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Questions of Gender in Chaucer, from *Anelida* to *Troilus*

Alcuin Blamires

No doubt many readers over the years will have found that *Troilus and Criseyde* provokes nagging doubts about the 'manliness' or otherwise of the Troilus it projects. In the words of one commentator, the presentation of Troilus raises the 'difficult question of what is manly' in the private sphere of love, where his experience 'involves a reversal of normal male assertiveness'.¹ Since this imputed 'reversal' was substantiated more than thirty years ago in Kaske's discovery that Chaucer switched around the utterances appropriate to lover and lady in the medieval *aube* tradition after their night of love, it is rather surprising that the topic has only quite recently begun to be extensively explored – for instance by Jill Mann and Elaine Tuttle Hansen.² There are absorbing differences between Mann's view of Troilus as a 'feminized' hero through whom Chaucer is triumphantly able to 'break down the apparently inevitable division between the active male betrayer and the passive female sufferer' (p. 169), and Hansen's impression that Troilus 'is tragically feminized', his 'destabilized manliness' becoming a threat to be resisted as his need for Criseyde develops (pp. 176, 154). Although Hansen perhaps takes the 'feminization' of the courtly male too much for granted, too readily finds it 'inherent in the conventions and texts of love' (p. 63), her analysis confirms that this subject is now conceived at a level of complexity beyond the horizon of Kaske's formulation of it when he wrote of 'a theme sometimes detected' in *Troilus and Criseyde* – 'the reversal of the roles of man and woman as they are popularly or romantically conceived' (p. 171).

Role-reversal will figure largely in what follows, though the aspiration will be to avoid the imprecision which besets universalizing claims about how these roles are 'popularly or romantically conceived' (when? where? by whom?): I think it preferable to analyse gender roles as they are demonstrably constructed – and thence reversed – in the period's texts. Admittedly those texts will sometimes seem to

vindicate the universalizing approach, for instance by sharply categorizing male as active and female as passive; a categorization transmitted by medieval theologians including Bonaventure and – closer to Chaucer's time – Gerson. Nevertheless the present discussion tries not to take it for granted that gender roles are timeless norms against which literary examples are to be compared, the active/passive 'norm' itself being one that has been too blandly invoked to allege that 'a reversal of male-female roles is implicit in the courtly love relationship itself'.³ Nor is it here the intention to engage directly with current debate about ways in which gender roles might have been dictated by the predominantly 'patriarchal' culture of the Middle Ages.⁴ Rather, attention will be directed to a number of what might be called gender-sensitive transpositions in the poetry; to the process of reversal itself – places where one may perceive that Chaucer, if not confounding medieval cultural stereotypes, is at least putting them under severe stress. Why he should be drawn to do this, and why so extravagantly in *Troilus*, will be questions well worth addressing.

As it happens, Chaucer's single use of the word *unmanhod* occurs in *Troilus*, in connection with Troilus's preliminary hopeless period of wallowing and weeping (like Queen Nyobe, Pandarus insists, doubtless intent on needling his companion through the gender of the comparison). After a while Troilus realizes 'That for to slen hymself myght he nat wyne, / But bothe don unmanhod and a synne' (I 823-24).⁵ Though the 'unmanhod' envisaged here strictly refers to the cowardice or unnaturalness of a hypothetical act of suicide and should not be taken out of context, the reader is likely to measure Troilus's *manhod* the more assiduously afterwards, precisely because the prospect of a negation has been raised. As we shall see, Chaucer does subject perceptions of gender to bold experiment in *Troilus*, especially in some undetected layers of implication in the celebrated episode of Troilus's arrival in Criseyde's bed. However, to consider gender games as a speciality of *Troilus*, or even as a concomitant of Chaucer's exploration of love paramours more generally, would be to miss their full significance, which has to do with a distaste he showed in a variety of contexts for reductive or divisive stereotyping according to sex.

Much of the evidence for making this larger claim is familiar, albeit elusive. It arises in the various urbane disclaimers interjected into Chaucer's narratives – those 'double-edged apologies' which Utley ascribed to Chaucer's taste for the sociable raillery of 'sex antagonism'.⁶ Ostensibly the disclaimers aim to rebut an impression which, they imply, might be arising within a given narrative that either of the sexes is being criticized in a partisan spirit. Thus, when the *Man of Law's Tale* dwells emotively upon the distress felt by Custance at the prospect of being translated from

home to a foreign land and into marital 'subjeccioun' to a man of she knows not what 'condicioun', there is a hasty manoeuvre to withdraw – equivocally or not – the putative implication that the general behaviour of the married male is under attack. Husbands are 'alle goode, and han ben yoore; / That knowen wyves; I dar sey yow na moore' (II 267-73). The speaker does not wish to become openly embroiled in gender skirmishing.⁷ Nor, it will be recalled, does the Nun's Priest, who elaborately disavows the intention to 'blame' women's 'conseils' (having just blamed them), because 'I noot to whom it myght displese' (VII 3256-66).

It could be argued that this conspicuous ducking and feinting has an essentially humorous effect, drawing more attention to stereotypical allegations between the sexes, the more anxiously each speaker retreats from those allegations: for the very process of retreat invites our closer scrutiny. Yet, without doubting the element of fun, I suggest that we might try beginning with the premise that Chaucer genuinely wants to impress upon us the futile nature of adversarial generalisations about gender. It is at least worth asking whether something besides mirth is involved in his recurrent interest in strategies which enable him in some way to transpose or, so to speak, 'cross-interpret' gender-sensitive episodes or statements.

Some of these strategies are highly visible in his poetry: some of them are invisible, unless we juxtapose his texts with his source texts. One well-known 'visible' example occurs, as we have noted, in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*; but of course the tactic occurs also in *The Manciple's Tale*. There, having patently developed an analogy between Phebus's sexually restless wife and various creatures (bird, cat, she-wolf) in whom the power of 'appetit' overcomes all forms of civilizing restraint, the Manciple coolly declares

Alle thise ensamples speke I by thise *men*

That been untrewē, and nothyng by wommen.

For men han evere a likerous appetit . . .

IX 187-89 (my emphasis)

Small wonder that the glossator of one manuscript discovers here the figure of *antiphrasis*, asserting that the Manciple means the opposite of what he says.⁸ The Manciple's inversion of the contextual logic, whereby we expect his analogies to apply to women, is brazen. Then there is the poker-faced parallel near the close of *Troilus*, where the narrator juggles self-consciously with the implications of Criseyde's 'gilt', claiming:

N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
But moost for wommen that bitraised be
Thorough false folk . . .
Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!

TC (V 1779-85)

What Donaldson has said of this 'excursion into farce' will probably seem true also of the Manciple's case; that is, the speaker is struggling to turn upside-down an 'anti-feminist moral' looming before him, one which is 'at once obvious' yet also presumed to be 'unacceptable'.⁹

It is interesting that Chaucer's chief precedent for these passages also focuses specifically on gender: namely the bland *volte-face* in *Le Roman de la Rose* whereby the tale of Narcissus and Echo is rehearsed right through to the youth's death ('thus did he receive his deserved retribution from the girl whom he had scorned'), only to be capped with a nonchalant cross-interpretation – 'You ladies who neglect your sweethearts, be instructed by this exemplum . . .'.¹⁰ Within the urbanity of this stratagem, which Chaucer so liked to emulate, there was also a simple, salutary thought. It is particularly short-sighted to turn stories into gender propaganda, when the actions and attitudes involved are not the monopoly of either sex. Culpable self-absorption belongs one minute to a male, Narcissus; tomorrow, it may belong to 'you ladies'.

Chaucer was fascinated, I believe, by the stratagem's potential for jolting readers, so that they would recognize how naive it is to suppose conventional allegations between the sexes to be irreversible: indeed the *Troilus* example we have glanced at, far from being farcical (or even the desperate last-ditch defence of Criseyde by a besotted narrator), constitutes just such a purposeful jolt. Chaucer wants to register the equal capacity of *either* sex, in love, to be disloyal. He declares that another time, he will happily write of 'Penelopées trouthe and good Alceste' (V 1778). It is ultimately the luck of the draw, whether a given story affirms female, or male, truth or falsehood. That being so, the proposition 'Criseyde was untrue; *ergo*, beware of false men' is actually a wise improvement upon the naively gender-divisive conclusion which it has displaced. The Manciple's seemingly brazen illogicality yields the same good sense, as well as possibly drawing attention to a habitual misrepresentation of what is asserted in the tale's source at that point.¹¹

I would argue, therefore, that while Chaucer's most visible cross-

interpretations in the sphere of gender were no doubt partly calculated to engage an antifeminist-conscious public in playful banter, they were also designed to unsettle complacent opinion about failings and traits deemed to be characteristic of each sex. But what needs to be better appreciated is the extent to which *invisible* reversals – i.e. occasions where Chaucer has silently transposed the gender-marking which applies in his source – reinforce that purpose. As we shall see *Anelida* and *Troilus* provide revealing instances, though it will help to underline just how widespread the transposition is if we also note in passing a couple of examples elsewhere. One occurs in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, where the Wife's method of firing a suitor's interest by telling him of dreams in which he has figured (III 577-84) is borrowed from Jean de Meun, who in turn took it from Ovid: except that both the latter poets, unlike their imitator, envisaged the fake dream as a seduction tactic deployed by the male against the female.¹²

Lest the Wife should be presumed to be a special case, let us recall also that more radical and spectacular defiance of gender archetypes whereby in the *Legend of Medea* Chaucer likens Jason's sexual appetite for women – instead of Medea's appetite for men – to the craving of 'matter' for 'form' (LGW, 1580-88). This coolly overturns, not just the misogynistic rhetoric of Guido delle Colonne (whose account he is following at this point), but a cardinal principle of medieval physiological theory transmitted from Aristotle by Isidore and Aquinas.¹³ Since the theory habitually associated woman with malleable matter and man with imprinting form, we underestimate Chaucer, I think, if we detect here only a translator's indulgence in 'hidden jokes'.¹⁴ After all, he highlights the snub to tradition by adding to Guido's analogy a secondary comparison, between Jason's obsessive desire and 'a wellle that were botomles' (1584). The inexhaustible well was, of course, a commonplace figure in the Middle Ages for the alleged insatiability of the vulva.¹⁵ The poet cannot have been innocent of the shock he was administering to conventional gender lore in this passage. Refusing to accept the invidious labelling of woman as 'insatiable matter', he perceived how thought-provokingly that label could be attached to a man instead.

While the examples so far considered constitute various signals that Chaucer liked to question the sexual stereotyping that prevailed in his culture, it seems that he reserved more extensive questioning for two of his most courtly productions. In the writing of *Anelida and Arcite*, and of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer took provocative liberties with the patterns of behaviour which had been scrupulously established for each sex by preceding generations of love poets.

So far as it proceeds, *Anelida* is a study in the reciprocity of love and awe. Chaucer directs us to these terms – with his usual flair for oblique anticipation – in a scene-setting stanza about the city in which Anelida's sufferings in love are to take place. We are told how Creon took advantage of the desolation of Thebes, how he moved into the power-vacuum left by the disappearance of its royal line, and 'held the cite by his tyrannye' (64-66). However, since he also took steps to secure the friendship of the region's nobility, it was a mixture of personal attachment and fear ('what for love of him, and what for awe') that drew many, and among them Anelida, to Thebes (67-70). The remainder of the text concerning Anelida, her transient lover Arcite, and the lady who usurps Anelida in Arcite's affections, explores a set of received literary assumptions about the due proportioning of love and awe (or 'drede') within heterosexual relationships.¹⁶

What is immediately clear is that nothing could be further from Anelida's mind than to hold on to Arcite's love 'by . . . tyrannye'. Her style of love, sacrificial and self-effacing, is not governed by any consideration of sustaining awe in her lover. If anything, she is in awe of him. We soon become aware of a paradox. On the one hand the narrative wastes no time in writing off Arcite as a no-good trifler, 'subtil' in the 'craft' (88) of seduction and only perfunctorily committed to her. On the other, when he abandons her for a 'newe lady' it is insinuated that Anelida's very lowliness and devotion to him have been a major factor in the abandonment:

This fals Arcite, of his newfanglenesse,
For she to him so lowly was and trewe,
Tok lesse deynte of her stidfastnesse. (141-43)

It is difficult not to feel some suspicion that the narrative's campaign of denigration against 'this fals' Arcite (accusing him of duplicity from the start as if with the hindsight of an Anelida supporter) is a partisan clouding of a problem in medieval love-psychology – namely, that Anelida's absolute 'freedom' or generosity towards Arcite, 'in such manere / That al was his that she hath' (106-07) is so untempered by conventionally feminine *daunger* that his interest fizzles out.¹⁷ On the rebound he attaches himself to a lady who keeps *him* 'lowe' on a diet of disdain:

And for she yaf him daunger al his fille,
Therfor she hadde him at her owne wille. (195-96)

Although the model of *daunger* represented by this rival lady is exaggerated to the point of caricature, we may sense on reflection that the model of *freedom* epitomized by Anelida – her acquaintance with every other person voluntarily extending no further 'then that hit lyked to Arcite', for instance (108-09) – is extreme too. The polarization is reminiscent of personification-allegory, for it is as though we see Daunger proving to be a successful rival to Freedom for the attentions of Lustiheed. (In the *Romaunt*, Dame Fraunchise, characterised as 'amiable and free', 1226, is allied with Pite against Daunger, 3499f.) Chaucer certainly means the effect to be paradigmatic as is shown by the way that the circumstances are offered as an *exemplum* to 'ye thrifty wymmen' at the conclusion of the initial narrative section of the poem. Arcite's flight from a woman too 'meke' in affection to one contrastingly aloof ('straunge') witnesses a condition of man's heart: 'what he may not gete, that wolde he have' (197-203).

It would be useful to establish two points about this last axiom. One is that Chaucer by no means assumes it to be typical of the male only. Thus, the Wife of Bath thinks it a *womanly* characteristic to crave 'what thyng we may nat lightly have' (III 517) – in her case, Jankyn's withheld or 'daungerous' love (514).¹⁸ By the same token, because her earlier husbands proffered their love too readily, she 'ne tolde no deyntee' of it (207-08). The other point is that Chaucer nevertheless recognised the extent to which, so far as the sexual domain was concerned, the weight of literary convention had referred the axiom to the male sex. In his poetry the voice of the forsaken woman often prompts thoughts of the risk of giving too much to men, of their likely 'newfangelnesse', once favours are granted. Phyllis reflects that probably Demophon has failed to return to her 'For I was of my love to yow to fre' (*LGW*, 2520-21). No doubt Dido, 'she that can in fredom passen alle' but who finds that in Aeneas the 'hote earnest' is soon 'overblowe', constitutes the major exemplar (*LGW* 1127, 1287). However, nowhere does Chaucer concentrate more exhaustively than in *Anelida* on the problematic exercise of denial by which in literature a woman was supposed to reduce this risk of desertion. The poem therefore discloses, as Norton-Smith has perceived, a 'psychological nexus' such as had 'fascinated Ovid' and 'exerted an equal fascination on Chaucer'.¹⁹ It may be enlightening to pursue the Ovidian connection for a moment.

Insofar as this nexus involves the attraction excited by denial, it is often articulated by Ovid in the context of a denial of the lover's access to a mistress by a third party. Let husbands take care to watch wives jealously: it sharpens a lover's passion, for 'what one may do freely has no charm; what one may not do pricks

more keenly on'; 'quod licet, ingratum est; quod non licet acrius urit' (*Amores* II 19.3).²⁰ However, the same poem which at first applies the maxim in this way, then proceeds to make it a cardinal rule *within* the couple's relationship too: an occasional rebuff by the woman brings on the lover's soulful vows; 'et faciat voto rara repulsa locum' (19.6). The speaker's current mistress is advised, love that is 'nimium patiens' (too compliant, 25) cloy; the trick is, 'saepe rogata nega' – 'oft when entreated say no' (20). Admittedly it is risky to impart such secrets to the other sex. The lover ruefully admits that 'Corinna the artful had marked this weakness in me', and that she subsequently exploited it so ruthlessly as to put him on the rack (9ff.). Ovid sees the rebuff mechanism, then, primarily as part of the woman's role, as he again suggests in the *Ars Amatoria*, and as Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun were to maintain in emulation.²¹ The tactic *can* be imagined in reverse, deployed by male in relation to female, both in Ovid and in the *Roman de la Rose*²² (which means that Jankyn's use of it in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* should not be considered a wholly radical departure). But more emphatically, the rebuff, the *Dangiers*, is the woman's prerogative, a Corinna's prerogative, as it should therefore by literary precedent be Anelida's prerogative.

Is it conceivable that Chaucer knew *Amores* II 19, in which the memory of Corinna's coquetry is held up as a kind of model for a new mistress, lest this one should indulge the lover too much? The switch from one mistress to another, one of whom cultivates the art of rebuff while (apparently) the other has yet to learn it – these are the elements of *Anelida* also, albeit in a different order. Admitting that such a connection remains highly speculative, I am certainly persuaded that when Chaucer claims in the poem's third stanza that he follows Statius first, 'and after him Corynne' (21), he means just what he says. He is going to take up the perspective of a Corinna, the woman's role, vis-à-vis the proficient Ovidian suitor – he is going to explore the options for a latter-day Corinna in response to the Ovidian *art* of the male who is potentially 'double in love', and 'subtil in that craft' which it 'nedeth not to men . . . to lere' (87-88, 98).²³ In fact, Arcite is nothing more than an ordinarily conscientious student of the medieval art of courtship. The narratorial campaign against him complicates the picture and could be held to reinforce an argument that Chaucer actively disliked the *Ars Amatoria* tradition because of its cynical attitude to 'trouthe'.²⁴ Nevertheless there is a sense in which Arcite simply epitomizes the problem of love going off the boil, which Ovid feared if a mistress should become too consistently devoted. For his part, the knight performs according to the book, with 'ful mykel besynesse', oaths and distress (99-102).

This is vilified by the narrator as 'feyned chere' and, with such feigning always a possibility, the female role urgently necessary to complement the male protestations would be the standard offer of prospective 'pite' subject to probation. Anelida tries to reassure herself retrospectively that she gave herself only guardedly ('as fer as hit was ryght', 224, and 'myn honor save', 267) but her attitude to Arcite has earlier been represented as unreservedly frank and open ('pleyn', 87, 116), so that the conventional observation 'al was his that she hath' (107) has seemed in this case to sum up an incautiously absolute commitment of herself. Her thoughts are utterly absorbed in him. She honours him as 'a kyng' (130), whereas her rival will scarcely acknowledge him as 'servaunt unto her ladishippe'. Far from often saying no, as Ovid recommended, she respects her lover's will in everything (128). Evidently she abides by Charmian's prescript, 'In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing', whereas the new lady will be of Cleopatra's opinion, 'Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, I. iii. 9-10).

Pace Charmian, one must conclude that Anelida is constructed at least partly in defiance of the received literary role requirements of gender within her situation. There is a tell-tale detail (it is another of Chaucer's transpositions) which rather precisely signposts that. A whole stanza is spent informing us that if a letter having the slightest amorous nuance was sent to her she would show it to Arcite prior to burning it, so anxious was she to 'hidden nothing from her knyght' (113-19). However, this voluntary submission to the lover's censorship directly precludes the tolerant connivance that is envisaged as the male's role in the Ovidian tradition if he finds evidence of a rival's love-letters. As Jean de Meun puts it, 'if anyone sends her a letter', the lover 'should not interpose by reading it or looking it over or trying to find out their secrets'.²⁵ Arcite doesn't get the chance to connive: perhaps Anelida's refusal to hide anything registers a criticism of the Ovidian tradition, but in another sense she is giving Arcite no room to function in his assigned role as suitor, is edging him towards relinquishing that role precisely because she eschews key constituents of her role as his lady. Consequently there is a special poignant irony in the part of her Complaint where she struggles to think of a way of regaining him and exclaims:

And shal I preye, and weyve womanhede? –

Nay! Rather deth then do so foul a dede! (299-300)

She reacts with horror to the thought of begging for Arcite's love and thereby

resorting to unwomanly behaviour. Her diagnosis of the enormity of the transgression of gender codes, if she were to 'preyen', may make her sound a trifle comic, too much like Congreve's Lady Wishfort perhaps ('I shall never break decorums – I shall die with confusion if I am forced to advance . . . I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms', *The Way of the World*, Act III); yet medieval romance and lyric had indeed insisted repeatedly that it was out of bounds for the woman to 'preyen' the man. 'Shall I ask him?' ('Proierai le je donques?'), Soredamors says to herself, wondering how to communicate her love to Alexander in *Cligés*; but instantly dismisses the idea since it would be a *faux pas* for a woman to request a man's love. If Chaucer needed a specific prompt, Machaut could have supplied him with one (as Wimsatt has shown) in a *chant royal* whose speaker betrays the same anxiety that it is not a lady's part to beseech 'son ami' for 'grace', because it is for ladies to deal out smiling rejections ('dame doit en riant refuser'), while sighing pleas are the province of their suitors ('Et amis doit prier en souspirant').²⁶ Literary culture held then, and it has been deeply ingrained in the centuries since, that the man does the asking. Pandarus has it from the experts that love thrives best when a man has 'a layser for to preye' (*Troilus* II 1369), so proceeds to set up a context expressly designed for Troilus to do that ('now prey', 1499; 'he shulde hire preye', 1756; 'his lessoun . . . To preyen hire', III 83-84).

What makes Anelida's dread of abandoning norms of *womanhede* in this respect so poignant, is that she has unwittingly lost touch with them in other important respects – even to the extent of usurping something of the role which belongs to the literary male. For instance she considers herself 'wounded' (like every afflicted troubadour, but like very few speakers of her sex) and wants 'non other medecyne' than what might be provided by 'my foo that yaf myn herte a wounde' (238-44). She even addresses Arcite as 'my swete foo' (272), appropriating an idiom reserved elsewhere in Chaucer for lovelorn suitors ('Fare wel, my sweete foo, myn Emelye!', *Knight's Tale* I 2780; 'Thanne is my swete fo called Criseyde!', and 'Criseyde, O swete fo!', *Troilus*, I 874 and V 228; 'I can but love hir best, my swete fo', *Complaint to his Lady*, 37).²⁷ The transposition of roles is sustained also, I think, in more covert ways. Thus, when she finally senses the futility of imagining that Arcite's love can be retrieved, this is articulated in terms of the impossibility of 'holding' something ungraspable:

I myghte as wel holde Aperill fro reyn,

As holde yow, to make yow be stidfast. (309-10)

Once again Chaucer is switching round an antifeminist allegation, this time l'Ami's sweeping claim in the *Roman* that no woman can ever be 'so firm of heart . . . that one could ever be certain of holding her, . . . any more than if one held an eel by the tail in the Seine'.²⁸ It is hard to decide here whether to talk more in terms of Chaucer quietly conducting a just war against such allegations, by demonstrating that women can have occasion to use them against men; or in terms of his contriving to extend our suspicion that Anelida keeps hitting a 'wrong' note in her doomed love-affair. We know in any case that her rival is successfully holding Arcite, by exploiting that form of *womanhede*, namely *daunger*, which Anelida herself has waived.

At the same time there is nothing attractive about that alternative relationship, in which the rival abuses Arcite's *drede* and makes him grovel for her attention 'at the staves ende' (184). She elicits from him a maximum of awe by conceding a minimum of love, and this is not allowed to arouse the level of sympathy in the reader so massively required for Anelida, who has elicited from Arcite a minimum of awe by entrusting her love wholeheartedly to him. Chaucer develops the point that the love relation is also a power relation, that love is inextricably bound up with awe: but this discovery here leads only to bewilderment and bitterness. We might have preferred to be guided towards a gratifying compromise – something like the 'wys accord' described in *The Franklin's Tale* (V 791f.) whereby the yielding and exercising of power are beneficially poised. Instead we are forced to concede pragmatically that where Ovidian men of Arcite's stamp are concerned, it is the art of *daunger* that a Corinna most needs to cultivate. To some extent Anelida epitomizes the 'sely wemen, ful of innocence' apostrophized in the *Legend of Good Women* (1254), the deceivable over-trusting woman imagined by Ovid, lacking in the necessary skill by which to prolong love ('Defuit ars vobis; arte perennat amor', *Ars Amatoria* III 42); only Chaucer reaches beyond that model in this instance to perceive the confusion of roles which arises when the woman's lack of 'art' manifests itself in extreme form.

Insofar as a question about the expedient balance between a woman's *freedom* and her *daunger* is at the core of *Anelida*, one may say that the poem confirms a conventional thrust in medieval courtly literature's prescriptions about gender, because these had long been obsessed with the due proportioning of responsiveness and reserve in the heroine. Anelida's various departures from the stereotypical role could, of course, be held simply to reinforce the stereotype by negative example, if it

were not for the immense emotional attraction vested in her devoted generosity. Her presentation seems to imply some considerable restlessness with received literary paradigms, as though Chaucer was seriously disaffected with the firm conventional separation between male (humble, suppliant) and female (sovereign, reserved) roles in courtship which medieval courtly writers generally upheld, while not being sure of the direction in which this disaffection was taking him. To this extent it may well be true, as Lee Patterson has suggested, that the poem represents an effort 'to expand the cultic language of the court beyond its prescribed limits, thus examining and implicitly challenging the largest presuppositions of aristocratic culture' (p. 49).

Such a restlessness can have comedic potential of course; sometimes quite nervously so, if cultural taboos seem to be threatened by it. The comedic potential is subdued in *Anelida* by an emphasis on the pain of betrayed trust and of uncomprehending loss. Elsewhere in Chaucer, the comic possibilities in this domain are cultivated more; especially so in the honeymoon episode of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. There, when the old woman contemplates her reluctant young bridegroom, wallowing and writhing in the marital bed, she implicitly likens him to a coy virginal bride. Is every Arthurian knight, she jests, 'so dangerous' with his wife: 'why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?' (III 1083-94). This example will serve as an apt transition to *Troilus*, in which the intertwined tension and comedy of the lovers' first night together owes much, and perhaps more than has yet been recognised, to Chaucer's criss-cross gender games.

A full analysis of the structuring of gender issues in *Troilus* is obviously beyond the scope of this discussion, which will draw attention to a few particulars only. So far as a broader view of the subject is concerned, I would agree with Barry Windeatt (in his editorial notes to I 285-87 and III 106) that there is a marked emphasis on Criseyde's 'womanly' qualities. Chaucer goes out of his way to assert that no-one was ever 'lasse mannyssh in semynge' than she (I 283-84). Her *wommanhede* is much reiterated – though rarely in such a way as to define its constituents: as Utley noticed, in this period it is 'played upon as an emotional term and rarely subjected to the light of day', Chaucer himself being especially given to 'a connotative expansion of the word'.²⁹

Windeatt also notes (at I 824) that 'the theme of Troilus's "manhood" and manly behaviour' is recurrent. But his manhood becomes as controversial in the poem as Criseyde's womanhood is uncontroversial. His prolonged periods of conspicuous paralysis enable Pandarus on more than one occasion to throw down before him, like a gauntlet, the ostensibly 'manly' course of action that he ought to

be following – even to the melodramatic extreme of envisaging the streets of Troy flowing with the blood of Pandarus's kin, hacked to death while seconding Troilus in an imaginary armed uprising to retain Criseyde (IV 617-28). Chaucer seems to be intent on maintaining a rather precarious balance, incorporating in the poem various reassurances about the youth's manliness, perhaps most effectively the description of his 'weldy' appearance on horseback after a hard day in the field (II 631-37), while also enhancing the innocence, diffidence, and absolute deference to his mistress's will, which leave him wide open to Pandarus's calculated jibes. However, it is rather notable that Troilus's behaviour is three times described as manly in a sense which is more subtle than that advocated by Pandarus, for it consists in self-control: the restraint of 'unbridled cheere', and the suppression of grief.³⁰

I should like to offer an argument – more novel than might be guessed from these preliminaries – that Troilus was partially constructed in this poem, as Anelida was constructed in hers, so as to confound specific medieval gender expectations. However, the ingenuity of the poem is such that *to Troilus himself* Criseyde appears more deviant than he at two critical junctures, the first of which again focuses on the word 'preye' already discussed in connection with *Anelida*. As we have seen, Pandarus's arrangements at Deiphebus's house are supposed to lead up to a momentous opportunity for Troilus to 'preyen' Criseyde (III 84). The planned scene nearly goes awkwardly wrong, not so much because the knight cannot sustain his role *per se*, as because Pandarus has over-compensated for anticipated diffidence in Troilus by arranging that Criseyde shall bewilderingly seem to 'preyen' *him* – albeit in a technical feudal sense – precisely when he has nerved himself to appeal to her. We are invited to relish the witty other meanings of Pandarus's words, as he puts the finishing touches to the lovers' alibi in remarks to Helen and Deiphebus, reasoning that it is best if Criseyde should be the last and briefest visitor to Troilus's sickroom, to 'preye' him just once 'to ben good lord'; for that surely will not much discomfort the patient, and besides he will be the more willing to forbear his own comfort in her case since she is 'straunge' ('not of the family' but punningly also 'aloof' in the courtly sense; II 1657-61). In the event Criseyde 'persists in acting out the public reason for her visit' (as Ian Bishop has put it), refusing to let Troilus move from the bed to kneel to her and formally requesting the continuance of his 'lordshipe' (III 76-77). Consequently, 'the doctrinaire lover, finding the expected roles reversed' on hearing 'his lady preye / Of lordshipe hym', becomes inarticulate 'for shame' (78-80).³¹

The pattern of this episode is complemented with brilliant modification later in Book III. When Troilus is introduced to Criseyde's bedside at Pandarus's house, it seems as if lover and lady can now be induced, with the strategic assistance of a cushion, to develop their relationship according to best practice: 'Nece, se how this lord kan knele!' exclaims Pandarus (962). Once again however, the context in which Troilus is to behave has been over-determined by his friend. In the face of reproaches from Criseyde, Troilus cannot go through with the role of jealous lover which has been foisted upon him as pretext for his midnight entrance. He faints; Pandarus casts him into the bed, stripping off his outer garments; and only when he is splashed with cold water, rubbed on the hands, and also kissed by Criseyde, does he revive. In these circumstances Troilus's first reaction is to be 'abayst': not at his own behaviour it seems, but because for the second time Criseyde's actions (as he awakes to them, in bed) are interpretable as unbecomingly forward or unladylike – hence his anxious exclamation, 'Why do ye with youreselven thus amys?' (1122-25).³²

Instantly Criseyde retorts, 'Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?' (1126-27). And, since this echoes Pandarus's own prior impatience with Troilus's swoon, 'O thef, is this a mannes herte?' (1098), the reader is bound to conclude that so far as conformity with gender prescription is concerned, the score is mounting against Troilus. To see just how subversively the poem *is* here mocking the lover in this respect it will be helpful to look briefly at Chaucer's modification of situations in the *Filostrato* involving the lover's, or lady's, embarrassment.

Chaucer's conception of his lovers as being fundamentally less worldly-wise than Boccaccio's seems to make him very prone to question any attribution of *vergogna* in the Italian. The convolutions of this are quite complex, and include for instance the elimination of a detail whereby Troiolo's embarrassment in the Italian betrays a consciousness, apparently not wanted by Chaucer, of unspoken sexual implications (*Fil* 2.31 concludes with Troiolo abashedly lowering his eyes, 'Poi bassò 'l viso alquanto vergognando'; but *Troilus* I 1030-36 dispenses with this).³³ There is also a case of direct transposition that is rather noteworthy in the context of the present discussion. This instance concerns Troiolo's misgivings in response to the suggestion that he should write Criseida a love-letter. He puts it to Pandaro that since ladies are observed to be modest or easily embarrassed ('son vergognose / le donne'), Criseida will refuse out of shame or embarrassment ('per vergogna'), and with scornful response, any letter carried to her (2.93). Here Chaucer, rather than

having his Troilus appear a connoisseur of this psychology of *shame* in women, deliberately reassigns the embarrassment to the lover, who says *he* is 'ashamed for to write . . . / Lest of myn innocence I seyde amys, / Or that she nolde it for despit receyve' (II 1047-49).

Now, the psychology of *vergogna* which is insistently engaging Chaucer's attention recurs at a central moment in the Italian narrative – the consummation scene – though Chaucer critics have so unanimously pronounced the scene irrelevant to Chaucer's rendition that they have usually overlooked the splendid cue he discovered there. In Boccaccio, Criseida goes to welcome Troilo as pre-arranged, and after mutually passionate embraces and kisses they go up to a bedchamber. Then,

ei si spogliaro ed entrarono nel letto,
dove la donna nell'ultima vesta
rimasa già, con piacevole detto
gli disse: – Spogliami io? Le nuove spose
son la notte primiera vergognose.–

A cui Troilo disse: – Anima mia,
io te ne priego, sí ch'io t'abbi in braccio
ignuda sí come il mio cor disia. –
Ed ella allora: – Ve' ch'io me ne spaccio. –
E la camiscia sua gittata via,
nelle sue braccia si ricolse avaccio. 3.31/4 - 32/6

[They undressed and entered the bed, where the lady, who still had one last garment on, asked him charmingly: 'Shall I take off everything? Newly-wed brides are shy on the first night.'

Troilo answered: 'Light of my life, I beg you to – so that I may hold you naked in my arms as my heart desires.' And she replied: 'See how I rid myself of it.' And throwing off her shift she at once enfolded herself in his arms.³⁴]

Chaucer's imagination retained several key details from this scene of Criseida's sweet, reluctant amorous delay. The details were; first, Boccaccio's emphasis on the process of undressing – especially the 'last garment', together with the ostentatious 'throwing' action – and second, the suggestive analogy with the shy

bride. In Chaucer's drastic transposition it is of course Troilus who is *thrown* inert into bed by Pandarus and whose clothes are *stripped off* down to a last garment ('And of he rente al to his bare sherte', III 1099). This was consistent, to a sensational degree, with the English poet's overall concern to remove all taint of practised initiative and even responsibility from Troilus. But what of Boccaccio's *le nuove spose* who are *vergognose* the first night? It does seem to me that the notion of a wedding night enters with an exceedingly mischievous wit into Chaucer's calculations here, in such a way as to cast Troilus as the bride.

The point is that although the undressing of Troilus is performed *ad hoc* and by but one attendant, it is an action that takes us peculiarly close to one of the rituals associated with the wedding night in medieval writing, namely the formal undressing and bedding of the bride by the women attending her, prior to the bridegroom's approach to the bedchamber and the consummation itself. A priest usually also blessed the nuptial bed during these proceedings, though that element is missing from the detailed account of the rituals given in a fifteenth-century French *nouvelle*:

Les nopces furent honorablement faictes en grand solennité. Et vint la desirée nuyt; et tantost après la feste faillye, que les jeunes gens furent retraiz et qu'ilz eurent prins congié du sire des nopces et de sa dame, la bonne mere, les cousines, voisines et aultres privées femmes prindrent nostre dame des nopces et la menerent en la chambre ou elle devoit coucher pour la nuyt avec son espousé, ou elles la desarmerent de ses actours et joyaux, et la firent coucher ainsi qu'il estoit de raison; puis luy donnerent bonne nuyt . . . Et ainsi chacune faisant sa priere se partit.

[The wedding was conducted worthily and with much ceremony: now came the longed-for night. Soon after the reception drew to an end and the young guests had withdrawn and taken leave of the lord of the nuptials and his wife, the bride's mother, cousins, neighbours and other women friends took our lady of the nuptials and led her to the room where she was to go to bed for the night with her bridegroom. There they disarmed her of her clothes and jewels and put her to bed as was appropriate; then they bade her good-night . . . And thus each one left, with a prayer on her behalf.]³⁵

Although it would be rash to state categorically that the whole of this ritual was present in Chaucer's culture too, something much like it is recognized in *The Merchant's Tale*. There, after the wedding feast, January tries to hasten the guests' departure until finally

Men drynken and the travers drawe anon.
The bryde was broght abedde as stille as stoon;
And whan the bed was with the preest yblessed,
Out of the chambre hath every wight hym dressed,
And Januarie hath faste in armes take
His fresshe May . . . IV 1817-21

The expression 'the bryde was broght abedde' here summarizes, I suppose, the formalities itemized in the French text.³⁶ Evidence specifically for the undressing ritual is hard to come by, and historians will be found to give lavish details about earlier parts of actual medieval wedding ceremony while trailing into inexactitude at this point: 'the newly married couple would be bedded', but 'we know almost nothing in detail about the marriage festivities of the Middle Ages', says one, though another states (without supporting reference) that 'very often the groom carried the bride over the threshold of his house, where her closest friends undressed her and put her in his bed'.³⁷ However, some reassurance that the practice outlined in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* was indeed familiar in English culture, can be derived from Spenser's *Epithalamion* 299ff., where the speaker urges at nightfall:

Now bring the Bryde into the brydall boures.
Now night is come, now soone her disaray,
And in her bed her lay;
Lay her in lillies and in violets . . .
Now it is night, ye damsels may be gon,
And leaue my loue alone . . .³⁸

So I would speculate that Troilus, hastily bundled into the lady's bed and undressed by his closest friend, is meant to cut a witty figure as a parody of the shy bride being prepared for the *rite de passage* with her bridegroom. The fact is that he and Criseyde are *not* actually wed (in the public sense which would be required for the enactment of any such rituals).³⁹ Nor is it actually any first-night nuptial

bashfulness in Troilus about undressing which necessitates Pandarus's ministrations. But from the reader's viewpoint, the action itself gives a bizarre glimpse of Troilus in that archetypal role of a bride, which Boccaccio's Criseida archly associates with herself. This is indeed no 'mannes game'. It appears to upset medieval gender lore yet more disconcertingly than does the faint, though clearly that in itself strikes Pandarus as a sufficiently culpable symptom of unvirile fearfulness ('is this a mannes herte?' 1098) just as elsewhere in Chaucer Chauntecleer's fear offends Pertelote ('Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?' *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII 2920).

If the transposition of roles effected in *Troilus* includes the parodic dimension here proposed, then this is the masterstroke of role-reversal in Chaucer. But can we determine, in conclusion, the motive or the function of such reversal? There had been analogous, sporadic experiments along these lines before, admittedly, so that Chaucer is not without precedent. It has been pointed out, for instance, how in the case of Cligés and Fénice Chrétien de Troyes 'has reversed the theme of the lover who surrenders his heart to the lady who holds it captive'.⁴⁰ *Aucassin et Nicolette* constitutes another precedent. Moreover readers often consider that the temptation scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* also rely on a displacement, if not reversal, of literary gender models (though whereas *Troilus* enhances its hero's passivity so elaborately as to confuse his role with that of a bride, the point in *Sir Gawain* is rather the attempt on the Lady's part to convert Gawain from 'passively obedient' *seruaunt* into 'active . . . master').⁴¹ In comparison with these other forays into such reversal, however, the range and sometimes the audacity of the evidence we have discovered in Chaucer suggest that the device was of peculiar interest to him.

Taken in isolation, the *Troilus* example could be explained as the fruit of an impulse to treat certain longstanding conventions of love paramours facetiously simply because they *were* longstanding. However, in my opinion Chaucer's critique of stereotypes is not confinable within such a perspective: as we have seen (even without taking account of every candidate for inclusion, such as Absolon and Sir Thopas) the critique extends beyond *Troilus* and it holds a greater significance. Perhaps it is sufficiently conspicuous in his poetry to rule out also the hypothesis that he was flirting comfortably with gender questions while leaving underlying orthodoxies unscathed. Rather, *because* the orthodoxies concerning men's and women's roles were so rigidly defined in medieval literature, Chaucer (who was by no means the benignly avuncular poet sometimes supposed) felt a need to challenge

them. In a discussion of the Wife of Bath, Derek Pearsall draws attention to some lines in Browning, which I too should like to borrow in order to describe the challenge:

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.

The honest thief, the tender murderer . . .

Bishop Blougram's Apology, 395-96⁴²

The demarcation of behaviour according to gender is potentially a 'dangerous edge', for the prospect of a 'mannysh' woman (as Donegild is fleetingly described in *The Man of Law's Tale*, II 782) or of the opposite has a power to disturb quite profoundly. Shakespeare seems to have realized this – whether in tragic mode (Lady Macbeth's 'unsex me here' speech) or comic (those heroines masquerading as young men, whose presence in the plays is so glibly accounted for by the traditional explanation that the Elizabethan theatre used boy actors for women).

Chaucer wanted to venture at the dangerous edge. He has us teetering on it when he arranges the bedroom drama in Book III: Troilus's doubt whether Criseyde is behaving decorously on the one hand, and Criseyde's anxiety that he is not conducting a 'mannes game' on the other. This is a crossfire meant to excite nervous amusement. Indeed, insofar as Troilus has lurched momentarily and involuntarily into the role of a bride, the situation is even more comically outrageous than usually supposed. Yet within the comedy, it is the inflexibility and inadequacy of the stereotyping – its irrelevance, really, to the emotional reaches of the episode, the artificiality of its segregation of human impulses – that are ultimately mocked. And these are the kinds of shortcomings, I believe, disclosed by other examples of reversal we have looked at.

Chaucer's campaign in this respect was intermittent. He moved less contentiously within established categories for the most part. It might be objected that this discussion has put the exceptions before the rule, that critical energy would be better spent investigating the prevailing forms of femininity and masculinity in his poetry.⁴³ My answer would be that because his reversals show up the points of strain where he found those forms problematic, they are more than negligible 'exceptions': indeed, they display an interesting degree of impatience with prevailing convention. Chaucer had little time for a partisan philosophy of gender, and I suppose that Chauntecleer's famous mistranslation of 'Mulier est hominis confusio' as 'Womman is mannes joye and al his blis' (*Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII 3164-66),

despite the layers of irony that are discernible within it, stands as a kind of monument both to a distaste for casual stereotyping and to the policy of reversal through which the poet saw that it might be opposed.

NOTES

¹ Barry Windeatt, "'Love that oughte ben secree" in Chaucer's *Troilus*', *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979-80), 116-31, at 128.

² R. E. Kaske, 'The Aube in Chaucer's *Troilus*', in *Chaucer Criticism*, Vol.II, *Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems*, ed. R. J. Schoeck and J. Taylor (Notre Dame, 1961), pp. 167-79; Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York and London, 1991), pp. 165-70; and Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley and L.A., 1992), pp. 141-87. David Aers, by contrast, focuses Troilus's situation less in terms of male-female reversal than in terms of adult-infant reversal, whereby he becomes an infantilized male unable to transcend feelings of dependency on the female mother-figure and 'healer': see 'Masculine Identity in the Courtly Community', in his *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* (London, 1988), pp. 117-52, at 135-47.

³ June H. Martin, *Love's Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calisto and the Parody of the Courtly Lover* (London, 1972), pp. 53-54; and for Gerson and Bonaventure, see D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 217 and n. 62.

⁴ For representative examples, see Arlyn Diamond, 'Troilus and Criseyde; The Politics of Love', in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse, 1986), pp. 93-103; David Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980), pp. 117-42; and Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), Ch. 1.

⁵ All quotations of Chaucer's works are taken from Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, 1987). The expression *don unmanhod* is glossed 'behave in an unmanly way' in *Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. B. A. Windeatt (London, 1984), but Chaucer may be thinking of suicide as a negation of human nature itself (*MED*, *manhed*(e n. 1.(a), rather than of 'manliness' or 'courageous behavior' (*ibid.* 2(a) and (b)).

⁶ Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib* (Columbus, Ohio, 1944), pp. 25-26.

⁷ A different reading is attempted by Carolyn Dinshaw, who thinks the lines betray 'ideology reconciling itself to contradiction' as the Man of Law 'unironically' rehearses patriarchal dogma, sensing only dimly that 'something is wrong' with it; 'The Law of Man and its "Abhomynacions"', *Exemplaria* 1 (1989), 117-48, at 136.

⁸ See Susan Schibanoff, 'The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 10 (1988), 71-108, at 105-06. A reading offered by Schibanoff is that the Manciple's disclaimer is 'the deliberate, even if contradictory, cover-up of a narrator who suddenly realizes that his antifeminism is showing too much.' For an intricate attempt to show that the 'inconsistency . . . is merely apparent', because 'these examples . . . reveal the untruth of men to the extent that they are an infelicitous, because imposed, representation of women', see Michele Robinson, 'Figuring Out Women: Chaucer's Reading of the Antifeminist

Tradition', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University (1988), pp. 191-92.

⁹ E. T. Donaldson, 'The Ending of Chaucer's *Troilus*', in his *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), pp. 84-101, at 94.

¹⁰ *The Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton, 1971), p. 51; 'Dames cest exemple aprenés, / Qui vers vos amis mesprenés', *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris, 1974), 1507-08. All further quotations from *RR* in the present article, in translation and in Old French respectively, are taken from these volumes. Chaucer's debt to the Guillaume passage is noted by F. N. M. Diekstra, who considers that Chaucer instinctively resorts to 'frivolous moralisation' as a way of distancing himself from the period's obsession with the 'monolithic moral'; *Chaucer's Quizzical Mode of Exemplification* (Nijmegen, 1974), pp. 7 and 17.

¹¹ The Manciple's reflections derive mainly from a passage beginning at 13,875 in La Vieille's speech in *RR*. Stating that *women* are born free, she immediately qualifies this by claiming that Nature made women for all men, *and* men for all women. Next she illustrates *women's* instinct for sexual freedom with the *exemplum* of the caged bird yearning for freedom, but then broadens the point to include men's desire for freedom when constrained in orders. Finally (taking in *exempla* of cat and mouse, colt and mare) she concludes that males want all females, while all females want all males; 'it is thus with every man and every woman as far as natural appetite goes', 'Aussi est il . . . / De tout homme et de toute fame / Quant a naturel apetit' (Dahlberg, p. 241; Poirion, 14087-89). Chaucer saw that the argument was evenly applied to both sexes, and the Manciple's conspicuous back-tracking registers this. Modern readers sometimes fail to register it: Ruth Ames implies that La Vieille's argument is one-sided ('monogamy is against the nature of the female') in 'The Feminist Connections of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', Wasserman and Blanch, *Chaucer in the Eighties*, pp. 57-74, at 61.

¹² See *Ars Amatoria*, II 327-28, in *Ovid: The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, ed. and trans. J. H. Mozley, second edn rev. by G. P. Goold, (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1979), pp. 88-89; and *RR*, Poirion, 9883-84 and Dahlberg, p. 176. Editions of the *WoBPr* have not noted this particular debt.

¹³ 'Scimus enim mulieris animum semper virum appetere, sicut appetit materia semper formam. O utinam materia transiens semel in formam posset dici suo contenta formato! Set sicut de forma ad formam procedere materie notum est, sic mulieris concupiscentia dissoluta procedere de viro ad virum . . .', Guido de Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel E. Griffin (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), Liber II, p. 17. For the background, see W. R. Moses, 'An Appetite for Form', *MLN* 49 (1934), 226-29; and the section 'Physiology and Etymology' in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford, 1992), pp. 38-45.

¹⁴ John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven and London, 1979), p. 104. The reversal has sometimes been considered a witty act of 'atonement' by the narrator for the antifeminism ascribed to him by the God of Love; e.g. Steven F. Kruger, 'Passion and Order in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 23 (1988-89), 219-35, at 233 and n. 21.

¹⁵ The *locus classicus* for the well as sexual location is *Ars Amatoria*, III 90-94. For medieval examples see *Le Blasme des Fames* lines 89-90 (and note, pp. 140-41) in *Three Medieval Views of Women*, trans. and ed. Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain (New Haven, 1989). One adaptation familiar to Chaucer was in the *Teseida*, where Venus's fire is seven times quenched in the well of passion (*nel fonte amoroso*) at the consummation of Emilia and Palemone's love (XII 77).

¹⁶ Both W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Bury St Edmunds, 1988), pp. 26-27, and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London, 1991), pp. 63-65, 78-81, speculate on the thematic implications of the poem's Theban introduction without making clear this most central point. The anticipatory significance of the 'love/awe' relation is, I suggest, alluded to when the narrator speaks of 'The slye wey of that I gan to write / Of queene Anelida and fals Arcite' (lines 48-9): but see Patterson, pp. 80-81, for a more convoluted explanation of these lines.

¹⁷ What I am describing as partisan denigration, Alfred David (who remarks that 'Arcite is a thoroughgoing cad') attributes to a 'distancing humor' arising from Chaucer's inability to 'play it straight' in this context; 'Recycling *Anelida and Arcite*: Chaucer as a Source for Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings*, No. 1, ed. T. J. Heffernan (Norman, Okla., 1984), 105-15, at 114.

¹⁸ Editors cite a proverb, 'Women yearn what men forbid them', from B. J. and H. W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases* (Cambridge, Mass, 1968), W549. However, the Wife soon slides back towards formulating the concept in terms of what women hold back from men ('... to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:/ This knoweth every womman that is wys', 521-24), perhaps by a process of authorial association with a passage in *RR* where the indefinite 'ce que l'en a por noient, / Trop le va l'en plus vitoient; / L'en nel prise pas une escorce' is clearly applied by La Vieille to *men's* scorn for what they can get for nothing, hence the translation '*Men* scorn what they can get for nothing; they don't value it at a single husk' (Poirion, 13,703-05, and Dahlberg, p. 235).

¹⁹ J. Norton-Smith, 'Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*', in *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett*, ed. P. L. Heyworth (Oxford, 1981), pp. 81-99, at 97. Patterson observes: 'As the *Amores* explore in detail, the elaborate system of impediments and frustrations that typifies Ovidian eroticism, and that Chaucer here and elsewhere calls "daunger", is established for no other reason than to forestall the disappointment of full possession'; *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 71.

²⁰ *Ovid*, Vol. I, *Heroides and Amores*, ed. and trans. Grant Showerman, rev. edn G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass., 1977). See also *Amores* III 4.17, 'we ever strive for what is forbid, and ever

covet what is denied' ('nitimur in vetitum semper cupimusque negata').

²¹ 'What is easily given ill fosters an enduring love; let an occasional repulse vary your merry sport . . . We cannot bear sweetness . . . 'tis this which prevents wives from being loved: to them their husbands come whenever they will' ('Quod datur ex facili, longum male nutrit amorem: / Miscenda est laetis rara repulsa iocis . . . / Dulcia non ferimus . . . / Hoc est, uxores quod non patiat amari: / Conveniunt illas, cum voluere, viri'), *Ars Am* III 579-86. Compare the psychological function of Dangiers in *RR* generally, reflected locally also in La Vieille's advice quoted in note 18 above. That the unavailability of a woman – her 'dangerous' behaviour – is a necessary corollary of the 'suffering' cultivated during the courtly male suitor's deferral of consummation, is underlined by Felicity Riddy (who also offers fresh analysis of the aristocratic concept of *freedom*) in 'Engendering Pity in *The Franklin's Tale*', forthcoming in *The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson.

²² L'Ami suggests to l'Amant that if his overtures continue to be haughtily rejected, he should simply make himself scarce: otherwise, the more one begs or serves, the less one is likely to be valued (Poirion, 7525-48; Dahlberg, p. 142). This in turn seems to derive from the advice to the male in *Ars Am* to 'draw back' if his entreaties produce 'swollen pride', for many women 'desire what flees them': 'Quod refugit, multae capiunt', I 715-17.

²³ The word *craft* is Chaucer's 'normal equivalent of Latin *ars*'; Richard Firth Green, 'Chaucer's Victimized Women', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 10 (1988), 3-21, at 11. John Fyler associates Corinna exclusively with Anelida: 'Corinna, Ovid's torment now given her own pen, provides the energy of Anelida's complaint from a female poet's perspective': 'Domesticating the Exotic in *The Squire's Tale*', *ELH* 55 (1988), 1-26, at 18. More complicatedly, Norton-Smith (p. 95) wants to interpret 'Corynne' as 'the inspirational side of the poet's activity.' Edgar F. Shannon argued that Chaucer simply meant he was following the *Amores*, since *Corinna* was a substitute title for that collection during the Middle Ages; *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 17-28. For further discussion, see Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 63. How much of Ovid's love poetry Chaucer knew, it is difficult to judge: surely the *Ars Am* (whether in Latin or in one of its medieval French translations), from which editors suggest he imitated Pandarus's advice to Troilus about letter-writing, and which I think may have supplied the cue for Criseyde's claim that she would not be in bed with Troilus if not 'er now . . . yolde' (*TC* III 1210-11; compare *iam victa* in *Ars Am* I 277-78, 'Conveniat maribus, nequam nos ante rogemus, / Femina iam partes victa rogantis agat'; 'Did it suit us males not to ask any woman first, the woman, *already won*, would play the asker', Mozley edn, pp. 32-33). The *Amores* were less widely disseminated, though it is interesting that Gower has a short lyric purporting to be a 'song' which 'Ovide in his bokes made' in *Confessio Amantis* IV 1210-17. Bruce Harbert finds no cast-iron evidence that Chaucer knew either *Ars Am* or the *Amores*; 'Chaucer and the Latin Classics', in

Geoffrey Chaucer: Writers and Their Backgrounds, ed. D. S. Brewer (London, 1974), pp. 137-53, at 145.

²⁴ Green, 'Chaucer's Victimized Women', pp. 11-12.

²⁵ Dahlberg, p. 173: 'Et s'aucuns li envoie lettre, / Il ne se doit pas entremetre / Du lire ne du reverchier / Ne de lor secrés encerchier', Poirion, 9703-06. The cue is in Ovid, probably *Ars Am II* 543 'does she write [to a rival]? touch not her tablets', 'scribet, ne tange tabellas': also II 595-96 'nor lie in wait for [a rival's] letters written in a secret hand', 'nec vos / Excipite arcana verba notata manu'. It seems to me that editors have not adequately charted the density of this sort of allusion in *Anelida*.

²⁶ James I. Wimsatt, 'Guillaume de Machaut and Chaucer's Love Lyrics', *MÆ* 47 (1978), 66-87, at 69-70: and see *Cligés*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Paris, 1965), 986-1003. The topos is ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, though arising most often as a point of etiquette concerning which partner is to speak of love *first* (which is not exactly *Anelida's* situation).

²⁷ For *swete fo*, *MED* (*fo*, n. 5.(a)) gives 'unkind mistress', citing instances in Chaucer but not mentioning the *Anelida* usage. The *Riverside* note to *Anelida* 272 compares 'tresdoulce ennemye' in Oton de Grandson. It would seem to be a case of an expression whose conventional gender-marking would have been rather difficult to obliterate in the process of transplant to a fresh context.

²⁸ Dahlberg, pp. 176-77; 'Ne si ferme cuer n'avra. . . . Que ja puisse estre hons asseür / De li tenir . . . / Ne plus que s'il tenoit en Sainne / Une anguille par mi la queue', Poirion, 9904-08. That Chaucer has this part of *RR* in view is clear from the further appropriation of 9913-14 in *Anelida* 315-16. The female stereotype of eel-like 'slipperiness' reappears in Jacques de Vitry; see Blamires, Pratt, and Marx, *Woman Defamed*, p. 146.

²⁹ Utey, *Crooked Rib*, p. 51 and n. 15. For typical occurrences, see I 283, III 1302 and 1740, IV 1462, and V 473. The word is elusive, as may be seen from the fact that in the line 'Ye shal nat blende hym for youre wommanhede' (IV 1462), the phrase *for youre wommanhede* is glossed 'with sex appeal' by Ian Bishop, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: A Critical Study* (Bristol, 1981), p. 84, and 'even granted your woman's wiles' in R. A. Shoaf's edition, (East Lansing, 1989), p. 232. *Wommanliche* is also much used in an analogously impressionistic way.

³⁰ 'But in hymself with manhod gan restreyn / Ech racle dede and ech unbridled cheere', III 428-29; 'he no word to it seyde . . . / With mannes herte he gan his sorwes drye', IV 152-54; 'He gan his wo ful manly for to hide', V 30. Windeatt observes how Chaucer 'links manhood with an intensity of feeling more admired because restrained and regulated,' "'Love that oughte ben secree"' p. 128. It may be that this emphasis in *Troilus* (though it accords with a respect for *mesure* in courtly tradition) is symptomatic of the poet's distrust of conventionally aggressive definitions of 'manhod'; see Alcuin Blamires, 'Chaucer's Revaluation of Chivalric Honor', *Mediaevalia* 5 (1979), 245-69; and Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 166-68.

³¹ *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, p.72. Compare the feudal usage in the *Knight's Tale*, I 1827, where Palamon and Arcite 'hym [Theseus] of lordshipe and of mercy preyde'. Jill Mann notes how 'the embarrassment of the word-order in the relative clause ["that herde his lady preyde / Of lordshipe hym"] demonstrates the unease with which Troilus entertains the idea that he might be Criseyde's "lord" rather than she his "lady":' 'Troilus' Swoon', *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979-80), 319-35, at 322.

³² This reading assumes that 'ye . . . youreselven' is addressed to Criseyde alone, rather than to her and Pandarus together: it is difficult to be certain, either from the context or from Chaucer's usage elsewhere. What is partly 'amys' in Criseyde's case, of course, is that her figurative role as Troilus's 'leche' has suddenly become uncomfortably literal; see Martin, *Love's Fools*, pp. 31 and 53. The complex moral and emotional causes of Troilus's swoon are discussed by Barry Windeatt, 'Gesture in Chaucer', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 9 (1978), 143-61, at 155-56, by Jill Mann (see n. 31 above), and by Elizabeth Liggins, 'The Lovers' Swoons in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Parergon* 3 (1985), 93-106.

³³ See Windeatt, "'Love that oughte ben secree",' pp. 127-28 for further discussion. The *Filostrato* is quoted from the text given in Windeatt's edition of *Troilus*: this reproduces Vincenzo Pernicone's definitive edition (Bari, 1937), which is also the basis for V. Branca's version in *Tutte le Opere*, Vol. II (Milan, 1964).

³⁴ *Chaucer's Boccaccio*, trans. N. R. Havely (Bury St Edmunds, 1980), pp. 49-50. Note that the translation in Nathaniel E. Griffin and Arthur B. Myrick, *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio* (Philadelphia, 1929) is based on an early unsatisfactory edition of the poem by Moutier (Florence, 1827-34), which gives *spoglio mio* for *Fil* 31/7 *spogliomi io*. Griffin and Myrick's rendering 'Mirror mine' is repeated in R. K. Gordon, *The Story of Troilus* (London, 1934; repr. Toronto, 1978). Havely is also to be preferred here for his expression 'newly-wed brides', more grammatically precise than Gordon's 'the newly married' or Griffin and Myrick's 'the newly wed'.

³⁵ *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles* (c.1461), in *Conteurs français du XVI^e siècle*, ed. Pierre Jourda (Paris, 1956), Nouvelle 86, p. 307; my translation. See also Madeleine Jeay, 'Sur quelques coutumes sexuelles du Moyen âge', in *L'Erotisme au Moyen âge*, ed. Bruno Roy (Montreal, 1977), 123-41, at 134.

³⁶ However, the groom (*WoBT* III 1084), or the bride and groom together (*LGW* 2766), or a lady on her own (*TC* I 914, III 682), or a couple (*TC* III 1678-9) can all be described by Chaucer as 'brought to bed', so the expression is fairly neutral in itself (see *MED bringen*, 3).

³⁷ G. C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (1941; repr. New York, 1960), pp. 172-73; and Robert Delort, *Life in the Middle Ages*, trans. Robert Allen (London, 1974), p. 109. Judith M. Bennett observes that 'the act of marriage . . . is very poorly described in historical records'; *Women in the Medieval English Countryside* (New York and Oxford, 1987), p. 98. J.-B.

Molin and P. Mutembe confine themselves to the church's role in *Le Rituel du mariage en France du xii^e au xvi^e siècle* (Paris, 1974). Other studies consulted include Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, second edn (London, 1891), and articles on marriage ritual in *Ritual, Religion, and the Sacred*, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Raum, *Selections from the Annales Economiques, Sociétés, Civilisations*, no. 7 (Baltimore, 1982). Accounts of weddings in medieval literature offer few details of the 'bedding' itself. In *Jehan et Blonde* (written c. 1270-80), supper and caroles are followed by the blessing of the bed, then Jehan's sisters preside over the bedding of Blonde before Jehan enters the chamber to undress himself; *Œuvres poétiques de Philippe de Remi, Sire de Beaumanoir*, ed. H. Suchier, 2 vols (Paris, 1884-85), II, 4785f. Variations of the ritual occur, e.g. in the *Teseida* (XII 75, Havely, p. 151) 'Emilia went with Palemone into a splendid chamber' (without mention of a formal separate undressing of the bride); and in Marie de France's *Le Fresne* 409-12, 'When the chamber was empty, the mother led her daughter in. She wished to prepare her for bed, and told her to get undressed'; *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (New York, 1978), p. 84.

³⁸ *Spenser's Minor Poems*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1910). Spenser is partly under the stimulus of classical tradition, of course: see Thomas M. Greene, 'Spenser and the Epithalamic Convention', *Comparative Literature* 9 (1957), 215-28; also *Catullus, The Poems*, ed. Kenneth Quinn (London, 1970), poem LXI, esp. 179f bidding the *bonae feminae* prepare the bride for her wedding night; and Paolo Fedeli, *Catullus' Carmen 61* (Amsterdam, 1983), pp. 115-18.

³⁹ It will be evident that I am not trying to contribute to the hypothesis put forward by John Maguire, 'The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde', *Chaucer Review* 8 (1973-4), 262-78, and seconded by Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Some Observations on the Concept of Clandestine Marriage in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980-81), 101-26. Nevertheless, the fact (emphasized by Wentersdorf, p. 116) that Chaucer imports a reference to Hymen into the Boccaccian narrative at III 1258 confirms his awareness of the nuptial hint in the phrase *le nuove sposse*.

⁴⁰ L. T. Topsfield, *Chretien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 81. Joan Ferrante has some interesting suggestions about reversals or exchanges of sexual roles, ranging from the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius to *Floire et Blancheflor*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, *Erec et Enide*, a lyric by Dino Frescobaldi, and Dante's *Comedia*; *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1975), pp. 45, 78-80, 124-25, 132, 141-44.

⁴¹ W. R. J. Barron, *'Trawthe' and Treason: The Sin of Gawain Reconsidered* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 46-47.

⁴² Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), pp. 77-78. See also the section 'An Audacious Art', in Alcuin Blamires, *The Canterbury Tales: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (London, 1987), pp. 69-75.

⁴³ Many of the relevant details await thorough research. For instance when Criseyde reflects on

the vicissitudes of love, 'Therto we wrecched wommen nothing konne, / Whan us is wo, but wepe and sitte and thinke' (II 782-83), Chaucer is developing Criseida's fear of love's torments (*Fil* 2.75) into a more decisive generalisation about women, for which the nearest parallel is in the 'Proemio' to the *Decameron*. There it is stated that women have to suffer distress in melancholy confinement, being unable to find relief (like men) in public pursuits (*Decameron*, ed. Cesare Segre [Milan, 1966] p. 26; and *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam [Harmondsworth, 1972] pp. 46-47). More needs to be known about the prevalence of such a concept in medieval culture. Then, too, there is the supposition twice advanced in *Troilus* that women excel in quick decision-making (IV 936, 1262-63). This was proverbial after Chaucer according to the note to 934-38 in the Riverside edition, but how widespread was it before; and how complimentary was it, given (a) traditional fabliau allegations (*MercT* IV 2271) about devious female quick-wittedness in a tight spot, and (b) traditional antipathies between 'good conseil' and 'hastifnesse' (*Mel* VII 1120-21) and between *prudencia* and *astutia* (J. D. Burnley, 'Criseyde's Heart and the Weakness of Women: An Essay in Lexical Interpretation', *Studia Neophilologica* 54 (1982), 25-38, at 34-36)?

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