels the situation of Troilus by taking up the position of a would-be courtly lover. He prays for grace and refinement through the benevolence of Venus:

> Now lady bryght, for thi benignite,
> At reuerence of hem that seruen the,
> Whos clerc I am, so techeth me deuyse
> Som ioye of that is felt in thi seruyse. (III.39-42)

The narrator, though, praises the temporal harmony that is only a limited imitation of the eternal. His proem is addressed to Venus as the centre and cause of universal harmony:

> O veray cause of heele and of gladnesse,
> I-heryed be thy myghte and thi goodnesse. (III.6-7)

The theme is taken up at the close of Book III in the *Canticus Troili*:

> Loue that of erthe and se hath gouernaunce,
> Loue, that his hestes hath in heunes hye,

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[18] Windeatt notes that 'the Italian Troilo's song to Venus after the consummation of his affair with Criseida thus becomes preface to the whole third book in *TC*'. See note to ll.1-47, p.249.

Loue, that with an hosom alliaunce
Halt peples ioyned..." (III.1744-7)

Troilus's song at this point in the *Filostrato* has already been used as the proem to the Book, and Chaucer draws for Troilus's song on Boethius II, metrum 8. The alterations made to Boethius firmly establish a worldly love as the object of celebration.[19]

With reference to charitable love, Gordon notes that God, in creating things, 'implanted in them the love that causes them to seek his love. Thus all created activity refers itself necessarily to God's love by virtue of a law implanted in the substance of each being'.[20] Troilus refers not to God but to what he is able to regard as the cause of his joy, and of universal harmony. Regarding him in the light of the 'late-medieval interest in the extent to which virtuous heathen had anticipated some of the truths of Christianity', Minnis writes that when Troilus is inspired by love, he 'rises above the general level of fatalism and polytheism to formulate the most enlightened pagan philosophy offered in the poem, a monolithic view of divine harmony'.[21] It is an enlightenment that produces little benefit for Criseyde. She is displaced as the 'fyn' of Troilus's 'entente' and becomes the means by which the virtuous pagan progresses towards a perception of harmony that lies beyond the significance of worldly players.

Wetherbee describes this neoplatonic progression in terms of contemporary psychologising of the imaginative faculty. As dramatised in Troilus, the imagination is 'responsive to aesthetic impulses, and tends, in its storing up of the images of sensory experience, to enhance that aspect of their attractiveness which approximates the ideal'. The

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[19] Windeatt notes that Boethius is 'somewhat reorganised so that the hailing of love comes first', and that ll.1748-9 have been altered from Boethius's reference to the 'sacrement of mariages of chaste loves'. See p.337, and Windeatt's introduction, p.38.

[20] Gordon, *Double Sorrow*, p.34.

[21] Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1982), pp.93-4; here Minnis is referring to the *Canticus Troili*, III.1744-71.

increasing reflectiveness whereby one moves towards a perception of the ideal in the present object, leads one to:

> intuit in what we love something that makes us yearn *beyond* possession, perhaps toward an ideal of which the beloved appears as a foreshadowing, or perhaps, nostalgically, toward a purity or a state of emotional integration we have lost and for which the ideal of union with the beloved serves us, consciously or not, as a substitute.[22]

Whether a looking forward to an inaccessible Christianity or a turning back to an equally inaccessible Edenic, pre-Oedipal Imaginary, Troilus's yearning ultimately desires a harmony beyond difference. He desires to write an unwriteable script, and in beginning to see Criseyde as a signifier beyond himself, he also begins his own philosophical trajectory beyond her. Written into the script of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde is circumscribed by the narrator's praise of worldly harmony at the beginning of the book, and by Troilus's neoplatonic celebration at its close. Her elevation in the eyes of Troilus and the narrator is her determination, the closure of her play of signification. It is hardly surprising that she can reflect back to Troilus 'the image of that faith' since that is precisely her neoplatonic function.

Prior to consummation, however, Troilus's neoplatonic leanings are still relatively muted. He is not inimical to deliberately using Criseyde's specific political, social and sexual vulnerabilities for his own ends. When Pandarus tells him "i-brought haue I thi beere" (II.1639), we are told that 'to smylen of this gan tho Troilus' (1639). After his initial confusion in Criseyde's presence, we learn that:

> ...the alderfirst word that hym asterte
> Was twyes, "mercy, mercy, swete herte". (III.97-8)

Criseyde the 'bryght' apparently shares Venus's ability to instruct and ennoble, to bestow mercy on a worthy complainant. The notional superiority contained in the image of Criseyde

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[22] Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, pp.76-7.

the physician-beloved, standing over the love-sick Troilus languishing in bed, is compromised by the events which have called it into being. Criseyde's articulation takes account of the contradiction whereby she is both superior beloved and inferior subject. Like a feudal lord, she 'Gan bothe hire hondes softe vpon hym leye' (72), and as a female political subject, she recognises her reliance on his forebearance, begging for his continued 'lordshipe' (75-7). Windeatt believes that her address to Troilus as 'sire' accounts for Troilus's 'delicious embarrassment' as he 'is himself all prepared to beseech Criseyde as his *lady*'.[23] But Troilus's 'delicious embarrassment' is of his own making, and would seem to be due as much to a sense of his own deception as to a titillating reversal of courtly power relations positioning him as 'lord' rather than complainant. While Criseyde plays on the ambiguity of Troilus's 'lordshipe', acknowledging both that she will accept his continuing devotions and that she requires his protection, Troilus refers to Criseyde only in courtly terms. In his most confident embrace of courtly convention to date in Book III, he responds to Criseyde's question about the 'fyn of his entente' by begging to be accepted as her 'verray, humble, trewe', 'secret', 'pacient', 'diligent' servant. Courtly ideology appears to have become a receptive form for Troilus's ideal devotion. As Diamond observes, however:

> the knight-lover's loyalties on the one hand to his female counterpart and on the other to his male structure of dominance can only be maintained as long as the implications of these loyalties are never fully explored. In courtly literature, the knight can never be shown to be conscious of the economic, political or sexual sources of his authority. The mistress can never be allowed to demand that the lover genuinely make the sacrifices he promises to make for her. Narrative conventions protect the values they reinforce.[24]

From Criseyde's position of interpretive ignorance, Troilus's courtly address could be read as a magnanimous gesture whereby Troilus is insisting on his role as courtly inferior rather than political and social superior. But just the opposite is the case, as Troilus acquiesces to

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[23] See Windeatt, note to l.76, p.253.
[24] Diamond, 'The Politics of Love', p.99.

the pandaric schemes designed to exploit Criseyde's vulnerabilities. Troilus is able to glide over the material sources of his power since Criseyde is patently aware of them and in any case, Pandarus is always there to remind her for him.

Upon being led to Troilus, the narrator observes that she is 'al innocent of Pandarus entente' (1723), a disingenuous remark drawing attention to the fact that Criseyde is quite likely to have some idea of Pandarus's intentions. The deceptions surrounding the event arise from contrasting positions of knowledge and ignorance, with both Troilus and Criseyde enjoying some degree of the knowledge which permits them to deceive. Troilus both actively deceives others - the fiction of Poliphete and the letter he gives Deiphebus and Helen - and also deceives himself, claiming that his suffering is not feigned. Insofar as she deceives, Criseyde does so passively, by reserving from public expression the private knowledge that she possesses:

> But ther sat oon, al list hire nought to teche,
> That thoughte, "best koude I 3et ben his leche". (II.1581-2)

Her dissembling is stressed by the narrator, who notes that 'with sobre *cheere* hire *herte* lough' (1592; my emphasis). Criseyde mistakes her partial knowledge for full knowledge, and it is this mistake that makes the exploitation of her vulnerability possible.[25] The courtly power that Criseyde recognises is contained within a larger context of manipulation over which she has little control. Similarly, her knowledge of the cause of Troilus's sickness is consumed in a larger context of her ignorance; she is not aware of the false basis for her added dependence on the good will of Trojan royalty.

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[25] The mistake is not surprising, given that Pandarus has control over her estate, and it is her estate that is supposedly threatened: see II.218-9, 1467-9. It is interesting to note that Pandarus appears to be economically dependent on his niece. She assures him that, even if Poliphete's malign intentions are successful, "With-outen that I haue ynough for *vs*" (1478; my emphasis). Her real - and prophetically well-founded - fear is of Poliphete's friends, Antenor and Aneas (1473-5).

Criseyde's real and perceived dependence on the benevolent auspices of others requires that she maintain a favourable reputation. Deiphebus is not slow to join the ranks of men claiming to defend Criseyde: "I wol be hire champioun with spore and 3erde" (1427). Criseyde's reputation is invoked as Deiphebus refers to her Book I champion, his brother Hector. Deiphebus has heard Hector:

> "Speke of Crydeyde swich honour that he
> May seyn no bet, swich hap to hym hath she". (II.1453-4)

The dinner party, as the narrator is pleased to note, is quick to praise Criseyde in her absence:

> And wonder wel speken in hire absence
> Of hire in preysing of hire excellence -
> ...it ioie was to here. (III.214-5, 217)

Criseyde's reputation, of which her beauty is a part,[26] is the only marketable commodity at her disposal. Her value, and therefore her safety, declines with it.[27] Reputation, however, is as much a product of public speech as it is of private, or public action. As a result of Pandarus's words, Poliphete's name becomes 'so heynous that men myghte on it spete' (1617). Poliphete gratuitously loses his name because it serves other interests for him to be condemned. Similarly, Pandarus can say in Book V that "I hate, ywis, Criseyde", since association with her no longer serves his purposes. Explaining Criseyde's supposed quandary to Deiphebus in Book II, he says that he has a niece:

> Which som men wolden don oppressioun
> And wrongfully han hire possessioun. (II.1418-9)

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[26] See above, section I of this chapter, and *TC*, I.112-6.

[27] Her estate is excluded as a marker of her value since it is controlled by Pandarus, and as the fiction of Poliphete makes clear, is not something which Criseyde can use to her advantage. Even an unimpeachable reputation, of course, is a commodity of limited political value, as her exchange in Book IV makes clear.

It is a lie with a larger truth, as Criseyde suffers abuse at the hands of both her uncle and the Trojan parliament. Pandarus's fiction of a male attack displaces the actual encroachment of Criseyde's autonomy by Pandarus, the narrator, and however unwittingly, Troilus himself.

Recognising the control men exercise over women's names, Pandarus implores Troilus to "kepe hire out of blame...and saue alwey hire name' (265-6). His awareness of the fragility of female reputation seems to provoke an uncharacteristic moment of self-recrimination. Pandarus tells Troilus that "ffor þe haue I bigonne a gamen pleye" whereby he has become:

> "Bitwixen game and ernest, swich a meene
> As maken wommen vn-to men to comen - ...
> ffor the haue I my Nece, of vices cleene,
> So fully maad thi gentilesse triste,
> That al shal ben right as thi seluen liste". (III.254-5, 257-9)

Pandarus refers to "a thousand olde stories" and "prouerbes" warning of the destruction wreaked on female reputation by male loquacity. Four stanzas expanding on this theme follow, as Pandarus embarks on his own "diffusioun of speche". "No wonder", he remarks, "Though wommen dreden with vs men to dele" (322), unexpectedly emerging as his own exemplar. His speech, an elaboration on the theme of *male* inconstancy, works against the stated purpose of the poem. Again, Pandarus becomes an unwitting exemplar. What had appeared to constitute a volte-face of his previous lack of regard for Criseyde turns out to be self-interest disguised, since if his part in the affair were known, he would be denounced for his "trecherie" (278). Pandarus's defence of his actions, consistent with his earlier defences, is based on laudability of intention. Whereas Criseyde in Book II criticises Pandarus on the very grounds of intention by which he seeks to establish his authority, Troilus's attempt to affirm his friend's intentional integrity succeeds in laying bare the commodification of women at the root of Pandarus's dealings.

As a sign of his belief in the morality of Pandarus's position, Troilus offers in exchange whichever of his sisters Pandarus might desire:

> "Tel me which thow wilt of euerychone,
> To han for thyn, and lat me thanne allone". (III.412-3)

Insofar as his intention is to prove a belief in the goodness of Pandarus's intention, Troilus's proof is correctly motivated. The proof itself obviously leaves something to be desired, not least on the philosophical grounds on which Troilus argues.[28] The exchange of women is substantiated by linguistic exchange. Troilus suggests that those who traffic in women for financial gain might be known as procurers, or whatever Pandarus might like to call them;

> "And this that thow doost, calle it gentilesse,
> Compassioun, and felawship, and triste". (III.402-3)

Troilus believes that his method of renaming and transferring is justified on philosophical grounds:

> "How that ther is diuersite requered
> Bytwixen thinges lik, as I haue lered". (III.405-6)[29]

Women become counters in the exchange of male 'trouthe' and trust; the traffic in women, either actual or suggested, is made overt in the narrator's comment: 'Thus held hym eche of other wel apayed' (421). The common currency of their payment is, of course, Criseyde. The mutual assurances of uncle and lover to protect her only underline the fact that Criseyde's putative courtly power is a very limited thing.

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[28] See the discussion below, and the following note.

[29] Gordon elaborates on the proof's insufficiency on philosophical grounds (see the entire passage under discussion here; Troilus's speech is III.360-420): 'What Troilus is claiming to prove, in his repudiation of Pandarus's 'bauderye', is the validity of Pandarus's own excuse that what is done 'for compaignie' is different from what is done 'for coveitise', but he goes further than Pandarus when he tries to prove that it is different in *kind*, by referring his proof to the distinction between 'thynges like', which is the logical distinction between likeness and identity of substance. But what Pandarus is doing *is* 'bauderye'...And Troilus's generous offer to do the like for Pandarus only underlines the fallacy of his 'proof'...What we learn from such a passage or scene is an ironic pointer to Troilus's attitude: he is only too willing to fall in with Pandarus's way of looking at things' (*Double Sorrow*, pp.116-7).

III. Pandarus's Court of Love

Each of the three public scenes under discussion marks a beginning to a different stage of love. In Book I's festival scene, Love's darts signify Troilus's entry into the world of courtly love, a world in which Criseyde's participation is confirmed by her meeting with Troilus in Books II and III. She promises to alleviate Troilus's pains and, through the transformative power of love, to convert his woe into joy:

> "And I shal trewely with al my myght
> 3oure bittre tornen al into swetenesse;
> If I be she that may 3ow do gladnesse,
> ffor euery wo 3e shal recouere a blisse."
> And hym in armes took and gan hym kisse. (III.178-82)

The neoplatonic aspirations inherent in Troilus's regard are continued and developed in the meeting at Pandarus's house. In each of the public scenes, the new stage of love that is inaugurated is both irreversible, and is engendered by a third party: either the god of love, or his surrogate, Pandarus. Troilus is seen to be incapable of furthering his love interest by himself, and Criseyde is seen to have little choice but to acquiesce in the desires of Troilus and Pandarus. Pandarus's manipulation of events in the latter two scenes, involving deceptions shared by Troilus, has parallels with the narrator's own manipulations, or *dispositio* of his material. The amorous and poetic constructions of Pandarus and the narrator are foregrounded in the text, so that they become part of its public meaning: the making, the telling of the story becomes part of the meaning of the story itself.

The knowledge shared by the poem's central male protagonists is again contrasted with Criseyde's unknowing in Book III's meeting at Pandarus's house. Just as Criseyde was subject to Troilus's newly amorous gaze during 'Palladiones feste', so, during Pandarus's dinner, her ignorance is contrasted with the knowledge shared by the poem's other protagonists. Again, she is secretly looked upon by her lover:

> But who was glad now, who, as trowe 3e,
> But Troilus, that stood and myghte it se
> Thorugh-out a litel wyndow in a stewe...
> Unwist of euery wight but of Pandare? (III.599-601,603)

This presentation of Pandarus as the poem's greatest knower echoes the previous scene's comparison of his knowledge with Criseyde's ignorance:

> She com to dyner in hire pleyne entente -
> But god and Pandare wist al what this mente. (II.1560-1)

The narrator's conspiratorial asides encircle a larger context of knowing deception than is admitted: it is not only Pandarus who possesses a knowledge to which Criseyde is not privy, but also Troilus (553-4), the narrator (531), and the audience (599).

The construction of the poem's action by Pandarus and the narrator incorporates an audience of lovers into the poem's meaning:

> This tymbur is al redy vp to frame;
> *Us* lakketh nought but that *we* witen wolde
> A certeyn houre in which she comen sholde. (III.530-2;my emphasis)

The narrator's description of the preparations made for Criseyde's visit recall Geoffrey of Vinsauf's admonitions of poetic preparation, cited at the end of Book I, and drawing upon the architectural image:

> ffor eueri wight that hath an hous to found
> Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
> With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
> And sende his hertes line out fro with-inne
> Alderfirst his purpos forto wynne. (I.1065-9)

These, however, are not presented as the reflections of the narrator as poet, but of the narrator's construction of *Pandarus's* amorous planning:

> Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,
> And caste his werk ful wisely er he wroughte. (I.1070-1)

By Book III, this privileged view on the construction of a love situation is shared with the audience. As Fyler notes, the "us" of III.531 'embraces even the audience. The poet's function as a go-between and our own voyeuristic impulses as readers come to the

foreground with a jolt when Pandarus makes his most outrageous false departure from the bedroom scene'.[30] The invoked complicity of the audience adds another level to the category of expectations within which Criseyde is read. Prior to the dinner, the narrator's observation that 'Now is ther litel more forto doone' (547), draws the audience into a knowledge that Criseyde lacks, and again, the audience is directly addressed: '3e han wel herd the fyn of his [Pandarus's] entente' (553). Criseyde's partial knowledge, and the distinction made between her position and the 'us' that includes the rest of the poem's major players, as well as the Trojan populace and the poem's audience, help diminish her capacity for independent action. She is a reactive, rather than proactive character.

Criseyde's actions are driven less by her own desires than by the manipulations of her uncle, and her autonomy significantly consists in making virtue of necessity. Pandarus's 'invitation' leaves little doubt as to the choices available to Criseyde:

> And finaly he swor and gan hire seye ...
> But certeynly she moste, *by hire leue*,
> Come soupen in his hous with hym at eue ...
> Or elles, softe he swor hire in hire ere,
> He nolde neuere comen ther she were. (III.556,559-60,566-7;my emphasis)

That the concession of 'by hire leue' is purely perfunctory is made apparent in the ensuing dialogue, where Pandarus responds to Criseyde's half-hearted excuse that it is raining:

> "Lat be," quod he, "ne stant nought thus to muse;
> This moot be don, 3e shal be ther anon". (III.563-4)

The nature of the invitation figures the state of Criseyde's 'autonomy': an invitation is not a commmand but the impossibility of any response except acquiesence is not such a significant choice. The narrator joins forces with Pandarus to present Criseyde's submission

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[30] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.132; Fyler refers to III.978-80 regarding the 'false departure'. See also III.547, 553.

to the desires of her uncle as mutual agreement: 'So at the laste herof they fille aton' (565).[31]

The circumscription of Criseyde's articulation by male desire has been adumbrated in preceding passages. Criseyde's favourable response to Troilus's devotions seems as much due to the narrator's encouragement as her own disposition. The narrator delights that Troilus

> ... so ful stood in his lady grace,
> That twenty thousand tymes, er she lette,
> She thonked god that euere she with hym mette. (III.472-4)

The exaggeration of 'twenty thousand tymes' is more consistent with the narrator's oft-precedented tendencies towards inordinate praise than with Criseyde's more cautious speech.[32] Eulogising the manifold virtues of Troilus to which Criseyde reacts as one with him, the narrator suddenly breaks the identification of the two responses by distinguishing his own voice:

> So wis he was, she was namore afered -
> I mene as fer as oughte ben requererd. (III.482-3)

Criseyde has little political or social choice but to put her faith in a series of male protectors (father, uncle, Hector, Deiphebus, Troilus, Diomede): her misfortunes arise from the expediencies of self-interest which blur the distinction between protector and predator.

The arrangement or disposition of the scene itself, its *forma tractatus*, corresponds to the narrowing of Criseyde's range of articulation. She is increasingly enclosed *physically* at the same time as she is increasingly enclosed by the poetic frames of courtly, platonic and patriarchal forces governing her terms of reference. Her constraint within this series of frames becomes overt in the third book of the poem, itself enclosed by the two preceding

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[31] See above, 4.II's discussion of the dialogue between Hypermnestra and her father (*Legend*, ll.2628 ff.).

[32] See, for instance, I.99-105.

and two following books. During the consummation scene itself, Criseyde is enclosed in Pandarus's house, encircled by her women, and at different stages, subject to the hidden gazes of both Pandarus and Troilus. As Lambert notes, 'we are aware in both [the houses of Deiphebus and Pandarus] of movement from larger to smaller rooms, and also of meals taken in commmon out there in the great hall'.[33] This movement shifts the focus of action from the public context of communal dining to the private context of the bedroom. In both public and private spheres, unbeknown to her, Criseyde is subject to the regard and readings of others. At the commencement of Pandarus's meal, in tones of rising anticipation, the narrator exclaims about the gladness felt by Troilus, hidden away in his secret vantage point (III.599-604). The narrator's enthusiasm, Troilus's own purported gladness, and Pandarus's orchestration cohere strategically against the object of their plans, Criseyde. Troilus's knowledge contrasts with Criseyde's ignorance, and the secretive vision he enjoys from his 'litel wyndow' becomes more overtly that of the voyeur, feasting happily on the framed picture of the beloved.[34] The audience, too, enjoys this privileged vision of Criseyde and of the structuring of the scene. Implicated in the 'proces' of male voyeurism, the audience is simultaneously distanced from Criseyde; it is, presumably, well-positioned to adjudicate upon the question of the praise or blame that should devolve upon her. By virtue of narrative structuring, the audience is encouraged to pass judgement on Criseyde.[35]

Pandarus stage-manages the transformation of his house into a court of love, in much the same way as Cupid's presence transformed Palladion's temple in Book I. The narrator,

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[33] M.Lambert, '*Troilus*, Books I-III: A Criseydan Reading', in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. M.Salu (Cambridge, 1979), p.119.

[34] In the note to l.601 (p.1039), the Riverside editors observe that 'Young ('Origin of Troilus', 144-5, *MP* 4:169-77) compares the "piccolo pertugio" (little aperture) through which Florio observes a festive scene in Filocolo 2.172'. If the comparison is correct, it emphasises the voyeuristic nature of Troilus's line of vision, through the window of the closet.

[35] See above, section I's discussion of Troilus's inability to pass judgement as he loses his detachment from love.

at one with Pandarus and Troilus in this scene, correctly observes the execution of the action as independent of Criseyde's willed participation. In ascribing that action to fate, he points to a larger force also working to determine Criseyde's articulation. Fortune's exercises are seen as conflicting with the intentions of Criseyde:

> This mene I now, for she gan homward hye,
> But execut was al bisyde hire leue
> The goddes wil, for which she moste bleue. (III.621-3)

Similarly, it seems, his duty in articulating Criseyde is determined by his 'auctor' (575-6). The fact that the 'goddes wil' is identical to that of Pandarus provokes no comment from the narrator, who appears unwilling to take responsibility for the story he tells. It is Pandarus, an artificer of fate, who calculates the 'climactic' import of the elements - of Fortune - in order to manipulate Criseyde (548-51), as is made clear to the audience:

> He streght o morwe vn-to his Nece wente -
> 3e han wel herd the fyn of his entente. (III.542-3)

Pandarus is more explicit than the narrator in professing the ordering role which he, rather than the 'goddes', assumes; he assures his niece that he will lie:

> "By god, right in my litel closet 3onder.
> And I wol in that outer hous allone
> Be wardein of 3oure wommen euerichone". (III.663-5)

The prospect of Pandarus protecting Criseyde's female protectors is rather like that of a wolf protecting sheep. Pandarus presents his framing devices in a benevolent and protective, rather than voyeuristic or manipulative light. He carefully describes the propriety of the sleeping arrangements:

> "And in this myddel chambre that 3e se
> Shal 3oure wommen slepen wel and softe". (III.666-7)

Framed by a network of women in her service, Criseyde's security seems assured (684-6). The limitations of this promised security are apparent, however, in the fact that the women are sleeping, and ignorant of the designs into which they have been inserted.

In the public arena of the dinner party, Criseyde's actions are allowed the appearance of proceeding from Pandarus's persuasions rather than his proscriptions. His public pleas for her to stay the night contrast with his prior private commands:

> "But goode Nece, if I myghte euere plese
> 3ow any thyng, than prey ich 3ow," quod he,
> "To don myn herte as now so grete an ese
> As for to dwelle here al this nyght with me". (III.631-4)

Criseyde is sensitive to the advantages of gaining social worship through gracious acquiescence rather than futile protest. As she is well aware, her choice is not *whether* to accept Pandarus's 'hospitality', but when and how: to appear to choose the foregone conclusion is to make virtue of necessity. Echoing her uncle's words two stanzas above (636-7), Criseyde tells him that:

> "Syn that 3ow list, it skile is to be so;
> I am right glad with 3ow to dwellen here;
> I seyde but a game I wolde go". (III.646-8)

The effect of Pandarus's reply is to mock her lack of choice. "I-wys", he says, "graunt-mercy":

> "Were it a game or no, soth forto telle,
> Now am I glad, syn that 3ow list to dwelle". (III.650-1)

It is because Pandarus's directives must be modulated by public propriety that Criseyde is allowed at least a fictional autonomy. He directs her action through a subtext of coercion that operates within a fiction of public choice.

Chapter 7

PRIVATE VIEWINGS

I. Pandarus and Criseyde

Pandarus consistently manipulates Criseyde into private spheres. In public contexts, Criseyde is allowed a perception of autonomy, however limited. She has some knowledge which other participants lack, even if that knowledge is only partial. When she is alone with Pandarus, on the other hand, her ignorance stands in complete contrast to his knowledge, and her reactiveness, rather than proactiveness, is thereby emphasised. Using his knowledge of Criseyde's desire for 'honour' and the imperative that she maintain a spotless reputation, as well as the obedience she owes him as uncle, Pandarus is able to shape Criseydan articulation in private to a very large extent. In the private scenes with his niece where he is unhampered by public propriety, Pandarus is less inclined to comply with fictions of feminine autonomy and choice.

i. The First Visit

Pandarus's dealings with Criseyde are marked by his superior ability to control their relations. His efforts appear to enjoy narratorial sanction. We are told that Pandarus:

> ... took his way ful soone
> Unto his Neces palays ther biside;
> Now Ianus, god of entree, thow hym gyde! (II.75-7)

The double faced Janus is not only an appropriate guide for the double-dealing Pandarus, but as 'god of entrances (of doorways and beginnings)',[1] he significantly establishes marked

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[1] See Windeatt, note to l.77, p.155. See also A.C.Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge, 1987), who notes that endings, like beginnings, 'mark the boundary between the work and the world' (p.108). Pandarus's production of his own love-narrative within the larger narrative of the poem might be seen as one of the works existing within the world of the poem.

boundaries, indicating both literal and metaphorical beginnings. This concern with beginnings and endings - with boundaries, or frames - carries over into the conversation between Pandarus and Criseyde. Pandarus has interrupted Criseyde's reading of the story of Thebes at the close of one chapter, replacing the anticipated beginning of the next with his own tale (II.94-5, 103). Criseyde's conjecture as to Pandarus's news - "is than the thassege aweye?" - suggests the close of a chapter of war and the beginning of a new era of peace. As Hermann notes, the Theban romance which Criseyde reads is 'a curiously apposite work':

> The story of the siege of Thebes is being read and discussed by Trojans who are under siege themselves; moreover, this occurs within a poem directed to Englishmen at war with France, a *mise en abyme* which has specific political relevance.[2]

The ending of the war would also have specific consequences for Criseyde, vulnerable in a besieged city which her father has betrayed. Pandarus's entry into the setting of public domesticity (81-4) functions as a disruption: as Pearsall notes, the 'paved parlour and entourage of ladies [is] a wonderfully evocative image of feminine enclosure and stability'.[3] Pandarus quickly establishes his interpretive superiority. He begins with a double-edged remark about his niece's reading that is also a tongue in cheek reference to Criseyde as courtly lady:

> "ffor goddes loue, what seith it? telle it vs;
> Is it of loue? O, some good 3e me leere!" (II.96-7)

In imploring Criseyde to teach him 'som good', Pandarus is mockingly presenting himself as the hopeful lover whose earnest regard for a superior might lead to his own refinement. The undermining of his posturing as a willing student of Criseyde's bookish learning is indicated by his reference to Statius's twelve-book *Thebiad*, set above Criseyde's twelfth-

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[2] J.Hermann, 'Gesture and Seduction in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *SAC*, 7 (1985), 119.
[3] Pearsall, 'Criseyde's Choices', *SAC*, Proceedings no. 2 (1986), 18.

century romance version of the Thebes story.[4] In establishing his own superior reading skill, Pandarus, by implication, also mocks the 'polite fiction'[5] of Criseyde not only as a superior reader, but as possessing any actual superiority in courtly terms. The verbal fencing which ensues is directed largely by Pandarus, who invites and then dismisses Criseyde's interpretations, revealing his information only when he has manoeuvred a private theatre with Criseyde in a position of interpretive uncertainty and impatience.

Pandarus encourages Criseyde into a new receptivity to Troilus's suit by attempting to break down the security and autonomy of her public status of widowhood:

> "Do wey 3oure barbe and shew 3oure face bare;
> Do wey 3oure book, rys vp, and lat vs daunce,
> And lat vs don to May som obseruaunce". (II.110-12)

His heavily rhetorical structures, using repetition and the balancing of opposites, help to proclaim his speech as an act of persuasion. Far from embodying the qualities of the *vir bonus*, Pandarus's persuasive rhetoric transgresses the role of male protector appropriate to his relationship with Criseyde. She proposes an alternative image of widowhood to counter his own:

> "It satte me wel bet ay in a caue
> To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyues;
> Lat maydens gon to daunce and 3onge wyues". (II.117-9)

Such a prospect seems unlikely in the light of Criseyde's palatial domesticity and 'ful assured lokyng and manere'. There is a disparity between the images of Criseyde's femininity produced by others, and her own projection of an appropriate piety. The disparity points to the partial nature both of her representation by male characters and her own self-perception, itself an effect of male literary production. Pandarus later points to the improbability of Criseyde's self-representation:

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[4] See Windeatt's notes to ll.100-8, p.157.
[5] Green, 'The *Familia Regis* and the *Familia Cupidis*', p.104.

"ffor proudder womman is ther noon on lyue,
And 3e it wist, in al the town of Troye". (II.138-9)

The address is ambiguous, both empowering and disempowering. On the one hand it acknowledges Criseyde's self-possession and potential strength, and on the other it undermines her self-image, her ability to interpret herself and act on this basis. Pandarus's presentation of a partial image of femininity fosters a private inclination - towards love - which is at odds with a public disposition - of chastity. He is attempting to drive a wedge between Criseyde's private and public perceptions of herself, or at least to make explicit a possible rift between the two. It is evident that public male standards of 'honour' and propriety significantly shape Criseyde's perception of her identity. The fact that these notions may be contradictory does not work to undermine their force; the onus to resolve conflicting images of femininity is on Criseyde.

Pandarus also reinterprets the siege itself, enlisting the violence and destruction of a ten-year war to the interests of a privately romanticised and eroticised vision of chivalric excellence. Since Criseyde is dependent on his presentation of the siege, Pandarus can present not only Troilus but the battle itself in an idealised form (191-6).

As in the case of her father's treachery, she hears of events through the mediation of others, and is prey to his fictions and interpretations on a number of levels. Pandarus uses his superior knowledge to tease Criseyde:

"As euere 3et thriue I," quod this Pandarus,
"3et koude I telle a thyng to doon 3ow pleye". (II.120-1)

In response, Criseyde explicitly confesses the interpretive lack upon which her uncle plays:

"ffor al this world ne kan I reden what
It sholde ben; som iape I trowe is this;
And but 3oure seluen telle vs what it is,
My wit is for tarede it al to leene". (II.129-32)

In order to pry the information from Pandarus, Criseyde acknowledges her reliance on his magnanimity. Her public articulation of submissiveness belies the private sentiments of curiousity that give rise to it:

> Tho gan she wondren moore than biforne
> A thousand fold, and down hire eyghen caste;
> ffor neuere sith the tyme that she was borne
> To knowe a thyng desired she so faste;
> And with a syk she seyde him atte laste,
> "Now, Uncle myn, I nyl 3ow nought displese,
> Nor axen more that may 3ow disese". (II.141-7)

Like Troilus's dissimulations, Criseyde's outward expression is designed to promote a misreading; unlike Troilus's manifestation of detached superiority, Criseyde's gestures signal deference and submissiveness. In arguing against the realist, representationalist approach to gesture that he finds in critics such as Benson and Windeatt, Hermann suggests that gestures should be read as signs, which are part of a system:

> This structuralist principle - that the atomistic approach to meaning is futile, since meanings are relational - by now has a familiar ring to most medievalists. The individual sound, or gesture, lacks sense apart from a system which invests it with meaning.

He argues further that 'the epistemological claim of direct access to the unitary mental state of a literary character upon which Benson's and Windeatt's readings are premised can be resisted by exploring the range of meanings for a given gesture'.[6] The system from which Criseyde's actions arise is one which subordinates female access to knowledge and capacity for independent action, to male superiority in interpreting, naming and initiating events. It is within a context of female disenfranchisement that Criseyde must operate. Her dissembling signals a recognition both of this reality, and the possibility that it might be used, however partially, to her advantage.

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[6] The citations are from Hermann, 'Gesture and Seduction', 113 and 124 respectively. The latter point is supported by the example of II.302-3.

In finally succumbing to Pandarus's insistent focus on Troilus, Criseyde concedes that Troilus's reputation derives from sources she values:

> "...alle pris hath he
> Of hem that me were leuest preysed be". (II.188-9)

His reputation, thus conceived, points to the power of praise from desired quarters, a fact to which Criseyde is not oblivious. Models of reading, of ascribing praise or blame, are present *within* the poem itself, and it is appropriate for Criseyde to praise Troilus: he is praised by the praiseworthy, and therefore it is praiseworthy to praise him. Having brought Criseyde to the point of acknowledging Troilus as a model of honour and praise, Pandarus stages an exit:

> And with that word tho Pandarus as blyue
> He took his leue and seyde, "I wol gon henne". (II.208-9)

Criseyde is checkmated into bringing about the private setting - apparently by her own volition (210-7) - in which Pandarus can speak of love matters. Pandarus reiterates the undesirability of Criseyde's public widowhood:

> "But 3et I say, ariseth, lat vs daunce,
> And cast 3oure widewes habit to mischaunce.
> What list 3ow thus 3oure self to disfigure,
> Sith 3ow is tid thus faire an auenture?" (II.221-4)

He invites her to dance and to remove her widow's weeds because they 'disfigure' her, since they misrepresent the sexual disposition which he desires. He must refigure - re-market - her in terms suitable to his desires. Criseyde emphasises her interpretive uncertainty: "Shal I nat witen what 3e meene of this?" (226). It seems evident that Criseyde knows more than she admits, and Pandarus mocks her disingenuity with his own, reappropriating her capacity to misread:

> "And eke me wolde muche greue, i-wis,
> If I it tolde and 3e it toke amys". (II.228-9)

In an ironic reversal of Criseyde's own predicament, Pandarus proclaims himself vulnerable to her misreading, implicitly claiming the goodness of his intentions. Pandarus is able to control the way that others read him to a greater extent than is Criseyde. She is manipulated into pledging her faith in Pandarus as a *vir bonus*:

> "As 3e ben he that I moost loue and triste,
> Lat be to me 3oure fremde manere speche,
> And sey to me, 3oure Nece, what 3ow liste". (II.246-8)

In this way, Pandarus secures his audience's favourable disposition - "Tak it for good that I shal sey 3ow here" (252). He emphasises the self-consciously rhetorical construction of his forthcoming delivery:

> "How so it be that some men hem delite
> With subtyl art hire tales forto endite,
> 3et for al that, in hire entencioun,
> Hire tale is al for som conclusioun". (II.256-9)

Pandarus presents himself as a persuasive rhetor, a *vir bonus*, rather than as an author of imaginative poetics, a teller of tales. He will, however, fictionalise Troilus in presenting to Criseyde the way in which he learnt of Troilus's courtly affliction (505-74), and Criseyde will refer to the 'peynted proces' (424) of her uncle's poetics. Pandarus adapts his speech to the audience of Criseyde:

> Than thought he thus, "if my tale endite
> Aught harde, or make a proces any whyle,
> She shal no sauour haue ther-in but lite,
> And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle...
> fforthi hire wit to seruen wol I fonde". (II.267-270,273)

As he finally presents his 'cas', Pandarus reads Criseyde as audience:

> And with that word he gan right inwardly
> Byholden hire and loken on hire face
> And seyde, "on swich a mirour goode grace!" (II.264-6)

The fin'amor frame which follows foregrounds the notion of woman-as-mirror, reflecting and confirming the qualities of the male subject. Female representation is derivative, arising from the directing influence of male desire. In calling her face a mirror, Pandarus is both

preparing Criseyde for her courtly role, and inviting her to reflect and absorb his teaching. Since he has induced in Criseyde a disposition whereby she claims to be trusting, eager to hear his words, and under his paternal authority, he is able to control her reading practice to a large extent.

Criseyde the audience is read and interpreted as much as Pandarus the speaker. His interpretations of her facial expressions as he talks demonstrates his dual task, which is to persuade Criseyde both through language and through his interpretation of her. She is a text read by Pandarus, who:

> ... *loked on hire* in a bysi wyse,
> And she was war that he *byheld hire* so,
> And seyde, "lord, so faste *3e mauise*!
> *Sey 3e* me neuere er now? what say 3e? no?" (II.274-7;my emphasis)

His reply - "3is, 3is...and bet wol er I go" (278) - echoes earlier hints of the refiguring that she will undergo at his hands, as he inscribes her in a particular tradition of love relations. His emphasis on her textuality serves his persuasive rhetoric, convincing the audience of the speaker's good intentions and sustaining interest in the sermon:

> "Beth naught agast, ne quaketh naught; wherto?
> Ne chaungeth naught for feere so 3oure hewe ...
> And though my tale as now be to 3ow newe,
> 3et trist alwey 3e shal me fynde trewe". (II.302-3,305-6)

Bishop observes that:

> Pandarus conducts his campaign in the manner of an advocate skilled in the techniques of deliberative and forensic rhetoric. But his talents go beyond that: he treats his 'grete emprise' as a living romance and regards himself as its author.[7]

In the face of Pandarus's rhetorical persuasions, Criseyde loses her capacity to signify herself, and we learn of her response *to* his words *through* his words. Throughout Pandarus's speech, as he persuades, harangues, threatens and blackmails, Criseyde is permitted no immediate, direct reaction.

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[7] Bishop, *A Critical Study*, p.54. Bishop is referring to II.321-5.

In a situation where control over representation, both poetic and political, is male, Criseyde's beauty is a commodity, one which she must act on while its market value is high. This is established by Pandarus through the conventional images of femininity projected in the *carpe diem* tradition (393-6), and which are used to reverse Criseyde's image of widowhood. Instead of practising a pious retreat from the public world and from love, Criseyde should take advantage of her mortal attributes while she may. Both images of widowhood make female signification dependent on female sexuality: a sexual existence must be either confirmed through acquiescence, or denied through chastity, and the choice will have implications for the woman's social and spiritual standing. While chaste widowhood implies a chosen destiny, the *carpe diem* arguments used by Pandarus transfer that choice to men, who would choose to exclude an aged Criseyde as undesirable. In an attempt to sequester the *carpe diem* tradition for his arguments in favour of love, Pandarus redeploys the mirror so that Criseyde is both subject and image. The king's fool, he tells her, will say to the woman who "berth hire hye":

> "'So longe mote 3e lyue, and alle proude,
> Tyl crowes feet be growe vnder 3oure eye,
> And sende 3ow than a myrour in-to prye,
> In which that 3e may se 3oure face a morwe'". (II.402-5)

Lacking the tools by which she might predict her future, and limited, too, in the available models which she might imitate, Criseyde is convinced by such conventional representations of feminine destiny as Pandarus supplies with his *carpe diem* arguments.

Pandarus predicts that the 'worste' Criseyde might 'dreden' if she were to accept Troilus's love is that the affair might become public knowledge: "men wolde wondren..." (368). He attempts to allay fears about her reputation with assurances that:

> "...euery wight, but he be fool of kynde,
> Wol deme it loue of frendshipe in his mynde". (II.370-1)

Referring to 'the general similarity of the language of love and the language of friendship in Chaucer's literary culture', Lambert observes the way in which:

> Pandarus and the author juggle and whisk around various ideas about love's relation to friendship. One may ask for the friendliness of a loved lady; one uses 'loue of frendshipe' as a disguise for a love which is not friendship.[8]

Criseyde does not seem to be duped by Pandarus's language of friendship, and thinks to herself, "I shal felen what he meneth, y-wis" (387). For once, Criseyde seems to out-manipulate her uncle. "That is wel seyd" (390), he commends her request for advice, confirming what is actually meant by the 'loue of frendshipe':

> "That 3e hym loue a3eyn for his louynge,
> As loue for loue is skilful guerdonynge". (II.391-2)

If Criseyde 'chooses' not to reciprocate Troilus's affections, she is choosing to condemn two men to death:

> "But if 3e late hym deyen,I wol sterue -
> Haue here my trouthe, Nece, I nyl nat lyen -
> Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerue". (II.323-6)

Her ostensible power over the lives of Troilus and Pandarus is compromised by the imperative to exercise courtly 'routhe', and by subordinate relationships with Pandarus and with Troilus.

Criseyde's thoughts acknowledge the power men have to control her destiny; her spoken words profess a determination to maintain her honour:

> "A, lord, what me is tid a sory chaunce!
> ffor myn estate lith now in iupartie,
> And ek myn Emes lif is in balaunce;
> But natheles, with goddes gouernaunce,
> I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe,
> And ek his lif" - and stynte forto wepe. (II.464-9)

The death of a royal prince could be construed as the result of an act of treason by a cruel beloved, and Criseyde explicitly articulates the political danger she faces as a result of the

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[8] Lambert, 'A Criseydean Reading', 115 and 110 respectively.

unsolicited suit (465). The very concept of honour upon which she sees her fortune to depend is not one constructed with her interests in mind; neither are its bestowal or removal in her power. It is crucial that she maintain a good reputation - the public acknowledgement of 'honour' - less to designate her as an object of devotion than to retain political and social standing.

Criseyde perceives herself as one besieged, lamenting not only the world's faithlessness but also, briefly, a sense of betrayal by her uncle:

> ... "allas, for wo why nere I deede?
> ffor al this world the feyth is al agoon.
> Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon,
> Whan he that for my beste frende I wende
> Ret me to loue, and sholde it me defende?" (II.409-13)

Criseyde's later, fatalistic attribution of blame to a 'false worlde' (420) prefaces the philosophical mismatch with Troilus that is developed in the following book. Her anger progresses to a higher pitch, as she points to the double sexual standard that operates on the question of choice. If she had loved first - had chosen to love - instead of being the passive recipient of another's love, she would have been condemned by Pandarus:

> "Allas, I wolde han trusted, douteles,
> That if that I thorugh my disauenture
> Hadde loued outher hym or Achilles,
> Ector, or any mannes creature,
> 3e nolde han had no mercy ne mesure
> On me, but alwey had me in repreue". (II.414-9)

While Pandarus can condemn Criseyde for not displaying the 'routhe' he requires, Criseyde has no such direct recourse. Her speech builds up to the point of openly attacking Pandarus for his double dealing, before falling away to a more general complaint against the world and the gods. Criseyde moves into the high style, in a magnificent passage of self-generating *repetitio*:

> "What! is this al the ioye and al the feste?
> Is this 3oure reed? is this my blisful cas?
> Is this the verray mede of 3oure byheeste?

> Is al this paynted proces seyd, allas,
> Right for this fyn?" (II.421-5)

Again, though, she steps back from directing outright blame towards Pandarus, instead criticising the goddess, Pallas. Pandarus denies Criseyde's implicit charge that his intention is at fault, and instead blames her suspicion. He concludes with yet another threat of his certain death, before invoking Neptune, identifying himself as a figure who receives no reward for loyal - and constructive - service.[9] Pandarus's charge is that by failing to respond as he intends, by failing to answer to the double sexual calling of niece and courtly beloved, Criseyde "wikkedly...don vs bothe deye" (441). The moral authority he attempts to claim by professing to have her best interests at heart is undermined by Criseyde's naming of his surrogate suit as a "paynted proces" of poetics. In assuming the position of reader of Pandarus's poetic text, rather than that of the trusting niece that he had attempted to foster, Criseyde moves towards a position of greater interpretive autonomy. She is nevertheless inserted as a character into Pandarus's 'paynted proces'.[10] While she shows herself to be aware of the fiction-making powers of her uncle, and aware of his manipulations, she is unable to use that knowledge to take greater command of her own destiny.

ii. The Second Visit

Pandarus's second visit to Criseyde contains several parallels with his first. On both occasions the visit is prefaced by an allusion to May. Pandarus's references to his own love situation (1098-9) are joined by those of Criseyde: on the first occasion she notes that

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[9] Windeatt's note to l.443 explicates: 'Neptune is only elsewhere mentioned in *TC* in an added stanza (IV.120-6), explaining his enmity towards Troy: he helped build the city walls but received no reward' (p.175).

[10] For Pandarus's conception of his task in poetic terms, see above with reference to I.1065-71; see also Bishop, *A Critical Study*, p.12.

"3oure maistresse is nat here" (98), and on the second enquires, "how ferforth be 3e put in loues daunce?" (1106). Pandarus's relations with his niece are framed in this way by questions and representations of love, and Pandarus and Criseyde themselves enjoy several flirtatious exchanges. There is an ambiguity in Criseyde's enquiry as to Pandarus's progression in 'loues daunce', which could refer either to Pandarus's situation with his anonymous mistress, an interpretation which Pandarus appears to follow, or to his progression in ministering to Troilus's devotion. Overtones of violence and violation occur both times. Prior to Pandarus's first visit, he is awoken by the swallow Procne, and overt allusion is made to the sexual violation that occasioned the metamorphoses of Philomela and Procne. During the second visit, Pandarus thrusts Troilus's love letter at Criseyde's breast.

Criseyde's eagerness to hear the cause of his second visit (1100-2) again involves delay, as Pandarus manipulates the private setting of the garden suitable to his courtly mission:

> "In-to the gardyn go we and 3e shal here
> Al pryuely of this a longe sermoun". (II.1114-5)

Pandarus's shift to Criseyde's garden recalls the courtly garden "in-with the paleis gardyn by a welle" (508) where he fictitiously claims to have overheard Troilus's complaint. His construction of Troilus's groaning, complaining and weeping, as he prayed for love's grace (526-32) and adopted the confessional guise of the penitent (540-1), indicate that Troilus, as much as Criseyde, is inscribed into a courtly role. Pandarus's compassion for Troilus's plight provides a model for the 'routhe' to which Criseyde, as courtly beloved, should be constrained. It is appropriate that Troilus should suffer courtly ailments, as it is appropriate that Criseyde should bestow 'routhe'. When Pandarus enjoins Criseyde, in the course of his first meeting with her, to love Troilus, he does so in a way which promotes a sense of the *appropriateness* of such a situation:

> "And be 3e wis as 3e be faire to see,
> Wel in the ryng than is the rubie set". (II.584-5)

The image of the stone set in the ring, taken from Boccaccio, is an implicitly sexual image. It recalls Pandarus's earlier exclamation: "Wo worth the faire gemme vertueless!" (II.344). Just as the ruby is appropriately placed in the ring, so it is inappropriate - unnatural - for the jewel not to manifest its natural healing powers. The sexual overtones of the later image are reinforced by the courtly conceit of women as physicians, healers.[11]

Criseyde's reaction upon being presented with Troilus's letter suggests that she is frightened of the dangers of publicity in an exchange of letters:

> fful dredfully tho gan she stonden thus stylle,
> And took it naught, but al hire humble chere
> Gan forto chaunge... (II.1128-30)

The audience shares in a knowledge about the progress of events that Criseyde obviously does not, and her reactions are read in the light of this knowledge. Her response provides a new perspective on the affair, as she points out that the interests of Pandarus and of Troilus are not necessarily the same as, or compatible with, her own. She admonishes her 'vncle deere':

> "To myn estat haue more rewarde, I preye,
> Than to his lust - what sholde I more seye?" (II.1133-4)

While Pandarus and Troilus, at this stage of the poem, appear to have much to gain and little to lose through the progress of the affair, the opposite seems to be true for Criseyde. She resists the appropriation of her speech into the form of a letter, which is both dangerous as a public record of the affair, and proves to be an unsympathetic genre. The letter's content is reported rather than directly cited by the narrator and, unlike Troilus's letter, as Bishop notes, 'is entirely innocent of the rhetorical formulas recommended by the *Artes*

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[11] This image of woman is not of course, exclusively courtly, as Boethius's Lady Philosophy demonstrates.

Dictaminis'.[12] Criseyde claims that it is the "firste lettre/That euere I wroot" (1213-4), and after it is written, that:

> "I neuere dide a thing with more peyne
> Than writen this, to which 3e me constreyne". (II.1231-2)

Lacking rhetorical proficiency, Criseyde exhibits an anxiety about how the letter might be interpreted (1222-4) when she is not present to help control that interpretation. The narrator's own words suggest that her fear might be well grounded, as he prefaces his summary of the letter with the qualification:

> Of which to telle in short is myn entente
> Theffect as fer as I kan vnderstonde. (II.1219-20)

The narrator's inability to account for Criseydean action, and her powerlessness to control others' interpretations of her become increasingly more ominous as the poem progresses.

The narrator subscribes to the Pandaric practice of imposing his own responses on Criseyde. In using the past tense while addressing his niece - "hard it was 3oure herte forto graue" (1241) - Pandarus assumes more than Criseyde has conceded:[13] he attributes to her lines that she has not yet learnt. As Troilus, again seen through Criseyde's window, rides through Troy, the narrator is unable to restrain himself, and Criseyde's responses are summarily thrust aside:

> God woot if he sat on his hors aright,
> Or goodly was biseyn that ilke day!
> God woot wher he was lik a manly knyght! (II.1261-3)

Almost as an afterthought, Criseyde is swept up into the eulogy, though her response is comparatively muted; the impression given is that she has no choice in thus regarding Troilus, but is forced to follow the consuming enthusiasm of the narrator:

> Criseyde, which that alle thise thynges say,

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[12] Bishop, *A Critical Study*, p.68.

[13] The same assumption is made in II.1288: "Lat nycete nat do 3ow bothe smerte", where Pandarus assumes Criseyde is as eager to love as is Troilus.

To telle in shorte, hire liked al in fere,
His persoun, his aray, his look, his chere. (II.1265-7)

His control over Criseyde is suggested in the following stanza where it is difficult to determine whether Criseyde or the narrator is the source of praise for Troilus. His own sympathies, by contrast, present no such interpretive problem:

To god hope I she hath now kaught a thorn,
She shal nat pulle it out this nexte wyke -
God sende mo swiche thornes on to pike. (II.1272-4)

Pandarus, following the narrator's reference to courtly 'routhe' (1270), adopts a moralist's pose, persuading Criseyde to agree with his proposition that a woman who fails to respond with 'routhe' to a worthy claimant is implicated in that lover's death (1277-83).[14] This moral is prefaced by an explication of Pandarus's intentions, reiterating previous undertones of violence:

Pandare, which that stood hire faste by,
ffelte iren hoot and he bygan to smyte. (II.1275-6)

The models provided by Pandarus and the narrator are crucial factors in persuading Criseyde to love.

iii. Preparations for the Consummation

When Criseyde asks her uncle whether Troilus will be present at the dinner, Pandarus's reassurance draws less on an unequivocal declaration that Troilus will not be there, than on a promise that Criseyde will have no cause to fear (570-4). The narrator's fumbling equivocation and hasty glance towards his 'auctor' ensure that the reader does not miss the opportunity to observe a possible double-take on the part of Criseyde:

Nought list myn auctour fully to declare
What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,
That Troilus was out of towne y-fare,

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[14] See the example of Chartier's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', discussed above, 2.II.

As if he seyde ther-of soth or no. (III.575-8)

If Criseyde does not believe her uncle that Troilus is out of town, it would seem that she finds it expedient to pretend that she does, and displace any responsibility for impropriety away from herself. Despite his equivocation, the narrator is exercising poetic control over Criseyde, so that she is presented as not simply fearful and obedient, but also possibly deceptive. The obedience she manifests -

But that, with-owten await, with hym to go
She graunted hym, sith he hire that bisoughte,
And as his Nece obeyed as hire oughte (III.579-81) -

is compounded as an unproblematic feminine virtue. Criseyde is both fearful of "goosish poeples speche" (584), and is forced to make a virtue of necessity by attempting to impose moral responsibility on her uncle, underlining her obedience to him:

..."Em, syn I most on 3ow triste,
Loke al be wel and do now as 3ow liste". (III.587-8)

Criseyde must trust in the sincerity of her uncle's intent, and his capacity to control the effect of the actions he sets into play. In telling him to 'do now as 3ow list', she is giving him a licence he had already assumed. It is as if her choice consists in legitimising action already taken; to agree to the inevitable, especially if the inevitable has already occurred.

The effect of the manoeuvres of Pandarus and the narrator is to remove the opportunities for choice available to Criseyde. The nature of this choice, however, is not a simple matter of Criseyde deciding whether or not to obey her uncle, or whether or not to accept Troilus's love. The voluntary act of consummation is an act which is *no longer available* to Criseyde after her uncle's presentation of his 'cas': as niece, as bestower of 'routhe', and as Trojan citizen, she has no choice but to receive Troilus. But in the light of Criseyde's crucial concern with propriety, and the narrative's emphasis on the importance and vulnerability of female reputation, it is difficult to imagine Criseyde's straightforward, entirely voluntary acceptance of Troilus into her bed. It is this ubiquitous propriety that

seems to motivate the extent to which Pandarus carries his manouevrings. When speaking to Criseyde of love matters, he inevitably frames a private setting, and even in her chamber, impresses silence upon her:

> "No word, for loue of god, I 3ow biseche:
> Lat no wight rise and heren of oure speche". (III.755-6)

While he presents his own freedom of speech as enhanced in a private context, he does not encourage Criseyde to enjoy a similar liberation, indicating a facility of linguistic as well as physical movement that is more available to male than to female articulation:

> "God help me so, 3e hadde hym neuere lief,
> That dar I seyn now ther is but we two". (III.864-5)

Paradoxically, then, it is by restricting the choices available to Criseyde that Pandarus manages to give her any choice at all. Choice, rather than love, is the point at issue for Criseyde. As much as she may have wanted to sleep with Troilus, propriety would forbid the expression of such a wish, the notion that desire might originate, rather than be reflected in, the female body.

Criseyde has already recognised the interdict on female desire, in pointing out that Pandarus would have blamed rather than praised her if she had herself chosen to love (414-9). In other words, it is only by having no choice, that Criseyde's choice might be enacted; rather than willed thraldom, her situation might be described as one of enthralled will. The lack of power inherent in such a predicament would be all the more overt if textual evidence precluded the possibility of Criseyde's sexual desire; the fact that her desire appears to coincide with Pandarus's direction is less an indication of female autonomy than simply lucky on the one hand, and circumscribed by fate and the poem on the other. This situation becomes evident in Criseyde's refusal, or inability, to sanction Troilus's entry into her bedchamber. She makes clear her willingness to 'don the beste/If that ich hadde grace to do so' (927-8), but must leave the final act to her uncle:

"I am, til god me bettre mynde sende,
At dulcarnoun, right at my wittes ende". (III.930-1)

In transferring this final responsibility to Pandarus, she can be seen as countenancing less an act of choice on her part than a feminine acquiescence to male resolution and closure.

II. The Woman Alone: Criseyde Persuaded to Love

The scene in which Criseyde reflects on Pandarus's surrogate suit in Book II is one of Chaucer's substantial amplifications of his source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Her reflections pull the forward movement of the narrative to a halt, and function, in part, as a commentary on the events of the poem so far. In particular, her thoughts provide a commentary on the roles of the narrator and of Pandarus in persuading her to love, and on her own position as a character within the poem. Chaucer's *amplificationes*, as Payne notes, do not substantially alter the course of Boccaccio's narrative, and chiefly work to alter 'the proportion of rising action to falling'. Of the six categories of amplification listed by Payne, 'the largest single block of change and addition is in Books II and III, in the elaborate preparations for the consummation'.[15] It is not surprising, then, to find more space devoted to the preparation of Criseyde's character than in the *Filostrato* - the responses, motivations, interpretations and pressures that elaborate on her role in the events that culminate in the consummation scene. As Payne notes, after the elaboration of the preparations for the consummation, and of the character of Pandarus, the expansion and alteration of Criseyde's character is the third principal area of elaboration in *Troilus and Criseyde*.[16]

Troilean idealism, as the scene makes clear, is for Criseyde a remote and unlikely indulgence; her decisions must take into account the realities of her current situation in

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[15] *Key*, p.178.

[16] On this point, Payne notes that 'we also see more of her following the separation of the lovers, and Chaucer relates more fully her affair with Diomede' (ibid.).

Chaucer's medieval Troy. Pandarus and the narrator clearly explicate the pressures influencing Criseyde's decision. Simply to call her motivation 'fear', as does Gerald Morgan, is reductive, since it posits a single, internal motivation, integral to Criseyde's character, from which her subsequent actions spring:

> The ruling passion of Criseyde, as C.S.Lewis rightly pointed out, is fear, and Criseyde's internal debate centres upon the conflicting fears that assail her - fear of alienation (II.708-12), fear of the loss of reputation (II.724-32) and of virtue (II.750-63), and fear of love itself (II.764-98).[17]

The 'key' to Criseyde's character is not fear, or any other stable, psychological characteristic. Her characterisation derives from her relations with a set of determinants, ranging from literary convention to political fragility. She is presented, furthermore, by the narrator, who is no objective, disinterested translator, but another character in the poem. However disingenuously, he enters into relations with his own Criseyde, with his sources' Criseyde, and with the philosophical and literary traditions of neoplatonism and fin'amor. Muscatine points to the inadequacy of 'naturalistic' and unitary readings of Criseyde:

> She cannot be understood purely through courtly convention. Yet Chaucer constructs her only partly of naturalistic materials, and she is thus only imperfectly describable by naturalistic criticism...In this limited perspective [exclusively as a psychological entity] we would have to read the love scenes as something like hypocrisy, and the betrayal as the product of an individual, psychological quirk, be it "fear," "impressionability," or any of the other "tragic flaws" that are used to explain her.[18]

While Muscatine concludes that 'the truth of her characterisation is in her consistent ambiguity', it seems more accurate to see Criseyde as resisting the appropriative readings of others that are so crucial to her presentation in the course of the poem. Pandarus reads her falsely, and Troilus partially; the narrator confesses his interpretive failure and begins (I.38-9) and ends (V.1780-5) his poem with a warning about men's betrayal of women.

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[17] Morgan, 'The Freedom of the Lovers in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Literature and Learning in Medieval and Renaissance England. Essays presented to Fitzroy Pyle*, ed. J.Scattergood (Dublin, 1984), p.92.

[18] Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, p.164.

Criseyde begins her reflections with a disavowal of fear as a guiding principle of action:

> ...but whan that she
> Was ful auysed, tho fond she right noughte
> Of peril why she ought afered be. (II.604-6)

She articulates a false perception of female choice by way of explanation:

> ffor man may loue, of possibilite,
> A womman so his herte may to-breste,
> And she naught loue a3ein but if hire leste. (II.607-9)

The balance of her thoughts serves to undermine this latter sentiment, as she considers the implications for herself of the dual suit of uncle and prince. The confidence of these early thoughts is also undermined by the disjunctions between narrative and narratorial presentations of Criseyde. The narrator claims that Criseyde decides there is no need to fear when she 'was ful auysed'; but it is clear from the subsequent narrative that this impression occurs well before Criseyde has fully considered. Similarly, in explaining why Criseyde decides to exercise 'routhe', before Criseyde has made any such decision herself, the narrator states that she considers Troilus's 'excellent prowesse', his 'estat', 'renown', 'wit', 'shap' and 'gentilesse' (II.660-2). In Book IV, however, Criseyde explicitly dismisses Troilus's 'estat roiale', 'nobleye or ek richesse' ('estat'), his worthiness in war and tournaments ('excellent prowesse', 'renown'), or any 'pompe', 'array' or 'veyn delit' ('wit', 'shap') as prompting her 'routhe' (IV.1667-70):

> "But moral vertue grounded vp-on trouthe,
> That was the cause I first hadde on 3ow routhe". (IV.1672-3)

The inconsistency calls the narrator's authority into question, but it also questions Criseyde's sincerity. The Book IV passage is a complete rewriting of the *Filostrato*, where the reasons for loving (1667-73) are not spoken by Criseida, but by Troilo, as he explains why he loved her and promises to be faithful. The veracity of both Criseyde and the narrator is compromised, since neither appears to exercise complete truthfulness or complete falseness.

In both explications of Criseydean motivation, the narrator is imposing views upon Criseyde that are not her own, and views that are vital elements in her characterisation.

The dominance of male representations and their influence on shaping perspectives is evident in the scene which interrupts Criseyde's thoughts. Troilus's triumphal ride through the gate Dardanus benefits from the erotic frames both of Pandarus, who has extolled the prince's virtues just prior to his entrance into Troy, and more particularly of the narrator, who once again, is barely able to contain his superlatives at the inspiring sight of Troilus:

> So lik a man of armes and a knyght
> He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse ...
> So fressh, so 3ong, so weldy semed he,
> It was an heuen vp-on hym forto see. (II.631-2,636-7)

Criseyde's favourable disposition towards Troilus is hardly surprising. Her closeted widowly life enforces her dependence on Pandarus for news outside her 'paleys', such as Troilus's prowess in battle. Her subjection to the narrator's presentation does not augur immunity from his own high regard for Troilus. After the narrator has admired Troilus's modest countenance -

> That to byholde it was a noble game,
> How sobreliche he caste down his eyen (II.647-8) -

Criseyde's reaction is finally described:

> Criseyda gan of his chere aspien,
> And leet it so softe in hire herte synke,
> That to hire self she seyde, "who 3af me drynke?" (II.649-51)

Boccaccio's heroine, by contrast, debates with herself about whether to love Troilo *before* spying the martial hero from her window. In Chaucer's version, the narrator is present in the crucial viewing of Troilus which *precedes* Criseyde's internal debate, and his influence over her subsequent thoughts is correspondingly more pronounced.

The 'drynke' in Criseyde's famous line, "who 3af me drynke", is glossed by Windeatt, following Skeat, Root and Robinson, as 'i.e. a love-potion'. 'Love-potion' is,

however, an interpretation rather than a simple gloss, apparently based on the idea that Criseyde is so suddenly and so violently struck with love that she can explain her smiting only in terms of a force external to herself and over which she has no control - a love-potion.[19] Since it is inappropriate for the courtly beloved to experience desire, the external device of the love-potion provides a convenient explanation for what might otherwise be interpreted as Criseyde's desire. Such an interpretation reinforces the notion that female desire, a potentially disruptive force, must be restrained - by interpretation. Immediately after her 'drynke' apprehension, we are told that 'of hire owen thought she wex al reed' (II.652), an action which more readily befits the realisation of a forbidden response to the sight of Troilus than an allergic reaction to a love-potion. The fact that the exclamation is made in direct speech by Criseyde suggests some degree of complicity in this interdict on choice. Criseyde might herself be seen as countenancing the idea that she has been administered a love-potion. Pearsall notes in these lines (II.649-52):

> how Criseyde, almost operating according to some "prime directive" of damage limitation, instinctively distances herself as a sentient centre of will from the activity of desire, associating the movement of desire with the administering of a love potion and granting to herself therefore the same freedom from responsibility as that of the lovers Tristan and Isolde. She presents to herself what is happening to her as something over which she has no control, and therefore something for which she has no responsibility.[20]

If Criseyde displaces responsibility for falling in love with Troilus away from herself, then she absolves herself of responsibility - and most importantly, of blame - for the events which follow. The thought of the power she has over Troilus provokes further shame, and Criseyde attempts to bridle the awakened desire to which she has not yet admitted directly:

> And with that thought for pure ashamed she
> Gan in hire hed to pulle and that as faste,
> While he and al the peple forby paste. (II.656-8)

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[19] The *Riverside* gloss notes that rather than interpreting 'drynke' as love-potion, 'it seems simpler and better to take drynke as any intoxicating beverage' (p.1033).

[20] Pearsall, 'Criseyde's Choices', 21.

Her thought processes whereby she suddenly draws back after perceiving she has granted too much parallel those of the narrator, whose fumbling assurances that Criseyde did not love Troilus too 'sodeynly' follow his reference to a 'sodeyn loue' that Criseyde has not admitted.

The narrator follows Criseyde's first sight of Troilus with five stanzas, not present in *Il Filostrato*, denying that Criseyde too quickly loved Troilus. It is significant that he, rather than Criseyde, introduces both the question of love and the possibility that it may have occurred too suddenly to be consistent with propriety. In taking on the role of defending Criseyde against such an accusation, the narrator is adopting the role of counsel for the defence. The rhetorical procedure of prosecution and defence, originating in the Roman law courts, entailed a concentration on character which was intimately bound up with the matter of verbal style:

> Through a study of the attributes of persons, a poet learned how to communicate most effectively his or her own sense of the significant aspects of a particular character and how these aspects related to the character's central action.[21]

The 'central action' of *Troilus and Criseyde* though, in terms of the character of Criseyde, is not her falling in love with Troilus, but her *betrayal* of him, that is, her turning to Diomede. In defending Criseyde for an action which apparently requires no defence, the narrator is implicitly adopting the dual roles of both prosecution and defence. This procedure is again in line with ancient rhetorical practice:

> Medieval rhetorical training encouraged the analysis of character. Its psychological focus came from its origin in the Roman courts of law. Where plausibility and persuasiveness were more effective than hard evidence, the contrasting characterisations of the defendant by the prosecutor and the counsel for the defence often formed the basis of judgement about the alleged crime.[22]

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[21] Woods, 'Chaucer the Rhetorician', 29. She refers to Cicero, *De inventione* I.34, listing the attributes of persons which provide the 'raw materials' of characters.

[22] Woods, 'Chaucer the Rhetorician', 29.

But the alleged crime of Criseyde is not the one which the narrator is defending in these stanzas. It is possible to perceive a game-like aspect to this parallel presentation of Criseyde's inclination toward Troilus as part of the narrator's given story on the one hand, and of his commentary on the event on the other hand. In his article, 'Medieval Monism and the Abuse of Authority in Chaucer', Stewart Justman refers to the definition of formal disputation given in Little and Pelster's *Oxford Theology and Theologians* as:

> a discussion of a scientific question between two or more disputants, of whom one undertakes the role of defender of a particular opinion, while the other or others raise objections and difficulties against this opinion.[23]

Justman concludes that it is evident from this definition:

> that there is something staged about the performance; and a potentially game-like quality seems to make disputation abundantly liable to abuse, even to farce.[24]

The farcical aspect of the disputation on the speed of Criseyde's love arises not only from the fact that the narrator is defending Criseyde for the wrong crime, but that the defence itself is so weak. The question of 'sodeyn' loving in fin'amor is informed by a double standard. Troilus's love could hardly be described as a 'gradual inclination', and yet the speed with which he loved carries no moral overtones. The moral quality appears to be placed on the speed not of *love*, which is the initiative of the lover, but of *acquiescence*, which is the response of the beloved.[25] The narrator concedes:

> Now myghte som envious iangle thus:
> "This was a sodeyn loue ... " (II.666-7)

His somewhat feeble counter trusts that the purveyors of such sentiments may never prosper; after all, without any doubt, all things need beginnings (670-2). The narrator's untimely

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[23] *Oxford Theology and Theolgians* (Oxford, 1934), p.29. Cited in Justman, 'Medieval Monism', *ChR*, 11 (1976), 96.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Payne makes a similar point: 'many readers worry about accounting for the "change" in Criseyde, but are not at all troubled by the reversal of attitude Troilus accomplishes in a couple of stanzas, from devout scorner of lovers to fatally constant lover' (*Key*, p.225).

defence has served to raise from obscurity into the realm of the credible an interpretation of Criseyde's love as being founded on a sidelong glance at Troilus from her window.[26] While it is true, as Woods argues, that the three major disputants in Chaucer's Trojan 'cas' are presented from the dual rhetorical positions of prosecution and counsel for the defence, it is also true that the counsel for the defence would be unlikely to advance his career on the strength of his defence of Criseyde.

After his three stanza defence of Criseyde, the narrator produces the *non sequitur*:

> Now lat vs stynte of Troilus a throwe,
> That rideth forth, and lat vs torne faste
> Vnto Criseyde. (II.687-9)

Since the focus has been on Criseyde, and not on Troilus, the narrator's comment seems an attempt to deny Criseyde's status as an independent focus of the narrative. The narrator adumbrates in Criseyde a process of 'to and fro' considering that is similar to his own. She is seen to be swaying at first one way, and then another:

> That plited she ful ofte in many folde;
> Now was hire herte warme, now was it colde. (697-8)

Criseyde is aware both of the dangers of offending 'my kynges sone' and of the honour to herself in being loved by such a knight. She thinks it wise to make a virtue of necessity:

> "Now were I wis me hate to purchase,
> With-outen nede, ther I may stonde in grace?" (II.713-4)

She is beginning to perceive acquiescence to Troilus as consistent with maintaining a good reputation; after having established the course likely to safeguard her honour, she proceeds to reiterate, to rationalise, in a sense, her decision to do as she has been bidden by Pandarus. During earlier reflections, she had wondered:

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[26] E.T.Donaldson, in 'Briseis, Briseida, Criseyde, Cresseid, Cressid: Progress of a Heroine', in *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives. Essays Presented to Paul E. Beichner*, ed. E.Vasta and Z.Thundy (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1979), notes that the narrator's efforts to counter condemnations of Criseyde have the opposite effect of the one apparently intended (see p.6).

> Where on she wolde apoynte hire atte laste,
> *If* it so were hire Em ne wolde cesse
> ffor Troilus vp-on hire forto presse. (II.691-3;my emphasis)

The image whereby Troilus is 'pressed' upon her echoes previous presentations of Criseyde as a text, or wax block, upon which the image of Troilus is imposed. The notion that Criseyde's decision is dependent on the persistence of her uncle's suit sits oddly with the narrator's presentation of her purported choice in deciding to love Troilus. Criseyde's reasoning is presented as less transparent to the audience than it was just prior to Pandarus's exit, when she considered the prospect of Troilus dying from unrequited love:

> "What men wolde of it deme I kan nat seye;
> It nedeth me ful sleighly forto plei". (II.461-2)

Pearsall observes of the earlier stanzas (449-62) that:

> What she is doing is constructing a world for herself in which she can contentedly live, identifying what she wants to do and securing the freedom to do it without assuming the responsibilities that are consequent upon the exercise of free choice. She has discovered the great principle of survival, and the solace of the survivor: true freedom is the ability to convince yourself that you have no choice but to do what you want to do.[27]

On these grounds, it is Criseyde's destiny to be exempted from responsibility, since men choose when and whom to love and not to love:

> "Men louen wommen al biside hire leue,
> And whan hem leste namore, lat hem byleue". (II.734-5)

But to say of Criseyde that 'what she wants to do' is to love Troilus, and that she absolves herself from responsibility for this wish by reasoning that she has no other alternative, is to lessen the very real pressures urging her to succumb to others' desires. It is to place a perhaps undeserved trust in the narrator, who provides the main evidence for the claim that Criseyde has actually already decided to love Troilus. The pressures of the story, of fate, of literary tradition, of male representation and male overtures are inextricable from Criseyde's

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[27] Pearsall, 'Criseyde's Choices', 19.

'desire' in the poem. She does have a choice, but in effect, it is the only choice possible, and it is this lack of alternatives that Pandarus presents to his niece in Books II and III.

Criseyde's attitudes to Fortune similarly rewrite lack of choice as choice. Her prior fatalism, as she lamented the world's inconstancy and untrustworthiness (II.409-27), is now replaced by the thought: 'But swich is loue and ek myn auenture' (II.742). While no longer presenting herself as a victim, Criseyde nevertheless acknowledges her subjection to Fortune. Whereas Troilus's love takes him beyond such fatalism, Criseyde remains bound to a less developed, less ideal philosophical position. Her position again foreshadows the philosophical disparity between the lovers that surfaces in Book III's consummation scene. She chooses to be there because she could not choose otherwise. Having decided to accept rather than rail against the influence of fortune, Criseyde rewrites the meaning of her widowly status. Her current buoyancy foregrounds the self-assurance that previously had sat uneasily as a postscript to a portrait of widowly modesty:

> "I am oon the faireste, out of drede,
> And goodlieste, whoso taketh hede,
> And so men seyn, in al the town of Troie". (II.746-8)

In prior action an impediment, Criseyde's widowly estate now becomes an advantage: she is 'naught religious', 'right 3ong' and stands 'vnteyd in lusty leese'.[28]

The movement back from optimism to considering the dangers of love is signalled by the image of clouds covering the sun: just as a cloud is blown by the wind,

> Which ouersprat the sonne as for a space,
> A cloudy thought gan thorugh hire soule pace,
> That ouerspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle. (II.767-9)

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[28] Although Windeatt, like most of the poem's editors, glosses 'lusty leese' as 'delightful pasture', Donaldson's alternative of 'love's leash' - i.e. marriage - seems more likely in the context, and is the reading assumed here; see *Riverside*, p.1034. This reading is substantiated if one takes Criseyde's reference to her 'estate' to include her marital status: "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese,/I thank it god, as after myn estate" (II.750-1).

Criseyde's speaking becomes indebted to the narrator's imagery, suggesting that contrary to his claims, Criseyde's articulation, rather than autonomous, is crucially shaped by male representation:

> ffor loue is 3et the mooste stormy lyf...
> ffor euere some mystrust or nice strif
> Ther is in loue, som cloude is ouere that sonne.(II.778, 780-1)

As well as this merging of Criseydan and narratorial imagery, repeated in 'hire thought gan forto clere' (806), Criseyde's dilemma over love and freedom - she is free to love, but if she loves would she still be free? - takes on the terms of Pandarus's courtly frame:

> ... "allas, syn I am free,
> Sholde I now loue, and put in iupertie
> My sikernesse and thrallen libertee?" (II.771-3)

Whereas the courtly model had proved a sympathetic vehicle for Troilus's devotion and he had embraced the notion of love's bondage, Criseyde resists it; for Troilus, the conceit of free thraldom had allowed for an opening out of emotion and philosophy, while for Criseyde it serves to focus the tangible constraints increasingly closing in on her. As the influence of male representation makes itself felt, Criseyde returns again to the issues of male fidelity and her own reputation:

> "Also thise wikked tonges ben so preste
> To speke vs harm, ek men ben so vntrewe". (II.785-6)

Her awareness of an audience which has the power to bestow praise or blame is indicated in the thought:

> "And who may stoppen euery wikked tonge,
> Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge?" (II.804-5)

Criseyde's thoughts highlight the power of others - both within and without the poem - to judge her like a text.

The scene in which Criseyde enters into the garden to hear Antigone's song is original with Chaucer. The *Canticus Antigone* is indebted to the idea of love as a religion,

with its multiple references to 'lord', 'god' and the 'blisful' nature of love. The 'willed thraldom' paradox, according to the song, arises from an imperfect experience of love (855-7), in the same way that true love is "withouten ialousie or strif" (837). It is perhaps a sign of the ideal nature of Troilus's love that thraldom does not disturb him in the same way it does Criseyde. Criseyde, like the narrator, regards the experience of love as crucial to fine 'makyng':

> ... "lord, is ther swych blisse amonge
> This loueres, as they konne faire endite?" (II.885-6)

Criseyde's words suggest that despite her marriage, she has not yet been a lover.[29] Since her current situation thus stands outside her experience, Criseyde is more vulnerable to persuasion by the conventional model of love supplied by Antigone. The author of the song in the poem is not Antigone but "the goodlieste mayde/Of gret estat in al the town of Troye" (880-1). The 'honour' of the speaker is a further inducement to Criseyde, answering as it appears to do, her anxieties about maintaining her reputation. The song itself confirms the virtue of the composer: as Criseyde replies to Antigone, "ffor-sothe, so it semeth by hire songe" (883). Criseyde's conversion to love is seen as a process of learning, as she is persuaded by Antigone's song:

> But euery word which that she of hire herde,
> She gan to *prenten in hire herte faste*,
> And ay gan loue hire lasse for tagaste
> Than it did erst and synken in hire herte,
> That she *wex somwhat able to conuerte*. (II.899-903;my emphasis)

Criseyde becomes a text written by others, a wax tablet upon which is imprinted the language of a particular ideology of love, determining her social and personal relations. She is seen as a child learning lessons, an image presented in the same textual terms of wax and

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[29] That 'loueres' refers to women as well as men is indicated by the tradition of French poetry from which Chaucer's song derives, where women sing in praise of lovers and love. See Windeatt, p.193, and *Riverside*, p.1034.

imprinting in Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. The book is addressed to a child, who 'Stondeth as yett vndir yndyff[e]rence' to following vice or virtue. The author advises:

> But ryght as wax receyeth printe and figure,
> So chylder ben disposed of nature.[30]

As male representations increasingly impinge upon her person, Criseyde becomes a text upon which their doctrine is imprinted, and like a child, a passive receptacle of that doctrine. The narrator comments on Criseyde's subsequent thoughts:

> Of al this thing the manere and the wise;
> Reherce it nedeth nought, for 3e ben wise. (II.916-7)

The audience, too, is encouraged to read Criseyde according to the terms of the model by which she is herself persuaded.

The narrator's claims to be a mere translator of the story of Troilus and Criseyde in the proem to Book II chart a deterioration from Book I's confident espousal of love and its conventions. Criseyde in Book II is persuaded to love by a song she does not herself speak, and even the speaker is not the composer. Although the narrator confidently names the French-derived poem as a 'Troian song' (825), the process of textual construction and reception is highlighted, and highlighted in such a way as to prove crucial to Criseyde's own reading. The virtue of the composer is read by the virtue of the song and the sentiments inscribed in it are inscribed into Criseyde's heart. She is seen to be a naive reader, finding in the song and its speaker a model for the honour she desires. The narrator of Book I, by contrast, demonstrates little awareness of how the meaning of texts might be contingent upon such circumstances as their delivery, their authorship, and their audience. He prefaces the Book I *Canticus Troili* with the words:

> But pleinly, saue oure tonges difference,
> I dar wel seyn in al that Troilus
> Seyde in his song, loo, euery word right thus

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[30] Furnivall, ed., *Caxton's Book of Curtesye*, 1.2, 4-5, p.3; taken from Oriel MS. lxxix.

> As I shal seyn; and who-so list it here,
> Loo, next this vers he may in fynden here. (I.395-9)

Troilus's song is a translation of Petrarch's sonnet on the paradoxes of love, and is independent of the mysterious 'auctor called Lollius' (I.394). As Shoaf observes:

> these lines are remarkable for the display of confidence the Narrator indulges in them. Here "oure tonges difference" is a mere trifle, mentioned only to be summarily ignored, so that the Narrator can fairly exult in the transparency of his translation - "loo! every word right thus...pleinly." Both tone and diction suggest a complete lack of anxiety about the practice and the results of translation; the Narrator is an "innocent instrument".[31]

The self-generating nature of desire, "ffor ay thurst I the more that ich it drynke" (406) - presenting the object of desire as object of consumption - refers not only to Troilus's predicament on how to proceed in love, but also the poet's predicament with his poem:

> "...thus possed to and fro,
> Al stereless with-inne a boot am I
> Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
> That inne contrarie stonden euere mo". (I.415-8)

Chaucer's elaboration on Petrarch reiterates the figuring of movement as a site of narrative control, which had previously arisen in the alternating centres of movement in the temple scene.[32]

Shoaf believes that the narrator has found in Pandarus an undesirable model of writing within the poem, and the decline in narratorial confidence results from an anxiety to distance himself from Pandarus's scribal practice. He argues that the Book II narrator:

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[31] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, p.126. See also "Pro Verbo", passim., for an elaboration about contemporary perceptions of the complex procedures and purposes of translation.

[32] Although Chaucer assumes the role of *servus servorum* rather than *magister* of love, his 'failures' as poet and as master artificer in control of his work have notable similarites with the Ovidian narrator in the *Ars Amatoria*. The *Troilus* as well as the *Ars Amatoria* draws on the ancient convention of a poem as a ship, and Ovid's, as John Fyler notes, runs wildly out of control, its helmsman swept overboard in the process: 'just as Ovid the teacher loses control of his lessons and his students, so Ovid the poet repeatedly shows himself losing control of his poem'. See *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.126. The narrator is unable to sustain a detached attitude toward his 'matere' and, as Ovid 'laments, once emotion overwhelms rational detachment, strategy flies out the window' (ibid., p.125). On the commonplace of using the figure of a voyage for a poem, see Curtius, *Latin Middle Ages*, pp.128-30.

> having observed how Pandarus imposes his *auctoritas* upon Troylus - how he adds to the latter's amorous disposition the metaphoricity of *fin'amors* - has begun to fear that he might impose his *auctoritas* upon his matter, perhaps in the form of "other art" or through the absence of "sentement." Hence the insistence on the *pose of translator*.[33]

The narrator, however, has not been innocent of imposing the fin'amor model on either Troilus or Criseyde. In doing so, he has been as naive a reader as Criseyde has been of Antigone's song. But both the narrator and Criseyde have a responsibility as readers. Their dispositions have contributed to the misreading: the narrator in wishing to force his story into a preconceived pattern which he can control, and Criseyde in wishing to be persuaded that she can love with impunity.

III. Criseyde and Troilus: Consummation

By Book III's consummation scene, Criseyde has been brought to the summit of Fortune's wheel which, as poet and audience are made well aware, is about to start on its inexorable downward movement. In what is arguably Criseyde's most powerful moment in the poem, she is at the same time subject to the convergence of male representations and control: Pandarus's machinations, the narrator's telling, and Troilus's platonism. She has far more 'local' control in the scene than Troilus, who, before embarking on lyric speeches, exhibits immobility and inarticulacy in his conscious moments. Criseyde is increasingly illegible to the narrator. The hermeneutical problems he experiences with his sources and the present story begin to assume a greater urgency, and surface in his treatment of Criseyde.

Criseyde is enclosed by a series of frames. The narrator's proem at the beginning of the Book and Troilus's hymn to love at its close are joined by Troilus's appeal to Venus and a plethora of classical figures prior to the consummation, and by his speech to love as a

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[33] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, p.125.

'holy bond of thynges' afterwards. His appeal to Venus, that she "this nyght thow me enspire" (712) and his subsequent prayers to the hierarchically arranged gods serve to construct a frame of literary love encounters prior to his meeting with Criseyde. The references do not adumbrate an unambiguous blessing on the night's encounter; Jupiter, for instance, is referred to in the context of raping Europa.[34] Criseyde is enclosed in Pandarus's court of love, surrounded by outer rooms, her sleeping ladies and subject to Troilus's secret gaze. Acts of treason frame the bedroom scene: the lie of jealousy is used by Pandarus and Troilus to deceive Criseyde, and the following Book effects her exchange with Antenor.

Dialogue accounts for much of the scene's significant expansion of Boccaccio. Commenting on the much greater length of dialogue passages in Chaucer than in Boccaccio, Stokes notes of exchanges between any two of the characters Pandarus, Criseyde and Troilus that:

> these are all exchanges in which one or both of the speakers attempts to win over, convince, or persuade the other to a particular point of view...The extent to which the story revolves around argument and persuasion is thus foregrounded in Chaucer, and the reliability of a character's words becomes paramount.[35]

Much of Criseyde's speaking in this scene is concerned with persuading Troilus that he has no need to be jealous. Since Troilus as audience, as well as the audience of the poem, knows that there is no cause to be jealous, the persuasive effect of Criseyde's words is undermined. Her articulation is rendered largely impotent in terms of her apparent intention; her words become instead a statement of love, whereby she is led to concede more than she might otherwise have done. As far as the action of the scene is concerned, Criseyde's speech is more influential than that of Troilus: she pulls Troilus out of his swoon and, with the help of Pandarus, into bed, thus making the consummation possible. Troilus alternates between

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[34] See III.722-4. Jupiter assumed the shape of a bull in order to rape Europa. See *Met.* ii.852.

[35] M.Stokes, 'Wordes White: Disingenuity in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *ES*, 64 (1983), 18.

a debilitating inarticulacy and highly rhetorical invocations. Unlike Criseyde, whose speech revolves directly around him, Troilus's own words are mainly concerned with a conception of Love to which love of Criseyde has brought him. Of the ten examples of lyric elaboration in the poem listed by Payne, eight are spoken by Troilus and only one by Criseyde.[36] Troilus's two aubades and hymn to love in the latter third of Book III enhance his status as an ideal character, and it is not surprising to find that Criseyde responds to his ideal devotion with her one formal speech: an aubade which precedes those of Troilus. The imagery of the aubade itself emphasises her inscription into male models of love. She refers to Jupiter's three-fold expansion of the night when he slept with Alcmena, an instance of male control in the interests of furthering amorous involvement.

The narrator, like Troilus and like Criseyde herself, draws on classical allusions which inscribe acts of betrayal and revenge, and of male control over women. In a purportedly blissful moment during the consummation scene, he draws a parallel between 'the newe abaysed nyghtyngale' (1233) and Criseyde. While Windeatt points out that the 'imagery of the stanza beautifully brings out Criseyde's fearfulness',[37] the recent startling of the nightingale, ascribed here to stirring in hedges, might also bring to mind the less beautiful startling of Philomela, metamorphosed into a nightingale as a consequence of her rape by Tereus. The allusion suggests a physical and sexual disempowering that also has connotations of linguistic disempowering. The voice of the nightingale is explicitly linked with Criseyde's voice:

> And after siker doth hire vois out rynge,
> Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,
> Opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente. (III.1237-9)

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[36] This count excludes Criseyde's response to Pandarus upon hearing of Troilus's love (II.409-27), and her speech on 'fals felicite' upon hearing of Troilus's jealousy (III.802-40). The tenth of Payne's lyric speeches is Antigone's song: see *Key*, p.185.

[37] Windeatt's note to l.1233, p.311.

The only 'vois' available to Philomela after her sexual startling is non-verbal, since Tereus has severed her tongue, and the implication of the narrative at this point is that Criseyde also suffers a linguistic violation. For the first time in the poem, it is made clear that she speaks from her heart (1239), thus yielding the power of detachment. In the following stanza, the exclusion of Criseyde's voice from the narrative is substantiated by the narrator's identification of himself and the audience with Troilus's point of view. He delights that:

> ... in swych present gladnesse,
> Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete:
> With worse hap god lat vs neuere mete. (III.1244-6)

What is being celebrated is the possession of Criseyde by Troilus, a shift in perspective from the mutuality admired in previous stanzas:

> ffor out of wo in blisse now they flete,
> Non swich they felten syn they were born. (III.1221-2)

Even here though, the apparent concession to the female view -

> ffor loue of god, take euery womman heede
> To werken thus, if it comth to the neede (III.1224-5) -

appears more didactic than sympathetic. The lesson, moreover, seems an inappropriate one: why is it, in view of the mutuality of experience just described, that women rather than men are enjoined to succumb to amorous persuasion, 'if it comth to the neede'? The implication seems to be that women must be actively convinced to love, whereas for men it is a natural disposition. The address to women contrasts with the narrator's more familiar style of asking a general audience of lovers to supplement his presentation with their own superior knowledge. Just the opposite is the case here, where the narrator proffers advice to women instead of appealing for assistance from lovers.

Criseyde shows herself to be versed in the language of sexual exchange used by Pandarus. She offers Pandarus a ring to give Troilus as a token of her amorous constancy:

> "Haue heere and beereth hym this blewe ryng,
> ffor ther is no thyng myghte hym bettre plese,

Saue I my self, ne more his herte a-pese". (III.885-7)

Her remark implicitly accepts the jewel as a figure of female sexuality, an association which Pandarus has already made in Book II. He makes an equation between a jewel without healing powers and a beauty without pity (II.344-6): it is unnatural for a lady, a beauty, not to exercise 'routhe'. It is appropriate that Criseyde the jewel be set in a ring. As Pandarus tells his niece:

"And 3e be wis as 3e be faire to see,
Wel in the rynge than is the rubie set". (II.584-5)

While both Troilus and Criseyde 'entrechaungeden hire rynges' after the consummation (III.1368), only Criseyde's gift of the broach is there described. Troilus's gift surfaces in Book V, where it returns to him from Diomede's person, and as Clark and Wasserman note: 'it is not merely that this broach comes back to Troilus that is striking, but also that the gift of it to Diomede denotes that for Criseyde, the gift of jewelry has ceased to function as the gift of one's heart'.[38] It seems that Criseyde's rejection of male modes of signification and sexual imagery coincide with her public condemnation. If Criseyde no longer accepts this convention of exchange, she is no longer readable under the terms with which the narrator, Pandarus and Troilus are familiar. To Troilus, Criseyde is a text that is already difficult to read:

"Though ther be mercy writen in 3oure cheere,
God woot the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde". (III.1356-7)

The narrator emphasises Criseyde's textuality to a greater extent than he does that of Troilus, altering the *Filostrato* so that Troilus gazes at Criseyde, rather than having both of the lovers staring at each other:

And lord, so he gan goodly on hire se,

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[38] S.Clark and J.Wasserman, 'The Heart in *Troilus and Criseyde*: The Eye of the Beast, the Mirror of the Mind, the Jewel in its Setting', *ChR*, 18 (1984), 323.

That neuere his look ne bleynte from hire face. (III.1345-6)[39]

Nevertheless, Criseyde is imprinted on his heart as a jewel in a ring: "3e ben so depe in-with myn herte graue" (1499). Drawing on the imagery of a stone set in its appropriate frame, he hopes that his own image:

> "Were in 3oure herte i-set so fermely
> As 3e in myn". (III.1488-9)

Criseyde is a text to be read, and by implication to be controlled, by Troilus. Her 'betrayal', symbolised in her giving of Troilus's broach to Diomede, is a betrayal of the system of meaning, simultaneously ideal and yet relying on deception and sexual transfer, within which Troilus has attempted to contain her articulation.

Pandarus replies to Criseyde's speech on the "brotel wele of mannes ioie vnstable" (820), as she is told of Troilus's jealousy, with the flat statement: "3e woot, 3e, Nece myn...what is" (844). His words, perhaps attributing a greater cognizance than Criseyde is willing to admit, call into question the sincerity of the preceding speech: what exactly is Criseyde lamenting? Is it that her "deere herte" can hold her "so lightly fals", or is it the "conceytes wronge" (804) whereby she is apparently deceived into admitting him into her bedroom? Her reflections on the falseness of worldly happiness draw methodically on Lady Philosophy's early 'medicines' to the forlorn Boethius, from Book II, prosa 4. Gordon has commented, to the widespread approval of subsequent critics, on the irony that Chaucer gives to Criseyde, 'the type of human falsity in love, a proof of the falsity of worldly happiness'.[40] But Chaucer's Criseyde, unlike Boccaccio's heroine, is not adequately describable as a type of feminine inconstancy in love, and she is not here imparting

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[39] Windeatt elaborates (p.317) in his note to this stanza: 'Troilo and Criseida gaze at each other, but Chaucer only mentions Troilus's looks at Criseyde, so that the uncertainty is all Troilus's (1347-8) and the reassurance all Criseyde's'.

[40] Gordon, *Double Sorrow*, p.46. Gordon's commment is noted by Windeatt with reference to l.836, p.293.

neoplatonic wisdoms. Whereas Boethius's Philosophy is endeavouring to lead her patient toward a fuller appreciation of the nature of true happiness, Criseyde is dismayed either at the prospect of a love unexpectedly tenuous, or at the manipulative fictions of uncle and lover. If, as Pandarus's words imply, Criseyde has some idea of the events planned by her uncle, her speech might be read as staking a claim to propriety: she resists the situation so far as she is able, and disavows any complicity or choice.

Pandarus presents her with the choice, not whether or not to receive Troilus, but *when* he might be brought into her presence: "And I al prest to fecche hym whan 3ow liste" (III.917). Criseyde's resulting reflections follow the pattern of a tumbling of various considerations, not linked in any logical order:

> This accident so pitous was to here,
> And ek so like a sooth at prime face,
> And Troilus hire knyght to hir so deere,
> His priue commyng and the siker place,
> That though that she did hym as thanne a grace,
> Considered alle thynges as they stoode,
> No wonder is, syn she did al for goode. (III.918-24)

The subject of the reflections moves almost imperceptably from Criseyde to the narrator at line 922. Criseyde's thoughts encompass a courtly pity for the plight of Troilus the lover-prince-knight, her own regard for him, and the fortunate secrecy of their immediate surroundings. The additional, guarded consideration - 'And ek so *like* a sooth at *prime face*' - is in line with the general ambiguity regarding her suspicions as to the facts of the situation. The impressionistic sequence succeeds in conveying the notion of haphazard thoughts prompted by an immediate, confused reaction to a situation, rather than an ordered, narratorially censored response. Of these lines (918-24), Pearsall observes that 'it is the tumble of *and's* thrown together in such sincere disorder that gives us a glimpse of that inextricable tangle of emotion and shrewd calculation that constitute the breeding ground

of choice'.[41] While Pearsall argues that Criseyde *does* have a choice but convinces herself that she does not in order to evade responsibility for her actions, it seems more to be the case that her choice is limited to one option. Knowing the constraints of propriety which would forbid Criseyde's direct acquiescence, Pandarus manipulates her immediate course of action. With the narrator, he also emphasises the appropriate action of the courtly beloved, so that Criseyde must do as others desire. She finally succumbs to Pandarus's superior control with the words:

> "Now Em...doth her-of as 3ow liste...
> ...syn al my triste
> Is on 3ow two, and 3e ben bothe wise,
> So werketh now in so discret a wise
> That I honour may haue and he plesaunce;
> ffor I am her al in 3oure gouernaunce". (III.939,941-5)

That her wishes appear to coincide with those of the poem's three major male characters is the result of a matrix of elements, of which her own desire is only one, heavily inscribed aspect: to say that what Criseyde wants happens to coincide with what others want her to want only begs the question of how she has come to want what she does. That her desire is so controlled has been indicated through the painless violence of the exchange of Criseyde's heart for that of the eagle in her Book II dream.

The story-telling frame is reiterated at crucial narrative moments, as the lovers' endearments are interrupted with statements of narratorial frustration:

> But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al,
> As kan myn auctour of his excellence... (III.1324-5)

In raising the question of how to tell his story, if it is tellable, the narrator seems to be equally interested in his own compositional difficulties as he is in the situation of the lovers. As a surrogate courtly lover himself, he is hoping that his poem - to love - will evoke the praise that might similarly be ascribed to the characters within the poem:

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[41] Pearsall, 'Criseyde's Choices', 23; he refers also to II.449-62.

> And if that ich, at loues reuerence,
> Haue eny word in-eched for the beste,
> Doth therwith-al right as 3oure seluen leste. (III.1328-30)

The narrator's obvious presence during the intimate scene portrays him as a voyeuristic overseer of the lovers' experience. His deference to the superior 'feeling' of lovers implicates them too, as he asks his audience if Troilus and Criseyde are pleased with their love-making:

> Of hire delit or ioies oon the leeste
> Were impossible to my wit to seye;
> But iuggeth 3e that han ben at the feste
> Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye.
> I kan namore... (III.1310-14)

His literary knowledge - 'men sen alday, and reden ek in stories' (1063) - must be supplemented by the amorous knowledge of his audience, who thus join with him in the hermeneutical challenge of reading Criseyde. The telling of the lovers' night together, it seems, is conditional upon the narrator's reportage of his sources, and on the supplementary readings of the audience.

The narrator's hermeneutical problems centre on Criseyde, and he interrupts the description of Troilus kneeling at Criseyde's bedside to confess his inability to read Criseyde's motives:

> Kan I naught seyn, for she bad hym nought rise,
> If sorwe it putte out of hire remembraunce,
> Or elles that she took it in the wise
> Of dewete, as for his obseruaunce;
> But wel fynde I she dede hym this plesaunce,
> That she hym kiste ... (III.967-72)

His is a partial text at the moment of composition, and its 'completion' is dependent on the 'sentement' of an audience of lovers:

> ffor myne wordes, heere and euery parte,
> I speke hem alle vnder correccioun
> Of 3ow that felyng han in loues arte,
> And putte it al in 3oure discrecioun
> To encresse or maken dymynucioun

Of my langage, and that I 3ow biseche. (III.1331-6)

The construction of the story is shown as vital to its performance:

Resoun wol nought that I speke of slepe,
ffor it acordeth nought to my matere. (III.1408-9)

This is apparent in the narrator's seeming reluctance to describe the bliss as well as the sorrow of the lovers:

Though that I tarie a 3er, som tyme I moot,
After myn auctour, tellen hire gladnesse,
As wel as I haue told hire heuynesse. (III.1195-7)

Narrative time - the actual telling of the story - contrasts with story time, and both are shown to have a bearing on the meaning of the present poem. Pandarus too, is a fiction-maker, embellishing the notion of a story within a story. Having arranged Troilus by Criseyde's bedside, he:

... took a light and fond his contenaunce,
As forto looke vpon an old romaunce. (III.979-80)

While the male characters are thus shown to have some control over the means of literary production, constructing texts within which Criseyde's experience can be framed and viewed, Criseyde herself is seen as more written, and written upon, than writing.

Alone with Troilus, Criseyde exercises a far greater control over the progress of events than is possible for her with Pandarus. She asks Troilus to tell her the 'sygne' (1152) by which he interpreted her fickleness. In response to Troilus's inadequate excuse, she asserts that he should trust in the sincerity of her intent:

"What harm was that, syn I non yvel mene?...
In alle thyng is myn entente cleene". (III.1164,1166)

She reprimands him: "Wol 3e the childissh ialous contrefete?" (1168), recalling an earlier resistance (II.753-5) to the equation often implicit in fin'amor between jealousy and love:

"Ek al my wo is this, that folk now vsen
To seyn right thus: '3e, ialousie is loue". (III.1023-4)

More physically active than she has been with Pandarus, or alone and unwittingly gazed upon, Criseyde works to bring Troilus to articulacy:

> And to deliueren hym fro bittre bondes,
> She ofte hym kiste and, shortly forto seyne,
> Hym to reuoken she did al hire peyne. (III.1116-8)

Her enhanced autonomy, though, exists within the larger frame of male control over her representation. Although it is she who initiates the aubade sequence (1422-42), her own complaint to day both contains an instance of male sexual control, and follows Troilus's own "O Loue, O Charite" invocation. Her formal, lyric speech might be seen as a response to Troilus's neoplatonic address. While her own words other than the aubade directly address Troilus, his idealism assumes a platonic form, as he conflates courtly and neoplatonic notions. He addresses "Benigne loue, thow holy bond of thynges" (1261):

> "3et al were lost, that dar I wel seyn certes,
> But if thi grace passed oure desertes". (III.1266-7)

Although his ideal of courtly love allows him to identify it with Criseyde, the higher love Troilus envisages requires that Criseyde is displaced as the end to which he aspires. She becomes instead the means by which he is able to articulate his vision of love and harmony, and she thus becomes dispensible. Criseyde's meaning, for Troilus, increasingly derives from his neoplatonic perceptions of her. Her derivative capacity to signify is evident in her lyric, Troilean aubade:

> "Thow rakle nyght, ther god, maker of kynde,
> The for thyn haste and thyn vnkynde vice
> So faste ay to oure hemysperie bynde,
> That neuere more vnder the ground thow wynde:
> ffor now, for thow so hiest out of Troie,
> Haue I forgon thus hastili my ioie". (III.1437-42)

The formal speech could easily be attributed to Troilus. Criseyde's moment of limited control is enclosed not only by Pandaric strategems and narratorial biases, but also by Troilean idealism.

Chapter 8

A SUBSTITUTION OF VOICES: THE BREAKDOWN OF FORMS IN BOOK IV

Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde* begins with the warning that had closed *Il Filostrato*, Parte 3, and ends with the narrator protesting the inadequacy of his words to convey Troilus's sorrow. Fortune, 'that semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle' (IV.3) is personified in such a way that the narrator might equally be referring to Criseyde:

> ffrom Troilus she gan hire brighte face
> Awey to writhe and tok of hym non heede,
> But caste hym clene out of his Lady grace,
> And on hire whiel she sette vp Diomede. (IV.8-11)

An explicit statement of Criseyde's betrayal is included in the proem, and is immediately followed by narratorial qualification and a reiteration of the poem's subject matter:

> ffor how Criseyde Troilus for-sook -
> Or at the leeste how that she was vnkynde -
> Moot hennes-forth ben matere of my book. (IV.15-17)

The narrator's practice of commenting on his sources' veracity and completeness features prominently in the composition of Books IV and V, and is adumbrated in the proem to Book IV:

> Allas, that they sholde euere cause fynde
> To speke hire harm, and if they on hire lye,
> I-wis, hem self sholde han the vilanye. (IV.19-21)

As Shoaf notes, this stanza demonstrates the narrator's 'awareness that *auctoritas* is also on trial...now he is a much more conscious instrument and no mere "rymer." Now he recognises the possibilities of error and even of falsehood in his sources'.[1] The narrator's increasing tendency to address his sources critically and self-consciously occurs alongside his dissatisfaction with the adequacy of forms to his project. The form of fin'amor is no longer seen as an apt vehicle for Troilus's ideal devotion, but as a convenient shorthand for

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[1] Shoaf, *Currency of The Word*, p.135.

Diomede's self-interest. Troilus's limited neoplatonism locks him into predestinarianism instead of liberating him into an apprehension of an eternal present, and is displaced in favour of the narrator's enveloping Christianity. The forms of political and paternal protection are revealed to be either ineffectual (Hector, Deiphebus, Pandarus) or destructive (Calkas). The narrator's blithe trust in literary forms is betrayed by the demands of the story - of Troilus's 'double sorwe' - which he has undertaken to tell:

> ffor mannes hed ymagynen ne kan,
> Nentendement considere, ne tonge telle
> The cruel peynes of this sorwful man,
> That passen euery torment down in helle. (IV.1695-8)

As the forms upon which he has relied in the first three books become more untenable, the narrator is forced to address his own motivations and intentions in telling the story. He is forced to take up a stance *within* the poem, a stance at which he arrives by way of dialogue with his sources. Since his hermeneutical dilemma centres principally on the character of Criseyde, she is appropriated in the narratorial quest to arrive at the poetic-philosophical position which will finally allow the narrator to conclude his poem. She is reinscribed by both the demands of the story and its present telling.

I. Troilean Despair

The narrator names Criseyde's first speech as a complaint. At the outset, he introduces her words with: 'And thus she spak, sobbyng in hire compleynte' (IV.742). By the conclusion of the speech, however, the narrator seems less certain about the naming of Criseyde's words. His inexpressibility *topos* repeats the reference to 'compleynte', but questions the ability either to read or to write Criseyde's 'heuynesse':

> How myghte it euere y-red ben or y-songe,
> The pleynte that she made in hire destresse? (IV.799-800)

His words are not adequate to describe Criseyde's distress; indeed, by describing her 'sentement' in such formal narrative terms, he is defacing - scribbling - instead of writing her:

> ... but as for me, my litel tonge,
> If I discryuen wolde hire heuynesse,
> It sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse
> Than that it was, and childisshly deface
> Hire heigh compleynte, and therfore ich it pace. (IV.801-5)

By questioning the generic description of Criseyde's speech as a complaint, and acknowledging his own narrative and amorous limitations (801), the narrator indicates the distance he has travelled from Book I. His tactful withdrawal from Criseyde's private complaint in Book IV is all the more evident for its contrast with the response of Pandarus. Pandarus has lost no faith in his ability to read Criseyde, and unlike the narrator, still attempts to contain her within his own interpretive model. He finds signs in Criseyde's appearance which he cannot dissociate from his all-consuming interpretation:

> The myghty tresses of hire sonnysshe heeris
> Vnbroiden hangen al aboute hire eeris,
> Which 3af hym verray signal of martire
> Of deth which that hire herte gan desire. (IV.816-9)

Criseyde's 'tresses' are a 'signal' taken by Pandarus to indicate her martyrdom to love. Reading Criseyde in a way that the narrator has refused to do, Pandarus uses the theology of love as a framework within which Criseyde might still be interpreted.

Pandarus's private theatre of fin'amor, however, proves unable to survive public politics. In the same way that the narrator's manipulation of old books proves in the end an insufficient ploy for ordering his own response to Troilus and Criseyde, so Pandarus' successful manipulation of Fortune is seen to be only limited and temporary:

> "But who may all eschue or al deuyne
> Swich is this world forthi I thus diffyne:
> Ne trust no wight to fynden in fortune
> Ay propretee - hire 3iftes ben commune". (IV.389-92)

The marker of Pandarus' impotence is the silence that replaces his rhetorical prowess: 'And Pandarus gan holde his tunge stille' (521). The signs by which he reads Criseyde evoke his pity, but no alternative strategies:

> Aboute hire eyen two a purpre ryng
> By-trent in sothfast tokenyng of hire peyne,
> That to biholde it was a dedly thyng,
> ffor which Pandare myghte nat restreyne
> The teeris from hise eighen forto reyne. (IV.869-73)

The signs by which men have read Criseyde have been transformed - 'ychaunged in a-nother kynde' (865) - and she is herself bereft of male comfort and control:

> The pleye, the laughter, men was wont to fynde
> In hire, and ek hire ioies euerichone,
> Ben fled, and thus lith now Criseyde allone. (IV.866-8)

The conventions of fin'amor supply no formula for Criseydan articulation, no course of action suitable for the changed circumstances of her political isolation. The only model of despair to which she has had access in the poem - mainly by way of Pandaric mediation - is that which has been provided by the love-lorn Troilus.[2] Criseyde's solitary lament in the fourth book draws on what have so far been presented in the poem as distinctively Troilean *topoi*.

The narrator is aware of the descriptive inadequacy of his repertoire of literary forms, and is unable to name the speech in which Criseyde articulates her distress. His reticence, at this stage of the poem, attempts to permit Criseyde's escape from inscription into the story. The crisis in articulation suffered by both Criseyde and the narrator suggests that a new form is required to articulate her experience. Her 'complaint' draws on the language of despair that has been characteristic of Troilus both prior to his satisfaction in love, and

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[2] See, for example, II.555-60, where Pandarus relates his entrance into Troilus's chamber to find the prince "so soore grone/Ne herde I neuere". Similarly, in describing to Criseyde the fiction of Troilus's jealousy, Pandarus states that Troilus is on the point of complete "woodnesse" (see III.792-5). See also III.863-8.

after he has heard the news of Criseyde's exchange. Vance makes the point that 'poetic language does not *express*, by its conventions, the consciousness of the desiring individual but *determines* the operations of that consciousness'.[3] Criseyde appears to be fixed in - determined by - the fatalism that Troilus eventually is able to transcend. She bewails both her birth (745) and the day that she first set eyes on Troilus, "That causeth me - and ich him - al this peyne!" (749), and feels that life is not worth living if she is separated from Troilus: "How sholde I lyue if that I from hym twynne?" (758). She attempts to reinscribe convention with renewed meaning by re-garbing herself in widow's weeds:

> "And Troilus, my clothes euerychon
> Shul blake ben in tokennyng, herte swete,
> That I am as out of this world gon". (IV.778-80)

Criseyde's subsequent evocation of herself as a nun rewrites an earlier image (II.117-9), but with greater conviction:

> "And of myn ordre ay til deth me mete,
> The obseruaunce euere in 3oure absence
> Shal sorwe ben, compleynte and abstinence". (IV.782-4)[4]

Criseyde's reinforcement of a second death assumes the passive stance provided by such models of aristocratic widowhood as Malory's Guinevere, waiting for her rescue by Lancelot after the reported death of Arthur. The separated lovers to whom Criseyde refers, Orpheus and Euridice, similarly encapsulate a situation where the beloved waits passively for rescue by her lovers. Unlike those of Orpheus, Troilus's poetic utterances are unable to appeal to - and repeal - the judgement of the authority controlling his lover's destiny. He cannot even persuade Criseyde to agree with his plans.[5]

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[3] *Mervelous Signals*, p.273.

[4] See Windeatt's comment on IV.778-84: 'whereas Criseida's widows' black will now be a sign of her sorrows (90), Criseyde imagines herself in Troilus's absence as a nun following her order's observances of sorrow and lament' (p.395).

[5] See A.Taylor, 'Troilus's Rhetorical Failure. 4:1440-1526', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 15 (1979), 357-69.

With a sentiment approaching Troilean neoplatonism, Criseyde proposes a metaphysical union to replace physical separation:

> "Myn herte and ek the woful goost ther-inne
> Byquethe I with 3oure spirit to compleyne
> Eternaly for they shal neuer twynne". (IV.785-7)

The repetition of 'twynne' throughout the book serves as a verbal echo of Criseyde's violent wrenchings from Troilus, from Troy, from the secure articulation of the fin'amor tradition and from the controlling powers of the narrator's hermeneutics. The eternal love of Troilus and Crisyeyde will be guaranteed, as they reinscribe themselves in the continuum of old stories of crossed lovers:

> "ffor though in erthe y-twynned be we tweyne,
> 3et in the feld of pite, out of peyne,
> That highte Elisos, shal we ben y-feere,
> As Orpheus with Erudice his feere". (IV.788-81)

The linguistic similarity between 'tweyne', indicating bonding and communality, and 'twynne', meaning separation, emphasises at the level of style the substitution of union for isolation that is the subject of Book IV.[6]

Criseyde's poetic self-consciousness strengthens the connections already indicated between her private articulation and the poem's public concerns. The exchange of poetic meaning between Criseyde and the narrator provides another level - or frame - to the motifs of exchange informing the poem: the narrator is the poetic entrepeneur mediating between his 'auctores' and his audience, and it is the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor that is responsible for Troilus' second sorrow. Pandarus, of course, is "swich a meene/As maken wommen vn-to men to comen" (254-5), and at times is presented almost as a human shuttlecock: 'Pandare, which that sent from Troilus/Was to Criseyde' (806-7). Criseyde's

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[6] The two words are obviously being brought together in the final two books. 'Twyne' or its variants occur once in Book III (1711), and twelve times in Books IV and V (IV:476, 758, 787, 788, 901, 1197, 1270, 1303; V:339, 679, 1125, 1662). 'Twyne' and 'tweyne' and their variants occur together in IV.476, 788, 1303, and V.679.

lack of control, over both articulation and destiny, is indicated by the incorporation of a Troilean acceptance of predestination into her speech:

> "I, woful wrecche and in-fortuned wight,
> And born in corsed constellacioun". (IV.744-5)

She takes over Troilus's actions as well as his speech, flinging herself onto her bed prior to articulating her distress:

> Criseyde, ful of sorwful pite,
> In-to hire chambre vp went out of the halle,
> And on hire bed she gan for ded to falle,
> In purpos neuere thennes for to rise. (IV.731-4)

Such action has been presented as a Troilean, not Criseydan, *topos*. Unlike Troilus, though, whose plan to leave Troy evinces a willingness finally to take charge of his own destiny, Criseyde does not question her fate; since it is decreed by parliament, Criseyde, "Moot goon and thus deperten from my knyght" (746). The limitations on her self-determination are suggested by the fact that her poetic destiny is at odds with the course of action she apparently attempts to instigate: she fails to die coupled with Troilus and instead is coupled with Diomede.

The sense of desperation evident in Criseyde's articulation prior to her scenes with Troilus in Book IV arises from a fundamental dislocation. Apart from being uprooted to the Greek host, she recognises that, having been re-positioned by the experience of love, she is now deprived of the courtly tradition's guiding reservoir of articulation. In her 'aspre pleynte' to Pandarus as he enters her chamber, she is moved by her grief to conclude that all worldly bliss must end in woe. She is herself the proof - the sign - of the inevitability of woe:

> "That my self hate and ay my burth a-corse,
> ffelyng alwey fro wikke I go to worse". (IV.839-40)

The rhythms of her speech demonstrate Criseyde's movement beyond an ordered, controlled articulation: her extended inventory of ills requires a constant emphasis that builds up to a crescendo-like effect:

> "Who-so me seeth, he seeth sorwe al atonys,
> Peyne, torment, pleynte, wo, distresse.
> Out of my woful body harm ther noon is,
> As angwissh, langour, cruel bitternesse,
> Anoy, smert, drede, fury and ek siknesse". (IV.841-5)

Her lament is then deflated by the pathos of the stanza's concluding couplet:

> "I trowe, ywys, from heuene teeris reyne
> ffor pite of myn aspre and cruel peyne". (IV.846-7)

Criseyde's speech is a crucial marker of her movement outside the courtly framework, and also of the lack of alternatives available to her. Pandarus makes this clear by condemning her Troilean voice: "So lef this sorwe or platly he wol deye" (924). His guidance serves to re-place the initiative on Criseyde. Their changed relations are indicated by Pandarus's opening words, addressing Criseyde not as the familiar 'nece', but as 'suster':

> "And thow my suster, ful of discomfort,"
> Quod Pandarus, "what thynkestow to do?" (IV.848-9)

In line with the direction urged by Pandarus, the dominant tone of Criseyde's second speech in Book IV (1255-1414) is Pandaric: business-like, confident and highly rhetorical.

In the face of her world being turned upside down, Criseyde's search for a new articulating code is like the narrator's quest for a new poetic language which his story requires. Just as she must find a substitute voice, so must he. As Vance writes: 'the legend of Troy offered to poets an occasion to explore their consciousness of language as the living expression of the social order, and even of language as the medium of poetic art'.[7] The fact that Criseyde's voice of the first three books has been substituted for distinctly Troilean intonations in Book IV suggests that the narrator finds it difficult to find a new voice for

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[7] *Mervelous Signals*, p.266; see also pp.264-9, and above, introduction to Part III.

her which is equal to the demands of the story.[8] In her first speech Criseyde speaks like Troilus and in her second she speaks like Pandarus. Vance argues that:

> *whenever utterances are dislocated from their proper functions and rearticulated in new speech acts, a problematics of meaning passes to the foreground.* Each time a speech act is transposed out of its original or proper context or code, a whole set of new intentions and referential factors is necessarily introduced, and we of the audience are caught in a movement that simultaneously compels and frustrates a hermeneutic reflex: if meanings of utterances can be transformed into their contraries, are not meanings from the very start perhaps also non-meanings?[9]

The dislocation of a speech act, in other words, is one way in which meaning is problematised. The dislocation of Criseyde's voice, and her loss of a personal idiom suggest she no longer has a centre or frame to direct her speech, and that the availability of models which she might imitate is limited. Lacking informing principles of speech, such as those of courtly beloved, obedient niece or secure political subject, Criseyde loses the illusion of choice. The logical conclusion is the view of Fortune which she articulates in Book V when she decides not to resist Fortune but to grasp that felicity which presents itself.

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[8] In referring to a Criseydan voice in Books I-III, I do not mean to imply that that voice is singular or unchanging. Her Book III aubade, for example, has been seen to be influenced by Troilus's idealism (see above, 7.III). In Book IV, though, the narrator patently and consistently appropriates Troilean and Pandaric *topoi* for Criseyde to a degree which clearly calls attention to itself.

[9] *Mervelous Signals*, p.272; his emphasis. Vance is here employing the axes of speech referred to as exclamatory, perlocutionary, illocutionary and constative; disruptions arise when a character performs a speech act not appropriate to that character. The examples he gives include 'when the voice of the narrator "exclaims" or the speakers in the poem "narrate"'. Although the notion of the decontextualisation of speech acts is used here in a slightly different sense, the principle holds true: see ibid., pp.272-4.

II. Pandaric Reassurance

During her first meeting with him in Book IV, Criseyde reassures Troilus that excessive woe is unnecessary:

> "ffor ther is art ynough forto redresse
> That 3et is mys and slen this heuynesse". (IV.1266-7)

This conclusion does not sit comfortably with the sentiments previously expressed in her monologue. The reference to 'art' seems more indicative of Pandarus's manipulations than Criseyde's passivity in the face of unwelcome events. Her language becomes more deeply imbued with the particular rhetorical constructions that characterise the discourses of both the narrator and Pandarus. She orates to Troilus with high self-consciousness:

> "ffor which I wol nat make long sermoun,
> ffor tyme y-lost may nought recouered be
> But I wol gon to my conclusioun,
> And to the beste in aught that I kan see". (IV.1282-5)

This new found sense of command and control, a narrative control, is apparent in the positively framed and active verbal structures that are emblematic of Criseyde's articulation here, as she assures Troilus that "I shal wel bryngen it a-boute" (1275), "I shal ben here" (1279) and "I shal 3ow wel" (1281). Again, her language points to a confidence in controlling future events that is not consistent with her characterisation thus far. The long preamble to her plans, as she seeks to engender an amenable disposition in her audience -

> "ffor in effect what so 3e me comaunde,
> That wol I don, for that is no demaunde" (IV.1294-5) -

exemplifies both a nominal feminine obedience and a Pandaric assumption that her suggestions will be followed.

Equally reminiscent of Pandarus' own method of argument is the dressing up of proverbial commonplace as comforting truth:

> "But hym byhoueth som tyme han a peyne,
> That serueth loue, if that he wol haue ioye". (IV.1305-6)

Gordon observes that 'if we know that *prosecutio cum prouerbiis* was recognised by medieval rhetoricians as one of the ways of presenting an argument misleadingly, we are more likely to treat with caution the many passages in the poem where an argument is given plausibility by proverbs'.[10] The undermining of Criseyde's veracity is further emphasised by the spurious argument immediately following this proverb:

> "And syn I shal no ferther out of Troie
> Than I may ride a3eyn on half a morwe,
> It oughte lesse causen vs to sorwe". (IV.1307-9)

But the physical distance separating the lovers is clearly irrelevant to their predicament, as their previous proximity while Troilus' courtly devotion was unrequited reveals. Criseyde's aphoristic speech, parodic of Pandarus's misleading proverbial reasoning, undermines her credibility and encourages the audience's reading of her as deceptive.

Similarly spurious are Criseyde's arguments to the effect that she may soon return to Troy. Troilus seems to figure almost as an afterthought in Criseyde's motives, as she says that all her 'kynne', bar her father, are in Troy:

> "And ek myn othere thynges alle yfeere -
> And nameliche, my deere herte, 3e". (IV.1333-4)

She proposes that she will deceive her father into allowing her to return. The rhetorical practice of justifying her actions in terms of intent is reminiscent of Pandarus's tactical manoeuvres. Her words, she says:

> "Nis but to shewen 3ow my mocioun
> To fynde vnto oure help the beste weye;
> And taketh it non other wise, I preye". (IV.1291-3)

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[10] Gordon, *Double Sorrow*, p.20. Burlin makes much the same point, specifically with regard to Pandarus: 'By the standard of the schools, he ranks low in reasoning powers; his devices - proverbs and exempla - form the bottom rung on the abstraction ladder, clinging still to the concrete. They consort better with village gossip than with the schooled rhetoricians'; *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.119.

Purity of intention is not only the ground on which Pandarus has previously defended himself, but also that on which the narrator defends Criseyde.

The narrator's increasing imperative to come to grips with his story works against Criseyde. In a passage original with Chaucer, the narrator claims that:

> And treweliche, as writen wel I fynde,
> That al this thyng was seyd of good entente;
> And that hire herte trewe was and kynde
> Towardes hym and spak right as she mente". (IV.1415-8)

The use of the past tense conveys a sense of helplessness after the event, and the fact that Criseyde's 'betrayal' has been foreshadowed several times already compromises her professed sincerity of intention. The narrator assumes an independent interpretive stance by asserting that Criseyde:

> ...was in purpos euere to be trewe:
> Thus writen they that of hire werkes knew. (IV.1420-1)

The fact that this stanza is a Chaucerian addition indicates the narrator's determination to imprint *his* Criseyde on his poem at the same time that it shows that Criseyde's intention is not as steadfast as it might be.

Criseyde's speech (1254-1414) comprises a significant departure from *Il Filostrato*, in terms of both length - Criseyde's speech is more than twice as long as Criseida's corresponding speech - and emphasis.[11] The additions and alterations mark a particularly flagrant instance of Criseyde having words put into her mouth. Her words to Troilus might equally be read as a narratorial apology to Criseyde herself:

> "And for the loue of god for3eue it me,
> If I speke aught a3eins 3oure hertes reste;
> ffor trewely, I speke it for the beste,
> Makyng alwey a protestacioun
> That now thise wordes which that I shal seye,

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[11] Windeatt makes this point regarding IV.1254-1414, p. 421: 'for Criseyde's speech Chaucer makes freer, more selective use of *Filostrato* than he has generally done hitherto in Book IV, and much expands, so that Criseida's 72 lines become Criseyde's 160'.

Nis but to shewen 3ow my mocioun
To fynde vnto oure help the best weye;
And taketh it non other wise, I preye". (IV.1286-93)

The indebtedness of Criseyde's speech to that of Pandarus and the narrator might be seen as the narrator's identification with her desire to alleviate Troilus's woes. Criseyde's articulation becomes interchangeable with that of Pandarus and the narrator; she becomes an object of narrative exchange between the narrator and Pandarus, and Troilus. There is a narrative recognition of this process of imposition at the level of imagery: images of imprinting, sealing and currency are frequent in the poem.[12] Criseyde's argument that the separation of the lovers is a necessary price to pay in the long term is made by way of Pandaric aphorisms, and significantly makes a connection between imprinting and financial exchange:

"That is to seyn, that men ful ofte, i-wys
Mote spenden part the remenaunt for to saue;
ffor ay with gold men may the herte graue
Of hym that set is vp-on coueytise". (IV.1375-8)

Yet Criseyde's previous Troilean monologue revealed the separation to be tantamount to spiritual and emotional, and eventually physical death. No longer railing against the miseries of separation, Criseyde's speech to Troilus amounts to an acceptance of male legal authority. As she informs him:

"My goynge graunted is by parlement
So ferforth that it may nat be withstonde
ffor al this world, as by my iugement". (IV.1297-9)

In convincing Troilus to accept parliamentary dictate, Criseyde successfully ensures the maintenance of Troilus's public honour. She also, inaccurately, sees this obedience as consistent with preserving her own honour. While Troilus is able to propose other courses of action, Criseyde's appraisal of alternatives is far more closed, suggesting her lack of

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[12] See, for instance, IV:293, 1461-2, 1499. See also Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, Part Two, passim.

ability to assert control over her destiny. Diamond observes that 'the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor is reasonable in a system in which men have control of women, slaves and prisoners, and where violence is a legitimate social tool'.[13] Public violation and control over women is seen to be concomitant with violence and control at the level of narrative.

III. The Breakdown of Forms

A ramification of Criseyde's voice being substituted for and interchangeable with that of Pandarus and the narrator is the breakdown of an ideological coherence promulgated primarily by way of the courtly love framework. If the narrator's voice, Troilus's, or Pandarus's can be substituted for that of Criseyde, the relations between these medieval Trojans are no longer subject to or contained by, the ordering frame of feudal courtly love. Criseyde can no longer take comfort in an illusion of choice where her private desires appear to coincide with the public demands of the story. Her options begin to narrow and she is reinscribed into the predetermined voices of her poetic heritage. The loss of her capacity to resist the overwhelming desires of the narrator or of other characters is evident in the appropriation of her articulation. In persuading Troilus that a solution to their fate may be found, she says:

> "I am a *womman*, as ful wel 3e woot,
> And as I am *auysed sodeynly*,
> So wol I tel 3ow while it is hoot". (IV.1261-3;my emphasis)

The power of this assertion is undercut by Pandarus' previous proverbial instruction that as women are able to think quickly under pressure, Criseyde ought to suggest a plan of action to Troilus:

> "Or come a3eyn soon after 3e bywente -
> *Wommen* ben wise in *short auysemente* -

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[13] Diamond, 'Politics of Love', p.100.

And lat sen how 3oure wit shal now auaille". (IV.935-7;my emphasis)[14]

Not only has Criseyde taken her uncle's suggestion on board, but her very terminology directly echoes his.

The suggestion of unwitting parody is developed further in the plan Criseyde presents to Troilus, whereby she will betray the archetypal betrayer:

> "So what for o thyng and for other, swete,
> I shal hym so enchaunten with my sawes,
> That right in heuene his sowle is, shal he mete". (IV.1394-6)

Criseyde's proposal is implicitly parodic of her love relations with Troilus. The two of them are, after all, in bed, as she develops her plan to seduce - 'enchaunten' - her father. She intends, moreover, to 'enchaunten' him with her words, her 'sawes', in a perversion of the proper rhetorical deployment of words to persuade, thus confirming the familiar association between female articulation and female sexuality. Similarly parodic is her almost gloating contempt of her father: "That right in heuene his sowle is, shal he mete" (1396). The preceding book of the poem is full of references to the heavenly bliss experienced by Troilus and Criseyde as they consummate their love, and the debased context of this new reference charts a deterioration of the noble sentiments that the characters had found in the ideology of fin'amor. The narrative megalomania that had figured in the discourse of the narrator and Pandarus enters Criseyde's own speaking, as she enthuses about her father:

> "Desir of gold shal so his soule blende,
> That as me lyst I shal wel make an ende". (IV.1399-1400)

But just as the narrator's efforts to exercise control over his text have failed in terms of his stated intentions, and just as Pandarus' machinations eventually prove to be powerless in the face of the Trojan parliament, so Criseyde's attempts to connive against male authority are doomed. Her confidence is undermined by the audience's foreknowledge that all these plans

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[14] Windeatt on p.421, note to IV.1261-3, cross references IV.936.

will come to nought (15-7). Swept along by the power of her rhetoric, Criseyde - proverbially - sets "nought thre hawes":

> "ffor al Appollo or his clerkes lawes,
> Or calkullynge". (IV.1397-8)

The deliberate play on her father's name is indicative of a confidence that she can beat him at his own game, subsuming his own named identity - calkas - into a verb that she herself will enact. But Criseyde is herself subsumed in the pun on her father's name, since its inspiration derives from the narrator. In Book I, he puns that 'this Calkas knew by calkulynge' (I.71) that Troy would be destroyed. It is not the first time that Criseyde's apparent control has been revealed as an instance of her appropriation by larger narratorial or narrative ironies that are shared with the audience. In reassuring Troilus about her return, Criseyde makes reference to the lovers' public poetic destiny:

> "And than at erste shal we be so feyn,
> So as we shal to-gideres euere dwelle,
> That al this world ne myght oure blisse telle". (IV.1321-3)

The tradition in which she is inscribed, though, as she recognises in Book V, is not that of blessed lovers but of female inconstancy.

Immediately following Criseyde's assurance to Pandarus that "hym forto glade I shal don al my peyne" (942), the narrator inserts Troilus's predestination soliloquy (958-1071). Wetherbee observes of this speech that: 'from the despair of the first line we pass to determination ("shop") and an increasingly intrusive sense of "argument" to the point at which we begin to hear Troilus's own voice actively engaged in *proving* the helplessness of his situation'.[15] Troilus's sense of an ordered universe emphasises his philosophical distance from Criseyde, whose sense of the unpredictable turning of Fortune's wheel culminates in her decision to make the best of what felicities might appear to her. While

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[15] Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets* (Ithaca, 1984), p.213.

Troilus might prove to himself his own helplessness, his predestinarianism does not appear to preclude a capacity actively to interpret and to propose solutions to his predicament. Having progressed from his disciple-like stance of previous books, Troilus is now able to differ rather than defer to Pandarus, and for the first time in the poem he explicitly rejects Pandarus's advice (452-5). Troilus will not, as Pandarus proposes, 'rauysshe' Criseyde:

> "At shorte wordes, though I deyen sholde,
> To rauysshe hire, but if hire self it wolde". (IV.636-7)

Troilus denies the reduction of Criseyde's 'choice' to a coy courtly reluctance to run away together, and his words implicitly recognise the ambiguity informing Criseydan 'choice'. He says that he will 'rauysshe hire' - take control of Criseyde's voluntary action - if she *voluntarily* accedes to this abdication of her will: 'but if hire self it wolde'. His words acknowledge that he cannot substitute his will or his voice for that of Criseyde unless she chooses that it be so. Unordered and illegitimate substitutions are disruptive because they decontextualise; they alter meaning because they transfer terms, *inappropriately*, from their proper contexts. When Troilus denounces Calkas as an "vnholsom and myslyued man", he asks "what eiled the/To ben a Grek, syn thow art born Troian?" (331-2). While Calkas's transference, or 'translation', reflects self-interested choice, the exchanges of both Criseyde and Helen, as Troilus points out (546-50), result from forceful abduction. It is almost as if Troilus's passivity and inability to interpret and take charge of his life have been exchanged for Criseyde's dilemmas: she both loves Troilus and is afraid of the future, and cannot decide on a course of action:

> And thus she brenneth both in loue and drede,
> So that she nyste what was best to reede. (IV.678-9)

In her final speech to Troilus, she raises the question of their honour. Their running off together would be condemned as "lust voluptuous" and "coward drede" (1573), and so would be lost to Troilus, "3oure honour which that now shyneth so clere" (1575). While Troilus'

honour, in quite a conventional manner, 'shines', Criseyde's honour is far more dramatically and visually realised. Only one positive appellation - 'floureth' - is employed, and Criseyde's dread of losing her name is manifested in the negative associations which dominate her future scenario: 'foule', 'filthe', 'lost', 'routhe', 'synne'(1577-82). Her decision to acquiesce in the male ruling of the exchange results in her condemnation by the very quarter whose approval she tailors her actions to secure. Nor are the odds in her favour when she turns to the interpretive authority of the literary tradition. She expresses concern that Troilus will either forget her or take another lover in her absence:

> "ffor I am euere agast, for why men rede
> That loue is thyng ay ful of bisy drede". (IV.1644-5)[16]

The irony of her fear about Troilus's faithfulness works against Criseyde because she is already narratively forsworn, and her elaborate promises of fidelity thereby become subject to an ironic distancing. Chaucer has postponed Boccaccio's Parte Three warning until Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*, so that the fact of Criseyde's betrayal establishes the frame to the book. The audience knows, both from the present poem and from the 'olde bokes' on which Chaucer draws, that Criseyde will leave Troilus for Diomede.

In a speech echoing her own association of her sexuality with her ability to deceive, Troilus doubts the success of Criseyde's enterprise to 'blende' her father:

> "3e shal nat blende hym for 3oure wommanhede,
> Ne feyne aright, and that is al my drede". (IV.1462-63)

Deception again surfaces in Criseyde's response to Troilus' suggestion that they steal 'priueliche away'. His words 'sle' her with vexation:

> "I se wel now that 3e mystrusten me,
> ffor by 3oure wordes it is wel yseene.
> Now for the loue of Cynthia the sheene,

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[16] Criseyde's reference to the interpretation of love literature is a Chaucerian addition to the poem, what Windeatt might view as Chaucer's 'in-eching' of the theme of interpretation in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Mistrust me nought thus causeles for routhe,
Syn to be trewe I haue 3ow plight my trouthe". (IV.1606-10)

Criseyde's speech raises the issue of Troilus's own words, and their association with his intention.[17] While she reads Troilus's words as a direct revelation of his thoughts, his mistrust suggests a discrepancy between her words and intentions. The breakdown in trust is seen to be connected with a breakdown in language. If people no longer mean what they say, if their words cannot be seen as representative of their intentions, then Criseyde's plighting of her 'trouthe' to Troilus - a verbal marker of action - is no longer an absolute statement and can no longer be taken as a sufficient guarantee of action. And if that is the case, then the nobility aspired to, by Troilus at least, is no longer possible in the world.[18] This breakdown in relations is also suggested by the reversal of traditional courtly love roles, whereby Criseyde, the beloved, plights her 'trouthe', and implores Troilus, the lover, for his 'routhe', rather than the other way around. This is the second such reversal of courtly roles, evoking memory of Criseyde's Book I pleas for Hector's indulgence. On both occasions, Criseyde's political vulnerability has made the private literary fiction of courtly superiority untenable.

In telling Troilus to take no care of fortune -

"Of fortune ay that naught wole of hire recche;
And she ne daunteth no wight but a wrecche" (IV.1588-9) -

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[17] The importance of the link to which Criseyde refers - between words and intention - is suggested by the fact that, as Windeatt points out, 'Criseyde's attention to Troilus' *wordes* is not in *Filostrato*' (note to IV.1607, p.439).

[18] This is also why Troilus's conclusions about predestination are double-edged. On the one hand, he progresses as far as is possible for virtuous pagans, following Lady Philosophy's arguments up to the point of Christian revelation, where the distinction between Fate and Providence is explained. On the other hand, though, the recourse to determinism can be seen as a 'rebound' effect - consequent not only upon the loss of Criseyde, but upon the loss of an absolute meaning in the world, as implied in the word 'trouthe'.

Criseyde may well be telling him to take no care of herself. The proem to Book IV frames the book telling of Criseyde's exchange with a warning of the malicious fickleness of fortune that is equally applicable to Criseyde:

> That semest trewest whan she wol bygyle,
> And kan to fooles so hire song entune,
> That she hem hent and blent, traitor comune. (IV.3-5)

The name of 'Criseyde the bryghte' (V.516)[19] is interchangeable with that of the personification Fortune (V.8-11). Troilus's vocabulary, too, draws on appellations that are applied to both Criseyde and Fortune. Addressing Fortune, he demands:

> "How myghtestow for routhe me by-gile?
> Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilte?
> Shal thus Creiseyde awey for that thow wilte?
> Allas, how maistow in thyn herte fynde
> To ben to me thus cruwel and vnkynde?" (IV.262-6)[20]

The construction is not so very far from that employed by the pining courtly lover, bewailing the unfathomable cruelty of the remote, unreadable beloved. Troilus' vocabulary here prefigures that which he later uses with reference to Criseyde:

> "So *cruel* wende I nought 3oure *herte*, ywis
> To sle me thus". (V.1685-6;my emphasis)

Troilus's misreading of Fortune as cruel and capricious in her rewards (267-9) stands for the misreading of Criseyde as courtly beloved, and on a more general level, points to Criseyde's subjection to the readings and desires of others. Nevertheless, Troilus does manage to reach a philosophical plateau where his reliance on fortune, and love of Criseyde, are subsumed into a larger Christian/platonic context, which replaces for him the framework of feudal courtly love. Such a resolution is unavailable to Criseyde. Her platonic

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[19] For some of the frequent references to Criseyde as 'bryghte' see I.175; II.769; III.1485; IV:310, 663, 747; V:162, 465, 516, 708, 1241, 1247, 1573, 1674, 1712.

[20] Similarly, Troilus, who will later refer to Criseyde as 'my swete fo', laments in Book I: "ffor wel fynde I that fortune is my fo;/Ne al the men that riden konne or go/May of hire cruel whiel the harm withstonde" (I.837-9).

objectification is further developed through her identification with Fortune, which, seductive, unreadable, and untrustworthy, simply names - and personifies - a partial reading of divine providence.

Chapter 9

PRESENCE AND ABSENCE: THE TYRANNY OF INTERPRETATION

Criseyde's direct appearances in the final book of the poem are infrequent. Her representation here is principally by way of other characters: the narrator's reporting and Troilus's apostrophes, dialogues with Pandarus and his reported thoughts. The scene remains for the most part Troy and Troilus, contrasting with the Greek camp beyond Troy's walls and Criseyde. The final book of the poem is concerned with signs (jewelry, dreams, letters and so on) and their interpretation. The treatment of interpretation is indebted to the distinction referred to in the final book of the *Consolation*, involving a dissociation between the event being interpreted and the mind and formulations of the one doing the interpreting. Or, as expressed in Chaucer's translation of Lady Philosophy's argument that knowledge depends not on the capacity of the object to be known but on the ability of the knower to know:

> And the cause of this errour [concerning the foreknowledge of things whose occurence is not inevitable] is that of alle the thingis that every wyght hath iknowe, thei wenen that tho thingis be iknowe al only by the strengthe and by the nature of the thinges that ben iwyst or iknowe. And it is al the contrarye; for al that evere is iknowe, it is rather comprehendid and knowen, nat aftir his strengthe and his nature, but aftir the faculte (that is to seyn, the power and the nature) of hem that knowen.[1]

Using this formulation as a model, the study of Criseyde's articulation in Book V will involve a double focus: her ability as knower to know, and thus her access to knowledge and to speech, and her capacity as object to be known, and thus her representation and interpretation by other characters in the poem.

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[1] *Boece*, V, prosa iv, 132-141; cited from *Riverside*, p.463.

I. Criseyde Reading Diomede

More addressed than addressing, Criseyde has no direct speech until line 689, over a third of the way into the book.[2] Her passivity, particularly with regard to the active Diomede, is rapidly foreshadowed:

> *ffful redy was* at prime Diomede,
> Criseyde vn-to the Grekis oost *to lede*. (V.15-6;my emphasis)

Troilus and Diomede are given both direct speeches to Criseyde, and thoughts or monologues concerning her, while her own first words are a complaint, spoken alone in the Greek camp. Her isolation - she no longer has a Pandarus to guide her articulation - occurs at a narratorial, as well as narrative level. The narrator has altered his perspective on the story so that he enjoys an 'eternal present' of narration: as the story's pace and demands intensify, the narrator begins to share his privileged view of events with the audience. We no longer learn of events, by and large, at the same time as the characters, but gain a foreknowledge not available to them.

The exchange of Criseyde from Trojan to Greek is dramatically realised through the interaction between Troilus and Diomede, as the latter forcefully

> ... by the reyne hire hente;
> And Troilus to Troie homward he wente. (V.90-1)

Troilus must resist his desire to re-possess Criseyde:

> Lest that Criseyde in rumour of this fare
> Sholde ben sleyn - lo, this was al his care,
> And ellis, certeyn, as I seyde 3ore,
> He hadde it don with-outen wordes more. (V.53-6)

The narrator's fervent explanation suggests the urgency he feels to take up an interpretive stance in the face of the seemingly inexorable forward movement of the poem. A proem has already been dispensed with, substituted for a reference to the approaching 'fatal destyne'

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[2] This is with the exception of the single word, 'allas', at V.58.

and a description of Criseyde's physical exchange. Having passed from the protectorship of her father, husband, to Calkas again, to Pandarus, Hector and to Troilus, Criseyde finally undergoes the transfer to Diomede which is the cause of Troilus's second sorrow.

By contrast with Troilus's posing of the interests of Criseyde, Diomede quickly assesses the furtherance of his own interests, a course of action which from the outset is associated with the power of words. Diomede thinks:

> ... "al my labour shal nat ben on ydel,
> If that I may, for somwhat shal I seye ...
> I haue herd seyde ek tymes twyes twelue,
> 'He is a fool that wol for3ete hym selue'". (V.94-5,97-8)

The hasty staking of sexual territory by Diomede is deliberately emphasised by Chaucer in a departure from the *Filostrato* where, as Windeatt notes, Diomede's 'courtship begins during a later visit to Criseyde'.[3] In Benoit, who provides the principal account for this passage, Diomede's words and actions exhibit far less subtlety and acuity. Benoit's Diomede, for example, does not make a habit of preceding speech with thought, and immediately declares his love for Criseyde.

Chaucer rewrites Diomede so that he appears to combine both Troilean and Pandaric characteristics in his person. A calculating courtly lover, Diomede is also his own Pandarus, and Criseyde's interaction with him serves to syncopate the poem's earlier love action. Diomede's determination to control Criseyde's access to the power of knowledge -

> "... but I shal fynde a meene
> That she naught wite as 3et shal what I mene" (V.104-5) -

is reminiscent of Pandarus's adaptation of speech to audience in Book II (266-73). Shoaf writes that 'Diomede's words [104-5] revel in the fact that means hide meaning, that words conceal even as they reveal, that language is the presence of an absence'.[4] His strategy of

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[3] Note to V.92-189, p.451.
[4] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, p.142.

absenting meaning from Criseyde is implemented linguistically, in contrast to Criseyde's silence: 'Whan tyme was', Diomede 'gan fallen forth in speche'(107). Diomede proceeds to state an allegiance to the bereft Criseyde in phrases original with Chaucer's poem, that confuse the language of love with the language of friendship:

> "And that 3e me wolde as 3oure brother trete,
> And taketh naught my frendshipe in despite...
> And if I may 3oure harmes nat redresse,
> I am right sory for 3oure heuynesse". (V.134-5,139-40)

The language of friendship was the language that initiated Criseyde's love for Troilus, and helps to establish Diomede's familiarity and appeal as a model lover. Criseyde has *learned* the language of love/friendship (II.899-903), printing it in her heart, and the ground has been laid for her to misread Diomede in the light of Pandarus's lessons on love. Diomede calls upon love-service as transcending political differences:

> "ffor though 3e Troians with vs Grekes [ben] wrothe...
> O god of loue in sothe we seruen both". (V.141,143)

Diomede's statement, nevertheless, contrasting '3e Troians' with 'vs Grekes', emphasises Criseyde's political vulnerability as a woman alone in the enemy camp. As with Hector's distinction in Book I between the 'vs' of Trojan citizens and the '3ow' given residency permission, Diomede's magnanimity undermines Criseyde's political security. Her situation in the final book has marked similarities with her position in Books I and II. Once again she is politically, socially and sexually vulnerable, and is propositioned by a lover of royal rank. The parallels are strengthened through Diomede's recourse to the same courtly sentiments as Troilus:

> "And for the loue of god beth nat my fo,
> Al kan I naught to 3ow, my lady deere,
> Compleyne aright, for I am 3et to leere". (V.160-1)

Criseyde was also Troilus's 'swete fo', whom he assured that

> "...though I dar ne kan vnto 3ow pleyne,
> I-wis, I suffre nought the lasse peyne". (III.104-5)

Troilus's extended complaints, soliloquies and courtly ailments are substituted for Diomede's mental planning about how to use speech to persuade. Geoffrey of Vinsauf's architectural image (I.1065-71) never seems far from Diomede's thoughts. The kind of 'rhetorical opportunism' practised by Diomede is of a kind with that for which Plato condemned the Sophists: since 'rhetoric has no subject-matter of its own, is concerned with persuasion not knowledge, is not activated solely by a moral concern, [it] can therfore be abused to the service of evil'.[5] The distinction between Diomede's virtuosity and Troilus's virtue regarding amorous procedure might be seen in the light of John Burrows' comment that 'the meaning of an "ensaumple" depends not on its content but on the variable "entente" of the people who use it'.[6] When Diomede calls Criseyde "myn owen lady bright" (162), he is not empowering her through praise, as the same endearment from Troilus might be seen to do, but designating her his love-object as he draws on the currency of courtly love language. His calculated appropriation of the endearment "lady bright" (922) marks a devaluation in the value of the terms, thus wrenched from a context of sincere intent. As Vance observes, Diomede 'is a perverter not only of loving hearts but of language':[7]

> "Al sholde I dye, I wol hire herte seche;
> I shal namore lesen but my speche". (V.797-8)

Diomede's "lady bright" appellation becomes common currency, a term of praise selected from a reservoir of such words used to further the interests of the speaker rather than expressive of the regard in which the recipient is held. Criseyde-the-addressed, denied right of reply, remains passive love-object, dependent on the ability of the knower-lover to know-love.

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[5] B.Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (London, 1970), p.20. The phrase 'rhetorical opportunism' is Vickers' (see p.19).

[6] Burrows, *Ricardian Poetry* (London, 1971), p.91.

[7] *Mervelous Signals*, p.302.

Diomede's term of praise for Criseyde replaces *Filostrato*'s 'angelico aspetto', suggesting that the parallels - and overtones - thus established between Troilus and Diomede are deliberate in Chaucer's text. The duplication of imagery emphasises the competitive impulse informing Diomede's conception of love, as, in a later speech, he assures Criseyde that:

> "...3e shal in Grekis fynde
> A moore perfit loue er it be nyght,
> Than any Troian is, and more kynde,
> And bet to seruen 3ow wol don his myght". (V.918-21)

The public military competition between the Greeks and the Trojans is substituted for amorous competition; in both cases, women provide the stake. Diomede connects military and feminine ravaging in his speech, boasting that Greeks will enact 'swich wreche' on Trojans 'for fecchyng of Eleyne' that

> "...men shul drede, vnto the worldes ende,
> ffrom hennes-forth to rauysshen any queene,
> So cruel shal oure wreche on hem be seene". (V.894-6)

Sexual victory is virtually synonymous with military victory, the successful conclusion to a sphere of male competition:

> "But who-so myghte wynnen swich a floure
> ffrom hym for whom she morneth nyght and day,
> He myghte seyn he were a conqueroure". (V.792-4)

He strengthens his suit to Criseyde with the argument that the Greeks will achieve military victory and the city of Troy will be destroyed:

> "And but if Calkas lede vs with ambages -
> That is to seyn with double wordes slye,
> Swich as men clepe a word with two visages -
> 3e shal wel knowen that I naught ne lye". (V.897-900)

The use of the word 'ambages' - the only recorded instance in the *Middle English Dictionary* - and the necessity to provide a two line gloss, both confirms Diomede's rhetorical proficiency and 'in-eches' the narrative concern with ambiguity.The sentiments

conveyed in his words clearly point to the linkage of Criseyde's destiny with the fortunes of war. If the Greeks win the war, then Criseyde will be better placed with Diomede than with a Trojan. If they lose the war, then Criseyde will be in jeopardy anyway, since her father would be blamed for his 'double wordes slye'. Diomede draws on the rhetoric of gesture advocated by the courtly code:

> And with that word he gan to waxen rede,
> And in his speche a litel wight he quoke,
> And caste a-syde a wight his hede. (V.925-7)

Again, the parallel with Troilus highlights the thoroughly conventional nature of such actions, which are able to promote a desired reading only in so far as they are read 'correctly'. Formulaic gestures, in other words, like conventions of speech, signify not in themselves, but only in relation to the articulating and reading subjects. What has become with Diomede a means to conceal and mislead had appeared to provide a receptive form for Troilus's sincere devotion. Criseyde reads the same signals of well-intentioned love in Diomede that she has previously read in Troilus. She is reinscribed into the past example of herself, playing out a future determined by the past.

Despite his apparent intentions, the narrator's own practice continues the process of reinscribing Criseyde into an already written script. He describes Diomede's amorous strategy by way of the fish and bait metaphor of previous books: 'To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and lyne' (777). The corresponding imagery for Troilus's progression in love is related more to the courtly paradox of willed thraldom. Troilus was bound in the nets of Criseyde's eyes (III.1352-5), and captured by the metaphorical nets of the beloved; as Pandarus says to Criseyde:

> "And right good thrifte, I prey to god, haue 3e
> That han swich oon y-kaught with-outen net". (II.582-3)

Criseyde herself shows the image applicable to practices of domination and duplicity with reference to deceiving her deceiving father. She tells Troilus:

"And I right now haue founden al the gise,
With-outen net, wherwith I shal hym hente". (IV.1370-1)[8]

The narrator presents Diomede's strategy in a far more aggressive and calculating - and successful - light. With the advance planning of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's poetic artificer, Diomede plans 'with al the sleghte and al that euere he kan' (773) how he might most efficiently 'in-to his net Criseydes herte bryng' (775). Criseyde's own words (IV.1370-1) prefigure the 'sleyghte' of which she is object rather than author.

Criseyde perceives her lack of readerly competence to be the cause of her imprisonment in the Greek camp. She regrets both the past - not having heeded Troilus's advice (736-8) - and her unfortunate present, arising from an inability to exercise foresight:

"Prudence, allas, oon of thyne yen thre
Me lakked alwey er that I come here:
On tyme y-passed wel remembred me,
And present tyme ek koud ich wel i-se,
But future tyme, er I was in the snare,
Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care". (V.744-9)

Prudence was iconographically represented in the Middle Ages with three eyes: the eye of *memoria*, looking back to the past, that of *intelligentia*, ascertaining the present, and *providentia*, representing the foresight to consider the future.[9] Regarded as a cardinal virtue in the Middle Ages, Prudence explicitly connects rhetoric with virtue, as Cicero makes clear in *De inventione*. Susan Schibanoff's discussion explicates this point:

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[8] On the implication of this imagery, see Moi's 'Desire in Language', p.22, where she describes the lover as 'both beast and prey; a slave bound by the chains of desire, he is at the same time a skilful fisherman trying to trick the lady into swallowing his bait'. She refers to the ambiguity of the image of the lover as simultaneously fish, bait and fisherman as signaling a textual uneasiness whereby the image works to undo itself, showing up its own contradictions.

[9] For the representation of Prudence with three eyes, Windeatt refers to L.Matthews, *ELN*, 13 (1975), 249-55. For the tripartite nature of Prudence he refers us to *De inventione*, II.53/160, where Cicero defines the three parts of memory, intelligence and foresight. See also S.Schibanoff, 'Prudence and Artificial Memory in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *ELH*, 42 (1975), 507-17.

> The prudent man must continually look to the past - to history, to the Bible, to the "auctoritees" - as a moral guide in order to assess the present and "foresee" the future.[10]

Criseyde is not a prudent reader, since her actions suggest that she reads Diomede without proper regard to context; she reads him as she has been taught to read the past example of Troilus. She has no Pandarus to choreograph her actions, and is, as the narrator points out, politically and socially isolated, with no reading audience to direct her through interpretation:

> And this was 3et the werste of al hire peyne,
> Ther was no wight to whom she dorst hire pleyne. (V.727-8)

The narrator's *dispositio* of his material constantly distances Criseyde from a sympathetic audience by pointing to the rift between her intentions and her actions that is becoming increasingly clear. Her betrayal is baldly stated before the process is described, and two months in the Greek camp are allowed to pass before the narrator shifts back to Troy, prior to the lapse of the ten days. In Criseyde's first direct speech in the book, she resolves to steal away from the Greek camp:

> "ffor which with-outen any wordes mo,
> To Troie I wol, as for conclusioun". (V.764-5)

Her resolve follows reflections on her isolation and on the absent Troilus, her father's unwillingness to let her return to Troy, her sorrow and her regret at not being able to take charge of her own destiny. She decides to abandon her fear of public praise or blame:

> "No fors of wikked tonges ianglerie,
> ffor euere on loue han wrecches had enuye". (V.755-6)

There is no point in shaping one's actions to placate public opinion since different opinions will always be present, and will shape the object according to their particular interests:

> "ffor who-so wol of euery worde take hede...
> Ne shal he neuere thryuen, out of drede:

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[10] Schibanoff, 'Prudence and Artificial Memory', 513.

ffor that that som men blamen euere 3it,
Lo, other manere folk comenden it". (V.757,759-61)

The position she arrives at, following a recognition of the world's mutability, is that happiness is the highest good, at least for her:

"And as for me, for al swich variaunce,
ffelicite clepe I my suffisaunce". (V.762-3)

This conclusion, of course, can lead to different courses of action. On the one hand, it can lead to the moral equivocation of a Pandarus or a Diomede. For Criseyde, this argument is used in the first place to justify reuniting with her lover in the face of antagonistic public opinion. It is an argument however, that lends itself just as well to her eventual course of action, which is to succumb to the pressures of the present and achieve love and safety in the Greek camp. It is this result to which the narrator points, immediately and damningly following her "conclusioun" to return to Troy:

But god it wot, er fully monthes two
She was ful fer fro that entencioun;
ffor bothe Troilus and Troy town
Shal knotteles thorugh-out hire herte slide,
ffor she wol take a purpos for tabide. (V.766-70)

The narrator's organisation of his material results in this statement of betrayal *preceding* the description of the process of Diomede's wooing.

Diomede's 'conquering' of Criseyde is interrupted by the insertion of portraits of Diomede, Criseyde and Troilus, bringing to a halt the forward movement of the narrative. Criseyde's centrality to this book, despite her absence from the focal point of Troy, is indicated by the three-stanza description devoted to her, as against Diomede's one and Troilus's two stanzas. The medieval rhetorical treatment of *descriptio*, with which the bulk of Matthew of Vendome's *Ars versificatoria* is concerned, shows that description is no objective process, but is devoted to the interests of either praise or blame. As Faral notes:

> The principal aim of the rhetorical genre which the ancients called demonstrative is praise or blame, and the principal means of attaining it was by description. This

> virtue of description is expressly commented on by medieval rhetoricians and given as its essential function...[this] explains why in medieval literature description...is always dominated by an affective intention which oscillates between praise and criticism.[11]

Characterisation is a rhetorical form usually considered under *descriptio*, and hence could be used to encourage either praise or blame.[12] While reservations about Diomede are implied by the 'testif' and'of tonge large' attributes (799-805), Troilus appears to represent the ideal warrior knight (826-40), 'in no degree secounde' to another knight. The poem, though, has previously presented Troilus as second only to Hector. The confirmation of the narrator's tendency towards inordinate praise suggests that Troilus's presentation must be seen as qualified, that knowledge of him is not given solely on the basis of Troilus as object to be known, but filtered through the perspective of the one describing him. The portraits mark a departure from Chaucer's main source, and draw instead on Benoit, Guido and Joseph of Exeter. The hermeneutical overlaps arising from the sources' conflicting details point to the narrator's own interpretive crisis. He clearly stamps his own readings on his characters, in a desperate attempt to regain the interpretive initiative, as the requirements of the story overtake his narrative. He oscillates from blame in the portrait of Diomede to praise in that of Troilus. In the case of Criseyde, this oscillation is exhibited *within* her characterisation. She is the sign of the conflict which arises between the demands of the story and the narrator's apparent intentions. It is this conflict which results in a *dispositio* of material where the narrator's efforts to defend Criseyde succeed in achieving just the opposite effect. Criseyde's portrait commences with the observations:

> Criseyde mene was of hire stature,
> Thereto of shap, of face and ek of cheere,
> Ther myghte ben no fairer creature. (V.806-8)

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[11] E.Faral, *Les Artes Poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle*, Bibiotéque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes (Paris, 1924), p.76; cited in Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric*, p.33.

[12] See *Key*, p.180.

Conventional enough in beginning his description with an external overview of Criseyde's beauty, the narrator nevertheless constructs an ambiguity, a pos sible qualification to his praise of this beauty: it is not certain whether line 807 is reliant upon the 'mene' of l.806, in which case Criseyde's proportions, face and expression are merely 'average', or whether it is linked to line 808, in which case these attributes are the fairest of features. In the following stanza, the negative medieval connotations of joined eyebrows (813-4)[13] are followed by the beautiful lines of praise:

> Lo, trewely, they writen that hire syen,
> That Paradis stood formed in hire eyen. (V.816-7)[14]

In the final stanza, the first five lines attribute unambiguous virtues to Criseyde, including that she 'Ne neuere mo ne lakked hire pite'. Her description is concluded with the lines that she was:

> Tendre herted, slydyng of corage -
> But trewely I kan nat telle hire age. (V.825-6)

The prominence of the apparently incidental criticism 'slydyng of corage' is achieved by its concluding context, its anticipation less than sixty lines previously (768-9), and its reiteration by Diomede (912). While the narrator gives the appearance of wishing to digress from the narrative that will condemn Criseyde for betrayal, his digressions have the effect of confirming that betrayal prior to the action comprising it.

Diomede's tenth-day wooing is resumed after the portraits. The narrator's presentation of Criseyde's seduction recalls the process of Books II and III. Criseyde and Diomede talk 'as frendes doon' (854), Criseyde reiterates her widowhood as a cause why

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[13] See the *Riverside* explanatory notes, p.1053, referring to Hanson's survey showing that 'joined brows were thought to signify sadness, or such traits as sagacity, vanity, cruelty, envy, etc.', *N&Q*, 216 (1971), 285-6.

[14] These lines are glossed with a reference to Dante's *Paradiso*, xviii.21.

"treweliche, as 3et me list nat to pleye" (987), and she reflects on Diomede as she had on Troilus:

> Retornyng in hire soule ay vp and down
> The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,
> His grete estat, and perel of the town. (V.1023-5)[15]

Acquiesence to Diomede would lessen Criseyde's isolation in the Greek camp:

> And that she was allone and hadde nede
> Of frendes help; and thus bygan to brede
> The cause whi, the sothe forto telle,
> That she took fully purpos forto dwelle. (V.1026-9)

The narrator's explanation of Criseyde's decision acquires the status of a post-hoc justification, since the previous stanza had made clear the passing of the ten day deadline (1018-21). In any case, Diomede has already achieved the token of his victory in Criseyde's glove (1013).

The narrator takes care to move quickly outside Criseyde's thoughts, adopting the style of rapid matter-of-fact reportage and addressing the audience:

> And shortly lest that 3e my tale breke,
> So wel he for hym seluen spak and seyde,
> That alle hire sikes soore adown he leyde;
> And finaly, the sothe forto seyne,
> He refte hire of the grete of alle hire peyne. (V.1032-6)

The barely concealed violence of Diomede's actions as he 'refte' Criseyde of her 'pain',[16] is supported by a more subtle narrative violation. Disregarding the many references throughout the poem to Criseyde's 'betrayal', this is the fourth time in Book V that the *process* of turning to Diomede is described.[17] Rather than downplaying Criseyde's turning to Diomede, this stanza (1030-6) simply reiterates it in a more direct way. Similarly, the

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[15] Cf., for instance, II.701 ff. and III.959.

[16] Cf. *LGW* 2325, where Tereus 'reft' Philomela of her 'maydenhede'.

[17] See V:766-70, 1009-15, 1027-9; see also 1046-50, 1086-92. By 'process' I mean a more extended treatment than such cursory comments as IV.15: 'ffor how Criseyde Troilus for-sook'.

narrator follows Criseyde's speech in which she takes her leave of Troilus with the assurance, ostensibly in feeble defense of Criseyde:

> But trewely, how longe it was bytwene
> That she forsok hym for this Diomede,
> Ther is non auctor telleth it, I wene...
> ffor though that he bigan to wowe hire soone,
> Er he hire wan, 3et was ther more to doone. (V.1086-8,1091-2)

The narrator's later confusion as to how long Criseyde was in the forsaking of Troilus (1086) seems to suggest that it was not so very long at all. This length of time is a Chaucerian emphasis, and one which works against the purported defence of Criseyde. In Boccaccio no time span is specified, and it has been calculated that in Benoit, 'between Briseida's arrival in the camp and her acceptance of Diomede there is an interval which can hardly be less than two years'.[18]

The effect is of hammering nails into Criseyde's coffin while apparently regretting the necessity for a coffin in the first place, and is reiterated in the further distancing of Criseyde following the narrator's uncertainty as to how long she took to desert Troilus:

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> ffurther than the story wol deuyse:
> Hir name, allas, is punysshed so wide,
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise. (V.1093-6)

The narrator's interpretation is evidently partial, and is highlighted by an explicit - and distancing - pity:

> ffor she so sory was for hire vntrouthe,
> I-wis, I wolde excuse hire 3et for routhe. (V.1098-9)

His interpretive claims are reiterated during the description of Diomede's wounds:

> And forto hele hym of his sorwes smerte,
> Men seyn - I not - that she 3af him hire herte. (V.1049-50)

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[18] In his note to V.1086-92, Windeatt refers to Root's calculation (made possible through battle references). Boccaccio's failure to specify a time span is noted with reference to V.766-7, p.487.

Patently, there is no reason why the narrator should know, other than through the interpretation of his sources. His authority is not helped by the hint of parody in the explanation that Criseyde eventually gave Diomede her heart in order to heal not his metaphorical love wounds but his physical battle wounds. The narrator's references to Criseyde's betrayal are often prefaced with a gesture towards the sources which constrain him, as in the following stanza:

> But trewely the *storie telleth vs*
> Ther made neuere womman moore wo
> Than she whan that *she falsed Troilus*. (V.1051-3;my emphasis)

His struggle with the meaning of texts becomes his struggle with the meaning of Criseyde, and her guilt. His hermeneutical difficulties carry over into Criseyde's articulation, as she resigns herself to Troilus lost:

> "And giltles, I woot wel, I 3ow leue -
> But al shal passe, and thus take I my leue". (V.1084-5)

Invidiously placed, as always, and 'despeired out of alle cure' (713), Criseyde can only continue to make virtue of necessity by promising 'trouthe' to present 'ffelicite':

> "But syn I se ther is no bettre way,
> And that to late is now for me to rewe,
> To Diomede algate I wol be trewe". (V.1069-71)

Her 'choice' is to conclude that the world is a changeable entity, to accept the present interpretations of her situation, provided mainly by Diomede, and act accordingly.

II. Troilus Reading Criseyde

Chaucer leaves his description of the desolate Criseyde in the Greek camp, prior to her wooing and winning by Diomede, to return to Troilus and Troy. Unlike those of Criseyde, Troilus's reported words are permitted progression to direct speech. What begins as a monologue slips mid-stanza into an apostrophe to the absent Criseyde:

> "...whi lete ich hire to go?

> As wolde god ich hadde as tho ben sleyn!
> O herte myn, Criseyde, O swete fo!" (V.226-8)

Troilus's speech, with its generous deployment of exclamations and use of the complaint is a characteristically medieval adaptation of the classical 'apostrophe'. Rather than the aside of the Roman law courts, where the speaker turned away from the judge 'in order to address the adversary directly', the apostrophe in the Middle Ages was an *exclamatio*, described in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as 'the figure which expresses grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object'.[19] As Vickers notes,

> this figure acquired great popularity, and there are a remarkable number of apostrophes in medieval poetry, addressed to all conceivable objects, especially in the tone of 'grief' or 'indignation', which accounts for the rise of the 'Complaint'.[20]

The form of Troilus's speech not only requires the absence of Criseyde, but prefigures his later apostrophe to the *sign* of Criseyde's absence, her empty palace. It adumbrates the procedure whereby Criseyde's signification becomes dependent on others' interpretations of the signs that stand for her person and her actions in her absence.

The narrator regards Troilus's sorrow not merely as a test case of his own linguistic shortcomings, but as lying beyond representational capacity:

> Who koude telle aright or ful discryue
> His wo, his pleynt, his langoure and his pyne?
> Naught alle the men that han or ben on lyue. (V.267-9)

His appeal to his readers in this stanza is not present in the *Filostrato*, and Troilus's sorrow becomes an occasion to foreground the narrator's compositional difficulties. While his inexpressibility *topos* conforms to a conventional formula, it is significant that the consequent direct address to the reader is not the expected appeal to imagine Troilus's sorrow, but to apprehend the impossible task facing the narrator:

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[19] [Cicero], *ad Herennium*, 4.15.22. See Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric*, p.32.
[20] See Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric*, who refers to Faral, *Les Artes*, pp.71-2.

Thow redere, maist thi self ful wel deuyne
That swich a wo my wit kan nat diffyne. (V.270-1)

In calling attention to his present construction of absent sources, the narrator reiterates the Book's process of reading - and judging - Criseyde in her absence.

Since Troilus first caught sight of Criseyde in the temple in Book I to his reflections on her in her absence, his status as a lover has been associated with the power of looking. He has read Criseyde as a text (III.1356-7) and made her into a mirror in his mind (I.365-6). By Book V, he can look on her no longer, and must substitute for her presence those signs by which he might interpret her. Criseyde's signification is reduced to the signs of her absence. Her palace is regarded by Troilus as a substitute object for the absent Criseyde; as he says to Pandarus:

"As go we sen the palais of Criseyde;
ffor syn we 3et may haue namore feste,
So lat vs sen hire paleys atte leeste". (V.523-5)

The object, like Criseyde in her absence, is inaccessible to Troilus: the doors, passage of entry, are 'spered', sealed up, and the windows, normally permitting visual access, are 'shet'. Seen in the image of the viewer, the palace is transformed by the watcher's gaze, as Troilus addresses it:

"Wel oughtestow to falle and I to dye
Syn she is went that wont was vs to gye". (V.545-6)

The palace, like the woman it stands for, is perceived in terms of absence - a lantern from which the flame has been extinguished, night from which the light of the sun has departed, and a ring from which the jewel has fallen:

"O thow lanterne of which queynt is the light,
O paleys, whilom day, that now art nyght...
O ryng fro which the rubie is out falle". (V.543-4,549)

Troilus's images of absence foreground the sexual transfer that is the subject of the book. Gordon finds in Troilus's treatment of the lamp image an instance of the poem's 'ironic

ambiguity' whereby 'Christian imagery is adapted to the cult of Venus', since 'as a Christian commonplace, the lamp is chastity and its light is charity: as Troilus uses the figure, the missing light becomes both Criseyde herself and what she represents for Troilus - the "sonne of alle blisse"'. She comments further on the 'inversion by which the lamp, that is chastity, becomes the "paleis" both of Criseyde and Venus, and its light, that is charity, becomes "queynt"'.[21] The word 'queynt' itself points to Criseyde's status as a sexual object. It can be a verb, meaning to extinguish, an adjective, meaning strange or curious, or a noun, referring to female genitals.[22] For Troilus, Criseyde's former home is transformed by her absence into a shrine, memorial of an absent saint, and an icon of denied sexuality. Criseyde absent is Criseyde 'queynt', a sexual object extinguished, estranged, transferred from Trojan to Greek. Similarly, Troilus's reference to the ring without a ruby, a sexual motif established by Pandarus in Books II and III,[23] reiterates the notion of sexuality displaced from its appropriate context.

The transference of Criseyde as sexual property is recalled in the image of the brooch, the reluctantly given gift of Book III that becomes the readily given gift of Book V. For Troilus, the discovery of the brooch on Diomede's coat confirms the 'kalendes of chaunge' he has just read in Criseyde's second letter. The brooch is read by Troilus as a sign of Criseyde's sexual substitution, a sign by which she means "Al outrely to shewen" her "entente" (1694). The audience reads the sign in sympathy with Troilus, since the narrator's *dispositio* has already revealed Criseyde's realignment over six hundred lines previously. With reluctance - 'And after this the storie telleth vs' (1037) - the narrator shows

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[21] All citations from Gordon, *Double Sorrow*, p.132.

[22] Cf. the *Miller's Tale*, 3276, the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, 332, 444. See *A Chaucer Glossary*, ed. N.Davis, et.al. (Oxford, 1979), p.115. Windeatt refers to J.Adams, *MLQ*, 24 (1963), 61-5, 'for the suggestion of a bawdy pun' on 'queynt', p.475. See also Troilus's use of the word, IV.313.

[23] See above, 7.I.ii.

Criseyde's sexual transfer by way of signs: she gives Diomede Troilus's horse and Troilus's brooch. Of the latter, unambiguous gift, the narrator deplores, 'and that was litel nede' (1040), and proceeds to make clear the implications of Criseyde's gift-giving: 'Men seyn - I not - that she 3af hym hire herte' (1050). The narrator's determination to stamp his own interpretation ('I not') on Criseyde, particularly in the light of the clear interpretation that presents itself to Troilus -

> ...but now wel he wiste
> His lady nas no lenger on to triste (V.1665-6) -

highlights Criseyde's increasing incapacity to voice her own interpretations. In comparing Troilus's language with that of Criseyde, Payne observes:

> The emotional repercussions which are realised in the images of Troilus's speeches are in the case of Criseyde externalised...Insofar as the states of feeling which are the center of focus in the poem are developed within the characters themselves, it is in Troilus, and not in Criseyde, that we observe that development. With Criseyde, we are always moved outside her at critical moments.[24]

The 'state of feeling' associated with Criseyde's betrayal cannot be spoken by her directly, but must be shown by signs external to herself, such as her gift of Troilus's brooch, or Troilus's own dream of the boar. Her 'present' voice is substituted for signs from which she is absent.

Troilus reads Criseyde's betrayal in his dream of the boar. His interpretation is followed by those of Pandarus and Cassandra. Pandarus has already dismissed Troilus's accurate foretelling of his own death in dreams (316-22): "A straw for alle sweuenes signifiaunce!" (362). He proposes an alternative interpretation to the present dream: that the boar be taken to signify Calkas, rather than a usurping lover. Regardless of the faith he places, or does not place, in this interpretation, Pandarus's reading is patently inaccurate. That his influence is on the wane, and that Troilus's interests are no longer his first priority,

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[24] *Key*, pp.199-200, 201; the passages to which Payne refers here are II:757-70, 918-31, and V:1002-08, 1016-22.

has already been indicated by the Chaucerian addition whereby Pandarus has had to attend Priam instead of seeing Troilus.[25] For the third and final interpretation of the dream by Cassandra, Chaucer deviates from the *Filostrato*, so that 'the interpretation of Troilus's dream [is made] the cause of the meeting with Cassandra'.[26] Unlike Criseyde, Cassandra is a prudent reader, and uses the past proscriptively with regard to the present and future, telling Troilus:

> "If thow a soth of this desirest knowe,
> Thow most a fewe of olde stories heere,
> To purpos how that fortune ouerthrowe
> Hath lordes olde, thorugh which with-inne a throwe
> Thow wel this boor shalt know, and of what kynde
> He comen is, as men in bokes fynde". (V.1458-63)

She proceeds with a selective account of the Ovidian tale of Meleager and Atlanta, showing disastrous consequences of male amorousness, competition and jealousy in love. Chaucer strengthens the connections with the present poem by making Diomede a direct descendent of Meleager.[27] Cassandra follows her summary of the conflict at Thebes with the blunt conclusion:

> "This Diomede hire herte hath and she his -
> Wepe if thow wolt or lef, for out of doute,
> This Diomede is inne and thow art oute". (V.1517-9)

Troilus condemns Cassandra ("thow sorceresse") and her interpretation ("Thow shalt be fals") for confirming his own interpretation: he has already told Pandarus that the dream signified that Criseyde "hath me bytrayed" (1247) ("thow arte oute") and "ellis-where hath now here herte apayed" (1249) ("this Diomede hire herte hath"). Cassandra's reiteration of

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[25] Regarding this addition, Windeatt remarks that 'Chaucer's Pandarus moves in higher circles than Pandaro' (note to V.283-5, p.463).

[26] Windeatt, note to V.1443, p.531. In the *Filostrato*, Cassandra, with the other ladies of the family, attempts to cheer up Troilo by criticising Creseida's birth and heritage; she is rebuked by Troilo.

[27] Windeatt suggests that Chaucer may be following *Filostrato*, 7.27, although in the Italian poem, it is Troilo who makes Meleager grandfather, rather than uncle of Diomede.

the theme of reinscription through her proscriptive use of old examples provides a model of the way in which Criseyde is written into the present story. It is this prudent proscriptiveness that Troilus condemns, since if he follows it, knowing as he does the old stories to which Cassandra refers, he must know that Criseyde will be unfaithful. Resisting Cassandra's interpretation is resisting the decree of Criseyde's unfaithfulness. Similarly, the narrator's attempts to resist the tyranny of reinscription are themselves circumscribed by the present narrative.

An exchange of letters intervenes between Troilus's dream and Cassandra's fatalistic interpretation. Pandarus recommends the epistolary form, with which he knows Criseyde to be unfamiliar, as a way for Troilus to determine a final, unambiguous interpretation, to "know a soth ther thow art now in doute" (1295). Troilus, whose interpretation of Criseyde has been oscillating -

> Bitwixen hope and drede his herte lay,
> 3et somwhat trustyng on hire hestes olde (V.1207-8) -

implores Criseyde to put an end to his words of complaint with her own words: "Now writeth, swete, and lat me thus nat pleyne" (1399). In exemplary rhetorical fashion, Troilus mentally prefaces the actual writing with a consideration of 'How he may best destruyen hire his wo' (1314).[28] Criseyde's briefly reported response confirms, again, her loss in Troilus's eyes. The narrator dispenses with the substance of her letter in six lines (1425-30). He emphasises his indirect reporting of her reply to Troilus's quoted letter: 'hire answere in effect was this' (1423), 'she wroot a3eyn and seyde' (1424), 'she wroot and seyde' (1427) and 'in hire lettre made she...' (1429). Troilus's interpretation is flat and singular, reading in Criseyde's letter the lack of sympathy that she herself finds in the letter genre:

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[28] The conformity of Troilus's letter to the *ars dictaminis* form has often been noted. See N.Davis, 'The *Litera Troili* and English Letters', *RES*, n.s., 16 (1965), 233-44. Windeatt refers to this article (p.523).

> But in hire lettre made she swich festes,
> That wonder was, and swerth she loueth hym best,
> Of which he fond but botmeles bihestes. (V.1429-31)

The narrator comments: 'Thus goth the world; god shilde vs fro meschaunce' (1434). His remark, like those he makes near the end of the poem (1748-50), articulates a position curiously sympathetic to that of Criseyde: making virtue of necessity by taking for the best those opportunities imposed on her by fortune and other designs.[29] The moral valence supplied by the intent of the speaker, however, distinguishes the narrator from Criseyde. As Taylor observes, St Augustine's argument in *De Mendacio* 'insists that evil in lying is a function of the liar's intent rather than the meaning of his utterance per se'.[30] The narrator makes this clear in the line immediately following his 'thus goth the world' statement: 'And euery wight that meneth trouthe auaunce' (1435). As Troilus's interpretation and the narrator's *dispositio* make clear, it is precisely Criseyde's intention that is at fault. Both the narrator and Criseyde have admitted her lack of 'trouthe' to Troilus prior to the letter, and Troilus has also reached the same conclusion. Criseyde's words are in this way textualised into the story of her falseness.

Troilus, nevertheless, continues sending Criseyde letters, to which she finally, for 'routhe' as the narrator tells us, replies. Relevant here is Jordan's comment that 'the motivations of Criseyde's actions are deliberately obscured in favour of a display of the *narrator*'s responses'.[31] Troilus does not read 'routhe' in Criseyde's second letter, but instead:

> ...wel vnderstod that she
> Nas nought so kynde as that hire oughte be. (V.1642-3)

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[29] See, for instance, V.1069-71, 1085, 1605-6.

[30] P.Taylor, '*Peynted Confessiouns*: Boccaccio and Chaucer', *CL*, 34, no.2 (1982), 118. Leaving aside the problematic 'meaning of the utterance per se', the point about intention holds; see above, 1.II.

[31] Jordan, *Shape of Creation*, p.99.

While Criseyde's letter demonstrates a surprising rhetorical proficiency, the effect is contrived and unconvincing.[32] She has no Pandarus to direct her letter, the form of which proscribes her articulation. The formal style with which she has demonstrated little familiarity in the poem is demanded by the letter form. It is a form which by definition requires her absence, thus closing off other elements of signification such as gesture or tone which would serve to contextualise her words in a way over which she might have some control. As she and Pandarus both recognise, she exercises a greater competence not only with the spoken than with the written word, but also in dealing directly with the present in the present, rather than constructing an articulation for future reception.[33] She hopes that Troilus will not take the brevity of her epistle amiss by dubiously arguing the rhetorical point: "Thentente is al and nat the lettres space" (1630). The dismissal of length is as rhetorically damning as her emphasis on intent. *Amplificatio* had undergone a change in meaning from that expressed by Quintilian - 'to heighten, enhance, stress an idea' - to signify the development or extension of a subject; as Vickers puts it, 'in effect, in length not intensity'.[34] Criseyde's letter fails to compensate in length for what is lacks in intensity, and its subject remains baldly stated and undeveloped. Criseyde is limited to the mono-vocal dimension of signification that the narrator's sources demand.

Criseyde's letter states that she has read Troilus's 'lettres ful, the papir al ypleynted' (1597; see also 1599-1600). Troilus's reading of Criseyde's old letters, prior to the current exchange, is also described:

> The lettres ek that she of olde tyme
> Hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede
> An hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,

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[32] See McKinnell, 'Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. M.Salu (Cambridge, 1979), p.87.

[33] See IV.1261-3, and 935-7; see above, 8.III.

[34] Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric*, p.32. I have used his reference to Faral's paraphrase of Quintilian (*Les Artes*, p.61).

> Refiguryng hire shap, hire wommanhede,
> With-inne his herte, and euery word or dede
> That passed was. (V.470-5)

Troilus recalls an image of the absent Criseyde to his present mind through her letters, signs of her absence. Criseyde is herself highly conscious of how posterity will read her in her absence; she knows that the record she leaves will bring about her condemantion:

> "Allas, of me vnto the worldes ende
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende". (V.1058-60)

The name of 'trouthe' that she has struggled to preserve will be lost:

> ..."allas, for now is clene ago
> My name of trouthe in loue for euere mo". (V.1054-5)

The letter constitutes the first literary stage of her misreading by others, forming a paradigm of Criseyde being "rolled...on many a tonge" (1061):

> Thorugh-out the world my belle shal be ronge!
> And wommen moost wol haten me of alle -
> Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle". (V.1062-4)

Knowing that she will be read in a particular tradition of female inconstancy, Criseyde recognises her subjection to the interpretations of others. She explains how she will be read, at the same time pointing out that such a reading is a misreading:

> "Thei wol seyn, in as muche as in me is,
> I haue hem don deshonour, weylaway!
> Al be I nat the first that dide amys,
> What helpeth that to don my blame awey?" (1065-8)

When she says "And giltles, I woot wel, I 3ow leue" (1085), it is not clear whether Criseyde regards herself or Troilus as the 'giltles' party: 'giltles' lacks a clear subject. Why is it that she is blamed, rather than Calkas, Pandarus, Diomede, or the Trojans that agreed to her exchange? As Criseyde recognises, it is not because she 'dide amys' that she will become a model of dishonour. She is destined to be 'rolled' as a Dido rather than a Thisbe because

the story demands it. Troilus as well as the narrator points to this reinscription of Criseyde as a model of dishonour. After his brooch has returned to him, Troilus laments:

> "...allas, 3oure name of trouthe
> Is now fordon and that is al my routhe". (V.1686-7)

Neither Troilus's 'routhe' nor that of the narrator is able to alleviate Criseyde's literary complaint.

III. The Narrator's Reading of His Poem: Epilogue

Insofar as it impinges on Criseyde, the narrator's reading of his poem has been treated in preceding sections, and I do not propose to deal with the conclusion to Book V in detail. The narrator's epilogue is less an engagement with his poem than a stepping out of it, and this movement is achieved through the adoption of an explicitly Christian perspective. The narrator seems forced to take up the position of commentator - separate and at a distance from his poem - as a way of escaping the tyranny of interpretation occasioned by his work, and to which he, as well as his characters, may be subject.

The structure or *dispositio* of Book V has been characterised by a series of disruptions. Diomede's seduction of Criseyde is interrupted by portraits of the poem's three active lovers, the interpretation of Troilus's dream of the boar is interrupted by the exchange of letters, and reports of Troilus's recklessness in battle, culminating in his death, are interrupted by the narrator's reflections on his poem. That these disruptions are part of the meaning of the poem, and provide a structural motif for the closing narratorial sentiments, is suggested by the series of false starts with which the narrator attempts to conclude his 'litel...tragedye'. The fragmentation of the poem's ending envisages not the previously invoked competent readers of the language of love, but a series of subject groups, such as 'euery lady bright of hewe' (1772), 'euery gentil womman' (1773), men and women who are falsely betrayed, '3onge fresshe folkes, he or she' (1835) and finally, 'moral Gower' and

'philosophical Strode'. The interpretive stability of the courtly love audience is breaking down into subject groups; the narrator appears to regard his alternative hermeneutical postures as a way of shaping and imposing meaning on his poem. The fragmentation of the addressed audience points to the fragmentation of meaning of the poem itself. It serves to emancipate readers into various, partial readings, rather than a single, overarching, tyrannical interpretation. The narrator's addresses, moreover, look forward to future works:

> And gladlier I wol write, if 3ow leste,
> Penelopes trouthe and good Alceste. (V.1777-8)

The poem adumbrated, the *Legend of Good Women*, provides another instance of the reinscription of women into particular models of love.

The matter of reinscription has been a concern for the narrator, in relation both to himself and to Criseyde. In imploring the women in his audience not to blame him for the blame accruing to Criseyde, he protests:

> That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me:
> 3e may hire gilt in other bokes se. (V.1775-6)

The subject of 'wroth' is unclear: the narrator could equally be imploring Criseyde as he is the audience of women reading his poem. It is, finally, only by absenting himself from the poem as a Christian commentator, that the narrator appears to find a way of concluding his poem and avoiding his own inscription within it. His reference to 'other bokes' points to the density of literariness that has increased with the progression of the poem, as the narrator has been forced to take interpretive decisions about how to write his poem. The narrator's problem, like Criseyde's, is one of representation: how will she be represented in her absence, and how will he represent both his absent sources and his own present conception of the story? As Shoaf notes, 'by the very act of translating, the Narrator, however faithful - indeed, because faithful - names and marks the story as old and thus adds strangeness to

it: his presence is the story's absence'.[35] In the final book of the poem, the narrator's desperate bid to rewrite his poem against the tyrannical inscription of his sources, to regain the interpretive initiative in the face of a poem increasingly asserting its presence, is shown up as a hermeneutical crisis. As a result, it is up to the audience to provide an interpretive stability, even if that stability is both partial and provisional. As Payne writes:

> the narrator himself warns us openly that his characters speak by the book, that their first existence (at least as far as he, the non-lover is concerned) was literary, that his recreation of them is still one further degree denatured, and that a considerable part of whatever "reality" they attain will have to be projected onto them from the sentiments of the audience.[36]

The sentiments of the audience are liberated by the absence of the narrator as an interpretive model. The narrator seems to be suggesting not only that the betrayer Criseyde was herself betrayed, but that betrayal is not a simple, one-way exercise. Praise and blame are not singular, categorical responses, since they are mediated and refracted by time and circumstance (II.22-49). Context is all important to sincere understanding, as the similarity of his phrases with those given to Criseyde indicates:

> Swich is this world, who-so it kan byholde;
> In ech estat is litel hertes reste;
> God leue vs forto take it for the beste. (V.1748-50)

The merging of Criseydan and narratorial sentiment suggests that despite his efforts to the contrary, Criseyde has been appropriated into the narrator's poem - just as the narrator fears that he, too, will be inscribed in his own poem. He hopes that he will not be misread as she is:

> And for ther is so gret diuersite
> In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
> So prey I god that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge...
> That thow be vnderstonde, god I biseche. (V.1793-6,1798)

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[35] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, p.126.
[36] *Key*, p.222; Payne cites III.1324-36.

It seems optimistic, though, for the narrator to hope for his text's interpretive stability when he is himself unable to conclude a work whose meaning has constantly appeared to elude him. As he has read, and rewritten, and been written by his sources, so must the groups in his audience read the present poem, and decide on their own, partial interpretations.

The narrator follows the description of Troilus's death with a series of highly rhetorical exclamations, deviating from Boccaccio's misogynistic moral, but failing to find one to replace it. Troilus's own departing sentiments evince an ambiguity, as he ends his final lament with an anachronistic glance towards the heavens and a statement of silence:

> "And fro this world almyghty god I preye
> Deliuere hire soon, I kan namore seye". (V.1742-3)

Troilus's wish is ambiguous: is he hoping for the premature death of a faithless lover, or for Criseyde's escape from an inscription where her "name of trouthe/Is now fordon" (1686-7)? The narrator can only point to Troilus's celestial dwelling and reflect that such is the end of his love, his worthiness, his royal estate, his nobility, and:

> Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse:
> And thus bigan his louynge of Criseyde,
> As I haue told, and in this wise he deyde. (V.1832-4)

This may provide an ending for the poem's action, but not for its meaning, and so the narrator is forced to address a new audience:

> O 3onge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
> In which that loue vp groweth with 3oure age,
> Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
> To thilke god that after his ymage
> 3ow made. (V.1835-40)

The '3onge fresshe folkes', who are just growing up into love and are not yet versed in its conventions and intricacies, are offered a different reading to that of the women in Chaucer's audience: 'they must turn themselves to the One Merchant and the One

Moneyer who "nyl falsen no wight" because euery "wight" is His'.[37] The concluding stanzas point to an explicitly Christian conclusion, apparently at odds with 'payens corsed olde rites' (1849). The narrator, though, has explicitly and several times emphasised that those 'in sondry ages' and 'sondry londes' 'spedde as wel in loue as men now do', and this would seem to rule out any simple Christian condemnation of a pagan 'tragedye'. The narrator has substituted for his narratorial voice that of a Christian commentator explicating a pagan work. While Troilus moves beyond worldly despair and 'variaunce' to regard the earth perhaps with contempt, perhaps with affection, Criseyde concludes from her perception of the world's changeability that the present, for all its limitations and pitfalls, is the only condition with which she can deal, by making virtue of necessity. Finally the narrator, emerging from the travails of his poem, looks to Christ:

> And syn he best to loue is and most meke,
> What nedeth feynede loues forto seke? (V.1847-8)

His orthodox Christian conclusion, rather than rejecting the poem that has occasioned it, relies on the experience of that work for its attainment.

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[37] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, p.144.

CONCLUSION

For many of the 'martyrs' in the *Legend of Good Women*, lack of language is associated with lack of power: they lose the power of speech and the power of the narrative as their bodies, kingdoms and poetic memories are plundered by the troops of faithless lovers and poets. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, by contrast, Troilus's inarticulacy often appears to be more debilitating than is Criseyde's. But whereas Troilus has the support of Pandarus, the narrator, and the literary and political institutions which privilege male interests, Criseyde faces impossible quandaries where, for the most part, she will be damned if she does and damned if she does not. She presents her resulting actions as making virtue of necessity. Even at those times when virtue and necessity appear to coincide, for instance -

> "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
> Ben 3olde, i-wis, I were now nought heere" (III.1210-1) -

Criseyde appears to be asserting the fiction of choice *after* the fact of necessity, since it is difficult to see how she could *not* have 'chosen' to love Troilus. While an assertion of choice, however misplaced, might be regarded as an empowering action, it can equally be seen as complicit in the structures that deny female choice. Constraints remain secure while they are not named and challenged. On those isolated occasions when Criseyde does name her constraints, she lacks the context of security and independence which might allow her to take action.[1] The narrator's efforts to protect Criseyde against literary defamation are also part of the very determinants ensuring that she will lose her name. He protests that she did not love Troilus too 'sodeynly' and that she was genuinely sorry for her 'untrouthe'. But his defence complies with the assumption that women, unlike men, ought not to love too

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[1] See, for instance, her conversation with Pandarus, where she claims he would have condemned her if she had chosen to love first (above, 7.I.i, II.414-9); or when she declaims Pandarus for not having her interests at heart (above, 7.I.i, II.409-13, 1133-4), or when she is unable to carry out her resolve to leave the Greek camp (V.694-707, 750-70).

quickly, and that in refocusing their affections, women violate notions of propriety and property which have moral overtones that they do not for men.

French feminist theory provides valuable insights into the structures whereby women are presented as derivative and potentially seditious deviations from the norm of a male-constructed order. Their theories are highly applicable to a poem such as the *Legend of Good Women*, where a discourse of love is propounded that requires the active exclusion of female interests for its perpetuity. The dynamics of specularisation deny female choice and enshrine feminine passivity: the female martyrs to love are defined by and against the interests of the male god of Love. But in the 'oppressioun' of women, material as well as metaphysical conditions pertain. The discourse of phallocentrism manifests itself in specific institutions, with which the female subject may not have simple, one-way relations. The forces determining Criseyde's articulation are subtle, complex and deceptive: limitation is masked as liberation, and constraint as choice. Her dilemmas cannot adequately be accounted for by an overarching psychology that has only limited facilities for incorporating the nuances of specific contexts.

The theories of rhetorical poetics and contemporary representations of women outlined in Part I provide a general, or 'extrinsic' context against which the 'intrinsic' analysis of the specifics of Chaucer's poetry is read. In a sense, Chaucer's poetry is itself a commentary on prevailing, theoretical notions of how meaning is produced and how it ought to be governed. The affective mode of poetry - as was implicitly and explicitly recognised through medieval views of psychology - means that poetic practice is unlikely to be contained within what is deemed to be an appropriate ideological framework. Similarly, the loquacity and hysteria of strictures concerning appropriate female behaviour exhibit an anxiety about their own efficacy. One wonders what message to take from recent

strictures about appropriate critical practice. Critics as well as poets are painters of lions, and perhaps it is time to acknowledge the hidden agendas of interpretation.

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