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Chaucer, the Ethical Ovid, and the Unanticipated Woman Reader

By

Michelle Ripplinger

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Committee in charge:

Professor Steven Justice, chair

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Abstract

Chaucer, the Ethical Ovid, and the Unanticipated Woman Reader

By

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This dissertation argues that Chaucer primes readers to confront pressing questions about the ethics of literary representation and the nature of interpretation by thinking biographically, of the author's crimes against women. He does so by reappropriating a set of critical tools from the medieval commentary tradition, specifically the scenario on which the repentant narrative of the Ovidian biography hinged: that of a woman reader encountering a work that was never intended for her. Unlike Ovid and his medieval commentators, who defend morally dubious poetic content by deflecting blame onto this feminized figure or by claiming to reveal the deeper moral meaning she cannot see, Chaucer revalues her supposed hermeneutic faults. Rather than simply dismissing the moral concerns about fictive mimesis which the unanticipated woman reader had been invented to address, however, Chaucer follows the woman reader's gaze and finds that ethical reflection can be conducted narratively, without moralizing commentary: at times her prurient and literal-minded mode of interpretation is precisely what his poetry requires. For Chaucer, the moral value of a work does not inhere in what the work represents, or in a moral that is prescribed to neutralize morally dubious content, so much as in what it does not represent: the narrative gaps and fissures which present themselves to the imaginative reader for further reflection. So understood, Chaucer harnesses performed authorial biography to reject simplistic concerns with fiction's imitative potential and to make the reader a co-creator in meaning, even as he acknowledges the author's responsibility to help facilitate ethical modes of readerly engagement.

My first chapter, "The Ovidian Career and the Unanticipated Woman Reader," begins by tracing the idea of the woman reader back to late antiquity, where her literal and carnal-minded misinterpretation consolidated and contained concerns about the dangers of immoral poetic content. During his lifetime, Ovid defended the *Ars amatoria* from moral objections by claiming that the poem had been misinterpreted by women readers he had not anticipated. Whatever they read, Ovid insists, these women read carnally, fixating on erotic possibilities whether named or

not. The medieval commentary tradition seized on this idea of the unanticipated woman reader to sanitize Ovid's amatory poetry for a Christian interpretive context. But whereas Ovid deflects accusations of moral insufficiency onto the carnal-minded woman reader, thereby shifting the focus from authority to interpretation, medieval commentators appropriate this figure to another effect as well. In addition to deflecting blame in that way, scholastic introductions for schoolroom and commentary use reordered the chronology of Ovid's career: they retroactively make the *Heroides*, his collection of women's complaints, into a palinode for the *Ars*, belatedly acknowledging the dangers of fictive mimesis and poetic wit. This biography in turn supplied the raw materials for a hermeneutic: just as the *Heroides'* complaints are reframed as recompense for the amatory manipulations the *Ars* taught, commentators theorized an ethical approach to fictive interpretation in which their exegetical expertise allowed them to look beyond the carnal surface of any text, no matter how illicit.

The next chapter, "Chapter's Proleptic Palinode," considers how Chaucer's representations of women readers derive but also depart from the moralized Ovid tradition. At the very peak of his literary career, having completed the *Troilus and Criseyde*, he put himself in Ovid's fix—commanded to atone for the work's offenses by writing the *Legend of Good Women*. The *Legend* has been the *locus classicus* for discussions about Chaucer's debt to the Ovidian career model and his friendliness to women. But I show that he writes the earlier *Troilus* with an eye toward such an eventual apology. Attentive to the Ovidian career model and its ethical implications, Chaucer gives himself something to apologize for by absorbing the corrective potential of the palinodal *Heroides* into the amatory scheming of the *Ars*. Pandarus and Troilus not only claim Ovidian heroines' grief for themselves; they do so in order to advance their own amatory interests, thereby absorbing the corrective potential of the female-voiced *Heroides* into gaps in the narration. In the intricate network of allusions, which effectively reverses the repentant narrative of the Ovidian biography, Chaucer returns those female-voiced complaints to his readers as an absent presence. But in asking readers to follow Criseyde and Cassandre's example and sound the gaps in the prevailing mode of narration, he also alerts them to both the banality and ethical limits of emotional empathy. Although he has read the *Heroides* and felt as Oenone, Pandarus never lets the results of that empathy inform his treatment of Criseyde: Ovidian heroines' subjective experiences instead become devices in pursuing the very same unrestrained male desire that had created the need for their complaints in the first place.

The second half of the dissertation turns to *The Canterbury Tales*. The penultimate chapter, "Chaucer's Glossed *Teseida*" shows how Chaucer develops this narrative strategy not by disregarding commentary, but rather by absorbing its form and functions into the interpretive process his poetry elicits. It does so by placing *The Knight's Tale* in conversation with its primary source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*. In this

important early work, Boccaccio had not been content to make romance safe for ethics by concealing moral meaning beneath the story of seduction; he encased that story in a self-authored interpretive apparatus brimming with Ovidian glosses. This apparatus repeatedly requires readers to interpret the narrative in tandem with Ovidian mythography, and to draw meaning from the gaps that emerge in that interpretive process: by concatenating Arcita wooing Emilia with a gloss that compares him to Tereus, for instance, Boccaccio not only asks his readers to notice the unsavory nature of this comparison. He also asks them to draw an ethical evaluation by subjecting the romance to a quasi-allegorical interpretation on that basis. Although the Knight hollows Emily out and reattributes her feminized subjectivity to male characters like Arcite and Palemon, Chaucer does not overlook or disregard Boccaccio's Ovidian glosses. Through a network of allusions—some of which ask readers to fill the narrative gaps by feeling on Emily's behalf, and others of which invite us to subject the male appropriation of Ovidian heroines' grief to scrutiny—he instead constructs a complex ethical apparatus, which directs attention to the practice of negotiating between emotion and rational processes of cognition.

This nuanced sensitivity to fiction's ethical affordances and its limits in turn enables us to reconsider the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, as the final chapter shows. At the beginning of his tale collection, Chaucer advises his readers not to make earnest out of game—that is, not to attribute a deeper moral meaning where none is intended. But far from abandoning the question of literature's ethical utility, Chaucer's attention to the unanticipated woman reader reveals the lively nature of his sustained engagement with such theoretical debates, as *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale* in particular show. In the latter, the Clerk's Walter exhibits a hermeneutics of suspicion about his wife Griselda's intentions, as he spends the duration of the tale violently attempting to turn her into a surface, to ensure that her outside appearance matches her inner nature. Yet like the gap between story and moral in the *Legend* or the narrative interstices in the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer redirects the search for deeper meaning back to the story itself. Like Emily before her, the flattened Griselda prompts the reader to feel on her behalf, to imaginatively construct characterological depth rooted in their own experience of the narrative. Even as he asks readers to feel for Griselda, however, Chaucer simultaneously asks us to reflect on empathy's potential moral quandaries: at the exact moment the amatory plot is set in motion, the *Clerk's Tale* invokes the same passage from the *Ars* that precipitates Pandarus's selective reading of Oenone's complaint. Both within individual tales and in his protracted appropriation of the Ovidian biography across multiple works, Chaucer thus advances a new understanding of the fiction's moral potential. Imaginatively inhabiting other subjectivities is not an end goal so much as a necessary component in an ongoing process that requires us to both imagine and adjudicate between various subjectivities, even as we remain alert to the ultimate uncertainty of experiences beyond our own.

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Introduction

The Dearth of the Author

This is a dissertation about the ethical stakes of performed authorial biography, particularly how the scenario of a woman reader encountering a work that was never intended for her shaped that literary device and made it available as a critical practice. By staging his career around this scenario and revaluing this feminized figure's supposed hermeneutic faults—her tendency to read literally and selectively, as well as to fixate on sexual narrative content and possibilities—Chaucer responds to concerns about fiction's imitative potential, defending the moral value of looking at rather than merely through the narrative surface. The vexed nature of the relationship between an author's life and the meaning or valuation of his works is not, of course, unique to premodern literature or to Chaucer. Nor is the habit of consolidating fears about the dangers of fictive mimesis by deflecting blame onto the woman reader,¹ or by aligning femininity with the “vacillating materiality of the signifier.”² Nevertheless, I focus on the literary history of this specific device, tracing its development as it moves from late antiquity into the medieval commentary tradition, where it informs vernacular poetic practice. In excavating Chaucer's sustained engagement with this body of ancient and medieval literary thought, I recast our understanding both of his career and of his place in literary history. Rather than anticipating modern literary thought insofar as he turns away from medieval moralization toward narrative and characterological subtlety, as so often has been asserted, Chaucer absorbs the commentary tradition's underlying concerns with the moral quandaries of fictive mimesis into the interpretive process his poetry elicits. The figure of the unanticipated woman reader also challenges common assumptions about the modern rise of fictionality, even as it affirms the woman reader's central role in that premodern history.³

Crucial to such an investigation is Chaucer's self-definition in relation to another poet: Ovid, whose scandalous poetry provoked similar concerns about literature's ethical value during his own lifetime, as well as the largest and most widely read compendium of moralized narratives in medieval western Europe. At the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, when Chaucer defines himself in distinction from “moral

¹ For a concise overview of this history of ideas, see Belinda Jack, *The Woman Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

² The phrase belongs to Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 41.

³ On medieval fictionality, see, for example, Michelle Karnes, “The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction,” *New Literary History* 51.1 (2020): 209–28; and Julie Orlemanski, “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 50.2 (2019): 145–70.

Gower,” he adapts that moniker from the common phrase *ethicus Ovidius*.⁴ A still clearer sign of Chaucer’s supposed rejection of the moralized Ovid tradition is the playful inversion of the Ovidian biography in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. By staging the *Legend* as a palinode, a poetic retraction for his youthful poetry, Chaucer models his career after a narrative of repentance that, as we will see in a moment, medieval commentary crafted for Ovid.⁵ But he turns it on its head. Ovid defended his amatory verse against moral objections that it urged readers to imitate the illicit love affairs it represents; Chaucer faces the God of Love’s anger that he has *deterred* readers from such affairs.⁶ The moralizing imperative of the palinode is thus parodically subverted.

Or so it has seemed. This dissertation will argue that Chaucer engaged seriously with a dynamic body of medieval thought about literature’s ethical effects, and precisely through a serious engagement with the career model retrojected onto Ovid in the commentary tradition and the biography constructed for him in the *accessus Ovidiani*. In the *Ars amatoria* and his subsequent defense of that work, Ovid claims that unanticipated women readers have misinterpreted it.⁷ Whatever they read, Ovid insists, these women read carnally, fixating on erotic possibilities whether salient or not. When reading Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, for instance, they cannot make it past the first line of the poem without wondering, to put it delicately, *how* Venus became the head of Aeneas’s line. The medieval commentary tradition seized on the idea of this unanticipated woman reader to accommodate Ovid’s amatory poetry to a Christian interpretive context. At the same time, scholastic introductions

⁴ Warren Ginsberg, “*Ovidius Ethicus?* Ovid and the Medieval Commentary Tradition,” in James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee, eds., *Desiring Discourse: The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna UP, 1998), 62–71. Some scholars judge Chaucer to be closer to Ovid’s own poetic manner than Gower: Andrew Galloway, “Ovid in Chaucer and Gower,” in John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands, eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 187–201, at 198; and Kathryn L. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer: Readings of Ovid in Late Medieval England.” In *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, edited by James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 210.

⁵ On the Ovidian career model, see Alessandro Barchiesi and Philip Hardie, “The Ovidian career model: Ovid, Gallus, Apuleius, Boccaccio,” in *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception*, ed. Philip Hardie and Helen Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 59–60.

⁶ Cf. *Legend of Good Women* F 323–334. All Chaucer references are to Larry Benson, gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

⁷ Exiled by Augustus for two crimes, “carmen et error” (*Tr.* II.207), Ovid defends the *Ars* from detractors in the *Tristia* by arguing that the *Ars* has been misinterpreted by readers he was not writing for, Roman matrons: “whatever she touches, be she inclined to wrongdoing, she will equip her character for vice” (*Tr.* II.245–62). Yet a poem cannot harm anyone if “read with upright mind” (*Tr.* II.275). Text and translation from Ovid, *Tristia; Ex Ponto*, trans. A. L. Wheeler, rev. G. P. Goold, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library 151 (1924; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1996).

for schoolroom and commentary use reordered the chronology of Ovid's career against its internal evidence, retroactively making the *Heroides* into a palinode for the *Ars*,⁸ belatedly acknowledging the dangers of fictive mimesis and poetic wit.⁹ This biography in turn supplied the raw materials for a hermeneutic: just as the female-voiced complaints of the *Heroides* are reframed as recompense for the amatory manipulations in the *Ars*, commentators theorized an ethical approach to literary fiction by claiming to reveal the deeper moral meaning beyond the narrative's carnal surface, the moral the woman reader supposedly could not see. It is this medieval reception history that enabled Chaucer to do something new. Crude as the commentaries' moralizing and misogyny are, he recognized in them tools for isolating and examining fictionality and the moral questions it raises. Thus he takes up the career model imputed to Ovid; but challenges the prevailing understanding of literature's moral dangers which she had been taken to reinforce. The question is not, as the Pardoner will later have it, whether a vicious man can tell a moral tale, but whether a vicious tale can be read morally. This shift from authority to interpretation, from author to reader, will be central to the argument I offer here.

Before proceeding to make that argument, it will be helpful to sketch how this study builds on but also departs from existent Chaucer criticism, as well as some of its implications for our understanding of medieval literary thought and fictionality more broadly construed. It is by now a familiar story that women are a major subject of Chaucer's poetry. In the prologue to his 1513 Middle Scots translation of the *Aeneid*, Gavin Douglas famously describes Chaucer as "all womanis frend."¹⁰ He does not intend this comment as a compliment, but rather as a slight: Chaucer's sympathy for Dido frustrates Virgil's labor on the *Aeneid*.¹¹ But this aspect of his

⁸ In the *accessus* preserved in the twelfth-century Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19475, the introduction to the *Heroides* claims that Ovid's "intention in this book is to urge the pursuit of virtues and to prove vices wrong. He himself was charged with a crime before Caesar because he had taught Roman married women about illicit love affairs with his writings. Consequently, he wrote a book setting this example for them in order that they may know which women they ought to imitate in loving and which not"; *Accessus ad auctores: Medieval Introductions to the Authors (Codex latinus monacensis 19475)*, ed. and trans. Stephen M. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 89. I will return to this point in Chapter One.

⁹ On the chronology, see Adrian S. Hollis, *Ovid Ars Amatoria Book I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 150–1; James C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores vol. I: Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987), 74–89.

¹⁰ For the text of Douglas' *Eneados*, see David F. C. Coldwell, ed., *Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 1957–64), Prologue 449.

¹¹ For reasons that will become clear as this introduction unfolds, it is notable that he aligns Chaucer's friendliness to women with a rhetorical fixture of his poetry: his tendency to "pass over" his sources. On Chaucer's pattern of "genealogical leapfrogging," see Leah Schwebel, "The Legend of Thebes and Literary Patricide in Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Statius," *Studies in*

poetry has also been approached more recuperatively. Two pioneering feminist studies, Carolyn Dinshaw's *Sexual Poetics* and Jill Mann's *Feminizing Chaucer*, illustrate this point. For Dinshaw, "Chaucer's positioning as feminine shapes the very form and structures of his poetry." Although Chaucer engages with patristic models of exegesis, which construe the feminized surface of the text as something to discard or to penetrate, his engagement with "this hermeneutic is subtle and nuanced, demonstrating both his investment in patriarchal discourse and his awareness of its limitations."¹² Mann shares that recuperative impulse, though she argues that Chaucer gives voice to women, that he "truly speaks for the excluded feminine."¹³ Where Douglas blames Chaucer for sympathizing with a feminized subjectivity, Mann revalues that representational impulse.

In what follows, I consider how Chaucer shifts the focus from the rhetorical practice of female impersonation to a corresponding hermeneutic. By examining the role of the woman reader in the Ovidian biography and showing how Chaucer attends to its theoretical stakes, this dissertation provides a different intellectual context for understanding the central place of women in his poetry. It also calls attention to the absent nature of that presence, thereby resolving a seeming contradiction in Chaucer's representations of women. After all, if women are a major subject of Chaucer's poetry, if he favors Dido at Aeneas's expense, it is puzzling that he systematically truncates female-voiced laments, Dido's included. In *The Legend*, Dido addresses Aeneas, telling him that "right so [...] as that the white swan / Ayens his deth begynnth for to synge, / Right so to yow make I my compleynyng" (*LGW* 1354–56). Before she can begin her lament, however, Chaucer interrupts the narrative: "But who wol al this letter have in mynde, / Rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal it fynde" (*LGW* 1366–67). Near the end of Ariadne's legend, the narrator similarly redirects his readers:

What shulde I more telle hir compleynyng?
It is so long, it were an hevy thyng.
In hire Epistel Naso telleth al;
But shortly to the ende I telle shal.
[...] I wol no more speke of this mateere. (*LGW* 2218–2221; 2225)

Whereas Ovid "telleth al" including Ariadne's complaint, Chaucer finds himself unable to narrate the "long" and "hevy thing." He tells the story "shortly." In the

the Age of Chaucer 36 (2014): 139–68. Schwebel argues that such literary leapfrogging is an act of "authorial usurpation" and self-authorization directed toward other poets (140); by contrast, I suggest that Chaucer is not concerned with self-authorization so much as an investment in the profoundly ethical nature of readerly experience.

¹² Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 25.

¹³ Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2002), xii.

legend of Philomela, the narrator notes “the wo, the compleynt, and the mone / That Progne upon hire doumbe syster maketh!” (LGW 2379–80), but he passes over her complaint to “late hem in here sorwe dwell” (LGW 2382). In the latter case, the subject matter of Philomela’s tale only further illustrates the seemingly contradictory nature of Chaucer’s decision to omit complaints which give voice to women wronged by men: the metaphorical silencing of Procne by passing over her lament invites comparison to Tereus’ literal silencing of Philomela by cutting out her tongue.

Far from being isolated to the *Legend*, this pattern of passing over female-voiced lament pervades Chaucer’s career. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the dream-narrator reads the story of Ceyx and Alcyone from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* by way of falling asleep, but he breaks off before the story’s conclusion.¹⁴ Since his account omits the couple’s transformation into birds, the narrator’s failure to recount the tale in its entirety has been linked to Chaucer’s tendency to omit metamorphoses.¹⁵ But a closer look shows that the narrator truncates the tale at the precise moment he seems poised to recount Alcyone’s complaint:

But what she sayede more in the swow
 I may not telle yow as now;
 Hyt were to longe for to dwell.
 My first matere I wil yow telle,
 Wherefore I have told this thyng
 Of Alcione and Seys the king,
 For thus moche dar I saye wel:
 I had be dolven everydel
 And ded, ryght thurgh defaute of slep,
 Yif I ne had red and take kep
 Of this tale next before. (BD 215–225)

In keeping with the interpretive ineptitude which he displays when confronted with the black knight’s metaphorical language, the narrator fails to see the lament’s potential usefulness as a model for consolation, both for the sorrow linked to his own sleeplessness and the knight’s grief later in the poem. He stops reading before Alcyone has a chance to speak, instead “[offering] a comically bad gloss” on the tale: namely, that Macrobius might be able to help him fall asleep.¹⁶ Yet dense as he may

¹⁴ *Metamorphoses* 11.410–748. All citations and translations of Ovid’s works are from the relevant volume of the Loeb Classical Library.

¹⁵ Whereas Gower includes the metamorphosis in the *Confessio Amantis* (4.3088–123), the *Riverside Chaucer* explanatory notes remind us that “Chaucer ordinarily omits the metamorphosis in stories adapted from Ovid (e.g., the legend of Philomela in LGW)” (968, n. 215).

¹⁶ The phrase belongs to James Simpson, “Chaucer as European Writer,” in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 67. For more about the

be, the dreamer is not alone in passing over a woman's complaint, nor in redirecting readers to Ovid. Rather than "giving voice" to women, Chaucer makes a habit of aligning his representations of women with what D. Vance Smith has described as the hallmark of his poetic practice: "*the failure to tell*."¹⁷

To understand the theoretical significance of these narrative gaps and omissions, which are so often linked to Ovid, we need to consider the Ovid which Chaucer would have read.¹⁸ Although no direct evidence about Chaucer's schooling has come to light,¹⁹ recent scholarship has shown "how the texts used to teach schoolboys their grammar also prepared them to make the kind of writing subsequently called 'literature.'"²⁰ In fourteenth-century England, the grammar school curriculum would have included compositional exercises focused on women's emotions, exercises which in prior oratorical iterations prepared students for declamation.²¹ Framed in this pedagogical context, the truncation of female-voiced complaints might simply look like another instance of Chaucerian irony, which contributes to the construction of an inept narratorial persona. But the Ovid of the medieval schoolroom also would have encompassed the sprawling body of medieval commentary which attached to his life and works, not just the moralized Ovid but

narrator's literal-minded interpretation, see Deanne Williams, *Making Chaucer's 'Book of the Duchess': Textuality and Reception* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015): "After all, for him, it was just a story about sleep aids. Chaucer here uses the cognitive gap between the Dreamer and his dream to play with the idea of a readership who can be expected to 'get it' and a narrator who doesn't" (152).

¹⁷ Cf. D. Vance Smith, "The Destroyer of Forms: Chaucer's Philomela," in Cristina Maria Cervone and Smith, eds., *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), 138. As Smith puts it, "I think of *the failure to tell* as one of the master tropes of Chaucer's art."

¹⁸ On the many medieval Ovids, see Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum* (Munich: Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1986): "There are as 'many Ovids' as there are audiences and ways to receive him" (11 n. 20).

¹⁹ Marjorie Curry Woods, "Boys Will Be Women: Musings on Classroom Nostalgia and the Chaucerian Audience(s)," in *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V.A. Kolve*, ed. Robert Y. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2001), 146. Edith Rickert's assumption that Chaucer attended the almonry school at St. Paul's has been appropriately scrutinized: "Chaucer at School," *Modern Philology* 29 (1932): 257–274.

²⁰ Christopher Cannon, *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300-1400*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

²¹ The use of *progymnasmata* declined around the year 1200. Although Chaucer wrote before their recuperation in early modern England, he would have been familiar with smaller compositional classroom exercises which required schoolboys to impersonate women, as well as a range of literary works which include female impersonation. There was not a fixed canon, but Woods notes that except for Cleopatra all the women in *The Legend of Good Women* come from Ovid or Virgil ("Boys Will Be Women," 147).

also the Ovidian *accessus*. Not unlike patristic exegesis, which attempts to eradicate or penetrate the carnal narrative surface, the idea of the unanticipated woman reader relies on the overlapping paradigms of women, carnality, and the literal surface. However, it does not construe the text or narrative as feminine; instead, it crafts a narrative in which the woman reader sparks the need for a corrective palinode. So understood, Chaucer “includes the excluded feminine,” but he does so in a counterintuitive manner. He transforms the rhetorical practice of female impersonation into a corresponding hermeneutic.

This critical approach also allows us to see that Chaucer does not feminize himself or his poetics so much as the interpretive process his poetry elicits. Since the “mother tongue” is a traditionally feminized entity, Chaucer often has been cast in the role of a vernacular poet vying for legitimacy alongside Latin *auctores*. According to Jennifer Summit, Chaucer aligns himself with the abject figure of the lost woman author.²² But as I will show, it is not the woman writer but rather the figure of the unanticipated woman *reader* that most informs Chaucer’s response to medieval debates about the ethics of representation and the nature of interpretation. His primary concern is not with self-authorization. If anything, Chaucer invokes this literary-theoretical tool as part of his project to propose a new relationship between author and reader, which cedes greater interpretive authority the reader. Importantly, that turn from rhetoric to hermeneutics does not reflect Chaucer’s rejection of medieval commentary and the moralized Ovid tradition, so much as his intense interest in absorbing and adapting certain modes of its procedure into the interpretive process his poetry elicits.

Understood within this context, we can also see more clearly how recent controversies and curricular debates surrounding Chaucer’s poetry are part of a longer history. Over the past century, “the most important event in the Chaucer biography” has arguably been the alleged *raptus* of Cecily Chaumpaigne.²³ However, two new life-records have radically altered our understanding of the case: Chaucer and Chaumpaigne were co-defendants.²⁴ An incidental benefit of my argument is that it explains why the the Chaumpaigne case has held such sway in critical discussions. No matter whether the historical Chaucer ever will or can be exculpated from his “moral inadequacies”—including but certainly not limited to the Chaumpaigne case—the literary-historical case of Chaucer *the poet’s* crimes against women is not

²² Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 45–6.

²³ The phrase belongs to Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Wiley, 1992), 136. On the critical reception of Chaucer’s biography, see Susan S. Morrison, “The Use of Biography in Medieval Literary Criticism: The Case of Geoffrey Chaucer and Cecily Chaumpaigne,” *The Chaucer Review* 34.1 (1999), 69–86.

²⁴ Euan Roger and Sebastian Sobiecki, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Cecily Chaumpaigne, and the Statute of Laborers: New Records and Old Evidence Reconsidered,” *The Chaucer Review* 57:4 (2022): 407–37.

closed, nor will it ever be.²⁵ Attuned to the ethical stakes of performed authorial biography, Chaucer painstakingly constructs his career in relation to the Ovidian model. He primes his readers to think biographically, of the author's crimes against women—and in so doing, he provides readers with the theoretical framework necessary to notice that the commentary tradition relocates the challenge of fiction's ethical value without resolving it.

The dissertation has four chapters. The first, "The Ovidian Career and the Unanticipated Woman Reader," begins by tracing the Ovidian career model as it moves down from antiquity into the medieval commentary tradition. It shows how Ovidian commentators repurpose an aspect of Ovid's self-presentation—his deflection of accusations of immorality onto Roman matrons—to legitimate their own textual and moral authority. Having excavated this literary history, the remainder of the dissertation turns to Chaucer. Chapter Two, "Chaucer's Proleptic Palinode," revisits the scholarly commonplace that Chaucer stages *The Legend of Good Women* as his own *Heroides*. It argues that Chaucer stages *Troilus and Criseyde* as a poem that will give him something to apologize for, but in so doing, he resists the assumptions about the dangers of fictive mimesis that had provoked that convention. The third chapter, "Chaucer's Glossed *Teseida*," turns from *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Legend of Good Women* to the final work in Chaucer's self-constructed career: *The Canterbury Tales*. It considers the *Knight's Tale*, which was composed concurrently with parts of the *Legend*. While it is true that Chaucer eliminates the network of glosses that appear in his primary source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*, this is not for lack of attention to their underlying theoretical significance; rather, Chaucer absorbs the function of those glosses into the gaps of his narration. Unlike Boccaccio, he cedes interpretive and moral responsibility to the reader, even as he acknowledges the author's role in facilitating ethical modes of interpretation. The dissertation concludes by considering how Chaucer's engagement with the Ovidian biography and the revaluation of the unanticipated woman reader structures *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole. Chapter Four, "The New Men's Wives and the Good of Literature in *The Canterbury Tales*," shows how the misrecognition of fiction becomes a structuring device in the frame narrative of the *Tales*. Unlike medieval commentators and vernacular authors who attempt to seize the authority of the commentator for themselves, or who present their commentary as a necessary supplement to neutralize immoral content, Chaucer shapes his body of work as a self-contained and sustaining literary artefact, encouraging readers to engage with his career holistically, to draw connections and sound the narrative gaps as the unanticipated woman reader would do.

²⁵ The phrase belongs to Samantha Katz Seal and Nicole Sidhu, "New Feminist Approaches to Chaucer: Introduction," *The Chaucer Review* 54:3 (2019): 229. For a response, see Jill Mann, letter to the editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 23, 2021, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/chaucer-today/>.

In this sustained engagement with Chaucer's literary career, my aim is not to defend him or his poetry from accusations of moral insufficiency, nor is it to evaluate his poetry with a commitment to any ethical theory.²⁶ Instead, I am interested in the history of ideas about the ethics of literary representation and the nature of interpretation, particularly how Chaucer anticipates and even invites the ethical objections which so often have been leveled against his poetry. It is through his own sustained engagement with the idea of the unanticipated woman reader that Chaucer rejects the underlying assumptions which provoked concern about fictive mimesis, especially the worry which that feminized figure had been used to consolidate. For Chaucer, the moral value of a work does not inhere in what the work represents, in a one-to-one correspondence between what is represented on the page and the world as it is or could be, so much as the readerly experience that it facilitates. Counterintuitively, Chaucer harnesses performed authorial biography as a device for ceding interpretive authority to the reader. He not only invites his readers to join such debates, but to think metaethically: to recognize that the ethical utility of literary activity cannot be guaranteed, that it will always carry certain risks. As an equation with multiple variables, it is always taking shape in the interplay between the author's work and the work which the reader brings to bear on it.

²⁶ Cf. Dorothy Hale, *The Novel and the New Ethics* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020) xviii.

Chapter One

The Ovidian Career and the Unanticipated Woman Reader

But first things first. Before examining how the idea of the unanticipated woman reader shapes Chaucer's career, I want to consider how this feminized figure moves from Ovid's self-defense of his poetry into the scholastic commentary tradition, specifically the *vita Ovidiana*. While Ovid provokes the largest and most widely read compendium of moralized stories in the medieval Latin West, his reception, like that of other authors from classical antiquity, is also deeply intertwined with educational and pedagogical practices.¹ In the *accessus ad auctores*, or the "introductory lectures to the grammarians' commentaries on their authors," Ovid garners a biography more elaborate than that of any other author.² Taking its prominence within that tradition as its point of departure, this chapter argues that we cannot fully understand the literary-theoretical significance of the Ovidian *vita* unless we attend to the imagined scenario on which it so often hinged: that of a woman reader encountering a work which was never intended for her.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I trace the moral controversy surrounding Ovid's poetry, paying special attention to how it prompts the most involved *vita* in the *accessus ad auctores*. Second, I turn to a commonly overlooked aspect of Ovid's authorial self-fashioning: his deflection of moral blame onto Roman matrons, whom he claims were not part of the intended audience for the *Ars amatoria*. Third, I show how the overlapping *accessus* categories of the *intentio* and *vita auctoris* adapt this idea of the unanticipated woman reader to accommodate Ovid's poetry to a new interpretive context.³ As we will see, the textual and moral authority of the commentator comes to be defined in relation to the interpretive faults of the unanticipated woman reader. But rather than there being a "proper" hermeneutic mode which precedes her deviation from it, the construction of this feminized figure as carnal-minded and error-prone was part of the process of conceiving what interpretation was in a fundamental way. Just as importantly, this feminized figure

¹ Rita Copeland, "England and the Classics from the Early Middle Ages to Early Humanism," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume I (800–1558)*, ed. Rita Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–20 at 1.

² The phrase belongs to A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, "An Anthology of Literary Prefaces: Introductions to the Authors," in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: 1988), 12. In the medieval schoolroom, this retroactively constructed biography would have been part of the student's first encounter with Ovid, as well as a paratext for his poetry which they subsequently read. For a concise overview of scholarship about the *accessus* tradition, see Copeland, "Academic Prologues to the Authors," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, 151–164.

³ On the relationship between the *vita auctoris* and *intentio*, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 193.

does not reflect a rejection the narrative surface so much as an intense desire to recuperate it, to theorize how one might engage with morally dubious material in an ethical manner.

1. The Ethics of the Ovidian *Vita*

The moral problems posed by reading literature from classical antiquity in a Christian interpretive context have often been associated with a specific scene of misreading. In his *Confessions*, Augustine memorably regrets weeping for Dido.⁴

Who can be more wretched than the wretched one who takes no pity on himself, who weeps over Dido's death, which she brought to pass by love for Aeneas, and who does not weep over his own death, brought to pass by not loving you, O God, light of my heart. [...] I did not love you, and I committed fornication against you. [...] I did not weep over these facts, but I wept over the dead Dido "who sought her end by the sword."⁵

If only he had read the *Aeneid* more expertly, Augustine suggests, he could have avoided this interpretive error. A more learned reader would have realized that Aeneas and Dido do not occupy the same historical moment, that the story is a fiction meant to provoke reflection rather than pity. As Augustine puts it: "Let not these buyers and sellers of literature inveigh against me if I put this question to them: 'Did Aeneas ever come to Carthage, as the poet says?' For if I do, the more unlearned will answer that they do not know; the more learned will even deny that it is true."⁶ The youthful interpretive foible of overidentifying with Dido's feminized emotions becomes a foil for more mature forms of textual authority, including Augustinian exegesis.

But rather than Virgil, it is Ovid who comes to sit most squarely at the center of such debates about the ethics of interpretation, particularly amidst twelfth- and thirteenth-century debates about which authors belonged in the schools.⁷ During

⁴ Thomas Hahn, "Don't Cry for Me, Augustinus: Dido and the Dangers of Empathy," in *Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 41–59, at 42. See also James J. O'Donnell: *Augustine, Confessions*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Text*, and *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1–7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), 55–56.

⁶ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, 56.

⁷ Ludwig Traube, *Vorlesungen und Abhandlungen*, vol. 2 (Munich 1911), 113. Traube designates the *aetas Ovidiana* as a period which begins in the second half of the eleventh century, extending to the thirteenth. For more recent accounts of the intense interest in Ovid during this period, see Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 15–16; Birger Munk Olsen, "Chroniques des manuscrits classiques latins (IXe–XIIe siècles)," *Revue d'histoire des textes* 21 (1991): 37;

this period, the height of Ovid's influence on medieval Latin poetry not only coincided with the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* and an increased number of commentaries on Horace and Cicero, but also with a renewed interest in the effects of poetry on readers—or what sometimes has been described as “proto-humanistic” thinking about the nature and effects of poetic consumption on its audience.⁸ In this context, some critics advised that Ovid should be avoided altogether. The fourteenth-century *Antiovidianus*, for instance, claims that all of Ovid's writing was false and that his works separate the pious from piety. Others advised caution in deciding which works to read: while Alexander Neckham includes Ovid's elegies and the *Metamorphoses* on his twelfth-century reading list, he warns that the love poetry and perhaps even the *Fasti* should be kept out of adolescent hands.⁹ Those who sought to neutralize morally objectionable content tended to prescribe moralized or allegorical modes of interpretation, explicating pagan mythology in Christian terms.¹⁰ Such Ovidian commentary, which became “virtually a genre unto itself,” could appear as marginal or interlinear glosses, or it could be packaged as a standalone work, like the most popular literary commentary in the Middle Ages: Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*.¹¹

Avoiding or moralizing Ovid's poetry was not the only option, however. Medieval commentators also adopted and developed a wide range of interpretive strategies, many of which do not necessarily construe the narrative surface as inimical to ethics. To cite a few examples, mythographic, genealogical, and euhemerist modes of commentary all engage with the narrative, rather than attempting to neutralize or look beyond it. Alongside these, we can also place the authorial biography, which supplements the fictional narrative with a narrative of its own about the author's life and works.¹² The six standard *accessus* categories, derived from Servius's commentary on the *Aeneid*, most commonly center the *intentio auctoris*, but as previous scholarship has shown, this category often overlaps with the *vita*. As Arnulf of Orléans explains

and Ian Thomson and Louis Perraud, “Introduction,” in *Ten Latin Schooltexts of the Later Middle Ages: Translated Selections* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 13.

⁸ Gillespie, “The Study of the Classical Authors,” 161–3.

⁹ Alexander Neckham, *Sacerdos ad altare accessurus* in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 537.

¹⁰ In fourteenth-century England, Ovid manuscripts tripled even as other classical authors declined in popularity. On the manuscript evidence, see Kathryn L. McKinley, “Manuscripts of Ovid in England 1100–1500,” in *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700*, Vol. 7, ed. Peter Beal and Jeremy Griffiths (London: The British Library, 1998), 44–5.

¹¹ Copeland, “England and the Classics from the Early Middle Ages to Early Humanism,” 8.

¹² As Frank Coulson sums up, an academic introduction's role was to “furnish for the reader both essential background information concerning the poet as well as a general orientation to the subject matter and nature of his poetry.” “Hitherto Unedited Medieval and Renaissance Lives of Ovid (I),” in *Medieval Studies* 49 (1987): 153.

in a gloss on Lucan's *Phrasalia*, "When we are dealing with any author we must ask who he was before we ask what he has done."¹³

Although focused on the author, the *accessus* tradition is nevertheless guided by an intense interest in the ethical experience of the reader. Among the six standard categories which appear in these introductions, the question "to which part of philosophy does it pertain" almost always yields the answer "ethicae subponitur."¹⁴ In his introduction to Cato, for instance, Conrad of Hirsau argues that "almost all authors concern themselves with morality."¹⁵ As Suzanne Reynolds explains, the *accessus* category of *intentio* is "the hermeneutic forum in which all other manoeuvres of the glossators are played out. Intention is what guarantees the moral value which allows the text to be read at all." This is because "the category of intention allows the reader [...] to appropriate for him or herself the place and authority of the author by claiming to have 'grasped' the originating thought behind the discourse."¹⁶ The explication of the *intentio* is motivated less by the desire to uncover the historical author's intention than by the desire to enable moral worth to result from engagement with his poetry.

It is within this context that we can more fully appreciate the theoretical significance of the Ovidian *vita*, as well as how it came to be the most elaborate in the *accessus* tradition. Ovid occupies a unique position among classical poets in that no "scholia" or ancient commentaries on his works come down to the Middle Ages. It has been speculated that this is likely because of his exile and abject political status. But rather than posing an obstacle to his medieval reception, the lack of an ancient *vita* afforded a rare opportunity: medieval commentators could construct his biography from the ground up and shape it to suit their purposes. Perhaps the most shameless instance of Ovid's biography being constructed to present him as a moralist is *De vetula*, a pseudo-Ovidian work which attributes a deathbed Christian conversion to Ovid.¹⁷

¹³ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 155.

¹⁴ Arnulf of Orléan's *accessus* for his philological commentary contains six categories: *vita poetae*, *titulus operis*, *utilitas*, *intentio*, *cui parti philosophiae subonatur*. Ghisalberti notes how these categories resemble those from the canon of classical grammarians, particularly Servius ("Mediaeval Biographies of Ovid," 18). Many *accessus* narrow down to just four: the work's *titulus*, *materia*, *intentio*, and *utilitas* (Coulson, "New MSS evidence," *Manuscripta* 30:2 (1986): 104.

¹⁵ *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. Huygens (1970), 83.

¹⁶ Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 148. See also Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 165.

¹⁷ On Gascoigne's retroactive attribution of a deathbed repentance to Chaucer in his early modern edition of Chaucer's collected works, see Jamie Fumo, "The God of Love and Love of God: Palinodic Exchange in the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Retraction,'" in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn Collette (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 157–75, at 164.

The *accessus* typically take a different approach, instead defending Ovid's authority as an ethical poet by constructing an inductive biography "more elaborate than that of any other author."¹⁸ In particular, commentators reorder the chronology of Ovid's works to fit the desired narrative of reform. Unlike the Virgilian career model, which ascends through literary genres before culminating triumphally in epic, the Ovidian career unfolds as a narrative of repentance.¹⁹ So, while the commentary tradition accurately views the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* as appeals for mercy which result from the *Ars*, it passes over evidence internal to the *Ars* which confirms that it was composed later than the *Heroides*; the female-voiced laments of the *Heroides* retroactively become a palinode for the amatory manipulations of the *Ars*.²⁰ The reordering of Ovid's compositional chronology in turn serves as a strategic moral defense. If a reader objects to the *Ars*, they unwittingly reveal that they have read selectively, that they failed to attend to the repentant narrative of Ovid's career. They read Ovid's youthful poetic indiscretions out of context. Not unlike Ovid, who extends the hermeneutic logic of the *carmen perpetuum* beyond the *Metamorphoses* and invites us to read his different works in conjunction, to approach his career *as a career*, the *accessus* tradition proposes that Ovid's career must be read holistically.

While it is packaged as a biography, then, the *vita* leverages the porous boundary between fact and fiction to investigate a set of concerns about the ethical utility of fictive mimesis. Although it can overlap with details from the author's historical or self-constructed biography, the *vita* comes to function as a literary-theoretical tool. In recent scholarly discussions, the distinction between the historical life of the author and the literary career provides a useful point of comparison, since it also treats overlapping and mutually reinforcing but nevertheless distinct categories.

Instead of starting from what might be known, or claimed, about the historical life and times of an author, career criticism takes as its starting point the totality of an author's textual output and asks how that oeuvre as a whole shapes itself, both in its intratextual relationships (what kinds of beginnings, middles, and ends are traced in the pattern of an oeuvre), and in the claims it makes to reflect or mold extratextual conditions of production

¹⁸ Gillespie, "The Study of the Classical Authors," 186.

¹⁹ On the postclassical reception of Virgil's career, see Andrew Laird, "Re-inventing Virgil's Wheel: the poet and his work from Dante to Petrarch," in *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138–59.

²⁰ On commentaries to the *Heroides*, see Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 137–209. On the chronology, see Adrian S. Hollis, *Ovid Ars Amatoria Book I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 150–1; James C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores* vol. I: *Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987), 74–89.

(whether located in the personal history of the author, or in the relationship of the author to political and cultural structures of power and authority).²¹

Not unlike contemporary career criticism, the *vita* “ascribes an agency to the oeuvre in ‘shaping’, ‘reflecting’ or ‘moulding’, an agency that can only be realized through a reader’s perception of these processes.” Admittedly, this tendency to “[emphasize] the category of the *literary* (rather than, say, the biographical)” is not unique to the *vita Ovidiana*.²² But since Ovid’s historical biography and literary career both end in exile, his life and works lend themselves extraordinarily well to a repentant narrative.²³

Alert to how the conflation of the author with his oeuvre and the ascription of agency to an author’s works invites the reader to become a co-creator in meaning, the *accessus Ovidiani* reconfigure Ovid’s compositional chronology as a narrative of repentance. By expanding his exilic works to include the *Heroides*, the *vita* constructs a narrative which allows the amatory manipulations of the *Ars* to be read in an ethical manner. Where Ovid deflects accusations of moral blame which were directed at him as the author onto the reader, the commentator instead aligns the corrective potential of his textual expertise with the palinodal quality retrojected onto the *Heroides*. Even as it speaks in terms of the author’s life and works, the *vita* has a counterintuitive effect: the life of the author becomes a tool for decentering the author, as commentators take it upon themselves to assume the moral responsibility which Ovid deflects onto his audience.

2. Ovid’s Self-Defense and the Unanticipated Woman Reader

Yet of all possible compositional chronologies, of all potential repentant narratives, why retroactively construct the Ovidian *vita* such that it hinges on the amatory manipulations of the *Ars* and the female-voiced laments of the *Heroides*? Or to put the question another way, what story does that reordered chronology tell—and what can it teach us about the ideological underpinnings of the *accessus Ovidiani*? Rather than unknowingly inheriting textual errors or misconstruing ancient source material, medieval commentators adapt this gendered narrative of reform from Ovid’s authorial self-fashioning.

²¹ Philip Hardie and Helen Moore, “Introduction: Literary careers – Classical models and their receptions,” *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–15, at 1.

²² Patrick Cheney, “Introduction: ‘Jog On, Jog On’, European Career Paths,” in *European Literary Careers: the Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Cheney and F. A. de Armas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 6.

²³ For an incisive discussion of how (auto)biographical details are not incompatible with literary convention, see J. A. Burrow, “Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve,” in *Proceedings of the British Academy: Volume LXVIII, 1982* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 389–412.

It is well-recognized that Ovid makes women a major subject of his poetry, and that he links his authorial identity to the special relationship which he fosters with women. Throughout his career, Ovid repeatedly opposes the literatures of love and war, aligning himself with the former rather than the latter. Although he begins the *Amores* with “arma,” the same word which begins the *Aeneid*, for instance, he sets up the expectation of epic only to pivot to elegy. In the *Remedia amoris*, he makes the target of this elegiac deflection explicit when he claims that “elegy admits that it owes me as much as noble epic owes Virgil” (*Rem.* 395–6).²⁴ Whereas Virgil favors the objectivity and closure of the male-centered epic tradition, Ovid shifts the focus from authority to interpretation by giving voice to women’s subjective experiences.

However, the elegiac deflection of epic is not the only job Ovid gives his female speakers: they also distinguish him from other Latin love elegists.²⁵ An established genre in Augustan Rome, elegy had already become synonymous with the first-person, subjective voice when Ovid took it up. While other Latin elegists traditionally resist the ascent of a Virgilian poetic career which culminates in epic, elegy was nevertheless “an obstinately male genre.”²⁶ Departing from the conventional elegiac premise in which a male-lover poet speaks to his female love object, Ovid draws on his renowned abilities as a declaimer in order to ventriloquize women speakers.²⁷ A rhetorical practice which filters down from Greek oratory and rhetoric, female impersonation was a fixture of the ancient schoolroom, where practice speeches delivered in character could take the form of individual assignments (*ethopoeiae*) or a series of graded exercises (*progymnasmata*). Whereas professional declaimers rarely ventriloquized female voices,²⁸ roughly one third of *ethopoeiae* preserved in ancient authors’ works or as themes in textbooks impersonate women, mostly mythical characters such as Niobe, Medea, Hecuba or Andromache (or, in Latin, Juno and Dido).²⁹ So understood, Ovid does not challenge epic objectivity by adopting a competing, authoritative poetic mode; he instead generates

²⁴ J. C. McKeown, *Ovid, Amores: Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987), 72. On the Ovidian career model, see Barchiesi and Hardie, “The Ovidian career model,” 59–60.

²⁵ On Ovid’s relationship to other Latin love elegists, see Hardie and Moore, “Classical models and, their reception,” 6.

²⁶ N. J. Lowe, “Sulpicia’s Syntax,” *Classical Quarterly* 38 (1988), 193. See also Sharon E. James, “‘Ipsa Dixerat’: Women’s Words in Roman Love Elegy,” *Phoenix* 64 (2010), 314.

²⁷ On the “anti-career” in Roman love elegy, see Hardie and Moore, “Classical models and, their reception,” 5.

²⁸ Richard Hawley, “Female Characterization in Greek Declamation,” in *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. D. C. Innes, H. Hine, and C. Pelling (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 255–67, at 261–65.

²⁹ Manfred Kraus, “Rehearsing the Other Sex: Impersonation of Women in Ancient Classroom Ethopoeia,” in *Escuela y literatura en Grecia antigua*, ed. José Antonio Fernández Delgado, Francisca Pordomingo, and Antonio Stramaglia (Cassino, IT, 2007), 457.

female subjectivity by absorbing into his poetry a rhetorical exercise which would have been familiar to any schoolboy.³⁰

While the female speaker distinguishes Ovid's poetry from epic and elegy alike, it is the figure of the woman *reader* which guards him against accusations of lasciviousness. During Ovid's lifetime, the *Ars* became the subject of heated debates about the moral dangers posed by its salacious content. Exiled by Augustus for "a poem and an error" (*Tr.* II.207), Ovid defends the *Ars* from detractors on two principal occasions.³¹ In the *Remedia*, he claims that every genre should be evaluated according to its own decorum (*Rem. am.* 361–98), but in the *Tristia*, he takes a different tack. He argues that the *Ars* has been misinterpreted by readers he was not writing for, Roman matrons (*Tr.* II.245–62). Affecting surprise and consternation that women might have read a work he claims was not intended for them, Ovid assumes an authorial stance which, as Chaucer's sustained engagement with it will show, becomes a dynamic literary-theoretical tool in the later Middle Ages. Whatever they read, Ovid insists, these women read carnally, fixating on erotic possibilities whether named or not. Since "*all* poems can increase her delinquent skills! / Whatever she touches, if wrongdoing's her bent, will furnish / matter that turns her character toward vice" (*Tr.* II.256–8), Ovid argues that he should not be held accountable for matrons' misinterpretation of the *Ars*. His poem cannot harm anyone if approached "in the proper spirit" (*Tr.* II.275). Importantly, although Ovid apologizes for the *Ars*, he does not apologize to women; he blames them.

But since the third book of the *Ars* is addressed to women and contains reading recommendations for women in which Ovid speculates that the *Heroides* will come to be read alongside Sappho, the unanticipated nature of these women readers is an acknowledged fiction.³² By eliding women from that poem's intended audience, Ovid not only defends himself against concerns about his illicit poetry. He also deflects the accusation of immorality onto the unanticipated woman reader. It is worth stressing that this feminized figure could but does not need to have any basis in facts about historical women readers; instead, the scenario of being misinterpreted by this feminized figure illustrates a literary-theoretical point. If a reader fails to see a deeper meaning, it is because of her own carnal-minded interpretive impulses, not because he intended it to be read in that manner. The benefit of such a defense is that it can justify any content no matter how illicit. By fashioning his authorial identity in these gendered terms, Ovid looks to the unanticipated woman reader to shift the focus from authority to interpretation, as part of his effort to ground

³⁰ On Ovid's training as a lawyer, see P. E. Prill, "Rhetoric and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 5.2 (1987): 132.

³¹ The quotations from Ovid in this paragraph are from *The Poems of Exile: Tristia and the Black Sea Letters*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³² On the status of *Ars* III in the *accessus*, see Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 137.

poetry's value not in the authorial arbitration of moral truth but rather in the interpretive process itself.³³

3. The Unanticipated Woman Reader in the *Accessus Ovidiani*

I have argued that the *accessus Ovidiani* leverages the *vita* as a literary-theoretical tool for accommodating Ovid's poetry to ethics, and that Ovid defends himself by deflecting accusations of immorality onto women readers he had not anticipated. This section puts two and two together: Ovidian commentators absorb the idea of the unanticipated woman reader into the repentant narrative of the Ovidian *vita*, as they attempt to accommodate his poetry to the ethical branch of philosophy and to legitimate their own textual expertise.

Often (although not always) perceived as didactic rather than ironic, the *Ars* did not pose a threat to laws regulating sexuality as it had in Augustan Rome, but rather, as we have already seen, to the medieval classification of literature under the ethical branch of philosophy.³⁴ In the earliest and most comprehensive example of the *accessus ad auctores*, which is preserved in the twelfth-century manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19475, the introduction to the *Heroides* claims that Ovid's

intention in this book is to urge the pursuit of virtues and to prove vices wrong. He himself was charged with a crime before Caesar because he had taught Roman married women about illicit love affairs with his writings. Consequently, he wrote a book setting this example for them in order that they may know which women they ought to imitate in loving and which not.³⁵

To explicate the *intentio auctoris*, the commentator presents Ovid's biography as a repentant narrative in which he compensates for his youthful poetic indiscretions in his later years. While Vincent Gillespie suggests that *Heroides* commentary provides the "clearest evidence of medieval awareness of Ovid's narrative subtlety," then, it also enables a narrative of a different sort in the *accessus*, where it lends a repentant arc to Ovid's career.³⁶

Most importantly for the larger argument at hand, the Munich *accessus* consolidates concerns about the ethical utility of fiction by thinking in terms of the

³³ Gillespie, "The Study of the Classical Authors," 163.

³⁴ On the serious reception of Ovid's irony in the Middle Ages, see C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), esp. 9; on that reception history as it relates to Chaucer, see Marilyn Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2006), 35–54.

³⁵ *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. and trans. Wheeler, 89.

³⁶ Gillespie, "The Study of the Classical Authors," 191.

woman reader. According to this account, Ovid composes the *Heroides* as a palinode for his earlier poetry because it had taught matrons about love affairs. Admittedly, the question of intended and unintended audience is not addressed directly—but since Ovid tells us in his own self-defense that he did not intend Roman wives to be part of his audience, the *accessus* implicitly seizes on the scenario of an unintended readership, absorbing it into that repentant narrative. In step with the common practice of reordering of Ovid's works and expanding the body of works he composed in exile, the unanticipated nature of the woman reader not only smooths the way for an Ovidian *vita* which culminates with the palinodal *Heroides*; it also reinforces that repentant narrative by rendering it in gendered terms.

In the Munich *accessus*, the temporality of the repentant narrative is clear: Ovid's "carmen et error" are the cause, which "consequently" provokes the composition of the palinodal *Heroides*. But that chronology could also be construed less explicitly. As another *accessus* to the *Heroides* explains:

His intention is to commend lawful marriage and love, and in keeping with this end, he deals with love in three forms: lawful love, unlawful love, and foolish love. He uses the example of Penelope to discuss lawful love, the example of Canace to discuss unlawful love, and example of Phyllis to discuss foolish love. He included two of the forms, foolish and unlawful love, not for their own sake, but in order to commend the third. Thus, in commending lawful love he criticizes foolish and unlawful love. The work pertains to ethics, because he is teaching good morality and eradicating evil behaviour.³⁷

At first glance, this defense may seem to recall a common refrain in arguments made by commentators like Vincent of Beauvais and Conrad of Hirsau, who both claim that any text no matter how elliptical can be deduced by the ability of the commentator to generate a moral reading.³⁸ Singling out three representations of women in the *Heroides*, this *accessus* defends Ovid's poetry by suggesting that it should be read in terms of its exemplarity. When Ovid represents an immoral act, he does so to provide a negative example which will "eradicate evil behaviour." But since the commentator cites Penelope and Canace as examples of "lawful" and "unlawful" love, it also evokes the Augustan laws regulating sexuality. The Ovidian scenario of Roman matrons being corrupted by a work which was never intended for them lurks here, as does the repentant narrative of the *vita*. That narrative invites Ovid's oeuvre to be read holistically, in conversation with his other works—an interpretive task which in turn creates the need for the commentator, who can provide the necessary framework.

³⁷ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 27.

³⁸ Gillespie, "The Study of the Classical Authors," 165.

Where both these introductions align the palinodal function of the *Heroides* with the woman reader, *accessus* to other Ovidian works amplify her unanticipated nature by eliding women from the audience of the *Ars* altogether. Rather than claiming that the *Ars* taught Roman matrons about illicit affairs, an *accessus* of the *Ex Ponto* describes how Ovid “had been exiled by Octavian Caesar because of the book he had written about love, which had been the means of corrupting Roman matrons.”³⁹ An introduction to the *Tristia* describes how Ovid’s illicit affairs or his descriptions of illicit affairs in the *Ars* resulted in his exile:

The question of why he was sent into exile is asked. Three opinions are given. The first is that he had an affair with Livia, Caesar’s wife. The second is that, being on close terms with Caesar, and chancing to pass through his portico, he saw Caesar cohabiting with his favorite male lover, and so Caesar, fearing that he might be betrayed by him, sent him into exile. The third reason is that he had written a book, *On the Art of Love*, in which he had taught young men how to deceive and attract married women. This gave offence to the Romans, and it was for this reason that he is alleged to have been sent into exile.⁴⁰

In the latter case, the syntactic parallelism created by the repetition of the coordinating conjunction sustains ambiguity, leaving it to the reader to navigate between multiple possibilities which carry equal grammatical weight. But both *accessus* imagine that the *Ars* prompts Ovid’s exile since it had been the means of corrupting men’s wives, not because it taught them directly. As a result, Ovid’s youthful poetry is conflated with heterosexual male prerogative.

Something else is also happening here. By overlooking the fact that Ovid addresses *Ars* III to women, these *accessus* collapse the difference between Roman matrons and all women, instead presenting the *Ars* as a poem intended solely for men. The refusal to acknowledge that the third book is addressed to women has the effect of construing Ovid’s repentant biography such that it dovetails with a shift in audience: Ovid not only matures from wanton poetry to write a palinodal retraction. He also comes to include the woman reader whom he had failed to anticipate in his youth.

Although the *accessus* vary in the particulars of the life and the compositional chronology which they ascribe to Ovid, they tend to align worries about the misrecognition of fictionality with women or a feminized interpretive mode, even in instances in which the figure of the woman reader does not appear. Introductions to the *Amores*, for instance, tend to explain its *titulus* (or rather the lack thereof) by

³⁹ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 26.

⁴⁰ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 27.

pointing to the representations of women in the *Ars*. According to one account, Ovid

feared Augustus Caesar who he knew had taken offense at the *Art of Love* because in that book Ovid has fictitiously placed the Roman matrons in the setting of a brothel. He knew that he would be even more offended if he read this title.⁴¹

This explanation recalls perennial debates about the ethics of representation, including Plato's critique of poet's false stories and the danger of lies dressed like the truth.⁴² But where Plato worries about the childish inability to distinguish fact from fiction, it is the representation of women which brings this concern to a head here. This *accessus* configures the overlapping paradigms of women, the surface, and carnality in a slightly different fashion than the Munich *accessus*, but it raises similar concerns about the dangers of fictive mimesis.

While commentators follow Ovid in attributing hermeneutic faults to women readers, then, they feminize misinterpretation to different effect. In Ovid's case, there is a conscious inadequacy to his self-defense that the *Ars* has been misinterpreted by Roman matrons: the poem's sexually explicit content is meant as an ironic critique of Augustus's legislation regulating sexuality, the Lex Julia and Lex Papia.⁴³ There is also a conscious inadequacy to the claim in the *accessus* that Ovid did not intend the *Ars* for women readers. In the latter case, however, commentators do not seek political cover so much as self-authorization. They do not follow Ovid and blame women readers for misinterpretation; they correct them. In addition to legitimating the commentator's ability to reveal the deeper moral meaning the woman reader cannot see, the idea of the unanticipated woman reader also helps the commentator to triangulate a new relationship between author, reader, and commentator. Or to put an even finer point on this difference, commentators imagine their textual expertise as a necessary guardrail, which can guide feminized modes of interpretation which focus on the narrative surface in the proper direction.

An example will help illustrate how commentators repurpose the gendered aspects of Ovid's self-fashioning to legitimate their textual expertise, without necessarily rejecting feminized modes of interpretation as inimical to ethics. In its sustained engagement with the narrative's literal meaning, the Vulgate *Metamorphoses*,

⁴¹ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 27.

⁴² Plato, *Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari and trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 61–87.

⁴³ On the relationship between Ovid's poetry and Caesar's laws, see Alison R. Sharrock, "Ovid and the Politics of Reading," *Materiali e discussion per l'analisi dei testi classici* 33 (1994), 97–122; Ellen O'Gorman, "Lover and the Family: August and Ovidian Elegy," *Arethusa* 30 (1997), 103–24; Hardie, "Ovid and the Early Imperial Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 34–45.

the most influential commentary on the *Metamorphoses* in the High Middle Ages, draws readers into a network of literary allusions that require an understanding of the poem's whole narrative.⁴⁴ At various points, the commentator acknowledges these narrative connections explicitly, such as when he glosses Ovid's description of Achelous's speech to Theseus:

Sicut Tereus linguam Philomene unde supra: luctantemque loqui
compressam forcipe linguam etc.

[Just as Tereus (held) the tongue of Philomena above: her tongue having
been compressed by forceps and struggling to speak.]⁴⁵

Linking two seemingly unrelated moments in Ovid's narrative, the commentator concatenates Achelous saying he will not hold back the truth to Tereus's act of violence which *prevents* Philomela from speaking her truth. Yet once these two narrative moments are considered together, the disjunction between them provokes readerly reflection, even discomfort. The excision of Philomela's tongue is violent, gruesome, whereas Achelous tells Hercules about the origins of the islands, including the one called Perimele. By aligning the two, the commentator indirectly calls attention to what Achelous leaves unsaid. Since Achelous narrates, he tells the story in such a way that obfuscates his rape of Perimele. As Katherine De Boer Simons puts it, "*adimo*, with its connotations of seizing, stealing, or depriving [...], suggests that Perimele was unwilling."⁴⁶ By drawing a comparison between Achelous's speech to Theseus and Tereus cutting out Philomela's tongue, the commentator invites the reader to attend to the unspoken sexual violence, not unlike the unanticipated woman reader who focuses on unspoken sexual possibilities.

I want to linger a bit longer with the image of the severed tongue, which the Vulgate commentator uses to suture the two narratives together. By pausing at this moment, when part of Philomela's body is compressed between the forceps, the Vulgate commentator drives readerly attention not to a moral, but rather to an aspect of Ovid's poetic form: in particular, how Ovid strings his representations of sexual violence together by evoking the sensation of physical constraint, even pressure or heaviness located in bodily extremities. In *Metamorphoses* VI, Ovid lingers on the image of the compressed tongue (*compressam*), which wriggles and remains animate after it is separated from Philomela's body. This same sensation is evoked in the

⁴⁴ On the Vulgate manuscripts, see Coulson, "Ovid's Transformations in Medieval France," 53; "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the School Tradition of France," 68.

⁴⁵ Amanda J. Gerber, "Reframing the Metamorphoses: The Enabling of Political Allegory in Late Medieval Ovidian Narrative," PhD diss., (The Ohio State University, 2012), 62. See also Gerber, *Medieval Ovid: Frame Narrative and Political Allegory* (Palgrave: New York, 2015).

⁴⁶ Katherine De Boer Simons, "Death and the Female Body in Homer, Vergil, and Ovid," PhD diss., (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), 186.

Perimele episode, where force and pressure are also associated with her constrained body and appendages: her “swimming limbs” (*artus...natantes*, 8.609) are embraced (*amplexa est*, 8.609) by the new land and “a heavy island grew over her transformed body” (*gravis increvit mutatis insula membris*, 8.610). Additional intertextual links can also be uncovered here: “radix” calls to mind the many Ovidian heroines who turn into trees, like Daphne who is unable to escape Apollo’s embrace as he wraps his arms around her trunk. In Daphne’s case, the effect is doubly claustrophobic: her body is first encased in bark, then constricted by Apollo’s unwanted embrace. The Vulgate commentator’s sensitivity to Ovid’s poetic language therefore has an unexpected effect. When Ovid accuses women of misreading, part of the charge he lodges against them is that they read selectively, fixating on the erotic details and potential of the narrative. Yet in this instance, the commentary grounds ethical reflection in attention to those precise sorts of details. Attentive to how Ovid generates meaning in the interplay between narratives, it calls attention to an image that will reward further reflection, but which invites the reader to consider the sexual violence which has been occluded.

It is also worth noting that this severed tongue encapsulates a key feature of Ovid’s poetic project, insofar as he attempts to “give voice” to the feminine. Here, it is not the woman speaker or feminized modes of expression associated with the *Heroides* which neutralize immoral narrative content, but rather the interpretive act which the commentary itself elicits. Rather than emptying out Ovid’s narrative so that it can function as a vehicle for a predetermined moral truth, this structural narrative linking instead leaves the labor of interpretation something to work on—and in its ambiguity, in the multiplicity of meanings it opens up, it invites an interpretive approach which bears more than a superficial resemblance to literary criticism as we now practice it. So understood, the Vulgate *Metamorphoses* decenters the rhetorical practice of female declamation, a hallmark of Ovid’s poetic practice, instead transforming it into a corresponding hermeneutic. It also takes Augustine’s youthful misinterpretation and revalues it: Augustine claims he erred in allowing himself to fill out the narrative gaps, to imagine Dido as a character with interiority, subjectivity, feeling. But in this example, the image of Philomela’s severed tongue elicits just that kind of reflection and attention to an unnarrated female interiority.

It is here that we can begin to see how the idea of the woman reader and the interpretation of fiction came to be defined in relation to one another in the Ovidian commentary tradition—or if not “fiction,” then at least what Gillespie has described as “a rudimentary notion of fictiveness grounded in the profoundly ethical nature of all literary experience.”⁴⁷ To accommodate Ovid’s poetry to the ethical branch of philosophy, these commentaries create a form of literary interpretation based on the negative example of women’s supposedly unskillful reading. However, this gendered model of literary activity does not reject fiction as inimical to ethics. To the contrary,

⁴⁷ Gillespie, “The Study of the Classical Authors,” 15.

its sustained engagement with the idea of the unanticipated woman reader reflects an intense desire to recuperate the narrative surface, and to think seriously about how one might engage with narrative fiction in a morally efficacious manner.

As we prepare to turn to Chaucer's poetry, this feminized figure also provides a solid basis from which we can begin to reassess the common understanding that Chaucer read his Ovid "straight"—that is, without commentary or a critical apparatus.⁴⁸ While Chaucer rightly has been understood to resist the application of tidy moralizations or *sententiae* to his works, his rejection of one mode of commentary does not amount to a wholesale rejection of the dynamic range of hermeneutic tools it afforded, nor the pressing questions it raised about the ethics of representation. Given the extent to which these theoretical questions were worked through in scholastic introductions to Ovid's works, we very well might wonder if it is possible that as astute a reader of Ovid as Chaucer could have managed—or for that matter, would have wanted—to avoid the lively critical conversation about the nature and effects of poetry which attached to Ovid's works, as well as the imagined scenario of the unanticipated woman reader on which it so often hinged.

⁴⁸ Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 1–14.

Chapter Two

Chaucer's Proleptic Palinode

Just as Ovid presents the female-voiced laments of the *Heroides* as recompense for the amatory manipulations of the *Ars*, so, too, Chaucer stages *The Legend of Good Women* as his own *Heroides*. Yet, as the previous chapter has shown, the Ovidian career is retroactively constructed such that it hinges less on Ovid's role as author than it does on the figure of the unanticipated woman reader. It is by engaging with this feminized figure that Ovid and his medieval commentators address pressing concerns about the ethics of representation and the nature of interpretation. How might this new understanding of the unanticipated woman reader's central role in the *vita Ovidiana* bear on our understanding of Chaucer's Ovidianism, if at all?

In what follows, we might regard the *Troilus* as a proleptic palinode: before he writes the *Legend*, Chaucer sets the stage for its palinode by giving himself something to apologize for.¹ With an eye on the Ovidian career just described, he leverages his own career as a literary-theoretical tool. The argument proceeds in four parts. First, I argue that Pandarus grounds his amatory practice not just in the Ovidian arts of love, but also, somewhat counterintuitively, in the complaints of women wronged by their male lovers, absorbing the corrective function of the *Heroides* into the male-centered amatory plot: the Ovidian apology for erotic manipulation is not so much compensation for that manipulation as an item in its toolkit. The second and third sections reconsider Criseyde and Cassandre's respective readings of the Theban narrative. Once read in relation to the theoretical debates which had coalesced around the Ovidian biography, it becomes clear that Chaucer writes with an eye toward Statius's Ovidianism, but that in so doing he probes the limits of female-voiced lament as an ameliorative or corrective mode. The fourth and final section turns to the palinode itself. Rather than claiming to reveal the deeper moral meaning which the carnal-minded woman reader cannot see, as Ovidian commentators had done, the *Legend* prompts us to look at rather than merely through the narrative surface. Chaucer does not give voice to the female subjectivity which results from male sexual violence in the *Heroides* tradition, but instead renders it into an absent presence, lodging it in the gaps of his narration. Having taken the Ovidian rhetorical practice of female impersonation and returned it to us as a hermeneutic,² he suggests that literature's ethical value lies in the acts of

¹ The importance of Chaucer's apologies to women has been noted before, albeit not in direct relation to the *vita Ovidiana* or the woman reader's role in perennial debates about literature's ethical utility. See Jill Mann, "Apologies to Women" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9–19.

² Cf. Roland Barthes, "L'ancienne rhétorique," *Communications* 16 (1970): 174. Ovid's female-voiced laments take shape as part of the so-called "rhetoricization" of Latin poetry—or what

probation and discernment that fiction requires, in the imaginative act of interpretation itself.

1. Pandarus's *Heroides*

It is well-recognized that Chaucer stages the *Legend* as his own *Heroides*. In doing so, however, he also attends to that poem's role within the repentant narrative of the *vita Ovidiana*. In the G-text prologue, the God of Love objects to two of Chaucer's earlier works: the English translation of the *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. It happens that both these Chaucerian works are closely aligned with the amatory manipulations of the *Ars amatoria*, which commentators say provokes the need for a corrective palinode. The first is a translation of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*, which claims to "enclose the whole art of love." Written later, at the midpoint of his career, *Troilus and Criseyde* is also deeply enmeshed with the Ovidian discourses of love.³ No character contributes more to the poem's Ovidian subtext than Pandarus, who facilitates the love affair by offering advice from the Ovidian love manuals.⁴ Prompting Troilus to compose a letter to Criseyde, for instance, Pandarus (but not Boccaccio's Pandaro) offers advice taken directly from the pages of the *Ars*.⁵ Even as the love affair faces obstacles, and later, sputters to a halt Pandarus continues to dole out Ovidian advice: invent a rival lover, take a new one when you grow bored.

It is all the more puzzling, then, that when Pandarus offers himself as an amatory advisor, his first recourse is not to the *Ars*, but rather to the putatively corrective *Heroides*. When Troilus scoffs that Pandarus cannot offer advice about love, Pandarus retorts by probing a gap in Troilus's reading. Citing proverbial examples, he draws on Oenone's letter to Paris. What results is so complex that it is worth quoting fully:

"I woot wel that it fareth thus be me
As to thi brother, Paris, an herdesse
Which that icleped was Oenone
Wrot in a compleynte of hir hevynesse.

Barthes describes as a wholesale "conversion" of rhetoric into "poetic technique" in Augustan Rome.

³ James Simpson, "The Elegiac," in *The Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 2, 1350–1457: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 134–90. See also Elizabeth Allen, "Flowing Backward to the Source: Criseyde's Promises and the Ethics of Allusion," *Speculum* 88 (2013): 681–720, at 696; Timothy D. Arner, "Chaucer's Second Hector: The Triumphs of Diomedes and the Possibility of Epic in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medium aevum* 79 (2010) 68–9; and Stephen A. Barney, "*Troilus and Criseyde*": *With Facing Page 'Il Filostrato'* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), xiv.

⁴ Michael A. Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1997), 44–5.

⁵ Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*, 52.

Yee say the letter that she wrote, I gesse?"
 "Nay, nevere yet, ywys," quod Troilus.
 "Now," quod Pandare, "herkne, it was thus:
 "Phebus, that first fond art of medicyne,
 Quod she, 'and couthe in every wightes care
 Remedye and reed, by herbes he knew fine,
 For love hadde hym so bounden in a snare,
 Al for the doughter of the kyng Amete,
 That al his craft ne koude his sorwes bete.'
 "Right so fare I, unhappily for me.
 I love oon best, and that me smerteth sore;
 And yet, peraunter, kan I reden the
 And nat myself; repreve me na more.
 I have no cause, I woot wel, for to sore
 As doth an hauk that listeth for to pleye;
 But to thin help yet somewhat kan I sey. [...]" (TC I.652–72)

Rather than reiterating advice from the *Arx* about how to win a lover, Pandarus turns to *Heroides* V, which Chaucer presents as if it were a historical document just then circulating in Troy. Of all the female-voiced complaints he might have chosen, he selects Oenone's letter to Paris, who transferred his love from Oenone to Helen, thereby setting the Trojan War in motion. Of course Pandarus ignores the letter's contemporary relevance, as well as its implied warning about sexual desire. But he also misquotes Oenone, indeed excises her from her own letter: he reattributes her grief to another man, whom he then proceeds to liken himself to. Just as the god Apollo can cure others despite his inability to remedy his own heartache, Pandarus claims that he, too, can serve as an amatory advisor despite his own lack of success in love.

All this is well-known. But the interpolation of this particular middleman is telling: Pandarus's strategy is to provoke sympathy for a man who, as Oenone reports in that same letter, raped her: "Apollo took me by force, but he is a god / whom mortals cannot resist. And he gave me the gift of healing, / with the secrets of all the potent roots and herbs."⁶ In antiquity, this narrative embellishment is unique to the *Heroides*. As a reader well-acquainted with Ovid, Pandarus thus makes the

⁶ The translation is not from the Loeb, but from *Love Poems, Letters, and Remedies of Ovid*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011). In the Loeb, ll.140–45, 151, and 152 have been placed in the footnotes, where they have been "condemned" and lack facing-page translation. Medieval readers would not have questioned these lines' authenticity: see Jamie C. Fumo, "'Little Troilus': *Heroides* 5 and Its Ovidian Contexts in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003): 284–5, n. 13.

brazen choice to represent Oenone's rapist as the victim: prey "bounden in a snare."⁷ Grammatically he removes Apollo's agency from violent action (indeed any action), instead rendering him as the direct object. Some scholars have suggested that Pandarus's misattribution of lovesickness to Apollo hints at another text, the *Metamorphoses*, where Apollo bemoans his inability to cure himself of love for the nymph Daphne.⁸ This is true enough. But Pandarus's Apollonian reading of *Heroides* V also recalls yet a third instance of unrequited love from the *Ars*: Apollo's love for Admetus, whom he later helps win the hand of Alcestis.⁹ Drawing on this tradition, the *Ars* cites Apollo as an example cautioning against pride in love: if the god became a herdsman due to his desire for Admetus, mere mortals should also be willing to set aside pride for love.¹⁰ While Pandarus begins his advice to Troilus by citing the *Heroides*, then, at least three Apollonian episodes linger here: his rape of Oenone from the *Heroides*, the love-hunt from the *Metamorphoses*, and his love for Admetus from the *Ars*.

In addition to burying Oenone's account of her rape within this densely interwoven network of mythological allusions, Pandarus further blunts the emotional force of her lament by giving Apollo a new female love object: the "doughter of the kyng Amete," Perimele. Ovid makes no reference to Apollo's desire for Perimele, nor does any other classical source.¹¹ In this episode (not Ovidian; I will consider its sources in a moment), Apollo is sentenced to tend Admetus's cattle as punishment for killing the Cyclops. It is because of his unrequited love for Admetus that Apollo ultimately helps him win the hand of Alceste in marriage. In addition to glossing over homosexual desire by placing another woman between men, this interpolation rests

⁷ C. M. C. Green, "Terms of Venery: *Ars amatoria* I," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 126 (1996): 221–263 at 232–33. Modeling love advice in relation to the hunt, for instance, Ovid constructs a conceit in which Rome becomes Venus's preserve (*Ars am.* I.67–100). A similar trope can also be found in Andreas Capellanus's etymological speculation that the word *amor* (love) derives from *amus* (hook).

⁸ John Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 123–24.

⁹ See Apollodorus, *The Library*, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 121–22 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 3.10.4. While Callimachus first describes how Apollo was "fired with love" for Admetus, Plutarch elaborates by claiming that Admetus served as his herdsman on account of this desire.

¹⁰ *Ars am.* II.239–43. All translations are from Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library 232 (1929; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1969). This episode does not occur in the *Metamorphoses*, but it can be found, for instance, in Servius's commentary on the *Aeneid*: *Servii Grammatici qui Feruntur in Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ed. Georgius Thilo and Hermannus Hagen, 3 vols. (1881–87), 6.398.

¹¹ Gilbert Tournoy, "Apollo and Admetus: The Forms of the Classical Myth through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," in *Forms of the 'Medieval' in the 'Renaissance': A Multidisciplinary Exploration of a Cultural Continuum*, ed. George Hugo Tucker (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 175–203.

on a glaring chronological confusion: Apollo sublimates his desire for a man by pursuing a woman on his behalf, while Pandarus multiplies the number of women between the two men, such that Apollo desires the daughter whose birth resulted from the union which he ostensibly had facilitated between Admetus and Alcestis. By using women to get closer to another man, Pandarus thus defends his credentials as *praeceptor amoris* with an example that encapsulates a key feature of his amatory practice: the elision or appropriation of female experience to smooth the way for male desire and strengthen bonds between men.

This reference to Perimele has tended to be viewed as a textual error which Chaucer inherits. Yet even if we concede that it is evidence of medieval “misreading”—the result perhaps of a misguided attempt to construe Ovid’s difficult Latin, as some critics have speculated—its transmission nevertheless has something to tell us about Chaucer’s relationship to the medieval Ovid, where just this reference appears in the margins to *Heroides* V. Just as modern textual criticism has questioned Oenone’s claim that Apollo raped her—often glossing over her account, either by placing it in the footnotes or removing it altogether—it seems that this detail also troubled medieval readers or at least gave them pause. That Oenone’s perfunctory reference to her rape should provoke confusion or the desire for further explication is not altogether surprising; indeed, that seems to be part of Ovid’s intended effect.¹² A reader familiar with *Heroides* V will not be inclined to look kindly on Apollo’s hunt of Daphne in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid’s intertextual experimentation with Apollo’s ambiguity encourages readers to draw connections between and across his works—to read his career *as* a career, even. However, the gloss which refers to Apollo’s love for Perimele works differently. Rather than placing the episode in conversation with another instance of Apollonian violence, the gloss sustains this recursive critical loop by directing attention away from the alleged rape in favor of another, more palatable love affair. So understood, Pandarus’s familiarity with the medieval Ovid allows him to neutralize sexual content, as commentators initially sought to do. But rather than allegorizing or revealing deeper moral meaning, he instead buries Apollo’s rape of Oenone within this complex network of Apollonian references.

It happens that the same triangulated association between Apollo’s rape of Oenone, his attempted rape of Daphne, and his desire for Perimele appears in the margins of a chief source for the *Troilus*: Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, which the author has encased in a network of his own glosses, staged to look as if they were written by an anonymous scholar-glossator. This self-commentary mentions only Virgil by name, but the overwhelming majority of its mythographic references come from Ovid.¹³ Rather than moralizing Ovid’s objectionable content or restoring his poetry to its original form, sans commentary, Boccaccio exploits and even amplifies the

¹² Fumo, “Little Troilus,” 289.

¹³ Robert Hollander, “The Validity of Boccaccio’s Self-Exegesis in His *Teseida*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 8 (1977): 164–5 and 176–7, n. 14.

interpretive possibilities the Apollonian references provide. This mythography, running in tandem with the *Teseida*'s narrative, asks the reader to scrutinize the poem's amatory plot. When the two knights fall in love with Emilia, for instance, the lover-poet describes their love as compulsory. In the margin, the scholar-glossator then draws an allusion to Apollo's hunt of Daphne:

Apollo, that is Phoebus, as it has been said in several places already, was very much in love with Daphne, daughter of Peneus, and he did not know how, nor was he able, to heal himself of this love by virtue of the extracts from all his herbs, with which he had cured every other man, and he knew them all, since he was god of medicine. (*Tes.* 3.25)

Rather than unambiguously reinforcing the lover-poet's claim that Arcita and Palamon cannot help themselves, this gloss is placed side-by-side with another that seems to call the compulsory nature of their love into question. As we learn in a gloss affixed to that same line: "Aesculapius was a very great physician that ... was the son of Apollo and a nymph called Coronis." Like Ovid's intertextual experimentation with Apollonian ambiguity, the reference to Aesculapius—Apollo's son, whose death provokes his stay with Admetus—reminds us that Apollo has made a troubling habit of impregnating nymphs. Later, the scholar-glossator directly appeals to Apollo's love for "the daughter of Admetus."¹⁴ For Boccaccio, Ovid's intertextual experimentation with Apollo's ambiguity thus bolsters his "radical act," which is to do for Ovid what Dante had done for Virgil:¹⁵ that is, to accommodate Ovid's amatory poetry to ethics. But rather than rendering the romance palatable through allegory, the mythographic commentary invites the reader to engage in ethical reflection by noticing the unsettling resonances or gaps that emerge between narrative and gloss.

Chaucer may have drawn these Apollonian references directly from the margins of the *Teseida*, or he and Boccaccio may have been independently influenced by *Heroides* manuscripts in the same tradition. No matter: both Pandarus's misattribution of Oenone's pain to Apollo and the introduction of Perimele as his new love object have roots in Ovid's intertextual experimentation with Apollo's ambiguity, especially as it takes on new life and interpretive forms within the medieval commentary tradition. But against this background the *Troilus* does something new: it absorbs that intricate network of intertextual references into the interstices of its narration. What had been construed as a gloss in the medieval Ovid and Boccaccio now has been reduced to a detail which the narrative glosses over.

¹⁴ *Tes.* 4.46.

¹⁵ The phrase belongs to Janet Levarie Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover* (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 60.

Chaucer does not ask his readers to examine commentary on the margins of the page, but instead pushes them to fill the gaps in the narration.

This rejection of straightforward moralization in turn shapes the poem's amatory plot, where Pandarus's efforts as *praeceptor amoris* succeed. Ignorant of these narrative gaps, at least for the time being, Troilus does not reflect on the similarities between Oenone's account of her rape in the *Heroides* and Apollo's love-hunt in the *Metamorphoses*. Disavowing his initial resistance to love, he embraces the same mode of reading as Pandarus, selectively appropriating or eliding women's pain in favor of male desire. Immediately before the so-called consummation scene, for instance, Troilus begins his prayer with an appeal to Venus's love for Adonis "that with the boor was slawe," and so reinforces Adonis's feminized subject position as a victim penetrated by the boar's tusks.¹⁶ The boar is the same Ovidian figure that later will prefigure in his dream Criseyde's betrayal and his death (III.721). But more than simply seizing women's grief on behalf of men, such posturing continues to elide male violence. In a direct echo of Pandarus's selective reading of Oenone's letter, he specifically cites Apollo's unrequited love for Daphne:

O Phebus, think whan Dane hireselven shette
Under the bark, and laurer wax for drede;
Yet for hire love, O help now at this need! (TC III.726–8)

Troilus too omits Apollo's attempted rape of Daphne and her plea for her father to transform her into a tree to escape these unwanted advances. He provokes sympathy not for Daphne but for the man who hunted her.¹⁷ As the poem unfolds, Troilus assumes this same victimized subject position by aligning himself with multiple Ovidian female personae: in addition to recruiting Helen to make a complaint on his behalf, the circumstances which precipitate the consummation recall the circumstances under which Dido first sleeps with Aeneas. Yet if Dido ultimately laments in the *Heroides* that Aeneas has abandoned her, it is Troilus who seizes the feminized subject position of the abandoned lover by the poem's end.

This systematic reabsorption of the corrective *Heroides* into the amatory *Arx* also disrupts the interpretive mode that the *accessus* had taken Ovid's female-voiced palinode to legitimate. I have mentioned that the repentant narrative of the *vita Ovidiana* had a corresponding hermeneutic: in addition to making the *Heroides* into a retroactive palinode, Ovidian commentators claimed to correct the woman reader by revealing the moral meaning she had failed to see. The exchanges between Pandarus and Troilus rely on exegetical metaphors, but these metaphors signal, not moral reflection, but systematic inattention to the amatory content that the *vita* sought to

¹⁶ Mary-Jo Arn, "Three Ovidian Women in Chaucer's 'Troilus': Medea, Helen, Oenone," *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980): 1–10.

¹⁷ Allen, "Flowing Backward," 704.

render palatable in the first place. Berating Troilus for his resistance to love, Pandarus compares him to “an asse to the harpe” (TC I.731–5). This allusion recalls Boethius, of course, but also Ovid’s story of Midas, whose ass’s ears were taken to signify his deafness to deeper moral meaning.¹⁸ However, Pandarus redeploys that exegetical metaphor to claim that Troilus is deaf, not to deeper moral meaning, but to love: the carnal surface *becomes* the deeper meaning Troilus fails to see. The repentant narrative of the *vita* is similarly redirected. While Troilus at first resists Pandarus’s accusation by protesting that “I am nat deaf” (TC I.753), he eventually reverses course and begs the God of Love, “my japes thow foryive” (TC I.937). In keeping with the male appropriation of the female-voiced *Heroides*, the love affair which Pandarus brokers thus centers on male suffering and desire at the expense of and in terms stolen from women’s experience. Whereas commentators elide the woman reader from the *Ars* to facilitate a narrative of reform, Pandarus and Troilus elide women from the ameliorative *Heroides* to anticipate and invert that repentant narrative.

Once we consider these elements of Pandarus’s reading in relation to the *vita Ovidiana*, what he is doing stands out with abrupt clarity: he reads the putatively repentant and corrective *Heroides* as if it were the *Ars*. He grounds this reading, paradoxically enough, in details that seem to be drawn directly from the margins of the medieval Ovid. Yet as this sustained attention to the medieval Ovid reveals, Chaucer neither mimics the Ovidian career nor inverts it to parodic effect. After all, Pandarus and Troilus have read the palinodal *Heroides*, but in such a manner that it, too, provokes the need for a corrective palinode. Even as he sets the stage for the *Legend* as his own *Heroides*, Chaucer therefore begins to probe the underlying logic of the *vita Ovidiana*. In so doing, he also takes the idea of the unanticipated woman reader familiar from the Ovidian career model and revalues the interpretive faults imputed to her, as we will shortly see.

2. Criseyde’s *Thebaid*

Part of what Pandarus’s Apollonian reading reveals is that Chaucer repurposes some of the same Ovidian commentary as Boccaccio, but rather than filling the poem’s margins with mythographic details, he lets them glimmer through the gaps of his

¹⁸ Late antique commentary glosses Midas as an exemplary figure who should be admired for his wealth. However, the moralized tradition referred to him as “le sot,” since he foolishly misjudges Pan’s musical abilities to be superior to those of Apollo. Cf. *Ovide moralisé*, ed. C. de Boer, volume 4, *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeeling Letterkunde, New Series, Part XXXVII* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Publishing, 1936), Book 11.303–968. See also Judson Boyce Allen and Patrick Gallagher, “Alisoun Through the Looking Glass: Or, Every Man His Own Midas,” *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970): 99–105; and Karla Taylor, “The Motives of Reeds: The Wife of Bath’s Midas and Literary Tradition,” in *Later Middle English Literature, Materiality, and Culture: Essays in Honor of James M. Dean* (Newark, DE.: University of Delaware Press, 2018), 25–41.

narration. This section will show that the *Troilus*'s representations of women reading take shape in much the same fashion, triangulated against the Ovidian tradition and Boccaccio's use of it: Ovid's commentators claim to reveal the deeper moral meaning the woman reader cannot see; Boccaccio addresses his poem to a specific woman reader; Chaucer's bookish women are not only readers of the poem but characters within it.

I will turn to Criseyde's scenes of reading in a moment; for reasons that will become clear as this section unfolds, I need to linger with the *Teseida*, which Boccaccio stages as if it were an address from the lover-poet to his lover, Fiammetta. Coupled with the poem's network of quasi-allegorical glosses, the frame narrative evokes the idea of the woman reader familiar from Ovidian commentary. Unlike the carnal-minded woman reader who mistakes a sexually suggestive poetic surface for the deeper meaning, however, the male lover-poet deliberately collapses that distinction between narrative surface and moral depth. He hopes that the amatory plot will rekindle Fiammetta's love for him; he *wants* her to read carnally. But the audience of the *Teseida* is invited to look past the lover-poet's amatory intentions—just as Fiammetta does. For she is a woman reader of exceptional intelligence.¹⁹ To present her as such, Boccaccio blurs the constructed *vita Ovidiana* with Statius's *Thebaid*. Specifically, Boccaccio models the lover-poet's Fiammetta (little flame) after the Statian motif of the woman who interprets the meaning of the funeral pyre's flames: Antigone, whose lament concludes the Statius' epic.²⁰ He directs his poem to readers who will be able to discern, as Fiammetta does, how the romance and amatory glosses collectively provide a vehicle for the quasi-allegorical interpretation—paradoxically, the same meaning that Ovidian commentators assumed the “woman reader” would miss.

It is therefore no coincidence that, although the *Troilus*'s narrator and male characters systematically neglect the Theban subtext in order to impose the meaning most conducive to male satisfaction, Chaucer bookends the poem with two representations of women apparently reading the *Thebaid*. Departing from the *Filostrato*, Chaucer reimagines Pandaro's initial encounter with Criseida as a scene of interrupted reading. Immediately after disregarding the swallow Procne's lament as “noyse” and refusing to listen to it in full (*TC* II.70)—another selective reading of an Ovidian female-voiced lament—Pandarus encounters Criseyde and two of her ladies listening to a third lady reading a book aloud. He inquires whether it is “of love,” evidently hoping it might aid his mission. To this inquiry Criseyde responds:

This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede;

¹⁹ On Fiammetta as a “reader of exceptional intelligence” see Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta*, 62. On the figure of the woman reader in the Italian Trecento, see also Elena Lombardi, *The Making of the Woman Reader in the Age of Dante* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), esp. 188–206.

²⁰ Kara Gaston, *Reading Chaucer in Time, Literary Formation in England and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), 52.

And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde
 Thorough Edippus his sone, and al that dede;
 And here we stynten at thisse lettres rede
 How the bisshop, as the book kan telle,
 Amphiorax, fil thorough the ground to helle. (TC II.106–12)

Since Chaucer draws his Theban subtext from Latin and vernacular sources alike, the book which Criseyde reads has been subject to debate.²¹ The question cannot be settled: the evidence points deliberately in both directions. Upon interrupting her, Pandarus proclaims that he already knows this story because he has read the *Thebaid*:

Al this knowe I myselve,
 And al th'assege of Thebes and the care;
 For herof ben ther maked bookes twelve.
 But lat be this, and telle me how ye fare. (TC II.106–9)

Pandarus asks Criseyde which romance she is reading; when she responds that it is the Theban narrative, he proceeds to explain the *Thebaid* to her. But is it that Pandarus sees her vernacular romance reading as an opportunity to display his learning? Or, is it that Criseyde calls attention to Pandarus's sexist assumption that she must be reading a romance and he then brazenly proceeds to explain to her the book she is reading? It is left to the reader to fill such gaps in their exchange.²²

What is most important for the argument at hand is that the uncertainty hinges on the *Thebaid*, which Pandarus claims he has read in its entirety. Taking great care to designate the point at which Pandarus truncates her reading, Chaucer specifies that she reads as far as the "lettres rede," presumably a rubric identifying Amphiaraus's fall to hell.²³ Yet no matter whether Criseyde is reading the *Thebaid* or Pandarus mentions it while interrupting her reading of a romance, Pandarus's decision to mention and then pass over the epic poem prevents Criseyde from

²¹ Some scholars have argued that the book is the vernacular *Roman de Thèbes*: Fleming, *Classical Imitation*, 96; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 164. Others have claimed that it is most likely the *Thebaid*: Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 47; and Paul Strohm, "Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives," *Speculum* 46 (1971): 348–59.

²² For a different account of this scene and its narrative gaps, see Steven Justice, "Chaucer's History-Effect," in *Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval England*, ed. Frank Grady and Andrew Galloway (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 169–94.

²³ Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*," 50. Anderson notes that chapter divisions are common in late medieval manuscripts of the *Thebaid*, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 4 (1982), 109–133, at 120n.

drawing connections between it and her own lived experience. If she were to read the *Thebaid* in its entirety, she not only would learn about the crimes of Tydeus, Diomedes's father, which in turn prefigure his own violent tendencies,²⁴ but also would see how Statius inflects his poem with female impersonations, such as Antigone's concluding lament. Whereas Statius departs from traditional epic by bracketing his poem with two extended episodes detailing the effects of male violence on women, Chaucer thus aligns this scene with the same elision of women's grief which Pandarus had applied to the *Heroides*. Just as he seizes Oenone's lament and refuses to listen to Procne's song, Pandarus similarly truncates the Theban narrative before Antigone has a chance to speak.

At the same moment that Pandarus subverts Statius's Ovidianism and female-voiced laments, he places this interruption of the Theban narrative in conversation with the idea of the woman reader familiar from the *vita Ovidiana*. First, he imposes a premature ending at a narrative juncture that can accommodate a tidy moralization: Eriphyle's betrayal of her husband Amphiaraus for the necklace or brooch of Thebes is, after all, an antifeminist set piece, and so could be thought to remedy "carnal" reading. Second, and more important, this truncation recalls the Ovidian figure of the unanticipated woman reader, since it shares a mythological intertext that looms over the beginning of the third book of the *Ars*. At this critical juncture in the *Ars*, when the specter of an angry female readership shapes the poem's account of its own production, Ovid contrasts Eriphyle with Alcestis. The former causes her husband to be sent "to Styx alive"; the latter "in her husband's funeral [...] was borne in her husband's stead."²⁵ But whereas Ovid imagines the unanticipated woman reader objecting to antifeminist representations of Eriphyle and asking that they be supplemented with those of good women like Alcestis and Penelope, Pandarus's premature truncation of the narrative once again forecloses the corrective potential commentators imputed to the *Heroides*.

Most importantly, Pandarus once again renders Ovid's Apollonian ambiguity into an absent presence. Just as he previously seized Oenone's grief on behalf of her rapist, he interrupts the Theban narrative at a juncture where Apollo looms as a chaotic, albeit unspoken narrative influence. At least two references to the cynical Apollo have been submerged here. If one traces the brooch back to its beginnings, that object has Apollonian origins, since it is associated with Apollo's decision to inform Hephaestus of his wife Venus's affair with Mars. But in addition to Eriphyle's betrayal of her husband Amphiaraus, the brooch of Thebes is also intertwined with the other episode which bookends Criseyde's reading: the story of Oedipus. It is Apollo who first predicts Oedipus's cursed fate, and who then fails to protect

²⁴ Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandra, and the *Thebaid*," 50–1. Pandarus does not seem to notice or care, for instance, how that narrative resonates with Criseyde's experience: just as Amphiaraus's departure to the underworld has implications for the future of the woman he has left behind, Calcas's departure to the Greek camp shapes Criseyde's fortune.

²⁵ *Ars am.* III.6–20.

Amphiaraus from falling to hell, despite his promises to the contrary. Within that mythographic episode, the same brooch that will eventually come to Eriphyle preserves Jocasta's youth, thereby allowing her to marry her own son; the repercussions for Oedipus and his descendants are disastrous. It is true that even the most diligent reader must labor to untangle these mythographic threads. But the point most salient to the argument at hand is this: even as Chaucer strips the *Teseida* of the unsavory glosses which accommodate the romance to ethics, he aligns Criseyde's interrupted reading of the Theban narrative with the interpretive approach which informs Pandarus's earlier misinterpretation of *Heroides* V.

Perhaps the most significant Theban detail that Pandarus occludes is Antigone's concluding lament in the *Thebaid's* twelfth book. But Criseyde soon encounters a *different* Antigone's song. In a narrative embellishment unique to the *Troilus*, Chaucer aligns Criseyde's conversion to love with a female-voiced lament sung not by the Theban Antigone—daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, sister of Polynices and Eteocles—but by her own niece, who shares the name. If this name and its Theban associations are not suggestive enough, the Trojan Antigone's song appears at a narrative juncture which recalls her namesake. In the *Thebaid*, the Statian motif of the woman who stares into the funeral pyre and interprets its flame is anticipated by an earlier episode: Antigone's interpretation of her sister Ismene's dream, where the wedding interrupted by fire prefigures Atys's death.²⁶ It is clear that Chaucer makes this narrative embellishment with the Theban Antigone and her interpretation of Ismene's dream in mind; Criseyde hears her niece's song immediately after her own dream of the eagle tearing her heart from her breast.

But while the Trojan Antigone employs the rhetorical practice of female impersonation, which Pandarus's truncation of the *Thebaid* had foreclosed, her song does not provide access to a feminized subjectivity which tempers the male-centered objectivity of epic. Her song has its own connections with the cynical Apollo. Its speaker, addressing Cupid, praises her lover as, among other things, "the wit of Apollo." Once these two specific gods have been called to mind, however, it is difficult to read the reference to Cupid's large bow (which "no one else can pull") without being reminded of Apollo's claim that his bow is bigger than Cupid's—the inflammatory claim that sets his love-hunt for Daphne in motion. So understood, the Trojan Antigone's song does not ameliorate Pandarus's absorption of the corrective *Heroides* into the *Arrs*. Instead, it extends the same Apollonian subtext which had shaped Pandarus's amatory reappropriation of Oenone's lament from *Heroides* V at the outset of the affair.

Still, Criseyde seems to have learned something of what Ovid's women can say about male violence against women. Returning later to Ovid's Oenone, Criseyde

²⁶ Emma Scioli, "Incohat Ismene: The Dream Narrative as a Mode of Female Discourse in Epic Poetry," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 140:1 (2010): 195–238.

calls such omissions to account by adopting Pandarus's rhetorical strategies for her own ends. She allays Troilus's concerns about her fidelity with this promise:

And thow, Symois, that as an arwe clere
Thorough Troie rennest downward to the se,
Ber witnesse of this world that seyde is here:
That thilke day that ich untrewed be
To Troilus, myn owene herte fre,
That thow retourne backward to thi welle,
And I with body and soule synke in helle! (TC 4.1534–54)

This speech recalls Oenone's account of the promise Paris made her in *Heroides*:

O poplar, ever live, I pray, that art planted by the marge of the stream and hast in thy seamy bark these verses: *If Paris' breath shall fail not, one Oenone he doth spurn, the waters of the Xanthus to their fount shall backward turn.* O Xanthus, backward haste; turn, waters, and flow again to your fount! Paris has deserted Oenone, and endures it.²⁷

Unlike Troilus, Criseyde knows more of the letter than just the lovesick physician topos, and she culls the passage concerning Paris's broken promise to Oenone.²⁸ By making the very promise to Troilus which Paris makes to Oenone, Criseyde at first may seem to perpetuate the erasure of female grief in favor of male suffering: since she offers Paris's promise to Troilus, Troilus occupies Oenone's feminized position as the wronged lover.²⁹ Yet by reading in this fashion, Criseyde subjects the omissions which enabled the amatory plot to scrutiny, effectively turning Pandarus and Troilus's refusal of historical consciousness against them. If Troilus were to read Oenone's letter in full rather than trusting Pandarus's précis, he would realize how her promise echoes Paris and prefigures her betrayal of him. But then he also would be forced to confront the cost of male violence against women, and acknowledge how the satisfaction of his desire for Criseyde has been premised on the violent appropriation and suppression of women's experience.

Most obviously and consequentially, by promising Troilus that she will "synke in helle" if she is untrue, Criseyde places Paris's broken promise in conversation with the moment at which Pandarus interrupts her reading,

²⁷ *Her.* V.27–32. I quote the text and translation from *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, Loeb Classical Library 41 (1914; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971): "popule, vive, precor, quae consita margine ripae / hoc in rugoso cortice carmen habes: / *cum Paris Oenone poterit spirare relicta, / ad fontem Xanthi versa recurret aqua.* / Xanthe, retro propera, versaeque recurrite lymphae! / sustinet Oenonen deseruisse Paris."

²⁸ Cf. Allen, "Flowing Backward to the Source," 89.

²⁹ Arn also notes this parallel between Criseyde and Paris, but she interprets it as ironic, "Three Ovidian Women," 8.

immediately before Amphiarus falls to hell. Criseyde's promise recalls Pandarus's calculated truncation as she returns to another work he selectively reads. In so doing, she herself embodies the idea of the unanticipated woman reader and turns it to advantage. Ovid's unanticipated woman reader demands that representations of bad women like Eriphyle be counterbalanced with representations of good women like Alcestis. Criseyde aims her reading at the gap between such binary opposites—indeed, she seems to wonder if there is any substantive difference between them in the end. It is by sinking to hell that Alcestis remains true to Admetus. But if the paradigmatic example of the good wife must submit herself to very same fate that Criseyde will meet if she betrays Troilus, can one blame Criseyde for pragmatically extricating herself from Troy? By inflecting Paris's promise from the *Heroides* with an allusion to Amphiarus's death in the *Thebaid*, Criseyde not only appeals to the figure of the unanticipated reader, but also makes that figure model a resistant mode of reading that can account for the double-bind she must negotiate: an interpretive mode that encompasses her experience as a woman who seems to be damned whether she does or doesn't remain faithful to Troilus.³⁰

So, it begins to seem less that the carnal-minded woman reader has misinterpreted her Ovid for lack of a moralizing commentary or explanatory gloss, than that Pandarus has done so precisely by means of just such moralizing. By calling attention to the circular logic that subtends the *vita Ovidiana* in this way, Chaucer only makes it more apparent that he does not turn away from perennial debates about the dangers of fictive mimesis. Far from it; he raises doubts about its underlying premises, even as he begins to propose a new relationship between author and reader. As Criseyde's scene of reading suggests, he does so by thinking with and through the idea of the woman reader familiar from the *vita Ovidiana*, particularly as it had filtered down from Statius's Ovidian subtext into contemporary vernacular debates about the value of narrative fiction. Not unlike Ovid's unanticipated woman reader who reads between the lines and attributes a carnal meaning where none is intended, the *Troilus* ultimately requires its audience to read with an eye toward what the prevailing mode of narration omits.

3. Cassandre's *Thebaid*

Whatever Criseyde's "romance...of Thebes" is and however far she gets, it is clear that Cassandre has read the *Thebaid* to its conclusion. After Pandarus dismisses the

³⁰ Fumo, "Little Troilus," 303–5. The reference to the river as "an arwe clear" adds another mythographic intertext: it recalls Philoctetes's arrows which mortally wound Paris. While the exchange of the river Xanthus for the Simois previously has been taken to be accidental or insignificant, the Simois thus calls to mind Mount Ida, where Helen begs Oenone to heal Paris after he is mortally wounded by said arrows. An Apollonian subtext once again lurks here: Oenone refuses to heal Paris, but in *Heroides* V, she notes that she received that ability from Apollo as a compensatory gift for her rape.

interpretation of dreams as “old wives” tales (*TC* V.379), she glosses Troilus’s dream of the boar with a summary of the twelve books of the *Thebaid* which Pandarus had been so eager to insist he knew. Boccaccio’s Troilo dreams that the boar tears Criseida’s heart out of her body with its tusks and that she enjoys the pain (7.23–24); Chaucer’s Troilus has a dream of a boar that “faste in his armes folde, / Lay, kyssyng ay, his lady bryght, Criseyde” (*TC* V.1240–41).³¹ In contrast with the *Filostrato*, the figure’s tenor is not Criseyde’s heart but Diomedes’s genealogy. Cassandre explains how

This ilke boor bitokneth Diomede,
Tideus sone, that down descended is
Fro Meleagre, that made the boor to blede;
And thy lady, wherso she be, ywis,
This Diomede hire herte hath, and she his. (*TC* V.1514–17)

As suggested by the twelve-line Latin *argumentum* interpolated within the seven-line rime royal Middle English stanzas of her summary, Cassandre’s interpretation of Troilus’s dream not only evokes the paraphrase function of commentary, but in some instances, it even looks like commentary on the page.³² Like the meaning that emerges through narrative concatenation in the glossed *Teseida*,³³ it is Ovidian mythography that animates Cassandre’s interpretation, since the details of Diomedes’s genealogy rest on Statius’s retelling of the Calydonian boar episode.³⁴

³¹ Cf. Valerie A. Ross, “Believing Cassandre: Intertextual Politics and the Interpretation of Dreams in ‘Troilus and Criseyde,’” *Chaucer Review* 31:4 (1997): 339–56.

³² In San Marino, Huntington Library, HM 114, f. 312r, the Middle English glosses the rubricated Latin. I owe this point to Ruen-Chuan Ma’s talk on “The Visual Grammar of the *Thebiad* Summary in *Troilus and Criseyde*” at the 2018 New Chaucer Society International Congress.

³³ The most influential commentary on the *Metamorphoses* in the high Middle Ages, the Vulgate *Metamorphoses* draws readers into a network of literary allusions that require understanding of Ovid’s narratives: see Gerber, “Reframing the Metamorphoses,” 62. On the Vulgate manuscripts, see Frank T. Coulson, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the School Tradition of France, 1180–1400: Texts, Manuscripts, Manuscript Settings,” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 68. Since Chaucer omits the quasi-allegorical textual apparatus in the *Knight’s Tale*, some scholars have speculated that Chaucer’s *Teseida* must have lacked both the dedicatory epistle and the glosses: William E. Coleman, “The Knight’s Tale,” in *The Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales: Volume II*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 87–247 at 113.

³⁴ Although Statius begins the *Thebaid* by sidestepping Ovid’s Theban narrative and identifying it as what he will not narrate, he consistently identifies Diomedes’s father Tydeus with the boar hunt. E.g. II.541–43, VIII.705–06. See Alison Keith, “Ovidian Personae in Statius’s *Thebaid*,” *Arethusa* 35 (2002): 382–3, 389.

But rather than affording a neat moralization about Troilus's victimization at the hands of Criseyde, the connection between Diomedes's father and the boar in the *Thebaid* instead raises doubt whether Criseyde is the perpetrator and Troilus the victim. The *sententia* sits in an uneasy relationship to Cassandra's material. As it recalls Troilus's earlier account of male victimization in which Adonis was killed by a boar, this figure recalls more pertinently the boar hunt in the *Metamorphoses*,³⁵ a narrative that might be taken to demonstrate the disastrous effects of male violence on several female personae: Meleager's mother Althaea, who laments the death of her brothers during the boar hunt, and Atalanta, who first strikes the boar but who later fails to dissuade her son from military violence.³⁶

Significantly, this is the precise set of narrative details that Cassandra's paraphrase omits. Despite her mastery of the *Thebaid*'s twelve books, her summary is incomplete in at least one significant sense: she obscures women's presence in the poem, including the two asides about the Lemnian and Argive women. After naming Tydeus as Meleager's ancestor, she explicitly passes over the story of Althaea:

But how this Meleagre gan to dye
Thorough his moder, wol I you naught telle,
For al to longe it were for to dwelle. (*TC* V.1482–84)

When Meleager concludes the Calydonian boar hunt by awarding Atalanta for striking the first blow, Ovid describes how Meleager's two uncles object to a woman receiving the prize.³⁷ After Meleager kills them, Althaea avenges her brothers by killing her son. Incorporating elegy into his hexameter *Metamorphoses*, Ovid details the depths of her sorrow when she sees her brothers' corpses: "She beat her breast and filled the city with woeful lamentation."³⁸ By omitting the male envy which precipitates Meleager's violence and the grief it provokes in Althaea, Cassandra's omissions elide Ovidian female personae just as Pandarus's have. But then her pointed *occupatio* announces that fact. By the same token, the association between Atalanta and the boar brings into Chaucer's poem recognition of how the privileging of male grief comes at women's expense. Recalling the boar hunt, Atalanta attempts to dissuade her son's expedition by reminding him of his unsuccessful encounter with the boar.³⁹ Parthenopaeus refuses to listen to his mother's advice, and the war that ensues has disastrous implications not only for the male players in military

³⁵ *Meta.* VIII.271–444. All citations are from *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1–8*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1916).

³⁶ Keith, "Ovidian Personae in Statius's *Thebaid*," 392–4.

³⁷ Apollodorus recalls how his two uncles respond in anger, "thinking scorn that a woman should get the prize in the face of men" (*The Library*, 1.8.2).

³⁸ *Meta.* VIII.446–7.

³⁹ *Theb.* IV.325–26.

violence but also for women, as Statius's final digression about the Argive women shows.

Yet what, if anything, distinguishes Cassandre's selective reading of the *Thebaid* from Pandarus's initial misappropriation of *Heroides* V? In both instances the putatively corrective potential of Ovid's female-voiced laments is omitted; in both instances, the omissions can be remedied by a reader who fills these narrative gaps and reflects on the moral questions these omissions raise. In keeping with this line of questioning, it is no wonder that Chaucer often has been taken to abandon the ethical defense of fiction, or to direct his attention away from moralization toward fictive play. As much as Cassandre's elision of Statius's Ovidianism may resemble Pandarus's selective reading, however, it is important to note that, once again, an Apollonian subtext lurks here. Whereas Pandarus selectively reads Oenone's letter by reattributing her grief to her rapist and truncates Criseyde's reading at a juncture which obscures the Apollonian associations of the brooch of Thebes, Cassandre passes over the *Thebaid*'s female-voiced laments within a prophecy that will go unheeded because *she* refused Apollo's unwanted sexual advances. It is true that even the most assiduous reader must labor to disentangle this web of mythographic and genealogical details—the same details which attract explanatory commentary in the poem's classical and medieval reception, including Boccaccio's autograph copy of Servius's commentary on the *Thebaid*. But that interpretive labor is part and parcel of Chaucer's intended effect. At a moment when Cassandre imitates the form and function of the commentary tradition, the rubricated Latin commentary has been absorbed into the narrative body, as Chaucer offloads the explication of those mythological details which typically appear in the margins to the reader. As with Criseyde's selective reading of Paris's letter, *the failure to tell* speaks.⁴⁰

Once considered alongside Pandarus's reading of the *Heroides* and his interruption of the *Thebaid*, Cassandre's elision of Statius's Ovidianism thus has a somewhat different effect. Within the *Troilus*'s narrative trajectory, it unfolds in response to the earlier misinterpretation of Oenone's letter. Or, to put it in slightly different terms: it invites the reader to consider the limits of the corrective potential commentators attribute to the *Heroides*. Not only is it the case that allowing women to speak does not guarantee that they will be believed or listened to, but there are also moral quandaries that come with the rhetorical practice of female impersonation, as well as with placing subjectivity-within-consciousness at the center of critical thought.⁴¹ Pandarus has read and felt *as* Oenone, after all, but he never lets his reading inform his treatment of Criseyde.

In addition to representing women characters reading in the narrative itself, the *Troilus* also concludes with a direct address to the women readers on which the

⁴⁰ Smith, "The Destroyer of Forms: Chaucer's Philomela," 138.

⁴¹ The phrase "subjectivity-within-consciousness" belongs to Lauren Berlant: "Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 447. See also Candace Vogler, "The Moral of the Story," *Critical Inquiry* 34:1 (2007): 7.

repentant narrative of the *vita Ovidiana* had hinged. The most famous of the poem's four attempted conclusions, the "Go, litel bok" envoy, echoes the *Thebaid*. After declaring his inability to express the Argive widows' laments adequately, Statius concludes his epic with an image of literary tradition as men following in each other's footsteps. Alluding to this image, Chaucer includes Statius in the catalogue of Greco-Roman authors whom he directs his little book toward: "And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan and Stace" (V.1791–2). But immediately before presenting himself as the sixth among six, Chaucer offers an apology to women readers who he worries will be angered by his representation of Criseyde's infidelity.⁴² Although the poem elsewhere addresses a mixed-gender audience of lovers, he expresses concern about how women readers in particular will respond.

Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe,
 And every gentil woman, what she be,
 That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
 That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me,
 Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se;
 And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
 Penolopees trouthe and good Alceste. (TC V.1772–78)

Setting the stage for his presentation of the *Legend* as a palinode for the *Troilus*, Chaucer singles out two female figures from the *accessus*: Alceste and Penelope.⁴³ Both women also appear at the beginning of *Ars* III as examples of good women who can serve as an antidote to the poem's previous two books. As we have seen, these unanticipated women readers demand that every Eriphyle must be counterbalanced with an Alceste. By promising such readers that he will write about these two specific women, Chaucer therefore seems to suggest that while the *Troilus* has appropriated and elided the female-voiced laments of the *Heroides* in favor of the male erotic manipulation associated with the *Ars*, the *Legend* will set that inversion

⁴² Helen Cooper, "The Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer: Hugolino and the House of Rumour," *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): 59–60. For a more recent consideration of this Dantean maneuver and its link to the *Roman de la rose*, see Philip Knox, *The Romance of the Rose and the Making of Fourteenth-Century English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2022), esp. 201.

⁴³ Sheila Delaney, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994), 105. His collected works include six references to Penelope, three of which pair her with Alceste. Both women appear in Ovid and one commentary on the *Ex Ponto* even lists them side-by-side. In a headnote to a letter containing multiple examples of faithful wives, an eleventh- or twelfth-century commentator singles out two examples: Alceste who died for her husband Admetus and Penelope who remained chaste in the absence of her husband Ulysses.

straight by telling the stories about good women which Ovid imagined his unanticipated women readers demanding.

By prostrating himself before women readers in the same moment that he prepares the *Legend* as a palinode for the *Troilus*, Chaucer also departs from the moralized Ovid tradition and does something new. Whereas Ovid blames women readers and the commentary tradition corrects them, Chaucer apologizes to them. He transforms the palinode from a corrective text into a compensatory one. In contrast with Boccaccio's poem which "demonstrates the poet's active power as moral arbiter and propagandist," Chaucer shifts the focus from authority to interpretation.⁴⁴ And whereas Ovid absorbs a feminized rhetorical practice into his poetry to counter the epic objectivity of Virgil and the Greco-Roman literary tradition, Chaucer instead locates that resistance to closure in the figure of the woman reader. By the poem's conclusion, it is not the male authors of the Latin literary tradition who emerge as the sole textual authorities Chaucer is eager to appease. Alongside them he places the figure of the woman reader who attends to the gaps in the prevailing mode of narration.

4. Chaucer's Palinode

So, what then of the palinode itself? Since Chaucer shapes his career in relation to the *vita Ovidiana* and presents the *Legend* as his own *Heroides*, it seems reasonable to expect that the poem will redress the *Troilus* by returning the *Heroides* to its proper role in the repentant narrative of the Ovidian biography. This is the expectation the apology to women at the end of the *Troilus* creates—and at first glance, the *Legend* sets out to do just that: just as commentators frame the *Heroides* as a palinode for the *Ars*, the prologue presents the *Legend* as recompense for the *Troilus* and *Romance of the Rose*. But it also makes two substantive departures, both of which hinge on the revaluation of the unanticipated woman reader. First, it retroactively elides Chaucer's apology to women from the *Troilus*; instead, it credits Alceste—the wife of Admetus, who Pandarus elides in favor of her daughter Perimele—with the idea for the compensatory palinode.⁴⁵ Second, the *Legend* alters the gender of the readers Chaucer's youthful works supposedly have offended and misled. Rather than pointing to the woman reader's carnal-minded misinterpretation, Cupid objects to Chaucer's misogyny since it "maketh *men* to wommen lasse triste" (LGW F 333, emphasis mine). According to Cupid's account, it seems that these men have read

⁴⁴ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 141.

⁴⁵ Whereas "moral Gower" frames Chaucer's career in terms of the Ovidian biography in the *Confessio Amantis*, Alceste revises Chaucer's career almost as if to prevent Gower from taking credit for it (*Confessio Amantis*, 2941–57). See also Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 194.

the *Troilus* but failed to recognize that its representation of Criseyde's infidelity does not reflect on the nature of all women as such.

Most strikingly, the *Legend* does not set these male readers straight. Rather than clarifying the chronically blurred distinction between literary representations of women and women as such, a circular logic begins to emerge in Alceste's compositional instructions. Within the context of the inverted Ovidian palinode, the discourse of "good women" will not redress male readers' misinterpretation, in which they draw a one-to-one correspondence between women and their representation; it merely disabuses them of the belief that women are unfaithful under that same interpretive paradigm. Or to put it another way, Chaucer's palinode corrects not how these men read but what they read. It does not redress a hermeneutic fault so much as extend the same hermeneutic mode to a different body of evidence which will produce the desired interpretive conclusion. Whereas men previously were (the God of Love says) deterred from love because they thought Criseyde's infidelity in the *Troilus* reflected on women as such, the assumption behind the palinode seems to be that they will now be drawn into love affairs by the belief that the exemplary behavior of the women in the *Legend* reflects on women as such.

It is worth pausing at this point to clarify just how far this reappropriation of the palinode departs from its traditional function in longstanding debates about the ethics of representation and the nature of interpretation. Ovidian commentators claim to correct women's literal-minded interpretive tendencies with the female-voiced *Heroides*, thereby guarding against the moral dangers of fictive mimesis. The *Legend* turns this logic on its head. Within Chaucer's doubly inverted palinode, it seems that the representation of an illicit affair, the immoral content that seemed to need a palinode in Ovid, has, rather auspiciously (or not, for Cupid) *deterred* these men from love. It has not led them to emulate the immoral behavior which the poem represents, but to avoid it. By the same token, the compositional instructions for the palinode rest on the assumption that representations of faithful, morally upright women will in turn prompt these male readers to pursue romantic affairs. Taken together, the inversion of the palinode and the revaluation of the woman reader therefore unsettle the assumptions about the nature of interpretation on which the literary convention of the palinode had been premised. It not only suggests that a work that prescribes a moral is no guarantee of an ethical readerly effect, but also leaves room for the possibility that some good might come from reading morally questionable material.⁴⁶

As the prologue unfolds, it probes the underlying concern which provoked the need for the palinode in the first place: that is, the worry that poetry like the *Arx* would encourage readers to imitate the immoral behavior that it represents. In addition to Alceste who materializes from the pages of the *Metamorphoses*, Chaucer

⁴⁶ Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 30.

defends himself while surrounded by a seemingly infinite number of women. As Cupid explains, the nineteen identifiable women are the good women whom Chaucer has represented in his poetry; like Alceste, they are material manifestations of women represented in books. However, the seemingly unquantifiable crowd of women trailing behind them are the good women whom he has passed over, and it is in terms of this “tras” that Cupid instructs Chaucer to compose his palinode.⁴⁷ Since the verb “tracen” can connote not only following in someone’s literal footsteps, but also emulating a way of life or actions, Cupid seemingly aligns these women with the ethical concerns associated with the palinodal *Heroides*. But this “tras” of 20,000 faithful women also pushes the interpretive mode which commentators align with the *Heroides* if not to its logical limit, then at least to the limits of readerly attention and patience. Readers have long complained about being bored by the *Legend*.⁴⁸ In this seemingly endless line of women, however, that boredom begins to look less like a poetic failure than a deliberate readerly effect. By forcing readers to stare down an interminable work, Chaucer does not endorse the mode of referentiality that underlies male readers’ tendency to blur fictional representations of women with women as such. The *Legend* instead invites readers to reconsider where the moral value lies in reading dull, repetitive moralizations. It prompts us to ask: does ethical interpretation require some proper ratio or correspondence between representations on the page and things as they really are, as Cupid’s epistemological account of literature suggests? Or, is it possible that rather than merely exemplifying knowledge, literature might in fact produce it?

These are the questions that the individual legends pick up. More than simply caricaturing bad reading or probing the limits of exemplarity as a representative or interpretive mode, they unfold with a finesse which rewards close attention, particularly to the gaps between their content and form.⁴⁹ By bending its materials to fit the predetermined moral that a woman can be faithful, the *Legend* consciously flattens the Ovidian stories. In fact, it even flattens the exegetical metaphor for interpretive depth itself: according to Cupid’s revision of the Augustinian kernel and chaff metaphor, unfaithful women like Criseyde are the “chaff,” whereas good women are the kernel or fruit which Chaucer must now uncover (G 529). But it is only within the context of the Chaucer’s neo-Ovidian *vita* and its corresponding ethics of elision that we can fully appreciate how the *Legend*’s flatness results from its

⁴⁷ Chaucer uses the word as a synonym for following an example in “Gentilesse”: “What man that desireth gentil for to be / Must folowe his trace” (*Gent.* 3). For an instance which explicitly links “trace” with exemplarity, see Clanvowe, *The Two Ways*, 70/525: “Crist suffrede for vs, leeuynge vs ensauple þat we schulden so doo folewynge hise traces.”

⁴⁸ Cf. L.O. Arayne Fradenburg, “Beauty and Boredom in *The Legend of Good Women*,” *Exemplaria* 22:1 (2010): 65–83.

⁴⁹ Smith, “The Destroyer of Forms: Chaucer’s Philomela,” 153.

narrative gaps and omissions.⁵⁰ In keeping with the defining function of examples, etymologically derived from “eximere” (to cut out), Chaucer provides *exempla* of good women by excising portions of their narratives which contradict or at least complicate the predetermined moral.⁵¹ Even as he flattens his source material, Chaucer therefore simultaneously invites readers to attend to these narrative gaps, to wrestle with the moral ambiguities such omissions create.

If we turn to Philomela, who haunts the narrative interstices of the *Troilus* but here receives a legend in her honor, we can see that Chaucer once again makes use of these narrative fissures to encourage a certain readerly response. Unlike Boccaccio who excises Philomela’s rape to condemn Itys’s murder, Chaucer excises the murder and includes the rape. It is not the meal made from Itys’s flesh that is described as “grisely,” but Tereus’s actions (2238). Yet in its sprint toward the conclusion, the “Legend of Philomela” repeatedly calls attention to these narrative gaps by redeploying *occupatio*, the same rhetorical practice which informs Cassandre’s summary of the Theban narrative. Eager to end the tale and bend it to the prescribed moral before the details of the meal creep in, Chaucer is just over halfway through the legend when he begins to remark that “Now is it tyme I make an ende sone” (2340). When he does manage to make an end, he cannot help but allude to Procne and Philomela’s revenge:

The remenaunt is no charge for to telle
For this is al and som; thus was she served,
That nevere harm agilte ne deserved
Unto this crewel man, that she of wiste. (2383–86)

Although Chaucer has excised Itys’s murder from the narrative, the epistrophe created by the rhyming of “served” and “deserved” in lines 2384–85 calls to mind the image of the grisly meal which the two sisters serve Tereus. Rather than a deeper moral meaning which lies beyond the narrative surface, the poetic language invites readers to grapple with the moral complexity of the sisters’ act of revenge, which must be apprehended narratively in response to Tereus raping Philomela. Or to put it in terms of the *vita Ovidiana*, the woman reader’s interpretive faults—including the tendency to get caught up in the fictional narrative and to fill its gaps with erotic possibilities never described—have been revalued, transformed into the precise mode of interpretation the legend elicits.

By prompting readers to attend to the narrative and imaginatively fill out the gaps between its form and matter, Chaucer follows Ovid, then, at least insofar as he

⁵⁰ Simpson describes this narrative constriction as the “*representation* of straitjacketed art,” in “Ethics and Interpretation: Reading Wills in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 95.

⁵¹ I owe this observation about the etymology of “example” to Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

insists on the reader's active role in the creation of literary meaning. But he also takes a leaf from the commentary tradition. He reimagines the production of literary meaning as a collaboration between author and reader: the author must provide the reader with the appropriate interpretive apparatus, including the narrative gaps necessary to provoke and guide ethical thought. The reader must in turn make use of these affordances. Admittedly, such an approach is not without complications. If a reader must come to a work with an already capacious knowledge of classical mythography, Christian doctrine, or morality, then it begins to seem as if no value inheres in literature itself. Under this paradigm, it seems that literature might not produce knowledge so much as reflect the reader's knowledge back to them. All but the most elite readers must continue to rely on supplementary reading aids, including commentary—or to put it in different terms, Chaucer's moral objection to moralizing commentary threatens to collapse on itself, to necessitate a return to the interpretive solution he set out to question.⁵²

But Chaucer seems to have recognized this potential complication, since he works to address it by extending his engagement with the neo-Ovidian biography throughout the remainder of his career. The Ovidian subtext of the Retraction suggests as much, but the theoretical debates which coalesced around the woman reader also allow us to see how this hermeneutic informs the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, beginning with the first tale. *The Knight's Tale* returns to the *Teseida*, a primary source for Chaucer's proleptic palinode; and as such, it fosters an interpretive mode which rewards readers who attend to Chaucer's career *as* a career. As we will see, that same hermeneutic mode structures the relationship between the tales themselves: throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, literary meaning does not emerge through explicit moralization (even when individual pilgrims moralize). Instead, it takes shape in the narrative concatenations and the gaps between tales which present themselves to the attentive reader for further investigation. So understood, the reader does not necessarily need to bring an already capacious knowledge of mythography to Chaucer's poetry; rather, his career becomes a self-contained and -sustaining literary artefact, which itself provokes and rewards close reading.

⁵² When Chaucer's fifteenth-century inheritors engage with his neo-Ovidian career, they make their own substantive contributions to these literary-theoretical debates. I have already begun to explore these fifteenth-century implications in my essay on "Hoccleve's *Series* and the Unanticipated Woman Reader," in *Thomas Hoccleve: New Approaches*, edited by Jenni Nuttall and David Watt (Westbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2022), 105–23.

Chapter Three

Chaucer's Glossed *Teseida*

It should be abundantly clear by now that Chaucer did not read his Ovid "straight." An astute reader not only of Ovid's narratives but also of the theoretical debates that played out around them in the commentary tradition, Chaucer stages *Troilus and Criseyde* as a proleptic palinode for the *Legend*. But whereas Ovidian commentators accommodate Ovid's morally dubious content to ethics by remaking the female-voiced *Heroides* into a palinode for the amatory manipulations of the *Art*, Chaucer absorbs the corrective potential of Ovid's female-voiced complaints into the male amatory plot. As we also have seen, Chaucer does not simply render Ovid's female-voiced laments into an absent presence in the *Troilus*, only to set that reversal straight in his own *Heroides*. As early as the *Troilus*, he also begins to probe the discursive limits of the supposedly ameliorative or compensatory role of female impersonation. Although he has read the *Heroides* and felt as Oenone, after all, Pandarus never lets the results of that empathy inform his treatment of Criseyde: Ovidian heroines' subjective experiences instead become devices in pursuing the very same unrestrained male desire that had created the need for their complaints in the first place.

This chapter argues that Chaucer sustains his engagement with the Ovidian career model beyond the palinodal *Legend* into the final poetic work of his career, the *Canterbury Tales*. By placing the *Knight's Tale* in conversation with its primary source, we can see that Chaucer develops this technique in conversation with Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Earlier in his career, Boccaccio had responded to perennial concerns about literature's moral dangers by speaking in terms of the woman reader: whereas Dante counters Augustine's concerns about literature's moral dangers by shifting focus from Dido's female-voiced lament to Francesca's selective, carnal-minded reading of romance, Boccaccio presents his Fiammetta as a woman reader of exceptional intelligence, thereby extending Dante's Christianization of Virgil to Ovid's amatory content. It is by attending to Boccaccio's engagement with the narrative function of Statius's Ovidianism that Chaucer ultimately offers his own response to such debates about the ethics of interpretation, in which he cedes greater interpretive authority to the reader even as he directs attention toward the limits of subjectivity-within-consciousness as the center of critical thought or ethical reflection.

1. The Knight's Corinne

It is well-recognized that the *Knight's Tale* intensifies the Statian subtext and *Thebaid*-like structure of its primary source, the *Teseida*. Whereas Boccaccio begins his poem with two books that precede Theseus's initial appearance in the *Thebaid*, Chaucer

picks up where Statius's narrative leaves off. The Latin epigraph, which appears before the tale in many of the manuscripts, foregrounds this point of connection:¹

Iamque domos patrias Scithice post aspera gentis prelia laurigero etc.

[And now (joyous applause and shout of the multitude sent up to the stars and cheerful trumpet announces Theseus returning) in his laurelled chariot to his native city after fierce battles with Scythia's folk.]²

Taken from the final book of the *Thebaid* (XII.519–20), these lines call attention to the tale's status as a continuation of Statius's epic. This "beginning-in-the-guise-of-an-ending" is itself a Statian gesture: in his invocation, Statius questions the arbitrary nature of the decision to begin or end a narrative at any point, declaring "longa retro series" ("far back goes the story").³ Later, the Knight's single explicit reference to Statius tellingly occurs during the adaptation of Boccaccio's allegorical set piece, the description of the temples. Since Chaucer does not acknowledge Boccaccio by name but instead passes over him in favor of Statius the scholarly conversation about the *Knight's Tale* often has circled around the relationships among these three male authors. In contrast with the long-held assumption that he improves Boccaccio's "failed epic" by returning the "medieval romance" to its epic roots,⁴ however, Chaucer does not correct Boccaccio so much as amplify what he had already done to the *Thebaid*. Written in response to Dante's call for an Italian epic, the *Teseida* not only contains about the same number of lines as the *Aeneid*.⁵ It also inserts itself into the epic tradition through narrative concatenation: whereas Virgil concatenates key

¹ On the manuscripts containing the epigraph, which include Hengwrt and Ellesmere, see John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the 'Canterbury Tales'*, 8 vols. (Chicago, IL: 1940), III.484. Cf. Jill Mann, "Beginning with the Ending: Narrative Techniques and Their Significance in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," in *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald, Megan G. Leitch, and Corinne Saunders (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2018), 86.

² Quotations and citations of the *Thebaid* are taken from Statius, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ Simpson hears an echo of Statius's phrase in the tale's conclusion, when the wedding of Palamon and Emily seems bring the tale's "longe serye" of vicissitudes to a halt (CT I.3067): *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 2, 1350–1547, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002), 309–10. See also Kara Gaston, *Reading Chaucer in Time: Literary Formation in England and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), 80–1.

⁴ On Chaucer driving Boccaccio's poem back to epic, see, for example, Winthrop Wetherbee, "Epic and Romance in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 303–28.

⁵ David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's 'Teseida'* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 142: since the number of lines in medieval copies of the *Aeneid* was inconsistent, Anderson notes that one can only say that Boccaccio, in designing the *Teseida*, approximated the epic's length.

moments in the *Aeneid* with the *Odyssey* and Statius shapes the narrative of the *Thebaid* with an eye toward the *Aeneid*, Boccaccio constructs the *Teseida* such that its narrative unfolds in relation to the *Thebaid*. Although Chaucer consolidates Boccaccio's twelve-book poem, he does so by intensifying the affinities Boccaccio had already fostered with Statius's account of Polynices and Eteocles.

Yet just as Chaucer crosshatches the Theban subtext of *Troilus and Criseyde* with the repentant narrative of the Ovidian biography, as the previous chapter has shown, so, too, he draws on the medieval Ovid even as he intensifies the network of allusions to the *Thebaid* in the *Knight's Tale*—a tale enmeshed, as the reference to “Filostrate” makes clear, with the *Filostrato*, and hence with the *Troilus*.⁶ Whereas the *Troilus* begins with the narrator's pointed deflection of epic, that Ovidian gesture manifests here as a feature of the Knight's “anti-narrative” routine, as he struggles to maintain narratorial control and impose order on his sources.⁷ Having returned from his own military conquest so recently that his tunic is still “bismotered with his habergeon” (I 76–77), he begins his narration at the juncture most relevant to his own interests, Theseus's triumphal homecoming.⁸ The Knight no sooner sets out to celebrate Theseus's military success, however, than he quickly finds himself struggling to sing “of arms”—or for that matter, even about “the man” in question.⁹ Before Theseus can enter the Athenian gates, the Argive women's cries drown out that glad applause:

⁶ On the etymology of “Filostrate,” see Vincent J. DiMarco's explanatory notes in *The Riverside Chaucer*, l. 1428.

⁷ On the Knight's “anti-narrative” strategies, see Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 207; on “stasis” and “anti-stasis,” see Sachi Shimomura, “The Walking Dead in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 48:1 (2013): 1–2.

⁸ The dramatic or discursive priority of the Knight as teller of the tale has been subject to debate, especially since the original composition predates the *Canterbury Tales*. Some critics attribute intentionality to the Knight as teller, e.g., Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 165–230. Others have seen a loose connection between tale-teller and tale, e.g. David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 95–6, and C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style: Poetic Variety and Contrast in the Canterbury Tales* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 64–88. For an overview of this well-rehearsed debate, see Ebbe Klitgård, *Chaucer's Narrative Voice in the “The Knight's Tale”* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1995), 29–38. Like Fumo, I do not assume an *a priori* narratorial position for the Knight but do maintain that the tale “absorbs new resonances and cultural affinities when assigned to the Knight”: Fumo, “The Pestilential Gaze: From Epidemiology to Erotomania in *The Knight's Tale*,” *SAC* 35 (2013): 90, n. 11.

⁹ Boccaccio's *Teseida* also begins with an echo of Ovid, for reasons that I will consider further in the next section. But where some scholars suggest that Boccaccio alludes to Ovid in order to “[demonstrate] the irreducibility of history to romance”—and that his approach thus more “modern” and “humanist”—I take a different approach. Cf. Wetherbee, “History and Romance in Boccaccio's *Teseida*,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991/92), 173–84.

But swich a cry and swich a wo they make
 That in this world nys creature lyvyng
 That herde swich another waymentynge;
 And of this cry they nolde nevere stenten
 Til they the reynes of his brydel henten. (I 900–903)

The widows force Theseus's triumphal procession to come to a halt, as the adversative conjunction indicates. But in addition to the syntactic disruption, their unanticipated cries also derail the narrative the Knight took himself to be telling. For, while the Latin epigraph functions like a *lemma*, inviting readers familiar with the *Thebaid* to recall how Theseus "is heralded by glad applause and the heaven-flung shout of the populace and the merry trump of warfare ended," the Knight begins to recount how Theseus returns to Athens "with victorie and with melodye" only for that joyous sound to be displaced by the widows' cry. The sudden shift from Theseus's joyous pomp to the Argive women's grief thus directs attention to the effects of military violence on its bystanders, who are often women (I 872). But unlike the *Troilus*, the elegiac deflection of epic is not staged as a deliberate narratorial decision so much as a result of the Knight's shortsightedness and failure to anticipate how the Argive widows' grief-stricken cries will interrupt the martial procession. Rather than simply returning Boccaccio's romance to its epic roots or intensifying its Theban subtext, then, the *Knight's Tale* begins by foregrounding a specific aspect of the *Thebaid*—namely, the feminized mode of complaint which Statius deploys in order to temper the objectivity of male-centered epic.¹⁰

The significance of this attention to Statius's Ovidianism only becomes more apparent when we consider that this is not the first time Chaucer adapts the *Teseida*, and that such attention also shapes an earlier attempted adaptation. Beginning at the same narrative juncture and with the same Latin epigraph as the *Knight's Tale*,¹¹ *Anelida and Arcite* recounts how the "fals Arcite" abandoned Anelida for another woman (*Anel* 49), presumably Emily who is mentioned in the poem's opening sequence (*Anel* 38). While the poem similarly begins by eliding Boccaccio in order to intensify the connection to Statius's epic,¹² its textual stability is complicated by the

¹⁰ Alistair Minnis similarly suggests that the omission of the first two books of the *Teseida* lends Theseus's encounter with the Argive women greater significance than in either Boccaccio or Statius: *The Cambridge Introduction to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 64.

¹¹ *Anel*. 21a–c: "Iamque domos patrias Cithice post aspera gentis / Prelia laurigero subuente Thesea curru / Letifici plausus missusque ad sidera vulgi."

¹² The first ten stanzas rewrite Statius, albeit with distance as Chaucer insists that he found the story "in Latin" (*Anel*. 10). But Boccaccio is also a clear intertext. The three opening stanzas rewrite the beginning of the *Teseida*, itself a rewriting of the *Thebaid*. The next three stanzas return to *Thebaid* to describe Hippolyta, before veering into the *Teseida* again to describe non-Statian Emily. The precis of the Theban War in stanzas 8–10 is itself drawn

fact that it consists of three parts, an Invocation, Story, and Complaint.¹³ Whereas the Story establishes a “literary context that is martial in tone, narrative in form, and male in ideology,” the Complaint displaces that masculine martial narrative in favor of a “highly aestheticized female lyricism.”¹⁴ In a chronologically confused allusion, Anelida aligns herself with the most famous Ovidian heroine in the Middle Ages; like Dido in the *Heroides*, she compares her Complaint to a swan song.¹⁵

Despite initially passing over Boccaccio to intensify the narrative’s connection to the *Thebaid*, the female-voiced Complaint has most influenced *Anelida and Arcite*’s reception, medieval and modern alike. Just as the manuscript evidence suggests that medieval compilers frequently placed *Anelida and Arcite* alongside Chaucer’s accounts of abandoned women, the relatively scant body of modern scholarship has centered on the technically virtuosic complaint. The poem’s own account of its fragmentary form has only reinforced such an approach, since it seems to suggest that Chaucer turns away from Statius’s epic mode.¹⁶ As the narrator states in the opening stanzas: “First folowe I Stace, and after him Corynne” (*Anel* 21). Drawn from final book of the *Thebaid*, where Statius defers to Virgil’s *Aeneid* by instructing his own epic to “follow from afar and evermore / Worship its steps” (12.816–17), this model of literary tradition as men “following” in each other’s footsteps is itself feminized.¹⁷ Statius places himself in the same position as the woman Aeneas left behind before meeting Dido: his wife Cruessa, who Virgil describes following in Aeneas’s footsteps near the end of the *Aeneid*. Although the Invocation cites Statius, the narrator thus couches that citation in an allusion which anticipates the Complaint’s feminized deflection of epic.

from the *Teseida*. As Patterson sees it, Chaucer historicizes the desire to escape from history and its impossibility: whereas Boccaccio suggests that modern love can escape the malignity of epic stock, for Chaucer the classical past “bears a dark, almost atavistic power” (*Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 80–82).

¹³ Since the order of these three parts was not fixed and the Complaint differs both in its tone and technical virtuosity, A. S. G. Edwards suggests that the Complaint should be understood as a discrete work; in the Middle Ages, it circulates on occasion separate from the rest of the text. For a discussion of the manuscript evidence, see Edwards, “The Unity and Authenticity of *Anelida and Arcite*: The Evidence of the Manuscripts,” *Studies in Bibliography* 41 (1988): 177–88.

¹⁴ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 63.

¹⁵ Cf. Summit, *Lost Property*, 47.

¹⁶ In Bodleian MS Tanner 346, the poem is preceded by the *Legend of Good Women*, and in British Library MS Add. 34360, it is followed by the apocryphal *Assemblee of Ladies*, a dream vision with a female narrator that centers around the articulation of female complaint.

¹⁷ This is the model Chaucer has in mind at the end of the *Troilus* when he includes Statius in his version of Dante’s “bella scola,” instructing his “litel bok” to kiss the steps of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius (*TC* V.1792). On Boccaccio citing Statius following Virgil like Cruessa follows Aeneas, and this pattern of literary leapfrogging, Schwebel, “Legend of Thebes and Literary Patricide,” 160. See also the discussion above in Chapter One.

But why Corinne? I would like to dwell a bit longer with the ambiguous nature of this reference. Elsewhere in his career, after all, Chaucer has no qualms about displacing Virgilian epic in favor of Ovidian elegy, as both the Legend of Dido and the *House of Fame* make clear. In order to make sense of this reference, Jennifer Summit therefore argues that Chaucer leaves behind Statius's literary authority in favor of Corinne, thereby aligning himself with the abject figure of the lost woman writer.¹⁸ It is true that Chaucer's knowledge of the obscure fact that Corinna was a Theban poet indicates "an intense and persistent interest in the Theban story."¹⁹ But within the context of Chaucer's sustained engagement with the medieval Ovid, the reference is both Statian and Ovidian at once: whereas Statius refers in the *Silvae* to "the hidden thought of subtle Corinna" (*tenuisque arcana Corinnae* [158]), Ovid addresses most of the *Amores* to a girl referred to in 21.19 as "well-versed Corinna" (*versuta Corinna*).²⁰ When Ovid defends his *Amores* by claiming that it represents myth, not the truth, he argues that Corinna should be seen as another mythological creation (3.12.19–40). In contrast with the "mimetic fantasy" that has haunted this persona, Ovid thus had good literary-historical reasons to name his *puella* Corinna.²¹ Indeed, it seems likely that Ovid had the Theban poet in mind: just as Roman elegy is the home of mythological reference,²² the most distinctive feature of Corinna's poetry is her mythographic innovation.²³ The reference to Corinna does not indicate "a rejection of Virgil and Statius's epic mode" in favor of Ovidian elegy, then, so much as encapsulate the dual narrative function of Statius's Ovidianism: his recognition that the objectivity of male-centered epic could be counterbalanced by bookending his poem with female elegiac. So understood, *Anelida and Arcite* does not simply intensify the *Teseida*'s status as a continuation of the *Thebaid*; it also amplifies that epic poem's distinctive structuring principle, the female-voiced complaint which sets Statius apart from, say, Virgil.

¹⁸ Summit, *Lost Property*, 45–6. Summit ties this supposed rejection of Statius in *Anelida and Arcite* to *The Legend of Good Women*, which abandons the epic invocation of Virgil in the opening lines of 'The Legend of Dido' ('I shal, as I can, / Folwe thy lanterne' [LGW 925–26]) to take up instead the story of Dido's 'compleynyng' (1357). Yet as I am arguing, to group Virgil and Statius together elides Chaucer's attentiveness to Statius's Ovidianism.

¹⁹ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 64, n. 59.

²⁰ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 79.

²¹ Cf. John Heath, "Why Corinna?" *Hermes* 141 (2013): 155–70.

²² Heath, "Why Corinna?", 163: "Roman elegy is the home of mythological references, with Propertius and Ovid accounting for over sixty percent of the mythological paradigms in Latin poetry." Although we cannot be certain he based his poetry on Hellenistic author or even read the Tanagorean poet, "they shared some of the same sense of humor in their treatment of myth" (165). See also H. V. Canter, "The Mythological Paradigm in Greek and Latin Poetry," *AJP* 54 (1933): 220.

²³ Heath, "Why Corinna?", 162. Although Statius's reference might seem to suggest that the Greek poet Corinna was renowned for the complexity of her poetry, Heath argues that his *arcana* likely refers to Corinna's mythological innovation.

This earlier attempted adaptation of the *Teseida* in turn clarifies the significance of female-voiced lament in the *Knight's Tale*. Although the *Knight's Tale* similarly begins by intensifying the narrative's status as a continuation of Statius's epic, it does not proceed to give voice to women, as Anelida's Complaint had done. To compress the first two books of the *Teseida* and begin the tale with Theseus's triumphal homecoming, for instance, the first of many instances of *occupatio* glosses over Theseus's war against femynye and "how asseged was Ypolita" (I 881). The Knight quickly turns away from the female grief which threatens to compromise his full-throated praise of Theseus, the "noble conqueror."²⁴ But perhaps most suggestively, this pattern of elision leads the Knight to omit the female voice that concludes the *Thebaid*. After all, although the Knight begins at the juncture where Boccaccio's narrative intersects with Statius's final book, he does not intensify or amplify the conclusion to the *Thebaid*. He omits it. Like Statius, the Knight embeds the description of the funerals in a rhetorical trope, but his *occupatio* has a much different poetic effect:

But it were al to longe for to devyse
 The grete clamour and the waymentynge
 That the ladyes made at the brennyng
 Of the bodies, and the grete honour
 That Theseus, the noble conqueror,
 Dooth to the ladyes, whan they from hym wente;
 But shortly for to telle is myn entent. (994–1000)

Whereas Statius concludes by acknowledging his own limitations and elevating the female voice to a position of prominence which exceeds his descriptive abilities, the Knight redirects attention from the women's "clamour" and "waymentynge." To him, their crying is just noise, since it is not pertinent to his "entent" or intended subject matter.²⁵ Interrupted by their complaint, he attempts to deflect the elegiac deflection of epic and begin anew.²⁶ So understood, the Knight does not simply pick

²⁴ Even at the end, Theseus arranges the marriage to end the noisy outpouring of grief over Arcite's death ("shright" [I.2814]; "roareth the crying and sound" (I.2881), "Thrice how the women gan cry" [I.2955]). More, the plot circumvents this grief through a literalization of the rhetorical trope of *occupatio*: it is the parliament's "poyntz" which advocate marriage out of political expediency that cause the narrator to come to the point ("shortly to the point" [I.2955]), glossing over Emily's sorrow to conclude with a happy ending.

²⁵ Chaucer amplifies the description of Theseus's military prowess, as indicated by the added description of how "shyneth in his white baner large" (I.976), and how he "faught, and slough hym manly as knight / In pleyn bataille" (I.987–88)

²⁶ As I will show in the next section, Pars 4 begins with a return to unruly noise, which sometimes praises Theseus but constantly threatens to compromise his social status. Although the voice of the people touches heaven on account of Theseus's noble leadership

up where Statius leaves off. He begins his tale at the narrative juncture that overlaps with the final book of the *Thebaid*. But rather than citing his own inability or lack, he instead passes over the Argive widows' cries due to the distracting and inconvenient nature of women's emotional excess.

More than simply intensifying Boccaccio's Theban subtext, what Chaucer really does to the *Teseida* hinges on this systematic male appropriation of women's grief. Upon placing the tale alongside Boccaccio's original, many readers have been dissatisfied with its representation of women, especially since it departs from Chaucer's usual practice: rather than lending depth to Boccaccio's female characters, the tale flattens Boccaccio's representations of women and "reduces them to near-silent appendages."²⁷ In the case of the Argive women's lament, the Knight no sooner relates the unnamed Evadne's complaint, than he desperately attempts to reassert narrative control by resuming his praise of Theseus. In addition to reconfiguring the narrative order such that Theseus appears before the Argive women and then barreling forward to recount his subsequent military success against Creon,²⁸ the Knight intensifies the self-centered nature of Theseus's exchange with the widows. Eager to silence their cries, Theseus responds as if their lament were a personal affront or injury.

"What folk been ye, that at *myn* homecomynge
Perturben so *my* feste with crynge?"

and returns to the "melodye" which had been sung in his honor at the beginning of the tale, these sounds also compete with clattering and noise, which prompts Theseus to demand that they "stynten all rancour and envye" (2730). So understood, the tale ends by returning to where it began, since this concluding gesture recalls Theseus's desire to silence the Argive women's supposedly envious cries, and the movement to the lists simultaneously charts a reverse course to the location where Theseus encountered the Argive women (I.2561; I.2565).

²⁷ The phrase belongs to Fumo, "Pestilential Gaze," 98. On Emily as an object, see David Aers, *Chaucer* (Brighton, Sussex, 1986), 77–8; on her lack of character, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), 48; and on how she is flattened, see John M. Fyler, "Chaucerian Romance and the World beyond Europe," in *Literary Aspects of Courty Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courty Literature Society*, edited by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 257–64. For a more recent consideration of the silencing of women's voices, see Roberta Magnani and Liz Herbert McAvoy, "What is a Woman? Enclosure and Female Piety in *The Knight's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 42 (2020): 311–24.

²⁸ In the *Teseida*, it is the Argive women who are described setting out for Athens, not Theseus: "They directed their steps toward Athens, borne up in their fatigue by their sorrow" (*Tes.* 2.15.1–2). All translations of the *Teseida* are from Boccaccio, *The Book of Theseus: Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*, translated by Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York: Medieval Text Association, 1974).

Quod Theseus. "Have ye so greet envye
 Of *myn* honour, that thus compleyne and crye?
 Or who hath yow mysboden or offended?
 And telleth *me* if it may been amended,
 And why that ye been clothed thus in blak." (I 905–11, emphases mine)

Not unlike the comically dense dream-narrator in the *Book of the Duchess*, who drives the Man in Black to explain his attire and spell out the cause of his grief ("she is dead!" [BD 1309]), Theseus overlooks the obvious explanation why the widows might be grieving.²⁹ In a retort brimming with first person pronouns ("myn," "my," "myn," "me"), he instead attempts to stave off the intrusion of female-voiced lament by redirecting attention away from the Argive women's sorrow toward his own pain, or rather annoyance.³⁰ At the syntactic level, he represents the Argive women as the subjects perpetrating violence against him, since they "perturben" his feast and threaten his good reputation with their imagined envy.

Whereas Anelida's Complaint provides access to her emotional state by recounting how Arcite "yaf myn herte a wounde" and implicitly invites all readers to "sounde" her figurative "sores" (*Anel* 239; 242), the *Knight's Tale* thus foregrounds the Argive women's lament only to subvert it in favor of a male interiority.³¹ Even once Theseus's annoyance subsides and he makes an elaborate display of pity, that display has less to do with the Argive women's subjective experience than his own. In step with his desire to celebrate chivalric values, the Knight describes how Theseus dismounts his horse and "in his armes he hem alle up hente, / And hem conforteth in ful good entente" (I 957–58).³² But the specific detail that provokes Theseus's pity is telling. Evadnê, who remains unnamed by the Knight (not Statius), begins her complaint by acknowledging how the wheel of fortune has turned on "us wrecched women": although each of them formerly had been "a duchesse or a

²⁹ On the "repression of the place of death" and its relationship to the tale's critique of chivalric practices, see Smith, "Plague, Panic Space, and the Tragic Medieval Household," *SAQ* 98.3 (1999): 397.

³⁰ Evadnê responds to Theseus's misplaced first-person pronouns by inviting him to direct his attention away from "youre" experience to "oure" grief (I.917; 919).

³¹ For reasons that will become clear by the end of this chapter, Chaucer also takes care to ensure that Argive women's cry reverberates between tales, particularly as Fragment 1 unfolds. For instance, whereas Theseus redirects attention from the women's cry to himself, the *Reeve's Tale* contains Malayne's scream within a counterfactual. So understood, the *Reeve's Tale* not only elides the scene of sexual violence; it also calls attention to that act of omission by inviting readers to consider that narrative moment in tandem with Theseus's earlier appropriation of the Argive women's subjective experiences.

³² On the Knight's celebration of chivalric values, see Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 169: Patterson claims that the "Knight means to celebrate chivalric values," but that "through voicing Chaucer historicizes his critique." See also Fradenburg, "Sacrificial Desire in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:1 (1997): 47–75.

queene / Now be we catyves” (I 921; 923–25). While she goes on to ascribe their grief to their husbands’ deaths and the inability to conduct funeral rites for them, it is the women’s loss of social status that pains Theseus. In selectively attending to this detail, it is almost as if Theseus does not hear them at all. Indeed, the Knight describes Theseus being moved to pity not through sound but rather through sight, since “hym thoughte that his herte wolde breke, / Whan he *saugh* hem so pitous and so maat, / That whilom weren of so greet estaat” (I 954–56, emphasis mine).³³ Although Theseus redresses the Argive women’s concerns by defeating the tyrant Creon, he does not act with the Argive women in mind so much as to ensure that “the peple of Grece sholde speke / How Creon was of Theseus yserved / As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved” (I 962–4). While his actions may at first glance seem admirable, Theseus’s intentions are therefore suspect on multiple counts: he does not sympathize with the Argive women by attending to their lament, but rather makes the women into a mirror for his own desires and preoccupations. As a result of the pain which the contemplation of a diminished social status provokes, Theseus proceeds to take a course of action that will bolster his reputation, not theirs.

The tale’s initial deflection of the Argive women’s complaint in turn sets the stage for the systematic deflection of female grief in favor of male desire—or to put it in terms familiar from the complex intercalation of Boccaccio, Statius, and Ovid in the *Troilus*, a return to the narrative strategy that had enabled Chaucer’s proleptic palinode. Just as Theseus redirects attention away from the Argive women’s complaint toward his own internal experience, Palamon and Arcite repeatedly adopt the feminized stance of abandoned or ensnared lovers. Such descriptions are formulaic to a certain extent—but Chaucer pushes these romantic formulae to their limits: the two male lovers are not feminized so much as “crossgendered,” since their masculinity comes to encompass rather than be exchanged for these feminized stances.³⁴ Later in the tale, when Hippolyta and Emily intercede on Palamon and Arcite’s behalf, their cries for Theseus to “Have mercy, Lord, upon us wommen

³³ On the role of sight in the tale, see Fumo, “Pestilential Gaze.” As Fumo notes, Arcite attributes his sickness and death to a lack of sight, then *due* to the sight of Emily (95–6). For an analysis of *Troilus* rendering himself into a victim of looking, see also A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyager: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11; 40. The “prehistory of Theban looking,” as Fumo calls it (115), reaches back to Oedipus whose lack of insight leads to his literal blinding, as well as Acteon who features prominently in the *Knight’s Tale*. Acteon is torn to pieces by Diana’s hounds as punishment for looking at what he should not: Diana’s naked body. I will have more to say about the significance of this mythological connection as the remainder of this chapter unfolds.

³⁴ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17. On the association between virtue and gender in Chaucer, see also Holly Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue: Women’s Ethical Action from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

alle!” parallel the Argive women’s cries for him to “Have on us wrecched wommen som mercy” (I 1757; 950).³⁵ While both episodes involve women kneeling and pleading to Theseus on account of their grief for men,³⁶ the latter not only displaces the Argive women in favor of the two male lovers. It also repurposes Hippolyta’s intercessory pleas on behalf of her fellow Amazonian women in the *Teseida*, instead redirecting her pity for women onto men.³⁷ Only further reiterating how the men appropriate the Argive women’s feminized stance, Palamon and Arcite similarly elicit pity on account of their social status. Just as Theseus pities the Argive women who “whilom weren of greet estaat” (956), Hippolyta and Emily beg Theseus to have mercy on Palamon and Arcite not only because they “saugh hir bloody woundes wyde and soore” (I 1755), but also because “gentil men they were of greet estaat” (I 1753).³⁸

Yet as their gaping wounds suggest, this male appropriation of female grief also systematically closes the gap between outward appearance and inner nature. Unlike Anelida’s plea for readers to sound her figurative sores, the literalized ransacking of Palamon and Arcite’s wounds instead renders their pain legible at the level of appearance. Although the unnamed Evadne first exhibits a pale face which renders her emotional distress visible (“swowned with a deedly cheere, / That it was routhe for to seen and heere” [I.913–14]), Palamon and Arcite take on these symptoms as the tale unfolds. When Palamon first sees Emily, for instance, Arcite asks him, “Why cridestow? Who hath thee doon offence?” (I.1083). The question echoes Theseus’s query to the Argive women, when he responds to their cries by asking them “who hath yow mysboden or offended.” So, too, when Palamon laments that Arcite has been freed from prison, the Knight describes how

Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte

³⁵ This parallel has been noted before. See, for example, H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Self in the Canterbury Tales* (? : University of California Press, 1990), 160.

³⁶ Cf. Wendy Harding, “The Function of Pity in Three Canterbury Tales,” *The Chaucer Review* 32:2 (1997): 165. As Harding notes, the women’s choice of pronoun blurs their experience with that of Palamon and Arcite.

³⁷ In Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, Hippolyta negotiates with Theseus and her fellow Amazonian women to bring about a peace treaty. After she marries Theseus of her own free will, her fellow Amazonian women also marry Greeks (*Tes.* I.121–35). See Keiko Hamaguchi, “Domesticating Amazons in *The Knight’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 2004 (26): 337. In the Knight’s treatment of Hippolyta’s intercession on behalf of the Amazons, Paul Strohm sees Chaucer’s “discontent with the whole system of female abjection and male concession”: *Hochon’s Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112.

³⁸ This link between pity and nobility, which draws on contemporary debates about *pitié* and gentility, in turn bolsters Chaucer’s response to Francesca’s self-defense, as I will discuss below.

Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte
So woodly that he lyk was to biholde
The boxtree or the ashen dede and colde. (1299–1302)

Like Arcite, who had described his freedom from prison as an exile for which “ther nys no remedye” (1274), Palamon here occupies the feminized stance of victim: disassociated from any agency in relation to the anger which fuels the deadly male rivalry, his heart becomes the direct object which jealousy possesses. More, the comparison between his pale face and a “boxtree of the ashen dede and cold” alludes to a specific female figure, since it evokes the description of Thisbe in the *Metamorphoses* (4.134–5) and the *Legend of Good Women*. When Thisbe discovers Pyramus’s bloody body, Chaucer reports that “pale as box she was” (LGW 866). After Palamon is freed from prison, his complexion is once again described in the same terms as he laments being exiled from Emily, immediately before his metamorphosis before the mirror.

Yet of all Ovid’s abandoned women, it is telling that the male appropriation of this feminized trope emerges through comparison to Thisbe, a figure popular not only within the vernacular lyric tradition but also within critical debates about the Christian reception of the classics, as we will consider at greater length in the chapter’s next section. As the causal link between Thisbe’s pale face and Pyramus’s spurting wound might suggest, Palamon and Arcite not only redirect attention away from women’s pain toward their own subjective experience. Their absorption of this set of narrative strategies also corresponds with a newfound emphasis on the male body in pain. When Palamon and Arcite enter the narrative, they are reborn from the “taas” of bodies on the battlefield on which Polynice and Eteocles lie dead.³⁹ That fleshy mound of bodies calls attention to the narrative’s status as a continuation of the *Thebaid*, similar to the *Teseida*, but it also bolsters the Knight’s effort to redirect attention away from the Argive women’s internal emotions toward men’s embodied pain. In Boccaccio’s account, the Greeks find the “two wounded young men” on the bloodstained field. He describes how they were “in a dangerous state, suffering constant agony; and so greatly did the pain of their injuries torment them that each one begged to die.”⁴⁰ Despite his insistence that he does not have enough time or space, the Knight amplifies and alters his description at this point:

To ransake in the taas of bodyes dede,
Hem for to strepe of harneys and of wede,
The pilours didnen bisynesse and cure
After the bataille and disconfiture.

³⁹ Magnani and McAvoy also note the fleshy nature of the “taas” which gives birth to Palamon and Arcite: “What Is a Woman?” 317.

⁴⁰ Coleman, *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales: vol. II* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 142.

And so bifel that in the taas they founde,
 Thurgh-girt with many a grievous bloody wounde,
 Two Yonge knyghtes liggyng by and by [...] (CT I 1005–11)

Alongside the genealogical details which reinforce the narrative connections with the *Thebaid*, the Knight intensifies his description of Palamon and Arcite as male bodies in pain.⁴¹ Whereas Anelida's lament implicitly invites readers "my sores for to sounde," it is instead Palamon and Arcite whose bodies now bear multiple wounds in need of sounding.⁴²

Importantly, the Middle English word "ransaken" can mean "to plunder" or to "search over (a battlefield)," but it can also refer to the investigation or medical examination of a wound.⁴³ As they emerge from the fleshy mound of corpses, Palamon and Arcite thus not only elide the female labor and pain of childbirth. Their rebirth also evokes the ransacking of wounds as a practice which relies on the contrast between surface appearance and deeper meaning. As recent scholarship has shown, late medieval devotional texts instructed sinners to "touch, kiss, suck, and enter the wound of Christ," just as Mary invites her midwives to taste, assay, and ransack her vaginal opening.⁴⁴ In the N-Town *Appearance to Luke, Cleophas, and Thomas*, Thomas attributes his belief in the resurrection to his experience ransacking Christ's wound:

My Lord and my God with sight do I se—
 That thu art now quyk, which henge deed on rode.
 More feythful than I, ther may no man be,
 For myn hand have I wasch in thi precyous blode.
 [...]

⁴¹ Aers argues that Chaucer darkens Boccaccio's original account through the addition of the "pilours," which implicitly hint at Theseus's failures as a leader: "Imagination, Order, and Ideology in *The Knight's Tale*," in *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1980), 175.

⁴² Later, Palamon explicitly asks Venus to "rewe upon my soore" (I.2233), and Arcite repeatedly asks Mars to "rewe upon my pyne," "hath route on my pains," "have routhe upon my sorwes soore" (I.2382; 2398; 2419). It is this same instruction which facilitates the tale's concluding marriage, as Theseus demands womanly pity from Emily: "rewe on him / Let us see your womanly pitee" (I.3080).

⁴³ *MED*, s.v. "ransaken." In romance, such as Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the ransacking of a wound heals. See Stephen Atkinson, "'They...Toke Their Shyldys before Them and Drew Oute Their Swerdys...': Inflicting and Healing Wounds in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeCries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 536–27; 540–2.

⁴⁴ On the long-standing semantic association between wounds and female genitalia, including the Latin *vulva* and *vulnus*, see Emma Maggie Solberg, *Virgin Whore* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 71.

The prechyng of Petir myght not converte me
Tyll I felyd the wound that the spere dyde cleve. (N 38:345–48, 377–78)⁴⁵

In addition to representing Doubting Thomas putting his arm so deep inside Christ's wound that he touches his heart's blood, medieval murals and manuscript illuminations also frequently depict the Doubting Midwife Salome with a stump severed at the wrist or even farther up the arm, as punishment for putting her hand or arm into Mary's vaginal canal. When Salome tests Mary's virginity, that process—itsself bound up with the worry that she potentially was raped and abandoned—is described using the same term:

Yow for to putt clene out of dowth,
Towch with youre hand and wele asay:
Wysely ransake and trye the trwethe owth
Whethyre I be fowlyd or a clene may. (15.250–53)⁴⁶

Understood within this devotional context, Chaucer does not simply intensify Palamon and Arcite's genealogy to strengthen the tale's connection to the ending of Statius's epic. Nor does he merely supplement Boccaccio's introduction of the two male lovers with a devotional subtext which indirectly acknowledges the male appropriation of women's pain. The wounded male lovers also enter the narrative as wounds which seemingly circumvent the need for that investigative process: unlike many Ovidian heroines, their pain is inscribed on the surface of their bodies.

Nowhere is this literalization of Ovidian heroines' emotional depth rendered more vivid than Arcite's injury and subsequent death, which transform his entire body into a wound. Traditionally, the medicalized description of his death has been read as an episode preventing cosmic order, since Arcite's Dantean flight through the spheres is removed and relocated to the *Troilus*, where it is Troilus who soars.⁴⁷ Considered in relation to the systematic male appropriation of female grief and its relevance to Chaucer's neo-Ovidian biography, however, the medicalized description takes on a broader theoretical significance. Rather than a feminized subjective interiority, Arcite's death is propelled by a hydraulic force which threatens to push his insides out:

Swellleth the brest of Arcite, and the soore
Encreeseth at his herte moore and moore. (I.2743–44)

⁴⁵ Cf. H. M. Cushman, "Handling Knowledge: Holy Bodies in the Middle English Mystery Plays," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47:2 (2017): 289.

⁴⁶ Cf. Solberg, *Virgin Whore*, 71.

⁴⁷ On the lack of cosmic order at Arcite's death, see Aers, "Imagination, Order, and Ideology in *The Knight's Tale*," 182–86.

The vertye **explusif**, or animal,
 Fro thilke vertu cleped natural
 Ne may the venym voyden ne **expelle**.
 The pipes of his longes gonne to **swelle**,
 And every lacerte in his brest adoun
 Is shent with venym and corrupcioun.
 Hym gayneth neither, for to gete his lif,
 Vomyt upward, ne dounward laxative.
 Al is **tobrosten** thilke region;
 Nature hat now no dominacioun. (I.2749–57)

In a nightmarish literalization of the interiority that female complaint enables, Arcite's insides swell and threaten to burst out. The injury is itself feminized, since Arcite is penetrated, just as Adonis (whom he earlier invoked in his prayer) is gored by the boar.⁴⁸ But whereas Ovid's female-voiced complaint opens up space for female subjectivity, the male absorption of Statius's Ovidian female personae has the opposite effect. Even as it evokes a hydraulic model of the mind, the description of Arcite's injury instead dramatizes the collapse of female subjectivity into the male body in pain, swelling with a literalized interiority.⁴⁹

Since Chaucer has gone to such great lengths to align the two male lovers with Ovidian female personae, the medicalized reference to "the **pipes** of his longes" once again evokes the Pyramus and Thisbe story. In *Metamorphoses* IV, Ovid not only describes how Thisbe mingles Pyramus's blood with her complaint, thereby making her one of the few heroines whose emotional distress results from her empathy for a man's embodied pain. He also describes Pyramus's death with a famously incongruous simile, which likens the blood spurting from his wound to water spraying from a burst pipe.

ut iacuit resupinus humo, cruor emicat alte,
 non aliter quam cum vitiato fistula plumbo

⁴⁸ As E. Talbot Donaldson notes, the original meaning of the verb *pight* is "to thrust in": "the verb implies, if not penetration of an object, sufficient force to cause penetration if the object is penetrable": "Arcite's Injury," in *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis in Honour of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 66–67. For a more recent reconsideration, see Stephen Stallcup, "Lectio difficilior and All That: Another Look at Arcite's Injury," in *Magistra Doctissima: Essays in Honor of Bonnie Wheeler*, ed. Dorsey Armstrong, et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 43–58.

⁴⁹ On the consternation this scene has evoked, see Fradenburg, "Sacrificial Desire in the *Knight's Tale*," 62. D. W. Robertson, for instance, remarks that "Arcite has little dignity even in death": *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962), 467.

scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas
eeiacultatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit. (*Meta.* IV.122–24)

[As he lay stretched upon the earth the spouting blood leaped high; just as when a pipe has broken at a weak spot in the lead and through the small hissing aperture sends spurting forth long streams of water, cleaving the air with its jets.]

At the same time that Arcite's swelling chest narrativizes the male appropriation of Ovidian heroines' interiority, it also recalls Statius's account of the Argive widows' cries, which the Knight initially had worked so hard to silence. Although Chaucer subsumes Statius's inexpressibility or false modesty topos into the same narrative strategy which had propelled his proleptic palinode, he does not disregard the widows' cries from the twelfth and final book of the *Thebaid*, which Pandarus had been so eager to insist he had read in its entirety. To the contrary, Statius's narrative conclusion provides Chaucer with the raw materials for rendering the Argive women's grief into an absent presence, which has been displaced in favor of literalized male interiority.

ecce per adversas Dircaei verticis umbras
femineus quatit astra fragor, matresque Pelasgae
decurrunt, quales Bacchea ad bella vocatae
Thyiades amentes, magnum quas poscere credas
aut fecisse nefas; gaudent lamenta novaeque
exsultant lacrimae; rapit huc, rapit impetus illuc,
Thesea magnanimum quaerant prius, anne Creonta,
anne suos: **vidui ducunt ad corpora luctus**.

Non **ego**, centena si quis **mea pectora laxet**
voce deus, tot busta simul vulgique ducumque,
tot pariter gemitus dignis conatibus aequem:
turbine quo sese caris instraverit audax
ignibus Evadne fulmenque **in pectore magno**
quaesierit; quo more iacens super oscula saevi
corporis infelix excuset Tydea coniunx;
ut saevos narret vigiles Argia sorori;
Arcada quo planctu genetrix Erymanthia clamet,
Arcada, consumpto servantem sanguine vultus,
Arcada, quem geminae pariter flevere cohortes. (XII.789–807)

[See, over in the shades of Dirce's height, **a cry of women shakes the stars** and the Pelasgian matrons are running down like mad Thyiads summoned to Bacchic wars; you might think they were demanding some great crime, or had committed one. Lamentations rejoice, new tears exult. Impulse sweeps them

hither and thither—should they first seek great-hearted Theseus or Creon or their loved ones? **Widows' mourning leads them to the bodies.**

Were some god **to loose my breast** in a hundred voices **I** could not in worthy effort do justice to so many pyres of captains and common folk alike, such a chorus of groanings: telling how Evadne boldly strewed herself **on beloved flames, seeking the thunderbolt in the mighty breast**; in what fashion Tydeus' hapless wife excuses him as she lies over the savage corpse's kisses; how Argia tells her sister of the cruel sentinels; with what lamentation the Erymanthian mother bewails the Arcadian, who keeps his beauty though his blood is spent, the Arcadian, for whom both armies wept alike.]

Statius describes the women's cry with the Latin word *fragor*, which can refer to grief but also to breaking or crashing to pieces. Yet as we have seen, it is not the Argive widows but rather Arcite for whom "Al is tobrosten," a Middle English word which can refer to heartfelt sorrow in a figurative sense, but which also connotes breaking into pieces, splitting open, or "to fracture (a bone); to cause injury to (a body, part of a body)."⁵⁰ Not coincidentally, Statius's account of the women's cries also contains the germ for Theseus's piteous heart: the Argive widows debate whether they should first seek "**Thesea magnanimum**" but instead find themselves pulled toward their husbands' corpses. Not unlike Arcite when he becomes a wound, the empathy which Theseus might have displayed for the widows instead gives way to the widows' empathy for the injured male body. Indeed, the narrative voice is led to the men's bodies by the widows' mourning or *luctus*, a word which refers to the external showing of grief: that is, the practice of taking one's internal emotions and rendering them externally legible, a task often designated as female labor particularly in ancient funereal rites.

In the rhetorical topos that centers his own lack or inability ("Non ego"), Statius imagines that he could do justice to the women's grief if a god were to loosen his breast ("mea pectora laxet"). But since this possibility is rendered as a counterfactual, the implied absence of this laxity in turn indicates that these emotions are swelling within him, not unlike the literalized pressure that swells within Arcite's chest, killing him. Even as he imagines what would happen if the feelings bottled up inside him were able to come out, Statius tellingly indicates that it would be the Argive women's grief that would come pouring out. If Statius's chest were loosened, he'd tell of how women plumbed men's emotional depths and felt on their behalf. Yet by

⁵⁰ If we push a bit further, additional meaning emerges from the word's intertextuality with Chaucer's sustained reflection on the Ovidian career model, particularly the strong association between the palinode and the idea of the woman reader. Since it can also mean "to cause a fissure in (the earth, a rock)," Chaucer's choice of this particular word also evokes the moment when Pandarus interrupts Criseyde's reading (when Amphiorax's fall to hell), as well as Pandarus's homosocial amatory practice which appropriates female grief in pursuit of male desire and thereby creates the need for Chaucer's own apologetic *Heroides*.

suggesting that what swells within his chest is an account of the Argive women feeling on men's behalf, Statius himself instrumentalizes female empathy. Not unlike Arcite's grotesque excess of appropriated female interiority, what Statius imagines coming out is not his own emotions or feelings, but rather women's grief on behalf of men: "Evadne fulmenque in **pectore magno** / quaesierit." By describing how she would seek the thunderbolt in her husband's mighty chest, this formulation echoes Statius's reference to his own chest two lines earlier, as well as "Thesea **magnanimum**."⁵¹

Once we are alert to how the *Knight's Tale* thinks with and through Statius's Ovidianism, we can see more clearly how Chaucer questions the inherent risks of such an approach. The male appropriation of women's grief is not Chaucer's innovation so much as a magnification of Statius's Ovidianism gone wrong. Far from restoring Boccaccio's Statian subtext to its ancient roots or passing over the *Thebaid* in favor of Ovid, Chaucer instead places the narrative function of Statius's Ovidianism within the *Teseida* in conversation with the fiercely contested debates which had coalesced around Ovid's poetry. Yet in extending the male appropriation of female grief from his proleptic palinode into the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer does more than drive readerly attention back to the narrative surface as a legitimate site for ethical reflection and speculation. The negotiation of the narrative's complex intercalation of literary allusions also directs attention to the potential pitfalls of placing subjectivity-within-consciousness at the center of critical thought, or conceiving of it as the ameliorative interpretive tool which renders Ovid's unsavory poetry palatable. Whereas Ovidian commentators present the female-voiced *Heroides* as a corrective to the amatory manipulations of the *Ars*, Chaucer invites us to reconsider the paradoxical logic of such a defense. To present empathy for women as the solution to violence against women is to misunderstand the fundamental logic of empathetic labor, what the philosopher Kate Manne has described as "himpathy."⁵² As we have seen, Pandarus does not subject Criseyde to violence because he fails to read the *Heroides*; to the contrary, he suffers from an excess of misdirected empathy. He makes her pain about him.

Yet even as Chaucer probes the limits of empathy as an interpretive tool which renders morally dubious poetry palatable, he does not abandon the terms in which these debates about literature's moral value had been framed. To the contrary, he continues to stage his own career as a protracted reflection on literature's ethical

⁵¹ According to Statius's gendered configuration of the surface-depth paradigm, it is women who probe men's emotional depths and pain; yet within his own heart, he suggests that we would find women's feeling on behalf of men, as they attempt to feel on men's behalf. What began as the promise of depth begins to look like surface, or perhaps even a stacking doll that risks infinite regress.

⁵² Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. 196–204. Manne argues that psychologism about misogyny obscures its underlying logic: rather than viewing women as sub-human, misogyny instead attributes to women superhuman abilities to feel (not for themselves, so much as on behalf of men).

utility. It is partially by aligning Arcite and Palemon's appropriation of women's pain with Pandarus's amatory practice, the same device which had prompted the need for his palinode, that Chaucer prompts his audience to derive a deeper meaning not by looking beyond the narrative surface, but rather by engaging more intently with it. By introducing Palamon and Arcite as "thurgh-girt with many a grevous bloody wounde," for instance, Chaucer concatenates their narrative entrance not only with Statius and Ovid, as we already have seen, but also with the narrative function of Statius's Ovidianism in the *Troilus*—that is, with Pandarus's amatory practice which systematically elides female grief in favor of male suffering, thereby reversing the palinodal function of the *Heroides*. When Pandarus advises Troilus that it is "no rape" to withhold Criseyde or to "ravish her," he deflects female pain in favor of male suffering in nearly identical terms. Advising Troilus that he should withhold Criseyde from the Greeks, Pandarus reassures him of his support.

I wol myself ben with the at this dede,
 Theigh ich and al my kyn upon a stownde
 Shulle in a street as dogges liggen dede,
 Thorugh-girte with many a wid and bloody wownde;
 In every case I wol a frend be founde. (TC IV.624–628)

In what comes to seem like a proleptic allusion to the first of the *Canterbury Tales*, at least within the chronology of Chaucer's self-constructed literary career, Pandarus aligns his homosocial amatory practice with the male appropriation of Statius's Ovidianism in the *Knight's Tale*. Whereas the Argive women bewail Creon's cruelty in allowing dogs to tear apart their husbands' corpses which remain unburied on the battlefield, Pandarus reiterates his homosocial amatory practice by collapsing the dogs and "wid and bloody wownde" into a single simile: he and his kin will be faithful to Troilus, even as dogs lying dead and wounded in the street. So understood, the *Knight's Tale* does not simply intensify the Theban subtext of the *Teseida*. It also directs readerly attention toward the theoretical function of the Ovidian career model across Chaucer's works. Yet as the previous chapter has shown, when the *Troilus* subjects the male co-option of female grief to scrutiny, it does so through its revaluation of the woman reader. It is to that female figure and her apparent absence from the *Knight's Tale* that we turn next.

2. The Knight's Absent Glosses

It is true that neither the *Knight's Tale* nor the *Canterbury Tales*' frame narrative represents the figure of the woman reader, as the *Troilus* and *Legend* had done. Yet at the precise moment Chaucer extends the male absorption of Ovidian heroines' grief into the *Knight's Tale*, he simultaneously alludes to the most famous medieval scene of reading: Francesca and Paolo's imitation of Guinevere and Lancelot's kiss. In addition to relocating Hippolyta's intercession on behalf of her fellow Amazonian

women such that she later begs Theseus to pardon Palamon and Arcite (I.1757), the Knight describes Theseus's inattention to the Argive women with the most oft-repeated line in Chaucer's complete works: "For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte" (I.1760–61). As has been recognized, this line comes from Dante.⁵³ It first appears in the *Vita Nuova*, at the critical juncture when he transitions to the new sweet style. Most pertinent to the argument at hand, however, Francesca cites this line from Dante's youthful amatory verse as part of her self-defense in the *Commedia*:

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui della bella persona
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.
Amor condusse noi ad una morte. (*Inf.* V, 100–06)

[Love, which is quickly kindled in a gentle heart, seized this one for the beautiful body that was taken from me in a way that still offends me. Love, which absolved no one loved from love, seized me so strongly with his pleasure that, as you see, it still has not left me. Love led us to one death.]⁵⁴

The first verse alludes to the famous sonnet "Amore e cor gentil son una cosa" ["Love and the gentle heart are one"] from the *Vita Nuova*. But since the allusion to the gentle heart is drawn from Dante's youthful love poetry, it is, as John Freccero observes, "clearly palinodic on the part of the mature poet, who would be rejecting his own theory as he rejects Francesca's."⁵⁵ In his sonnet, Dante initially adapts this line from Guido Guinizelli's "Al cor gentil repaira sempre Amore," but whereas Guinizelli concludes with a moralizing stanza, Francesca apparently has been misled

⁵³ Although Dante draws the line from Guido Guinizelli's "Al cor gentil repaira sempre Amore," the evidence suggests that by Chaucer's time Dante enjoyed the reputation as its progenitor. *Tristia* 3.5.31–2 is another analogue. For a consideration of how the line has an amalgamation of sources rather than having one specific source, see Jessica N. Hines, "In Search of Pity: Chaucerian Poetics and the Suffering of Others," PhD diss., (Duke University, 2017), 40.

⁵⁴ The translation belongs to Charles S. Singleton, *The Divine Comedy, Vol. 1* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 53.

⁵⁵ John Freccero, "The Portrait of Francesca. *Inferno* V," *Modern Language Notes* 124.5 (2009): S7–S38, at S23. Cf. Peter Levine, "Why Dante Damned Francesca da Rimini," *Philosophy and Literature* 23 (1999): 347. Dante adapts the line from Guido Guinizelli's "Al cor gentil repaira sempre Amore," but whereas Guinizelli concludes with a moralizing stanza, Francesca apparently has been misled by Dante's youthful disregard for such moralizing.

by Dante's youthful disregard for such moralization.⁵⁶ In addition to citing Dante's youthful poetry, she even insists on love's involuntary nature at the level of her grammar: by presenting love as the subject, she distances herself and Paolo from responsibility, since they become the direct objects love compels.⁵⁷ In contrast with Dante's pity for Francesca, which aligns the idea of the woman reader with his palinodic regret for his youthful poetry, Chaucer thus applies the "gentil hert" reference to the pity Theseus redirects away from Hippolyta's fellow Amazonian women to the two male lovers. That is, he embeds an allusion to Dante's palinodic representation of a woman reader within the narrative strategy that gives him something to apologize for in the *Troilus*.

I need to linger a bit longer with Dante's palinodic representation of Francesca, since it will be crucial to the argument that follows here. It previously has been observed that Dante self-authors glosses for his vernacular poetry to lend it the authority associated with Latin commentary; but by repurposing this female figure, he also enters into conversation with the theoretical debates which had coalesced around the medieval Ovid. Whereas Augustine famously warns against narrative poetry's moral dangers in his *Confessions*, Dante defends its ethical value by appealing to Virgil, his first guide in the *Commedia*. When Statius appears in the poem, for instance, he claims that reading Virgil's poetry converted him to Christianity. Importantly, while Augustine's tearful pity for Dido calls to mind the rhetorical function of Ovidian elegiac, Augustine only refers to Ovid once in his entire oeuvre: "I am vexed somewhat," he tells his student Licentius in *De ordine*, "because [...] you pursue that verse-making of yours which may be erecting between yourself and reality a wall more impenetrable than they are trying to rear between your lovers" (I.3.9). Yet rather than citing this myth in order to dismiss its ethical potential, Dante aligns both Francesca and Beatrice with the Ovidian Thisbe: a voracious reader of romance, Francesca echoes the Ovidian myth in her self-defense, when she attempts to elicit Dante's pity by describing the noxious purple air which drowns out conversation, since her actions stained the world "perso."⁵⁸ (In the *Metamorphoses*, it is Pyramus's blood, spurting from his body like water from a broken pipe, which stains the fruit of the mulberry bush, thereby lending it its purple appearance.) Later, Dante the pilgrim looks upon Beatrice as Pyramus looks at Thisbe. However, this similarity

⁵⁶ Cf. Freccero, "The Portrait of Francesca. *Inferno* V," 22–23: "It is true that [Dante's] early sonnet specifically credits Guido Guinizelli with that definition of love, but it is equally true that it came to be universally associated with Dante, if not from the little book, certainly from the *Inferno*. In the *Knight's Tale*, Geoffrey Chaucer writes, 'pitee rennet soone in gentil herte' (890), which unmistakably echoes Francesca's 'pietà' and suggests that by Chaucer's time, Dante owned the allusion, even if he was not its sole proprietor."

⁵⁷ Unlike Chaucer's Arcite, who argues that he has been abandoned by Emily, Francesca claims she has *not* been abandoned by love; it still has not left her.

⁵⁸ Cf. Levine, *Reforming the Humanities: Literature and Ethics from Dante to Modern Times* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 48–9.

ultimately serves to contrast the two women: unlike Paolo and Francesca's amatory reading and carnal love which leads them to death, Beatrice's divine love leads Dante the pilgrim past the wall of fire to eternal salvation. Although it would be inaccurate to claim, as some criticism has done, that Dante offers a dualistic account of love, in which carnal love must be exchanged for divine love, the contrast between these two women readers conveys his attentiveness to the terms of similar debates within Ovidian commentary and *accessus*. It also has another unexpected effect. Even as he endeavors to accommodate Virgil's poetry to a Christian interpretive context, the medieval Ovid nevertheless furnishes Dante with a useful theoretical tool: like Ovid and Ovidian commentators alike, he makes a negative example of the carnal-minded woman reader, who he then contrasts with a positive foil.⁵⁹ So understood, Dante not only seeks to align his poetry with commentary through his self-exegesis; he also theorizes ethical interpretation through and against the woman reader.

Just as Dante responds to Augustine by turning from Dido's female-voiced lament to the figure of the female reader familiar from the commentary tradition, Boccaccio couples his appeal to Fiammetta as a woman reader of exceptional intelligence with a network of self-authored glosses. But rather than recuperating Ovid's poetry by stipulating a deeper moral meaning within his commentary, like Dante's self-exegesis, Boccaccio instead reverses the usual relationship between carnal poetic content and corrective prose commentary. While most of the glosses "do no more than offer the reader a paraphrase of 'difficult' words [...] and straighten out the normal indirections of poetic discourse," seemingly in an effort to lend the poem a "scholastic atmosphere," the second largest category of glosses, by far, is not allegorical but rather mythographic. Significantly, the scholar-glossator cites only one *auctor* by name in his commentary, when he claims that the author models the character Ida after Virgil's Camilla (VI 53.1). Yet even as Boccaccio draws inspiration for this technique from Dante, the overwhelming majority of these mythographic glosses are drawn not from Virgil, but rather from Ovid.⁶⁰ In the first stanza of the invocation, for instance, the reference to the "boughs which Phoebus

⁵⁹ On Dante as a reader of his time and the medieval Ovid, see Julie Van Peteghem, *Italian Readers of Ovid from the Origins to Petrarch* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), esp. 169–222. Dante's reading in general, not just of Ovid, occurs within a medieval context, which includes among its characteristic features "the fluidity of the text and its translations in medieval times; the collection and inclusion of isolated, fragmented passages in anthologies and other medieval works that provide indirect, intermediary access to an author; and the *accessus*, biographies, glosses, and commentaries that accompany medieval texts, but not their medieval editions" (179).

⁶⁰ Hollander, "The Validity of Boccaccio's Self-Exegesis in His *Teseida*," 164–5 and 176–7, n. 14. With one exception (Hero and Leander from the *Heroides*), all the Ovidian matter in the glosses can be found in the *Metamorphoses*. An exhaustive list would be too lengthy, but Hollander provides a short list of the longer glosses that descend from the *Metamorphoses*, which span nearly all twelve books.

loves” is accompanied by a gloss which recalls the episode from the first book of the *Metamorphoses*, in which “Phoebus fell in love with a maiden called Daphne who did not love him and fled before him and became a laurel tree.”⁶¹ As the story unfolds, the commentary brims with explications of Ovidian allusions, many of which push male sexual violence against women into the margins. When Emilia recognizes Arcita disguised as Penteo, the lover-poet remarks:

I do not believe that Tereus felt more joy when Pandion granted permissions
to Philomela to go with him to her sister in Thrace, than Pentheus did now.
(4.54.1–3)

The accompanying gloss recounts the story of Philomela from the *Metamorphoses*, including how Tereus “raped her” and “tore out her tongue and left her imprisoned.”⁶² Later in Book 4, Arcita laments how he is wasting away and falls asleep from exhaustion; he then wakes “hearing Philomela sing as she made merry over dead Tereus” (4.73.1). To ensure the unsavory nature of this allusion is not lost, the gloss reminds readers that the “story of Tereus is written extensively above.”⁶³ Far from being limited to Arcita, the glosses proliferate with Ovidian narratives that reflect poorly on the male lovers. At one point, Palemon compares his love for Emilia to that of Pluto for Prosperina: “I am drawn along by that powerful love that caused Pluto to fall in love with your great beauty” (5.31.1–2). But whereas Palemon elides Pluto’s sexual violence, the gloss elaborates the story at length, including how “he ravished her.”⁶⁴ It is left to the reader to make an evaluative judgment about the nature of that narrative and the comparison: “Therefore that love which Palaemon mentions was that which Pluto bore for the moon.” By distinguishing Arcita and Palemon’s carnal passions from Teseo’s rationality, this network of Ovidian allusions thereby lends the romance a Christian intention.

Yet in filling the poem’s margins with the very same Ovidian narratives which prompted the need for corrective commentary in the first place, Boccaccio’s scholar-glossator at various points seems to become more caught up in those marginal narratives than the underlying moral he is ostensibly explicating. In the gloss meant to accommodate the description of Venus’s naked body to a Christian interpretive context, for instance, the scholar-glossator subjects her carnal love to scrutiny by recounting the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. Rather than glossing the lion as a symbolic representation of the devil, as in the most popular moralized accounts,⁶⁵ he relates the narrative in its entirety, alongside a handful of other

⁶¹ McCoy, *Book of Theseus*, 47.

⁶² McCoy, *Book of Theseus*, 116.

⁶³ McCoy, *Book of Theseus*, 117.

⁶⁴ McCoy, *Book of Theseus*, 140.

⁶⁵ In the *Ovide moralisé* the entrance of the lion is taken to signify the devil who threatens the pure soul. Cf. Sheila Delaney, *The Naked Text*, 132.

Ovidian stories which illustrate “the mighty powers of Venus,” i.e. the destructive potential of carnal love.⁶⁶ Given its appearance within the marginal commentary supposedly meant to neutralize the poem’s salacious content, however, the scholar-glossator’s enthusiasm for Ovidian narrative and this *particular* Ovidian narrative has a rather curious effect. An assiduous reader of popular romance literature, Dante’s Francesca is well-acquainted with story of Pyramus and Thisbe, as we have just seen. In addition to her description of how her actions stained the world “perso,” her burial in the same grave as Paolo is also drawn from that narrative. But whereas Francesca seems to err in virtue of consuming romantic literature for its carnal content rather than seeking out an allegorized version which could reveal the narrative’s moral significance, Boccaccio’s self-exegesis suggests otherwise. At the same time that Boccaccio’s gloss appeals to the idea of the woman reader who prompts the need for commentary, it also passes over the most widely accepted method for rendering Ovid’s narratives palatable for a Christian audience. In so doing, Boccaccio demonstrates how sustained engagement with the morally dubious content of Ovidian narrative can itself serve as a vehicle for ethical contemplation and reflection. The self-exegesis lends the romance a Christian intention, as we might expect, but it bolsters that quasi-allegorical interpretation through the unsavory nature of the comparisons invited by the Ovidian narratives in the poem’s margins.

Rather than allegory, then, it is Ovidian narrative that facilitates ethical engagement with Boccaccio’s romance. A reader who attends only to the romance, as the lover-poet prescribes, will misinterpret, but so, too, will the reader who attends only to the quasi-allegorical and figural glosses. Such a reader will be at a loss, for instance, about the moral significance of the Pyramus and Thisbe story. Whereas Dante adapts scholastic intellectual tools familiar from the commentary tradition, including the palinode and the trope of the carnal-minded woman reader, Boccaccio repurposes these tools to depart from Dante. He grounds his “radical act” in a revalued representation of the woman reader, as well as a narrative frame which illustrates how Ovidian narrative can bolster quasi-allegorical interpretation. Unlike Dante, who asserts the primacy of the author and his control over the meaning of the work, Boccaccio shifts the ethical onus, such that his audience must draw meaning from these unsavory narrative concatenations.

Despite his shared conviction that even the most morally dubious content can be accommodated to ethics, Chaucer dispenses with the dedicatory epistle addressed to Fiammetta, as well as the quasi-allegorical textual apparatus Boccaccio constructs to render such narrative content palatable. To explain these omissions, some scholars have speculated that Chaucer’s *Teseida* must have lacked both the dedicatory epistle and the glosses.⁶⁷ But just as Chaucer reads Ovidian commentary,

⁶⁶ McCoy, *The Book of Thesens*, 206.

⁶⁷ Cf. Gaston, *Reading Chaucer in Time*, 52. Alistair Minnis links the lack of glosses in Middle English texts more generally with a climate of fear around vernacular hermeneutics, resulting from the Wycliffite heresy and perhaps best exemplified by Arundel’s Constitutions:

so, too, he engages with the lively critical conversation between Boccaccio and Dante which unfolds in the *Teseida*'s margins. It is a critical commonplace that Chaucer elides the distinction between Arcite and Palemon such that they are nearly indistinguishable,⁶⁸ as well as that he softens the polarity between the two male lovers and Theseus.⁶⁹ Yet far from bearing no relation to Boccaccio's textual apparatus, Chaucer flattens these oppositions by repurposing the same Ovidian material which serves as its basis. He does so, at least in part, by evoking Theseus's checkered past, which would be familiar to any reader of the *Heroides*. Even as he barrels through the first two books of the *Teseida* due to limitations of time and space, the Knight supplements his source with a description of Theseus's banner, which represents the minotaur and thus calls to mind how he abandoned Ariadne for her sister. Chaucer trusts his readers to notice not an allusion to Ariadne so much as its glaring absence.

Rather than including her story in a reading aid or reference work, however, Chaucer instead invites the same kind of comparison by alluding to works in his career—or by asking his readers to approach his own literary career *as* a career, like the medieval *accessus* tradition. Since the *Legend* contains Ariadne's story, for instance, her absent presence does not reward readers of Ovid so much as readers of Chaucer's Ovid, who are familiar with his account of Ariadne's letter from the *Heroides* in the *Legend*. For, whereas Ovid's Ariadne tells Theseus how she fashioned the signal flag with her veil and “and waved that back and forth in the perfectly vain hope that you might see it, might be moved and shamed, and somehow might change your mind and return to me” (*Her.* 10), Chaucer intensifies this moment by relocating it to the end of her legend. Composed contemporaneously with what would later become the *Knight's Tale*, the *Legend* instead concludes with the narrator's description of how

Hire coverchef on a pole up steked she,
Ascaunce that he shulde it wele yse,

“Absent Glosses: The Trouble with Middle English Hermeneutics,” in *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17–37.

⁶⁸ As Fragment I unfolds, this theme of indistinguishability carries over into the *Reeve's Tale*. On the Reeve's indistinguishable “felawes”, see Carissa Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 48. On Chaucer's addition of the men's concern with social class in the *Reeve's Tale*, see Sidhu, *Indecent Exposure: Gender, Politics, and Obscene Comedy in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 90. Given the Knight's later interruption of the Monk, it seems he shares Theseus's fear of the transitory nature of fame. On the Knight's interruption of the Monk, see Kurt Olsson, “*Securitas* and Chaucer's Knight,” *SAC* 9 (1987): 123, 127.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 230. As Patterson observes, they are no longer the foil to Theseus's rationality, as in the *Teseida*.

And hym remember that she was behynde,
And turne ageyn, and on the stronde hire fynde. (*LGW* 2202–2205)

With Ariadne's coverchief in mind, the Knight's sprawling addition of Theseus's banner, which occurs immediately after his interaction with the Argive women, takes on added significance. Whereas Ariadne had hoped Theseus would see her coverchief "ascaunce," it is the Argive women who Theseus sees "as he caste his eye aside" (I 896). This verbal echo and the narrative parallel between the coverchief and banner in turn invite these two moments to be read in conjunction. Rather than a gloss, it is thus this verbal echo that places these two moments in conversation with one another. Yet as the previous section shows, Theseus pities the Argive women not because he listens to their complaint, but rather because they provide a mirror for his own anxieties about the transitory nature of fame. It does not take a great leap of imagination, then, to understand why he responds so defensively to the women's complaint. He recently has abandoned Ariadne, as the *Legend* recounts, after promising to put off his social status and serve as her page:

And if I evere cleyme other degree,
But if ye vouche-sauf to yeve it me,
As I have seyde, of shames deth I deye! (*LGW* 2070–72)

A reader familiar with *Heroides* will not look kindly on Theseus entering a narrative with two sisters. But by submerging the reference to Ariadne as an unspoken subtext, Chaucer invites readers familiar with his own career to attend to the meaning its resonances open up. Unlike Boccaccio's prose allegory which a reader must consider by looking "ascaunce" at the marginal commentary, Chaucer instead invites readers to contemplate the narrative concatenation created by Theseus's sidelong glance. Once considered in conjunction, these two narrative moments show how Theseus plasters over the grief of Ariadne and the Argive widows alike, diverting attention away from women's pain toward his own desires. Whereas Boccaccio's network of Ovidian glosses bolsters his effort to accommodate the romance to ethics, Chaucer thus softens these formerly allegorical oppositions. He subverts the quasi-allegorical reading wherein the scholar-glossator had contrasted the two young lovers' lust with Theseus's tempering reason.

Only further confirming the Ovidian woman reader's absent presence within the tale, the pity running within Theseus's gentle heart in turn anticipates his own repentant *vita*, which he offers in response to Hippolyta's redirection of her pleas from her fellow Amazonian women onto the two male lovers. Like his earlier exchange with the Argive women, in which his pity was rooted in his own desire and self-interest, Theseus's pity seems to have less to do with Arcite and Palamon's youthful indiscretions than his own. Although he reasons that "every man / Wol helpe himself in love, if that he kan, / And eek deliver him out of prisoun"

(I.1767–69), a reader familiar with his checkered past will hear in that generalizable “every man” an echo of his earlier escape from prison, in which he accepted Ariadne’s help and promised that he would marry her, only to abandon her for her sister. Seemingly absolving himself and the two young male lovers at once, Theseus distances himself from his youthful indiscretions by appealing to the youth-to-old-age model familiar from the *accessus Ovidiani*.

But all moot ben assayed, hoot and coold;
 A man moot ben a fool, or yong or oold –
 It woot it by myself ful yore agon,
 For in my tyme a servant was I oon.
 And therefore, syn I knowe of loves peyne
 And woot hou soore it kan a man distreyne,
 As he hath been caught ofte in his laas,
 I yow foryeve al hoolly this trespass,
 At requeste of the queene, that kneleth heere,
 And eke of Emelye, my suster deere. (I.1811–20)

Should there be any doubt whether Chaucer intends Theseus’s “gentil herte” and repentant *vita* to be read in relation to his own neo-Ovidian palinode, he explicitly links them through the repeated reference to Francesca’s self-defense. In the *Legend*, when Alceste defends Chaucer by constructing a repentant *vita* and proposing that he compose a palinode,⁷⁰ Cupid describes her by alluding to this same line: he asks Chaucer if he knows the identity of the woman who has interceded on his behalf due to her gentle heart. By modifying the palinode’s conventional function as a corrective to the carnal-minded woman reader in this way, Chaucer thus offer an implicit critique of recurring worries about the dangers of mimesis, including the concern that readers will not be able to distinguish literary fiction from fact. So understood, the collocation of these two narrative moments does more than simply allude to Dante; it also marks an important point of theoretical departure. Rather than repurposing the scholastic convention of the carnal-minded woman reader to justify a corrective palinode and reassert the primacy of the author, Chaucer instead couples the allusion to Francesca’s self-defense with the male appropriation of women’s grief, the same narrative strategy which enables him to probe the underlying theoretical assumption that prompted the need for that convention in the first place.

Just as Chaucer invites readers to connect the Knight’s Theseus with the Theseus of the *Legend*, he further destabilizes Boccaccio’s quasi-allegorical approach

⁷⁰ As we saw in Chapter Two, Alceste defends Chaucer by reworking this scholastic convention: rather than a simple narrative of repentance, she lends Chaucer’s career a parabolic structure, in which he was initially faithful to Cupid and then fell astray before being led into his current state of repentance.

by constructing a network of allusions to the *Troilus*.⁷¹ While the *Teseida* is not the *Troilus*'s primary source, it often has been understood as the likely model for that poem's Theban subtext, since that subtext does not appear in the *Filostrato*. Attentive to the function of Ovidian mythography in Boccaccio's self-exegesis, which as we have seen bolsters the quasi-allegorical reading that accommodates amatory content to ethics, Chaucer does not simply inflect the *Troilus*'s Theban subtext with attention to Statius's Ovidianism. He also links that male appropriation of female grief with material that Boccaccio pushes to the margins of the *Teseida*. Indeed, Pandarus's initial appeal to Oenone's complaint, which perfectly encapsulates his male amatory practice, seems to be drawn directly from the Ovidian material in Boccaccio's self-authored glosses. In the *Teseida*, immediately before the narrator compares Arcita's joy to that of Tereus when he saw Philomela, Boccaccio compares Arcita's disguise to that of Apollo when he served Admetus as a shepherd. In the accompanying gloss, the scholar-glossator elaborates:

Phoebus fell in love with the daughter of Admetus, King of Thessaly, and since he could not have her any other way, he changed himself into a shepherd, and placed himself with this kind, and stayed with him keeping his cattle, under this guise, for seven years.⁷²

As we saw in the previous chapter, this same homosocial reappropriation of the Apollo and Admetus myth undergirds Pandarus's reversal of the palinodal function of the *Heroides*, thereby propelling the male appropriation of female grief which sets the romance plot in motion. While scholarship has tended to dismiss this reference as a medieval misreading of classical myth, the complexity of this intercalation therefore tells a different story. Here, we instead can see the creative potential such a "misreading" held for Boccaccio and Chaucer alike, in virtue not of its faithfulness to a classical source but of the interpretive potential afforded by the medieval Ovid tradition in its own right. After all, while we know that Boccaccio read Lactantius's glosses on the *Thebaid*, there is little evidence to suggest that his glosses to the *Teseida* reflect "anything of Lactantius's actual language at all."⁷³ Although we cannot be

⁷¹ In other words, he concatenates the two major epic poems of his career. On narrative concatenation and the imitation of classical epic in Boccaccio and Chaucer alike, see Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*.

⁷² McCoy, *The Book of Theseus*, 116. Cf. Tournoy, "Apollo and Admetus," 187–88.

⁷³ In a well-known article, Limentani comments on the apparent lack of influence from Lactantius's commentary on Boccaccio's glossed *Teseida*: "Tendenze della prosa del Boccaccio ai margini del *Teseida*," *GSLI* 135 (1958): 524–551. For a complementary but more contemporary view, see Hollander, "The Validity of Boccaccio's Self-Exegesis," 167–68: since "there is little or no evidence to suggest that Boccaccio's glosses reflect anything of Lactantius's actual language at all," Hollander concludes "either that Boccaccio as yet did not know them or that, if he did, he did not find them particularly interesting or useful. For a

certain of his exact source, this gloss in particular strongly suggests that Boccaccio draws not just on a vernacular Ovid compendium, but also on Latin commentary.⁷⁴ In the first comprehensive *Accessus ad auctores*, for instance, the word “Phareas” in *Heroides* V.151 is glossed in this manner:

Phareas: [the name] is from Pharus, father of King Admetus, whose cows [Apollo] fed, after being suspended from his divinity, because of his passion for [Admetus’s daughter] Leucadia.⁷⁵

Whether Chaucer draws this reference from the relevant gloss to the *Teseida* or whether he, like Boccaccio, adapts a gloss from Ovidian commentary to suit his poetic needs, one important upshot remains unchanged: from the outset, Chaucer takes a cue from Boccaccio by drawing on the rich poetic possibilities afforded by the commentary tradition.⁷⁶

Just as the Theban subtext of the *Troilus* anticipates the *Knight’s Tale* within the chronology of Chaucer’s self-constructed literary career, the male appropriation of female grief which extends beyond the palinodal *Legend* similarly generates meaning by driving attention back to the *Troilus*. In the previous section, we saw how the Knight describes Arcite and Palemon in terms typically applied to Ovidian heroines, such as Thisbe, Daphne, and the like. But Chaucer also feminizes Palamon and Arcite by coupling such references to Ovidian heroines with allusions to women in the *Troilus*. When Arcite is released from prison, for instance, Palemon’s face is not only compared to the yellow hue of a boxtree, thereby evoking Thisbe’s complexion when she sees Pyramus’s wounded body in the *Legend*. He also laments, “What governaunce is in this prescience, / That **giltelees tormenteth innocence?**” (I.1313–14). Rather than an Ovidian heroine from the *Heroides*, this phrase calls to mind Criseyde. During her first night with Troilus, immediately after

contrary view, see James H. McGregor, “Boccaccio’s Athenian Theatre: Form and Function of an Ancient Monument in the *Teseida*,” *Modern Language Notes* 99:1 (1984): 11–12.

⁷⁴ Hollander speculates that he may have had an Ovidian compendium ready to hand when composing the glosses: “The Validity of Boccaccio’s Self-Exegesis,” 165.

⁷⁵ Tournoy, “Apollo and Admetus,” 189–91: in Tournoy’s view, the “first one to state that Apollo entered the service of Admetus in order to conquer the love of a woman is the author of the *Epitome*, whilst Lactantius himself does not diverge from his predecessors and points to a homosexual relationship through the *iunctura* ‘flagrabit turpissime’” (191).

⁷⁶ Contrary to Leicester’s argument that Theseus’s fellowship with Perotheus reflects poorly on the antipathy between Arcite and Palamon, for instance, the glancing reference toward Theseus’s escapades with Perotheus only further softens his opposition with the two male lovers by inviting readers to reflect on his checkered past: *The Disenchanted Self*, 236–9. On homosociality in the *Knight’s Tale*, see Patricia Clare Ingham, “Homosociality and Creative Masculinity in the *Knight’s Tale*,” in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Peter G. Beidler (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 1998): 23–35.

Pandarus looks on the two lovers “as [...] upon an old romaunce” (*TC* 3.980), Criseyde responds to Troilus’s feigned jealousy, an Ovidian love tactic familiar from the *Arx*. Defending her innocence in the face of his accusations, she laments:

But O, thow Jove, O auctour of nature,
Is this an honour to thi deyte,
That folk **ungiltif suffren hire injure**,
And who that giltif is, al quyt goth he? (*TC* 3.1016–19)

Shortly thereafter, the Knight describes Arcite’s physical transformation or metamorphosis into Filostrate:

And with that word he caught a greet mirour,
And saugh that **chaunged** was al his colour,
And saugh his **visage in another kynde**. (I.1399–1401)

Here, too, the male lover’s pale face calls for comparison not to an Ovidian heroine, but rather to Criseyde. After Criseyde learns that she will be traded to the Greeks and Pandarus confronts her on Troilus’s behalf, the narrator describes her change in countenance in similar terms:

She was right swich to seen in hire **visage**
As is that wight that men on beere bynde;
Hire face, lik of Paradys the ymage,
Was al **ychaunged in another kynde**. (*TC* 4.862–65)

By referring to the change as a change in “kynde,” the verbal echo directs attention to the Ovidian subtext lurking here, since it suggests a change or metamorphosis that runs deeper than a temporary change in outward appearance. At the same time, a reader who contemplates that narrative parallel will notice some salient differences: whereas Criseyde’s countenance renders her internal emotional state visible as she grapples with the violent reality of being trafficked between men, Arcite’s transformation allows him to conceal his identity as he pursues his desire for a woman. In the end, that desire will similarly lead Emily be trafficked between men, forced to redirect her love for Arcite onto Palamon.

As the darker subtext of this example suggests, the tale’s intertextuality with the *Troilus* functions to roll back Boccaccio’s quasi-allegorical framework. In addition to feminizing Palemon and Arcite through allusions to Criseyde,⁷⁷ however, Chaucer leverages a litany of verbal resonances that further destabilize Boccaccio’s ordered

⁷⁷ Perhaps the most well-recognized instance of this tactic is Arcite’s Dantean flight, which Chaucer relocates to the *Troilus*.

approach, including the polarity between Theseus and the two male lovers. Perturbed by sound from the outset of the tale, when the Argive widows' "noyse" disrupts the joyous pomp of his triumphal procession, Theseus attempts to control it. Immediately before he wakes to the noise of the populace on the day of the competition, the tale's third part concludes with a parliament among the gods, as they attempt to reconcile their seemingly contradictory promises. In an addition not found in the *Teseida*, Saturn draws on the wisdom of his old age in order to resolve the dispute. Reminding Venus of his advanced age and that he is her "aiel," he renders the looming threat of social disorder vivid by placing particular emphasis on riotous noise:

Myn is the drenching in the see so wan;
 Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
 Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
The murmure and the cherles rebelling,
 The groynynge, and the pryvee empoysonyng;
 I do vengeance and pleyn correccioun,
 Whil I dwelle in the signe of the leoun. (I.2456–62)

In the *Troilus*, the populace's threatening noise rising up results in the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor. Although Hector initially responds by claiming that "We usen here no wommen for to selle" (TC 4.182), the people's cries overpower him:

The noyse of peple up stirte thanne at ones,
 As breme as blase of strawe iset on-fire;
 For infortune it wolde, for the nones,
 They sholden hire confusioun desire. (TC 4.183–86)

These two moments previously have been cited in conjunction as instances which evoke contemporary fears of social disorder and upheaval.⁷⁸ But this narrative echo also reverberates throughout the conclusion to the *Knight's Tale*. After all, if these two narrative moments are read in conjunction, the comparison is ultimately unsavory: Theseus's preoccupation with controlling noise, with silencing people's "groynynge" and insisting that "whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye, / And rebel is to hym that al may gye" (I.3045–46), recalls a similar narrative juncture in the *Troilus*: indeed, another parliament in which political expediency not only silences women, but

⁷⁸ On Saturn's association with the "pestilence" and the plague, see Smith, "Plague and Panic Space," 400. For an extension of Smith's reading that attends to the plague's literary impact, albeit not in relation to the *Knight's Tale*, see Sealy Gilles, "Love and Disease in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003): 157–97.

similarly reduces sexual violence against women to a virtuous necessity.⁷⁹ Just as the “noyse of peple” results in Criseyde being exchanged and forced to capitulate to Diomedes’s advances in the interest of self-preservation, the “murmure and the cherles rebelling” similarly leads Theseus to arrange a politically advantageous marriage without any regard for Emily’s subjective experience. Only further reinforcing this point of connection, Theseus’s claim to make one joy out of two sorrows narrativizes the male appropriation of female grief in the *Troilus*, where it is the narrator who appropriates Jocasta’s “twin sorrows” to describe Troilus’s pain. Itself a reference to Virgil’s description of Statius in the *Commedia*, in which Dante foregrounds Statius’s concern for women, the Statian subtext of Theseus’s alchemical transformation of two woes into one joy is in turn reinforced by his reappropriation of Statius’s “long serye.”⁸⁰ While the *Troilus* begins with a Statian gesture by acknowledging the arbitrary nature of beginning a narrative at any point, Theseus’s eagerness to “conclude of this longe serye” (I.3067), to gloss over Emily’s lack of consent in order to make a happy ending, has the opposite effect: it instead highlights the arbitrariness of concluding a narrative at any point.

As this network of allusions reveals, Chaucer disrupts Boccaccio’s proposed method for accommodating the romance to ethics. But in so doing, he does not simply render the female speaker into an absent presence. In addition to embedding echoes of the *Troilus* with the male appropriation of female grief, he also constructs a network of intertextual references with an eye toward the women readers who encounter the Theban narrative in the *Troilus*, Criseyde and Cassandre. He does so, at least in part, by carefully tracing the network of avian allusions which suggest Criseyde’s rape, as well as by leveraging the function of Criseyde’s dream in facilitating a corrective interpretive mode which attends to what is left out.⁸¹ In the final armed contest between the male lovers, Arcite puts forward Emetreus as his champion.⁸² During his feminized portrait of the “kyng of Inde” (I.2156), the Knight

⁷⁹ As Ingham sums up: “To make virtue of such putative necessity would be tragic indeed” (“Homosociality and Creative Masculinity in the *Knight’s Tale*,” 35).

⁸⁰ On the Statian roots of Chaucer’s long serye, see Simpson *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 2, 1350–1547, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002), 309–10, and Gaston, *Reading Chaucer in Time*, 80–1.

⁸¹ In the *Troilus*, Chaucer reattributes Troilo’s dream of the eagle to Criseyde, thereby making space for Troilus’s dream of the boar and Cassandre’s subsequent summary of the *Thebaid*. It is Cassandre’s summary that exemplifies how Chaucer transforms Boccaccio’s Ovidian glosses from the *Teseida* into a hermeneutic: taking the Ovidian Calydonian boar as its impetus, her gloss systematically omits references to Ovidian female personae, thereby inviting readers to fill those gaps, to perform the interpretive labor of commentary themselves.

⁸² Palamon puts forward Lygurgus as his champion, thereby only further directing attention toward the poem’s Theban subtext and the narrative function of Statius’s Ovidianism, since his son died as a result of Hypsipyle’s female-voiced aside in *Thebaid* 4.

not only describes his “lippes rounde” and his “garland, fresssh and lusty for to sene” (I.2168; I.2176), thereby evoking the threat of sexual violence implicit in the Maying rituals.⁸³ He also describes a figure familiar from Criseyde’s dream: an “egle tame, as any lilye whyt” (I.2178). Since “white eagles do not occur in nature,” the *Riverside* suggests that Chaucer “uses egle generically.”⁸⁴ But given the context in which the reference appears, it is significant that Criseyde dreams about how

an egle, fethered whit as bon,
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,
And did his herte into hire brest to gon—
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothing smerte—
And forth he fleigh, with herte lefte for herte. (TC 2.926–31)

In stark contrast with the excess of male feeling in the *Knight’s Tale*, including the gruesome literalization of Arcite’s innards threatening to burst out, Criseyde’s dream leaves her numb to feeling (“ne nothing smerte”). Removing her heart from her chest, the eagle literally hollows her out. Yet if a reader pauses to reflect on the two narrative moments concatenated by the recurrence of the figure of the white eagle, the comparison is, once again, unsavory.⁸⁵ At the outset of the final contest between Palamon and Arcite over Emily, Chaucer embeds an avian allusion which recalls the violence of Pandarus and Troilus’s male homosocial bonding over Criseyde. Even as the lists present an image of order and recall Boccaccio’s allegorical set piece, the figure of the white eagle thus destabilizes that sense of control.

This allusion to the white eagle from Criseyde’s dream takes on still greater significance when considered in relation to Arcite’s medicalized death. Whereas Criseyde dreams that the eagle tears her heart from her chest, Arcite’s wound inverts that image: his excessive interiority instead swells within his breast, unable to come out. As we have seen, the description of his wound also literalizes the Ovidian simile of the broken pipe from the Pyramus and Thisbe myth. But in keeping with his implicit critique of the limits of empathy as a critical tool, Chaucer also links these two episodes through a telling verbal resonance. In addition to the mounting

⁸³ On the Mayings and their implicit suggestion of sexual violence in the *Knight’s Tale*, see Bruce Moore, “‘Allone, Withouten Any Compaignye’: The Mayings in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 25.4 (1991): 285–301.

⁸⁴ *Riverside*, 837, n. 2178.

⁸⁵ Narrative concatenation is a key feature of the epic tradition, as previously noted. But it is also worth stressing that this technique often hinges on avian references, particularly the eagle: in the *Odyssey*, for instance, eagles appear as symbolic omens in Book 2, Book 3, Book 15, Book 19, and Book 20. See, for example, Elizabeth Stockdale, “The Omen and the Dream: Helen’s and Penelope’s Visions of the Eagle and the Geese in Homer, *Odyssey* 15.160–178 and 19.535–555,” *Helios* 46:1 (2019): 1–15.

pressure which builds within Arcite's chest, the Knight catalogues the various medical treatments which fail to revive Arcite.⁸⁶ This list draws attention to the heightened importance of the male body in pain and renders Arcite into an object of pity. But in so doing, it also implicitly acknowledges the male appropriation and even elision of women's interiority.⁸⁷ Immediately after describing how the pain swells more and more within Arcite's body, the Knight proceeds to describe how

every lacerte in his brest adoun
Is shent with venym and corrupcioun.
Hym gayneth neither, for to gete his lif,
Vomyt **upward**, ne **dounward** laxative.

The absence of any upward or downward movement within Arcite's body in turn recalls the first time Palemon sets eyes on Emily as she "romed up and doun" (I.1069) in turn causing him to "[g]oth in the chamber romynge to and fro" (I.1072). Yet Emily's desire to move freely without the threat of sexual violence throws the contrast between these two narrative moments into relief.

So understood, Chaucer collocates the literalization of Arcite's excessive interiority with Emily's initial appearance in the poem, where it is the male gaze which flattens her into a surface and hollows out her subjectivity in favor of male desire. Not unlike the narrative connection with Criseyde's eagle, that episode itself evokes Pandarus's initial encounter with Criseyde, when he interrupts her reading and subverts the Theban narrative in favor of the male amatory plot. He does so by appealing to the Maying rituals: "Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce, / And lat us don to May some observaunce" (*TC* II.111–12). By leveraging such allusions within and across his works, Chaucer thus not only extends the male appropriation of female grief which had enabled his palinode and its underlying critique, but also concatenates narrative moments within his own career which themselves provide the tools for ethical reflection. This intricate network of intercalations aligns Arcite, Palemon, and Theseus alike with Pandarus's amatory manipulations. What enables that unsavory comparison is not quasi-allegory, but one's familiarity with Chaucer's earlier narrative account, including its affective intricacies.

Nowhere does Chaucer destabilize Boccaccio's quasi-allegorical approach more straightforwardly than his reworking of the *Teseida's* allegorical set piece, the

⁸⁶ "The clothered blood, for any lechecraft, / Corrupteth, and is in his bouk ylaft, / That neither veyne-blood, ne ventusyng, / Ne drink of herbes may ben his helpynge" (I.2745–48).

⁸⁷ This list of medical treatments not only calls attention to the heightened importance of the male body in pain. It also makes his body into the object of readerly pity. At the end of the description, the Knight explicitly extends that empathetic labor to the reader with an imperative command, as he urges us to "ber the man to chirche!" (I.2760).

description of the temples. Crucially for the argument at hand, this episode hinges on the woman reader, both in Chaucer's source and the revisions he makes to it. As a reader of exceptional intelligence, Fiammetta, the lover-poet's "little flame," calls for clear comparison to Emilia as an interpreter of the two flames, as well as the Statian subtext with which Boccaccio inflects this scene: Antigone burning Eteocles's body on a pyre. Even as Boccaccio insists on Fiammetta's exceptional intelligence, the allegorical glosses simultaneously evoke the idea of the unanticipated woman reader who needs guidance uncovering the deeper moral meaning. Yet in the extensive gloss on the temple of Mars, the anonymous scholar-glossator puzzlingly stops himself short precisely because he anticipates women readers. Even though he could go on at greater length, he redirects readers interested in such allegory to consult Dino del Garbo's gloss to Guido Cavalcanti's "Donna me prega." Throughout his career, both as a poet in his own right and as the first lecturer on Dante, Boccaccio consistently aligns the Paolo and Francesca episode with Dino's gloss. In his *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, for instance, Dino's gloss serves as a palinodic corrective, meant to redress Francesca's self-defense of love's involuntary nature which she had bolstered by citing Dante's youthful sonnet. Taking up the question of intrinsic and extrinsic causality, both Cavalcanti's poem and Dino's gloss advance an extrinsic, volitional, and rational account of the nature of love. In dealing with the distinction between love "per concupiscentiam" [for desire's sake] and "per amicitiam" [for friendship's sake], Dino considers the pathology of so-called "ereos," or the illness that derives from amorous excess.⁸⁸ Rather than being involuntary and an innate part of one's identity, as Francesca insists in her self-defense, Dino's medicalized gloss instead asserts its extrinsic nature.⁸⁹

For Boccaccio, Dino's gloss bolsters his own theoretical departure from Dante. In the *Commedia*, Dante reflects on the question of free will, which is so central to Francesca's self-defense, by engaging with an Augustinian analysis of desire, itself bound up with Aristotelian philosophy. In *Nichomachean Ethics* 3.1, Aristotle describes the relationship between compulsion and the will in the following way:

Those things, then, are thought involuntary, which take place by force or owing to ignorance; and that is compulsory of which the moving principle is *outside*, being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who acts—or rather, is *acted upon*, e.g., if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Jonathan Usher, "Boccaccio, Cavalcanti's Canzone 'Donna me prega' and Dino's Glosses," *Heliotropia* 2.1 (2004): 1–19, at 16.

⁸⁹ On the medical commentary which Dino's gloss to Cavalcanti elicits well into the early modern period, see Usher, "Boccaccio, Cavalcanti's Canzone [...], and Dino's Glosses," 4.

⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 48 (emphases mine). On this passage as an intertext for Dante's windstorm, see

In *Inferno* 5, Dante aligns his infernal windstorm with this Aristotelian model, since the wind that blows also dramatizes the question of volition. Whereas Francesca defends herself and Paolo by claiming that love moved *within* their hearts and therefore could not be resisted, his reworking of Aristotle's wind inverts that logic: the external compulsions of Hell in effect ratify the habits the damned adopted through choices made while in their mortal lives, confirming their surrender of voluntary control. In addition to presenting desire as subject to reason, thereby countering Aristotle's determinism, this image thus bolsters Dante's response to Francesca's self-defense: he offers an anti-deterministic theory of desire, which ensures that it remains subject to rationality. By aligning the *Teseida*'s allegorical set piece with Dino's gloss, Boccaccio thus engages with but also calls attention to his departure from Cavalcanti and Dante. Rather than cleanly subjecting the poem's carnal content to tempering reason, in keeping with Dante's anti-deterministic response to Francesca, he instead draws on Dino's medicalized gloss, which associates the concupiscible and irascible appetites with medical discourse.⁹¹ In so doing, he develops a quasi-allegorical approach to interpretation, which requires readers to engage seriously with Ovidian mythography and the fictional romance alike. (Boccaccio will reverse this stance later in his career; the next chapter will discuss Chaucer's response to the reversal.)

Like Boccaccio, Chaucer attends to the spatial terms of debates about desire and free will, as well as how they could intersect with certain hermeneutic stances within debates about the ethics of interpretation. Yet he does something a bit different. Far from oblivious to the allegorical function of the temples in the *Teseida* or their association with Dino's gloss on "Donna me prega," Chaucer realigns Francesca's self-defense with Theseus in the very same moment that he misappropriates female grief ("pity runneth sore"). Rather than offering a palinodic correction by appealing to Dino's corrective gloss on Cavalcanti, as Boccaccio does in his *Teseida*, Chaucer disorders the previously ordered representation, thereby lending the episode a "counterallegorical" cast.⁹² Even as the allegorical set piece dissolves from order into disorder, from an allegorical description of Venus's reclining body into a leering description of Emily's nakedness, however, Chaucer once again grounds ethical readerly engagement in the narrative surface, as the description of Emily's attempt to interpret the flames makes clear.

The fires brenne upon the auter cleere,

Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love): *Inferno* 5 in Its Lyric and Autobiographical Context" in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, ed. Barolini (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 70–101.

⁹¹ Otto Bird, "The Canzone d'Amore of Cavalcanti According to the Commentary of Dino del Garbo," *Mediaeval Studies* 2 (1940): 186–87.

⁹² On the "counterallegorical" nature of the *Knight's Tale*, see Leicester, *Disenchanted Self*, 295.

Whil Emelye was thus in hir preyere.
 But sodeynly she saugh a sighte queynte,
 For right anon oon of the fyres queynte
 And quyked agayn, and after that anon
 That oother fyr was queynt and al agon;
 And as it queynte it made a whistelynge,
 As doon thise wete brondes in hir brenynge,
 And at the brondes ende out ran anon
 As it were bloody dropes many oon;
 For which so soore agast was Emelye
 That she was wel ny mad and gan to crye,
 For she ne wiste what it signified,
 But oonly for the feere thus hath she cried,
 And weep that it was pitee for to heere. (I.2333–45)

Although the episode recalls the bleeding branch tradition, including the Atalanta and Meleager episode Cassandre glosses over in her summary of the *Thebaid*, Emily is unable to interpret the meaning of the flames. As Susan Crane and Aryne Fradenburg both observe, the repeated reference to “queynt” calls attention to the possibility of Emily’s rape.⁹³ Rather than the symbolism of the burning branches, it is thus the poetic language that hints at a deeper, unspoken meaning. This euphemistic reference to Emily’s body is itself preceded by an instance of *occupatio* which has already called the male gaze and the threat of sexual violence into the reader’s mind. When Emily enters the temple, the Knight coyly refuses to describe Emily’s nakedness:

Smokyng the temple, ful of clothes debonaire,
 Hir body wessh with water of a welle.
 But hou she dide hir ryte I darn at telle,
 But it be any thing in general;
 And yet it were a **game** to heeren al. (I.2281–86, emphasis mine)

As previously has been acknowledged, the Knight here assumes the same position as Acteon who was torn to shreds by hounds as punishment for looking at Diana bathing. Yet the final line also recalls the homosocial “game” Theseus and Perotheus enjoyed together in their youth. By aligning the two male friends with this Ovidian

⁹³ Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, 177. For an opposing view, see Larry D. Benson, “The ‘Queynte’ Punnings of Chaucer’s Critics,” in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings 1 (1984): Reconstructing Chaucer*, ed. Paul Stohm and Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 45: “If we are led to expect the obscenity and hear *queynte* instead, we have a pun. Unless we are led to expect the obscenity, no pun is possible with this word.”

myth, Chaucer thus implicitly links Theseus with Pandarus's homosocial male amatory practice, including his conflation of the dogs and wide bloody wound into one image.⁹⁴ The Ovidian myth becomes a link between works in Chaucer's own career.

So understood, the *Knight's Tale* does not accommodate its romance to ethics by contrasting Palemon and Arcite's concupiscence with Theseus's tempering reason, as the *Teseida* had done. The description of the pagan temples is not neutralized by appealing to the "concupiscible" and "irascible" appetites. In the case of Emily's nakedness, after all, it is not what the Knight describes or a gloss in the margins but rather Chaucer's characteristic refusal to tell which calls attention to the narrative voice's complicity in such concupiscence, and which by extension, invites the reader to reflect on their own interpretive practice. Rather than simply disregarding Boccaccio's allegorical set-piece, Chaucer thus absorbs the corrective function of commentary into the intercalation of the fictional narrative, both within and across works in his career. In other words, Chaucer attends closely to the terms in which these debates had been framed, but he offers a new response to concerns about literature's ethical utility: he suggests that fiction's ethical value lies in the self-reflective process it provokes in the reader. Eliminating the quasi-allegorical gloss but reabsorbing Dino's concern with "concupiscence" into the narrative gaps, Chaucer thus implicitly extends his revaluation of the unanticipated woman reader in the *Troilus*, as he invites all readers to interpret with an eye toward what the prevailing mode of narration has omitted. Rather than serving as negative examples which justify the need for commentary or reinforce Fiammetta's exceptional intelligence, both Criseyde and Cassandre model the interpretive mode necessary to navigate the interpretive terrain of the *Knight's Tale*, as well as Chaucer's neo-Ovidian career.

Whereas Boccaccio presents Fiammetta's exceptional intelligence as a riposte to Francesca's carnal-minded misreading, Chaucer thus submerges the woman reader in that same interstitial space where he lodges unsavory Ovidian mythography. When Palamon and Arcite first lay eyes on Emily, the Knight describes her Maying ritual in terms familiar to readers of Chaucer's previous works.

The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
And maketh it out of his slep to sterte,
And seith, "Arys, and **do thyn observaunce**."
This maked Emelye have *remembraunce*
To doon honour **to May**, and for to ryse. (I 1043–47, emphases mine)

In a subsequent episode, the Knight describes Arcite's Maying in similar terms:

⁹⁴ "I dare not tell; it would be fun to tell; it is better not to; well, I'll tell just a little" (Leicester, *Disenchanted Self*, 309–10).

And for to **doon his observaunce to May,**
Remembrynge on the point of his desir,
 He on a courser, startlynge as the fir,
 Is riden into the feeldes hym to pleye,
 Out of the court, were it a myle or tweye. (I 1500–1504, emphases mine)

The figure of the woman reader familiar from the Ovidian commentary tradition and subsequent vernacular debates lurks in both these passages, albeit two degrees removed. When Pandarus interrupts Criseyde's reading, immediately after dismissing the swallow Procne's "noyse," he instructs Criseyde to put away her book (TC I.70):

Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare;
 Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,
 And lat us **don to May some observaunce.** (TC I.110–12)

Eliding the Dantean dawn from the *Teseida*, which Chaucer instead invokes in the *Troilus* (TC 2.64–70), the Knight replaces the swallow Procne with a generic lark (I 1491).⁹⁵ Although Procne's truncated lament is elided, the description of how "loude he song ayein the sonne shene" (I.1509) nevertheless evokes the nightingale which lulls Criseyde to sleep immediately before her dream of the white eagle: "Ful loude song ayein the moone shene" (TC 2.920).⁹⁶

As the tale draws to a close, Theseus effectively silences Emily, in an act that recalls Tereus's literal silencing of Philomela—a reference which, as we have just seen, Chaucer submerges in an intercalation between the *Troilus* and *Knight's Tale*, since the Dantean dawn from the *Teseida* is displaced to the moment in the *Troilus* when Pandarus wakes to Procne's song. But more than simply silencing the female speaker familiar from the *Heroides* tradition, Theseus's demands for "womanly pitee" and "gentil mercy" specifically recall Dante's Francesca, as well as the figure of the woman reader that filters down from the Ovidian commentary tradition into vernacular debates about literature's ethical value. Rather than looking to the margins for Dante's authorial self-exegesis or puzzling over the ironic tension between Boccaccio's narrative and self-authored glosses, however, Chaucer instead combines this final reference to the gentle heart, so central both to Dante's palinodal self-exegesis and to Boccaccio's persistent re-reading of the Francesca and Paolo episode, with a verbal echo that pulls readerly attention toward the gaps and fissures in the narration itself. In his effort to coerce Emily to marry Palemon, Theseus offers an imperative command:

⁹⁵ On Boccaccio's allusions to Dantean dawns in the *Decameron*, see Hollander, "Boccaccio's Dante," *Italica* 63.3 (1986): 278–89, at 85.

⁹⁶ This moment is itself proleptically concatenated with the description of the eagle in *SqT* 53.

Lat se now of youre wommanly pitee.
 He is a kynges brother sone, pardee;
 And though he were a povre bachelor,
 Syn he hath served yow so many a yeer,
 And had for yow so greet adversitee,
 It moste been considered, leeveth me,
 For gentil **mercy oght to passen right**. (I.3083–89)

Just as Emily's Maying ritual and the elision of the Dantean dawn call to mind Pandarus's truncation of Procne's song and Criseyde's reading, Theseus's speech pulls readerly attention back to a corresponding moment in the *Troilus*. Immediately before Troilus and Criseyde spend their first night together, in the scene that hints of the possibility of Criseyde's rape through Ovidian avian references, Troilus uses nearly the exact same phrase:

And therwithal Criseyde anon he kiste,
Of which certein she felte no disese,
 And thus seyde he: "Now wolde God I wiste,
 Myn herte swete, how I yow myghte plese!
 What man," quod he, "was evere thus at ese
 As I, on which the faireste and the beste
 That evere I say deyneth hire herte reste?
 "Here may men seen that **mercy passeth right**;
 Th'experience of that is felt in me,
 That am unworthi to so swete a wight. [...]" (TC III.1275–84)

In step with the unsavory parallel between Theseus pressuring Emily and Troilus coercing Criseyde, the resonances between these two moments generate meaning not through prose allegory, but rather by rendering the poetry itself into an object of reflection. Rather than a straightforward description of a mutually reciprocal amorous encounter, the double negative of "no disese" raises the question of sexual violence. Why, after all, does the narrator even feel the need to mention that Criseyde is not uncomfortable? Placing the possibility of her "disese" into the reader's minds even as it is negated, this moment in turn invites another unsavory comparison with the Knight's happy ending, which is similarly haunted by Emily's unspoken coercion:⁹⁷

And thus with all blisse and melodye

⁹⁷ On the unspoken nature of Emily's coercion, see Ingham, "Homosociality and Creative Masculinity in *The Knight's Tale*," 33–35. See also Fradenburg, "Sacrificial Desire in the *Knight's Tale*," 61–2: "The *Knight's Tale* is preoccupied with hiding, constraining, burying, and removing things that emerge or become manifest inside it."

Hath Palamon ywedded Emelye.
 And God, that al this wyde world hath wrought,
 Send hym his love that hath it deere about;
 For now is Palamon in alle wele,
 Lyvyng in blisse, in riches, and in heele,
 And Emelye hym loveth so tendrely,
 And he hire serveth so Gentilly,
 That **nevere was there no word hem bitwene**
 Of jalousie or any other teene. (I.3097–3106)

As Theseus attempts to make one perfect joy out of two sorrows (I.3071–72), the enjambment between these two final lines does him no favors. Not unlike the narrator’s insistence that Criseyde “felte no disese” or even Criseyde’s statement to Diomedes that she will “say nat nay,” the assertion that “nevere was there no word hem bitwene / Of jalousie” similarly invites readerly scrutiny. Once again, the double negation seems to protest too much. Although no gloss compares the male lovers to Tereus silencing of Philomela, as in the *Teseida*, we also might notice how that Ovidian narrative continues to reverberate here—not only in Theseus’s disregard for Emily’s consent, but also in the interstitial space between the two lines, in the enjambment which briefly raises the possibility that they do not speak at all.

Part of what I am driving at here, then, is that while Chaucer eliminates Boccaccio’s glosses, he offers something else in return: rather than directing his audience to the margins of the page, he instead directs attention toward the interstitial gaps in the narration itself, to what the Knight leaves out. He does not pull back the carnal narrative surface to reveal deeper moral meaning. Instead, he asks us to close read the narrative itself. Whereas Boccaccio pushes sexual violence into the margins of the *Teseida* in order to accommodate such material to ethics, Chaucer instead submerges it in a pointed inversion of the usual orientation of the surface-depth paradigm. Both in the glancing references to Criseyde and Cassandra’s reading that reinforce the redirection from the allegorical set piece to Emily’s “queynt” and the resonances of Criseyde’s coercion that echo in the tale’s conclusion, it is the carnal meaning, the sexual violence enacted on women’s bodies, that becomes submerged as the deeper meaning he asks his readers to uncover. The sexual content exegetes initially sought to neutralize has been remade as a site for readerly reflection and an ethical mode of interpretation.⁹⁸ Contrary to claims that

⁹⁸ While Schwebel traces the relationships among Statius, Boccaccio, and Chaucer in the *Knight’s Tale*, she claims that this conversation would have been legible only to male authors: “The Legend of Thebes and Literary Patricide in Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Statius,” *SAC* 36 (2014): 139–68. Rather than male authors’ homosocial games of literary one-upmanship, I redirect attention Chaucer’s concerns with the ethics of interpretation and his poetry’s effect on its readers.

only a romance reader would be satisfied by the Knight's conclusion,⁹⁹ it is, paradoxically, the reader who neglects Chaucer's sustained engagement with the convention of the woman reader who will fail to glean the lively theoretical conversation which flourishes in its interstitial gaps, as well as its significance within a longer history of ideas about literature's ethical value and the nature of interpretation. What started as a rhetorical exercise in late antiquity not only becomes absorbed into poetic practice, per Barthes' observation about late antiquity; by the late Middle Ages, the practice of female impersonation had also become a hermeneutic, one which is grounded at every turn of its longer history in the idea of the woman reader. It was with this feminized hermeneutic in mind that Chaucer shapes the *Canterbury Tales* as a structure.

⁹⁹ Aers, "Imagination, Order, and Ideology: *The Knight's Tale*," 194.

Chapter Four

The New Men's Wives and the Good of Literature in *The Canterbury Tales*

What, then, does Chaucer's adaptation of the glossed *Teseida* have to do with the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole?¹ Before turning to its most straightforward representation of an unanticipated woman reader, the Wife of Bath, I want to begin my thinking about the tale-telling competition by considering how this initial return to the male co-option of female grief primes readers for what is to come. Since the *Canterbury Tales* is "among other things a challenging and ongoing course on how to read and understand the *Canterbury Tales*,"² the *Knight's Tale* raises a set of questions about the ethics of representation and the nature of interpretation which the remainder of the poem continues to work through. As we have seen, Chaucer not only adapts the *Teseida* by eliminating Boccaccio's textual apparatus, thereby driving readerly attention away from abstraction and moral depth back toward the particularities of the narrative surface; by absorbing morally dubious content into the interstices in the Knight's narration, Chaucer also shows that what is *not* represented can also become a key site for ethical reflection and readerly discernment. In what follows, I argue that this feminized hermeneutic, itself reminiscent of Ovid's unanticipated woman reader who demands that each representation of a Eriphyle must be counterbalanced with an Alceste, can help us better understand the *Canterbury Tales* as a structure, as well as how Chaucer joins a lively contemporary conversation about the ethics of representation in which Dante, Boccaccio, and Gower alike repurpose the scholastic tool of the palinode.

In terms of its structure, the first fragment of the *Canterbury Tales* traditionally has been understood to unfold such that it stages a breakdown in authority. Although the Knight's selection to tell the first tale creates the impression of order, the quitting of the Miller and Reeve disrupts this expectation, only for the fragment to sputter to a halt with the inconclusiveness of the *Cook's Tale*. In addition to holding out the promise of order only to disrupt it, however, it is significant that this pattern of quitting emerges from the misrecognition of fiction, the same fear which Chaucer reworks in his palinodal *Legend* alongside the idea of the woman reader. Before the

¹ The title for this chapter alludes to Anne Middleton's excellent essay, from which I continue to learn: "Chaucer's New Men and the Good of Literature in the 'Canterbury Tales,'" in *Literature and Society. Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 15–56. Like Middleton, I am interested in how Chaucer's pilgrims consider "the pleasure and the use of literature [to be] one thing" (16). But where Middleton suggests that Chaucer's "new men" anticipate Renaissance thinking, I instead consider how Chaucer entangles his representations of the pilgrim's wives with the ethical concerns of medieval commentary.

² The phrase belongs to Frank Grady, "Moral Chaucer," *The Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales*, edited by Frank Grady (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 213.

Miller can even begin his tale, the Reeve objects since he fears that a story about a cuckolded reeve will reflect poorly on him. Tellingly, he couples this concern about the threat of defamation with a more general complaint:

Stynt thy clappe!
Lat be thy lewed drunken harlotrye.
It is a synne and eek a greet folye
To apeyren any man, or hym defame,
And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame. (I.3143–48)

In step with a long tradition stretching back to antiquity, the Reeve links his concerns about the overidentification with fiction and the dangers of mimesis with the representation of women and married women in particular. Similar to Augustus's concern that the *Arx* will reflect poorly on Roman matrons and perhaps even lead readers to imitate the adulterous acts represented, the Reeve couples his concern about his own reputation with the objection that the *Miller's Tale* will reflect poorly on all wives. In advancing such an argument, he extends the very same interpretive logic which had prompted Chaucer to compose his palinode in the first instance. As the second chapter has shown, the prologue to the *Legend* modifies the scholastic tool of the palinode not only by revaluing the woman reader, but also by redirecting the misrecognition of fiction traditionally attributed to the unanticipated woman reader onto men. It is because men misinterpret the representation of Criseyde's infidelity in the *Troilus* as a reflection on the nature of women as such that Chaucer must compose the compensatory *Legend*, thereby counterbalancing his earlier representations of bad women with legends of good ones. By supplementing his self-interested concern in his social status, the Reeve also simultaneously recalls the mechanism which extends this male co-option of female grief into the first of the *Canterbury Tales*. Just as Theseus veils his effort to preserve his own reputation as an act of pity elicited by the Argive women's complaint, the Reeve suggests that he is gallantly thinking about how the tale will reflect on women.

Surprisingly, rather than dismissing the Reeve's objections out of hand, the Miller doubles down on the representation of women as a marker of or index to fictionality. Only further amplifying the set of theoretical concerns familiar from the palinodal *Legend*, he insists that his representation of a cuckolded reeve does not reflect on his fellow pilgrim:

Leve brother Osewold,
Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.
But I sey nat therefore that thou art oon;
Ther been ful goode wyves many oon,

And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde. (I.3151–55)³

The Miller distinguishes fiction from fact by insisting that the reeve in his tale does not have a referent in the material world. Yet notice that by conceding the misogynous proverb that a man who does not marry cannot be cuckolded, the Miller does not correct the Reeve's overidentification with the fictional representation of a reeve or dispel his worry about the potential misrecognition of fiction. In pointing out that the inverse does not logically follow from that misogynous proverb, that a married man is not necessarily a cuckhold, he nevertheless leaves the "like-for-like economy" of interpretation which enables this antifeminist mode of thought intact.⁴ As a self-defense, this explanation thus curiously relies on the same logic as the Reeve's critique. Rather than rejecting or even questioning the Reeve's implicit assumption about the dangers of mimesis that locates such concerns in and around women, the Miller's response itself blurs the distinction between fictional representations of women and women in the material world.

This implicit premise only becomes more evident as the Miller turns to the Reeve's secondary concern that the tale will defame matrons. Rather than noting Alison's fictional status or the fact that she does not have a referent in the material world, he instead maintains that his tale about a wife cuckholding her husband is permissible since there are representations of "a thousand goode [wives] ayeyns oon badde" (I.3155). Just as the Reeve's first objection recalls the male misrecognition of fiction familiar from the *Legend*, this ratio similarly echoes the prologue to the *Legend*, where it is Chaucer's disproportionate representation of bad women which prompts the need for his compensatory palinode. When Alceste intercedes on Chaucer's behalf and instructs him that he must compose a palinode to counterbalance his representations of bad women which have deterred men from love, the modification of the palinode from a corrective into a compensatory text results from the disproportionate ratio of bad women he has represented over the course of his career. Immediately after noting how the representation of Criseyde's infidelity hindered men from love, Cupid points to Chaucer's vast library of books and the other accounts of women he might have told:

Was there no good matere in thy mynde,
Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thow nat fynde
Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?
Yis, God wot, sixty bokes olde and newe

³ He then goes on to describe how a husband should not be "inquisityf / Of Goddes pryvete, nor of his wyf" (I.3163–64). This hermeneutic of suspicion in turn informs the structuring of the poem as a whole, as I will discuss in further detail in relation to *The Clerk's Tale*.

⁴ As noted in the Introduction, this phrase belongs to Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, 41.

Hast thou thyself, alle ful of stories grete,
 That bothe Romayns and ek Grekes trete
 Of sundry wemen, which lyf that they ladde,
 And evere **an hundred goode ageyn oon badde**. (LGW G 270–77)⁵

In addition to citing the ratio of one hundred to one, Cupid later directs Chaucer's attention to the "traas" of twenty thousand good women trailing behind Alceste. It is by reappropriating the convention of the palinode and forcing readers to stare down this interminable string of moralized exempla that Chaucer invites readers to question the one-on-one correspondence which fuels the misrecognition of fiction. As we have seen, Chaucer's playful appropriation of the palinode does not correct the male misrecognition of fiction, but instead renders Cupid's desired interpretive result by changing *what* the male servants of love read. So, too, the Miller does not attempt to disavow the Reeve of the qualitative assumption baked into his conclusion that one fictional representation of an adulterous woman will defame all women, but rather disputes it on quantitative grounds. Yet by tallying up all the stories of good women against his tale of one bad woman rather than advocating the application of a corrective hermeneutic mode, the Miller only further reifies the misrecognition of fiction associated with representations of women.

As these resonances between the Miller's self-defense and the prologue to the *Legend* suggest, then, the male misrecognition of fiction extends beyond the palinodal *Legend* into the *Canterbury Tales*, where it emerges as a structuring principle in the frame narrative. While the Host's questionable aesthetic judgment in the tale-telling competition has been noted before, we can make better sense of his preference for tales about obedient wives within this context. When the *Merchant's Tale* reaches its conclusion, for instance, the Host immediately bridges the gap between the fictional representation of an untrue wife and actual women.

Now swich a wyf I pray God kepe me fro!
 Lo, whiche sleightes and subtiltees
 In wommen been! For ay as bisy as bees
 Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,
 And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;
 By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel. (IV.2421–26)

The exclamatory "Lo" aligns the Host's response with homiletic discourse, almost as if he means to conclude the *Merchant's Tale* by drawing out the necessary moralization. But the Host does not read allegorically, pulling back the integumental

⁵ "How clene maydenes and how trwer wyves, / How stedefaste widewes durynge alle here lyves, / Telleth Jerome, and that nat of a fewe / But, I dar seyn, an hundred on a rewe, / That it is pite for to rede, and routh, / The wo that they endure for here trouthe" (LGW G 282–87).

veil in order to reveal the deeper moral meaning which the woman reader cannot see. Instead, he reads the tale as if it were an antifeminist exemplum. Or to put it in slightly different terms, he closes the gap between allegorical tenor and vehicle, such that he draws a one-to-one correspondence between fictional representations of women and women as such. When the Host praises the *Tale of Melibee*, he similarly couches his praise in terms of his wife:

As I am feithful man,
And by that precious corpus Madrian,
I had levere than a barel ale
That Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale!
For she nys no thyng of swich pacience
As was this Melibeus wyf Prudence. (VII 1891–96)

Even as he calls to mind misrecognition of fiction aligned with representations of women in Ovid's self-reception and the ethical Ovid tradition, the Host's aesthetic judgment calls to mind Chaucer's appropriation of the figure of the unanticipated woman reader. But rather than blaming the woman reader for her carnal-minded misinterpretation, it is the male pilgrims whose interpretive confusion hinges on representations of women, as they struggle to maintain the proper distinction between fiction and fact.

As Chaucer extends the male misrecognition of fiction into the structuring principles of the pilgrims' tale-telling competition, he also revalues the woman reader and her supposed hermeneutic faults. Whereas the selective reading of Ovid's unanticipated woman reader justifies the work of commentary and Francesca's decision not to read further precipitates Dante's palinodic self-exegesis, Chaucer's inversion of this convention instead couples the male misrecognition of fiction with the rhetorical hallmark of his poetry, the refusal to tell. After drawing a one-on-one correspondence between the tale's representation of a woman and women as such, the Host begins to narrate what we might understand as the shortest of all the tales in the entire collection. He has only just begun to tell the pilgrims about his wife when he cuts himself short:

But doutelees, as trewe as any steel
I have a wyf, though that she povre be,
But of hir tongue, a labbyng shrewe is she,
And yet she hath an heep of vices mo;
Thereof no fors! Lat all swiche thynges go.
But wyte ye what? In conseil be it seyde,
Me reweth soore I am unto hire teyde.
For and I sholde rekenen every vice
Which that she hath, ywis I were to nyce.

And cause why? It sholde reported be
 And toold to hire of somme of this meynee—
 Of whom, it nedeth nat for to declare,
 Syn wommen konnen outen swich chaffare;
 And eek my wit suffiseth nat thereto
 To tellen al; wherefore my tale is do. (IV.2427–40)

Anticipating the formerly unanticipated woman reader, the Host stops narrating because he fears that what he says about his wife will get back to her. Since this fear relies on the misogynistic belief in women's loquacity and tendency to gossip, the Host's decision to abort his tale relies on the triple conflation of women, the surface, and carnality, in contrast with masculine moral depth. Since women are shallow and all surface, so the implicit antifeminist assumption suggests, they cannot be trusted to conceal secrets. In the Host's formulation, he must stop "Syn wommen konnen **outen** swich chaffare." When the Host briefly reprises his tale in the *Monk's Prologue*, he once again brings himself to a premature halt, seemingly out of this same fear.

I woot wel she wol do me slee som day
 Som neighebor, and thane go my way;
 For I am perilous with knyf in hond,
 Al be it that I dar nat hire withstonde,
 For she is byg in armes, by my faith:
 That shal he fynde that hire mysdooth or seith—
 But lat us passe away fro this mateere. (VII 1916–24)

Even as the Host's refusal to tell bolsters the male misrecognition of fiction and playfully appeals to the traditional role of the unanticipated woman reader, it also has another curious effect. Unlike Ovid who wishes the woman reader had not read selectively or Dante whose palinodic self-exegesis responds to Francesca's incomplete reading of the Lancelot narrative, the Host truncates himself mid-sentence precisely because he does not want his wife to hear the narrative in its entirety. Rather than citing the figure of the woman reader to justify the work of commentary itself, in which commentators claim to plumb the moral depths which the woman reader cannot see or append the moralization which she failed to read, the Host instead truncates his tale and leaves it incomplete precisely because he fears that female figure.

In appropriating the repentant narrative of the Ovidian *vita*, Chaucer thus couples the male misrecognition of fiction with the inversion of the scale of reading typically prescribed as an antidote to the woman reader's carnal-minded hermeneutic

faults.⁶ Immediately after the Miller's self-defense of his tale, Chaucer places this revaluation of selective reading even more prominently on display. Although he does not deflect blame onto the figure of the woman reader and instead associates the misrecognition of fiction with men, he nevertheless follows Ovid in shifting the focus from authority to interpretation. But whereas Ovid deflects moral critiques of his poetry by deflecting blame onto the unanticipated woman reader who selectively culls sexual content and reads it out of context and commentators claim to reveal the deeper meaning she could not see or to append the moralization she failed to read, Chaucer continues to invert the scale of reading traditionally aligned with the palinodal function of the *Heroides* or the corrective function of commentary. Not unlike the "mere reportour" defense in the *General Prologue*, in which Chaucer deploys a false humility topos in order to deflect blame from himself onto the tale-tellers, Chaucer prefaces the *Miller's Tale* with a disclaimer meant to safeguard against objections to the tale's sexually explicit content. He warns his readers:

And therfore, whoso list it nay yheere,
 Turne over the leef and chese another tale;
 For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
 Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,
 And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.
 Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.
 The Millere is a cherl; ye know wel this. (I.3176–82)

Instructing the reader that "he" should turn the page if he will be offended by the tale's morally dubious content, Chaucer extends the male misrecognition of fiction familiar from the *Legend* where it necessitates his palinode. By claiming that he does not have "yvel entente," he also calls to mind the *accessus* category of the *intentio auctoris*, albeit with a pointed difference. Whereas commentators co-opt the *intentio auctoris* to further their own desire to enable moral worth to result from engagement with Ovid's amatory verse, Chaucer redirects that scholastic tool to the opposite effect. Rather than blurring the distinction between the intention of the author and that of the commentator, he instead forcefully insists on that distinction. Advising his readers that they can read about "moralitee and hoolynesse" elsewhere, Chaucer does not prescribe a moral hermeneutic framework to accommodate the tale's illicit content to ethics, as the commentaries do. Quite the reverse, he advises against it, since he specifically instructs readers *not* to "maken ernest of game." Whereas Ovidian commentators insist on the woman reader's inability to complete the interpretive process without scholastic reading aids, thereby aligning ethical interpretation with depth and their own textual expertise, then, Chaucer turns that

⁶ On scales of reading in contemporary critical practice as they relate to the hermeneutic tradition, see Orlemanski, "Scales of Reading" *Exemplaria* 26:2–3 (2014): 215–33.

convention on its head.⁷ What was once seen as the feminized hermeneutic fault in need of correction in order to accommodate morally dubious poetic content to ethics has become Chaucer's prescribed solution to that very same interpretive dilemma.

Whereas the Host attempts to avoid the anger of an unanticipated woman reader by refusing to tell his tale and Chaucer playfully deflects the ethical onus onto the reader by instructing him to turn the page on morally dubious content, it is this shared attention to what is not read or represented that lies at the heart of Chaucer's sustained attention to the ethics of representation and the nature of interpretation in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the poem's most explicit discussion of literature's moral value, the Man of Law raises the question of literature's ethical utility in his discussion of Chaucer's career. Since the Man of Law's Chaucer is first and foremost the author of the *Legend*, the Ovidian biography looms over his remarks. In addition to cataloguing Chaucer's works in terms familiar from the repentant narrative of the *vita Ovidiana*, the Man of Law even goes so far as to assert that Chaucer has out-palinated Ovid, since "he hath toold of loveris up and down / Mo than Ovide made of mencion / In his Epistles" (II.53–55). While the Man of Law attends to the palinode's larger theoretical function by aligning that neo-Ovidian biography with the question of literary ethics, he lauds the moral superiority of Chaucer's poetry by making an argument from absence, thereby acknowledging how Chaucer has inverted the device's traditional function.⁸ In step with the simplistic view of literature's moral value which implies that morally dubious content will lead readers into error, the Man of Law peppers his catalogue of Chaucer's works with references to what Chaucer does not represent.

But certainly no word ne writeth he
Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,
That loved hir owene brother synfully—
Of swiche cursed stories I sey fy!—
Or ellis of Tyro Appollonius,

⁷ This attitude is not without precedent in the commentary tradition. As we saw in the first chapter, Alexander Neckham's twelfth-century reading list includes Ovid's elegies and the *Metamorphoses* but advises that the love poetry and perhaps even the *Fasti* should be kept out of adolescent hands.

⁸ The Man of Law's litany of what Chaucer does not represent in turn calls for comparison to the eventual description of the Parson as an exemplary figure, which lists all the things he does not do. As Larry Scanlon puts it, the Parson "does not sell his benefice for hire, or seek chantry, or retreat into brotherhood (I.505–14). Nor does he stand on ceremony, refusing the 'pompe or reverence,' of his position, and pursuing correction of his flock discreetly and benignly (I.515–26). Earlier in his portrait we are told he is loath 'to cursen for his tithes,' and more often gives out of his own funds to poor parishioners (I.486–90)" (Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 10).

How that cursed kyn Antiochus
 Birafte his doghter of hir maydenhede,
 That is so horrible a tale for to rede,
 Whan he hir threw upon the pavement. (II.76–85)

Since both Canacee and Antiochus appear in the *Confessio Amantis*, the Man of Law here implicitly acknowledges Chaucer's rivalry with Gower. In his address to Chaucer near the end of the *Confessio*, Gower similarly refers to Chaucer in terms of the Ovidian career model. By describing how Chaucer wrote "ditees" and "songes glade" in "his youthe" but advising him that he should make "his testament of love," or a palinode for those youthful poetic indiscretions in "hise daies olde" and "latere age," Gower not only attends to Chaucer's playful appropriation of the palinode; he takes credit for it. Eliding Cupid and taking the words out of Alceste's mouth, Gower presents himself as the figure who advises Chaucer to compose a compensatory text.⁹ Understood in terms of how the two authors repurpose the critical vocabulary of the *accessus* and the Ovidian biography, we can see how their shared familiarity with the ethical Ovid enabled both poets to engage with perennial debates about the ethics of representation, as well as how their homosocial poetic rivalry and respective identities as the poet of love and morality takes shape in this context.

Even as he lauds Chaucer's moral superiority to Gower in virtue of what his poetry does not represent, however, the Man of Law paradoxically cannot seem to resist the narrative pull or affective force of the illicit content he claims Chaucer omits. Although he praises Chaucer for glossing over Antiochus's rape of his daughter, the Man of Law nevertheless dwells on the details of this scene of sexual violence, calling to mind the specific narrative moment "Whan he hir threw upon the pavement." Since Chaucer's moral superiority supposedly lies in his refusal to represent immoral content, it is all the more significant that when Antiochus rapes his daughter in the *Confessio*, Gower includes no such description of him throwing her to the ground, but instead glosses over the rape in abstract terms.¹⁰ Although Gower includes a metaphorical description which compares incest to cannibalism, noting how Antiochus "devoureth / His oghne fleissh" (CA VIII.309–10), the moment in which the rape occurs lacks graphic details about the violence Antiochus enacts on his daughter's body.

This king hath leisir at his wille
 With strengthe, and whanne he time sih,

⁹ On the two poets' self-presentation in these Ovidian terms, see Andrew Cole, "John Gower Copies Geoffrey Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review* 52:1 (2017): 63–4.

¹⁰ On the possibility that the detail may come from Gower's misreading of the Latin, see John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 289 and 370 n. 18.

This Yonge maiden he forlih. (*CA* VIII.298–300)

While Gower does not describe Antiochus throwing his daughter to the ground, he nevertheless punctuates his account of Apollonius of Tyre with multiple instances in which women appear at men's feet. Apollonius's daughter Thaise repeatedly avoids the threat of sexual violence by throwing herself to the ground, thereby eliciting pity.¹¹ In the final iteration of this recurring plot point, she must beg Apollonius for mercy, not yet aware that he is her father. That plea is precipitated by the threat of physical violence:

he wroth,
 And after hire with his hond
 He smot: and thus whan sche him fond
 Desesed, coutaisly sche saide,
 “Avoi, mi lord, I am a maide;
 And if ye wiste what I am,
 And oout of what lignage I cam,
 Ye wolde noght be so salvage.” (*CA* VIII.1692–99)

Although this episode makes no explicit reference to Thaise being thrown to the pavement, it is the third and final narrative instance in which Thaise preserves her maidenhood by eliciting men's pity. In both previous iterations, the scene is explicitly staged such that she is on the ground at men's feet. When "ten or twelve" men enter her room in succession at the brothel, each with the intention that "he with strenghte agein hire leve / Tho scholde hir maidenhood bereve" (*CA* VIII.1426; 1439–40), Gower specifically notes that "she kepte himself fro schame" because she "kneleth doun to th'erthe" (*CA* VIII.1446–47). Given the recurrence of this plot point in which Thaise prostrates herself before men to avoid violence, it is almost as if the Man of Law has misremembered, combining details from these two instances of fathers abusing their daughters: Antiochus's rape of his daughter blurs into Apollonius hitting Thaise, as well as the prostrate stance she must repeatedly assume. The result is one composite image which elicits pity by allowing the metaphorical description of Antiochus raping his daughter to absorb the narrative particularities of parallel instances of violence.

While it may be tempting to dismiss the Man of Law's "mis-telling" of the *Confessio* as just that, then, I propose that we might instead consider how it contains evidence of an interpretive mind at work. That is, even though the Man of Law misremembers certain narrative details, the manner in which these details blur

¹¹ “This maiden tho for feere schryhte, / And for the love of God almyhte / Sche preith that
for a litel stounde / Sche myhte knele upon the grounde, / Toward the hevene for to crave,
/ Hire wofull soule if sche mai save. (*CA* VIII.1383–88).

together in his mind is telling. The composite image of Antiochus throwing his daughter to the pavement, for instance, suggests that the Man of Law has attended to the narrative echo between the repeated episodes of father-daughter violence, a narrative parallel which contributes to the story's meaning. Although Apollonius avoids making the same incestuous mistake as his father-in-law, Antiochus, it is crucial to notice that this pattern of male violence threatens to recur. The narrative parallel with the earlier episode of incestuous rape lends added significance to Thaise's plea that she is a maid, as well as her claim that if Apollonius knew her lineage, he would not abuse her so. It creates the readerly expectation or at least threat of incestuous sexual violence, only to tiptoe back from it at the last possible moment.

So understood, the Man of Law's blurred recollection of the *Confessio* hinges on several key issues associated with the scholastic tool of the palinode, particularly insofar as the Ovidian retraction provides access to female subjectivity. In Gower's account of Antiochus's rape of his daughter, the act of sexual violence facilitates the emergence of a female subjectivity ["sche lay stille, and of this thing, / **Withinne hirself** such sorghe made" (CA VIII.313–14)], which is in turn reflected by the daughter's outward appearance ["hire **chiere** was unglad" (CA VIII.321)]. In step with the narrative conventions familiar from the Ovidian tradition, male violence against women gives way to a female subjectivity which in turn elicits empathy.¹² Perhaps most importantly for the larger argument at hand, the Man of Law's collation of details from these specific narrative moments, all instances in which men subject women to acts of violence, also seems to result from a series of empathetic interpretive acts which attend to female interiority. The image of Thaise, beaten and begging for mercy, elicits pity, and it is that precise moment which the Man of Law amplifies and allows to absorb the narrative particularities of parallel episodes. The Man of Law's mis-recollection thus places his readerly habits on display, including evidence that he has engaged an interpretive process which attends to the internal mental events which poetry renders accessible.¹³ It is precisely because the Man of Law's mis-recollection of this pitiful image does not occur in the *Confessio*, strictly

¹² On the conservatism of Chaucerian empathy, see Matthew W. Irvin, "Chaucer's Fantasy of Pity," *The Chaucer Review* 55:4 (2020): 379–96; and Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 18. For competing accounts which instead argue for its radical potential, see Holly Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue*, and Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹³ On the relationship between interpretation and evidence of the mind at work in Chaucer's poetry, see Gaston, *Reading Chaucer in Time*, 51. This point also bears an important relationship to contemporary close reading practices: on the relationship between close reading and behaviorist assumptions about the inaccessibility of inner mental states, see Joshua Gang, "Behaviorism and the Beginnings of Close Reading," *English Literary History* 78.1 (2011): 1–25. On the under-theorization of close reading and its literary-historical relationship to the hermeneutic tradition, see Orlemanski, "Scales of Reading," 215–33.

speaking, that we are able to see evidence of the empathetic interpretive act he has performed in the course of reading that work. What seems to have most stuck with the Man of Law is not the content of the tale per se, but rather the pity he felt as a result of imaginatively filling out the gaps in Gower's narration.

Rather than simply parodying the Man of Law's anti-representational impulse or his naïve understanding of literature's ethical value, Chaucer thus places the prologue in conversation with a complex body of literary thought enmeshed with discourse about pity—discourse which as we have seen, informs Chaucer's reappropriation of the convention of the palinode, as he systematically redirects pity away from women's interiority toward a male subjectivity in order to enter into perennial debates about literary ethics. Even more to this point, the Man of Law's *Prologue* not only invokes the Ovidian career model from the ethical Ovid tradition; it also recalls the function of Chaucer's modified palinode, as well as how the theoretical stakes of those modifications extend beyond the *Legend* into the *Canterbury Tales*. By filling out a gap in Gower's narration with a pitiful image of Antiochus's daughter on the pavement, for instance, the Man of Law's mis-telling of the tale of Apollonius of Tyre tellingly harks back to the hierarchical spatial terms which structure Theseus's pity and the male co-option of female grief in the *Knight's Tale*.¹⁴ Just as Theseus looks down from his horse at the Argive women kneeling on the ground or Hippolyta and Emily who have thrown themselves at his feet, the Man of Law renders vivid an affectively moving narrative moment, in which we as readers come to occupy a position analogous to Theseus. Even as his modifications to the palinode resist the simplistic view of literature's ethical value associated with the risks of overidentifying with fiction, then, Chaucer nevertheless directs attention toward the emotional dispositions fiction requires readers to develop. By directing our pity toward Thaise even as he rejects the male misrecognition of fiction, he asks readers to reflect on the nature of fictive interpretation, as well as the interpretive middle ground he asks readers to find. He suggests that learning to read fiction well involves the regulation of the "affective pulsation between identification with fictional characters and withdrawal from them."¹⁵

Just as Chaucer's attention to literary and philosophical conversations about *pitié* and the heart extend from his palinode into the *Knight's Tale*, the Man of Law's pitiful image of Antiochus's daughter illustrates how such concerns about the ethics of representation extend into the poem's second fragment. For, alongside the mis-recollection of the rape which supplements Gower's narration with graphic details he does not include, the Man of Law includes a similarly pathetic image in his catalogue of women from Chaucer's *Legend*.

¹⁴ Reminiscent of the hierarchical spatial paradigm associated with pity in Chaucer's works, Gower reports that, as a result of Thaise's pleas, Apollonius "His herte upon this maide caste" (*CA* VIII.1706).

¹⁵ Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, xvii.

The crueltee of the, queene Medea,
 Thy litel children hangynge by the hals,
 For thy Jason, that was of love so false!
 O Ypermystra, Penelopee, Alceste,
 Youre wifhod he comendeth with the beste! (II.72–76)

At the same time that the reference to Penelope and Alceste acknowledges the association between the *Legend* and the palinodal function of the *Heroides*, the gruesome description of Medea's violence thrusts readers into a specific narrative moment, when her children's mangled corpses hang in suspension. Yet as discussed in the second chapter, this is a narrative moment the *Legend* pointedly refuses to tell. The *Confessio* recounts how Medea "sloughe" her children (CA 5.3246). By contrast, Chaucer's selective mode of narration causes him to omit this detail, as he instead barrels ahead to Jason's betrayal in order to shape his material to support the intended meaning prescribed by Alceste. In the end, Chaucer does not earnestly ask his readers to accept the abstract moralization, but rather to probe this gap or omission, to apprehend the legend's deeper meaning by wrestling with the narrative particularities which run against the moralization's smooth grain.¹⁶

Curiously, then, even as he lauds the moral value of Chaucer's poetry because of what it does not represent, it is precisely what Chaucer does not include in the *Legend* that most seizes the Man of Law's attention. While he contrasts Chaucer's refusal to represent immoral content with that of Gower, he reads both poets in the same fashion, seizing on pitiful images which neither poet includes. What lies at the heart of this seeming contradiction, I would like to suggest, is not merely a parodic rejection of the Man of Law's simplistic account of literature's moral value, but rather a continuation of Chaucer's engagement with debates about the ethics of representation which had coalesced around the woman reader and the palinode. As we have seen, Chaucer revalues the woman reader's hermeneutic faults, thereby locating the ethical value of his poetry not in the poet as moral arbiter but rather in an interpretive process which requires readers to attend to those gaps and omissions. He does not merely ask us to look at "the large woundes wyde / Of Lucesse" (II.62–63), but also to sound the flattened description of those wounds and thereby render Ovid's declamatory or rhetorical practice of female impersonation into a corresponding hermeneutic. The extension of Chaucer's neo-Ovidian *vita* from the *Legend* into the *Canterbury Tales* thus not only recalls but also speaks to perennial disciplinary contests between philosophy and literature, particularly the scholastic understanding which categorizes literary works under the ethical branch of philosophy.

¹⁶ Cf. Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 30 ("the moral can only be apprehended narratively") and Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature*, esp. 1–26.

It would be possible to explore how the association between representations of women and this like-for-like hermeneutic bear on disciplinary contests about the type of knowledge literature and close reading lay claim to, as well as debates within literary studies about the rise of fictionality. One might show, for instance, how Chaucer anticipates recent philosophical thought at the intersection between moral theory and action theory. Just as contemporary analytic philosophy has reminded us that inaction is not morally neutral, that the failure to act can and does have ethical implications on par with morally impermissible actions,¹⁷ we can see Chaucer engaging with theoretical debates about the ethics of representation by extending a similar logic. In addition to rejecting the simplistic view of literature's ethical value, which locates its moral danger in the risk of readers imitating the immoral behavior literature represents, Chaucer begins to work through his own understanding of how the omission of "morally dubious" content does not free one from ethical obligations, as well as how the refusal to tell itself elicits a certain mode of interpretation. One might further show that while the emergence of fiction recently has been attributed to the rise of the novel, a genre inextricably bound up with questions of gender, the tendency to focus on the figure of the woman writer and the development of female authorial personae has come at the expense of a longer history of ideas. The literary-historical development of the figure of the woman reader enables us to see how fiction arises as an answer to a pressing question about literature's ethical utility—not only at the juncture where exemplarity ends, but also in the turn away from authorial control to readerly discernment. In step with a growing body of medieval scholarship which invites us to see how recent accounts of fiction return to premodern body of literary thought, the woman reader lends further texture to our understanding of the deeper links between gender and fictionality. Rather than digressing too far from the primary matter at hand, however, I instead want to bear these questions in mind as we turn to Chaucer's most famous representation of a woman reader.

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Once we are attuned to how the male misrecognition of fiction structures the tale-telling competition, we can more clearly see how what is not represented informs the Wife of Bath's thinking about literature's moral value. Although the Wife's bookishness and her status as a reader have been widely acknowledged, it bears stressing that she is not the intended audience for Jankyn's antifeminist book of wicked wives. In addition to containing selections ranging from Theophrastus to Heloise, the antifeminist compendium also includes "Ovid's Art" (III.679), the *locus*

¹⁷ The significance of the distinction between "killing" and "letting die" emerges in several different contexts in moral philosophy. For an influential rejection of the distinction, see Peter Singer "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (1972).

classicus for the trope of the unanticipated woman reader in the medieval Ovid tradition. While the explicit citation of the *Ars* calls to mind that female figure's literal-mindedness, however, the Wife does not object to the book's contents by drawing a one-to-one correspondence between its representations of women and women in the material world. Departing from the underlying assumption about the dangers of mimesis and women's hermeneutic faults which created the need for that corrective convention, she instead returns to the representational ratios which serve as the impetus for the palinodal *Legend*. As she sees it, Jankyn reads stories about bad women to the point of excess.

He knew of hem **mo** legends and lyves
Than been of goode wyves in the Bible.
 For trusteth wel, it is impossible
 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
 But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
 Ne of noon other womman never the **mo**.
 Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
 By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
 As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
 They wolde han writen of men **moore** wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (III.686–96)

Unlike the Reeve's misrecognition of fiction, the Wife does not decry the book's subject matter as immoral in itself. After all, she claims that women writers would deploy the same representational mode if given the chance, albeit to depict men rather than women. Rather than reverting to a simplistic view of literary ethics or putting forward an antirepresentational argument, her comparative syntactic construction instead takes aim at the book's disproportionate representation of bad wives. While the Wife does not cite the Miller's representational ratio of a thousand tales of good wives against one bad, then, she nevertheless critiques Jankyn's book by appealing to the same logic. She objects not because it represents women in an unflattering light, but rather because the monotonous collection of antifeminist exempla exceeds the legends of "goode wyves" associated with the palinode's corrective function.

At the same time, the Wife's appeal to such representational ratios also implicitly suggests that the Miller's self-defense misrecognizes fiction. That is, it is not simply that the Wife arrives at a different final tally than the Miller, due to the plethora of antifeminist material in Jankyn's book. She also takes care to resist a defense of literary fiction which maintains that a fictional story is "just" a story, which assumes that since fiction does not make referential truth claims it is therefore free from moral obligations. As her prologue makes clear, she is intimately familiar

with how abstract ideation cannot ever quite leave the material world behind.¹⁸ Most illustrative of this point, Jankyn's reading precipitates his domestic violence against the Wife. By hitting her on the ear with his book and causing her to become deaf in one ear, he literalizes the trope of the carnal-minded woman reader who is "deaf" to deeper moral meaning.¹⁹ But rather than the Wife drawing a one-to-one correspondence between fiction and fact, it is instead Jankyn who does so. Moreover, contrary to the prevailing set of concerns about the dangers of mimesis, his violence does not result from imitating the fictional. Instead, he beats the Wife out of the desire to avoid becoming like the emasculated husbands he has read about.

Although the Wife does not object to Jankyn's book by assuming a one-on-one correspondence between fictional representations of women and women as such, as the figure of the unanticipated woman reader traditionally had done, the Wife's Prologue nevertheless engages with the conventional idea of the woman to reflect on the prevailing understanding of literature's ethical value. When the Wife catalogues graphic representations from Jankyn's book that describe how women kill their husbands, for instance, she reports how some wives

slayn hir housbanded in hir bed,
And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght,
Whan that the corps lay in the floor upright.
And somme han dryve nayles in hir brayn,
Whil that they slepte, and thus they had hem slayn.
Somme han hem yeve poysoun in hire drynke. (III.765–771)

At least part of the joke Chaucer seems to be making here relies on the conventional role of the unanticipated woman reader in perennial debates about literature's ethical utility. This passage invites the reader to look at the Wife's string of dead husbands with suspicion. It is easy to imagine, after all, how these stories could be read by the traditional figure of the literal-minded and selective woman reader, not as negative exempla with a deeper moral meaning but rather as a practical guide or manual on how to kill one's husband. The Wife's recollection of graphic details, such as the nails being driven into a sleeping man's brain, suggests that these images in particular

¹⁸ For a similar argument about the feminized status of the signifier which examines how historical women writers capitalized on its "flickering" nature, see Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, xxiv.

¹⁹ While this study traces the revaluation of the idea of the woman reader and its association narrative surface, it is worth stressing the intersectionality between gender and disability in these hermeneutic models. Although it is beyond the purview of this study, it would be possible to consider how this late fourteenth-century inversion of traditional hermeneutic models bears on recent critiques of "crip drag" (able-bodied actors portraying disabled characters).

have become lodged in her memory. Yet as we have just seen, at the same time that Chaucer playfully holds out the possibility that the Wife has imitated these literary representations of immoral behavior, it is Jankyn who hits the Wife. Even as the convention of the unanticipated woman reader familiar from the ethical Ovid tradition hangs in suspension, the Wife does not object that women will read these stories literally and imitate such behavior. Instead, she reaffirms her objection to the proportionality of Jankyn's book, with how it lists such examples to the point of excess: "And therewithal he knew of **mo** proverbs / **Than** in this world ther growen grad or herbes" (III.773–74).

While she does not suggest that fictional representations bear a one-to-one correspondence with the material world or that it is impermissible to represent sexually explicit content, then, the Wife does not abandon the question of literature's ethical effects. She does not suggest that it is morally impermissible to represent violence against women, but her Prologue nevertheless suggests that there is a point at which representational ratios carry moral weight. Contrary to the Miller's self-defense, it suggests that there is a certain point at which the claim that a story is "just" a story rings hollow. After all, if fiction has no effect or bearing on the material world, then what good can it do? At the same time that the simplistic view of literature's ethical utility falls short, the Wife nevertheless seems to concede that there is a kernel of truth to that concern. As a self-defense, the appeal to fictionality does not free one from morally culpability. It only reiterates the complex nature of literature's ethical value more forcefully, as well as the inadequacy of the traditional account of its moral value which underlies the palinode.

In addition to recalling the traditional function of this female figure in perennial debates about literature's ethical utility, the Wife's Prologue also engages with Chaucer's reworking of that convention throughout his career. Only further illustrating how the Wife's Prologue holds up the idea of the woman reader familiar from the palinode even as it questions that convention's underlying assumptions, the Wife returns to the scene of reading which set the stage for the palinodal *Legend*. As we have seen, the *Troilus* reimagines Pandarus's initial encounter with Criseyde as a scene of interrupted reading, in which Pandarus brings Criseyde's reading of the Theban narrative to a premature halt at a juncture which can accommodate an antifeminist moral. Inverting the gendered dynamics of this scene, the Wife refers to Eriphyle's betrayal of her husband Amphiorax immediately before she interrupts Jankyn's reading of his book of wicked wives. As her frustration with Jankyn's antifeminist compendium reaches a fever pitch, the Wife recounts how

He tolde me eek for what occasioun
 Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.
 Myn housbonde hadde a legend of his wyf,
 Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold
 Hath prively unto the Grekes told

Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym in a place,
For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace. (III.740–46)

In the *Troilus*, Pandarus occludes Statius's Ovidianism and the female-voiced asides which bookend the *Thebaid*, instead appealing to an antifeminist dictum from *Ars* II which reinforces the systematic absorption of the palinodal function of Ovidian female personae into the amatory *Ars*. Not only does he prevent Criseyde from reading the female-voiced complaints pertinent to her experience. By reducing the *Thebaid* to an antifeminist exemplum, he also effectively co-opts that female-voiced lament in order to advance the male-centered amatory plot. In contrast with Criseyde's interrupted reading, it is the Wife who now interrupts Jankyn's selective reading of Eriphyle, even going so far as to physically tear a page from his book to prevent him from reading further. So understood, she does more than simply object to the ratio between representations of bad and good women. Just as Criseyde repurposes Pandarus's practice of selective reading to serve her own argumentative ends, the Wife responds to antifeminist discourse in a similar fashion. In addition to violently truncating exegetical authorities and bending the Bible beyond the parameters of reasonable interpretation, thereby illustrating how commentators can exploit scholastic tools like the *intentio auctoris* to serve their own desires, the Wife puts a stop to the moralized interpretive mode which had enabled the male co-option of female grief in the first instance.

This larger theoretical context in turn elucidates the Wife's digression in her tale, which puzzlingly revises the tale of Midas into an antifeminist exemplum. Despite her fierce objections to Jankyn's tiresome book, which piles one exemplum about a bad woman after the next, the Wife interrupts her own tale to add an antifeminist exemplum which seemingly could have been pulled from the pages of that compendium. In support of the *sententia* that "we wommen konne no thyng **hyde**" (III.950), she proceeds to "mis-tell" the tale of Midas by misattributing the failure to keep silent to Midas's wife rather than his barber.²⁰ Although she promises to keep the secret of Midas's ears, his wife cannot help herself:

She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.
But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde
That she so longe sholde a conseil **hyde**;
Hir thoughte it **swal so soore** aboute hir **herte**
That nedely som word hire moste asterte;
And sith she dorste telle it to no man,
Doun to a mareys faste by she rane—
Til she cam there hir herte was afyre—
And as a bitore bombleth in the myre,

²⁰ Taylor, "The Motives of Reeds," esp. 27–31.

She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun:
 “Biwreye me nat, thou water, with thy soun,”
 Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys two!
 Now is **myn herte** al hool; now it is **oute**.
 I myghte no lenger kepe it, oute of doute.”
 Heere may ye se, though we a tyme abyde,
 Yet **oute** it moot; we can no conseil **hyde**.
 The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,
 Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere.

As the secret swells around her heart and threatens to burst out, Midas’s wife’s struggle calls for comparison to the medicalized description of Arcite’s death, which gruesomely literalizes the male co-option of female grief: since his body “Ne may the venym voyden ne **expelle** / The pipes of his longes gonne to **swelle**.” As previously noted, Arcite’s medicalized description itself evokes gynophobic fears of women’s bodily fluids, thereby vividly illustrating the male co-option of female grief which enables Chaucer’s proleptic palinode.

Intermingled with such gynophobic discourse and the antifeminist trope of women’s inability to keep secrets, which is so often parsed in terms of spatial metaphors contrasting outsides with insides, surface with depth, we can also hear echoes of the larger literary-theoretical conversation about literature’s ethical utility. If it seems contradictory for the Wife to reframe the tale as an exemplum warning that women “kan no conseil hyde” (III.980), the incompatibility between her moral and Ovid’s narrative is precisely the point. By directing those who want to hear the “remanent of the tale” to Ovid (III.981), the Wife invites readers to notice that she has reversed Ovidian commentators’ warning against carnal-minded misinterpretation: rather than subjecting Midas’s foolish inattention to deeper meaning to scrutiny, the Wife instead critiques moral-minded readers who are so eager to accept the antifeminist moralization that they will neglect the narrative surface. Or to put it another way, whereas commentators accommodate morally dubious content to ethics by claiming to redress women’s hermeneutic faults with moralization, the Wife of Bath calls attention to the reductive potential of that interpretive mode, as evidenced by the discontinuity between the antifeminist moralization and the particularities of the narrative itself.

As it happens, the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* misapplies an antifeminist moralization to nearly identical effect. Like the Wife of Bath’s mis-telling of the Midas story, the Nun’s Priest bends the tale of Chanticleer away from its source text to accommodate an antifeminist moral. Although it does not propagate the same *sententia* that wives cannot keep “conseil” in the sense that they cannot keep secrets, it offers another variation on that theme by maintaining that women’s “conseil” or advice cannot be

trusted.²¹ In order to do so, the Nun's Priest puts words in Pertelote's mouth, markedly departing from his source. Whereas the cock makes light of his dream, and the hen foretells disaster in the *Roman de Renart*, he reverses the speakers' argumentative positions. As Jill Mann puts it, "The effect of the change is to sever any meaningful connection between the intellectual superstructure of the debate on dreams and the subsequent action of the tale (since Chaunticleer ignores the import of his own argument)."²² The Wife's parallel misapplication of an antifeminist moralization enables us to take Mann's analysis one step further, particularly insofar as the episode bears on perennial debates about literature's ethical utility. Upon beginning to relate the antifeminist *sententia* ("Wommens conseil ben ful ofte colde; / Wommanes conseil broughte us first to wo"), the Nun's Priest cuts himself short. Although he feigns ignorance and claims that he is uncertain "whom it mighte displease," he seemingly follows the Host's example, stopping for fear of the woman reader.²³ Yet by claiming that he will pass over antifeminist discourse, Chaucer invites attentive readers to notice that such discourse does not appear in or cohere with his source, where the hen's counsel would help the cock evade woe rather than bringing him to it.

The invitation for readers to attend to these narrative gaps in turn directs attention to the absent presence of the figure of the unanticipated woman reader. Only further illustrating how the tale recalls the woman reader's central role in contemporary debates about literature's ethical utility, the Nun's Priest aligns the misrecognition of fiction with Lancelot, the same narrative which inspires Paolo and Francesca to commit adultery when their decision to read no further leads them to imitate the adulterous kiss. In one of the many instances in which the tale calls attention to its fictional status, the Nun's Priest makes a joke at women's expense:

Now every wys man, lat him herkne me;
 This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
 As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
 That wommen holde in ful greet reverence.
 Now wol I torne agayn to my sentence. (CT VII.3210–13)

As a device which self-consciously places the tale's fictional status display, this disclaimer not only calls to mind the figure of the unanticipated woman reader, carnal-minded and error-prone; it also recalls Boccaccio's claim that Lancelot was "composed rather for approval than to accord with truth" (*più composte a*

²¹ MED, s.v. "counsel."

²² Jill Mann, ed., *The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 1041.

²³ See, for instance, John A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the Gawain Poet* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

beneplacito che secondo la verità).²⁴ Yet by coupling the misapplication of an antifeminist moral with a reference to Francesca's incomplete reading, Chaucer once again redirects scrutiny away from the woman reader toward the moralizing male reader who ignores the narrative surface. Like the Wife's antifeminist account of Midas, the real joke comes at the expense of the reader who laughs uncritically at the antifeminist joke. The misapplication of the antifeminist moral drives readerly attention to what is not said or represented, to the narrative particularities which the moralization flattens.

Just as the Nun's Priest's misapplication of an antifeminist moralization reinforces the allusion to Paolo and Francesca's selective reading of the Lancelot narrative, the Wife's description of how Midas's wife's "hert was afyre" similarly recalls Francesca, who defends herself by quoting Dante's unmoralized adaptation of Guinizelli's canzone as evidence of love's innate and therefore involuntary nature. For Dante, Francesca's citation of the innate nature of love prompts his palinodic self-exegesis, which corrects her view by insisting on its exterior, voluntaristic, and rational nature. As Midas's wife's thoughts swell around her heart, however, the antifeminist re-writing of the tale does not reverse so much as reify the male co-option of female grief which the medicalized description of Arcite's death so graphically literalized: she is ultimately denied a private subjectivity, since she cannot keep the secret which bursts out of her. The male co-option of female grief which enabled Chaucer's modified palinode extends throughout the tale as a whole. In the temporal confusion at the beginning of her tale, the Wife attempts to assure readers that acts of sexual violence like the one she is about to recount are a thing of the past; the tale is fiction, not fact. By claiming that women can now go "saufly up and down" (III.878), however, the Wife echoes the construction familiar from the Mayings in the *Knight's Tale*, where Emily's desire to go safely "up and down" is frustrated by the male gaze which strips her of her subjectivity, instead transforming her into an object of desire. In addition to reproducing the scene of female intercession familiar from the *Knight's Tale*, where it is Hippolyta who redirects concern from her fellow Amazonian women onto Palemon and Arcite, the queen in the Wife's tale only further extends the male co-option of female grief by interceding on the knight's behalf. While the plot centers on the knight's attempt to ascertain what women really want, to look beyond mere appearance and "assay" what is "within" wives (III.943), this act of female intercession precipitates a male subjectivity and interiority. It pushes the male co-option of female grief familiar from the *Knight's Tale* to a parodic extreme: after the knight rapes the maiden, she is not only hollowed out, as Emily had been. She is evacuated from the tale altogether. We receive no account of her subjective experience, but instead learn how the knight has "great wo" that he "may nat do al as hym liketh" (III.914). When he later bewails his

²⁴ Boccaccio, *Il Comento alla Divina Commedia, e gli altri scritti intorno a Dante*, edited by Domenico Guerri (Bari, G. Laterza & Figli, 1918), 2.144.

wife's ugly appearance, the knight similarly has great "wo in his thoughte," such that he fears that his "herte wolde breste" (1102).

This repeated echo of Francesca's burning heart, which highlights the sustained male co-option of female grief, and its relevance to Chaucer's modification of the traditional role of the palinode is only further intensified by the inclusion of the image of fire in the loathly lady's concluding pillow-lecture. Picking up several threads from Chaucer's sustained engagement with intellectual conversations around *pitié*, the heart, and gentility circulating in fourteenth-century literary and philosophical circles,²⁵ the tale concludes with the loathly lady's defense of "gentilesse." Although she leaves Boccaccio unnamed, the loathly lady cites his key interlocutor, "the wise poete of Florence / That highte Dant" and quotes a line from the *Purgatorio* (III.1125–26). In so doing, she obscures the primary source of her engagement with Dante, the *Convivio*. The canzone "Le dolci rime d'amor, ch'I' solia" not only rejects the argument for the intrinsic, involuntary, and irrational nature of love; it specifically advances the argument that it is volitional and subject to reason by aligning an innate understanding of nobility with incomplete or selective reading.

One ruler held that nobility,
According to this view,
Consisted of ancestral wealth
Together with fine manners.
And someone else of lesser wit
Recast this saying,
Dispensing with the second half,
Since he himself was likely lacking!

The primary source for Dante's discussion of nobility is Boethius, but crucially, this error of *divisio*, which leads a wealthy but ignoble person to read selectively in order to insist that nobility is innate, recalls Francesca's truncated reading of the Lancelot narrative, which she defends by citing another Dantean canzone about the innate nature of love. As previous scholarship has shown, Dante picks up Boethius's discussion of nobility and tailors it to his purpose, as part of a larger effort to legitimate his vernacular self-exegesis.²⁶ In contrast with Francesca's intrinsic self-defense, he draws an analogy between the exterior or voluntaristic view of nobility which assumes that family trees all eventually trace back to the same root and historical linguistics, where a parallel genealogical theory of language relations legitimates vernacular literature.

²⁵ Hines, "In Search of Pity: Chaucerian Poetics and the Suffering of Others," 40.

²⁶ Cf. Minnis, "Dante in Inglissh": What *Il Convivio* Really Did for Chaucer," *Essays in Criticism* 55.2 (2005): 97–116.

For Boccaccio, Dino's corrective gloss, which explains the exterior nature of love and posits that it is therefore voluntary and subject to reason, serves as the basis for his eventual palinodic rejection of Francesca's self-defense. Later in his career, Boccaccio's final re-reading of the Francesca and Paolo episode hinges on Dino's gloss: it is the notion of love's exterior and therefore voluntary nature that counters Francesca's self-defense that love is innate and involuntary. In his gloss on love's voluntary nature, Dino explains why erotic passion has a greater effect on the nobility:

The second cause is because, though in love for instance the appetite, when it is much pressed, is not free, indeed it is enslaved and is led by the impetus of this passion, nevertheless in the beginning, when this passion starts in the appetite, at that point the appetite is almost free, so that it can love or desist from love. And so the beginning of this passion frequently starts from choice.²⁷

In the *Teseida*, however, the truncation of the quasi-allegorical gloss on Cupid, which redirects interested readers to Dino's gloss on Cavalcanti, calls attention to the link between the quasi-allegorical textual apparatus and the idea of the woman reader. Since he writes "at the insistence of ladies," the anonymous scholar-glossator returns to providing glosses filled with Ovidian mythography, which as we have seen often elicit unsavory comparisons, thereby accommodating such immoral material to ethics.

Whereas Francesca's self-defense and citation of the "Amore" canzone serves as the basis for Dante's palinodal self-exegesis which is meant to neutralize representations of immoral behavior, Chaucer follows Boccaccio, who collocates his repeated re-reading of the Francesca and Paolo episode with Dino's argument for the exterior or voluntaristic nature of love. Rather than culminating in distrust of readers or the erasure of the gap between allegorical tenor and vehicle, as it does over the course of Boccaccio's career, however, the tale's concluding turn toward the exterior and voluntaristic nature of love familiar from Dino's gloss only further reinforces the earlier point implicit in the retelling of Midas: namely, the Wife entrusts the labor of interpretation to readers by grounding its ethical value not in the deeper moral meaning which the woman reader cannot see but rather in the narrative surface itself. Or to put it another way, Chaucer follows both Dante and Boccaccio in speaking to the question of literature's ethical utility in terms of Francesca's reading and Dino's gloss, but in so doing, he inverts the traditional orientation associated with ethical interpretation and the surface-depth paradigm.

²⁷ Translated by Usher, "Boccaccio, Cavalcanti's Canzone 'Donna me prega' and Dino's Glosses," 14. For the Italian, see Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, edited by Guido Favati (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1957), 373.

The ethical value of suggestive narrative content does not rely on corrective self-exegesis or lie in its ability to bolster a quasi-allegorical interpretation. Instead, the narrative itself become the vehicle for ethical readerly engagement, as its particularities “stimulate judgment in the reader.”²⁸

While the Wife’s *Prologue* reworks the *Troilus*’s re-staging of the scene of Paolo and Francesca’s reading which had enabled Chaucer’s proleptic palinode, her tale thus concludes by taking up a line of argument in step with Dino’s corrective gloss. In her pillow-lecture to the knight, the loathly lady makes the case for the exterior or voluntaristic nature of “gentilesse.”

But, for ye speken of swich gentilesse
 As is descended out of old richesse,
 That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
 Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.
 Looke who that is moost **virtuous** always,
Pryvee and apert, and moost **entendeth** ay
 To do the gentil dedes that he kan;
 Taak hym for the grettest gentil man. (III.1109–16)

At first glance, the tale’s conclusion may seem to recapitulate the same view which Dante presents as a corrective to Francesca’s selective reading and her accompanying argument for the innate nature of love. As her speech unfolds, her example of fire in the house specifically recalls Guinizelli’s claim that “Love’s fire is kindled in the gentle heart,” the line which Francesca cites in her self-defense to claim that love is involuntary. Here, the loathly lady inverts the example of fire to the precise opposite effect.

Taak fyr and ber it in the derkeste hous
 Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,
 And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;
 Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne
 As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;
 His office natureel ay wol it holde,
 Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.
 Heere may ye se wel how that genterye
 Is nat annexed to possessioun,
 Sith folk ne doon dir operacioun
 Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde. (CT III.1139–49)

²⁸ Anne Middleton, “The ‘Physician’s Tale’ and Love’s Martyrs: Ensamples Mo than Ten as a Method in the ‘Canterbury Tales,’” *The Chaucer Review* 8.1 (1973), 25.

The loathly lady cites the example of fire which will burn whether it is being watched or not, by way of contrast with the knight who rapes the maiden when nobody is watching. It therefore also calls to mind Boccaccio's "radical departure" from Dante in the glossed *Teseida*, where Dino's corrective gloss undergirds his quasi-allegorical textual apparatus, as well as Chaucer's reabsorption of the glosses into the narrative gaps and fissures in the *Knight's Tale*. Just as Emily's interpretation of the flames directs readerly attention toward the possibility of her rape, the pillow-lecture similarly folds the threat of sexual violence into the image of the fire.

Rather than genuinely endorsing such an argumentative position and revealing the deeper moral meaning the woman reader cannot see or facilitating a quasi-allegorical interpretation, however, Chaucer raises the question of literature's ethical value in terms familiar from contemporary debates only to drive attention back toward the narrative's interstitial gaps. For, just as the Wife's antifeminist rendition of the Midas story invites readers to go read Ovid, a reader well-acquainted with Ovidian narrative will find that the loathly lady's ultimatum to the knight is itself drawn from the *Heroides*. By asking the knight to choose between a young but adulterous wife or a faithful but old wife, the loathly lady appeals to the notion of the incompatibility between beauty and fidelity familiar from *Heroides* 16. In his letter to Helen, Paris makes an argument that she might as well sleep with him since her beauty will lead to rumors of infidelity regardless:²⁹

Do not deceive yourself. Such beauty as you possess
is never above suspicion, right or wrong.
Do not be naïve or try to deny it: envy
has already drawn its conclusions. The only choice
is whether or not the rumors have any basis in truth. (*Her.* 16.348–52)

Where Pandarus's selective reading of Oenone's letter to Paris serves as the basis for the male co-option of female grief, as well as the reversal of the palinodal function of the *Heroides*, the loathly lady seems to have read beyond that antifeminist truncation. In step with the male co-option of female grief, she alludes to a moment when Paris negates Helen's interiority, insisting that that all that matters is appearance. Since Paris describes himself as prostrate at Helen's feet, the loathly lady's speech also implicitly acknowledges the enabling mechanism for Chaucer's proleptic palinode. For, rather than empathizing with Helen's victimization at the hands of Theseus, in keeping with the usual function of female-voiced complaint in the *Heroides*, Paris instead aligns his internal pain with that of Theseus, claiming that he "understood at

²⁹ Relevant to the larger question of gentility's innate nature or heritability, Paris also proceeds to argue that Helen's infidelity is inevitable because of her lineage (i.e. that it is innate or inherited), since she was conceived when Jove raped her mother.

once how Theseus felt / when he and Pirithoüs carried you [Helen] off" (*Her.* 16.190–91).

I see why he stole you away: what I cannot understand
is how and why he ever gave you back.
If I had been he, I would sooner have given up my life
than let you be pried from my embracing arms.
At the very least, I should have taken some token from you
to cherish as long as I live—your maidenhead,
or something just a bit less that would leave you still a virgin.
Give yourself to me, and you shall discover
the constancy of Paris. The hot flame of my love
will only extinguish itself in the lesser flame of my funeral pyre.
(*Her.* 16.194–207)

The references to Paris being fired with love and carrying "the blazing passion within [his] breast" makes him the object of pity and directs attention toward his interiority (*Her.* 16.165), not Helen's. In addition to conflating the image of the flame with sexual violence, as Chaucer's earlier adaptation of the *Teseida* had done, Paris also claims that he tells stories in which the "invented names do not / conceal the fact that I'm the lover and you're the beloved" (*Her.* 16.305–6). The loathly lady's allusion to his letter therefore also calls to mind the hermeneutic elicited by the lover-poet in the *Teseida*, an interpretive stance which as we have seen asks the reader like Emilia to attend to male interiority, to try to see beyond the amatory intentions of the male lover-poet to the quasi-allegorical meaning.

While the loathly lady's argument for the exterior or voluntaristic nature of love therefore may seem to follow Dante and Boccaccio, Chaucer does not proceed to prescribe an allegorical mode of interpretation meant to accommodate morally dubious content to ethics. Instead, he directs attention to the narrative's interstitial gaps, where the sexual violence and the violent male co-option of female grief itself becomes the "deeper" meaning he asks his readers to see. Here, we can also see that the scale of reading associated with moralization once again has been inverted. Unlike Ovid, who condemns the woman reader's carnal-minded and selective reading, claiming that she culls out the dirty and immoral content for her enjoyment, the commentary tradition claims to correct this interpretive error either by revealing the deeper moral meaning she cannot see or appending the moralization she failed to read. At the end of the Wife's tale, however, it is a moralized reading which begins to look selective or incomplete. It is the reader who fails to attend to the narrative gaps and omissions who reads at the surface level, so to speak, failing to uncover the deeper meaning contained both in the antifeminist rendition of Midas and the loathly lady's pillow-lecture.

To sum up, then: although the Wife begins by rejecting the like-for-like model of interpretation which fuels the misrecognition of fiction and prompts the need for the palinode in the first instance, her tale nevertheless concludes with an argument for gentility's exterior and rational nature. That is, it returns to the argumentative position traditionally aligned with deeper moral meaning, which undergirds both Dante's palinodic self-exegesis and Boccaccio's textual apparatus. Despite this fact, the tale does not endorse the standard palinodal logic behind the voluntaristic account of gentility so much as hold it up for our inspection. The loathly lady's pillow-lecture on *gentilesse* is itself complicated by an allusion to the male co-option of female grief, the mechanism that enables Chaucer to rework the convention of the palinode and question its underlying assumptions about the nature of literature's moral danger. In contrast with Francesca and Fiammetta as representations of women readers which concede the need for deeper moral meaning, Chaucer's representation of the Wife of Bath thus inverts the traditional view of the narrative surface as inimical to ethics, as a problem which must be solved. By inviting readers to attend to its narrative gaps, the tale instead drives readerly attention back to the narrative itself, thereby unsettling the underlying set of assumptions that prompted the need for a corrective palinode in the first instance.

Whereas the *Wife of Bath's Tale* concludes with the loathly lady's exterior or voluntaristic account of *gentilesse*, the *Clerk's Tale* attributes this same understanding of nobility to Walter, the husband who cruelly tests his wife Griselda's fidelity to the point of excess. At the outset, the Clerk begins his tale by introducing the marquis Walter "as of linage, /The gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye" (IV.71–2). Yet more than simply echoing the loathly lady's pillow-lecture on *gentilesse*, Chaucer collocates this initial return to the question of *gentilesse* with his appropriation of the Ovidian career model, as it had been presented in his earlier works. When the populace sets the amatory plot in motion by expressing their anxieties about the threat of a succession crisis and pleading with Walter to marry, they do so by instructing him to reflect on the transience of youth:

And **thenketh**, lord, among youre thoghtes wyse
How that oure dayes passe in sondry wyse,
For thogh we slepe, or wake, or rome, or ryde,
Ay fleeth the tyme; it nyl no man abyde.
And thogh youre grene youthe floure as yit,
In crepeth age alwey, as still as stoon,
And deeth manaceth every age, and smyt
In ech estaat, for ther escapeth noon;
And al so certein as we knowe echoon
That we shul deye, as uncerteyn we alle
Been of that day whan deeth shal on us falle. (IV.116–26)

The voice of the people not only recalls the introductory remark on Petrarch's death that "all shul we dye" (IV.38), thereby aligning Petrarch with the tale's concluding quasi-allegorical moralization. In reminding Walter that he will soon grow old, the complaint also recalls a familiar passage from *Ars* II:

Beauty's a fragile good; the more the years pile up,
 The smaller it gets, and it's ravaged by its own length.
 Neither violets nor yawning lilies are always in bloom;
 the thorn hardens, left behind by the rose it's lost.
 Grey hairs are coming for your soon, you beautiful man;
 The wrinkles are coming soon to plow your body.
 Now build your mind to make it last and add on to your beauty:
 The mind alone remains till the funeral pyre. (*Ars am.* 2.113–20)

When Pandarus interrupts Criseyde's reading and truncates the Theban narrative at the juncture where Amphiorax falls to hell, he adapts this sentiment to an antifeminist context, as he turns away from Statius's Ovidianism and the palinodal function of the *Heroides* in favor of the amatory *Ars*. Intensifying Boccaccio's antifeminism at this moment,³⁰ Pandarus lends the passage from *Ars* II a distinctly misogynistic bent:

Thenk ek how elde wasteth every houre
 In ech of yow partie of beautee;
 And therfore er that age the devoure,
 Go love; for old, ther wol no wight of the.
 Lat this proverbe a lore unto yow be:
 To late ywar, quod Beaute, whan it paste;
 And Elde daunteth Daunger at the laste.

 The kynges fool is wont to crien loude,
 Whan that hym thinketh a womman berth hire hye,
 "So longe mote ye lyve, and alle proude,
 Tyl crowes feet be growe under youre yë,
 And sende yow than a myrour in to pryde,
 In which that ye may se youre face a morwe!"
 I bidde wisshe yow namore sorwe. (*TC* II.393–406)

Just as the *Knight's Tale* rewards readers of the *Canterbury Tales* familiar with Chaucer's adaptation of the *Heroides*, so, too, the *Clerk's Tale* mediates this reference to the *Ars* through his earlier engagement with that work, particularly insofar as it enabled his proleptic palinode in the *Troilus*. For, at the precise moment that the amatory plot is

³⁰ Cf. *Fil.* 2.54.

set in motion, the *Clerk's Tale* invokes the same passage from the *Arx* which precipitates Pandarus's selective reading of the *Thebaid* and enables him to deflect the palinodal function of Statius's female-voiced lament, thereby facilitating the male co-option of female grief that smooths the way for the amatory plot and Chaucer's proleptic palinode. Not only does Walter endorse an exterior and voluntaristic account of gentility, then. That argument is itself precipitated by an allusion to the same passage from *Arx* II which serves as the impetus for Chaucer's modified palinode. Much as Pandarus prevents Criseyde from reading Statius's female-voiced laments by reminding her that she will die, Walter's people express a similar concern about the inevitability of his death.

It is Walter's belief in the voluntaristic nature of nobility that leads him to marry Griselda despite her humble social status. When "this markys sette his ye" on Griselda in a scene which calls to mind the association between the male gaze and the male co-option of female grief in the *Knight's Tale*, he appeals to the exterior understanding of nobility familiar from the loathly lady's pillow lecture. Accepting the populace's pleas for him to marry but stipulating that he will choose his bride, Walter decides to marry Griselda due to his ability to see beyond mere appearance. The Clerk describes how Walter sees beyond her humble appearance to her virtuous inner nature: "for he saugh that under low degree / Was ofte vertu hid" (IV.424–25). Crucially for the larger argument at hand, Chaucer also takes care to align Walter's hermeneutic of suspicion with the very same account of nobility which serves as a riposte to Francesca's selective reading of the Lancelot narrative, as well as her self-defense that love is intrinsic and therefore not subject to reason. In fact, when Griselda first appears, the Clerk describes her in terms which echo Chaucer's most oft-repeated line that pity runneth sore in gentil heart. But rather than attributing that notion of gentility to her, the Clerk instead renders it into an absence. In addition to describing how Griselda is "fair ynogh to sight" and "of vertuous beautee [...] faireste under sonne" (IV.209–12), he also refers to *pitee* and the *gentil* heart. Rather than straightforwardly ascribing a noble nature to her, the Clerk instead advances the voluntaristic account of gentility through negation, claiming that "No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne" (IV.214).

As the plot unfolds, it is the same hermeneutic of suspicion that enables Walter to see beyond Griselda's appearance that precipitates his repeated acts of cruelty. Even before they marry, Walter begins his attempt to align Griselda's appearance with her inner nature. In an effort to close the gap between her humble appearance and inner nobility, he strips her naked and arrays her in rich clothing which will reflect outwardly what Walter can see lies hidden beneath her appearance. While he is initially able to look beyond Griselda's humble status, then, he paradoxically spends the rest of the tale violently attempting to flatten her into a surface, to test that her outward appearance corresponds with her virtuous inner nature. Having no sooner ascribed depth to her, Walter surreptitiously attempts to

flatten her into a surface, as evidenced by the pre-nuptial agreement which he extracts:

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
To al my lust, and that I frely may,
As my best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
And nevere ye to grucched it, nyght ne day?
And eek whan I sey “ye,” ne sey nat “nay,”
Neither by word ne frownyng contenance? (IV.351–56)

Griselda responds by echoing Walter’s double negative, promising that her outward appearance and inner nature will both be subject to him: “I swere that nevere willyngly, / In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye, / For to be deed, though me were looth to deye” (IV.362–64). Reminiscent of the thoughts that swell around Midas’s wife’s heart in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* but which ultimately must be expelled, Griselda becomes all surface:

And she with humble herte and glad visage,
Nat with no swollen thought in hire corage,
Cam at his heste, and **on hire knees hire sette,**
And reverently and wisely she him grette. (IV.949–52)

Coupled with the initial suggestion of female interiority, the description of Griselda on her knees also recalls the hierarchical spatial terms which Chaucer associates with the pity which supposedly runs quickly in a gentle heart. In keeping with the male co-optation of female grief, however, Walter does not attend to that interiority, but instead attempts to empty it out. Unable to bridle his suspicion that there is more to her than meets the eye, Walter engages in a string of increasingly cruel tests of her fidelity. Hollowed out like Emily before her, Griselda’s interiority is violently flattened by Walter’s desires for continuity between her appearance and inner nature.

In addition to its resonances with Emily in the *Knight’s Tale* and Midas’s wife in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, Walter’s command that Griselda “say nat nay” also echoes Criseyde, the woman reader whom Pandarus interrupts by quoting *Arx* II in order to co-opt female grief and thereby further the male-centered amatory plot. As we have seen, Criseyde does not say “yes” to Troilus or Diomedes, but rather adopts a rhetorical strategy which invites a certain hermeneutic, one which attends to the gaps and fissures in her narration, to what she leaves out. When Griselda assents by echoing Criseyde’s answer, she thereby elicits that same hermeneutic mode which asks readers to attend to the gaps and fissures in the narration. As the tale unfolds the grammar of negation illustrates how she is numb, devoid of feeling:

Whan she had herd al of this, she noghte ameved

Neither in word, or chiere, or countenaunce,
 For as it semed, she was nat agreved.
 [...]
 Ther may no thyng, God my soule save,
 Liken to yow that may displese me;
 Ne I desire no thyng for to have,
 Ne drede for to leese, save oonly yee. (IV.498–500; 505–8)

Despite Walter's efforts to flatten Griselda into a surface, the tale nevertheless consistently evokes pity on her behalf, practically baiting readers to attend to her internal experience and thereby engage in an empathetic interpretive process. Whereas the first part of the *Knight's Tale* concludes with a question asking readers to reflect on Arcite and Palemon's pain, the Clerk instead directs attention to Griselda's experience. Not unlike the Host's anticipation of the formerly unanticipated woman reader, the Clerk acknowledges the women in his audience. He suggests that since they are women, they will be able to speak more authoritatively to the nature of Griselda's pain and suffering:³¹

But now of wommen wolde I axen fayne
 If thise assayes myght nat suffise?
 What koude a studry housbonde moore devyse
 To preve hir wyfhod and hir stedefastnesse,
 And he continuyng evere in sturdinesse? (IV.696–700)

Whereas the Knight's question reinforces the male co-option of female grief, since he asks readers to reflect on Arcite and Palemon's pain, the Clerk instead dwells on Griselda's experience. Like Boccaccio's Dineo, the Clerk passes his own moral judgment on Walter, thereby subjecting the narrative to ethical reflection. Here, too, the key terms associated with the unanticipated woman reader and convention of the palinode inform the terms of the debate: by calling his actions "yvel," Chaucer translates and attends to Boccaccio's argument that the marquis is *bestiale*. That is, he suggests that Walter acts without reason, but that he nevertheless bears moral responsibility for his actions.³² Such an ethical judgment seemingly responds to

³¹ As with the earlier exchange between the Miller and Reeve, this redirection of the question to women readers implicitly relies on a literal-mindedness about representations of women.

³² Jessica Harkin, "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale and Boccaccio's Decameron X.10," *The Chaucer Review*, 47.3 (2013): 267. It also echoes literalized metaphors about animal desire which run throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, such as Palamon's wish he could be free from reason and act on animal desire or the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* derives much of its humor from constantly calling attention to its fictionality, since it is a story about chickens not humans. But within the context of this larger critical conversation that I have been tracing, the choice of the animal fable takes on added significance in terms of Chaucer's attention to

Francesca's incomplete reading and her intrinsic account of *gentillesse*, both of which precipitates Dante's palinodic self-exegesis and Boccaccio's revaluing of Fiammetta's interpretive abilities.

Oversaturated with pathos, the tale's repeated appeals for the audience to have pity on Griselda not only reverse the male co-option of female grief by redirecting attention to female pain and experience; this reversal also points to the larger theoretical stakes of the woman reader and gendered models of reading. Although Griselda's interiority has been emptied out, the Clerk nevertheless supplies a string of pathetic images meant to tug at his readers' heartstrings, such as the repeated references to her dead babies' bodies. While a mother's woe for her dead child earlier had been phrased as a hypothetical, Griselda explains to her children how

Youre woful mooder wende stedfastly
That **crueel houndes** or some foul vermyne
Hadde **eten yow**; but God of his mercy
And youre benynge fader tendrely
Hath doon yow kept"—and in that same stounde
Al sodeynly she swapte **adoun to grounde**.

Here, readers of the *Canterbury Tales* will hear an echo of the Argive women's cries in the *Knight's Tale*, when they fall to the ground at Theseus's feet on account of their husbands' corpses being eaten by the hounds. Not coincidentally, it is at this precise moment that pity supposedly runs through Theseus's gentle heart. Yet in this instance, no analogous description follows. The Clerk does not give voice to Griselda or describe her interiority so much as invite readers to feel pity on her behalf, to imaginatively fill out the gaps in the Clerk's narration.

By asking his audience to read in this way, the Clerk only further reiterates how the tale builds on Chaucer's consideration of literature's ethical value, since Griselda's retroactive sorrow upon imagining her children's corpses calls for comparison to the Man of Law's discussion of literature's ethical value. Although he praises Chaucer's poetry for what it does not represent, he fixes his attention on the omitted image of Medea's children's corpses hanging in the hall. Coupled with the threat of incest, as Walter creates the impression that he is about to marry his daughter, the image of a woman on the ground also recalls the Man of Law's mis-recollection of Apollonius of Tyre, which contains evidence of an empathetic interpretive act attentive to women's pain and experience. As we have seen, the *Man of Law's Prologue* combines pitiful images of Thaise begging for mercy with the

Boccaccio's description of the marquis as "bestiale," as well as debates over the interior or exterior nature of nobility, since that word points to behaving like an animal or a lack of reason.

repeated threat of incest. In keeping with Chaucer's attention to the role of *pitee* in literary and philosophical discussions, then, the *Clerk's Tale* does not give voice to Griselda's female-voiced lament, but instead deflects that empathetic act onto the reader, who must sound the narrative gaps and omissions. Even as the Clerk insists that Griselda feels nothing, that she is all surface, we as readers cannot help but respond emotionally, to inhabit a female subjectivity and feel on her behalf.

As Walter's suspicion of Griselda leads him to attribute depth to her only to attempt to flatten her into a surface, the reliance of antifeminist discourse on the surface-depth paradigm thus only further places the tale in conversation with literary-theoretical debates which coalesced around the convention of the palinode and the woman reader. In his Prologue, the Clerk refuses to name Boccaccio as his source and instead claims that he has translated the tale from Petrarch. Revivifying Petrarch only so that he can be reinterred, the Clerk couples his lament over Petrarch's death with the observation that "alle shul we dye" (CT IV.38). While the narrative relates how Griselda proves her faithfulness as a wife in the face of Walter's cruelty, this concluding phrase encourages a different mode of interpretation which the moralization subsequently develops. It invites all readers, men and women alike, to interpret the tale in an exemplary mode rather than as a literal representation of women as such. As the Clerk states, Petrarch wrote his story:

nat for that wyves sholde
 Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
 For it were inportable, though they wolde,
 But for that every wight, in his degree
 Sholde be constant in adversitee
 As was Grisilde; (IV.1142–7)

The Clerk's insistence that Petrarch did not intend the tale of Griselda to be an example to "wyves" but rather to "every wight" ostensibly turns away from questions of gender. The moralization reframes the tale as an example for all readers.

As a device that compensates for the unpalatable descriptions of Walter's violence against Griselda, Petrarch's moralization has been aligned with and reinterpreted as an apology to women. The husband-narrator who addresses *Le Ménagier de Paris* to his bride cites Petrarch's moralization to defend his inclusion of the tale in his book.³³ Just as Petrarch informs Boccaccio that he retold this story "not so much to encourage the married women of our day to imitate this wife's patience, which to me seems hardly imitable," the husband insists that he translates the tale not because he hopes that his wife will behave like Griselda but rather to illustrate how "men and women" should "suffer patiently the tribulations that God,

³³ See Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose (trans.), *The Good Wife's Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Medieval Household Book* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 1–43, at 37.

immortal, eternal, and everlasting, sends them.”³⁴ In addition to insisting that all readers, men and women alike, should learn through the “example of this poor woman,” he invokes Petrarch’s authority by way of making an apology to his wife:

I apologize if the story contains excessive accounts of cruelty, in my opinion more than is fitting, and I don’t believe it was ever true. But the story is thus, and I must not amend or change it, for someone wiser than I compiled and recounted it. Since others are familiar with it, I very much wish that you also may be familiar with it and be able to converse about such things as everyone else does.³⁵

In coupling his apology with a “noon auctor” defense and humility topos, the husband-narrator protests too much. The more he insists he does not want his wife to behave like Griselda, the more he calls that claim into question, especially since the Griselda story is only one of the book’s contents which describes the obedience a wife owes her husband. Crucially for the argument at hand, it is Petrarch’s moralization that bolsters the husband-narrator’s apology to his wife and the concomitant claim that he does not intend the tale to be read literally.

No sooner does the Clerk prescribe the moralization associated with his implicit apology to women, however, than he immediately reverts to an antifeminist interpretive mode. After applying the moralization aligned with the apology to women, he concludes with a quick aside addressed only to the men in his audience:

But o word, lordynges, herkneth er I go,
It were ful hard to fynde now-a-dayes
In al a toun Grisildis thre or two;
For if that they were put to swiche assayes,
The gold of hem hath now so badde alayes
With bras, that thogh the coyne be fair at ye
It wolde rather breste a-two than plye. (CT IV.1163–69)

The metaphorical conceit aligns women with counterfeit coins, the implication being that women “now-a-dayes” conceal their deceptive inner nature beneath a beautiful outward appearance. Yet in making such a remark, it is almost as the Clerk has failed to attend to his own tale, since he here reproduces the same hermeneutic of suspicion which served as the impetus for Walter’s cruelty. He presents the possibility of testing women through “swiche assayes,” in a similar attempt to determine whether their inner nature coheres with their outward appearance.

³⁴ Aldo S. Bernardo, Saul Levin, and Reta A. Bernardo (trans.), *Letters of Old Age X–XVIII* (New York: Italica Press, 2005), 668; *The Good Wife’s Guide*, 118.

³⁵ *The Good Wife’s Guide*, 119.

Reminiscent of the male co-option of female grief, the Clerk even presents women's interiority and subjective experience as a threat to male dominance. As he puts it, a counterfeit coin "wolde rather breste **a-two** than plye."

At the end of the *Clerk's Tale*, the male misrecognition of fiction which centers around representations of women and married women in particular thus reemerges in full force. The Envoy, which is appended to the tale and begins with the invocation "for the Wyves love of Bathe" (CT IV.1170), itself expands on the antifeminist rhetoric associated with the surface-depth paradigm. Addressed to women, the Envoy extends the Clerk's like-for-like economy of interpretation by advising women *not* to be like Griselda, instead interpreting it as a negative exemplum. This injunction is accompanied by a reference to the antifeminist figure of Chichevache, the skinny cow who feeds on patient wives and therefore has little to eat. The advice to take Griselda as a negative exemplum "Lest Chichevache yow **swelwe** in hire entraille" itself provides an image of a flattened Griselda enclosed within the cow's belly (CT IV. 1188). Rather than swelling with thought or her own subjective experience, the patient wife is instead hollowed out, swallowed by Chichevache such that she becomes the matter which swells inside the antifeminist figure's belly. More, this antifeminist rhetoric which relies on the surface-depth paradigm is in turn coupled with references to female-voiced lament, the rhetorical practice which Ovid adapts to probe female characters' interiority. Alongside antifeminist references to female-voiced complaint, such as the advice that women should "clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille" (CT IV.1200), the Envoy includes the injunction to "Folweth Ekko, that holdeth no silence / But evere answereth at the countretaille" (CT IV.1189–90). This reference often has been interpreted as a joke which comes at women's expense, since it seems to imply that women will not understand how the mythological reference to Echo undercuts the advice not to be submissive. Yet within the arc of the argument which I have put forward, I suggest that we can more fully appreciate how that antifeminist joke relies on the figure of the unanticipated woman reader, as well as how it grows out of Chaucer's sustained engagement with the question of literature's ethical utility.

There is perhaps no surer sign of the return to the blurred distinction between fictional women and women in the material world than the Host's concluding proclamation of his aesthetic judgment. In the stanza which appears after the Envoy in most of the manuscripts that preserve it, the Host immediately bursts out in full-throated praise.

This worthy Clerk, whan ended was his tale,
 Oure Hooste seyde, and swoore, "By Goddes bones,
 Me were levere than a barel ale
 My wyf at hoom had herd this legend ones!
 This is a gentil tale for the nones,
 As to my purpose, wiste ye my wille;

But thyng that wol nat be, lat it be stille.” (CT IV.1212a–1212g)

In another false start, the Host begins to talk about his wife and how he wishes she had heard this tale so she could imitate it, only to stop short: “But thyng that wol nat be, lat it be stille.” Paradoxically, then, even as the Host stumbles onto the recognition that the story is not true, that it does not have a referent in the material world, he cannot seem to claw his way out of this antifeminist hermeneutic, to make himself disambiguate fiction from fact.

As I have been suggesting, this is what Chaucer asks and even teaches his readers to do. As the *Canterbury Tales* unfolds, it takes shape as an ongoing course on how to properly engage with fiction, as it prompts readers to develop and also negotiate the emotional dispositions which fiction requires. The “deeper” meaning of the *Clerk’s Tale* does not lie in the moralization, but it also does not quite lie in the narrative surface either. Instead, it takes shape in the interpretive process itself, as Chaucer calls attention to the internal mental events which interpretation renders accessible. When Griselda faces Walter’s final attempt to flatten her into a surface, a gap emerges in the seamless continuity between her appearance and subjective experience: “O thyng biseke I yow, and warne also, / That ye ne prikke with no tormentynge / This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo” (IV.1037–40). Yet buried within that plea, we find an implicit acknowledgement of her interiority and pain which contradicts the tale’s repeated insistence that Griselda feels nothing. So understood, Chaucer holds up the interpretive process for our inspection, as he prompts the reader to reflect on the empathetic interpretive act the work elicits. Where the rhetorical practice of female declamation locates the empathetic act in the poet as rhetorician, Chaucer refashions the rhetorical practice of female declamation into a corresponding hermeneutic. And it is this hermeneutic which he offers up as an answer to the perennial question about literature’s ethical utility which prompted the need for the palinodal *Heroides* in the first instance.

In the end, it seems that the Man of Law is right after all: literature derives its value from what it does not represent. But contrary to perennial concerns about the dangers of mimesis, this is not because literature’s ethical utility bears a one-to-one correspondence with the moral status of the acts it represents, or because the carnal and literal-minded woman reader cannot be trusted to engage ethically with morally dubious content. Instead, Chaucer instead suggests that literature’s ethical value lies in the experience of the reader, in the imaginative act of interpretation itself.

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