judicial authority, the adversaries can indeed be admonished that fighting is their duty: "Tho were the gates shet, and cried was loud: / 'Do now youre devoir, yonge knyghtes proude!'" [I 2597-98]

The greatest success of the tournament, as for Erec's encounters with his most important adversaries, is that it furthers courtship by perpetuating and deepening the relations among knights. Like the mutual blows that express shared merits in Erec's combats, the shared purpose of the knights on both sides of Theseus's tournament leads to their easy reconciliation at its end. The occasion itself was honorable, so that even those who fell or were captured share in honor:

Ne ther was holden no disconfitynge
But as a justes or a tourneyynge;
For soothly ther was no disconfiture. . . .
For which anon due Theseus leet crye,
To stynten alle rancour and envye,
The gre as wel of o syde as of oother,
And eyther syde ylik as ootheres brother. . . .

[I 2719-21, 2731-34]

The adversaries who become "ylik as ootheres brother" adumbrate Arcite's reconciliation with Palamon, providing a wider context than the deathbed for Arcite's account of their enmity as a thing of the past ["I have heer with my cosyn Palamon / Had strif and rancour many a day agon" [I 2783-84]]. Love has opposed brotherhood in this plot, but in conceding Emelye to Palamon, in inviting their union as he dies, Arcite subsumes Emelye into a restored economy of brotherhood. The tournament has set the brothers on opposite sides, apparently reversing the condition in which they were found "liggyne by and by, / Bothe in oon armes," but in effect the tournament has expanded the brothers' chivalric experience by incorporating love as an occasion for their rivalry and reconciliation. Here as in many romances, men negotiate the difficult demand that they establish a heterosexual bond but maintain strong homosocial bonds by building the former into the latter, redoubling and extending masculine relations through courtship.

CHAPTER II

Feminine Mimicry and Masquerade

ROMANCES, in contrast to much medieval literature, abound in representations of women. This chapter argues that in their female characters romances work out both a version of femininity generated by masculine courtship and a critique of that version of femininity. Female characters, moreover, themselves stage this critique within the terms of their social construction. Dorigen confronted with Aurelius's suit, the abandoned falcon of the Squire's Tale, the Amazons of the Knight's Tale, and the Wife of Bath's shape-shifting fairy deploy the language and paradigms of conventional femininity to press against their positioning within it. Placing Chaucer's characters in the company of others from a variety of romances clarifies the strategies each woman uses to articulate and question her lot. In each case, respeaking and remanipulating familiar gender paradigms offers ways around them.

The representation of women is a central problem of feminist criticism. In what sense are women visible or absent in literary language? What is the relation of a discourse such as that of courtship in romance to the historical identities of medieval (or modern) women? An early paradigm of impressive explanatory force was Simone de Beauvoir's conception of woman as the Other of masculine identity, the category of strangeness that by opposition founds a coherent meaning for masculinity. "Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself" [139]. This conception of woman as a "second" sex that consolidates the identity of men is modified by recent French feminists for whom the representation of woman in the realm of masculine discourse is altogether impossible; the feminine can-
not be constituted even as an “other” but is instead the “sex which is not one,” in Luce Irigaray’s phrase, the negative or absence within conceptions that are already fully masculine. Conceiving woman as negativity revises and critiques De Beauvoir’s concept of the Other, but each analysis explains how a difference might exist between literary invocations of masculine and feminine, such that the latter becomes a function of the former and further that a different sort of gap divides literary representation from historical situation in the case of each gender.

In many respects medieval romance does conceive gender as a binary but unreciprocal division that constrains femininity to masculine terms. One consequence of the conception is that historians and critics recognize complex transformations at work between the historical situation of women and literary representations of, for example, an adulterous and authoritative Queen Guinevere. In contrast, romances represent the practical and ideological situation of men with sufficient directness that John Stevens’s transgeneric definition may ring true to critics of several persuasions: “the concerns of medieval romance are the concerns of all narrative fiction: man loving; man fighting; man with his lover, his leader or his friends; man alone; man facing mystery, or death; man seeking for God” [9]. Romance, that is, insistently exemplifies De Beauvoir’s argument that the masculine stands for the universal experience. The prominence of courtship in romance is compatible with this version of masculinity. Barbara Johnson begins The Critical Difference with the assertion, even more encompassing than Stevens’s and apparently incompatible with it, that “if human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature” [13]. Yet her analysis of love from Guillaume de Lorris’s Roman de la Rose to Honoré de Balzac’s Sarrasine traces the process of deferral by which romantic love becomes indistinguishable from masculine narcissistic love. “What is at stake is not the union between two

---

1 This Sex, see also Irigaray, Speculum, 133–46. De Beauvoir does suggest that masculine and feminine are not a true binary, e.g., “In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles; for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity” [xv, her italics].

---

2 Outstanding examples that are of importance to this study are Dinshaw, Hansen, the essays by Fisher, Halley, and Roberta L. Krucger in Seeking the Wounded, and Heng, “Feminine Knots” and “A Woman Wants.” An early and ground-breaking essay on the masculine perspective and the roles of female characters is Ferrante, “Male Fantasy and Female Reality.”
the feminine is multiple, unstable, and diffused. Although Irigaray remains committed to a conception of woman that is at least metaphorically based in biological sex, the deconstruction of binary difference from which her argument derives initiates a theoretical shift away from the binary paradigm toward questioning the bond it implies between biological sex and gendered identity.3 The deconstructionist critique of the merely apparent separateness and stability of binary oppositions together with its focus on the semiotic composition of consciousness sustain feminist efforts to reconceive biological sex as partaking not of a natural ground for identity but of a shifting discursive network that constitutes historical subjects in particular places and times.4 The concept that identities are constructed by numberless intersecting pressures that have no single cause or origin calls into question whether biological sex is “prior” to gender: is that version of sex not merely a further discursive construction through which we interpret the relations between body and identity? Judith Butler concludes that “the tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible ‘sex’ ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations” (147). However enforced and constraining, sex and gender are arbitrary in the sense that they are culturally elaborated, and differently in different times and places.

The position that identity is socially constituted connects the literary representation of gender to historical women and men. Insofar as construction is a discursive process, it can take place in poetic language as in legal codes, moral instruction, school texts, and a wide range of further articulations. For those who, with Michel Foucault, view construction more as a matter of repeated practices than of ideological influences, literature partakes of social practice—as an aspect of the relationship between author and patron, a site of interaction for individuals of a particular audi-
women respectively, opens the heterosexual binary to a more complex range of gendered identities by recognizing constraints on all subject positions and by finding a richer potential for response in the temporal space of identity formation. Because the constitution of subjects is a historical process, ongoing as well as specific to time and place, its unfolding may be visible in the experience of the reflecting subject who can then intervene and comment using the terms of the discourse at work: "the only way to position oneself outside of that [dominant, constitutive] discourse is to displace oneself within it—to refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviseously [though in its words], even to quote (but against the grain)." Butler argues similarly that the multiplicity of intersecting and contradictory forces constituting identities betrays the unnaturalness of gender and "holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing." For Butler as for De Lauretis, the process of construction in time provides the invitation to deconstruct its appearance of naturalness. As "the repeated stylization of the body," gender and sex both form the subject and allow for "parodic proliferation and subversive play" (Butler, 32–33). Each writer argues that agency occurs through strategic repetition in the course of developing wider theories that reach far beyond the limits of my brief summary. My purpose in this chapter is to establish two vantage points for considering the representation of women in romance— I draw these from the constellation of ways in which gender theorists describe agency as reacting to cultural construction by drawing on its own terms to critique it.

This chapter examines two kinds of distortion that female characters work on gender roles, each of which could be described as answering deviseously, quoting against the grain, or parodying the imperatives of gender. In the first case, vocal mimicry uses courtly topoi against themselves in characters' attempts to resist the scripted roles of courtship. In the second, physical distortions question the consonance between feminine identity and bodily appearance.

**QUOTING AGAINST THE GRAIN**

Framed by her protestation "ne shal I never been untrewe wyf" and her instruction to "lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde" [V 984, 1002], Dorigen's promise to love Aurelius if he can remove the rocks along the coast of Brittany is suspect:

But after that in pley thus seyde she:
"Aurelie," quod she, "by heighe God above,
Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
Looke what day that endelong Britayne
Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon... "
[V 988–93]

How are we to understand the contradiction between the promise of love and the assertions of wifely loyalty? In Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, apparently Chaucer's source for the plot of the *Franklin's Tale*, the wife's private thoughts illuminate her demand: "She said to herself, 'It is an impossible thing to do, and that is how I shall get free of him.'" Her suitor understands that she has found a "cunning stratagem" to get rid of him. Meaning is more elusive in Chaucer's tale both for readers, who are privy only to Dorigen's desire that the rocks not threaten her husband's return, and for Aurelius, who laments the task's difficulty but apparently does not consider its assignment equivalent to a rejection.

The last chapter of this study argues that such alterations to Chaucer's sources have to do with the concept of adventure that develops in medieval romance, a concept that configures women as a ground of adventure through their contradictions and unknowability. Aurelius responds as if Dorigen's words were an enigmatic encouragement, a mystery to be explored and suffered.

5 Alice Doesn't, 7. In "Eccentric Subjects" De Lauretis pushes the possibilities for resistance to the process of construction by proposing that since the process is multiple and even contradictory (involving many intersecting forces such as social class, religion, and race in conjunction with gender), it may invite a thinking beyond binary gender, a "dis-identification" by which each subject may perceive several self-identities that, in their disunities, invite "a redefinition of the terms of both feminist theory and social reality from a standpoint at once inside and outside their determinations" (136, 139).


---

**FEMININE MIMICRY AND MASQUERADE**
This chapter attends not to how lovers perceive women in romance but to how women articulate and respond to their positioning by lovers. The project might seem an impossible archaeology since, as outlined above, the feminine in romance can accurately be described as the place where masculinity is not—the space of adventure, in the present case. According to the Franklin’s Tale, however, that very condition of femininity can be pointed out and pressed upon by a character so constructed. Dorigen’s reply to Aurelius resists the conventional feminine role in courtship by scrambling and exaggerating it.

Most readers concur that Dorigen reiterates her framing words of refusal through the impossibility of the assigned task; that she speaks “in pley” [V 988] signals the task’s unthinkable difficulty and undermines its similarity to “many a labour, many a greet emprise” through which Arveragus won her [V 732]. Readers generally agree that not only the overt refusal that frames the task but also Dorigen’s astonishment when the task is performed—“she wende nevere han come in swich a trappe” [V 1341]—and the analogies she strikes between the prospect of acquiescence and historical instances of maidens “defouled with mans delit” [V 1396] indicate that she is attempting throughout to discourage Aurelius. The problem, then, is not whether she means to encourage Aurelius but why she chooses a tactic to discourage him that does not work.

Dorigen’s ultimate failure to deflect Aurelius’s courtship has led Robert Kaske to condemn her for “feminine flightiness”: although she means the task to be “a graceful way of saying no,” the effort fails because “in an area of endeavor where ‘no’ often enough means ‘perhaps,’ and ‘perhaps’ almost inevitably means ‘yes,’ it will not do” [61-62]. This interpretation draws on the overwhelming presumption in courtly literature that a woman worthy of courtship will eventually accede to a worthy suitor. Given that Dorigen has already conformed to this pattern with Arveragus, it might be argued that the impossible task she invents is a further instance of participation in courtship’s dynamic of resistance and submission, as Aurelius seems determined to hope, or that her submission to Arveragus exempts her from further participation, as Dorigen’s references to Arveragus seem to insist. Rather than assessing blame for the parties’ misconstruals, I would like to read the difference between Dorigen’s desire to refuse Aurelius and his focus on the assigned task as an illustration of the difficulty of expressing resistance to courtship in romance.

The literature of courtship does not suggest that a plain “no” would have persuaded Aurelius to stop importuming Dorigen; indeed, as Kaske recognizes, refusal is itself scripted into courtship as a first stage of feminine responsiveness. The Book of the Duchess, in which fair White “sayde ‘Nay’ / Al outerly” [1243-44] when first approached by the black knight, looks back to romance tradition as codified in the anger of Bel Accueil and the sudden appearance of Dangier when the lover first speaks of love in the Romance of the Rose:

Thanne Bialacoil, affrayed all,
Seyde, “Sir, it may not fall;
That ye desire, it may not arise...”
With that sterre oute anoon Daunger,
Out of the place were he was hid.
His malice in his chere was kid.

[in Riverside Chaucer, 3113-15, 3130-32]

In early romances women are with some frequency the aggressors in love or at least suffer its pangs as quickly and acutely as their suitors. Josian comes to Bevis’s bed in the various versions of Bevis of Hamtoun, and Tristan as well as Chrétien de Troyes’s Cligès, which has been called in other respects an “anti-Tristan,” portray women falling as quickly and uncontrollably in love as their men. Later romances, particularly under the influence of the Romance of the Rose, develop a strongly narrative impulse within courtship by relocating the difficulties that divide the knight and his beloved from external circumstances to the lady’s own resistance. With this development, refusal becomes an integral part of courtship, an expected first response that the lover’s efforts can overcome.

7 E.g., Fenster, 154-57; Mann, Geoffrey Chaucer, 115; Morgan, 295; Lee, 173. Charnes, in contrast, argues for complications in Dorigen’s feelings rather than in her rhetorical situation.

8 E.g., Beve, II. 670-773; Beues, II. 1093-1199 (A-text). Fenice contrasts the events of the Tristan story to the conduct she and Cligés should follow: Chrétien de Troyes, Cligés, II. 5103-24, 5199-5203, 5249-58; see also Van Hamel, Weiss.
Dorigen's task of removing the rocks, like her direct refusal, has a place in paradigms of courtship: it parallels the resistant lady's demand that her suitor perform extraordinary deeds in order to win her love. In the romances of Guy of Warwick, Felice requires that the young Guy become the best knight in the world before she will marry him (Gui, ll. 1055-82; Guy, Auchinleck MS, ll. 1131-60); in the romances of Ipomedon the heroine's courtiers have nicknamed her La Fiére in recognition of her proud vow to marry only the world's best knight (Hue de Rotelande, Ipomedon, ll. 119-42; Ipomedon, ll. 98-132). Guy and Ipomedon do meet these demands, but criticism of the demands' prescriptive control is implicit in Guy's rejection of his past life of empty conquests for exploits in God's service after marriage, and in Ipomedon's teasing evasiveness once La Fiére is anxious to accept him. In Jean Froissart's Meliador the lady Hermondine intends her conditions to be discouraging; she resists her suitor Camel, who is afflicted with the undesirable habit of sleepwalking, by announcing that she will marry the knight who proves himself best in five years of tests and adventures. The vow generates an enormously complex plot in which Méliador's success displaces Camel's suit (ll. 1836-2147). Jean de Condé's Dit don Levrier further exemplifies the imposition of great tasks as a way of deflecting love. Here the lady demands seven years of unstinting generosity and participation in tournaments and wars "pour los à querre" (to win renown) [460]. The narrator comments, "Ensemant parla la pu- cielle / A l'escuyer si comme celle / Qui de lui se voet descom- brer" (the maiden spoke to the squire as if she wanted to get rid of him) [477-79], and indeed she refuses his love even after he has fulfilled all her conditions, driving him into insanity. His faithful dog's ministrations preserve him from death until, after much suffering, he is cured by a fairy in pity for his story. These plots illustrate that extraordinary demands, even when motivated by distaste, no more deflect courtship than do outright refusals; in-
intention and the language in which she can express it. Dorigen's failure to convince Aurelius of her disinterest reveals the difficulty of being heard to speak against courtship. Scanning the rhetorical horizon for a way to describe her position, she settles on a strategy of distorting and exaggerating the scripted role for feminine negations in masculine courtships. This peculiar kind of mimicry, this quoting against the grain, both clarifies the restrictions under which she speaks and articulates a resistance to them.

The deceived falcon who recounts her plight to Canacee in the Squire's Tale resists her literary gendering differently from Dorigen, by reversing male and female roles from Jean de Meun's exemplum of the caged bird in the Romance of the Rose. The Squire's Tale as a whole prepares for the condemnation of men's "newefangelnesse" by asserting an essential "wommanly" virtue [V 610, 486]: Canacee is "ful mesurable, as wommen be" [V 362]; the falcon attributes Canacee's gentle pity to her sex:

That pitee renneth soone in gentil herte,  
Feelynge his similitude in peynes smerte,  
Is preved alday, as men may it see,  
As wel by werk as by auctoritee;  
For gentil herte kitheth gentillesse.  
I se wel that ye han of my distresse  
Compassion, my faire Canacee,  
Of verray wommanly benignytee  
That Nature in youre principles hath set.  
[V 479-87]

Although she begins, in that line Chaucer uses more often than any other, with the claim that "pitee" is common to all of "gentil herte," the falcon specifies that Canacee's arises from her "wommanly benignytee." The falcon's shift from locating human compassion in gentility to locating womanly compassion in feminine nature exemplifies a wider effort in the tale to formulate a conjoined beneficence and alienness in women that differentiates them from men. This uncanny combination, most evident in women's magical functions in romance, here finds its explanation in Nature's allotment of particular attributes to women that contrast, in the binary model that arguments from nature always invoke, with masculine attributes. The sympathy that unites "Canacee and alle hir wommen" [V 633] with the wronged falcon illustrates both a special feminine capacity for compassion and a certain exoticism that connects women more closely than men to the animal world—so closely, indeed, that a bird can voice feminine positions more vividly than Canacee herself.

The tale's positing of a distinctively feminine sensibility prepares for the falcon's analysis of her lover's inconstancy:

I trowe he hadde thilke text in mynde  
That "alle thyng, repeirynge to his kynde,  
Gladeth hymself"; thus seyn men, as I gesse.  
Men loven of propre kynde newefangelnesse,  
As briddes doon that men in cages fede.  
For though thou nyght and day take of hem hede,  
And strawe hir cage faire and softe as silk,  
And yeve hem sugre, hony, breed and milk,  
Yet right anon as that his dore is uppe  
He with his feet wol spume adown his cuppe,  
And to the wode he wole and wormes ete;  
So newefangel been they of hire mete,  
And loven novelries of propre kynde,  
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde.  
[V 607-20]

Although the passage begins by using "men" to signify humanity in general, it is men in the gender-specific sense whose behavior resembles that of caged birds. The tercelet's puzzling inconstancy is explained in the axiom that "men loven of propre kynde newefangelnesse." The falcon has already gendered an axiom concerning her own behavior: "bihoveth hire a ful long spoon / That shal ete with a feend" [V 602-3]. Recalling as well the gentle heart's glide from human to feminine in the falcon's first words to Canacee, the caged-bird passage more visibly splits the universal "man" into men and women. The falcon's persistent divisions draw on the creative energy that romances as well as lyrics and...
dits amoureux find in gender difference. Yet even as the falcon’s complaint recalls this familiar dynamic, it works some striking revisions on masculine and feminine categories.

The falcon revoices a topos that Chaucer knew from Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, which he translated with the aid of Jean de Meun’s French version. In both sources the bird’s gender is a function of grammatical gender: the feminine ales garula of Boethius becomes a masculine oiseaus in Jean’s translation.13 Chaucer chooses in *Boece* the feminine “sche,” presumably in deference to the Latin substantive over Jean’s translation since the argument concerns a behavior universal not only to men and women but to all creation. The tamed lion, the caged bird, the bent tree, and the sun all strive to revert to their good and natural paths: “Alle thynge seken ayen to hir propre cours, and alle thynge rejoyssen hem of hir retornynge ayen to hir nature.”14 Chaucer’s shift from the feminine bird in his translation of the Consolation to the masculine bird in the Squire’s Tale’s adaptation of the passage corresponds to a shift from illustrating laudable universal order through the caged bird to illustrating harmful masculine inconstancy.

From the perspective of gender and romance, the revision of *Boece* in the Squire’s Tale responds most directly to Jean de Meun’s revision of the same Boethian passage in La Vieille’s teachings on how to manipulate lovers. The old woman whose job it is to guard the chastity of the dreamer’s beloved in the Romance of the Rose urges instead that women should profit from taking as many lovers as they can entice—“Ausinc sachiez que toutes fames, saient damoiseles ou dames, de quelconques procession,”15 know that in the same way all women, whether maids or ladies of whatever station, have a natural inclination to seek gladly by what roads and paths they may get their liberty, for they constantly desire it. The caged bird represents the woman constrained by law but promiscuous by nature who sells her favors dearly to avenge herself on men’s duplicity. “Briefment tuit les bolent et trichent, / tuit sunt ribaut, par tout se fichent, / si les doit l’en ausinc trichier” [all men, in short, trick and cheat women, all are ribalds and always try to get their way, so women should cheat them right back] (13235-37). Women should indulge their natural promiscuity to defend themselves against men’s depredations by exchanging sex for gifts with as many men as possible. La Vieille’s application of the Boethian example illustrates just what Philosophy is warning against in the caged-bird passage, that false goals such as wealth can distract humans from the truly good: “naturel ententioun ledeth yow to thilke verray good, but many maner errous mystorneth yow therfro” (Boece, bk. 3, prose 3, ll. 6-8). La Vieille’s distortion of Boethius’s example marks her with the immorality and illogic that Jean draws into her character primarily from clerical antifeminist writing.

La Vieille invokes the caged bird to comment, as in the Squire’s Tale, on specifically courtly deceptions. La Vieelle’s teachings on love echo between women the conversation between the God of Love and the lover in Guillaume de Lorris’s commencement to the Romance of the Rose. Her teachings are part of the Rose’s immensely complex response to romance—a response that involves both Guillaume’s codifying transformation of romance’s

---

13 Boethius, bk. 3, meter 2, ll. 17-26; Jean de Meun, bk. 3, meter 2, ll. 21-18. That grammatical gender is not innocent of sexual connotation is illustrated throughout medieval allegory, e.g., in Jean’s crossgendering of Bel Acueil: see Zink. On the universal versus the gendered sense of “man” in Chaucer’s works see Fyler, “Man, Men, and Women.”

14 Boece, bk. 3, meter 2, ll. 39-42. Chaucer uses “sche” and “hir” to refer to the bird at ll. 27, 28, 29, and 31, calling into question the editors’ correction “[hym]” for “hym” (singular for plural) at l. 25 (see textual note, 1155). Ales as a substantive is sometimes given masculine modifiers but is usually feminine as in the present case.

15 On the relations of this passage to the Squire’s Tale, see David, 112-13.
events into an emotional drama and Jean's multifaceted critique of Guillaume. With reference to the Squire's Tale, the most suggestive relation between La Vieille and the wronged falcon is that they both argue from personal experience that all men are inconsistent. They do so from radically different perspectives, however. La Vieille speaks as a disabused pragmatist; her revisions to the God of Love's instructions seem to invert his ideals for lovers' conduct. The God of Love's ten commandments to the lover enjoins generosity and faithfulness; La Vieille counters with the instruction "ja larges ne saiez; en plusieurs leus le queur aiez" (never be generous; give your heart in several places). Yet her discourse of manipulation clarifies retrospectively the manipulative subtext in the God of Love's instructions. Love's overt incitements to deception, for example by bribing servants and feigning impatience when separated from the beloved, are for La Vieille contiguous and compatible with his commands that men should dress and behave in such a way as to incite love. La Vieille's focus on deception analyzes romantic courtship as incompletely mystified self-interest. Women scheme and manipulate, in her view, in response to the courtly manipulations practiced on them by men. Her discourse suggests that the misogyny Jean builds into her voice is not so much distinct from courtship, and their invocation of Boethius's caged bird to exemplify gentleness she has experienced from her tercelet to a contradiction in men's nature:

So newefangel been they of hire mete,
And loven novelries of propre kynde,
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde.
So ferde this tercelet, alias the day!
Though he were gentil born.

By setting the faithfulness that "gentillesse of blood" would guarantee against the inconstancy that "propre kynde" inspires, the falcon ascribes to men a paradoxical, disunified nature reminiscent of that ascribed to women in romance. Her metaphors of veiling and preening also reverse the culturally pervasive associations between courtly and misogynist constructions of the feminine that Jean de Meun's text illustrates. La Vieille reveals that complicity but works within its terms, and consequently speaks less directly against the grain of gender constraints than does the wronged falcon.

Indeed, the falcon works a series of inversions on masculinity in her account of the tercelet's behavior. Her analysis splits men's "gentillesse of blood" from their "kynde," attributing the doubleness she has experienced from her tercelet to a contradiction in men's nature:

So newefangel been they of hire mete,
And loven novelries of propre kynde,
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde.
So ferde this tercelet, alias the day!
Though he were gentil born.

By setting the faithfulness that "gentillesse of blood" would guarantee against the inconstancy that "propre kynde" inspires, the falcon ascribes to men a paradoxical, disunified nature reminiscent of that ascribed to women in romance. Her metaphors of veiling and preening also reverse the culturally pervasive associations

---

16 A recent discussion of Guillaume's debt to romance is Hult, 186-208, 257-63; the locus classicus on the Romance of the Rose, courtly literature including romance, and Chaucer is Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition.

17 La Vieille instructs Bel Aceuil to disobey the God of Love's ninth and tenth commandments at II. 12981-13006; contrast the God of Love's instructions according to Guillaume, II. 2199-2252.

18 Guillaume, II. 2322-24, 2545-62; compare Romannt of the Rose, II. 2247-88, 2695-5716.

19 Guillaume, I. 2103 ("Toutes fames ser et honore"); Romannt of the Rose, I. 2239.
between women and deceptively alluring appearance: her suitor's falseness is "wrapped under humble cheere / And under hewe of trouthe" in colors dyed "depe in greyn" (V 507-8, 511); his falseness is imperceptible because "So peynted he and kembde at point-devys / As wel his wordes as his contenaunce" (V 560-61). His preening, like that conventionally attributed to women, is inextricably self-enhancing and self-concealing. Further reversing the positions of feminine and masculine in the falcon's account are the several animal metaphors for her suitor's conduct: "Right as a serpent hit hym under floures" (V 512); "Anon this tigre, ful of doublenesse, / Fil on his knees" (V 543-44); and of course the caged bird who is so oddly analogous to both a man and a tercelet. These metaphors revise the tale's first and framing association between Canacee's sympathetic femininity and the natural world of the birds. Within that initially exoticized feminine space, the falcon articulates masculinity as a still more animal, unstable, and elusively metamorphosing duplicity. By so figuring men's nature, the falcon establishes her own claim to a contrasting and distinctively feminine reliability: Canacee hangs her cage in "veluettes blewe / In signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene" (V 644-45).

The falcon's radical inversions take place, as do Dorigen's distortions and exaggerations, in a playful context that might counter their effort to speak against the grain of gender construction. That Dorigen speaks "in pley" may not only express her alienation from courtship but also restrict the impact of her words, setting her critique of courtship off the record. The detached narratorial comments on Dorigen's two laments in the Franklin's Tale—she mourns "As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh" and plans for "a day or tweye" to kill herself—further lighten the weight accorded to her words (V 818, 1457). The Squire's Tale so insists on feminine trouthe and yet in so fantastic a mode that its claims too may be suspect. The Wife of Bath, whose resistance to social rank as well as gender constructions will figure in the third chapter of this study, recalls Dorigen in declaring that "myn entente nys but for to pleye" (III 192). Her powerfully illogical "fantasye" may implicitly cancel her gender inversions even before they are articulated—as in Chaunticleer's "Mulier est hominis confusio: / Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is, / 'Womman is mannes joye and al his bliss'" (III 190, 516; VII 3164-66). The latent masculine retort seems to be the necessary context for the feminine articulations that oppose it.

Calling these articulations "feminine" is not to deny the cultural authority of male writers such as Chaucer or the masculine perspectives of dominant literary conventions. What is "feminine" about Dorigen, Canacee, and the falcon works itself out in terms of those conventions. For Chaucer, treating women's voices lightly places them in a register where playing with gender becomes possible. Within the limitations of his literary situation, Chaucer's playfulness illustrates the theoretical concept that mimicry and misquotation can reconfigure the cultural constraints placed on gender. Dorigen's parodic exaggerations of a feminine voice, like the falcon's inversions of gendered attributes, do not so much escape the categories they critique as they mime and estrange them, placing a distance between the conventional categories and the speaker who is asked to instantiate them.

EMBODIED VOICES

The falcon's cries and self-wounding in the Squire's Tale introduce a strategy of expression that is based not in speech but in the close association between femininity and the body. Striking herself with wings and beak "til the rede blood / Ran endelong the tree ther-as she stood," the falcon communicates the loss she has suffered through her physical suffering (V 415-16). Critics have noted a cultural referent for this scene in Christian sacrifice: the dry tree in which the falcon sits suggests the cross, and the falcon herself recalls the self-wounding pelican that represents Christ in bestiaries.21 Romances provide a referent more apposite to the tale's generic affiliations and the falcon's predicament. The courted lady, seen and understood first of all as an alluring and adorned body, may find that manipulating her body communicates more effectively than does voicing her positions.

21 See Meindl and the summary of further work in the Variorum Edition of the Squire's Tale, 204-5n. The variorum editors do not approve specifically Christian references, but I would defend a less focused invocation of martyrdom for love in the passage.
The identification of the feminine with the corporeal is of course not specific to romance: as De Lauretis summarizes, “the representation of woman as image... is so pervasive in our culture, well before and beyond the institution of cinema, that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects” (Alice Doesn’t, 37-38; see also Ferrante, Woman as Image). Medieval romance is a notable and, for later literature, a foundational site for elaborating and refining the connection between femininity and the observed body. The origin of love in looking on a woman’s beauty, a lyric topos soon allegorized in the God of Love’s arrows shot to the lover’s eyes in the Romance of the Rose, dictates in romance the precedence of physical description (rhetorical effictio) in introducing female characters and effictio’s place in adumbrating traits of character.

The masculine gaze, as we have seen in the first chapter, both establishes feminine beauty as its object of desire and sees masculinity reflected back to itself in the difference between the ideal feminine and masculine identity. Moreover, when the courted lady looks back at her suitor, her look affirms the primacy of his deeds over his appearance. The paradigmatic exchange of looks takes place at a tournament or a siege where the knight takes inspiration for his deeds from looking on his lady, while the lady’s gaze witnesses to deeds of prowess among knights (see Fradenberg, City, Marriage, Tournament). Romances persistently conceive the female body in terms of its desirability for courtship, licensing a certain inertness in the worthy woman that contrasts with her suitor’s active demonstration of merit.

The destruction of beauty draws meaning from this grounding of the courted lady’s identity in her appearance. For example, when Herodis learns in Sir Orfeo that a fairy king will steal her away from Orfeo, her wordless lament communicates to Orfeo as shocking reversals of her feminine attractiveness. Herodis’s quietness and her rosy and fair complexion are identifying traits for Orfeo that she reverses through her cries, pallor, and bleeding. She seems to beundoing her relation to Orfeo, most evidently in that her “louesum eyzen to / Lokep so man dop on his fo,” but more generally in destroying her beauty. When she speaks, her narrative of abduction by the fairy king confirms her body’s visible message of division from her lover. By communicating her loss first of all through a bodily spectacle rather than speech, Herodis recognizes as does Orfeo that her body is crucial to her identity in the relationship she is losing.

The abandoned falcon of the Squire’s Tale similarly laments first of all in cries and self-mutilation that she later glosses in her narrative of loss. Exceptional beauty is again the context for beauty’s destruction:

Ther sat a faucon over hire heed ful hye,  
That with a pitous voys so gan to crye  
That all the wode resouned of hire cry.  
Ybeten hadde she hirself so pitously  
With bothe hir wynges til the rede blood  
Ran endelong the tree ther-as she stood.  
... ther nas nevere yet no man on lyve,  
If that I koude a faucon wel discryve,  
That herde of swich another of fairnesse,  
As wel of plumage as of gentillesse  
Of shap, of al that myghte yrekened be.  

[Auchinleck MS, t02-12]  

Although Herodis’s cries and self-wounding await a verbal explanation, they already have meaning for Orfeo as shocking reversals of her feminine attractiveness. Herodis’s quietness and her rosy and fair complexion are identifying traits for Orfeo that she reverses through her cries, pallor, and bleeding. She seems to be undoing her relation to Orfeo, most evidently in that her “louesum eyzen to / Lokep so man dop on his fo,” but more generally in destroying her beauty. When she speaks, her narrative of abduction by the fairy king confirms her body’s visible message of division from her lover. By communicating her loss first of all through a bodily spectacle rather than speech, Herodis recognizes as does Orfeo that her body is crucial to her identity in the relationship she is losing.

The abandoned falcon of the Squire’s Tale similarly laments first of all in cries and self-mutilation that she later glosses in her narrative of loss. Exceptional beauty is again the context for beauty’s destruction:

O lef liif, what is te,  
Pat cuer gete hast ben so stille,  

22 An early instance of a feminine portrait in which great beauty promises good character is that of Enide (Chretien de Troyes, Erec et Enide, II. 401-41, 509-46). see Sargent-Bauer.
As in *Sir Orfeo*, the spectacle of self-wounding communicates before speech. Indeed, Canacee in some sense "hath understood what this falcon scyde" before she asks the falcon to explain why "evere in oon she cryde alwey and shrighte" ([V 437, 417]). The falcon's cries and blood, manifesting her grief on the scene of her beautiful body, signify either "sorwe of deeth or los of love" ([V 450]). In the syntax of courtly sentiment her self-destruction has sufficiently determinate meaning to amount to a kind of speech.

The falcon's self-wounding communicates bereavement to Canacee, but it also expresses a profound helplessness in the face of events. Herodis and the falcon represent their incapacity to act effectively through their acquiescence to courtship's conflation of the body with identity. Their violence might protest the conflation, but their violence is nonetheless directed against themselves. Canacee so describes the falcon's action in the telling reflexives of "ye youreself upon yourself yow wreke" ([V 454]). In attacking their bodies Herodis and the falcon suggest that externally directed action is impossible for them; instead they turn on their bodies both to signal and to yield to the equivalence struck within courtship between their external appearance and their identity.

A bodily distortion that could resist that relation is the Amazonian practice, widely attested in classical and medieval sources, of removing one breast. This practice represents the Amazons' war-making identity (in that it facilitates the use of bow or shield), their refusal to nurture sons (whom they kill, maim, or turn over to their fathers), and their resistance to amorous relations generally in favor of virginity and chastity. The very etymology of the name *Amazon* is said to derive from the practice: in the version from the prose *Roman de Troie*, "maintenant que elle est née, li copent elle[s] sa senestre mamelle por estre plus delivre a l'escu porter, et por ce ont elles a non Amazoines, c'est a dire: sans l'une des maistles" ([as soon as she [a daughter] is born, they cut off her left breast so she will be more able to carry a shield, and because of this they are called Amazons, that is to say, lacking a breast].

The one bare breast the Amazons show in battle further emphasizes their rejection of passivity and sexuality together. The Amazon queen Penthesilea of Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* associates her companions' war making with chastity:

> Tu cuides que nos seisons taus
> Come autres femmes comunaux,
> Que les cors ont vains e legiers:
> Cô n'est mie nostre mistiers.
> Puceles some: n'avons cure
> De mauvaisté ne de luxure;
> Le regne qui nous appartient
> Defendons si que rien ne crient:
> N'est pecere, arz ne maumis. ([2491-99]34)

[You think we are like ordinary women who have fragile, weak bodies: that is not at all our way. We are virgins; we have no care for wickedness or lust; we defend the realm that belongs to us such that it bears nothing; it is not ravaged, burned, or ruined.]

Yet this Penthesilea has come to aid the Trojans out of love for Hector, a motivation Benoit adds to his source as he omits mastectomy from his description of Amazonian ways (ll. 23302-56; Petit, "Traitement courtois," 68). In the *Roman d'Alexandre* Amazonian episode the queen's emissaries fall in love with followers of Alexander and the Amazons' practices do not include mastectomy (ll. 7237-70, 7395-7643). The women of Scythia in Thomas of Kent's *Alexander*, in contrast, do not fall in love with Alexander or his men, and "De la destre part n'ont cresant maistles; / Horn les ard de fer quant sunt joennes puceles" (on the right side their breasts do not grow; they are seared with iron when they are little girls) (6177-78). Other *romans antiques*, in the above episodes from *Troie* and the *Roman d'Alexandre* and in *Eneas*' depiction of the woman warrior Camille, show a preoccupation very early in the history of romance with Amazonian prowess and chastity as a potential model for femininity.

The *romans antiques* suppress the Amazonian gesture of re-

---


24 Virgil (and classical sources) have the Amazons uncover a breast in battle ([Aeneid] 1.491-93, 11.648-49. On the significance of baring a breast in relation to chastity in the Christian tradition, see Miles, Fradenberg's chapter "The Black Lady" discusses cultural associations between winning an exotic woman and conquering land ([City, Marriage, Tournament], 244-64).
moving a breast, so telling in classical and many medieval works, as part of a process that relocates the dynamic of women's resistance and subordination from Amazonian militancy to the metaphorical combat of courtship. For classical writers the Amazons were not positive figures but challengers to Athenian civilization, outsiders aligned with animals and barbarians whose “topsy-turvy world,” in W. B. Tyrrell’s phrase, must be destroyed in order for Greekness and masculinity to attain their proper ascendency. As mythic adversary to all that is Greek, the Amazon is to be subdued by the superiority of Greek men, whether in battle or by rape or marriage. The romans antiques present Amazons and woman warriors more positively, and not only in evading classical references to their practices of killing or crippling their sons and removing one of their daughters’ breasts. The romances’ revisions amount in the favorable interpretation of Aimé Petit to “une féminisation des Amazones,” culminating in their “normalisation” when they fall in love and marry in the Roman d’Alexandre. Now they are exemplary in both prowess and beauty, they are chaste but available to courtship, and they have recovered susceptibility to tenderness with their previously lacking breasts. As I see it, however, the gestures of subordination that accompany the Amazons’ reintegration with masculine culture qualify Petit’s argument for a completeness or amplitude in women that is predicated on the restored breast.

When Alexander hears of the Amazons’ prowess in the Roman d’Alexandre, he first conceives their independence as a military issue: “Se je icel terre nen ai en ma baillie, / Et je ne puis avoir sor elles seignorie, / Dont porrai je bien dire ma proesce est faille” (If I cannot take control of that country and have lordship over the women, then truly I can say my prowess has failed). But the Amazon queen’s warning dream of a peahen and her chicks taking refuge from an eagle by running into the kitchen transposes the conflict to the domestic sphere, preparing for her emissaries’ amatory bonds with Alexander’s men as they deliver her message of fealty to Alexander. Even in her message the language of love and fealty are indistinguishable: “La roine vos mande que cle est vostre amie, / Son anel vos envoie par molt grant duretie” (the queen wants you to know that she is your friend [or sweet-heart], she sends you her ring out of great devotion [or passionate love]). Penthesilea of the Roman de Troie is similarly drawn to the cause of Troy by her love for Hector, although his death preserves her status as a chaste queen (ll. 23357-416). Consensual surrender, amatory and political, overcomes the Amazons’ militant opposition from within their own consciousness: rather than suffering defeat by men, they suffer susceptibility to men’s desires for love and rule. Deleting the practice of removing a breast at birth from their accounts of Amazon society, the romans antiques prepare to transform the Amazon from an opponent of masculine culture into an admirable figure of beauty and prowess, a worthy participant in courtship.

The Knight’s Tale traces this shift from classical to romance versions of the Amazon in its presentation of Hippolyta’s and Emelye’s contrasting fates. Boccaccio records the shift in the Teseida, curiously, by noting the practice of mastectomy when he narrates Teseo’s conquest of the Amazons, but praising Emilia’s beautiful breasts at the time of her marriage to Palemone (bk. 1, st. 58; bk. 12, st. 61). Boccaccio pictures the defeated Amazons transforming themselves as they set down their arms and look on Teseo’s men, becoming modest, beautiful, and well-dressed, taking smaller steps and singing sweetly (bk. 1, sts. 132-34). Are we to imagine that love even swells the seared breast? The opening episode of the Knight’s Tale draws instead on the classical sensibility of Statius’s Thebaid, where the only context for Hippolyta’s marriage is the military conquest of the Amazons; marriage is not so much a consequence as an aspect of the queen’s defeat. The women of Athens observe the spectacle of Hippolyta’s subjected and altered body, marveling that she has broken with Amazon

25 Tyrrell, 63; on monomastia see Tyrrell, 47, 49; on the meanings of Amazons in classical literature see also dubyos.
26 Petit, “Traitement courtois,” 75; see also Petit, “La Reine Camille.” Petit quotes Honore de Balzac’s association between the breast and feminine qualities (versus the masculine connotations of riding) from La Comedie Humaine: “J’ai remarque que la plupart des femmes qui montent bien a cheval ont peu de ten-dresse. Comme aux Amazones, il leur manque une mamelle, et leurs coeurs sont endurcis en un certain endroit” (I have noticed that most women who ride horses well have little tenderness. Like Amazons, they are lacking a breast, and a place in their hearts has hardened) (“Thème des Amazones,” 74).

27 LL. 7597-98; compare “La roine vos mande que vos estes ses drus” (ll. 7585); the warning dream is at ll. 7305-34.
custom, “quod pectora palla / tota latent, magnis quod bara-

s err Athis / misceat atque hosti ueniat paritura marito” (that all her breast is hidden beneath her robe, that although a barbarian she has intercourse with the mighty Athenian, that she comes to bear children to her enemy and husband) [bk. 12, ll. 537–39]. Although “patiens . . . mariti foederis” [accepting patiently the marriage contract], Hippolyta is still identifiably barbarian, an outsider brought under Athenian control by force [bk. 12, ll. 534–35]. In the *Knight’s Tale* as well, marriage is consequent on military defeat with no intervening movement of consensual subordination or self-transformation on the part of the Amazons. Parallel clauses recount that Theseus has “conquered al the regne of Femenye . . . And wedde de the queene Ypolita” [I 866, 868], that it would be too long to tell “of the grete bataille for the nones” and “of the feste that was at hir weddyng” [I 879, 883]. No reference to courtship mediates between Hippolyta’s defeat and her marriage. The classicism of this opening episode will, however, be tempered in the case of Hippolyta’s “yonge suster Emelye” [I 871]. Young Emelye and the scions of Thebes, Palamon and Arcite, echo the combat and alliance of Hippolyta and Theseus in the new register of courtship. The shift from warfare to courtship plays out a generic shift from epic to romance. The *Roman d’Alexandre* dramatizes this shift by juxtaposing the Amazon queen who swears fealty because of Alexander’s military superiority and her very young emissaries Floré and Biaute who fall in love with two of Alexander’s followers. To be sure, military confrontations remain important in romances subsequent to the *romans antiques*, but I have argued in the first chapter that one generic distinction of romance is to figure women as objects of heterosexual courtship, courtship as metaphorical combat, and the experience of love as integral to knightly identity.29 Palamon and Arcite, the younger generation’s version of the Theban brothers Eteocles and Polynices who make war with each other over their

FEMININE MIMICRY AND MASQUERADE

rights to rule, transfer that rivalry to the affective conflict over Emelye.30 Palamon and Arcite’s persistently combative metaphors for Emelye’s effect on them accomplish in turn her displacement from warrior to courted lady: Palamon is “hurt right now thurghout myn eye” by “the fairnesse of that lady that I see” and Arcite agrees that Emelye’s “fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly” [I 1096, 1098, 1118].

Palamon and Arcite’s experience of love, as argued in the preceding chapter, expands and complicates their chivalric relation to one another, but the experience of their courtship does not similarly enlarge Emelye’s Amazonian identity. Her lethal beauty replaces Amazonian prowess in battle rather than doubling it; Emelye is conspicuously inactive throughout the tale except for unknowingly wounding her lovers with her beauty. In contrast to the more aware and resourceful Emilia of Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, for Emelye beauty is so consonant with passivity that her status as Palamon and Arcite’s beloved diametrically reverses her status as Amazon. Here the conjoint beauty and prowess of Penthésilée, Floré, and Biaute in the *romans antiques* yields to the later romances’ fully demilitarized women. Even as early as *Eneas*, the death of Camille, a virgin warrior though not an Amazon, foregrounds a contradiction between prowess and beauty in women. All Turnus’s followers marvel at Camille, “qui tant ert proz et tant ert bele” [who was so brave and beautiful], and on her tomb they note again the consonance of prowess and beauty in her: “Ci gist Camile la pucelle, / qui molt fu proz et molt fu belle” [here lies the maiden Camille who was very brave and very beautiful] [4094, 7663–64]. But Eneas’s follower Tarcon taunts her, just before she is killed, that her chivalry is incompatible with femininity:

Feme ne se doit pas combatre, 
se par nuit non tot an gisant;

28 Chaucer’s opening scene draws on Statius, bk. 12, ll. 519–610.

30 On the relation between Palamon and Arcite and Eteocles and Polynices of the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Thebais* see Patterson, *Chaucer*, 198–202; Anderson, *Anderson* argues strongly for the epic associations of the *Knight’s Tale*, particularly for its imitation of Statius across its use of Boccaccio, but his argument [112–19] that Palamon and Arcite’s private and affective rivalry revises the military and political rivalry of Eteocles and Polynices in my view sustains a generic shift toward romance rather than an allegiance to epic.
CHAPTER II

la peut fere home recreant . . .
. . . ne mostrez vostre proesce.
Ce ne est pas vostre mestier,
mes filer, colldre et taillier;
en bele chambre soez cortine
fet bon esbatre o tel meschine.

[A woman should not enter into combat, except at night lying down; there she can defeat a man. . . . Do not show your prowess. That is not your business, but rather spinning, sewing, and clipping. In a pretty room behind the bedcurtains it's good to fight with a maiden like you.]

Tarcon's comment on femininity, which the Eneas poet adds to Virgil's episode, charges that for women there is no reciprocity of literal and metaphorical combat. Identifying women so fully with sexuality and domesticity allows Tarcon to claim that Camille's presence on the battlefield is a gauche attempt at seduction: "Venistes ça por vos mostrar? / Ge ne vos voil pas acheter,- / por-
tant blanche vos voi et bloie" (Do you come here to show yourself? I do not want to buy you, though I see you are fair and blonde) (7089-91). Assigned to an authoritative Trojan voice, this critique reinforces the plot's wider contrasts between Dido and Camille and the superior Lavine, preparing for Camille's death not only on the battlefield but in the genre as a model of femininity that combines prowess with beauty. The woman warrior revives in Renaissance versions of romance, but for later medieval romances, as Edmond Faral has noted, it is Camille's effictio, the static portrait of her beauty, that becomes paradigmatic rather than her prowess.32

31 Eneas adds the comments on femininity to the corresponding speech in Virgil's Aeneid 11.732-40. Compare Thomas of Kent's similar conclusion to his account of Scythian women allied with Alexander: "Mult vienent bel en l'ost; done dient li purvers: / 'Cy freit bon combatre en un bois a envers!' (They looked so fine in the army that lecherous men said, "These would be good to fight in a woods on their backs") (6190-91).
32 Concerning Camille's portrait [ll. 3859-4046], Faral comments, "sans doute les contemporains ont-ils apprecie cette singuliere production, puisque, dorenavant, dans tous les romans postérieurs, elle sera prise comme modele et fournira la formule de tous les portraits à venir" (contemporaries no doubt approved of this remarkable passage since from then on, in all subsequent romances, it was used as a model and furnished the formula for all the portraits to come) (413). Huchet analyzes in detail the gendered implications of Camille's portrait: Roman médiéval, 68-74. On Renaissance significances for Amazons in relation to gender, see the essays by Margaret Sullivan, Alison Taufier, and Susanne Woods in Playing with Gender.

The history of women warriors in the romans antiques, tracing how courtship's metaphorical combat comes to supplant military confrontation, prepares for Emelye's ascendancy over the "faire, hardy queene of Scythia" (I 882) in the plot of the Knight's Tale. In Emelye hardiness is divorced from fairness, which alone defines her desirability for her lovers. I will argue in chapter 5 that her lovers' radical detachment from her productively complicates her identity for them, invoking a sense of adventure around her. In considering here the feminine body's potential for communication, it is the lovers' apprehension of her beauty that deserves mention. Only her beauty speaks to them, and so compellingly as to transform their lives. On the one hand, their susceptibility to beauty and Emelye's to a responsive affection—in the "frendlich ye" she casts on victorious Arcite and the tender love that follows on her marriage to Palamon—contrast her status as courted lady to Hippolyta's as defeated Amazon (I 2680, 3103). Yet Emelye's susceptibility to love appears in these post-facto notations so muted as to interrogate its substantiality. Moreover, Emelye's body communicates to her lovers independently of her will, knowledge, and desire, calling all too much attention to the dissonance of her body and her faculties as to their final harmony. In the end, Emelye's fate seems more to repeat Hippolyta's than to contrast with it. The matches arranged for her first with Arcite and later with Palamon resemble Hippolyta's with Theseus in that all are under the control of Theseus and instantiate his victory over the Amazons. Palamon and Arcite's sense that Emelye is fiercely resistant rather than merely ignorant of their suit is consonant with her Amazonian origins and her expressed resistance in the temple of Diana. The virtually spurious mutuality of Emelye's two matches invites readers to reconsider whether courtship's metaphorical combat has transformed or only mystified the combative hostility enacted in Amazon culture and its conquest. That Emelye's fairness is the sole referent for Palamon and...
Arcite's love further invites us to recall that severing a breast signified for the Amazons severing the bond between feminine beauty and involvement in heterosexual courtship. Mastectomy vanishes as the romance genre returns Amazons to the domestic scene of courtship and marriage. Emelye's experience of undesired love illustrates the loss of feminine agency entailed in that return to the unmutilated body.

In the context of courtship, then, Amazons represent a disappearing rather than a potential site of assertion through bodily distortion. A third kind of distortion, more characteristic of the genre than either self-wounding or Amazonian mastectomy, provides a language for female characters that comments more fully on the relation between body and identity. By their own magic or under enchantment, female characters in romance may take more than one bodily form. Shape-shifting can be read in two directions, one tending toward reinforcing an image of feminine alienness and contradiction. This is the more accessible reading of shape-shifting, linked to wider literary contexts such as the theological, medical, and legal disputations on "Is woman a monster?" and "Is woman inhuman?" Ian Maclean in his useful survey notes that medieval writers treat these questions facetiously and finally affirm woman's humanity [12-13, 30-33, 70-72]. The questions nonetheless voice possibilities that are not fully contained by their negation. Shape-shifting in romance offers a striking concretization of feminine uncanniness, whether by mixing human with animal forms as in the serpent-woman Melusine, by juxtaposing contradictory images of woman as in the loathly-lovely Ragnell, or by simply deceiving the masculine gaze. The uncanniness of women's shape-shifting is the starting point for my reading in chapter 4 of magical powers ascribed to women in romance. Here I will pursue a different and perhaps less evident reading that finds in shape-shifting an attempt to break the bond that ties feminine identity to bodily appearance.

The loathly lady of the Wife of Bath's Tale has close literary affiliations with those of the Marriage of Sir Gawaine and the Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell who transform themselves for Gawain when he marries them in exchange for their aid and surrenders sovereignty to them. John Gower's tale of Florent in the Confessio Amantis uses a similar plot to a more neatly didactic end than do the Arthurian versions. Melusine, who meets a desperate Raymondin in the woods and aids him in return for marriage, is a rather distant analogue to Chaucer's loathly lady in that Melusine's transformations take place every week and constitute an ongoing test of submission for Raymondin, until he breaks his promise not to seek her out on Saturdays and so brings about her permanent transformation into a serpent. A still more distant analogue is the enchanted lady of Le Bel Inconnu and Lybeaus Desconus who requires only a kiss from one of Gawain's kin to transform her from serpent to woman.

Beyond the masculine experience of contradiction lies the further implication in shape-shifting that feminine identity is not inherent in bodily appearance. Shifting from superlative repulsiveness to attractiveness redoubles the emphasis on appearance that characterizes the feminine position in courtship, but undermines the derivation of stable meaning from appearance. Shape-shifting offers, if not a way out of the body, a way to indict its tyranny over the feminine by dramatizing its arbitrariness. Further, by countering their repulsive manifestations with hyperbolically appealing ones, shapeshifters raise the possibility that beauty is not native to woman but is an artificially produced masquerade. The concept of womanliness as masquerade has a long history in psychoanalytic theory, where it has seemed to represent not a strategy for confronting gender construction but either a given of woman's construction or a compulsive exaggeration of the given. So fully does the identity formation of women associate them with the body, the image, and the desired over against masculine thought and signification that, in Joan Riviere's influential study, for a woman to locate her meaning in the gestures and behaviors of stereotypical femininity is inescapable. Citing the case of a successful professional who felt driven to flirt and act subservient to her male colleagues, to "put on a mask of womanliness" in compensation for her competence, Riviere comments, "The

On the occurrence of the shape-shifting woman in a wider literary context see Sumner, ed., Weddyng of Sir Gawen, xiii-xxvii. My quotations from the Marriage of Sir Gawaine and Weddyng of Sir Gawen are from Sources and Analogues, 235-64 (Whiting reproduces earlier editions with a few corrections); the tale of Florent is quoted from Gower, Confessio Amantis.
reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade.' My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing" (210, 213). For Riviere, womanliness is itself a mask, a fabrication that answers masculine desire by meeting that desire's specifications. The classic version of masquerade sees no escape from woman's identification with her body, but recently a few related suggestions have opened the idea of masquerade to the possibility of resisting that identification. Mary Ann Doane proposes that Riviere's account in fact attributes to masquerading women "the distance, alienation, and divisiveness of self" which is denied to women conceived as coterminous with their image but which is accorded to men in the model of development that relates men's awareness of difference between body and identity to the capacity to signify in language ("Masquerade Reconsidered," 47; see also Doane, "Film and the Masquerade"). Masquerade demonstrates a self-consciousness that belies the cultural association of femininity with the imagistic, unreflective object of desire. The woman reads her own image and reproduces herself, perhaps in a playful exaggeration that pushes at the limits of her construction. Irigaray, who uses "masquerade" only negatively, with Riviere, to describe women experiencing desire by experiencing themselves as the objects of masculine desire, develops also an idea of mimicry or "playing with mimesis" that resembles Doane's revised masquerade. To mimic is to "assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it... To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it" (This Sex, 76). We have seen that Dorigen and the falcon attempt such mimicry in their responses to courtship. Taking "discourse" in its wider sense of any system of signification that encodes a specific endeavor would apply Irigaray's mimicry to gendered behavior as well as to language. Judith Butler sees a similar potential for bodily significations, in that they challenge the association of the body with "mute facticity," with an innate sexuality that precedes the constructions of gender. Under the rubric of "performative subversions" she argues that a range of bodily exaggerations and distortions, such as glamour, cross-dressing, and drag, can in their deliberateness shift entrenched dichotomies between body and intellect, and between female and male (128-29). This constellation of approaches to bodily manipulations, arising from a variety of theoretical projects whose differences I do not mean to elide, provides a context for considering how shape-shifting comments on feminine identity in romance.

Shape-shifting women put on beauty like a costume, rewarding a kiss, marriage, or obedience with a superlative body. Their assumed and hyperbolic beauty amounts to a masquerade that marks a distinction between their identities and their played-up bodies. The "olde wyf" of the Wife of Bath's Tale introduces her transformation with offhanded confidence and tailors her new shape to her audience's taste: "But nathelesse, syn I knowe youre delit, / I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit" (III 1046, 1217-18). Further, the shape-shifting masquerade deploys the grotesque as well as the glamorous to exaggerate and question femininity. Here two problems complicate the effort to find agency and self-definition in masquerade: most of the plots in question identify the shapeshifter with her beautiful rather than her grotesque body, and most shapeshifters finally claim that they were not responsible for their grotesque forms.

It might be argued that the works under consideration make the beautiful woman the only true form of the shapeshifter since the misshapen body is associated with a spell or a test of faith, and the shapely body rewards the man who breaks the spell and passes the test. Dame Ragnell describes the spell she was under as a bodily deformation ("thus was I disformyd") and the narration concurs that breaking the spell restores the lost truth of her body: "she was recouered of that she was defoylyd" (Weddyng of Sir Gawen, 699, 710). In Lybeaus Desconus the enchanted serpent body falls off to reveal the naked beauty that the spell merely concealed: "be warmys tayle and wynge / Anon hyt fall fro hyre" (Cotton MS, 2009-10). But the persistence of recognizably female qualities in the deformed bodies questions the equivalence the plots seem to strike between beauty and the natural identity of

34 For a fine discussion of aspects of female disguise in medieval literature see Fradenberg, City, Marriage, Tournament, 244-64 ("The Black Lady").
woman. Dame Ragnell's "hanging papys to be an hors lode," the "lothly wommannysch figure" of the tale of Florent, the lady "witched" in the Marriage of Sir Gawaine to "walke in womans liknesse, / Most like a feend of hell," and the vermilion lips of the serpent that kisses Giglain against his will instantiate a repulsive, aggressive womanhood that supplements the desirable femininity these women can also manifest. The lothly lady's unsolicited lustfulness contributes to her association with wildness and bestiality, as Richard Bernheimer has shown, but it also contributes to her intimate threat to men: "Whosoever kisses this lady," Sir Kay remarks, "of his kisse he stands in feare" [Bernheimer, 33-38; Marriage of Sir Gawaine, 239]. The shapeshifter masquerades in both the beautiful and the deformed bodies, then, because both are exaggerated versions of womanhood that solicit a sexual reaction from men. This doubling of the masquerade complicates its challenge to gender categories. If both bodies are female, what are the defining characteristics of feminalness? In every case the transformed body recalls its other form by the perfect opposition of its qualities: Chaucer's hag "so loothly, and so oold also" now "so fair was, and so yong therto" [III 1100, 1251]. The destabilizations that shape-shifting accomplishes are substantial and significant despite the plots' concluding promise that the shapeshifter has achieved a stable body.

In those conclusions, Melusine, Dame Ragnell, and other transformed wives claim that a stepmother or an angry mother was responsible for both the monstrous body and the monstrous demand for masculine submission; the wife, for her part, wants only to serve and obey. Belatedly attributing the grotesque body to a mother or stepmother; male enchanters are responsible for the serpent form in Le Bel Inconnu.

Far from experiencing shame or displeasure at her foulness, Chaucer's old wife deploys it, "smylyng everemo," to explore the limits of masculine desire [III 1086]. The knight's miserable conviction that "it wol nat been amended nevere mo" (III 1099) contrasts with the old wife's superior control both in her masterly verbal demonstration that nothing is amiss and in her physical self-transformation. The body that answers to the knight's worldly desire is a second case of the superlative spectacle she offers to his gaze. In her ugly form, "a fouler wight ther may no man devyse"; after transforming herself, she presents herself theatrically in a second visual spectacle: "Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is" [III 999, 1249]. This emphasis on the visual seems to provide reliable information—the knight "saugh verraily al this" and is joyful (III 1250-52)—but the very representation of two female bodies denies the complete veracity of either and contributes to constituting both as masquerades of womanliness, exaggerated facades reflecting back to the knight his own standards of repulsion and desire.

The old wife's playful mimicry of ugliness and beauty opens the question of whether her words might partake of her masquerade.

35 Weddynge of Sir Gawen, I. 241; Gower, Confessio Amantis, bk. 1, l. 1539; Marriage of Sir Gawaine, 240; Renaut de Beaujeu, Le Bel Inconnu, ll. 3181-3211 ("Li diables m'a encantà, / Que j'ai baissé otre mon grc," I. 3209-10).

36 The tale of Florent, Weddynge of Sir Gawen, Marriage of Sir Gawaine, and Melusine attribute the transformation to a mother or stepmother; male enchanters are responsible for the serpent form in Le Bel Inconnu.

37 English Melusine, 597, cf. the French Melusine, 242: "du nombril en aval estoit en forme de la queue d'un serpent, aussi grosse comme une tonne ou on met haret, et longue durement, et deboutit de sa coue l'eau tellement qu'elle la faisait saillir jusques a la voule de la chambre."
The superlative submission of “dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest” suits masquerading beauty just as the earlier reproach “ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit” matches the aggressiveness of the ugly body (III 1248, 1095). Dame Ragnell in her ugly form similarly charges Gawain to “shewe me your cortesey in bed” and switches her attitude with her body in the first words out of her pretty new mouth: “She sayd, ‘What is youre wyll?’” (630, 643). Changes so extreme, particularly the timing of Ragnell’s submissive words, which come before the testing question has even been put to Gawain, reinforce the possibility that these husbands may be winning access not to the lady’s true identity but to a performance playfully calibrated to their “worldly appetit.”

Where then is identity in masquerade? To the extent that the shapeshifter establishes a detachment from her two superlative bodies, acting out their parts to win her chosen man, she experiences the double alienation from and social configuration of the body that we have seen in the process of masculine self-definition. Melusine illustrates this experience after Raymondin’s betrayal, lamenting that “al they that myght come into my presence had grete Joye to behold me / and fro this tyme foorth they shal dysdayne me &. be ferefull of myn abhomynable figure.”

She speaks of herself both from without, as the object of responses from those who see her, and from within as a “me” who exists beyond and beside the two bodies she inhabits. She experiences herself independently of her public effects, but she remains socially identified by those effects. The Wife of Bath expresses a similar sense of a self that persists unchanged in her young and her old body, although age changes her status with men:

Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.
But age, alas, that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
Lat go. Farewell The devel go therwith!
The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle,-
The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle. (Ill 472-78)

Masquerade accomplishes the severing of identity from body not by denying the centrality of appearance in defining womanliness, but by working within that connection. Butler describes “subversive repetition” in similar terms: “there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat” (148). Masquerade is a choice within limitations so powerful that it is at least equally interpretable in misogynist terms: the grotesque woman reactivates clerical antifeminist tropes; the beautifully submissive woman closes the potential for agency that shape-shifting figured, if indeed it did not simply figure woman’s contradictoriness. The

38 Melusine, 319; the passage in the French Melusine is “ceulx qui me souloient faire grant joye quans ilz me voient, se defuissent de moy, et auront pasor et grant hidour de moy quans ilz me verront” (159).
constraints under which masquerading operates are similar to those under which Dorigen and the falcon quote courtship's discourse against the grain, attempting to resist its gendered configurations. Their implications countermanded, their assertions ostensibly but playful, masquerading and mimicry nonetheless provide female characters with a language in which to reconsider their place in courtship and the identity courtship assigns them in romance.

CHAPTER III • Gender and Social Hierarchy

Gender difference is persistently hierarchical. We have seen that in romance masculinity is the “fully human” experience that femininity helps to define, that Emelye is both her lovers’ exalted object of devotion and Theseus’s object of exchange, and that the Squire’s Tale imagines women to be more true and gentle than men by reversing the topos that they are less so. The Franklin suggests reciprocity in Dorigen and Arveragus’s marriage by imagining it to combine two relations of unequal power:

Heere may men seen, an humble, wys accord;
Thys hath she take, hir servant and hir lord—
Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
Thanne was he bothe in lordship and servage.
Servage? Nay, but in lordshipe above,
Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love.... [V 791-96]

The chiasmus knitting together lordship and servitude through these lines may strive toward an idea of equivalence between Dorigen and Arveragus, but that idea, if it is even latent, finds expression only by juxtaposing two conditions in which male and female have reversed hierarchical relations. Here as elsewhere in romance, gender is a system of difference that entails inequivalence.

This chapter looks at how gender inequity can intersect with, repeat, and clarify inequities of social rank and authority that might seem independent of gender. The social hierarchy, as conceived in estates literature, frames and motivates tale-telling from the General Prologue onward. Certain ideological contiguities between estates literature and romance invite in this chapter more consideration than in other chapters of Chaucer’s diversely positioned narrators in relation to their tales. The Franklin’s rela-