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Reading Narratives of Rape: The Story of Lucretia in Chaucer, Gower and Christine de Pizan

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Introduction

The story of the rape of Lucretia appears in three medieval story-collections: Chaucer's poem *The Legend of Good Women*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Christine de Pizan's story collection *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*. In the prologue to the *Legend*, Chaucer informs his readers, in a narrative persona which seems closer than usual to the authorial voice, that he is required to enact a penance for his treatment of Criseyde and of love in his earlier poem *Troilus and Criseyde*. He must write about women who were faithful in love. The 'Legend of Lucrece' is the fifth narrative in this unfinished collection, which features Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, and Medea, among others. As this list might suggest, the work has been variously characterized as a satire against women and a satire of bad men; the women have been seen as rebels against authority, and as generally helpless and pathetic. What remains clear is the difficulties that critics have had, and continue to find, in their attempts to locate its tone securely.[1]

The structuring device of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is that of the confession by the Lover to Genius, who functions both as priest and as devotee of Venus. The seventh book, which contains the story of the rape of Lucretia, has been the subject of much critical debate. Editors have variously suggested that in a deliberate departure from the general plan, the Confessor who says he has little or no understanding except of love is allowed to make a digression which embraces the whole field of human knowledge.[2] Conversely, Book VII has been seen as one of the essential stages in the poem's plot.[3] The subject of the *Confessio* is love, which 'reveals man's moral nature under its greatest stress',[4] while Book VII appears to focus on the proper conduct of a ruler. At the end of Book VII, however, Genius supplies a discussion 'of love which is unavised' (VII.5433), including excessive love.

Like Chaucer's, Christine de Pizan's collection of tales about women is introduced by a dramatic prologue involving the writer of the collection, both as narrator and in *propria persona*, in which the reader is shown the source of her inspiration. The text is depicted as arising out of Christine's having chanced to read an antifeminist text, an experience which prompts reactions of depression and ultimately of disbelief. De Pizan also dramatizes these reactions: instead of the god of love, three women, Reason, Rectitude and Justice, visit her, and they help her to develop her metaphor of the City of Ladies.[5] The collection rewrites stories from the Bible, from classical writers such as Livy, and from more recent history in order to vindicate the women in these texts. De Pizan positions it explicitly as a defence of women, and implicitly as an exercise in morale-building among women. This dual perspective on its intended audience needs to be borne in mind in any consideration of its contents, and of its style, as does its author's self-representation.

This paper focuses on reader-response to the male and female sexual roles posited by romance and romantic texts, and on notions of a female masochism that is erotic, rather than psychological. It explores the ways in which literature, and the responses it provokes which fuel eroticism, may have an impact when the reader arrives at a fictional narrative of rape, especially when the narrative is troped in the way that Gower, and in a slightly different and more knowing way, Chaucer, trope their narratives of the rape of Lucretia. The authors of these narratives self-consciously open up an interpretive space by choosing to tell a classical story that was almost certainly mythical. The texts are additionally removed from their modern readers by the remoteness of their dates of composition. I shall address the possibility that these medieval fictions of rape may offer their readers the opportunity to explore relationships between sexual pleasure and the literary conventions of male and female desire. These narratives may be seen to play on rituals of courtship and consummation posited in romance texts, but to offer a version of these in which the male role remains fixed. At the same time these texts appear to offer a space in which the parameters of homosocial relationships and the slippage between desire and identification with an abject sexuality may be explored.

Public Reading/Private Response

In his essay 'Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe' Daniel Boyarin suggests that the thirteenth century saw the transition of reading in European culture from an oral, public activity to a private one, and argues that this transition

initiated an erotic connection between the book, its author, its protagonist and the reader. Boyarin suggests that from the newly emerged practice of private reading for pleasure came the distancing of reading from public, ritualistic and controlled space to what he terms the 'private, ludic eroticized space' of the bedroom.[6] His analysis thus offers a historical context for an approach to medieval texts founded on the notion that they may be read for pleasure. Boyarin discusses the famous narrative of Paolo and Francesca in Dante's *Inferno* as a text which both explicitly thematizes a scene of reading for private pleasure, and problematizes that practice. Boyarin thus develops Paul Saenger's study, which suggests that the transition to silent reading offered the medieval reader a sense of control over his [sic] material and provided a refuge from the kinds of group sanctions which commonly operated.[7] In particular, Saenger points to 'a revival of erotic art and the production of salacious writing' which he says was stimulated by private reading.[8]

In contrast to these views, the history of public and private reading in the late medieval period has been thoroughly reinvestigated by Joyce Coleman, who suggests that her evidence lays to rest the 'favorite myth' about 'private chambers evolving as the natural setting for private reading' and asserts that the increasing tendency of the aristocracy to favour the privacy of their own chambers 'did not affect the publicness of the reading undertaken there'.[9] Coleman argues persuasively for a number of formats for reading in this period, concluding that silent private reading was in general restricted to the kind of professional reading an author would undertake in order to produce a new text. Her analysis takes careful account of the 'special enhancement of experience', of the 'heightened intensity of communicative interaction' of the shared reading experience, and of the 'deep play involved in group hearing, the emotionality it accessed, and the identifications it fostered'.[10] I should like to suggest that the modern reader of a medieval text may also experience the eroticized pleasure of private reading even within the context of prescribed study, in the initial, private reading that must take place prior to discussion in a public and evaluative setting in which the reader's visceral responses to the text may be suppressed. This prompts the further question of whether such responses should be acknowledged and explored in a context delimited by a definition of scholarship.[11] Two kinds of pleasure are available to the reader: first, the pleasure of the consumption and interpretation of text, the erotic association of which is now well documented, and which was well understood in the medieval period.[12] There is, secondly, the particular pleasure which may be afforded by the subject matter which is simultaneously sexual and violent.[13]

Kathryn Gravdal's important book *Ravishing Maidens* set the agenda for

reading representations of rape in medieval literary texts, in particular in its focus on the ways in which rape is 'troped' within the different genres she selects for study.[14] The importance of troping in connection with the reception of rape in literary texts is emphasized by her definition of the term:

> By 'trope' I mean a literary device that presents an event in such a way that it heightens figurative elements and manipulates the reader's ordinary response by suspending or interrupting that response in order to displace the reader's focus onto other formal or thematic elements. The mimesis of rape is made tolerable when the poet tropes it as moral, comic, heroic, spiritual, or erotic.[15]

This definition underlines Gravdal's anxiety over the issue of responses that might be aroused by rape narratives. She notes of the female hagiographer Hrotsvitha that 'rather than use rape scenes to titillate her audience, she shapes them such that they disassociate female sexuality from female lust',[16] and considers that the *pastourelle* authors 'allow the audience to overcome their own inner censors or scruples and to contemplate rape with pleasure', through their use of formalized aesthetic devices such as metre or music, or 'through the use of character and narrative as intellectual defenses'. [17]

These anxieties about the possible pleasure attendant on the act of writing or of reading texts of rape are also reflected in Stephanie Jed's examination of a Renaissance version of the story of the rape of Lucretia. Jed notes that: 'To retell the story of the rape of Lucretia in the 1980s is to enter into some sort of binding relationship with all of those readers and writers who somehow found the narrative of this rape edifying, *pleasurable or even titillating*' (my italics).[18] Gravdal, Jed and others may thus be seen to set a moral agenda according to which the only proper modern reaction to the desire to retell or to re-read the story of Lucretia's rape is shame. Jed seeks a way of interacting with the text which would 'short-circuit the economy of pleasure afforded by reproducing the story of this rape'.[19] Her suggestion is 'to rehabilitate, as women readers, the humanists' practice of describing their contact with textual materials.'[20] Jed's work is thus focused on reader-response, but her discussion is directed towards the process of interacting with the physical manuscript. She does not produce a reading of the story of the rape, and she thus implies that the 'economy of pleasure' is universal. A response, to Gravdal in particular, has been put forward by Evelyn Birge Vitz, who argues for reading

medieval rape narratives within a context of the attraction of rape fantasies for both medieval and modern women.[21] What is lacking on both sides of this discussion, however, is an interrogation of the sources of the pleasure that the writing and reading of fictional rape narratives has been seen to produce.

The process of selection of a narrative of rape begins with the author. The reader, who is presented in each of these three medieval texts with a collection of tales, and who may choose to overlook this particular story, then repeats this process. The decision to read this well-known story may be framed as an act of consent by the reader, who thereby supplies the lack of consent marked in the text itself. The narrative must, however, be made attractive to a readership, while not compromising the author (writer or narrative persona), whose reputation is explicitly at stake in at least two of these collections. The story of the rape of Lucretia offers its own justification, in that the origin of republicanism in Rome depends on this act of violence towards a woman.[22]

Chaucer pays particular attention to the question of audience: the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women* has been instructed to offer a penance for his previous literary treatment of women; a promise is thus implied that with the emphasis placed entirely on the virtue of the heroine, Lucretia's possible enjoyment of the rape will not be called into question. We may note here John Burrow's series of fascinating observations discussing Chaucer's strong tendency to fictionalize the process of exemplification, bringing into question the teller of the exemplum and his motives, as well as those of his audience, to subversive effect. Burrow's remark, 'if listeners use stories for their own private purposes, so, of course, do the story-tellers', invites the thought that so, of course, do writers; particularly in view of the Chaumpaigne release document of 1380.[23] Chaucer's carefully crafted artless opening reveals that there is a sense in which for him, as indeed for Christine de Pizan, this rape narrative, with its elements of sexual violence, death and legal reform, offers an exemplum for reform, both political and personal:

> Now mot I seyn the exilynge of kynges
> Of Rome, for here horible doinges,
> And of the laste kyng Tarquinius,
> As seyth Ovyde and Titus Lyvius.
> But for that cause telle I nat this storye,
> But for to preyse and drawe to memorye
> The verray wif, the verray trewe Lucresse (*LGW* 1680-1686)

The possibility of a private response to the narrative that will remain unacknowledged in the thematic economy of the text is thus suggested. Although I am interested in the ways in which these three texts may be seen to offer signs of complicity with or resistance to the reader who experiences these pleasures, the main focus here will be on the possible reading of these texts as sites in which male and female sexuality may be explored within the context of narrative frameworks more usually found in romance texts. These frameworks may be crucial in the formation, and documentation of possible erotic responses as they are encoded in literary texts. Clearly, two of these texts are male-authored and patriarchally located; for a woman reader, in particular, to experience an erotic response to the story of a rape is almost certainly intensely private; it may be seen to involve reading against her gendered subjectivity as it reveals itself in Christine de Pizan's text, as well as in feminist readings of narratives such as those of Lucretia and Philomela.[24] It seems to me, however, that all three authors of these texts acknowledge the possibility of an erotic response to these rape narratives. We need to consider, therefore, how eroticism is inscribed within or erased from these texts. As well, we need to examine the kinds of conditioning and experience that might allow readers to experience them as erotic.

Romance paradigms of sexuality

De Pizan presents the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* as a response to writings critical of women, and selects Lucretia's story specifically to refute those who allege that women want to be raped. De Pizan thus positions her narrative in opposition to the idea of female pleasure in enforced sex. Much of the literature of the medieval and later periods is predicated on the notion that sexual consummation is dependant on male desire overcoming female resistance. As Kathryn Gravdal formulates it, 'in life as in literature, male force and female submission have for centuries been coded and internalized as erotically appealing.'[25] Jill Mann suggests that the conventional pattern of courtship is 'active male, passive female. Desire is masculine, woman is its object'. She cites various examples of how this pattern was 'familiar . . . in medieval literature as doubtless also in life' and suggests that 'The ritually codified sexual rôles observable in the *Pamphilus* – male aggression, female reluctance – . . . become in themselves a source of sexual pleasure. Female reluctance feeds and heightens male desire.'[26] One may interpret the repeated representation of woman resisting rampant male desire, which results in a heightening of that desire, as contributing to a project whose aim is to underline male potency in the face of the well-documented fear of an

insatiable female sexuality. The denial of this contingency is made absolute in the representation of a sexual act which takes place without even the consent of the woman.

Georges Duby characterizes courtly love as a game which 'exalted the value which, at that period, was placed at the pinnacle of male values, and thus of all values - sexual aggression. In order to heighten the man's pleasure, he demanded that the woman suppress her desire'.[27] The close relationship between rape and courtly romance has not gone unnoticed by scholars who have remarked on 'the violence that subtends courtly discourse',[28] and noted that the 'archetypes of male attacker and female victim are particularly common to the romance form'.[29] Equally it is clear that representations of rape in Middle English texts closely shadow courtly love narratives. In the Lucretia narratives of Gower and Chaucer, the process of attraction is depicted in wholly conventional romance terms. Gower's long description is focalized entirely through Arrons (Gower's name for the rapist). It suggests that he is simply a victim of love's arrows:[30]

> The kinges Sone, which was nyh,
> And of this lady herde and syh
> The thinges as thei ben befalle,
> The resoun of hise wittes alle
> Hath lost; for love upon his part
> Cam thanne, and of his fyri dart
> With such a wounde him hath thurghsmite,
> That he mot nedes fiele and wite
> Of thilke blinde maladie,
> To which no cure of Surgerie
> Can helpe. . . . (*CA* 4847-57)

This description of Arrons's thoughts and feelings continues for another thirty lines in a manner indistinguishable from a narrative of courtly love.

As Chaucer depicts the moment of attraction it seems that it is not only Tarquin, but also the narrator who falls in love with Lucretia. This bringing in of the narrative voice further invites the reader's empathy, and the description may be compared to the moment in which Troilus first encounters Criseyde:

> Tarquinius, this proude kynges sone,
> Conceyved hath hire beaute and hyre cheere,

Hire yelwe her, hire shap, and hire manere,
Hire hew, hire wordes, that she hath compleyned
(And by no craft hire beaute nas nat feyned),
And caughte to this lady swich desyr
That in his herte brende as any fyr,
So wodly that his wit was al forgeten. (*LGW* 1745-52)

In part, then, I want to explore what kinds of responses women and men may have to this apparent ideology of sexuality as it is played out along a continuum of narrative structures which may include scenes of rape. Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues that Chaucer's poem is written both for and against a male audience, and that the narrator identifies with masculine interests and privilege.[31] These suggestions appear to foreclose a range of responses which may not be inscribed on the surface of the text, but which may nevertheless not be negated within it. Other interpretations of women's responses to their positioning in the conventional formulation may well be possible; it seems unlikely that such a well-established representation of sexual roles can have expressed the erotic excitement of men alone over the course of centuries of both male and female readerships. I should like to consider the possibility of charting a relationship between the pleasure that many women (and some gay men) derive from male supremacy in the sexual act, and the literary and conventional courtship pattern Mann describes. We may thus be able to replace the interpretation in which desire is only masculine, with one in which the sexual desire of the 'passive' partner is represented within textual depictions of courtship and sex. Women readers may situate narratives of rape (and by this I do not mean non-fictionalized accounts of real rapes) on a continuum with all the texts which operate from within an encoding of masculine and feminine sexual roles in which the woman is located in a position of powerlessness and is overwhelmed by masculine supremacy.

Studies of the encoding of female sexual responses in romantic fiction, which women read in enormous quantities, have shown that women are presented as struggling in vain against their attraction to the forceful male. Mary Talbot's study notes that such stories typically contain scenes of aggression in which the hero intimidates the heroine: 'It is his sexual forcefulness, sometimes outright aggression, that precipitates all the erotic passages.'[32] Talbot concludes her study with the statement that 'romances fill a vacuum. They provide something for which feminism has so far had little to offer; namely a celebration of women's heterosexual desire'.[33] It may be argued that the conception of female sexuality defined in popular romantic fiction is not necessarily shared by women reading other kinds of literature. Catherine

Belsey, however, locates the definitions of sexuality constructed by romantic fiction within the wider culture:

> The romance is widely held in contempt in our culture, but it draws its definitions of desire from that culture itself . . . Many of the affirmations of the romances, much of their understanding of the nature of sexuality, are readily available elsewhere, reiterated in discussions of desire, both public and private, or silently taken for granted in our personal "experience".[34]

This is not to suggest that literary conditioning is necessarily determinative in the construction of sexuality and sexual desire, but to note that such formulations may speak to the erotic desires of many women.[35] Hansen and others have argued that these narratives place the reader in the position of voyeur, and exclude the woman reader from the encoding of the situation as productive of sexual excitement. They do not wish to consider that such narratives may function as sites for female fantasy. Feminist views of female sexuality would like to reject formulations of women's desire that depend on conventional sexual roles, but the ways in which women have been positioned in texts representing male and female sexualities mean that women are quite likely to eroticize the powerless subject position.

Reading Lucretia as the passive feminine

Leo Bersani was the first to write about a sexuality in which it is the erotics of submission which is privileged. In his article 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', he argues that phallocentrism is not primarily the denial of power to women but rather 'the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women'.[36] Jonathan Dollimore glosses this as referring not to gentleness, non-aggressiveness, or even passivity, but rather to the positive potential for a sexual pleasure that crosses a threshold and shatters psychic organization.[37] We may be able to trace a source of pleasure for the woman reader of a narrative of rape as located precisely in the totality of the woman's powerlessness represented in it if we are open to the idea that sexual desire may involve a yearning to annihilate the self in ecstacy characterized by Bersani and Dollimore as the desire for a radical disintegration of the ego. Responding to Bersani's discussions, Lynda Hart persuasively suggests that 'the "passive" role is more about an attempt to "lose" (self)-consciousness, rather than the "shattering of the self" (by

which Bersani clearly means the ego).'[38] Hart goes on to consider this in relation to women's sexual responsiveness:

> Paradoxically, people who are self-conscious are not really focusing on themselves but rather, on the mirrors of the others who are watching them. They make bad actors in the realistic theater (and bad sexual partners) [. . .] Thus self-consciousness is precisely what one has to lose in order to focus on oneself. It is a "truism" that women are more inclined to this form of self-consciousness than men, having been socialized not only to attend to the needs and desires of others, but also to watch themselves being watched and conform their images to the ways they imagine themselves being seen.[39]

Bersani has suggested that 'the appeal of that dying – the desire to be shattered out of coherence – is perhaps what psychoanalysis has sought most urgently to repress.'[40] I should perhaps raise to full consciousness here the term *masochism* which has hovered beneath this discussion. Despite the historical attribution of masochism to women by psychoanalysis, Lynda Hart points out that Bersani's arguments led the way to the term's undergoing 'a theoretical renaissance in which the erotics of submission have been reclaimed as an emancipatory sexuality.'[41] While Bersani's arguments are carefully applied only to men, I want to suggest that women, too, may celebrate this theoretical reclamation. The formulations of Bersani, Dollimore, Hart, and others, provide a less reductive analysis of the ways in which sexual excitement is produced in both men and women. These formulations may therefore be productively applied to considerations of how female and male readers may approach texts in which sexualities are represented. An erotic response to fictional rape narratives may be viewed in this context, and in the context of Hart's suggestion that 'representations created *by* women *for* women who enjoy beng sexually submissive are relatively scarce'.[42]

As we approach the scene of the rape, Gower compares Arrons to a tiger waiting to catch his prey (l. 4944), and to a wolf with a lamb in its mouth (l. 4984). It would seem self-evident that we should feel pity for this lamb caught by the wolf, and yet the simile compels the reader to recognize that wolves by their nature seize lambs, in the same way, presumably, as male desire, by its nature, exercises coercion upon female resistance. As in the romance paradigm, the woman is represented as the focus of male thought and active preparation, and is shown to be powerless to prevent this

natural force. Lucretia's nakedness and physical vulnerability are juxtaposed with the nakedness of Arrons's sword:

> And thanne upon himself he caste
> A mantell, and his swerd al naked
> He tok in honde; and sche unwaked
> Abedde lay,
> [. . .]
> That lich a Lomb whanne it is sesed
> In wolves mouth, so was desesed
> Lucrece, which he naked fond: (*CA* 4964-4985)

Why does the text insist on Lucretia's nakedness? For readers of both sexes the conjunction of his sword and her nakedness may well produce erotic excitement as well as a reminder of the violence inherent in all acts of penetration.

In Chaucer's text, although we are told about Tarquin's feelings, the focus is rather on his view of Lucretia, which we are shown first from the situation of the two men spying on her, then again as we are offered a gloss on his feelings, and a third time as Tarquin compulsively remembers her:

> And by hymself he walketh soberly,
> Th'ymage of hire recordynge alwey newe:
> "Thus lay hire her, and thus fresh was hyre hewe;
> Thus sat, thus spak, thus span; this was hire chere;
> Thus fayr she was, and this was hire manere." (*LGW* 1759-63)

It is noticeable that the only narrative intervention situates the narrator alongside Tarquin, gazing at Lucretia. In between these speeches the narrative insists on Tarquin's covetous attitude to Lucretia: the term seems to confirm the mirroring of the earlier mingling of voyeurism and identification. Chaucer's depiction of the scene of the rape offers the same wolf-lamb figuration, but his text appears to draw attention to these techniques and to the effect they may produce in his audience. The narrative voice constantly interrupts the action to speak to us directly of Lucretia's plight:

> What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago.
> Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone,
> To whom shal she compleyne or make mone?

> What, shal she fyghte with an hardy knyght?
> Wel wot men that a woman hath no myght.
> What, shal she crye, or how shal she asterte
> That hath hire by the throte with swerd at herte?
>
> (*LGW* 1797-1803.)

His careful narrative disruptions suggest that without them we might well read the text as a conventional account of the process of courtship.

De Pizan's text insists on Lucretia's point of view, and seems to note Tarquin's entreaties, threats and drawn sword only because they are necessary to explain Lucretia's actions. The focalization remains unbroken, and the rape is narrated in one short phrase:

> elle souffry sa force (II.44.1, par. 195; she suffered his rape)[43]

Chaucer's narrative retains Lucretia's fear and paralysis as its focus. The statement that at the moment of the rape, 'She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr' (l. 1818), however, holds on to the idea that the text concerns a sexual act and that it is available for multiple interpretations. This narrative refuses to allow the reader to witness the rape, for it announces 'But now to purpos' (l. 1825), and then tells us that Tarquin has already gone. This strategy thus offers a partial refutation of its absolute insistence on the terror Lucretia experiences, for non-representation of the rape in the text forces a concentration on the act itself on the part of the reader who must imaginatively recreate it for themselves.[44] The withdrawal of the writer at this point brings into renewed focus the complexity of the reader-writer-narrative relation in the context of private reading. Finally the text seems to confirm that, as so often, male desire (the desire of a 'hardy knyght') overwhelms female resistance. This almost iconic representation is suggestive about women's affective identification with a narrative of a rape.[45]

Sexuality and Politics

Chaucer's version of the story of Lucretia in *The Legend of Good Women* and Gower's in the *Confessio Amantis* place the focus immediately on the power structures that subsequent events disrupt, rehearsing the inscription of the story of the rape of Lucretia as a founding fiction of republican identity. Jed suggests that in the

absence of an indigenous Roman legend of sexual violence appropriate to the representation of the change from a monarchy to a republican form of government, the early Roman annalists imported the legend from their neighbours in Ardea and Collatia to confer legitimacy on the new laws and institutions.[46] De Pizan's narrator alludes to the wider political context only after the narration of the rape, but in doing so focuses on the legal implications for men and women in respect of their sexual relationships consequent upon it.[47] All three narratives thus hint at the nexus of social and political structures and sexual behaviours, with the versions of Chaucer and Gower referring explicitly to government.

In his argument that sexual pleasure involves the relinquishing, as well as the exercise, of power, Bersani suggests that rather than sexual practice mimicking the structures of society, as is generally thought, it may be, rather, that social and political structures derive from the ways in which the erotically thrilling is enacted: 'The social structures from which it is often said that the eroticizing of mastery and subordination derive are perhaps themselves derivations (and sublimations) of the indissociable nature of sexual pleasure and the exercise or loss of power.'[48] Bersani's model for sexual pleasure, especially that involving loss of power, is primarily that of the gay man who has anal sex. He is thinking too, however, of sex between women and men in which men lie on top of women in order to penetrate (and thus impregnate) them. The positions of the partners in this case are less significant than the important fact that the woman is the recipient of the act. One may see the representation in all three texts of the suppression of sexual violence and the contingent institution of new laws as a way of finally confirming and at the same time cancelling the connection between the exercise or loss of power in the enactment of the erotic and in the structures of government. Sex and politics are represented as commensurable, and the possibilities of violence inherent in each as admitting of suppression by law. I should like to draw a parallel between this assumption and Bersani's characterization of contemporary discourse about sex:

> The immense body of contemporary discourse that argues for a radically revised imagination of the body's capacity for pleasure [. . .] has as its very condition of possibility a certain refusal of sex as we know it, and a frequent hidden agreement about sexuality as being, in its essence, less disturbing, less socially abrasive, less violent, more respectful of "personhood" than it has been in a male-dominated phallocentric culture.[49]

If we reject the 'pastoral project' which seeks to romanticize sex as a wholesome and egalitarian activity, a project in which feminism has been deeply implicated in its warnings against 'politically recalcitrant fantasies',[50] its appeals for the discovery 'of a new feminist eroticism and fantasy',[51] and its announcements that 'the point is to get rid of power roles as much as possible',[52] we may see the new republican laws (the establishment of which is included in each of the three narratives of Lucretia's rape) as attempting to create a society from which tyranny has been banished. In such a society erotic excitement would be initiated and sustained in the absence of the motivation of its deepest fears and drives: the exercise and the contingent loss of power.[53]

Bersani suggests that the most brutal male oppression of women may be understood as part of a domesticating, even sanitizing, project if such oppression is seen as disguising a fearful male response to the seductiveness of an image of sexual powerlessness.[54] Is this the foundation of the representation of Lucretia in these texts? Certainly her chastity is insisted on in the narratives of her rape in the *Confessio* and the *LGW*, both of which present the competition about wifely virtue as part of their narrations of the rape. In *De Mulieribus Claris*, de Pizan's source for the story of the rape, Boccaccio presents this competition, which illustrates Lucretia's extreme chasitity, as the result possibly of boredom ('The siege lasted a long time') and of a heavy drinking session ('perhaps warmed by too much wine, they began to argue about their wives' honor. As usual each one placed his own ahead of the others.').[55] In the *Cité des Dames* the episode does not appear in the redaction of the rape; it is mentioned much later, in the chapter devoted to virtue. Maureen Quilligan suggests that Christine changes the story in an essential way by shortening the narrative so that the rape and suicide are central: 'the drama of the rape is not, consequently, based upon a rivalry among Tarquin, Collatine, and the other Roman men'.[56] The displacement of the episode of the competition in de Pizan's text may lead us to consider its function in the narratives of Chaucer and Gower.

In Chaucer's version, the siege goes on for a long time without much happening, the soldiers think that they are 'half idel'. The co-text of Tarquin's speech includes the terms 'pley', 'jape' and 'lyght of tonge'; the discussion about the wives is presented as a way of soothing their feelings:[57]

> "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." (*LGW* 1702-04)

Two explanations for what follows seem to be on offer here: first, that the men are tense, they are away from their wives and their energies are not being channelled by this extremely undemanding war, and second, that their activities are in any case all motivated by a spirit of fun. The discussion seems to turn into a competition at the point at which Collatin points out that they do not need to believe one another's words, they may substitute deeds. Although he describes his wife simply as one who is esteemed by all who know her, the notion that they are to spy on Lucretia without her knowing is indicated by the secrecy with which they effect their entry into the house.

In Gower's narrative much is made of the masculine social setting in which the discussion takes place, and in particular of Arrons's role as instigator of the formal meal and of the accompanying competitive discourse:

> Arrons, which hadde his souper diht,
> A part of the chivalerie
> With him to soupe in compaignie
> Hath bede: and whan thei comen were
> And seten at the souper there,
> Among here othre wordes glade
> Arrons a gret spekinge made,
> Who hadde tho the beste wif
> Of Rome: and ther began a strif,
> For Arrons seith he hath the beste.
> So jangle thei withoute reste (*CA* 4764-74).

It is clear that the testing of the wives is the reification of what Arrons has set up, and that the competition over the wives' chastity is a way of enacting the male homosocial bonding implicit in the relationships. The episode makes (almost) explicit the way in which the primary relationships in this episode, and by extension, therefore, in the episode of the rape, are those between the men involved. As Quilligan suggests, it is 'the male groups that make sense of the homosocial exchanges in Boccaccio's story'.[58] We may see in this episode, emphasized most strongly in Gower's version, the working out of masculine hierarchies, with the woman's sexuality as the space across which the power relations move.[59]

The inclusion of the competition element of the story, with its foregrounding of the homosocial relations between the characters, positions them explicitly within a system of the exchange of women. As Gayle Rubin has pointed out, from the

standpoint of this system, the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response.[60] It is this version of female sexuality that de Pizan has attempted to write out of her narrative of the rape, but which is inscribed in the versions by Chaucer and Gower, and which must therefore inform the reader's response to those narratives. In Gower's version we first visit Arrons's wife, and the foundation of the competition is made clear by her identification in the text as the woman 'Of which Arrons had made his avant' (l. 4877). She is depicted as enjoying herself (company unspecified), and as failing to mention her husband away at war. Gower's Lucretia, meanwhile, is 'al environed/ With wommen' (ll. 4809-10), with whom she is working on a garment for her husband while fretting about the way in which her husband's courageous behaviour will put him at the forefront in the fighting.

In the *LGW*, we visit only Lucretia. The reader gazes at her state of partial undress while it is quickly pointed out to us that she does not imagine that her privacy may be violated:

> This noble wif sat by hire beddes side
> Dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte (*LGW* 1719-20.)

These two lines of description appear to be unique to Chaucer.[61] The references to Lucretia's bed and her unbound hair, focalized not through Collatin and Tarquin, but seemingly offered as direct observation, and to the innocence of her thoughts mean that the scene presents a seductive image, and therefore one which may include the possibility of female desire.[62] We may note here Ann Barr Snitow's observation that mass market romances for women revitalize daily routines for their readers 'by insisting that a woman combing her hair, a woman reaching up to put a plate on a high shelf (so that her knees show beneath the hem, if only there were a viewer), a woman doing what women do all day, is in a constant state of potential sexuality. You never can tell when you may be seen'.[63] Here we may note again Lynda Hart's observations about women having been socialized to 'watch themselves being watched.'[64] Chaucer's text seems to split at this point: the abjection of femininity is essential to the homosocial interests in the text, but desire slips momentarily into identification with an image of sexual powerlessness.[65] Gravdal's tracing of the evolution of the term *ravissement*, which appeared in the thirteenth century with the sense of carrying off a woman is particularly interesting in this connection. Having gained a religious sense, the action of carrying a soul to heaven, and a secular affective meaning, the state of soul transported by joy, in the fourteenth century the

term came to mean the state of being 'carried away' emotionally, and then to refer to a state of sexual pleasure: *ravir* is to bring someone to a state of sexual ecstasy. For Gravdal, the second meaning does not replace the first, but rather it contains it, so that she suggests that the 'slippage from violent abduction to sexual pleasure . . . reveals the assumption that whatever is attractive begs to be ravished'.[66] Woman readers used to splitting their subjectivity in the reading of male-authored texts, and experienced in the paradigms of romantic novels, seem likely to identify with the beautiful, dishevelled figure unconsciously available to the male gaze, and to read such an identification as erotic.

One version of reading as a woman

In *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, Earl Jeffrey Richards asks 'what happens when a woman writer enters a previously male-dominated literary culture? Does the nature of literature itself change?'[67] Susan Schibanoff has shown that de Pizan was aware of the 'immasculisation' of the woman reader, the process by which, in response to a hostile text, the female reader must change herself: she must read 'not as a woman, but as a man, for male readers, according to the topos, are neither offended nor troubled by literary mysogyny', and has suggested that in the *Querelle de la Rose* debate, Christine was not concerned with how the *Roman de la Rose* ought to be read, but rather with the ways that readers inevitably recreate the texts they read in their own images.[68] By the time she came to compose the *Cité*, she had responded to the charge that she was reading like a woman, and therefore misreading the text, and had arrived at the idea of a woman reader who may create her own readings of standard texts which often diverge considerably from earlier readings. Schibanoff is on comparatively easy ground, however, as she deals only with the woman reader confronting overtly misogynistic texts. Examination of de Pizan's version of the story of the rape of Lucretia suggests that de Pizan's editorial strategies close off a range of private responses and interpretations that narratives of rape may offer.

In both the *LGW* and the *Confessio*, the king's son is overwhelmed by love for Lucretia. This process is dispensed with in de Pizan's text in one line at the point at which the story of the rape is told:

> Tarquin l'Orguilleux, filz du roy Tarquin, fust forment espris de l'amour de ceste noble Lucresce (II.44.1, par. 195; Tarquin the

> Proud, son of King Tarquin, was greatly taken with love for this noble Lucretia)

It is not until we come to the section dealing with women who are loved for their virtues that we are informed that Lucretia's virtue is the catalyst for Tarquin's feelings. This displacement may well be motivated by de Pizan's wish to avoid the easy formulation that the chaste woman's body is fatally seductive.[69] She is careful to separate the feelings in Tarquin that that are aroused by Lucretia's virtue, and their subsequent enactment: the information that the king's son fell in love with Lucretia is enclosed by unequivocal statements of the rape that followed:

> Item, Lucresce, de laquelle cy dessus t'ay parlé, qui fut efforciée, la grant honnestété d'elle fu cause d'enamourer Tarquin plus que ne fut sa biauté. Car comme le mary d'elle fust une foiz a un soupper, la ou estoit celluy Tarquin qui puis l'efforça [. . .]
>
> (II.64.1, par. 239)

> Consider Lucretia, whom I spoke to you about before and who was raped: her great integrity was the reason why Tarquin became enamoured, much more so than because of her beauty. For once, when her husband was dining with this Tarquin (who afterwards raped her) [. . .]

We are not presented with any physical description of Lucretia, nor does de Pizan offer any motivation for Tarquin's feelings as she narrates the rape. These statements also work to ensure that the reader does not get caught up in the pleasure of narrative and begin to forget the perspective offered by the knowledge of the outcome of this story.

De Pizan thus refuses to offer the reader the pleasure of narrative, that is, she does not present a linear narrative of falling in love leading to a sexual encounter (in this case a rape), but separates these two elements so that the rape is entirely unmotivated at the point in the text at which it appears. I refer here to the pleasure of the plot versus that of the story; which de Pizan refuses the reader through the structuring of this narrative within the larger structure of her book. It may be this that has led to an assessment of de Pizan's writing as boring and stylistically tedious to read. Sheila Delany says of the *Cité*: 'I believe I have understood her subversive propagandistic effort to "rewrite woman good" in that text [. . .] Yet I have also been

terminally bored by the tedious, mind-numbing bureaucratic prose of *Cité des Dames*, imitated from the style of royal notaries and civil servants'.[70] Maureen Curnow suggests that the legal and judicial framework is an essential part of the stylistic structuring of the *Cité*. She states that 'in choosing this style Christine is constantly reminding the reader that she is presenting a defense of women', in other words, she appears as an advocate presenting the case for women.[71] De Pizan's restructuring, however, affects the narrative at all levels, and her anti-misogynist strategy causes her to deny one of the functions of literary representations of sexuality. The style of her writing, and the editorial strategies she adopts, suggest that Lucretia's story will most easily find a readership where the pleasures of narrative accompany a subject matter which remains available, even at the most submerged level, to multiple interpretations.[72]

Reading consent

I have suspended my consideration of the parts of these narratives which precede Lucretia's suicide, as this turn of the plot appears to be entirely culturally determined. Lucretia's suicide seems to foreclose the debate around the issue haunting all writers and readers to varying degrees: the question of Lucretia's possible enjoyment of the rape. As we have noted, de Pizan's purpose in re-telling this story is to refute the suggestion that women want to be raped, and for her, Lucretia's story offers an unambiguous counter-example, especially as it ends with the woman committing suicide. From a modern perspective it may be argued that de Pizan's inclusion of the suicide works not to confirm her position, but rather to suggest that the doubt about whether or not a woman might enjoy the experience of rape is strong enough to require this extreme form of refutation. Work on the testimony of those who have suffered sexual abuse, however, indicates that feelings of shame are almost ineradicable. Lynda Hart considers the paradox of the incest survivor: 'the *survivor* is also at once, indeed by definition, the one who endured the abuse. How does one cease to be, or rather become other than the *survivor and still survive?*'[73] It is clear that this paradox proves impossible for Lucretia to sustain.

Lucretia's conscious decision to submit to the rape in the source texts appears to have suggested to Chaucer and Gower an acquiescence that could be constructed as having led to enjoyment, and so, in their texts, Lucretia faints rather than actively submit to her rapist. The question of will is a complicated one, and it appears in the literature concerning sex and reproduction in texts dating from the twelfth century

onwards. The discussion focuses on the links between pleasure and conception, since it was widely believed that female seed, as well as male, was required for conception to occur, and that in women the production of seed depended on the experience of pleasure. Rape victims are specifically mentioned in *On Human Generation* where the questioner notes that women who have been raped protest and cry, and have suffered violence at the moment of intercourse, and yet have conceived.[74] The response offered is that women's pleasure is necessary for conception. Conceptions resulting from rape must then be accounted for. *On Human Generation* suggests that women move from revulsion to pleasure in rape (an interesting parallel with the movement in seduction from reluctance to acquiescence), and then invokes the human condition in general, suggesting that our reason and our flesh are often at war with one another. A woman can withold rational consent even though on the carnal level she may experience pleasure and thus emit seed (the process thought to be necessary for conception to take place):

> If in the beginning the act displeases the women raped, yet in the end it pleases [them] because of the weakness of the flesh. For there are two wills in humans, namely, the rational and the natural, which we often see fighting within us. [What] is displeasing to reason is pleasing to the flesh. And if, therefore, there is not the rational will in the raped women, there is nevertheless [the will] of carnal pleasure.[75]

In *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Joan Cadden notes that the two explanations both hinge on carnal acquiescence, but points to the greater importance accorded to intention and consent in medieval law and theology from the twelfth century onwards. The problem with Lucretia in early versions of the story is complicated by the fact that she consciously chooses to be raped rather than lose her good name after her death. As Ian Donaldson observes, 'Certain late medieval narrators were sufficiently disconcerted by this aspect of the story to vary the narrative, and allow Lucretia to swoon at the critical moment rather than exercise her moral choice'.[76]

Although de Pizan's clearly stated project is to oppose the idea that women want to be raped, she does away with the swoon; instead Lucretia attempts to reason with her attacker from a position of extreme unwillingness to undergo the sexual attack. When Tarquin threatens to kill her if she does not submit,

> elle respondi que hardiement l'occist et que mieulx amoit mourir que s'i consentir (II.44.1, par. 195; She answered that he should go ahead and kill her, for she would rather die than consent.)

The threat that she may be represented as having been taken in adultery after her death does not lead her to faint. Instead, she decides to submit to the rape because she fears that he will be believed:

> Et à brief dire, de ceste chose tant l'espoventa, penssant que on croiroit aux parolles de luy, que au paraler elle souffry sa force.
> (II.44 1, par. 195)

> In brief, he so scared her with this threat (for she thought that people would believe him) that finally she suffered his rape.[77]

It seems as if death after the rape is inevitable, for it is the only way that she can be sure of persuading her husband and everybody else that she did not want to be raped, and that she did not enjoy the experience.[78] Had she experienced seduction rather than rape, the issue would have become one of a wife's infidelity, rather than that of a violent attack on a beloved woman. Lucretia's suicide, in all three narratives, forecloses this possibility.

The enduring legends of rape seem to me to offer a trope by which authors can investigate the conventions of female sexuality (reluctance which needs to be overwhelmed by male desire, passivity) in a context in which the fear of an insatiable female sexuality is excluded. In the context of these conventions about female and male sexuality, the belief that female reluctance could change into excitement during the course of a rape, proved for the Middle Ages by the fact that rapes resulted in pregnancies, can be seen as fuelling male fears about masculine potency in the face of female desire and pleasure. In these narratives, therefore, the victim's suicide confirms her reluctance in the face of male sexual advances, and thus works to eliminate these fears. For the female reader a narrative of a rape offers an exploration of the enactment of the conventional female sexual role of reluctance overcome by male desire, and a representation of powerlessness in the sexual act. The well-documented fantasy of rape may be derived from a culturally dominant set of beliefs about the passivity or lack of female desire announced in conventional depictions of male and female sexual roles. It might speak too, to the terrifying appeal of the loss of the ego, the sexual drive for the radical disintegration of the self described by Bersani, the

desires of passivity, and the attendant loss of self-consciousness Hart discusses. As a literary topos, rape may function for the woman reader as the correlative of the erotic desire for annihilation of the self. Fictionalized narratives of rape may thus provide a locus in which to explore desires perceived as antipathetic to a feminist project. These desires may be in part the product of literary conventions laid down by male writers, and yet paradoxically these conventions may work to liberate female desire from the bounds of a dominant representation of sexuality enacted as a struggle for power which offers a reductive and limiting articulation of the possibilities of sexual pleasure.

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NOTES

[1] For a useful overview of the critical positions taken see the notes to the *Legend of Good Women* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All quotations from the *LGW* are from this edition.

[2] G. C. Macaulay, Introduction to his edition, *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols, EETS o.s. 81, 82 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900), I, xix. Quotations from the *Confessio Amantis* are from this edition; the story of the rape of Lucretia appears in II, 363-77.

[3] Russell A. Peck, Introduction to his edition of the *Confessio Amantis* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press, 1980), p. xxi.

[4] Derek Pearsall, 'Chaucer's Narrative Art' (1966) repr. in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Peter Nicholson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), p. 64.

[5] The illustration depicting Christine and Reason clearing the Field of Letters of misogynist opinion in BL MS Add. 20698 reveals de Pizan's programme.

[6] Daniel Boyarin, 'Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe' in *Summoning: Ideas of the Covenant and Interpretive Theory*, ed. by Ellen Spolsky (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 153-86 (pp. 164-71).

[7] Paul Saenger, 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator*, 13 (1982), 367-414 (p. 399).

[8] Saenger, 'Silent Reading', pp. 412-13.

[9] Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 143.

[10] Coleman, *Public Reading*, p. 30.

[11] In a recent article Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Andrew Murphy posit an opposition in Shakespeare scholarship between academic specialism which they characterize as 'dry-as-dust textual nitpicking' and criticism, that is 'the organic presence of a fully-lived critical appreciation'. See Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Andrew Murphy, '"What's the matter?" Shakespeare and Textual Theory', *Textual Practice*, 9 (1995), 93-119 (pp. 93-94). In the case of Middle English an even more deeply entrenched opposition between exegetics and new criticism is anatomized by Lee Patterson in the opening chapter of his book *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). It is difficult not to feel that the discoveries of scholarship are more valuable than the formulation of new readings of Middle English texts.

[12] This subject is interestingly discussed by Catherine Cox in *Gender and Language in Chaucer* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997). See especially p. 26.

[13] For an analysis of the former proposition see, for example, Victor Nell, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[14] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

[15] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 13.

[16] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 13.

[17] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 17.

[18] Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1989), p. 49. The issue of involvement raised by the reading of textual representations of violence against women is taken up by Anne Laskaya in her discussion of the Middle English poem *Emaré*. Like Gravdal, Laskaya is mainly concerned with the ways in which readers' responses may be constructed by the text. See Anne Laskaya, 'The Rhetoric of Incest in the Middle English *Emaré*' in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. by Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. 97-114, especially p. 99. For a consideration of the ways in which Gravdal's book has influenced readings of medieval rape narratives in contemporary scholarship see my 'Reading Rape in Medieval Literature' in *Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Metzger (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 120-35.

[19] Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 49.

[20] Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, pp. 49-50.

[21] Evelyn Birge Vitz, 'Rereading Rape in Medieval Literature', *Partisan Review*, 63 (1996), 280-91. Vitz deplores recent scholarship on medieval rape narratives and finds it to be man-hating, and to be conducted in a tone of self-pity. She does not examine the meanings of fantasy, however, which she suggests as a corrective approach to these texts.

[22] As Elizabeth J. Bryan neatly formulates it 'Rape is associated with tyranny of the Tarquins. The rape of Lucretia represents an act of violence – of tyranny – so horrific it cannot go unanswered, and the rape becomes the event that motivates the overthrow of the tyrant'. See Elizabeth J. Bryan, 'Laȝamon's Four Helens: Female Figurations of Nation in the *Brut*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 26 (1995), 63-78 (p. 64).

[23] See J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Gawain-Poet* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 88-89, and Gayle Margherita, 'Some Thoughts on History, Epistemology, and Rape', *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, 11 (1991), 2-4.

[24] Maureen Quilligan observes that 'Christine rewrites Boccaccio to insert an active female subjectivity into each story'. See Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority:*

Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 160.

[25] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 18. Reflecting on the female audience listening to rape scenes, Gravdal suggests that we may wish to recognize that men, like women, have been taught to view male aggressiveness as flattering.

[26] Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Feminist Readings* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 96-98.

[27] Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Jane Dunnett (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 58.

[28] Gayle Margherita, *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 43.

[29] Corinne Saunders, 'Woman Displaced: Rape and Romance in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*', *Arthurian Literature*, 13 (1995), 115-31 (p. 115).

[30] We may note here Michael Hoey's observation that 'it is as if the inclusion of an Object of Desire statement licenses a narrative in which the other person's body may be used for the satisfaction of the self. In other words, all it needs to make a narrative of abuse acceptable is a statement of desire aroused.' Michael Hoey, 'The Organisation of Narratives of Desire' in *Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance and Intimacy*, ed. by Keith Harvey and Celia Shalom (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 85-105 (p. 103).

[31] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), especially the Introduction.

[32] Mary M. Talbot, '"An Explosion Deep Inside Her": Women's Desire and Popular Romantic Fiction' in *Language and Desire*, pp. 106-22 (p. 108).

[33] Talbot, 'An Explosion', p. 118.

[34] Catherine Belsey, 'True Love: The Metaphysics of Romance', *Women: a cultural review*, 3 (1992), 181-92 (p. 191). In a stylistic exploration of heterosexual romantic encounters and sex scenes in contemporary fiction which appear to depart from many of the conventional features of romantic fiction, Shan Wareing found that 'romantic norms frequently still govern the way certain parts of novels are written – particularly romantic and sexual encounters' and concluded that 'it is evident that the tradition of the passive heroine is deeply rooted in the norms of novel writing.' See Shan Wareing, 'And Then He Kissed Her: The Reclamation of Female Characters to Submissive Roles in Contemporary Fiction' in *Feminist Linguistics in Literary Criticism*, ed. by Katie Wales, Essays and Studies 47 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 117-36.

[35] Belsey considers this point in the continuation of her argument: 'This is not to say that sex is the same for all of us, since we are not conditioned robots . . . But it is to insist that we in

the West cannot, as an act of will, simply step outside the metaphysics of desire which is our cultural heritage.' ('True Love', p. 191)

[36] Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. by Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 201-22 (p. 219).

[37] Jonathan Dollimore, 'Sex and Death', *Textual Practice*, 9 (1995), 27-53 (p. 37).

[38] Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 116.

[39] Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 116.

[40] Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 100-101. See also Ann Barr Snitow's discussion of mass-market romances as pornography: 'in pornography the joys of passivity, of helpless abandon, of response without responsibility are all endlessly repeated, savored, minutely described. Again, this is a fantasy often dismissed with the pejorative "masochistic" as if passivity were in no way a pleasant or a natural condition.' Ann Barr Snitow, 'Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different' in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 245-63 (p. 256).

[41] Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 87.

[42] Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 55.

[43] Quotations from *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* are by part, chapter and paragraph from Maureen Curnow, 'The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* by Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition', 2 vols (PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1975). Translations are from *The Book of the City of Ladies* trans. by Earl Jeffrey Richards (London: Pan Books, 1983).

[44] The openness of this textual strategy is described by Laskaya, though I do not think that she interrogates the process that she is describing sufficiently closely. Laskaya notes that 'texts that inscribe silent victims [. . .] separate the reader from the victims' consciousness and leave a space within which readers create (or ignore) the drama of pain that fictonal characters are imaginatively forced to enact and experience.' See 'The Rhetoric of Incest', p. 100.

[45] It is interesting to note Andrew Galloway's suggestion that Chaucer frequently uses a feminine perspective for establishing a critique of masculine assumptions. Galloway refers to the ways in which Chaucer changes the story of Lucretia that he inherited to stress, for example, Lucretia's self-consciousness of her choices within Roman ideology. He considers, however, that in spite of his sympathy with a feminine perspective, 'Chaucer finally avoids a closer identification with the women through whose eyes he looks'. See 'Chaucer's *Legend of Lucrece* and the Critique of Ideology in Fourteenth-century England', *ELH*, 60 (1993), 813-32 (pp. 825-28). My argument suggests that Chaucer's text thus enables women to read Lucretia in a way that is erotically charged, but that may not present a challenge to a woman-centred ideology. It seems clear, however, that not everyone will agree that this is possible; see Corinne

J. Saunders's observation of Gravdal's *Ravishing Maidens*: 'her reading, which relates literary rape to that which is legally forbidden yet viewed ambivalently in legal texts, is perhaps more persuasive and sympathetic than is the psychoanalytical reading of some critics who suggest that rape is an acceptable female fantasy with no relation to reality.' ('Woman Displaced', p. 116).

[46] Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 4.

[47] Judith Laird points out that Lucretia's selection and manipulation of her speech takes her out of her private sphere as lover and wife and into the public realm of politics, but it is in Christine's version that a note is added about the just and fitting law for executing rapists. See 'Good Women and *Bonnes Dames*: Virtuous Females in Chaucer and Christine de Pizan', *Chaucer Review*, 30 (1995), 58-70 (p. 68). Maureen Quilligan makes the same point in *The Allegory of Female Authority*, p. 160. Narrating the rape is of course central to the story of Philomela told in the *LGW*. The point in de Pizan's redaction of the rape of Lucretia, however, is made through the reader's witnessing the rape. Although she does not explore it, Laird makes reference to this when she states that 'There is little character building of either Lucretia or Tarquin. Most of the narrative quite plainly describes the action in the bedroom' (p. 67). For her, however, the bedroom is 'where Tarquin seems far more ineffectual than Lucretia', a suggestion which seems to me to gloss over the mechanics of rape, and thus to change the meaning of this story.

[48] Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', p. 216.

[49] Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', p. 215.

[50] Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', in *The Woman in Question: M/f*, ed. by Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) pp. 140-96 (p. 150), cited in Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 97.

[51] Cowie, 'Fantasia' cited in Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 97.

[52] Tacie Dejanikus, 'Our Legacy' in *Off Our Backs* (November 1980), 6-9 (p. 6), cited in Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 194.

[53] Although it could be argued that republican laws acknowledge the necessity of regulation in this area, it seems to me that the omission of the law executing rapists in Christine's sources suggests that the new republican society is representing itself as one which will not need such laws. Just as the rape is seen to have ended tyranny, so the end of tyranny will entail the end of sexual crime: the two are presented as intimately intertwined.

[54] Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', p. 221.

[55] Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris*, ed. by Vittorio Zaccaria, vol. 10 *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1967) p. 195, translation from *Concerning Famous Women* trans. by Guido A. Guarino (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963, repr. 1964), p. 101.

[56] Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, p. 157. This homosocial interpretation of the competition and its consequences echoes Carolyn Dinshaw's comment on Gower's version that 'Genius's language does suggest that rape is an offense by one man against another'. See 'Rivalry, Rape and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Victoria, B. C.: University of Victoria, 1991) pp. 130-52 (p. 137).

[57] The definition of *ese* is not entirely clear in the *Riverside Chaucer* glossary, but *The Chaucer Glossary*, ed. by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham and Anne Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, repr. 1983), cites *LGW*, l. 1704.

[58] Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, p. 159.

[59] See Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, repr. 1992). The facts of the case which led to the controversial House of Lords ruling that a man cannot be convicted of rape if he genuinely believed that the woman was consenting to sex, however fanciful and unreasonable the grounds for his belief (DPP v. Morgan and others [1975], 61 Cr. App. R. 136) provide a fascinating analogue to the Lucretia story, in which the army setting is replicated, and the homosocial relationships, and the culturally determined beliefs about female sexuality similarly inform the action. Morgan, an RAF pilot, invited three of his colleagues to go home with him after an evening spent drinking and have intercourse with his wife. He told them that although she may protest and struggle, they should not pay any attention because this turned her on. The facts of the case and its implications for the law of rape are set out in Zsuzsanna Adler, *Rape on Trial* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

[60] Rubin, 'Traffic', p. 182.

[61] Ovid implies that Lucretia is on a bed: 'Lucretia, before whose bed were baskets full of soft wool', *Ovid*, with an English translation by James George Frazer, 6 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1926), *Fasti*, V, 109-19 (p. 111); in Livy's narration Lucretia is simply 'busily engaged upon her wool'. *Livy*, with an English translation by B. O. Foster, 13 vols (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), I, 197-209 (p. 199). In Boccaccio's text Lucretia is 'dressed without any ornaments' (p. 102), and in de Pizan's she is 'vestue d'une simple robe' (II.64.1 par. 240; 'clothed in a simple gown'). None of the texts seems to me to imply the kind of abandonment to privacy that we see in Chaucer's.

[62] Neither the *Riverside Chaucer* glossary nor *The Chaucer Glossary* impute any sexual connotation to the notion of 'dischevele'. *The Chaucer Glossary* offers two senses: for the

moment cited here the editors suggest 'bareheaded, her hair hanging loose'. For the other usages in the *LGW*, Dido pleading with Aeneas to marry her (l. 1315), and Lucretia sending for her father, mother and husband after the rapist has fled (l. 1829), they offer 'with hair in disorder'. Although this definition may be seen as seeking to deny that Lucretia and Dido deliberately appear in public in this state, arguably this division suggests that Lucretia after she has been raped, and Dido offering to be Aeneas's 'thral, his servant in the leste degre' (l. 1313) as part of her plea that he marry her, are represented as actively sexual, and thus compromised in their femininity in which passivity is necessarily inscribed for a successful reiteration of sexuality (I am here using terms derived from Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York: Routledge, 1990]).

[63] Snitow, 'Mass Market Romance', p. 249.

[64] Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 116.

[65] This observation derives in part from Linda Lomperis, 'Unruly Bodies and Ruling Practices: Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* as Socially Symbolic Act', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 21-37, and from Gayle Margherita's chapter in the same volume, 'Originary Fantasies and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', pp. 116-41, and from her *The Romance of Origins*.

[66] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 5. See also Michael Hoey's comment on one of the heterosexual fantasies contained in *Women on Top*, Nancy Friday's anthology of women's sexual fantasies: 'here the Object of Desire is the narrator's own body. (Interestingly no equivalent text to this was found in the men's data.)' Hoey, 'Organisation of Narratives of Desire', p. 101.

[67] *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Earl Jeffrey Richards with Joan Williamson, Nadia Margolis, and Christine Reno (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 1.

[68] Susan Schibanoff, '"Taking the Gold out of Egypt": the art of reading as a woman' (1986) repr. in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All her Sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 221-45 (pp. 223-24)

[69] See Patricia Klindienst Joplin's discussion of the moment when Tereus sees Philomela with Pandion, in 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours', *Stanford Literature Review*, 1 (1984), 25-53: 'as Ovid has it, the chaste woman's body is fatally seductive. We are asked to believe that Philomela unwittingly and passively invites Tereus' desire by being what she is: pure' (pp. 33-34).

[70] Sheila Delany, '"Mothers to Think Back Through": Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan' in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. by Laurie A.

Finke and Martin B. Shichtman (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 177-97 (p. 182).

[71] Curnow, 'The *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', pp. 248-250.

[72] Laird suggests in 'Good Women and *Bonnes Dames*' that in contrast to reactions to the *LGW*, there is no debate about the ambiguous tone of Christine's work. It is interesting in this context to note that Laird does not cite Delany's assessment of de Pizan's prose style. Schibanoff suggests that de Pizan's achievement is 'still undervalued' ('Taking the Gold out of Egypt', p. 239), and despite the popularity of Earl Jeffrey Richard's translation, the continued absence of an edition of the *Cité* at the time of writing seems suggestive of debate at some level.

[73] Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, p. 181.

[74] *On Human Generation* is the title Joan Cadden accords to a group of question-and-answer texts consisting of dialogue copied from William of Conches' *Dragmaticon* and the *Prose Salernitan Questions*. See Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 88-96. My thanks to Helen Cooper for suggesting this reference.

[75] See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 95. This is her translation of Cambridge University, Trinity, MS O.2.5, fol. 76ra-rb; Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. nouv. acq. 693, fol. 183v.

[76] Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 70.

[77] Richards's translation seems to me to gloss over the senses 'submit to' and 'permit' contained in the meaning of 'souffrir'. See Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'Ancienne Langue Française* (Paris: Librairie des sciences et des arts, 1937-1938), and Tobler-Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1973).

[78] The linking of Lucretia's suicide and her decision to submit to the rape seems to me to be crucial: the knowledge that she will afterwards refute it with her suicide is part of the decision to offer consent, under duress, to the rape. Maureen Quilligan suggests this in her summary of the story; 'Her suicide is her means of making the truth known, for her own honor and for the future honor of all women', but seems to elide the connection when she notes that 'for Christine, Lucretia slays herself to demonstrate how awful it is to be raped'. See *The Allegory of Female Authority*, pp. 157 and 159.