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Shakespeare adapting Chaucer: “Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne”

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SHAKESPEARE ADAPTING CHAUCER: “MYN AUCTOUR
SHAL I FOLWEN, IF I KONNE”

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ABSTRACT

**Shakespeare Adapting Chaucer: “Myn auctour
shal I folwen, if I konne”**

by

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Geoffrey Chaucer’s distinctively English appropriations of such genres as dream vision, fabliau and Breton *lai*, as well as his liberal citation of authorities in *Troilus and Criseyde*, offered early modern English poets the license to mingle sources and authorities within their work, rather than bend their writing to fit the format. Few authors took such productive advantage of Chaucerian permissiveness as William Shakespeare, whose narrative poems defer to Chaucer’s distinctively English authority with a regularity comparable to his uses of Homer, Ovid, Virgil and Plutarch. This free-associative approach to *auctoritee*, the whetstone of the poet-playwright’s dramatic imagination, suggests that he favored his literary memory over the open book in his approach to adaptation.

Key sources for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* have been well elucidated, but Shakespeare’s memory of Chaucer runs deeper. We can trace threads of sexual self-awareness from The Wife of Bath’s Prologue through Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, then back through Dame Alisoun’s tale where they emerge to embroider *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare externalizes inner states, most profoundly those of Venus and Hermia, provoking other characters to look within. Complimenting this aesthetics of the inside-out, derived from the Wife of Bath, Shakespeare’s characterization of Bottom

echoes Chaucer's clueless Sir Thopas in the doggerel verses and drama *interruptus* of his "Pyramus and Thisbe."

With *The Rape of Lucrece*, a prerequisite for his mastery of metatheatrical forms, Shakespeare established Lucrece as Chaucerian interpreter and active spectator. The poet-playwright's intertextual approach transcends mere character centrality or point of view—Lucrece is a master observer and contextualizer, viewing "Troy's painted woes" (1492) selectively, in emotional rather than narrative order, fitting what she sees to how she feels, much as the adapting poet shapes source material. The "painter" to whom she frequently refers, if he does not precisely correspond to Chaucer, certainly exemplifies the aesthetic and emotional intersections of artist, work and audience that formed Shakespeare's sense of the Chaucerian.

Had Shakespeare been merely interested in a formal skeleton on which to hang his *Troilus and Cressida*, William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, possibly in conjunction with John Lydgate's *Troy Book*, would have been an apt framework. Their references to Troilus as a noted warrior present sufficient foundation for Shakespeare's dilatory gifts, if only the young knight's abortive romance with Criseyde—"Englissed" and fully defined by Chaucer—were not central to the poet-playwright's explorations of love, duty and honor. With these disjunctions of narrative authority and poetic agenda in mind, Shakespeare engaged his memory of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which renders the Trojan War insignificant to the poet's purpose and yet indivisible from his narrative, establishing a reflexive relationship between works separated by two centuries.

The contradictions of style and content in *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* derive in part from Chaucer's (and John Gower's) readings of the antique world, filtered

through Shakespeare's conception of medieval literary *auctoritee*. Further difficulties stem from uneasy, however well-intended, collaborations. Shakespeare's need to repurpose the well-worn theatrical tropes and static modes of interpretation relied upon by many early modern playwrights, including George Wilkins and John Fletcher, characterizes his dramatic approach from his earliest work. His collaborative contributions reveal their singularity by assimilating narrative verisimilitude and poetic authority into character. More than theatrical pomp or a winking familiarity with audience expectations, Shakespeare sought emotional resonance—to rouse human feeling rather than manufacture it. The willingness and facility to serve both source and audience while negotiating between them may be the unquantifiable something that makes Shakespeare “Shakespeare” and Chaucer “Chaucer.”

Mediating generic commonplaces with Chaucerian poetics, Shakespeare revealed a bottomless comprehension of literary forms and their evocative potential. Developing these approaches and devices throughout his career, regardless of dramatic genre and parallel to his Ovidian proclivities, the poet-playwright honed his profound sensibility on dialogues with the past.

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PROLOGUE

“MYN AUCTOUR SHAL I FOLWEN,
IF I KONNE”

Though Shakespeare’s choice of Chaucer as a literary father appears an obvious one, even the broadest comparative study of the two authors presents formidable challenges. Shakespeare’s usage of Chaucerian language is rare at best, while the playwright’s direct references to and appropriations of Chaucer’s text, even in direct-source adaptations, suggest that Shakespeare adapted his memory of Chaucer rather than consulting readily available contemporary editions. *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* with John Fletcher reveal altogether different creative approaches and techniques of adaptation than his work with Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, Sir Thomas North’s translations of Plutarch, or Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. I suggest that this is primarily due to Shakespeare’s poetic, rather than simply narrative, debt to his Chaucerian sources, evidenced most significantly in his poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Shakespeare regards the authority of many narrative sources with indifference, frequently borrowing pure plot and collections of names rather than *gravitas* or thematic resonance. Of great infrequency in Shakespeare’s dramatic work prior to 1600 are his responses—or hints thereof—to the work he is adapting. For these reasons, ambiguities of translations and editions consulted prevail. Had the playwright, demonstrating an ear for *sententiae* and modes of Classical reference since his earliest works, regarded Matteo Bandello or Robert Greene as narrative authorities whose authorship rather than their tales was worth preserving, he would likely have staged direct-source adaptations of

Novelle 22 and *Pandosto* instead of folding their plots into the more sophisticated pastiches of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, respectively. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's first great genre successes aside from the Histories, while not yet granting Chaucer provenance as authoritative English poet, wove their elaborate narrative and stylistic filaments into Chaucerian cloth.

In the narrative poems, however, Shakespeare defers to Chaucer's distinctively English authority with a regularity comparable to his uses of Homer, Ovid, Virgil and Plutarch. Clearly recognizing this new ground for what it was, the playwright understood that he was turning a field made fertile by a few men nearly two centuries before he picked up a quill. His comprehension of Classical languages notwithstanding, Shakespeare's status as a native speaker of English would preclude creative immersion, as poetry, in the Latin poetry he read in grammar school. Though he absorbed the scope and detail of Virgilian and Ovidian narratives alike, Shakespeare made his strongest poetic identifications with Chaucer and Gower—whom he would not have read at school—writers who navigated between the English and Latin traditions with amazing facility. But unlike Gower, who regarded languages as modes of authority and set them in dialogue with each other throughout his career, Chaucer ventured through the languages in which a medieval poet was expected to compose toward the poetic voice within. As if in response to the question, "How can a poet emote in a language he cannot feel in?" Chaucer assimilated lessons learned from his compositions in French and translations of French (*Roman de la Rose*) and Latin (Boethius) works into his career as an English poet. In a similar frame of mind, Shakespeare translated the substance of

Plautus, Plutarch and Seneca into formative training, “Englishing” classical comedy and tragedy.

The last three decades of scholarship demonstrate a reciprocal urge to connect Shakespeare with the English literary past and establish Chaucer’s presence within that tradition. The proliferation of Chaucer adaptations and Chaucerian material from the late sixteenth through late seventeenth centuries appears to reach further into this collective consciousness than John Dryden’s well-known blazon suggests.¹ From Spenser forward, we find Chaucer’s authority expanding for the English narrative poet to Homeric as well as Ovidian degrees. Clare R. Kinney observes:

[Francis] Beaumont’s rather exaggerated encomium [in Thomas Speght’s 1598 and 1602 editions of Chaucer]. . . which locates Chaucerian sententiousness within a tradition stretching back to ancient Greece, reinforces Speght’s own hint that in simultaneously restoring the poet “to his owne Antiquitie” and in providing the apparatus that will make his work fully comprehensible to contemporary readers, he is granting Chaucer the status and authority of a Greek or Latin poet. (68)

That such transcendent poets as Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare equated Chaucer with Ovid need hardly be mentioned, and yet the embrace of Chaucer by more mundane poets and dramatists suggests the phenomenon—at least at its outset—was more idolatry than influence. As Seth Lerer assesses the situation:

[John] Lydgate, [Thomas] Hoccleve, and Stephen Hawes seem to have

1. “In the first place, as he is the Father of English Poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil: He is a perpetual Fountain of good Sense; learn’d in all Sciences; and, therefore speaks properly on all Subjects: As he knew what to say, so he knew also when to leave off; a Continenence which is practic’d by few Writers, and scarcely by any of the Ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace. One of our late, great poets is sunk in his Reputation, because he cou’d never forgive any Conceit which came in his way; but swept like a Drag-net, great and small . . . Chaucer follow’d Nature every where, but was never so bold to go beyond her . . .” (qtd. in Spurgeon, 1.276).

spent most of their time rewriting Chaucer's exhortations to his kings and the final stanzas of the *Troilus*. In fact, so much of the lyric poetry that fills the manuscript anthologies of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is full of pleas for 'correccioun' and versions of the 'Go litel bok' phrase, that we might well view such verse as private versions of the public Chaucer perpetrated by later imitators. (17)

Though not an immediate influence on Shakespeare's reading or poetic consciousness, Lydgate's *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes* held great appeal for another early modern Chaucerian, Edmund Spenser (Edwards 443). Only slightly in Spenser's Chaucer-channeling shadow, Shakespeare built his narrative voices and his poetics upon Chaucerian foundations while eschewing the pervasive archaism and *imitatio* Spenser mastered in *The Shepheardes Calendar* and *The Faerie Queene*. It hardly seems a coincidence, then, that the playwright's first major engagements of Chaucerian *matere*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, follow the licensing for publication of *The Rape of Lucrece* almost immediately.² Few Shakespeare-Chaucer connections—from overt influence to poetic confluence—are more immediately compelling than those between *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, which extend far beyond Shakespeare's employment of rhyme-royal to present the serious Classical matter promised in the dedication to *Venus and Adonis*.

To declare the obvious, we cannot compare Shakespeare with Chaucer as a dramatist. But we can compare them as poets and use that comparison to connect them even more deeply as dramatic poets. I suggest this not in the sense of staging Chaucer but in the sense that Chaucer, in setting the stage for his storytellers and dreamers, often

2. *Richard II*, with its many de casibus reflections of The Monk's Tale, is also nestled firmly in this period.

prefigures early modern staging and narrative techniques. Imagine, if you will, how a Shakespearean adaptation of Chaucerian *ekphrasis* (such as “the destruccion/Of Troye” in *The House of Fame* at 1.151-2) might *sound*, and the dilatory flights of *The Rape of Lucrece* present themselves to the view regardless of stanza form or metrics.

Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* can be read as an investigation of classical techniques; his objective, if not directly to discover their reasons for being, was to comprehend their appeal to his late medieval forebears and continuing ubiquity among his contemporaries. As Chaucer employed poetic artifice to make a believable world, his literary descendant manipulated stage artifice to ground the most poetic flights in a hyper-reality no less artificial or constructed. For Shakespeare, the commercial stage became a limitless space for poetry and modes of rhetorical delivery.

The central concern, and central challenge, of this study is that Shakespeare’s memory of Chaucer runs much deeper than texts consulted. We can trace threads of sexual self-awareness from *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue* through Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, then back through *Dame Alisoun’s* tale, from which they emerge to embroider *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Further, Shakespeare’s characterization of Bottom echoes Sir Thopas in many particulars, invoking Chaucer’s clueless knight errant in the doggerel verses and drama *interruptus* of his “Pyramus and Thisbe.” With such integrations of quest-romance commonplace and the specifics of Chaucerian dream vision, Shakespeare reveals a bottomless comprehension of these forms and their evocative potential; that he developed these devices throughout his career, regardless of dramatic genre and parallel to his Ovidian proclivities, indicates a sensibility honed upon dialogues with the past.

Geoffrey Bullough included Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* as a "Probable Source" for Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, and yet noted little more of the connection than Chaucer's position in the chain of evidence. Since a number of Chaucer's passages seem translations of Ovid rather than Chaucerian spins on the *Lucrece* narrative, Chaucer's "legendary," possibly the only English *Lucrece* extant for Shakespeare, represents a source for *The Rape of Lucrece* nearly as authoritative as the *Fasti* and Willam Painter's translation of Livy's *Historia* in his *Palace of Pleasure*. As in his *Troilus*, Chaucer introduces multiple sources as a nod to posterity and proceeds to rely upon one of them. While Chaucer's Lollius tottered on the threshold of Trojan mytho-historical authority, Ovid remained for Shakespeare and his contemporaries as he had been for Chaucer—the ultimate authority on Roman custom. If the *Fasti* languishes as the single unfinished work in the long shadow of Ovid's *oeuvre*, it seems also to predict *The Legend of Good Women*'s willful inconclusiveness.

So focused was Chaucer on bringing the worthy lovers Troilus and Criseyde together and exploring their suffering states of mind that the Trojan War receded almost irretrievably into the background. Aligning Troilus's downfall with the spiritual fall of Troy as the *Iliad* associated Hector's death with its physical integrity, the poet alienates the singular "known" at his narrative's foundation, remystifying Ilium for a courtly audience overfamiliar with its finer points. Chaucer's emphasis on the lovers' courtship and consummation remains the most enduring contribution to the vast body of Trojan mytho-history created before his time or since. Given Shakespeare's habitual merging of sources and narratives, he can hardly have wondered whether juxtaposing a clandestine love affair with the most legendary conflict of the ancient world—a conflict intimately

connected with the founding of Rome and Britain—had the potential to transcend narrative reciprocity with its source material. Subtly concretizing Troilus’s narcissistic infatuation, Shakespeare develops his portrait of Cressida by diminishing her (and Chaucer’s outward characterization) in the eyes of her beholders but crucially informs her self-expression (and our reading) with the esteem of Chaucer’s narrator.

Combining Chaucer with Caxton and Lydgate, but disregarding their respective styles and forms as often as he embraces them, Shakespeare accepted as a totality the late medieval view of Classical narratives and themes. This left him free, in a play Jill Mann describes as “constructed around a theme rather than around characters” (109), to retool narrative and theme for a Troy already crumbling at the outset, suggesting in his endgame views of romance and heroism more cynical than Chaucer’s. “To the perhaps large extent Shakespeare is turning to contemporary satire and to observations from his own experience,” observes David Bevington with acknowledgements to Ann Thompson’s *Shakespeare’s Chaucer: A study in literary origins*, “he seems to be doing so as a meaningfully disillusioning way of rewriting Chaucer” (385). But Shakespeare accomplishes still more with these variations on Chaucer’s narrative strategy. For each factual or legendary detail he derives from Caxton or Lydgate, he devises a parallel to Chaucer’s Troy-bound romance narrative among the Greeks.

The genre-blending of *Troilus and Cressida*, from the Prologue’s *Henry V*-like presentation of epic history in microcosm to the interventions of comedic romance, romantic satire, tragic romance and neoclassical tragedy, suggests that Shakespeare discovered in Chaucer a kaleidoscopic refraction of the medieval world and the English literary past. Rooted in the histories, refashioned as a touchstone of human interaction in

the comedies, revisited as setting and tone in the tragedies, Shakespeare engaged his “memory” of Chaucer most directly in the romances. Inspired perhaps by Chaucerian juxtapositions of poet-narrators and their tales, Shakespeare explored the potential of generic multiplication and recombination most successfully in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*, wherein narrator figures appear for narrative expediency (“Time”) or effect.³ In collaboration with other playwrights on “medieval” material, however—most notably *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, their narrators either ubiquitous or conspicuously absent—Shakespeare found his lens on the past fragmented or blurred.

In the interest of smooth transitions between Middle English, early modern English, and twentieth-century English, all references to Chaucer’s works are from *The Riverside Chaucer*. The choice of a modern edition naturally raises the question of which edition of Chaucer’s works Shakespeare might have cut his reader’s teeth upon. The definitive (if biographically questionable) early modern edition, Thomas Speght’s of 1598, arrives too late to account for the profound Chaucerian presence in the narrative poems, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and elsewhere. That said, it seems unlikely that Shakespeare’s perception of Chaucer’s biography or his art, affixed firmly in his author-consciousness since his earliest readings in English, would have been shaken by even the most radical revisionism. Speght’s doubts regarding the thoroughness of his editorial project in the first edition (definitively remedied in the second edition of 1602) would suggest to any student of Chaucer that Speght was entrusting the completion of this task

3. In its conflation of character and poet’s voices, Prospero’s Epilogue in Chaucerian octosyllabic couplets converts an early modern commonplace to a leading character’s closing argument, a possible echo of “Chaucer’s Retraction,” granting all credit for Prospero’s success to the audience’s—rather than Christ’s—charity and sound judgment.

to his readers.⁴ The most likely candidate appears to be John Stow's 1561 edition, based primarily on William Thynne's Henry VIII-commissioned collections of 1532/42. All printings of this edition, it should be noted, contained Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* as a continuation of *Troilus and Criseyde*. It could certainly be argued that the authentic Chaucer texts Shakespeare might have read seem less significant to his construction of the poet's authority than the several spurious or misattributed texts—from the Complaynt D'Amours to the "B" fragment of *The Romaunt of the Rose*—he might have recognized as Chaucerian. Since these texts, primarily lyrics and translations "included in collected editions of Chaucer's works until the publication of Skeat's Oxford Chaucer (1894) and the Globe Chaucer (1898)" (Benson xxvi), have no immediate bearing on the works discussed below, I have eschewed their inclusion in favor of probable narrative sources and formative poetic influences.

4. This is an editorial implication unlikely to be lost on Shakespeare, whose interest in interrelationships of textual authority and readerly imagination, objectivity and subjectivity, comprehension and interpretation, informs his own diverse sententiae: "And all this dumb play had his acts made plain / With tears which chorus-like her eyes did rain" (*Ven.* 359-60); "Such sweet observance in this work was had / That one might see those far-off eyes look sad" (*Luc.* 1385-6), and; "The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing. / Our sport shall be to take what they mistake" (*MND* 5.1.89-90).

CHAPTER 1

THE CHAUCERIAN MUSE: THE WIFE OF BATH, *VENUS AND ADONIS*

AND *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

In a literary tradition still gestating, seemingly locked in a post-Chaucer stasis, options for poets were few: recapitulate, imitate, translate or transform. Though Chaucer progressed through these stages as limitations became possibilities, even his more astute followers like Lydgate, Caxton and Henryson tended to bog down in imitation. While testaments to early esteem for Chaucer's poetic legacy, these displays of more adoration for than insight into the poet and his poetics implicate Chaucer's early readership in mimetic ignorance. The emphasis on *auctoritee*, carried through the medieval tradition from the Classical, assured in many cases that no poet's work was ever truly his own. Chaucer's efforts to break loose from that cycle, from his distinctively English adaptations of such continental genres as the dream vision, fabliau and Breton *lai* to his liberal citation of authorities in *Troilus and Criseyde*, offered young English poets the license to mingle sources and authorities within their work, rather than bending their writing to fit the format. Few authors took such productive advantage of Chaucerian permissiveness as William Shakespeare, and the poet-playwright—to borrow Patrick Cheney's apt coinage (10)—rarely did so as fluidly as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁵

If we accept even half of the source materials proposed for *Dream*—from Apuleius'

5. Cheney addresses a crucial critical need to view Shakespeare simultaneously as artist and artisan regardless of the mode he is working in. This allows us to study the artist intact rather than slicing him up into genre-specific morsels. Early modern verse dramatists were not required to be great poets in order to compose for the stage. Many serious early modern poets—Ben Jonson is a notable exception—considered writing for the public stages a fit occupation for neither themselves nor their contemporaries. For Sidney and Spenser, the hybrid term “poet-playwright” would have seemed an oxymoron. Even if we discount the Sonnets and narrative poems, Shakespeare's dramatic work finds an intriguing reciprocity between writing for patronage and writing for a paycheck. To create himself a poet of the public stage (or at least to follow Christopher Marlowe's bold example successfully), Shakespeare positioned himself at the fulcrum of art and commerce, another relationship embodied in Cheney's distinction.

Golden Ass to Anthony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber*, Ovid to Seneca, Chaucer to Spenser—we create such a pastiche that the work itself loses something of its Shakespearean authority. Perhaps the only way these eclectic, time- and authority-warping sources might be reconciled with Shakespeare's maturing sensibilities is to combine them gently in Harold F. Brooks' "supersaturated solution" (Arden 2, lviii). This formulation for Shakespeare's free-associative mind functions as more than a rationalization of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* eclecticism, eliminating distinctions between the poet-playwright's output and the material he absorbed into his author-consciousness. What we tend to see as adaptive lenses or windows—terms notable for situating transparent and solid barriers between source and adaptation—were for Shakespeare the most permeable of boundaries. Writing on Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*, Theresa M. Krier charts a fascinating travelogue of source and influence we might also associate with Shakespeare's syncretic, poetic imagination:

. . .the dreamer's itinerary charts the poet's journey through several genres and several vernaculars, all closer to Chaucer's own time than the ancient writers and thinkers he has met . . . the poetic and philosophical works of his predecessors, carried across the centuries and across western Europe into fourteenth-century England. Hence the Macrobian portion of the dream, gathering up several texts from Greek and Latin antiquity, is followed by a section notably indebted to Dante and Boccaccio, who not only wrote in their vernacular but, as Italians, formed a bridge between ancient Latinity and medieval Romance tongues; then by a section indebted to . . . the *Roman de la Rose* and Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae*. Dante, Alan, and the others together form a bridge of *translatio* over which the poet-dreamer passes in his peripatetic movement toward his fusions of genres. (171-2)

Far from stacking materials he hoped to incorporate next to his writing desk as he

surely did when composing the Histories and most likely did with the narrative poems, Shakespeare may well have begun his transition to encyclopedic self-reliance with *Dream*. Certainly this approach would yield a smoother blend of source materials, determined more by the poet's flexible memory than his awe of those sources or expectations of their usefulness, a point especially germane where Ovid and Chaucer enter the dialogue. As Scipio Africanus informs Chaucer's dreamer: "And if thou haddest connyng for t'endite, / I shal the shewe mater of to write" (*PF* 167-8).

But a question, illuminating though it might be, beclouds this solution of myth, philosophy, poetry and literary history: Would any poet, regardless of his imaginative faculties and given the freewheeling, fantastical tone of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, require more than one inspiration and three or more narrative sources to give Bottom, who so manifestly embodies human ass-headedness, an ass's head? Nonetheless, compelling arguments have been made for so many major and incidental components of Shakespeare's signature fantasia that a reasonably inclusive explanation of the play's eclecticism would apply the strange and fantastic logic of the subconscious. As Kathryn Lynch has indicated, we need look no further for a fruitful mode in which to consider the vicissitudes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than the Chaucerian dream vision ("Baring Bottom," 103). With Chaucer's *House of Fame* and *The Book of the Duchess* as his models, we might well imagine Shakespeare free-associating source materials in a conscious attempt to create the instability of a dream, particularly the dreamer's transition from reading to dreaming state.

The connections between Chaucer and Shakespeare are rarely so clear or manifest as those among the *Legend of Good Women*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Romeo and Juliet*,

but on the page these relationships are primarily narrative. It seems perversely appropriate that Shakespeare developed the Chaucerian echoes of his dream-vision play from Chaucer's most literal-minded storytellers: the Knight, of whom critical mention has been made consistently for over a century; the Merchant, included by Bullough and Brooks in this same chain of evidence; Chaucer the Pilgrim, whose rejected Tale of Sir Thopas Shakespeare adopted, informally rechristening it "Bottom's Dream;" and Alisoun, the Wife of Bath. This latter perhaps begs a bit more explaining than the others, beginning with Dame Alisoun's connection to Shakespeare's Venus.

For Chaucer, Venus lost her physical agency as a consequence of her affair with Mars. In other words, her transformation from necessary divinity to allegorical figure was assured when her divinity was compromised. The late medieval poet never makes this explicit in his dealings with the goddess, but his acceptance of a purely allegorical Venus prefigures both Palamon's perception of her as mercenary abstraction in the Knight's Tale and as a mere line item in a vast catalog of Love's aspects in *The Parliament of Fowls*.⁶ But even deprived of her former mobility and exiled to permanent temple installations, the most invoked divinity this side of Death needs representation. It is pertinent to note that one child of that liaison, Cupid, becomes Venus' physical proxy. Culminating for Chaucer as the dreamer's accuser in the *Legend of Good Women*, the disembodied goddess has deferred even the act of penance to her tyrannical progeny, a petulant man-child seriously lacking interpretive faculties and, by all appearance, incapable of dreaming. Chaucer's dream visions—or in the cases of The Wife of Bath's

6. Palamon begs and achieves Venus's favor by pledging "For though so be that Mars is god of armes, / Youre vertu is so greet in hevne above / That if yow list, I shal wel have my love. / Thy temple wol I worshipe everemo, / And on thyn auter, where I ride or go, / I wol doon sacrifice and fires beete" (KT 1.2248-53). In *Parliament*, Chaucer invokes Cytherea as his muse in the transition from Scipio to the dream itself but relegates her to a throne inside the temple during the birds' raucous debate. She retains her symbolic value, but Chaucer invests the force of Venus's will in the female eagle.

Tale and Sir Thopas, dream stories—herald not merely enlightenment but rebirth for the dreamer who awakens at the moment of comprehending them.

Shakespeare imagines a Venus beset by the consequences of her controversial affair with Mars, derived from the *Iliad* by way of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Rather than sentencing the divine adultress to convent or art gallery, however, the early modern poet embraces her degradation from Venus Ourania to the lower aspects of Venus. Mediated by Chaucer's Dame Alisoun, a number of earthier Venuses from Morgan le Fay to Spenser's Argante suggest philosophical amputations of *cupiditas* and *caritas* from the goddess who once embodied them both. Sending the former arm to the garden and the latter to the temple, Chaucer's alternate conception of Venus as allegorical point of reference and prayer in *The Knight's Tale* and Spenser's like-minded *Garden of Adonis* and *Temple of Venus* are both reflexive of the goddess' abode in the *Parliament of Fowls*. Though these temples and gardens display her many aspects and endless bounty, Venus had become pure allegory, stripped of materiality and direct physical influence over her "knights." Shakespeare's intricate series of references and echoes positions his Venus as an attempt to reconcile Ovid, Chaucer and perhaps even Spenser in his reader's mind. Streamlining the influence of these auspicious predecessors with his erotic agenda, the early modern poet reincorporates an intangible goddess of love into a body—of words and of flesh—that not only accommodates her many aspects but reimagines them as productions of a manifestly desiring body guided by a profoundly human soul. With no Latin or English precedents for a loquacious, overtly self-aware love-goddess who thrives upon blush-inducing confession and sententious self-justification, Shakespeare recalled

Chaucer's Wife of Bath, as inherently human as she is larger-than-life.⁷

Dame Alisoun comprehends life as a series of conflicts between theory and practice, deftly navigating the twists and turns of masculine reason through force of will. As an orator she creates several layers of tension—between her perception of events and that of her husbands, between scriptural precedent and secular routine, between written truth and physical memory, between who she knows herself to be and what she represents to individual pilgrims. The Wife of Bath is thematic precursor and direct inspiration of Shakespeare's characterization of Venus, though the epyllion's narrative and Venus' attentions are by their nature more narrowly focused. When we consider that *Venus* and *Lucrece* fill the gap between Shakespeare's formative works and first unqualified successes in comedy and tragedy—namely *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, each informed to significant degrees by Chaucerian *matere*—Shakespeare's interest in Chaucer becomes much more than the flirtation implied by critics who would give lesser storytellers and cataloguers the lead among Shakespeare's sources. To decode the intertwinings of Chaucer and Shakespeare, phenomena that often grow elusive the closer the inspection, the narrative poems may well be the key.

There is more to this correspondence than the marks of Venus and Mars, by which the Wife of Bath claims her heritage. Carolyn Dinshaw explains that the Wife of Bath appropriates the language and tenor of male fantasy in order to promote herself as that fantasy (116-7). This effect is not lost on Shakespeare, whose every poetic dilation prior to Adonis' speech on being too young to love is dedicated to this principle, his Venus as

7. This transition, though Shakespeare may not have intended the correlation, also suggests the story of Psyche, the mortal woman whose pulchritude distracted men from Venus's altars. As told by Apuleius, the goddess dispatched Cupid to intervene. The love god mishandled his arrows and fell for his mother's nemesis himself.

earthily sensual as Chaucer's Wife. In fact, we can readily read the Wife of Bath's Tale as a Chaucerian negotiation of Venus issues, from its confession-as-seduction (abetted tonally more by the proximity of her Prologue than the content of the Tale) to its begged questions presented as *sententiae* because "Al this sentence me lyketh every deel" (WBP 3.162). A central inference of Dinshaw's discussion, that the knight-rapist's quest is less about discovering *what* women desire than comprehending the fact that they *do* desire (127), is the soil in which Shakespeare grows his Venus's garden. Until she became a marble abstraction cold to the palmer's touch, the goddess of love's conundrum was being even more susceptible to passion and its fallout than her followers. With Dame Alisoun never far from his mind, Shakespeare presents Venus as a desiring body whose every pang is manifest, rather than the cool, courtly arbitrator of her subjects' desire:

...impatience chokes her pleading tongue
And swelling passion doth provoke a pause;
Red cheeks and fiery eyes blaze forth her wrong;
Being judge in love, she cannot right her cause.
And now she weeps, and now she fain would speak,
And now her sobs do her intendments break. (*Ven.* 217-22)

Here and elsewhere, the early modern poet re-personifies and personalizes the "goddess of love" abstraction in terms traditionally denied the objects of masculine desire. Shakespeare's focus, as so often in Chaucer, is to externalize inner states that by their nature provoke other characters to look within. Then he further transcends expectation by emphasizing the Scylla and Charybdis of Venus's conflict. Should she punish Adonis for his offense to Love or use him according to her very human desire? Chaucer expressed Alisoun's similar confusion of violence and appetite at the climax of the Wife of Bath's Prologue:

And whan he saugh how stille that I lay,
He was agast and wolde han fled his way,
Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde,
'O! hastow slayn me, false theef?' I seyde,
'And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.' (WBP 3.797-802)

Resituating the color in Venus cheeks and animating her limbs would have been sufficient to transcend the icy deliberation of the figure presented by Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer, but Shakespeare goes further. Not only does blood race through her veins, she perspires in response to the heat of the sun and the fires within. With this in view, the poetic tendency to take the woman out of Venus seems a reaction against her fallen status, while Shakespeare's trajectory from passionate if misplaced devotion to abjection and remove at the poem's close poses her classical chilliness as an irrevocable response to Adonis's death.

Shakespeare conspicuously restores flesh to Venus's image, taking a strong cue from the Wife of Bath, who presents herself as a fleshly icon in the making. Taking license from her birthmark "the prente of Seinte Venus seel" (WBP 3.604), she is, by her admission already a legend, or at least parts of her are, to her five husbands. Alisoun balances her "Venerien" temperament with a "Marcien" heart, suggesting that she is the very issue of Venus's fall from grace, contrasted by her later astrological reference to the "ful contrarius" "children of Mercurie and Venus" of which her latest husband Jankyn is one (WBP 3.698; 697). With her account of Mars, who once hung his battle gear over her altars and "for my sake hath learned to sport and dance" (*Ven.* 103, 105), Venus follows Dame Alisoun in applying the rhetoric of confession as seduction, highlighting Jankyn's and Adonis' resistance to aggressive older women. Their mutual fondness for

describing their bottomless capacities for love, extending from the Wife's rhetorical strategy to Venus's very nature, depends upon intimate truths such auditors as The Prioress, The Monk, and even Adonis would prefer they kept hidden.

The Pardoner's strong identification with the Wife's confession—who understands her chosen genre more than he?—leads to the straight-man quality of his interjection, clearly demonstrating the kind of audience participation his own livelihood demands. Only Dame Alisoun, with her mark of Venus and her *sentence*, could get a heteronormative rise out of Chaucer's eunuch, and quite on cue at that:

Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;
“Now, dame,” quod he, “by God and by Seinte John!
Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.
I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!” (WBP 3.163-6)

Venus's rhetorical strategy, with its emphases on her personal experience and irresistibility, titillates the reader but leaves her pretty auditor chafing against his own nature. As if sensing this friction, as the Pardoner does, between spoken word and perceived meaning, Nature provides an illustrative example somewhere between pantomime and audio-visual aid. Shakespeare presents the horse episode as an organic response to Venus's Mars confession, but it is not a product of her will. Though her aspects of Proserpina grow increasingly apparent the more Adonis resists her charms, Venus does not control the stuff of the garden she made possible. She is the facilitator of coupling here, as she is in Chaucer's *Parliament*, but wields little influence beyond her authoritative presence.

Adonis's palfrey indulges his basest instincts and loses all control at first sight, looking forward to Shakespeare's handling of this essential effect through the middle acts

of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When the “breeding jennet, lusty, young and proud,/Adonis’ trampling courser doth espy” and “Breaketh his rein” (*Ven.* 260-1; 264), it is not a trick of the love goddess (though Venus was responsible, at 37-8, for hitching his bridle to a tree) but Nature’s corrective response to Adonis’ embrace of death, via the hunt, over what youthful male fantasy ought to be. So profound is Venus’s seductive skill that her pleas prick up ears not yet attuned to them, rendering Adonis’s traditional stonewalling all the more incongruous. This state of affairs precluded a faithful rendering of Ovid’s juvenile love interest and prefigured Shakespeare’s metamorphosis of child of incest to prepubescent love object. I disagree with the notion, put forth by Katharine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen in *Arden 3*, that Shakespeare willfully obscured the controversy of Adonis’ Ovidian origins in his adaptation, specifically his birth from Myrrha transformed to a tree (“Introduction,” 61-2). That the boy is so contrary to Nature seems more to emphasize than deny his liminal status as child of both unchecked human desire and a natural world free of human encroachment.

Also worth noting is Shakespeare’s growing encouragement of intertextual reading, perhaps expecting his most sophisticated readers to have Ovid, and even Chaucer, in mind while reading his *Venus*, even when he does not directly invoke them. The early modern poet envisions his “Rose-cheeked Adonis” (*Ven.* 3) on the cusp of adolescence—possessing the anatomical necessities for copulation with the love goddess but untainted by knowledge of their uses; in his Ovidian iteration, he is aware of their function but would rather hunt. In a meaningful, reflective coincidence, Adonis’s sexual awakening, tinged as it is with feminine coyness, is analogous to Alisoun’s at twelve years of age (WBP 3.4). While coming of age in Adonis’s case means realizing his true purpose is

death,⁸ young Alisoun's coming of age results in self-awareness, a development unusual for a female character in medieval literature and, one might argue, not a feature of English letters until the advent of Juliet and the heroines of Shakespeare's mature comedies. By contrast in Ovid, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, Pyramus and Thisbe know not themselves but only the other. Whether framed as fable, legendary, or "very tragical mirth," their lack of self-knowledge fuels the tale. The Wife of Bath's implicit understanding of self—as autonomous being and abstract concept—makes possible, at least in her own unassuming context, her greatest marital exploit:

And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,
He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
'But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,
For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'
And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught...

(WBP 3.577-82)

This double confession, which implicates her auditors in its own deception, reveals the most intimate terms of Dame Alisoun's seduction and the hard fact that its perfidy underlies "the wo that is in marriage" (WBP 3.3). She assigns the lie to her subconscious for reasons practical (it can be neither verified nor contradicted) and authoritative (dreams presented modes of truth otherwise inaccessible to mortal minds and opportunities for sententious glossating). Venus's swoon resembles in many respects the Wife of Bath's false dream—her successful attempt to repurpose Jankyn's casual interest as desire—and produces a similar effect with sympathy and guilt reimagined by the

8. *Venus and Adonis* presents death as the ultimate transformation. In Ovid, of course, Adonis' lifeblood becomes the anemone, plucked by Venus and nestled forever in her bosom. For Shakespeare, his literal death is the metamorphic agent of Venus from living goddess to impersonal icon.

beholder as overwhelming sensations of love. In terms of psychological depth, the Wife and Venus are incredibly self-referential, accessing spiritual minutiae with the deftness of Troilus or Hamlet. As Dame Alisoun exploits the tension between conscious and subconscious states, with the truest expression of emotion contained in the latter, Venus recasts her perennial argument in the aftermath of resurrection:

For on the grass she lies as she were slain,
Till his breath breatheth life in her again. (*Ven.* 473-4)

‘But now I lived, and life was death’s annoy;
But now I died, and death was lively joy.’ (497-8)

‘O, thou didst kill me: kill me once again!’ (499)

Seeing these lines, particularly the couplets, out of their *Venus* context produces strange echoes.⁹ Had Shakespeare not held the irreverence of Sir Thopas in mind when composing his Pyramus and Thisbe, the final scene of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* might have rung with similar lines. This would have aligned Peter Quince’s “tedious brief scene” (*MND* 5.1.56) with its narrative source in Chaucer’s *Legend*, even rendered Pyramus’s spontaneous resurrection to ease his audience’s mind more pathetic than comic, but afforded Theseus and Hippolyta much less opportunity for comment.

Adding depth and perhaps confusion to the Shakespearean confluence of Ovid and Chaucer, the Roman poet’s brief account of Venus and Mars in Book IV of *Metamorphoses* immediately follows his Pyramus and Thisbe, at the very least a semi-direct source for the rude mechanicals’ play by way of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good*

9. These effects are further abetted when Venus waxes pale and trembling with the boar-prophecy at 589-91, only to “swoon” Adonis into another sexual position by stanza’s end. Here, as with Friar Laurence’s “thing like death” (*Rom.* 4.1.74) and looking forward to the false deaths of Hero, Imogen and Hermione, Shakespeare alludes to Dame Alisoun’s dream. The intended result in each case is to turn detractors into mourners, correcting their apparently irreversible opinions of the recently “deceased.” Specific to the Wife of Bath and Shakespeare’s Venus, thwarted desire opens a parallel realm of dream and prophecy, only accessible through loss of consciousness.

Women. Further, both narratives are embedded in the “Daughters of Minyas” sequence, where the four girls remain indoors, spinning and storytelling, in full defiance of the mandatory Bacchanal outside. Closing this sequence, the tale of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, long acknowledged as a key source of the seduction in *Venus and Adonis*, also informs the haunting quality of Adonis’s metamorphosis and Venus’s transition to icy remoteness. Shakespeare’s preference for this section highlights his interest in youths of controversial origin, from Bacchus to Adonis to the little changeling boy, which would find its most profound expression in Viola/Cesario and Rosalind/Ganymede. Whether this section, perhaps representing Shakespeare’s formative experience of Ovid, was a selection in his Latin primer or only later to become a favorite excerpt in his personal copy of *Metamorphoses* is uncertain, but clearly Shakespeare considered these tales of a piece and found it either difficult or unnecessary to parse their details. The early modern poet, demonstrating an affinity for such concentrations of narrative, was preoccupied throughout his career with Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* and *The Parliament of Fowls* as authoritative nexuses of storytelling and poetics.

Shakespeare clearly understood the dramatic connections among pilgrims, prologues and tales so lucidly discussed by George Lyman Kittredge.¹⁰ Dame Alisoun’s ability to transform masculine attitudes within the domestic space, strongly supported by her awareness of this fact, advances the agenda of transformative enlightenment and also echoes through her Tale. When the loathly lady, transformed from forest exile to

10. Of value to any inquiry into the Chaucer-Shakespeare nexus is Kittredge’s evaluation, in *Chaucer and His Poetry*, of Chaucerian continuity: “. . . they move by virtue of their inherent vitality, not as tale-telling puppets, but as men and women. From this point of view, which surely accords with Chaucer’s intention, the Pilgrims do not exist for the sake of the stories, but vice versa. Structurally regarded, the stories are merely long speeches expressing, directly or indirectly, the characters of several persons . . . the story of any pilgrim may be determined, —not only by his character in general, but also by the circumstances, by the situation, by his momentary relations to the others in the company, or even by something in the tale that has come before” (155-6).

Arthurian courtier, effects a further makeover from absolute undesirability to desirability without fear of cuckold's horns, she becomes queen of the neutral point between feminine extremes. Though she now embodies Arthurian womanhood by harmonizing these forms, eclipsing Guinevere in significant details, she does so by embracing and advocating a dual nature both archetypal in purpose (a goddess of love and female sovereignty) and transitory in form (like a Fairy queen). Shakespeare's Venus likewise finds herself in a perpetual state of redefinition, adjusting the descriptors of her physical existence to fit the gamut of Adonis's moods. For Chaucer and Shakespeare alike, garden and forest-side echo the connection of primeval man and goddess of love to the natural world. Ever-growing and always in flux, these spaces reshape even their most temporary denizens better to fit the civilized constructs of domestic space. Where Dame Alisoun's prologue invited auditors into her domestic approximation of Venus's garden, her appropriation of Arthurian romance reinvents her confession as legend. Shakespeare appears to have infused his adaptation of *The Knight's Tale* with elements of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* to create the romantic and anti-romantic pairings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He arranges Chaucerian representations of the reeducated male (Theseus, Jankyn, and the knight-rapist) against figures of self-absorbed, ineducable masculinity (Sir Thopas, Adonis, Lysander/Demetrius and Bottom). Setting these in dialogue with feminine "educators," most notably Chaucer's Dame Alisoun and loathly lady, and his own Venus and Titania, the poet-playwright explored comedic potential within the austere frame of Chaucer's romance.¹¹

Intervening in her own tale, the *Wife of Bath* cites Ovid's account of Midas as an

11. As Shakespeare attempted to reaffirm the austerity of his source in his *The Two Noble Kinsmen* scenes, his collaborator Fletcher was apparently eager to revisit the comic point of view, teetering on the edge of irreverence, from which Shakespeare had approached *The Knight's Tale* in *Dream* (see Chapter 4).

authoritative example of women's inability to keep secrets, regardless of their degree or discretion. Shakespeare's Venus retains Alisoun's ironic comprehension of lovers' subjectivity, the boundless nature of her dreamlike garden poised between day and night, primed to absorb the truth of her tryst with Adonis:

‘Art thou ashamed to kiss? Then wink again,
And I will wink; so shall the day seem night.
Love keeps his revels where there are but twain;
Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight.
These blue-veined violets whereon we lean
Never can blab, nor know not what we mean.

(*Ven.* 121-6)

As Venus would have it, self-deception can also fool the mortal and natural worlds. Yet, as Lee Patterson has keenly elucidated, the Wife of Bath strategically altered Ovid as she had manipulated attributions to King Solomon and Paul of Tarsus. It is not Midas' wife in the *Metamorphoses* but his trusted barber who cannot keep those asses' ears under his own hat (656-7). If we recall how Midas earned those ears in the first place, by his preference for native woodnotes over Apollonian tones, an intriguing reciprocity arises among the Wife of Bath's allusive confession, Titania's bower in 3.1 of *Dream*, and The Tale of Sir Thopas. Transformed in part to an ass for his *braggadocio*, his rusticity, and his Ovidian malapropisms, Bottom sings a version of Thopas's lovebird song to the queen of fairies. In a combination of homage and complex literary quibble, Shakespeare couches his comic invention in a Chaucerian frame.

Considering that the Bottom's transformation has only the swap of ass-essence for human essence in common with the oft-mentioned *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, I suggest that Chaucer, by virtue of the surfeit of Chaucerian material permeating the fabric of the

Dream, might be a more compelling source of Shakespeare's association in this particular play of ass-headed man with compromised goddess. I do not commit to Chaucer at the exclusion of valuable connections with *Huon of Burdeux* or *The discoverie of witchcraft*, but find it difficult to believe that Shakespeare would require, let alone directly consult, so many sources for a single, self-evident visual joke. Cryptomnesia aside, if Shakespeare appropriated the Knight's Tale as the frame of his dream vision (Lynch, "Baring Bottom," 118), could the Wife of Bath or Sir Thopas be farther from his mind than Reginald Scot? Ever-inclusive, Shakespeare contains Ovid's and Chaucer's versions of the Midas episode, multiplying the witnesses to Bottom's "translated" state—which occurs, it must be noted, while he is mutilating an Ovidian story handed down by Chaucer. The secret-keepers multiply from either manservant or wife to Peter Quince and his players, especially Flute who nominally bridges the gender gap; Puck, who moves at will between human world and Fairy-land; and Titania herself, enclosed within her bower but secure only in Oberon's displeasure.

Correlating Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* with *Love's Labour's Lost*, but no less applicable to the synonymies of *Venus and Adonis* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theresa Krier writes:

Shakespeare's articulation of his precise role in the genre-historical issues raised by Chaucer marks not only the temporal distance of two centuries between himself and Chaucer but also the genre difference between a written, narrative poem and a performed comedy; Shakespeare contemplates his place as dramatist in *poetic* genre history. He carries a step further the Chaucerian declaration for the vernacular over Latinity, for lyric over discursive mode, for (the fiction of) sung over written utterance, for cosmological over courtly eros—though both writers cherish, preserve, and

disseminate to later writers even the losing terms of these binarisms. (177-8)

Shakespeare generated just such a profound binarism between his Dame Alisoun-inspired Venus (a vernacular figure if ever there was) and his schemed-against Titania (Latinate in form and manner), both brought low by desire. They are true opposites, an Olympian goddess turned earth-mother and an earth-spirit turned celestial. As such, the Queen of the fairies can never engage the sensual beyond courtly rhetoric and is too perfect to perspire. If she could, her seduction of Bottom would be pathetic rather than comic, as is Venus's pursuit of Adonis. But the poet-playwright develops further significance from the disparities between love goddesses. Though Shakespeare clearly took The Merchant's Tale's Persephone and Hades—as seekers of truth and, inadvertently, reconcilers of marital strife—as models for his fairy monarch subplot, he substitutes Robin Goodfellow for that tale's carnal, torch-bearing Venus (MerT 4.1723-8), most probably derived from the *Romance of the Rose*.

Traditional representations of Cupid prove exquisitely problematic. Originally a primal force of procreation, mentioned between the underworld and primordial darkness in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In *The Birds*, Aristophanes hatches the love god from an egg laid by Night, while in Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates has it from a female authority that Love is the offspring of Poverty and Plenty. The Latin redactions of Ovid and Apuleius present Cupid as the son of Venus and Mars, while some unattributed versions grant paternity, or at least tutelage, to Mercury. As noted above, the Wife of Bath has made her thoughts on such “ful contrarius” children abundantly clear to us. Ovid's adaptation of the Adonis story in Book X of *Metamorphoses* has a stray arrow in Cupid's quiver graze his mother's breast, a neat inversion of the Psyche legend, plunging her into Adonis

obsession. In response to the many complications any representation of this child would pose to his narrative, Shakespeare avoids reference to Cupid in *Venus and Adonis*, leaving the reader with the fallout of Venus's all-too-human desire. Significantly, though, Adonis demonstrates a number of Cupidesque characteristics. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the goddess of love resides in the thematic background, her presence substantiated here by intimate connections with Dame Alisoun the storyteller. Though a composite of Hippolyta, Hermia, Helena and Titania might produce a kind of Venus, in her allegorical form she represents that section of *The Knight's Tale* for which Shakespeare could find no place among the lessons learned by misdirected lovers—the temple prayers of Palamon, Arcite and Emelye on the eve of the tournament.

From Boccaccio to Chaucer extends a minor tradition of revisionist Theseuses. *Il Teseida*, as Lee Patterson observes, “wanting to suppress both the abandonment of Ariadne and the extramarital relationship with Hippolyta because they undermined his celebratory purpose, placed the campaign against the Amazons before the Cretan adventure” (241). Shakespeare follows the more traditional, if problematic, continuity suggested by the *Knight's Tale* and the Legend of Ariadne, ironically for the same reasons Boccaccio altered it.¹² Though Shakespeare acknowledges Theseus' chequered romantic past through his fairy counterpart Oberon, he suggests that the Duke of Athens has learned lessons of experience and plotted a course of future constancy. Oberon attributes Theseus' faith-breaking to Titania “lead[ing] him through the glimmering night” (*MND* 2.1.77); by consecrating his marriage to Hippolyta, especially in the blessing of bride-beds, the fairy couple eliminates the very idea of Hippolytus and the

12. In the *Legend of Good Women*, twenty-three year old Theseus promises to wed Phaedra to his son upon their arrival in Athens.

possibility of a spurned or fallen Hippolyta. This gives a disjunctive ring to the Senecan appropriations noted by Harold F. Brooks:

In the *Dream*, the principal [Senecan] debts are to Medea's invocation of Hecate (*Medea*), and extensively to *Hippolytus*; both works, judging from his use of them elsewhere as well as here, were favourites with Shakespeare. The most striking parallel is between Seneca's seascape with Cupid all armed (*Hippolytus*), and Shakespeare's in the vision which Oberon relates to Puck. More than local, however, is the resemblance to Phaedra's of Helena's self-abasement in love, and her desperate resolves. (lxii-iii)

If indeed the poet-playwright imported Senecan imagery into the *Dream*, he did so in a manner divergent from his appropriations of Chaucer—the adaptation of pure image, divested of context, rather than narrative or authorial voice. If Seneca truly underlies Helena's dejection and Oberon's vision, then the joyful resolution of the play is for nought and *Hippolytus*, so ominously foreshadowed, will emerge from the bride-bed to undo it entirely. Shakespeare seems especially keen to sweep away even the tiniest mote of unrest in Athens. Rather than produce children who will figure prominently in an unfortunate personal and political future or commissioning professional artists to grace their nuptials with a tragedy or chronicle play, the royal newlyweds patronize a work of “very tragical mirth” from the most doubtful of artisans' ensembles. In doing so they recreate the spontaneity of fairyland within the palace walls and invest the artisan class with artistic and political clout. Their sense of order is as absolute as that espoused by Chaucer's Theseus, but it extends into and comments upon realms outside the court.

Situating the problematic pairing of Hippolyta and Theseus in love, at peace, and on the verge of consummation, Shakespeare encourages disruptions above and below.

Married love, in its most iconic state, takes the stage as conflict between Oberon and Titania, who campaign against each other over something human. The idea of romantic love, poked and prodded from the outset, becomes fodder for fairy experimentation within the Chaucerian dream space. For mortals from Theseus on down to Bottom, Titania is the most exalted goal of courtly romance, Sir Thopas's very "elf-queene," all the more exalted for being utterly inaccessible. To Oberon, however, she is a wife as any other, a form of compromise that reverberates through each of the *Dream's* couplings and back through its multiple sources. Once Hippolyta marries Theseus, she ceases to be Queen of the Amazons. When Oberon, Puck and Theseus sort out the love-juice and wedding pairs, Hermia must jettison her fierce autonomy, and Helena her probing poetry according to Athenian marriage law. These state-subsidized compromises of self, which Dame Alisoun and Venus claim to defy but intermittently succumb to, were among Chaucer's primary concerns in the "Marriage" group. Whatever Jankyn and the Wife of Bath signified to each other during their presumptive courtship, they became uncomfortable equals before the church door. Alisoun recounts Jankyn's penitent revision of his marriage vows:

And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,
And seyde, 'Deere suster Alisoun,
As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!
That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.
Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!' (3.803-7)

This passage finds a subtle echo in Shakespeare's exceptionally Chaucerian Theseus, who declares at the outset:

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love doing thee injuries,

But I will wed thee in another key... (*MND* 1.1.16-9)

Based on his complex and compromised past, Theseus comprehends as the Wife of Bath does the need for balance in marriage—however subjective that balance may be—though he also suggests that bitter exchanges such as those between Alisoun and Jankyn are better resolved during courtship. This is greatly complicated by mytho-historical accounts of the Athenian Duke's fickleness as noted by Bullough: "Shakespeare attributed to Theseus staid and steadfast qualities taken from Plutarch's parallel picture of Romulus, a monogamous character" (1.369). It is already clear that Shakespeare's freewheeling application of source material can be most clearly comprehended when considering his use of one source, in this case the Knight's Tale, as illuminated by another, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. In fact, Shakespeare might well have taken license from Plutarch's more high-contrast parallels to match the Roman historian's mytho-historical, philandering Theseus and Romulus with Chaucer's purely mythical, courtly romance-infused monarch.¹³ With this in mind, we can regard Shakespeare's Theseus and Oberon as the Knight's Tale's contemplative, authoritative tyrant deconstructed, into an essentially Dionysian-Apollonian polarity.¹⁴ The resolution of each set of lovers' problems is possible only between the poles of a mundane, Athenian world governed by universal laws, and a Fairy-land defined by celestial bodies but ruled by a cacophony of

13. The poet-playwright appears aware of profound dialectical tensions between these key sources. The Greek Plutarch, a naturalized Roman citizen and civil servant, explored the irreconcilable differences of national history and character-oriented biography, part of and excluded from the mytho-historical continuities he described. Chaucer constructed his literary identity on the middle ground between his early upbringing in the socially eclectic (and one imagines, bustling) Vintry Ward and Richard II's insular, Francophone court, straddling worlds linguistic, poetic and political.

14. Nietzsche puts it this way in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Through Apollo and Dionysus, the art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognize that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in origin and aims, between the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music. These two different tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance; and they continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism, only superficially reconciled by the common term 'art' . . . let us first conceive of them as the separate art worlds of dreams and intoxication" (33).

individuals.

But just because the Theseus of Shakespeare's *Dream* can change his mind does not make him the *Dream*'s agent of transformation. As Shakespeare recognized that the Knight's Theseus was perhaps a bit too unbending, suggesting the Duke had not taken any lasting lessons from his legendary past, he also seems to have hoped that Sir Thopas might get his act, or at least his armor, together. Realizing this could only happen by accident, and to anyone other than Chaucer's clueless young knight, he created Bottom. A weaver like the Wife of Bath, both of homespun and text, his ambition to make his voice heard in the world, especially if it means donning a temporary suit of someone else's speech, is profound. Bottom believes his purpose is to interpret, and yet lacks the self-awareness to see beyond the surface of the text, just as Thopas is incapable of seeing beyond the rituals and accoutrements of his hereditary profession. To Thopas, a mating call is a mating call, and he falls hard for, as Bottom sings, "The throstle, with his note so true" (*MND* 3.1.122):

The briddes sing, it is no nay,
The sperhawk and the papejay,
That joy it was to heere;
The thrustelcok made eek hir lay,
The wodedowve upon the spray
She sang ful loude and cleere.

Sire Thopas fil in love-longynge,
Al whan he herde the thrustel synge... (Th 7.766-73)

Chaucer's passage, like Bottom's song, echoes his own *Parliament of Fowls*. While Sir Thopas would likely prick right past and Bottom is only visiting, Shakespeare situates the birdsong Thopas hears within Bottom's heart. Nature will take its course, whether at the

Duke's Oak or Ninny's tomb; his song, as discussed by E. Talbot Donaldson, in spite of its bray, becomes the means of finding the "elf-queene" that Thopas could not (17). Before *seeing* him, a prerequisite of the love-juice's efficacy, Titania perceives and adores the *sound* of Bottom, regardless of whether his ass-headedness is literal or figurative.¹⁵ Bottom's confusion, between spoken word and interpreted meaning, is Shakespeare's mediation of Sir Thopas's confusion of outfit and outcome, both necessary and poetically apt in "translating" the Chaucerian to the stage.

But what does Bottom, Shakespeare's most inadvertent knight-errant, learn by remaining ineffably himself in spite of his remarkable transformation? Notably, the knightly Demetrius remains "translated" to a devotee of Helena as well as a new yes-man for Theseus, learning nothing in the process because the enchantment has done the work. Bottom resolves the *aporia* between waking and dreaming worlds by acknowledging that he knows neither what happened nor recalls the narrative details leading up to his dream. In a joyous confluence of Chaucerian dream-logic and Shakespearean foolery, because Bottom embraces what he does not know, he now knows who he is. His role as blustery Bottom officially obsolete, he can now play Pyramus, which is precisely who he was attempting to be when his dream began.

Krier expresses the Chaucer-Shakespeare nexus in terms of space and language, more specifically the speech acts made possible by crossing imaginary thresholds: "The park [in *Love's Labour's Lost*] is a figure for the essential finitude of all the characters and for the ubiquitousness of the mother tongue" (181), represented quite literally in *Venus and Adonis* by Venus' language of aggressive feminine courtship. Venus's

15. Donaldson also points out that, unlike Thopas's sparrowhawk, whose song "was nothing to sing about," Bottom's song identifies and imitates to Titania's ears actual British/Athenian songbirds (17).

garden, for all its suggestions of an overgrown Eden, likewise provides its legendary characters a seemingly limitless space in which to realize their specific narrative purpose. In marked contrast to the habitats of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, delimited by the legendary transformations that must occur within their boundaries, the illusion of alternate outcomes pervades Chaucerian and Shakespearean garden- and dream-spaces.

The lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* view the forest, the liminal space of quest romance and the Chaucerian dream vision, as something to be passed through. Chaucer merged quest and dream space in *Sir Thopas*, where the most comedic effects derive from the divorce of knightly purpose from the quest experience. And yet the time *Hermia* and *Lysander* spend in the forest redefines them—not as rebellious young lovers leading romantic new lives but as proper Athenians. Because *Helena* and *Demetrius* are following rather than blazing the trail, their courtship is the most compromised by fairy intervention. As part of Shakespeare's Chaucerian design, it must continue to be, conflicting as it does with *Demetrius*' pre-dream will and the altered, post-dream will of *Helena*, who would rather save herself by returning to Athens in disgrace than suffer abuse from her fellows or intimidation from her environment. This feels in many ways an inversion of the wilderness function of the typical romance but analogous to Chaucer's forest-side in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. In *Marie de France's* "Bisclavret," the wilderness is a place of concealment of truth rather than its discovery, while the narrative's revelations take place at court; in *Huon of Burdeaux*, *Oberon's* realm is the endpoint of the titular hero's quest (accompanied by his wife, no less), rendering Faerie land as a stand-in for spiritual enlightenment. The forest is also a space where, as in dreams, absence equates to vanishing. The knight-rapist of *Dame Alisoun's* tale, having definitively

forsaken his right to interact with young ladies, experiences the phenomenon like this:

And in his wey it happed hym to ryde,
In al this care, under a forest side,
Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go
Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;
Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,
In hope that som wisdom sholde he lerne.
But certainly, er he cam fully there,
Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where. (WoBT 3.989-96)

And Hermia, seeking answers in the darkness between dreaming and waking, observes:

Lysander! What, remov'd? Lysander! lord!
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear;
Speak, of all loves! I swoon almost with fear.
No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately. (*MND* 2.2.150-5)

At the very least, these misconceptions of potential enlightenment as apparent nothingness or absence apotheosize infinite possibility into sententious essence. Even Chaucer's misguided knight-rapist and Shakespeare's disoriented Helena apprehend that by denying the visible, material world its dominion over the senses, one can begin to discover essential, immaterial truths.

Helen Cooper reminds us that the point of any dream vision or quest romance is never the narrative endgame, stated or implied (*Romance* 49). Marie de France's Lanval sets out to redeem himself at court and finds himself adopted by a fairy lover who instructs him and the court on the meaning of truth. The dreamer's recognition that, though Blanche is dead, the Black Knight's love cannot die does not precisely address his

insomnia, and yet the deeper insights Chaucer leaves to the reader's imagination lull the dreamer to sleep at night. Gawain's embrace of shame, magnified by the endorsement of the Round Table, rehumanizes Arthur's hyper-civilized kingdom. In Shakespeare's willful commingling of source materials, eclectic even when limited to its Chaucerian references, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* challenges an audience informed by medieval romance and early modern derivatives to spot its seams. In their happy confusion, they will ultimately resolve to embrace the seams as Bottom does.

To foster these eventualities, Shakespeare followed Chaucer in constructing a closed world on the page, limiting reader perception—and of course audience perception in performance—to the contents of a space he defines.¹⁶ Whether aiming at spaces imaginary or theatrical (in Shakespeare's greatest successes, a balance of both), the playwright sets his action within bounds both definite and permeable. The clearly delineated "world" of the play is often informed by externals that drift through gauze that, in carefully directed light and just a bit of misdirection, renders their infiltration invisible. The spaces Shakespeare creates, in spite of his selection of character or subject matter, are not those of the *de casibus* figure trapped in a broom closet (like Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Faustus) nor the book-lined intellectual spaces of Ben Jonson, but spaces of human discovery on a sliding scale from the individual to the legendary, a template for which Chaucer offered the keenest of prototypes.

16. Shakespeare's focused approach to reader and audience presents a stark contrast to the seemingly endless nesting narratives of Spenser, the sixteenth century's most profound developer of Chaucerianism besides Shakespeare.

CHAPTER 2

CHAUCERIAN AUCTORITEE:

THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

For bare narrative, Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* rests upon Livy's account in the *Historia*, where Chaucer's legend owes its initial existence to Ovid. While Chaucer found strong insight to the character of Tarquin in the *Fasti*, he reacted against a fundamental lack in the Roman poet's treatment of Lucrece. Addressing the various inner states of Lucrece—certainly the defining feature of his epyllion—Shakespeare would have found no precedent but Chaucer in English. Intensifying the connection, the poem's power also derives from strong tonal echoes of *The Physician's Tale* and, perhaps more significantly, the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*. Those aspects of Lucrece Shakespeare's poem shares with Ovid's characterization in the *Fasti* likewise appear in Chaucer's concise, selective presentation of her character. Both poets react to the time-capsule quality of their source narratives, infuse them with contemporary flourishes. Where Chaucer deviated from retelling Ovid to interpret Tarquin's inevitable entry to her bedchamber, Shakespeare reinvokes a few notable epic tropes to retrench his Chaucerian epyllion in its Ovidian idiom.

Throughout the piece, as is true of any poet who recognizes he is no more profound than his influences, Shakespeare engages what I will call his "memory of Chaucer," a phenomenon as textually indirect as it is emotionally specific. Similar vibrations travel from the poet-narrator's view of Criseyde through to Troilus's view of Cressida in Shakespeare, as if the connection between source and adaptation for the latter poet were rooted more in emotional and intellectual stimulus than textual provenance. More

significantly, there is something Lucrece-like about the latter-day Cressida's self-presentation and commitment to Troilus's love, making her needful inconstancy all the more tragic. Taken further, there is a great deal of reciprocity between the love stories of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*—the key points of contact with his Chaucerian source—and his earlier, undisputedly tragic *Romeo and Juliet*.

When Ben Jonson credited Shakespeare with “little Latin,” he seems not to have considered *The Rape of Lucrece*. In part because there was no English translation of the *Fasti* extant in the early 1590s, Shakespeare would likely have “used an edition . . . with Latin annotations by Paulus Marsus of which there are many reprints from 1508 onwards” (Bullough I.179). He may also have consulted Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, in execution and feel very much an Englishing of Ovid, at least until a profound departure at line 1815. Considering Chaucer's likely sources, I disagree with Kathryn Lynch's suggestion that “there are few signs that he actually used Livy in this tale; details not taken from Ovid could have come from other sources, such as the *Romance of the Rose*” (*Dream Visions* 164 n2). Only a few, perhaps, but at least one is profound. One hallmark of Shakespeare's *Lucrece* is the poet's reassessment of culpability in Lucrece's violation. The poet waxes rhetorical in lines 36-49 as to how such a thing could happen to so perfectly chaste a woman, then assigns blame to Collatinus in spite of his stainless, or at least ambiguous, reputation in the sources. This perspective, not to mention a conspicuous willingness to set himself up for judgment by readers and peers, aligns Shakespeare's poetic voice with Chaucer's narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

In the *Legend*, Chaucer transcends the traditional name-dropping of Classical sources by “recommending” Livy, whose account of Lucretia he seems to have assimilated rather

than consulted, alongside Ovid. Though Chaucer builds his legendary upon Ovid's foundation, he often consults Livy for key details or follows him in the omission of same. Giving all credence to Ovid, Chaucer parlays deference to Classical authority into poetic agency, turning what amounts to a straight translation into a defense of Lucrece's character against the Augustinian reading of her suicide.¹⁷ This affords Shakespeare an analogous license to free-associate source material and story elements in his narrative poems as he had begun to do on the stage. The chain of evidence runs something like this:

In the tyme of the siege of that citee the yong *Romane* gentlemen banqueted one an other, emonges whom there was one called *Collatinus Tarquinius*, the sonne of *Egerius*. And by chaunce thei entred in comunicacion of their wiues, euery one praisyng his seuerall spouse. At length the talke began to grow hotte, wherevpon *Collatinus* said, that words wer vaine. For within fewe howers it might be tried, how muche his wife *Lucrecia* did excel the rest, wherfore (*quoth* he) if there be any liulihood in you: Let vs take our horse, to proue whiche of our wiues doth surmount. (Livy 8-16)

Livy notes that a heated debate ensues "by chaunce," neither suggested nor fomented by any Roman noble in particular. We must infer, based on what ensues, that the topic is chastity. Collatine's boast might merely have exacerbated the issue had he not also proposed as remedy the surprise visit to Rome. Ovid gives Tarquin definition, beginning with the prince's proposal of a "virtuous wife" contest and inflames the conversation with wine, but the result is the same. What he changes is the portrayal of Collatinus, simultaneously vague in specifics and vigorous in action:

17. Chaucer notes that "Austyn hath gret compassioun / Of this Lucesse, that starf at Rome toun" (LGW 1690-1). In *City of God* 1.19, Augustine maintains that Lucretia is blameless with regard to the rape but suggests that, even if "she was betrayed by the pleasure of the act" (24), she would still have no excuse to commit suicide. To wit, God is the ultimate judge of purity, and Lucretia ought to have stayed her hand.

Young Tarquin entertained his comrades with feast and wine: among them the king's son spake: "While Ardea keeps us here on tenterhooks with sluggish war, and suffers us not to carry back our arms to the gods of our fathers, what of the loyalty of the marriage-bed? and are we as dear to our wives as they to us?" Each praised his wife: in their eagerness dispute ran high, and every tongue and heart grew hot with the deep draughts of wine. Then up and spake the man who from Collatia took his famous name: "No need of words! Trust deeds! There's night enough. To horse! and ride we to the City." (*Fasti* 111)

Though Ovid's topic is clearly "the loyalty of the marriage-bed," his Collatine, indirectly named, neither names his wife nor does he "praise" her virtue specifically as the other Roman husbands and Livy's Collatinus do. Instead, without begging the question, this man of action suggests they move the symposium toward ocular proof of what must be seen to be believed. Where Livy clearly sets the precedent for Chaucer's and Shakespeare's readings, Ovid conceived of a Collatine for whom words, even names, are insufficient when presenting a legend.

Though Chaucer follows Ovid in the mechanics of the scene, he relies upon Livy for the details. Rendering Collatine's praise of Lucrece specific, as opposed to Ovid's depersonalized abstraction, he significantly omits any reference to other Roman wives upon the delegation's arrival in Rome, thus establishing peerless Lucrece as the *only* Roman wife:

And in his pley Tarquinius the yonge
Gan for to jape, for he was lyght of tonge,
And seyde that it was an ydel lyf;
No man dide there no more than his wif.
"And lat us speke of wyves, that is best;
Preyse every man his owene as hym lest,

And with oure speche lat us ese oure herte.”

A knight that highte Colatyn up sterte,
And seyde thus: “Nay, sire, it is no need
To trowen on the word, but on the dede.
I have a wif,” quod he, “that, as I trowe,
Is holden good of al that evere hire knowe.
Go we to-nyght to Rome, and we shal se.”

(LGWF1698-1710)

Curiously, Tarquin proposes an ironic notion that warriors at an impasse in war might as well be women: “No man dide there more than his wif.” This is far distant from Ovid’s foregrounding of marital chastity, brought to a strange conclusion when the soldiers find Lucretia industriously spinning wool. In the Livy/Chaucer frame, Lucrece spinning wool constitutes the last word; in Ovid, Lucretia’s speech, concerned for the Roman state, longing for Collatinus’s return, and ruling her household and servants, wins the day and wraps up debate. Tarquin’s jest shows the masculine force of Rome as having less to offer the State in time of war than one woman. Chaucer’s lines also suggest that, without Lucrece’s virtue and its consequences, “A knight that highte Colatyn” might have languished in obscurity, contrary to Ovid’s linking of Collatinus’s destiny with the city of his birth.

Shakespeare forgoes the setup (the “Argument” notwithstanding), beginning instead with Tarquin racing toward Rome and the fulfillment of desire. While he is a-horse, his narrator reflects upon actions past, accusing Collatine of a husband’s unforgivable sin. Somewhat less than Chaucer’s “knight,” having given voice to Lucrece’s unquantifiable virtue, Shakespeare embodies his compromised Collatine in the epithet “publisher.” This is clearly not Ovid’s “man who from Collatia took his famous name,” not a mytho-

historical construct but a man whose flesh cannot contain his pride in the greatest thing about him.

Beauty itself doth of itself persuade
The eyes of men without an orator.
What needeth then apology be made
To set forth that which is so singular?
Or why is COLLATINE the publisher
Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown
From thievish ears, because it is his own?

(*Luc.* 29-35)

To its benefit, the language of the “Argument” affixed to *Lucrece* follows Livy in its suggestion that the Roman officers praise their wives as a sort of dessert course, unprompted by Tarquin but topped off by Collatine’s boast. Likewise identifying Tarquin’s suggestion as harmless, Chaucer presents it as a philosophical entertainment, “for he was light of tongue” (*LGW* F1699). In none of the sources, then, can Tarquin be blamed for bringing up a topic of such unanimous appeal among the nobles. Whether he proposes the topic of after-dinner conversation or not (and whatever the topic might have been), Shakespeare may well have distilled the truth to its essence by conflating these sources. It is no wonder that Ovid and Chaucer note the absence of a sentry at the door, since Collatine himself unlocks young Tarquin’s lust.

Working with Livy quite possibly at Chaucer’s suggestion, Shakespeare sets his stage of words with that straightforward account and segues into a double character study that ultimately indicts masculine pride and the objectification of women, specifically wives. In this latter case, Lucretius and Collatinus share ignominy with Tarquin himself, a concept undreamt by Ovid at his most restrained and out of bounds for Livy the

chronicler. Shakespeare seems to have derived from Chaucer, more than any other poet we might link to his developing author-consciousness, the capacity for allegorical layerings such as these. On a less tangible but no less relevant note, Chaucer and Shakespeare each set out as adaptors of the Lucrece narrative but found themselves making their own poems.

What Shakespeare seems clearly to have adapted from Chaucer's legendary are not the details of the Lucrece narrative, which as mentioned derive in his poem mainly from William Painter's translation of Livy, but ways of reinvesting the legend of Lucrece with character and agency. A commonplace of marital chastity long before Shakespeare's day but particularly so in it, the specific case of Lucrece, recorded as such by Livy and presented without frills or generalizations by Ovid, represented for poets and painters a strange synthesis of feminine purity and sacrifice to the State. In Chaucer's deviations from Ovid, he attempts to restore the icon of Lucrece to her situational, if mytho-historical, context while situating her martyrdom within the particular scope of his "penance" to the god of Love. That Shakespeare achieved this Chaucerian confluence not by imitating Chaucer but by locating Lucrece's mortal and martyred beauty in the frame of Chaucer's dream vision demonstrates his immersion in Chaucerian influence and dovetails with his pastiche approach to source material (discussed in Chapter 1).

Like Chaucer, Shakespeare challenged himself to create reason and motivation behind the mythic actions of legendary figures. Shakespeare's Tarquin summons the Chaucerian terms of Lucrece's beauty to his defense and fabricates her culpability in his transgression. Encroaching upon the Petrarchan garden with the language of conquest, the ravisher pits Lucrece's red and white in a struggle to the death rather than celebrating

their blending into gold:

Thus he replies: ‘The colour in thy face,’
That even for anger makes the lily pale
And the red rose blush at her own disgrace,
Shall plead for me and tell my loving tale.
Under that colour am I come to scale
Thy never-conquered fort. The fault is thine,
For those thine eyes betray me unto mine.

(*Luc.* 477-83)

Here, Shakespeare’s poem engages Chaucer’s in a lively debate, expanding monolithic, Roman definitions of purity, chastity and submission. Tarquin sees Lucrece and her chastity in terms traditional and organic—the Petrarchan lily and rose—alternated with images stonelike and leached of warmth—azure, alabaster, monuments, parapets—a dearth his fire of battle will resupply. This persistent cold and ultimate numbness aligns her with Chaucer’s Lucrece who, while offering few details of the experience from her point of view, uniquely expresses her physical state during the rape. Ovid and Livy stated that Lucrece surrendered to Tarquin’s force of will. Powerless to resist even in spirit, this chastest of women and most perfect of Roman wives gave up. Chaucer followed Ovid’s lead but introduced a unique and crucial detail:

These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name
At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame,
That, what for fer of sclander and drede of deth,
She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
And in a swough she lay, and wex so ded
Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
She feleth no thyng neyther foul ne fayr.

(*LGW* F1812-18)

This is a vital interpretive moment, making Chaucer the first to suggest that Lucrece, overwhelmed by the compromise of body and impending loss of self, is still capable of resisting Tarquin's attack even as the poet denies her physical hardness. In Chaucer's metaphysical reading, seemingly informed by Augustinian theology, Lucrece must separate soul from body, weakening both but making her immaterial part inaccessible to her ravisher. If Shakespeare did not have Chaucer's *Criseyde* in mind when composing *Lucrece*, his adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* certainly recalled the ways Chaucer's Lucrece and Criseyde (first with Troilus and later with Diomedes) gained control of their inner selves by relinquishing control of their bodies.

As Chaucer humanized Criseyde, providing both reason and emotional foundation for her forsaking of Troilus, Shakespeare keenly revalidated Lucrece's status in early modern iconography. Similar to his literal fleshing out of Venus, informed as she was by the Wife of Bath, the early modern poet rehabilitated Lucrece from untouchable classical symbol to contemplative living being. Though Shakespeare deviates from Chaucer in his suggestion that Lucrece is conscious throughout the assault, he details Tarquin's campaign to repress that consciousness in its physical, spiritual and emotional manifestations. Obsessed and virile as the rapist might be, he can hardly be taking pleasure in the multitasking, making his act that much more pointless and self-nullifying than it is in the sources. Shakespeare's accounts of Tarquin's virility, derived from chivalric romance and projected retroactively onto the legendary past, first exploit the superficial occupations of princes (soldiers, hunters, wooers) but ultimately transcend them to define more completely the transgressor's inner being. That Shakespeare looked to Chaucer to realize a complete Tarquin in miniature is not surprising; that he found

what he was looking for in a text which observes and judges Tarquin without explicitly addressing those issues raises enigmatic questions of adaptation.

The smale foules, of the sesoun fayn,
That from the panter and the net ben scaped,
Upon the foweler, that hem made awhaped
In winter, and distroyed had hire brood,
In his despit hem thoughte yt did hem good
To synge of hym, and in hir song despise
The foule cherl that, for his coveytise,
Had hem betrayed with his sophistrye.

(LGW F130-7)

From *The Legend of Good Women's* Prologue rather than Ovid, Livy or Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece, Shakespeare derives the fowler/trapper imagery that informs Tarquin's verbal ravishment of his prey, aligns itself with Chaucer's vision of a Lucrece shocked into a willing separation of mind from body, and evokes *The Parliament of Fowls*, that other dream vision keen to elevate feminine agency in the selection of mates.

Here with a cockatrice' dead-killing eye
He rouseth up himself, and makes a pause,
While she, the picture of pure piety,
Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws,
Pleads in a wilderness where are no laws
 To the rough beast that knows no gentle right,
 Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite.

(*Luc.* 540-6)

The persistent punning on "fowl/foul" continues as, having exhausted his lust as soon as he exercises it, Tarquin feels regret creep into his innards. Again, Shakespeare reinvigorates a Chaucerian precedent to mine psychological depths at the intersection of

allegory and legendary. The early modern poet also elevates his standard wordplay, typically a negotiation of words and meanings between author and reader, to a locus of insight between reader and Tarquin, who gains full, tragic self-awareness from the connections.

Look as the full-fed hound or gorged hawk,
Unapt for tender smell of speedy flight,
Make slow pursuit, or altogether balk
The prey wherein by nature they delight,
So surfeit-taking Tarquin fares this night:
His taste delicious, in digestion souring,
Devours his will that lived by foul devouring.

(*Luc.* 694-700)

In The Franklin's and Wife of Bath's Tales, the appearance of chastity and propriety strengthens marriage and, by extension, the social order. For Shakespeare, the encouragement and portrayal of "seems" ring ever-negative. Only actual states of being—spiritual, physical, political—can transcend their outcomes. With many texts, not least *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare develops this notion in response to Chaucer and abetted by Chaucerian authority. The poet frequently takes great pains to present not merely a "full-scale exercise in lyrical and descriptive dilation" as Bullough puts it (1.182), but to de-conflate Classical and Chaucerian versions of his characters and the narrative they inhabit.

From the outset of Ovid's version of the Lucrece story, the poet emphasizes the contrast between the light, wanton behavior of Roman wives in general and the unbound, wool-spinning, longing-for-Collatine Lucretia. Neither Ovid nor Livy mentions chastity as a cardinal virtue that requires ocular proof for the claimant to win the argument. The

closest analogue in Chaucer is that she sits “dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte” (LGF1720), with no mention of women or activity outside Collatine’s house. Though the disputable “Argument” of Shakespeare’s poem hits this note, the poem proper whittles the stark impression of “Lucrece the chaste” still further, opening with Tarquin already inflamed by his imaginary picture of an unattainable object.¹⁸ While the tone of many a Shakespeare play-text relies upon its prologue or chorus, this one seems redundant, especially in consideration of its patron and intended audience. *In medias res* openings are far from unusual, but Shakespeare perpetuates Chaucer’s downplaying strategy still further. Rather than support Tarquinius’ lust with ocular proof and misconception, Chaucer casts her as an icon on par with Virgil’s Creusa from the outset. In order for an audience to perceive her importance, this prototype of Roman wives must be lost, compromised or abandoned and her memory made a driving narrative force.

To possess Lucrece, Tarquin must smash the idol his fevered imagination has sculpted her into. In aid of this, Tarquin brings with him the wintry ravages of early spring, the frost which might overtake the sweet bud as it forms (*Luc.* 48-9). Shakespeare similarly catches Tarquin in the midst of misguided inspiration, much as he caught Venus at the apex of her loneliness and lust for pure, fresh flesh. In Chaucer, Collatine’s description of her perfect chastity (F1706-10) collided in Tarquin’s mind with actual observations of her pulchritude (F1757-74), which become for Shakespeare existential conundrums on the cusp of the deed:

Her hair, like golden threads, played with her breath,

O modest wantons, wanton modesty!

18. This is a close analogue to Apius’s knee-jerk attraction to Virginia in *The Physician’s Tale*: “And so bifel this juge his eyen caste / Upon this mayde, avysing hym ful faste,/ As she cam forby ther as this juge stood./ Anon his herte chaunged and his mood,/ So was he caught with beauty of this mayde,/ And to himself ful pryvely he sayde,/ ‘This mayde shal be myn, for any man!’” (PhyT 6.123-9).

Showing life's triumphs in the map of death,
And death's dim look in life's mortality.
Each in her sleep themselves so beautify,
As if between them twain there were no strife,
But that life lived in death, and death in life.

(*Luc.* 400-6)

What could he see but mightily he noted?
What did he note but strongly he desired?
What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,
And in his will his willful eye he tired.
With more than admiration he admired
Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,
Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin.

(*Luc.* 414-20)

Shakespeare's further innovation of his source material for *The Rape of Lucrece*, a development that informs subsequent dramatic work from *Romeo and Juliet* to *As You Like It* and beyond, is the balance of authorial voice with character voices, most significantly those of the inner self.¹⁹ Ovid emphasized the reasoning of the transgressor, Chaucer that of his wronged heroine, but Shakespeare manages to do both (not to mention invite typically silent characters into the dialogue), all the while maintaining his usual distance. When the poet's voice reenters the narrative, it does so only to judge

19. Friar Laurence (esp. *Rom.* 2.6.9-20) represents most fully the authorial voice that intervenes in the narrative poems, suggesting that Shakespeare's approach to the stage was not as removed from his approach to the epyllion as we might believe. Laurence operates on a level of pure sententiousness, chaining together such chestnuts as "These violent delights have violent ends. . ." and "The sweetest honey/ Is loathsome in its own deliciousness," multiplying meanings through continuous juxtaposition, much of a piece with the poet's many authorial interventions in *Lucrece*. Shakespeare establishes just such a motif early in the poem—"For unstained thoughts do seldom dream on evil"; "Birds never limed no secret bushes fear" (*Luc.* 87-8). Then, anticipating her reading of the Troy mural, the poet transfers his sententious authority to Lucrece: "The sweets we wish for turn to loathed sours / Even in the moment that we call them ours" (867-8). These sententious interventions prompt Juliet and Lucrece to internal dialogue, a sophisticated revision of the good angel/bad angel trope of morality plays, reflecting the meaningful debate Chaucer and Shakespeare strove to inspire between text and reader/auditor.

those at fault, implicating Collatine even more stringently than it does Tarquin himself. And yet Shakespeare, via carefully modulated equivocations and in light of the fact that Tarquin's crime in *Lucrece* is even more sinister than previous versions suggest, retains a kind of dramatic objectivity in his most damning accusations, such as the indictment of Collatine at 29-35. Perhaps inspired by Collatine's "advertisement" of his wife, Tarquin seduces Lucrece with an account of her husband's virtues and uses his status as honored guest to access her bedchamber:

He stories to her ears her husband's fame
Won in the fields of fruitful Italy,
And decks with praises Collatine's high name
Made glorious by his manly chivalry
With bruised arms and wreaths of victory.

(*Luc.* 106-10)

Shakespeare reinstates Lucrece's entertainment of Tarquin whereas Chaucer cuts directly to his infiltration of her chamber—reminiscent of Iachimo's violation-by-description of Imogen in *Cymbeline*—suggesting along the lines of Chaucer's Franklin's and Shipman's Tales that the only way to possess a Classically chaste woman is by subterfuge. It is certainly preferable to arguing with chastity personified (a significant point of contact with Marina in *Pericles*) if the transgressor cares not a fig for the consequences, as all versions of Lucretia's story imply. Ovid's Tarquin fondles Lucrece's breasts, perhaps too in awe of their purity to make more than threats involving his sword; replacing Tarquin's hand, Chaucer situates the business end of Tarquin's sword directly at Lucretia's heart. Where Ovid presents a Tarquin beguiled by the tension between pure soul and pulchritude, Chaucer's Tarquin is already aware that his violation of her chastity will also destroy Lucrece's physical body. Though Ovid and

Livy emphasize Tarquin's pause over the political consequences of the impending rape, Chaucer and Shakespeare after him suggest the young prince's spiritual self-negation through his readiness to destroy the object of his desire by possessing her.

In a number of intriguing ways, Tarquin's extremes of self-consciousness anticipate the narrative and emotional centers of potent Shakespearean drama. While clearly invoking Chaucer's narrative voice,²⁰ the self-negating opening of his soliloquy prefigures Richard II's deep immersion in self and, ultimately, his resignation of the crown and its attendant immortality:²¹

'O shame to knighthood and to shining arms!
O foul dishonor to my household's grave!
O impious act including all foul harms!
A martial man to be soft fancy's slave!
True valour still a true respect should have;
Then my digression is so vile, so base,
That it will live engraven in my face.

(*Luc.* 197-203)

This speech serves as a precursor to Hamlet's introspective dilations on the consequences not only of revenge, but life itself. Tarquin's approach to Lucrece's bedchamber as observed by a narrative voice infused with Chaucerian authority is intensified by echoes of Chaucer's "And in the nyght ful thefly gan he stalke" (*LGW* 1781) at line 305.²²

The locks between her chamber and his will,

20. "Tarquinius that art a kyniges eyr,/ And sholdest, as by lynage and by right,/ Don as a lord and as a verry knyght,/ Whi hast thou don dispit to chivalrye? / Whi hastow don this lady villanye? / Allas of the this was a vileyns dede! // But now to purpose; in the story I rede. . ." (*LGW* 1819-25).

21. "Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be. / Therefore, no 'no', for I resign to thee. / Now mark me how I will undo myself; / I give this heavy weight from off my head, / . . . / The pride of kingly sway from out my heart; / With mine own tears I wash away my balm, / With mine own hands I give away my crown, / With mine own tongue deny my sacred state, / . . . / Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit, / And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit!" (*R2* 4.1.201-19).

22. Shakespeare presents this clear appropriation of Chaucer's text even more directly at line 365-6: "Into the chamber wickedly he stalks, / And gazeth on her yet unstained bed."

Each one by him enforced, retires his ward;
But as they open they all rate his ill,
Which drives the creeping thief to some regard.
The threshold grates the door to have him heard;
Night-wandering weasels shriek to see him there:
They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear.

(*Luc.* 302-8)

The poets' firsthand knowledge of sensory impressions, vital to their reader's correlation of human behavior with legendary events, reveals itself in their discursive commentary. Shakespeare, engaging Chaucer at his deepest level yet, recognizes his narrator's dangerous proximity to morality-play vice figures, a subject position necessary to witness mytho-history without being seen. Both poets assume a conspicuous objectivity to mask the darker implications of being, at least spiritually, in Lucretia's bedchamber with Tarquin, but here Shakespeare achieves his strongest resonance with Chaucer by deviating from him. The early modern poet sublimates narrative authority and moral judgement—so strongly delineated in Chaucer's legendary—into the violator's own consciousness. No longer able to rely on his own faculties to justify his impending actions, Tarquin defers to abstractions as he determines to become one himself:

'Then Love and Fortune be my gods, my guide!
My will is backed with resolution.
Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried;
The blackest sin is cleared with absolution;
Against love's fire fear's frost hath dissolution,
The eye of heaven is out, and misty night
Covers the shame that follows sweet delight.'

(*Luc.* 351-7)

These Tarquin-centric moments also evoke Chaucer's English at opportune moments,

enforcing with his metrics precise syllabic readings of diphthongs (dis-pu-ta-ti-on, dis-pen-sa-ti-on, res-o-lu-ti-on, though markedly not in 354-5). Shakespeare emphasizes this trend toward the already archaic in what I perceive as a leaning upon Chaucerian rhyming patterns, especially assonances, not as a rule but when suitable opportunities permit. In these instances, the early modern poet applies a touch of archaism to a specific character whose mindset is a construct of the past, as opposed to a Spenserian evocation of an entire, mythical era through language. Also significant to Shakespeare's Chaucerianism in *The Rape of Lucrece* is that he allows no too-convenient rhyme nor sententious commonplace to disrupt or otherwise the pomp and precision of his rhyme royal.²³ The passage and others, rhythmic and rooted in Tarquin's palpable confusion, encourage strange empathy for a figure painted monolithically and monochromatically in Shakespeare's sources. When he shatters *noblesse* with passion's false blade, the reader is likewise betrayed.

Ovid and Chaucer express Tarquin's princeliness as a series of threats, each of which presumes he wields his father's power, directing it not toward the Roman state but in service of unbridled desire. Shakespeare expands Tarquin's promises of murder and obfuscation from the execution of individual will into a prophecy of monarchy's end, the very ousting of the Tarquins that Ovid's *Fasti* commemorated in the abstract and with which Chaucer bookended his legendary. Finding these authorities sufficient to stand, the early modern poet foregrounds character, hanging the legend in the background like a cyclorama, a mural for the reader to interpret as his Lucrece will read her memory of "a

23. Though it has been frequently noted, it is worth reiterating that rhyme-royal represents the most straightforward of Shakespeare's Chaucerian inheritances. The verse form of *The Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde* (both adapted more than once, as a whole or in part, by Shakespeare), one could not ask for a firmer declaration of serious poetic intent. Likewise, there exist few more challenging models for successful, long-form emulation this side of the Spenserian stanza, itself based on rhyme-royal.

piece / Of skilful painting made for Priam's Troy" (*Luc.* 1366-7). Chaucer, who for roughly the first half of the legendary was content to adapt Ovid, begins at the point of Tarquin's bedchamber incursion to dissent from his source and investigate Lucrese's character:²⁴

Doun was the sonne and day hath lost his lyght:
And in he cometh into a privy halke,
And in the nyght ful thefly gan he stalke, . . .

Were it by wyndow or by other gyn,
With swerd ydrawe shortly he com in
There as she lay, this noble wif Lucesse.
And as she wok, hire bed she felte presse. . . .

And therwithal unto hire throte he sterte,
And sette the poynt al sharp upon hire herte.
No word she spak, she hath no myght therto.
What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago.
Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone,
To whom shal she compleyne or make mone?

(*LGW* F1779-99)

The wolves and lambs of Ovid's and Chaucer's narrative voices become the stuff of Tarquin's inner struggle. What Adonis rejected as antithetical to youth, Shakespeare's Tarquin embraces at his own urging; Romeo's passionate pilgrim resides at their nexus. Like Troilus, young Tarquin abandons the business of state for the pursuit of desire and persistent denial of negative omens. Ultimately, Tarquin must abandon his gods to

24. A. J. Minnis suggests that Chaucer was interested in more than imitating his sources as the great admirers of Ovid (Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, et al) had done. Rather, "According to the Man of Law's account of the *Legend*, his attitude toward Ovid was competitive, even confrontational" (358). Minnis continues, "Chaucer, to be sure, sought to introduce some principles of order and control, as when he presents Lucrece as a martyr for marriage, and emphasis which is quite unprecedented in the *Fasti*" (366). There is something of this tension, this urge to innovate, in Shakespeare's appropriations of Chaucer, but none more manifest than *The Rape of Lucrece*.

achieve Lucrece, much as Juliet and Romeo individually embrace Death and take their own lives, forsaking their God to die together. Though the legendary form does not accommodate introspection through dialogue or interior monologue, Chaucer manages to achieve it by creating a tableau of the rape and positioning his heroine within it—very much a precursor to Shakespeare’s Lucrece, finally a full agent in the construction of her legend, reading the Troy mural for negative examples of what she has been transformed into and refuses to become.

Roman authors present Lucretia’s beauty and praise her chastity without, Chaucer and then Shakespeare imply, truly comprehending these concepts or their implications for her narrative. As Chaucer questioned the Ovidian narrative through the *mise en scene* of her bed’s violation, Shakespeare carries the cleansing torch to the next threshold, humanizing the Lucrece icon to represent her significance more fully. A vital part of this campaign is the implication of Collatine in his wife’s undoing, an accusation that echoes through Classical treatments of Lucretia. Shakespeare, motivated by Chaucer, implicates Ovid and Livy, respectively, in the impassioned praise and coldly objective reporting that inflamed Tarquin’s imagination in the first place. As Chaucer sought to understand Criseyde’s reputation by granting her subjectivity, Shakespeare maintains Lucrece’s traditional blandness until she is alone with great purpose.²⁵

The depth of Shakespeare’s involvement with the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women* suggests that, by 1594, the poet had already begun to work from his memory of

25. This deliberate intervention into the Criseyde legend makes it even more of a strange miracle that Robert Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid* was ever associated with Chaucer’s text, suggesting that subject matter and morality, rather than tone or authorial agenda, guided early modern editors of Chaucer.

Chaucer, a component of the “encyclopedic self-reference” noted above.²⁶ Though he may have consulted Chaucerian texts from time to time, his dexterous application of Chaucerian *matere* and essence in *Lucrece* and elsewhere elicits the sense that he did not need to. To adapt this esteemed literary forefather meant not a conspicuous emulation of his metrics but rather an assimilation of the elder poet’s essence into his developing conception of authorship.²⁷

Shakespeare’s integration of the Chaucerian into his own authorship, which he could now consider as that of a serious narrative poet with a noble patron, probes further depths in his Chaucer memory. In a stroke of meaningful coincidence, Chaucer’s praiseful introduction of Criseyde closely coincides with another of his trademark evocations of “Spring”:

And so bifel, whan comen was the tyme
Of Aperil, whan clothed is the mede
With newe grene, of lusty Veer the pryme,
And swote smellen floures white and rede,
In sondry wises shewed, as I rede,
The folk of Troie hire observaunces olde,
Palladiones feste for to holde.

(*TC* 1.155-161)

In no particular order, feeling in no way “adapted,” Shakespeare incorporates Chaucerian image sets—setting both scene and tone for Troilus’ overwhelming attraction to

26. Kathryn Lynch notes similar, strong connections between Chaucer’s *Legend* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in “Baring Bottom: Shakespeare and the Chaucerian Dream Vision.”

27. As to the question of Thomas Speght’s 1598 edition having a meaningful effect on the poet-playwright’s view of Chaucer the man or maker of Chaucerian narrative, I propose that no impression is ever as potent or perception-altering as the first. Shakespeare clearly read and absorbed Chaucer in an early sixteenth-century edition and would have had to know the poet at least as well as his grammar school Ovid to make such fluid, innovative, and intertextual use of him in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Criseyde—into a vision of feverish desire and icy death. Perhaps a coincidence but no less meaningful, Chaucer’s feast of Pallas corresponds neatly with Ovid’s account of Lucrece in the *Fasti*; both occasions are sober reflections on the source of nation-state power and the means of holding it, each with an unassailable feminine icon at its center. Tarquin’s visual desire mirrors Troilus, nefarious but no less poetic. Shakespeare maintains, as Chaucer does, an ample ambiguity between perceiver and poet. The question of who is seeing and judging Lucrece is ever-present, but mediated by the poet’s subtle implication of himself and audience in Tarquin’s eloquent voyeurism.

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,
Coz’ning the pillow of a lawful kiss;
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombed is,
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.

(*Luc.* 386-92)

In all, Shakespeare offers a prophecy of passionate incontinence so self-negating that Tarquin can only abandon it at the moment of satisfaction. The fecundity of Spring, the green world of dream vision, perhaps only so vivid in Chaucerian dream-spaces and Spenserian pastoral, entwines the cold marble of monuments. Framing these stones in conventional whites and reds are the Petrarchan lilies and roses that Lucrece herself stays from their implications of gold. Shakespeare’s exception to her profound self-denial, a reimagining of the unconscious refuge Chaucer afforded his martyr, materializes when Lucrece sleeps. Shakespeare conceals each detailed image within the silken cemetery of Lucrece’s bedchamber, skillfully repurposing Chaucerian imagery as its antithesis.

While such facility fulfills expectations for the citation and invocation of literary authority within the reader's frame of reference, it is hardly the key to Shakespeare's poetics or the limit of his debt to Chaucer.

Without the bed her other fair hand was,
On the green coverlet, whose perfect white
Showed like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat resembling dew of night.
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light,
And canopied in darkness sweetly lay
Till they might open to adorn the day.

(*Luc.* 393-9)

The "was"/"grass" rhyme forces pronunciations closer to Middle English. This stanza evokes a major Chaucerian trope with its introduction of the daisy, so prominent in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*. Also strongly in evidence is Shakespeare's seamless folding of Chaucer's imagery into his poem's white/red conceit. Shakespeare describes Lucrece's hands separately, one a "lily" beneath her "rosy cheek," the other bereft of warmth atop her bedclothes. Beauty and virtue no longer defy death but take their places in its cycle. I identify Lucrece's "daisy hand" with her suicide simply because the poet presents it as segregated from her beauty's warmth, and therefore more capable of the deed than the "lily," in spite of the latter flower's connection with mourning. Binding the daisy's warmth with the chill of the grave, Shakespeare again employs a Chaucerian image both as a self-contained truth and as its own opposite. By appearance, the food of Tarquin's imagination, Lucrece is an idol akin to Ovid's Galatea and Shakespeare's statues of Diana and Hermione. Too perfect to be touched, their irresistible anti-flesh remains dissectible into fetish objects.

It might be argued that the bulk of these images are commonplaces, are not specifically Chaucerian, and may have other precedents in Shakespeare's experience. But it is worth considering that writers, not to mention readers and auditors, develop awareness in their own time and their own way, usually experiencing figures of speech as original occurrences in the work of others before recognizing them as clichés. As a young writer honing his craft, Shakespeare likely discovered that lines he conceived as original had already been written and, in the cases most germane to this discussion, already written by Chaucer. Though cryptomnesia likely played its part, it remains possible that when Shakespeare knowingly employed a commonplace of idiomatic or poetic English, he used it not because it was a standard trope but because Chaucer's usage was his benchmark. A significant feature of Shakespeare's Chaucer-memory is its permeability, from actual Chaucerian source to free-association with Chaucer's probable sources, to Shakespeare's interpretation of each singularity, to imaginative confluences of the above. The early modern poet makes this bleed-through a virtue, presenting a collective essence of the elder poet without depending on any particular source.

The many points of contact between Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, at first thought as thematically improbable a pairing as ever there was, illuminate this process without undoing too much of its mystery. The sun rises and sets based upon its relationship to the daisy in Chaucer and Lucrece in Shakespeare. Motivated perhaps by her association with the daisy, Shakespeare questions Cupid's positioning of Alceste as foremost of love's martyrs and attempts to elevate Lucrece to the exalted status she enjoys in Chaucer's prologue. For Chaucer's narrator, the sun rises to renew the daisy, only to find itself outshone; in Shakespeare's appropriation, the

relationship is much more tenuous, with clouds capable of bringing temporary darkness and death into the green world of Chaucer's prologue.

That said, an opposing truth may reside in the disparity between Chaucer's "morwe of May," when the narrator's dream vision takes place, and Shakespeare's "April daisy on the grass." Coincidence or not, Shakespeare's positioning of the daisy prior to the devotions of Chaucer's dreamer entrenches his reading of Lucrece at Spring's beginning rather than its fecund peak, representing a sort of mid-point between Ovid's February cleansing and Chaucer's May devotions. Chaucer's generic May morning, complicated somewhat by revisions in the G-prologue, suggests a plateau rather than an ascent to perfection. His daisy, already perfected, is ready to be consecrated an altar. Shakespeare equates the synecdoche of Lucrece's suicide hand, the publicist of the rape in sources where she cannot or does not speak for herself, with Chaucer's metonymic floral wellspring of purity. Tarquin's descriptions of Lucrece's physical beauty, the rationale for his violation, transform perfections once known solely to Collatine to common knowledge; Lucrece's reading of the Troy tapestry completes her relocation from an isolated, bepedastaled state to public view where she might be idolized or disparaged should the poet inadequately present her case.

Shakespeare often takes issue with Chaucer's occasionally unquestioning representations of Ovid, whose Lucretia gives herself to Tarquin in order to preserve Collatinus's reputation by way of her own. It should be noted, though, that Livy's more causal view—that Tarquin's threat of staged adultery is the specific instrument of Lucrece's surrender—

Then *Tarquinius* confessed his loue, and began to intreate her, and therewithal vsed sundry menacing woordes, by all meanes attemptyng

to make her quiet: when he sawe her obstinate, and that she would not yelde to his requeste, notwithstanding his cruell threates, he added shamefull and villainous woordes, sayng. That he would kill her, and when she was slaine he would also kill his slaue , and place hym by her, that it might be reported she was slain, beyng taken in adulterie. She *vanquished* with his terrible and infamous threat. (Livy 39-47)

This scene is not far removed from the sacrifice-as-avoidance ethos Ovid espouses.

Chaucer mediates this tension by depriving Lucrece of consciousness when faced with infamy and therefore the ability to defend herself at 1812-8 of *The Legend of Good Women*, quoted above.

Shakespeare inverts Chaucer's strategy, rendering Lucrece, at that critical moment unexplored by Livy or Ovid, hyperconscious during the rape. If physically unable to resist, as Ovid suggests and Chaucer concurs, she resists Tarquin spiritually and philosophically; this state of elevated agency would be undone by Ovid's invocation of feminine frailty and impossible to achieve if she, as in Livy, were to consciously surrender.²⁸ Shakespeare's Lucrece, who has already implored Tarquin with princely rhetoric, even takes retroactive control of the situation by employing Tarquin's own language to deconstruct his actions. Taking Chaucer's only non-Ovidian attribution of speech to Lucrece as his touchstone—"What best is that," quod she, "that weyeth thus?" (LGW F1788)—Shakespeare fully realized one of his earliest trademarks: a heroine who

28. "He was welcomed kindly, for he came of kindred blood. How was her heart deceived! All unaware she, hapless dame, prepared a meal for her own foes. His repast over, the hour of slumber came. 'Twas night, and not a taper shone in the whole house. He rose, and from the gilded scabbard he drew his sword, and came into thy chamber, virtuous spouse. And when he touched the bed, 'The steel is in my hand, Lucretia,' said the king's son 'and I that speak am a Tarquin.' She answered never a word. Voice and power of speech and thought itself fled from her breast. But she trembled, as trembles a little lamb that, caught straying from the fold, lies low under a ravening wolf. What could she do? Should she struggle? In a struggle a woman will always be worsted. Should she cry out? But in his clutch was a sword to silence her. Should she fly? His hands pressed heavy on her breast, the breast that till then had never known the touch of stranger hand" (*Fasti* 115). Chaucer closely follows Ovid's lines before calling their substance to account.

attempts to comprehend her surroundings and take responsibility for her actions, externalizing the inner being that, according to classical sources, must remain hermetically sealed, is more inherently dramatic than the most charismatic of heroes.

A significant aspect of the Lucrece figure, which also denotes her centrality in the Chaucer-Shakespeare nexus, is her subject-position. In a prediction of his ultimate mastery of metatheatrical forms, the poet-playwright infuses his poetic narrative with stagecraft, establishing Lucrece as Chaucerian interpreter and active spectator.

To this well-painted piece is LUCRECE come,
To find a face where all distress is stelled.

(*Luc.* 1443-4)

In [Hecuba] the painter had anatomized
Time's ruin, beauty's wrack and grim care's reign.

(1450-1)

On this sad shadow LUCRECE spends her eyes,
And shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes,
Who nothing wants to answer her but cries
And bitter words to ban her cruel foes:
The painter was no god to lend her those,
And therefore LUCRECE swears he did her wrong
To give her so much grief without a tongue.

(1457-63)

This study of Hecuba, in which Lucrece connects her plight and its consequences to Virgil's founding epic of Rome,²⁹ is but one potent example among several, effectively

29. The *Aeneid* is also the clear source for Geoffrey the poet's extended, Dido-centric ekphrasis on the "table of bras" in Chaucer's *The House of Fame* (140-382). Some of the confusion between relief and paint, wall and tapestry in Shakespeare's *Lucrece* might well have its source in this connection.

balancing psychologically detailed character study against a mytho-historical backdrop.³⁰ Shakespeare's "supersaturated," intertextual approach (here, we might add "multimedia") transcends mere character centrality or point of view. Lucrece is a master observer and contextualizer, viewing "Troy's painted woes" (1492) selectively, out of narrative order, fitting what she sees to how she feels, much as the adapting poet shapes source material. The "painter" to whom she consistently refers, if he does not precisely correspond to Chaucer, certainly exemplifies the aesthetic and emotional intersections of artist, work and audience that formed Shakespeare's sense of the Chaucerian.

Deviating from Ovid, Chaucer multiplied Lucesse's husband and father into a crowd of co-mourners who do not yet comprehend what they are mourning. Shakespeare focuses on Collatine and his personal retinue, representing Rome's sorrow and outrage as well as its collective guilt. To emphasize the singular blame the early modern poet earlier ascribed to Collatine, Lucrece's father remains conspicuously absent from her semi-public revelation. In a marked thematic contrast to the sources, Collatine's arrival coincides with the conclusion of Lucrece's *ekphrasis* and imaginary defacing of the Troy mural.³¹ Ovid notes a protracted pause between the mourners' arrival and Lucretia's revelation:

When they saw her plight, they asked why she mourned, whose obsequies she was preparing, or what ill had befallen her. She was long silent, and for shame hid her face in her robe: her tears flowed like a running stream. On this side and on that her father and her spouse did soothe her grief and pray her to tell, and in blind fear they wept and quaked. Thrice she assayed

30. That this passage also resonates with Chaucer's dream visions, particularly *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*, seems a compelling basis for future study.

31. Livy and Ovid, in the spirit of Oedipus's blinding or Atreus's culinary experiments, note Tarquin's departure and leave the rape's immediate impact on Lucrece to dramatic ellipsis. Rather than respond introspectively or emotionally, she acts out of deference to husband and father. Her decision to die by her own hand already made, she summons them as witnesses to a predetermined act.

to speak, and thrice gave o'er, and when the fourth time she summoned up courage she did not for that lift up her eyes. (*Fasti* 117)

Emphasizing her impeccable modesty and preternatural self-denial, Ovid's format allows Lucretia one expression of humanity: an admission of shame. Any introspection on her part would be subject to encroachment by the institutions she is made to serve. Chaucer addressed this issue with Lucesse's swoon, a metaphysical moment that supplements her subjective experience with out-of-body objectivity. The tension between Chaucerian and Ovidian redactions now manifest in his own adaptation, Shakespeare answers the loss of consciousness with heightened subjectivity. His humanized Lucrece, seeking "means to mourn some newer way" (*Luc.* 1365), finds mytho-historical precedent and context for her woe within her memory of the Troy mural. In his presentation of that "well-painted piece," Shakespeare suggests that Lucrece's tragic resolve extends from her reading of those "thousand lamentable objects" (*Luc.* 1373) rather than marital duty. The set-piece, which looks forward to the Chorus of *Henry V* in its elucidation-on-the-fly style, affords Lucrece the agency deprived her by Ovid, hinted at but unexplored by Chaucer and solidifies Shakespeare's invaluable contribution to her legend. Lucrece's reading, inclusive of her admiration for the "wondrous skill" of the "conceited artist" (*Luc.* 1528; 1371), evokes Virgil and Homer by way of Chaucer's *House of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, asserting herself as an active participant in her own legacy. In the process, she also makes explicit Shakespeare's association of Chaucer with Classical authority.

CHAPTER 3

CHAUCERIAN SOLAAS: *TROILUSES*

AND CRISEYDES

Chaucer-Shakespeare studies to date weave an intricate web of insight and conjecture, not least where Shakespeare's first direct source adaptation of Chaucer is concerned. As Ann Thompson observes of *Troilus and Cressida*:

From the very earliest comments on the source to the present day we find the critics radically divided. Several have argued for a fairly close connection between the two versions of the story, but we find a modern editor of the play saying there is 'no certainty of a debt at first-hand to Chaucer's tale'. Frequently such statements are based on rather vague literary judgements: M. M. Reese remarked that 'one of the most surprising gaps in Shakespeare's reading is his comparative unfamiliarity with the works of Chaucer', revealing in a footnote that the evidence for this consisted in the difference in tone between *Troilus and Cressida* and Chaucer's poem. (9)

E. Talbot Donaldson's *The Swan at the Well* details the continuing one-sidedness of the Chaucer-Shakespeare conversation:

. . .most critics concerned with comparisons have been Shakespeareans and only incidentally Chaucerians . . . Shakespeareans are naturally interested in showing how the Chaucerian background can illuminate the plays, but this perfectly proper interest often has the effect of assuming that, although the play is a puzzle requiring answers, the Chaucerian works that may help provide answers have settled—one might also say static—meanings that are available to any reader. (2)

But perhaps Donaldson best explains the critical confusion surrounding *Troilus and*

Cressida when he roots it firmly in the relation of poet-playwright to source material.³²

Donaldson writes, “Chaucer’s poem is a vast assemblage of unknowns, of half-truths and half-perceptions on which each must build his understanding of the poem—something Shakespeare did not miss” (4). Chaucer’s *Troilus*, veering as it does from homage to innovation, encourages *imitatio* while suggesting through its mastery of imitative forms the very end of homage.

But litel book, no making thow n’envie,
But subgit be to alle poesye;
And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

(*TC* 5.1789-92)

If critics looked to Shakespeare to provide scene-by-scene echoes of Chaucer’s epic or imitations of his style, they may have been constructing idealized, variant Chaucers and Shakespeares, poets defined not by the texts they produced but narrowly subjective readings of them. Between the idol-making of Caxton and Lydgate and the reverent revisionism of Robert Henryson, Chaucer’s paradigmatic relationship to vernacular English poetry experienced a significant shift. Seth Lerer explains, “by the turn of the sixteenth century, Chaucer’s presence in the literary system has itself changed radically . . . Chaucer functions in the invocations of his name rather than the evocations of his style. He is the object of citation rather than quotation, a figure whose works are not to be imitated in any wholesale or controlling way, but rather as a mine for tag lines, clichés, and allusions” (20). Echoing Chaucer’s *humblesse* in the closing stanzas of the *Troilus*, the poet-playwright acknowledges his inability to imitate. Keenly aware of his

32. The lack of consensus continues the misapprehension of Shakespeare’s *Troilus* begun with its Quarto (1609) and Folio publications.

source's recent reputation as a fountain of well-worn *sententiae*—as Clare R. Kinney aptly dubs the phenomenon, “fragments of detachable wisdom” (68)—and wishing to transcend it, Shakespeare instead evokes the master as a voice from the past, then asserts him as a voice of the present.³³

Streamlining the epic yet intimate romance of Chaucer's poem for the stage, Shakespeare introduced Troilus after the fatalistic intervention of Love, bristling with arrows in response to the petulant young warrior's brash insult. Chaucer's descriptions of Troilus as well as those of Criseyde, limited to his humane Pandarus and smitten narrator, find voice in nearly every character of Shakespeare's romantic, mock-historical tragicomedy. Even moments in the Greek camp are dedicated to building concentrated, three-dimensional versions of the play's multitude of two-dimensional lovers, locked as they are in a medieval romance entrapped by its Classical setting. Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, in a love clearly unknown to Paris, Helen, Aeneas and Hector, find their passion acknowledged only by an unreliable Pandarus. Since he treats their night together as a one-night stand, one doubts he trusts the efficacy of his own work. In Chaucer, Pandarus is primarily concerned with keeping their secret, an element scarcely nodded to in Shakespeare's plot.

Along these lines, the cohabitation of Achilles and Patroclus is enough to convince the Greeks of their supposedly secret romance—that the latter is in fact their great hero's “varlet” and “male whore.” Thus a camp rumor becomes Greek truth even as it recalls the experience of the titular lovers. Love is weakness in both worlds, emphasized by Shakespeare's peculiar focus on the dormant Achilles. In Homer, Achilles moped about,

33. This project was no doubt abetted, perhaps even motivated, by the popularity of Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer.

demanded that he not be troubled with anything so unseemly as a battlefield summons, and received elaborate gifts from his mother. Shakespeare's Achilles plays word games with a stolen slave and approves mocking impressions of his fellow commanders, enjoying his self-exclusion from the battlefield rather than suffering for it. Likewise, Shakespeare turns the lovelorn, ineffectual Troilus into an object lesson in misused potential. The boy who could have grown into manhood, the equivalent of his heralded brother, shares the brunt of Shakespeare's dual plot with the glory hound who drops out of the military campaign of his lifetime. As Chaucer's Troilus witnesses from a great height, the war goes on without them.

In Chaucer, Criseyde's anguish and the private details of intimacy become public knowledge, readily manipulated and strategized as machines of war. Where source and adaptation engage in dialogue, we find Chaucer's Pandarus less in command of Troilus and Criseyde's secret than he takes pains to believe. A telling moment in Shakespeare's play, when the otherwise oblivious Paris instantly declares that he knows where Troilus can be found, suggests that, contrary to the indications of Shakespeare's source material, this Pandar's wanton enthusiasm has exposed the lovers' secret.

Praising his lovers even as he introduces them, Chaucer extols their virtues in the face of romantic adversity. His clear intention is to bring Troilus and Criseyde into unquestionable repute with his audience. In this way, Chaucer plays Pandar with his narrative voice, extolling the virtues of his lovers to the reading audience in spite of their previous handling by Boccaccio and others. Similarly, Shakespeare embeds his play with Chaucer's textual authority, an intimate qualifier for his merciless satire of love and war, albeit by different, even contrary, means. The Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*, an

audience's first contact with his play, is clearly geared for war in the vein of *Henry V's* Chorus.

...Now on Dardan plains
The fresh and yet unbruised Greeks do pitch
Their brave pavilions. Priam's six-gated city—
Dardan and Timbria, Helias, Chetas, Troien
And Antenorides—with massy staples
And corresponsive and fulfilling bolts,
Spar up the sons of Troy.
Now expectation, tickling skittish spirits
On one and other side, Trojan and Greek,
Sets all on hazard.

(*Tro.* Prologue 13-22)

Speaking no words of love or even mentioning Troilus' demeanor on the battlefield, Shakespeare's first example of a warrior in a play preoccupied with war is not "The wise, the worthi Ector the secounde,/In whom that alle vertu list habounde" Chaucer presents (*TC* 2.158-9), but a young man seemingly unaffected by the serious business of death who unarms when he should rearm. Instead he beweeeps his lovelorn state, yearns for Cressida, and trades insipid double-entendres with a bawdy, troublemaking Pandarus. Both authors manipulate their sources to suit their varying agendas and tones.

E. Talbot Donaldson muses, "It is said that Boccaccio intended his *Criseida* to represent his hotly loved mistress, Maria d'Aquino, apparently in revenge for an infidelity she was guilty of or one he knew she would be guilty of. And no matter how much charm Chaucer's *Criseyde* shows in the course of her love affair with Troilus, she betrays him brutally in the end" (78-9). The poetic presence of Chaucer's narrator suggests a reconciling, rationalizing agent, more of an intimately involved Boccaccio

than an objective, elusive Lollius. Knowing the inevitable outcome of his narrative and the predisposition of his reader, he presents a detailed before-and-after, a human woman in an impossible situation not of her making become the Pandora of feminine fickleness. Rather than promote an authority compromised by subjectivity, he defers to ancient narrative and historical sources and presents what he understands. It is crucial not to lose sight of the fact that Shakespeare interpreted Chaucer in the process of adapting his tragic romance in much the same way that Chaucer converted Boccaccio's very personal, very courtly construction of the Troilus story in *Il Filostrato* into a third-person identification with his misunderstood lovers.

Those aspects Shakespeare might have misread and those he might have willfully misrepresented are doubtless a sound basis for future study. Suffice it to say for purposes to follow that Shakespeare both embraced and corrupted Chaucer's conceptions of Troilus and Criseyde beyond any necessary concessions to the stage. Most evidently, the poet-playwright's fast and loose treatment of the love story, demystifying Chaucer's Classical notion of Love as a petulant, vengeful entity, creates stronger juxtapositions with the war plot. Shakespeare's redaction transcends typical relations of adapter to source when the poet-playwright intentionally draws Chaucer's text into a multi-textual fray, positing *Troilus and Criseyde*'s intimate poetic identifications against Caxton's exhaustive confluences of medieval chivalry with the Trojan War and Lydgate's reverential, *ab ovo*, Chaucerian *imitatio*.³⁴ In this way, Shakespeare situates Chaucer at

34. Ann Thompson, who has considered Caxton and Lydgate in conjunction with Shakespeare's *Troilus* in even more detail than Geoffrey Bullough, remarks: "[Shakespeare's] other medieval sources for *Troilus*, Lydgate and Caxton, refer frequently to Chaucer, especially in conjunction with the love-story, of which they give abbreviated accounts, relying on their readers' knowledge of his authoritative version" (115). Of the exhaustiveness of Lydgate's *Troy-Book*, Bullough notes that the poet begins with Jason and the Golden Fleece, tracing the narratives of multiple Greek and Roman characters through Aeneas's arrival

the top of his personal canon without appearing to depend upon him.

Chaucer's narrator unrestrainedly admires Criseyde, an audience-friendly advocate verging on one-man fan club. Though his accounts of her beauty and virtue never ring ironic, let alone false, Chaucer contrasts the reported Criseyde with the Criseyde his narrator takes for true. This makes Criseyde a prototype for such future negotiations among authorial presentation, character perceptions and inner reality as the Knight, Pardoner, and the Wife of Bath. Shakespeare, aware of the difficult balance of sympathetic identification between his dual plots, contains this point of view within the love story while prompting key Greeks to voice dubious approaches to chivalry in love and on the battlefield. With Chaucer's initial descriptions of Criseyde in mind (1.99-105 and 1.169-82), E. Talbot Donaldson explains:

What [Chaucer] does is present us with the portrait of a woman of almost mythological femininity, and readers respond to such a portrait by becoming their own mythmakers, working on those aspects of Criseyde they find most congenial. And what an abundance of contradictory qualities we have to work on! Criseyde is the timidest creature in the world, afraid of Greeks, and of love, and of steel weapons; she is also, as we have just seen, of full assured looking and manner, and she almost never loses her poise of self-possession; she trembles like an aspen leaf in Troilus's embrace, a poor lark in the clutches of a sparrow hawk, to whom, a few minutes before, she has had to administer first aid for a fainting fit. Indeed, in the details of carrying on a love affair a certain aggressiveness compromises her timidity. (81)

The play frames attitudes toward constancy, chastity, chivalry and *noblesse* in such ways that those themes call themselves into question as they do in the Knight's and Miller's Tales. Adding to this collective adaptation of Chaucerian themes as opposed to direct-

in Italy. Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* is similarly concerned with conveying the whole story, in marked contrast to Chaucer's focused, character-driven narrative (6.92-5).

source adaptation are echoes of image and matter from *The Parliament of Fowls*:

“Nay, God forbede a lovere shulde chaunge!”
The turtle seyde, and wex for shame al red,
“Though that his lady everemore be straunge,
Yit lat hym serve hire ever, til he be ded.
Forsothe, I preyse nat the goeses red;
‘For, though she deyede, I wolde non other make;
I wol ben hires, til that the deth me take.’”
“Well bourded,” quod the doke, “by myn hat!
That men shulde loven alwey causeles!
Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?
Daunseth he murye that is myrtheles?
Who shulde recche of that is recheles?”
“Ye queke,” seyde the goos [doke], “ful wel and fayre!³⁵
There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!”
“Now fy, cher!” quod the gentil tercelet,
“Out of the dunghill cam that word ful right!
Thow canst nat seen which thing is wel beset!
Thow farst by love as oules don by light:
The day hem blent, ful wel they se by nyght.”
(PF 582-600)

Follow the limb cautiously to this moment, roughly analogous to Pandarus’ admixture of maxims in Chaucer’s *Troilus*:

“Nece, alle thyng hath tyme, I dar awove;
For when a chaumbre afire is or an halle,
Wel more need is, it sodeynly rescowe
Than to dispute and axe amonges alle
How this candel in the strawe is falle.

35. There is much variation from manuscript to manuscript on the “doke” or “goos” of line 594.

A benedicite! For al among that fare
The harm is don, and fare-wel feldefare!”³⁶

(*TC* 3.855-61)

Shakespeare picks up the tone of these passages, cross-pollinating Chaucerian images that, though they continue to mean what they meant with regard to pairings of lovers, have picked up some dirt along the way:

Alas the day, how loath you are to offend daylight! An ‘twere dark,
you’d close sooner. So, so, rub on, and kiss the mistress. How now,
a kiss in a fee farm? Build there, carpenter, the air is sweet. Nay,
you shall fight your hearts out ere I part you. The falcon as the tercel,
for all the ducks i’ the river. Go to, go to. (*Tro.* 2.46-52)

That this free association of carpenter, light and dark, and falcon, tercel and duck issues from the unlikely mouth of Pandarus suggests that Shakespeare looked to Chaucer for the means of transition from the ridiculous to the sublime, but also from purely constructed romantic abstraction to utterly concrete physical consummation.³⁷ As Chaucer’s narrator treads the line between praise and pandering, Shakespeare’s Pandarus asserts himself as a pseudo-Chaucerian authority, mixing metaphors of lovers’ entwinings.

Himself apparently unlucky in love, Chaucer’s Pandarus opens the floodgates of profligacy, turpitude, and regret both for himself and Troilus, all due to the appeal of vicarious romance. His genuine affection for the lovers makes his own end as tragic as theirs. Shakespeare’s irreverent Pandarus is already well practiced at arranging romantic entanglements for himself and others, converting what might have been a third tragic ending for his Chaucerian namesake into ironic desert. He does, however, demonstrate

36. Feldefare means “thrush.”

37. This is the cornerstone of Donaldson’s opening chapter, “The Embarrassments of Art: The Tale of Sir Thopas, “Pyramus and Thisbe,” and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”

dramatic prescience, predicting Cressida's ultimate end early in the first scene ("let her to the Greeks, and I'll tell her the next time I see her," 1.1.77-8) and compensate for compromises of Chaucer's benign and benevolent characterization by presenting Troilus as the great warrior Shakespeare's three medieval sources tout him as. This Pandar's praise is difficult to reconcile with a Troilus we have just heard whining about his unrequited love for Cressida. In Chaucer, Troilus is indeed as Pandarus advertises, but ultimately becomes what Shakespeare says he is. In Shakespeare, Troilus's behavior is comical among men but somehow honest and poignant in Cressida's presence. Shakespeare's Troilus, then, is a blend of source-inspired verisimilitude and wildly anachronistic early modern liberties. Then again, Chaucer was hardly a stickler regarding the sort of periodicity that interfered with the collective impact of his storytelling. Many of Shakespeare's tonal shifts derive from the pastiche of styles, genres and sources, as well as his narrative and dramatic goals. This is perhaps best exemplified by the play's revolving-door climax of comedic, mytho-historical and romantic plot elements, with each collision of source and tone represented and reinvented within the dramatic space: The homosocial triangle of Troilus, Diomedes and Ajax, each determined to resolve subjective issues of masculinity; the epic confrontation of Achilles and Hector reimagined as a gang slaying; and the sardonic commentary of Thersites struggling against the fatalistic irony of Pandarus for supremacy over the din of battle (*Tro.* 5.6-11).

Since Shakespeare invokes Chaucer with many an allusion but no direct application of Chaucerian text, any evaluation of the former's adaptation of the latter's romantic plot must naturally hinge on the playwright's management and mediation of the poet's themes, agendas and figurative devices underscored by a working knowledge of their

unraveling. Such an awareness, detailed by Ann Thompson, facilitates Shakespeare's mutual application of prophecy and hindsight, rooting his adaptation of the Troilus narrative in perpetual awareness of the narrative traditions it derives from, going back to Benoît de Sainte-Maure through Guido de Colonne and Giovanni Boccaccio to Chaucer. Thompson describes the pervasive appeal the story had for early modern playwrights:

The type of story that attracted the the dramatists' attention is significant, since it shows an interest in the serious, romantic side of Chaucer rather than the comic naturalism for which he is perhaps known today. No one dramatized *The Miller's Tale* or *The Reeve's Tale* for example, which might seem more stage-worthy to a modern writer than *The Knight's Tale* or *The Clerk's Tale*. (58)

Thompson's comment dovetails interestingly with Seth Lerer's later assessment of turn-of-the-sixteenth-century Chaucer as a storehouse of sententiousness, decontextualized from his existence as a maker of poetry. The playwrights, attracted as their predecessors were to "serious" Chaucer, worked to restore him from commonplace-book quotability to the status of foundational English narrative poet. Implicit in Thompson's discussion is an acknowledgment of Chaucer's intent—based in many respects on his reading of and changes to Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*—to advance from translation and adaptation to the composition of a serious romance. Just such an agenda, readily identifiable throughout Chaucer's "litel bok," informs Shakespeare's transition from populist writer for the public stage to poet-playwright, a movement from *Titus Andronicus* to *Romeo and Juliet*, from *Venus and Adonis* to *The Rape of Lucrece*. In this light, Shakespeare's adaptation of the Troilus narrative seems geared to concretize his Chaucerian muse while moving firmly to an interpretive, rather than merely evocative, relationship with his source. For Chaucer's concept to function at its full potential, readers must take his lovers seriously, a

fact of Chaucerian *auctoritee* implicit in Shakespeare's approach to adaptation.

The poet-playwright's Cressida represents virtue and vice interchangeably, a shifting dynamic the play distributes between Troilus's romantic idealism and the dissolution of Greek morality and humanity. Her much-remarked suggestive interplay with Pandarus is merely the most blatant example of the lengths she will go to preserve herself. She is Shakespeare's Beatrice with neither a comedy to inhabit nor intimates to confide in, as Jill Mann has also noted, and as such her openness and banter have serious consequences (116). Cast adrift among the Greeks, with echoes of the Magdalene plays that Shakespeare exaggerates in 4.5 and then sublimates into Cressida's suffering, the adriftness she strives to avoid becomes her metaphor of choice. Rather than simply set up oppositions between Chaucer's idealized Classical-cum-chivalric world, observing its brutal realities from the safe distance of soliloquy, Shakespeare attempts to juxtapose and reconcile them.³⁸ We must add *Troilus and Cressida* to that short list including *Julius Caesar* of prerequisites for *Hamlet*. As Hamlet must reconcile his father's proactive, political demonstrations of military force to what he knows of national sovereignty and the individual human soul, Cressida and the audience must negotiate the play's minefield of passionate indulgence and political commodification. More than the answer to what happens when the object of chivalrous affection turns out to be human, Cressida is the poet-playwright's attempt to bridge the *Criseyde* of Chaucer and the *Cresseid* of Henryson.³⁹

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare's first romantic tragedy, is a play as informed by

38. This effect is most pronounced in Shakespeare's greatest amendment to Chaucer's narrative, Ulysses and Troilus bearing witness to, and offering live commentary upon, Cressida's inconstancy in 5.2.

39. I follow Donaldson here in refuting any possibility that Shakespeare believed Chaucer to be the author of *The Testament of Cresseid*, regardless of its inclusion in either pre-Speght text through which he may have first received both poems (76-7).

Chaucerian authority as his first great romantic comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, considered above. Reading the love plot of *Troilus and Cressida* against *Romeo*, its probable prototype, we find a Troilus pining for the Petrarchan ideal, an unattainable, objectified Rosaline. He recognizes, and Pandarus exploits, Cressida's vulnerability to the whims of honorable men, a condition inherent to her status as daughter of a traitor. The Trojan council and Greek army objectify her primarily because she is a woman and therefore may be traded. The fact that she is Calchas's offspring merely increases her economic viability. As Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio create a collective definition of Juliet that can only exist outside of Capulet's estate, Troilus's allies describe Cressida as a daughter of the enemy even when she sits quietly at home. In time of war, Chaucer and Shakespeare suggest, these masculine revisions of feminine identity need justify neither themselves nor the commodification they promote. Where Chaucer expressed the individual and social manifestations of this phenomenon as conditions of *Troilus and Criseyde*'s mytho-historical world, Shakespeare continued their aggressive dissection of them, begun in *Lucrece* and refined in *Romeo and Juliet*.

I tell thee I am mad
In Cressid's love. Thou answer'st 'She is fair',
Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse, O, that her hand
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense
Hard as the palm of ploughman. This thou tell'st me—
As true thou tell'st me—when I say I love her;
But, saying thus, instead of oil and balm,

Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given me
The knife that made it.

(*Tro.* 1.1.48-60)⁴⁰

Troilus's romantic longing for Cressida in the abstract—what amounts to an untouchable Rosaline—effectively removes him, like Romeo, from the “war plot.” Upon meeting the object of his desire, however, he finds a perfectly willing, no questions asked, physically approachable Juliet with whom he can explore the non-martial aspects of his nature. What they desire is Petrarchan, but what they are allowed to have—and are ready to die for, each discovers—is inherently Chaucerian. Shakespeare's bifurcation of Chaucer's *Troilus* plot prefigures the dramatic romances more fully than the comic/tragic, high/low dichotomies of earlier works, suggesting that the poet-playwright was keen to renovate materials long in play. A significant step in this process, evident in Shakespeare's approach to *Troilus*, involved relocating that *matere* nearer its Chaucerian origins by an emphasis on thematic resonance over narrative content. As Ann Thompson elucidates, poetic and dramatic allusions to Chaucer and *Troilus and Criseyde* were a relative commonplace in the late sixteenth century (2-3; 17). The end result, with its page and stage possibilities fully considered, suggests that Shakespeare set out to bring Chaucer's “litel bok . . . litel myn tragedye” (*TC* 5.1786) to the stage as the poet had not yet been, with a clear, on-the-sleeve acknowledgment of his narrative authority. Rather than continue to cement Chaucerian narrative and *sentence* into the brickwork of early modern drama, with *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare revealed Chaucer as the architect of its infrastructure.

Most likely a deliberate choice by Shakespeare, the few romantic moments that

40. This passage seems to evoke Chaucer's *Troilus* 1.1086-92, cited below.

function free of his play's running irony are Troilus's Petrarchan outpourings and Cressida's Juliet-like responses when they are ultimately left alone. Apart from each other—especially in the presence of Shakespeare's Pandarus-gone-wrong—the lovers read as either morose or giddy. Unusual as this seems coming from Shakespeare's pen in other than outright comedy, he renders the love plot romantically honest through the poetry of their exchanges. In this way, Shakespeare draws on Chaucer's parting scene (*TC* 3.1415-1530) while accessing the spectator's memory of his own *Romeo and Juliet* for a number of its contrasting as well as contrary effects.

Troilus: To bed, to bed! Sleep kill those pretty eyes
 And give as soft attachment to thy senses
 As infants empty of all thought!

Cressida: Good morrow, then.

Troilus: I prithee now, to bed.

Cressida: Are you aweary of me?

Troilus: O Cressida! But that the busy day,
 Waked by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows,
 And dreaming night will hide our joys no longer,
 I would not from thee.

Cressida: Night hath been too brief.

Troilus: Beshrew the witch! With venomous wights she stays
 As tediously as hell, but flies the grasps of love
 With wings more momentary-swift than thought.

(*Tro.* 4.2.4-15)

Troilus, filled with a romantic knight's sense of duty on awakening, obeys the dawn's call with his intention to leave and yet contradicts its reality with his choice of words. Intimate philosophical connections to Shakespeare's Romeo render hints of disingenuousness, a kind of morning-after insouciance lingering around the edges of his

lines, less compelling than the conflicting modes of his poetry. On the page, Shakespeare builds Troilus's most Chaucerian moment from a conflation of Petrarch and Romeo with the even more elevated speech of his Theseus and Oberon. The images which Troilus conjures prove prophetic, summoning him to battle against the Greeks, upon whom his story and his life are about to depend. Contradicting Troilus with emotional truth based in the reality of the morning after, Cressida enforces Shakespeare's dramatic need in *Troilus and Cressida* to undo every romantic expression and declaration of chivalric purpose within moments of its realization. Larks heralding the morn, which in turn heralds the raising of nighttime's curtain over secret assignations, might be considered purely incidental to the romantic mode had not Shakespeare already used them to foreshadow the separation of Romeo from Juliet. Their indelible parting at dawn is not only an echo of Chaucer,⁴¹ but Shakespeare's revisitation as tragedy of the Chaucerian sources of comedy he deployed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The poet-playwright mirrors Chaucer's dramatic strategy if not entirely his intent, juxtaposing Troilus and Cressida's romantic union with Calchas's demand to be reunited with his daughter. In another instance of genre blending, Calchas's demands of Agamemnon recall Egeus's request of Theseus at the outset of *Dream*. In exchange for self-sacrifice and prophetic services rendered, Calchas demands that the patriarchal status quo be maintained and his daughter remain under his thumb. Since as a traitor to his nation he is in no position to negotiate with or dictate policy to his new masters, the prophet's imperatives border on the comic:

. . .but this Antenor,

41. The moment resonates through The Legend of Thisbe in *The Legend of Good Women*, most profoundly in their planning and parting (LGW F770-92). Sadly, though, it appears that the lioness devoured the songbirds.

I know, is such a wrest in their affairs
That their negotiations all must slack,
Wanting his manage; and they will almost
Give us a prince of blood, a son of Priam,
In change of him.

(*Tro.* 3.3.22-27)

Indeed, Calchas appears by his hyperbole fully prepared to set in motion a series of merry mixups in the forest rather than the thwarted romance and tragic endgame necessitated by Shakespeare's configuration. Dares, Dictys and Dante, each with their particular influence on Chaucer's text, develop Antenor beyond Homer's wise Trojan counselor into Troy's great traitor. If it takes one to know one, Shakespeare's Calchas is either extremely remiss in his prophetic duties or playing both sides against the middle. Agamemnon's instantaneous assent emphasizes the clownish dullness Aeneas attributes to him in the earlier tent scene.

Chaucer's text—and not merely his narrative—is central to Shakespeare's play, for even when the playwright draws from other sources or fabricates material entirely, he does so as complement or opposition to Chaucer's romance. Arguably, outside of *Troilus and Cressida*, none of Shakespeare's plays can boast characters more aware of their source material. As Donaldson, having noted Criseyde's awareness of Boccaccio and Benoît de Sainte-Maure, explains:

In Shakespeare's play, Troilus, Cressida, and Pandarus are also already familiar with the story, with the result that Cressida is forced to foreshadow her infidelity even before she sleeps with Troilus, and it is he who forces her to do so . . . [his] Troilus has been reading Henryson as well as Chaucer, for Henryson is the first considerable poet to celebrate Troilus' truth and to counterbalance it rhetorically with Cressida's false-

ness . . . Like the lovers, [Pandarus] has been reading the old story too, as his faulty logic [in lines 3.2.192-9 of the Arden 3] shows. (100-2)

In this mode, at the climax of 4.2, Shakespeare assays the Henryson approach he seems otherwise consciously to eschew, expostulating on *Troilus and Criseyde* by portraying his characters not as they are in Chaucer but according to what they fear they will become or, still worse, what they fear to be remembered as. Pandarus predicts the separation “‘Twill be [Troilus’] death, twill be his bane; he cannot bear it” and assigns blame, impugning Cressida as a “wench.” Cressida follows suit, challenging death and forsaking her family ties, admitting “no touch of consanguinity” with her uncle (*Tro.* 4.2.93-4, 91, 98).

As Chaucer relied on Classical authority to give his tale the weight and credibility expected of epic narrative in the fourteenth century, Shakespeare clearly considers Chaucer a dual authority on medieval romance and English poetry, mirroring his title, love plot and lovers’ suffering as Chaucer mirrored and deferred to “Lollius.” As George Lyman Kittredge explained, it matters not that Lollius was a fiction; Chaucer and his contemporaries likely regarded him as a legitimate authority (48-9). Since anachronism was *de rigueur* for both writers in virtually every genre and style they assayed,⁴² the Trojan setting serves a setting’s usual purposes but remains secondary to Chaucer’s unique negotiation of established accounts of Troy. By extension, these collisions of ancient, medieval and early modern moments, places and contexts also afforded Shakespeare multivaried opportunities to negotiate Chaucer’s complex systems of reference and authority as windows upon the past more completely than he had hitherto been able.

42. “The medieval proclivity for anachronism is, I admit, outrageous, often worse than Shakespeare’s. Criseyde swears by God more often than any other woman in Chaucer, and it is clearly the Christian God by whom the narrator thinks she is swearing” (Donaldson 126).

Chaucer's Troilus is a fully-established, well-regarded warrior fatally wounded by Love. This definition of Troilus suggests that, as Hector's peer, his absence from battles could be a significant factor in their outcome. It is a condition easily forgotten, in the midst of Troilus's turmoil and Criseyde's torment, that his casual boast of lovers being "veray fooles, nyce and blynde" (*TC* 1.202) was the very conjuration of Troilus's doom. Shakespeare's Troilus, an untested youth of Hector's promise, contrasts with the contextual uselessness of Paris, who has given his fighting body over to carnal desire, and Helenus, the servant of the gods who, with his spirit dedicated elsewhere, serves little purpose in battle. Troilus' most significant analogue, however, is not one of his brothers but a Greek, mentioned only in passing by Chaucer. Achilles, capable of bringing Troy to its knees in his self-proclaimed quest for *kleos*, selfishly withholds body and spirit from his countrymen and squanders his energy on play. Shakespeare, reducing Chaucer's characters to dramatically necessary essences, does so in the interest of reconnecting body with soul, those symbiotes oft-separated in the medieval romantic and *de casibus* traditions. *Troilus and Cressida* teeters between these two poles of knightly endeavor, subtly foregrounding the anachronisms of medieval chivalry in the service of Chaucer's conception of love both mutable and irrecoverable. If the private sincerity of emotion expressed by one lover to another—as those inimitable stolen moments between Troilus and Criseyde, Romeo and Juliet, Pyramus and Thisbe, and even Achilles and Patroclus attest—is disjunctive with the brand of love popularly and publicly acknowledged, then the more fully each of these scenes might complement *Troilus and Cressida*'s other great seduction sequence, Ulysses' wooing of Achilles back to war.

Not coincidentally in a work simultaneously philosophical and dismissive of

philosophy, these are also themes with which Shakespeare takes the most significant satirical liberties. Neither Troilus has yet been in love or, it appears, has even experienced true carnal passion, yet Shakespeare converts Troilus' general boast of lovers' foolishness in Chaucer from an affront to the gods to Troilus' bitter criticism of his brother Paris—"Let Paris bleed. 'Tis but a scar to scorn;/Paris is gored with Menelaus' horn" (*Tro.* 1.1.107-8)—which also recalls the ostensible cause of the war. Achilles, emphasizing his own role as an able Troilus removed from the fray and a Cressid to be aggressively wooed, picks up the vengeful cuckold metaphor some time later in response to the election of Ajax as respondent to Hector's challenge: "I see my reputation is at stake./My fame is shrewdly gored" (*Tro.* 3.3.228-9). At the nexus of love and honor, then, lies many a bleeding reputation. Like Shakespeare's Troilus, Achilles is turned so inward that he cannot resist his desire to underachieve even as he bears witness to the future consequences of inaction. Ulysses, like Shakespeare's Pandarus, uses his comrades for cynical reasons. Whether pitting Ajax against Achilles or leading Troilus to the scene of Cressida's manifest infidelity with Diomedes, Ulysses appears to share with Pandarus the vicarious thrill of a well-laid plan consummated. Patroclus, while he stands in as a sort of Cressida—a rival between a born warrior and his war—acts as a true if submissive lover, making frequent attempts to brighten Achilles' mood and cater to his whims. As a counterpoint to Ulysses, Patroclus uncynically encourages Achilles to realize his warrior potential, comparing his idleness to the kind of rot Pandarus falls victim to and Ulysses attempts to work upon Ajax and Agamemnon, even as he accuses Cressida of exuding it:

Those wounds heal ill that men do give themselves.

Omission to do what is necessary

Seals a commission to a blank of danger,
And danger, like an ague, subtly taints
Even then when we sit idly in the sun.

(*Tro.* 3.3.231-5)

In both versions, Troilus exceeds the romantic hero paradigm, less poet-warrior than precursor to nineteenth-century romantics like Shelley. Shakespeare's Troilus, "the prince of chivalry," as Pandarus describes him at 1.2.220-1, is self-aware to a fault, calling himself womanish and ineffectual; Chaucer's Troilus never really comprehends what prevents him from living a life beyond that of a lover. He cannot realize his warrior potential until he becomes a spirit of romantic revenge, making him a non-factor in winning the war until he has utterly undone his romantic self. Love, indirectly a producer of new bodies, removes Chaucer's Troilus from the *mêlée*, a destroyer of bodies. This is in large measure the *sentence* Shakespeare brought from his reading of *The Knight's Tale* into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Perhaps the very contradiction Theseus so readily reconciled by marrying his Amazon enemy inhibits Troilus's ability to act sexually of his own volition. Once his Boethian, Petrarchan and political ideals have been comprehensively thwarted, Troilus becomes a death machine. Chaucer was cognizant that chivalry was an ethos born of poetry rather than manly action. For his Troilus, failed romance equals vengeance and the quest for death.

In the true mold of a chivalric hero, Troilus is ennobled by love, be it chaste or passionate, in thoughts, words, desires and deeds. His declarations of purpose, in Chaucer and Shakespeare alike, thrive on an alternating dynamic of self-love and self-deprecation derived from Dante, Petrarch and Ovid. Both Troiluses indicate that they will realize their utmost potential through love for Cressida, whether consummated or

not. By the close of Book One, as Ann Thompson notes, Chaucer's Troilus has been improved as a knight and a *mensch* by his love for Criseyde (117):

Now lat us stynte of Troilus a stounde,
That fareth lik a man that hurt is soore,
And is somdeel of akyngge of his wownde
Ylissed wel, but heeled no deel moore,
And, as an esy pacyent, the loore
Abit of hym that gooth aboute his cure;
And thus he dryeth forth his aventure.

(TC 1.1086-92)

Yet the final stanza suggests that his outward joy is but a balm and mask for the same sort of untreatable wound Shakespeare has Patroclus—the Greek that only egocentric Achilles takes seriously—allude to. In this way, Chaucer recalls Troilus's insult of Love, even if Troilus himself does not remember, and his disparaging of lovers, a category which now includes himself, cues the suffering to come. Shakespeare, setting Troilus's spiritual quest at odds with the cynical world of the play, seems especially alert to this significant Chaucerian paradox. In these circumstances, Troilus cannot flourish. His love wound will fester as that of his brother Paris, abetting Troy's decay, while the resulting melancholy, like that of Achilles, will further aid his enemies, reducing him from scourge to solipsist in Chaucer, from solipsistic lover to ineffectual warrior in Shakespeare. Resonating with Chaucer's tragic romance, Shakespeare's romantic warriors, having forgotten the war on Love's behalf, find their ideals corrupted or slaughtered along with their lovers.

As if in denial of her psychological and sexual sophistication, both Troiluses “think of Cressida exclusively in terms of physical beauty” as Ann Thompson observes of

Chaucer's and Shakespeare's opening scenes (118). Criseyde's moral character, however, so extolled by Chaucer and his Pandarus to Troilus, is reduced to an admirable quick-wittedness by Shakespeare's go-between when he compares her to Cassandra. Cressida's arrival at the Greek camp represents the merged strands of Shakespeare's dual plot and the collision of his heretofore antithetical themes. The playwright reconciles the Chaucerian Criseyde with her negatives (Henryson, et al) by placing disparagement of her graces in Ulysses' mouth. His are the words and wisdom that define Cressida's status among the Greeks, though they clearly fail to represent the woman in full. Ulysses detects whorishness in her every movement, hardly having seen her move (4.5.55-64) while Nestor, much to Ulysses' chagrin, likewise notes Cressida's wit ("A woman of quick sense," 4.5.55) hardly having heard her speak a word.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Ulysses balances Dante's anti-Greek/pro-Trojan stance with a narrow-minded account of the legendary wisdom accorded him in the Homeric epics. He follows Chaucer in representing Cressida's fall as one of necessity, motivated by a desire to survive. It is Troilus's perception of her revised outer reality that undoes him, the failure to see Cressida's soul once he has possessed her body. This manifests in Chaucer's poem, so deliberately focused on Criseyde, when Troilus falls into a Dantean swoon at the moment of truth; Pandarus removes Troilus's shirt to help him breathe, bringing him closer to the sexual point of no return he has tried to postpone with Petrarchan rhetoric. Favoring anticipation over sexual fulfillment, Troilus's blackout recalls his initial rejection of Love, the ultimate facilitator in bodily matters.

Criseyde's ultimate degradation in Chaucer is her tarnished reputation. She wants love but is too philosophical to fall into it. Rather, she makes a conscious choice to fall

for Troilus, adopting his romantic mode in the process, a manner of speech that contrasts most completely with the way she later speaks to Diomedes. Her agency in love is suggested by her widowhood, an element of her character vital to Chaucer but unmentioned by Shakespeare, whose Cressida has less philosophical depth but is much more the young woman driven first by the desire for romance, later by practical necessity. If Shakespeare does not make her widowhood explicit, he clearly portrays her—with frequent echoes of *Much Ado About Nothing*'s Beatrice nostalgic for her days as a Hero—as a young woman superior in age and experience to her would-be lover. Concealed beneath Cressida's elegant responses to Troilus's love-rhetoric and bawdy repartee with Pandarus, each interpreted later as masks of her fickleness, lies a bittersweet awareness of her status as commodity. While her expectations of love remain constant, masculine appraisals of her value fluctuate with their sexual interest. Here, Shakespeare returns to the tragic *matere* of *The Rape of Lucrece* and its Chaucerian antecedents, informed by the depth of feminine characterization he developed primarily in comedies from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through *Twelfth Night*.

Regardless of the Chaucerian material he invokes or the dramatic genre he is working in, Shakespeare's uses of Chaucer are of a similar stamp, the poet-playwright's readings and revisions of his poet-mentor inextricably linked with his likely reasons for invoking them: English literary authority and a profound sense of character-based, psychological verisimilitude. For *Troilus and Cressida*, arguably the least classifiable and most generically unstable work in the Shakespeare canon, the playwright could have relied upon the same non-Chaucerian sources evident in other works from the post-1598 "Troilus" boom, most likely instigated by the first edition of Thomas Speght's Chaucer

(Thompson 30).⁴³ Consider Chaucer's first self-proclaimed acolyte, John Lydgate, who for all his imitations of Chaucer's style and language, writes of monolithic, unalterable events, never grasping that Chaucer's genius inhabited characters who might materialize for the reader were they presented as something more than helpless protagonists of *de casibus* tragedy. Jill Mann explains the lady's predicament:

Shakespeare, like Chaucer, sees the importance of context in creating the wholeness of a person—the coalescence of inner and outer that makes up their 'worth'. 'What is Criseyde worth, from Troilus?' (IV 766) is Criseyde's anguished question as she contemplates leaving Troy. Away from Troilus, she loses the esteem that constitutes her worth as a person. (126)

Had Shakespeare been merely interested in a formal skeleton on which to hang a comedy or history, Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, possibly in conjunction with Lydgate's *Troy-Book*, would have been an apt framework. Caxton and Lydgate's brief references to Troilus as "a martial hero" (Bevington 385) presented a sufficiently solid foundation for Shakespeare's turn-of-the-century gifts, if only the young knight's abortive romance with Criseyde, not merely "Englissed" but fully defined by Chaucer, were not central to his explorations of love, duty and honor. To mediate these clashes, he engaged his memory of Chaucer's *Troilus*, which renders the Trojan War startlingly insignificant to the poet's purpose yet indivisible from his narrative, suggesting a reflexive relationship between works at two centuries' remove.

43. Thompson 57-8: "...the non-Shakespearian drama of the period yields a total of six extant plays based on Chaucer which provide us with a variety of examples of how he could be used, ranging from simple plot-borrowing to the mixture of affectionate re-creation and implied criticism in Chapman [']s *Giles Goosecap*."

CHAPTER 4

CHAUCERIAN RENAISSANCE: *PERICLES* ENCOUNTERS

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

Pericles, its Shakespearean contributions drawn primarily from Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" in his *Confessio Amantis* (ca. 1390), visits as many genres and narrative traditions as it does Mediterranean ports. The narrative itself not only recalls the Anglo-Saxon roots of Middle English but exemplifies the derivation of the Old English poetic canon from other, not necessarily Scandinavian, sources. As the sole Shakespearean through-narrator beyond *Henry V*'s Chorus, "Gower" (possibly the creation of George Wilkins)⁴⁴ materializes as dramatically necessary tour guide and resident moral authority. With the complexities of *Pericles* in mind, Fletcher and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is an exercise in restraint—of Fletcherian pageantry (though not of bawdry), Shakespearean poetry and the hallmarks of medieval romance—predicated on conspicuous awe of its Chaucerian source. In an attempt to discover a source-code of generic recombination, this chapter considers disjunctions in these dramatic romances, products of tension in the revision and collaborative processes. In both plays, Shakespeare's esteem for his source material and audience mediates what he comprehends as disregard for the former and reshapes apparent disservices to the

44. George Wilkins was a 'victualler' (read by some as 'brothel-keeper') and sometime pamphleteer (*Three Miseries of Barbary*, 1608) whose association with Shakespeare includes a 1612 dowry case in which both were witnesses. He enjoyed a brief period of dramatic productivity from 1607-09 which included *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (performed by The King's Men), collaborations with William Rowley and John Day (*The Travails of the Three English Brothers*), and with Day alone on *Law Tricks*. An imitator of Shakespeare throughout his brief literary career, Wilkins appears to have imitated his possible collaboration with Shakespeare in sections of the 1608 prose redaction *The Painful Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, balancing the novel with wholesale borrowings from Laurence Twine's *The Pattern of Painefull Adventures* (c. 1594). Unlike Bullough, Cooper and others, Suzanne Gossett supports collaboration between Shakespeare and Wilkins, charting one possible trajectory of *Pericles*' composition in her Arden 3 introduction (62-70).

latter. Read as responses to the work of his fellow contributors, Shakespeare's revisions to *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* demonstrate increasing emphases on medieval orality and on Chaucer as literary authority.⁴⁵

Helen Cooper, whose discussion of *Pericles* gains a remarkable degree of clarity by first tracing the presence of Gower in Shakespeare's poetic imagination back to *The Comedy of Errors* and then pushing the Wilkins question to the side, also suggests that the play encapsulates the essence of Shakespeare's dramatic romances.

Shakespeare's return to Gower is a measure of the high value he was prepared to place on the native English traditions of poetry. He makes that the subject of the Prologue to *Pericles*, in one of his rare discussions of the theory underlying his writing (and here, of course, it is mediated through Gower himself, in his hallmark tetrameters) . . . What the play values about Gower is precisely the ability of his stories to delight [here, Cooper quotes lines 1-10 of the Prologue] ("Worthy," 106)

It may well be true that the older an old thing is the better,⁴⁶ but the material Shakespeare left unrevised seems intent on reconciling a late medieval version of an ancient Greek novella on the Jacobean stage. These passages—almost universally referred to as “non-Shakespearean”—consistently emphasize the power of the poet to conjure the visual over the poetry of the poet's spell. Their author creates an almost bipolar state in the audience, who must collectively and repeatedly engage their imaginative faculties (“fine fancies”) only to dismiss them at the poet-narrator's whim.⁴⁷

45. Though the debate will likely continue until the machines take over, I accept the general attribution of Acts 1 and 2 to the initial playwright and Acts 3-5 to Shakespeare. The somewhat thornier issue of the Choruses leaves only 4 and 6 as most definitely by Shakespeare, with at least the initial versions of the remaining Gower sections shaped prior to Shakespeare's involvement and at least partially revised by him.

46. This is the sense of *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius* at Per. 1.0.10.

47. This tension could derive from Shakespeare's intervention in the Gower choruses, with line 13 restoring his view of audience agency to Gower's voice while maintaining the well-established archaism of

Be attent,
And time that is so briefly spent
With your fine fancies quaintly eche.
What's dumb in show, I'll plain with speech.

(*Per.* 3.0.11-4)

Rather than reciprocally enhancing his *matere*, Gower and the pantomimes he conjures seemed conceived primarily to prevent that matter from lulling the spectator to distraction. If their imaginative faculties were truly engaged, this would hardly be a consideration. Even when not offering his impersonation of Gower, the initial author of *Pericles* refuses to let the audience, on- or offstage, see what they've just imagined. His Gower implores the audience to hear his song but never harken to his *sententiae*, suggesting a Homeric singer who forgets the muse's words once they leave his lips. In a scene generally credited to the other author, a rapt Pericles describes Antiochus's daughter to himself and the audience:

See where she comes, apparelled like the spring,
Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the king
Of every virtue gives renown to men;
Her face the book of praises, where is read
Nothing but curious pleasures, as from thence
Sorrow were ever razed, and testy wrath
Could never be her mild companion.

(*Per.* 1.1.13-9)

Shortly Antiochus, with a wall of severed heads as his backdrop, interrupts Pericles' blazon of Antiochus's daughter and proceeds to dictate its terms with a conflation of Herculean myth and Judeo-Christian scripture:

previous choruses. Here, the "two out of three ain't bad" rule of revision applies: The rhyme in line 14, in spite of immediately contradicting Gower's best intentions, follows in tone and mood, but not in sense.

Before thee stands this fair Hesperides,
With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched,
For death-like dragons here affright thee hard.
Her face, like heaven, enticeth thee to view
Her countless glory, which desert must gain,
And which without desert because thine eye
Presumes to reach, all the whole heap must die.

(*Per.* 1.1.28-34)

Though there is no indication that Antiochus overhears Pericles' aside, his response to it follows the pattern of a father-lover who cannot praise his wrongly gotten object too highly. In addition to offering a godlike warning of the consequences of over-reaching desire, Antiochus competes for precedence with Pericles' declaration of "ocular" love even if he has not heard it. He need only see a young man in love to perceive him as a rival.

Marjorie Garber writes, "Jacobean audiences loved *Pericles*. It was one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, reprinted no fewer than five times in thirty years. It was the first of his plays to be revived at the time of the Restoration, when theaters, closed by the Puritan Cromwell, were opened again—and women began for the first time to act upon the public stage" (755). By its apparent popularity, we may presume that *Pericles* set the tone, inadvertent or not, for subsequent dramatic romances. That tone, however, is the product of two authors, each with a unique regard for his source material. If the previous author was George Wilkins, some of the textual confusions and inconsistencies of approach appear comprehensible if unresolvable. Whatever shape his manuscript of *Painfull Adventures* took, Wilkins was essentially adapting, perhaps in a mode he thought Shakespearean, Laurence Twine adapting Gower. The text was

essentially not his to begin with even if prior to compiling it he also produced the verse drama that Shakespeare revised. The general authority of Twine's English text and its connection to Gower clouded any instinct for thematic or interpretive continuity the first author might have had. He also seems not to have comprehended the necessary shift from pseudo-Classical prose narrative to stage narrative. Even with strong structural focus on the storyteller, who claims to be an interpreter of the past rather than the last word on it, the didacticism evident in Twine's text and the narrative frame of Gower's *Confessio* require revoicing and a change of focus from page to stage. The first playwright treats his Gower—and by extension, Gower's audience—as Antiochus treats Pericles. Like a benefactor with everyone's best interests in mind, this writer suggests that the audience has imaginative agency, that everything he presents must be validated by their seeing, masking an authoritative sway which deprives them of that very gift. His Gower chorus modestly states that he has arisen to set scenes and supplement the spectator's enjoyment through gladdened ears and pleased eyes. What he does for the nonce, however, is offer descriptive voiceover of pantomimed action and, in the strictest Aristotelian sense, set the moral tone for each imitative moment. This is not to say the narrator willfully misrepresents his intentions or purpose. As Gower, perhaps imagined as more of a Chaucerian storyteller than a dramatic chorus, intones at the outset: "What now ensues, to the judgment of your eye / I give, my cause who best can justify" (*Per.* 1.0.41-2). This seems reasonable enough, in line with the "legal appeal" matter familiar from *Measure for Measure* and prefiguring Prospero's Epilogue. Offering up at least the visual matter of the play, that which can never appear on the page, to audience discretion, the Chorus establishes rapport between the house and the stage.

The particularly non-Gowerian appeal to the spectator's eye over the auditor's ear recurs throughout the choral interludes attributed to the first playwright. He slyly insinuates that all will be revealed to the audience and that their reading of the "facts" will determine the outcome.⁴⁸ This conflicts with a later example which suggests quite definitively that only Gower, verging on the mystic, can elucidate the extreme and antique behavior of characters in the Apollonius narrative: "Like motes and shadows see them move awhile; / Your ears unto your eyes I'll reconcile" (*Per.* 4.4.21-2). Gower's introduction of Act 3 reinforces the redundancy of narrated and staged action even as he attempts to normalize it with storytelling commonplaces: "What's dumb in show I'll plain with speech" (*Per.* 3.0.14). The line frames the contents of the stage as if between the covers of a book—without purpose if unread—but unlike a text the reader is free to interpret, *Pericles* in its original form presented dumbshows either void of meaning or beyond the audience's understanding without an interpretive intermediary.

In short, the first playwright's emphasis on the eye demonstrates a loss of focus on the source-text. His position on poetic authority, seemingly derived from his reading of the Confessor of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* rather than the poet himself, often proves incongruous with the brands of Gowerian authority put forth by either collaborator. At the opening of Book Eight, the Confessor not only couches his discussion of incest in a Biblical context, but makes conspicuous use of Methodius of Olympus, a relatively obscure fourth-century martyr of whose life and church office there are conflicting

48. Shakespeare's predecessor on the text of *Pericles* strikes me as a would-be theatrical showman, an early modern William Castle, promising the spectator a choice of two different endings but only screening one. In synchronicity with the Fletcher prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and its jokes about new plays and maidenheads, the "other" playwright appears to regard the presence of poetic authority on the stage as more of a gimmick than a storytelling necessity. Another reference I can't resist is the revealed Wizard of Oz in Warner Brothers' 1939 adaptation: If you would rather the spectator pay no attention to the man behind the curtain, why conceal your secrets behind a curtain?

reports. Methodius was known primarily for his opposition to the transcendental notion of the resurrected body proposed by Origen:⁴⁹

Metodre seith to this matiere,
As he be revelacion
It hadde upon avision,
Hou that Adam and Eve also
Virgines comen bothe tuo
Into the world and were aschamed...

(*Confessio* 8.48-53)

Methodius apparently drew upon the Hebrew Midrash for his explications of Genesis, including that of Cain and Abel's sisters-cum-brides-to-be:

Nature so the cause ladde,
Tuo douhtres ek Dame Eve hadde,
The ferste cleped Calmana
Was, and that other Delbora.
Thus was mankind to beginne;
Forthi that time it was no Sinne
The Soster forto take hire brother,
Whan that ther was of chois non other...

(*Confessio* 8.63-70)

49. Caroline Walker Bynum succinctly expresses this complex philosophical dialogue: "Using the seed metaphor from 1 Corinthians 15, the reference to our angelic life in heaven from Matthew 22.29-33, and the suggestion in 2 Corinthians 5.4 that we are tents or tabernacles that must take on a covering of incorruption, Origen argued that we will have a body in heaven but a spiritual and luminous one . . . accounting for the permanence of a body through material flux but attributing to that body its own dynamism, Origen's theory recognized that both the natural world and the human person really change. Growth now belonged to a self; process was fully real and could be fully good. The Pauline seed metaphor could therefore refer to fertility rather than to decay; natural changes, such as the developing fetus or the flowering or a fig tree—both images Origen used—became unambiguously appropriate to describe the journey toward heaven . . . Methodius's rejection of Origen's theory is a rejection of the image of the burgeoning seed in favor of that of the reconstructed statue or temple . . . one of his major images for the body is a stone temple within which the tree of sin is growing. In death, the temple falls; the tree is rooted out. Then in resurrection the exact stones are reconstructed to the exact shape that existed before. What grows and changes here is sinister, needing to be curtailed or destroyed; that which is salvageable is that—and only that—which persists unchanged" (64-70). As an irreverent aside, one envies Gower his apparent access to a now-lost text of Methodius and curses his executors.

A perhaps significant coincidence in this preface to Gower's *Apollonius* is that Saint Jerome cites Methodius as the bishop of Tyre. Presentational and didactic as the *Confessio* can be, Gower collaborates intellectually with a readership he considers learned; though sometimes bogged down by his own sententiousness, the poet rarely presents material only to reveal his reader's lack of comprehension. The pre-Shakespeare version of Gower spends a good deal of stage time convincing an audience already resigned to theatrical artifice that the stage is incapable of representing reality, that it requires no less a mediator than the author himself. What Cooper notes as a product of Shakespeare's interest in revisiting antiquity may derive at least in part from Wilkins' often unsuccessful stabs at recreating it:

Gower's tale is to be mediated through Gower himself, and his continuing interventions—summarising plot transitions, conjuring up and explaining dumbshows, indulging in a little atmospheric scene-setting ('the cat with eyne of burning coal', III.i.5), marking notional act-divisions, and so on—serve as a continuous reminder that we are watching the dramatization of a story: a story told with such conviction that it acts itself out in front of our eyes. ("Worthy" 107)

The narrator frequently represents Gower and not-Gower in the same breath, the poet himself materialized on the stage and a simulacrum who cannot help but remind the spectator that words heard are only imitations of themselves. This Gower suggests that his text is further removed from the theatrically possible by stage images utterly lacking in verisimilitude, a far cry from Gower's own deferrals to textual authority or a poet's self-conscious inability to do his subject proper homage.

On the surface it seems curious that Shakespeare found himself working on a Gower play toward the end of a career spent conspicuously avoiding what he might have seen as

a Gowerian approach to stage narrative.⁵⁰ Playwriting contemporaries such as Marlowe, Lyly and Jonson tended toward the sententious, heightened, and didactic regardless of appropriateness to character. But Shakespeare would have found much to admire and embrace in Gower as well—sententiousness tempered by honesty and directness of emotion, a natural clarity in the midst of the most obscure philosophical sidebar or Classical reference—all characteristics that inform Shakespearean tragicomedy. In line with his Chaucerian work, however, Shakespeare’s mediation of Gower favors an authoritative “medieval” feel without specific authority, as well as a timeless sense of narrative while refusing temporality’s rule. Outside of the Histories, direct citations of source texts and specific points of contact with source authors, so vital to Marlowe and Jonson, are rare in Shakespeare, whose career (need it be said again?) was predicated on adapting extant narratives. As if to reestablish a connection he found wanting in the original Gower choruses, Shakespeare’s Gower restores imaginative agency to the auditors before they engage the matter of Act 5:

In your supposing once more put your sight:
Of heavy Pericles, think this his bark,
Where what is done in action, more if might,
Shall be discovered, please you sit and hark.

(*Per.* 5.0.21-4)

Shakespeare’s lines, presuming they are his, not only recall the “imaginary forces” invoked by the *Henry V* Chorus but encourage the auditor to use them. Rather than the poet’s words functioning as mediators of ocular and aural, Shakespeare continues to advocate the word-turned-image. Actively processed by the auditor, these images blend

50. Geoffrey Bullough notes this possible exception: “Shakespeare knew Gower’s work early in his career, and probably drew for the dénouement of *The Comedy of Errors* on the reunion of Apollinus with his wife in the Temple of Diana at Ephesus” (6.354).

with onstage representations to create theatrical hyperreality.

Though the thrust of the last three acts is certainly Shakespearean, Shakespeare himself appears to have left well enough alone in certain Gower choruses. Suzanne Gossett notes that Gary Taylor finds no evidence of Shakespeare's hand in the relatively valuable and awkwardly iambic 5 Chorus/4.4, cited above (69). Indeed, "Your ears unto your eyes I'll reconcile" does not seem the kind of concession or assurance Shakespeare would have found necessary to provide the audience and yet, being in, proves too innocuous and ingrained in the original play's style to revise out. The line mediates the play's persistent show-and-tell approach⁵¹ by deferring it to Gower, the storytelling authority. Apparently interested in more complete, Chaucerian immersions in narrative once underway, Shakespeare seems unlikely to have included a metatheatrical aside *in medias res*. Gower's recurring appearances were certain to speak for themselves.

While these issues are actively in play, I suggest that the (single) appeal to the imagination in a passage usually attributed to the first playwright be placed firmly among Shakespeare's revisions to the dramatic text he took over. Given its immediate proximity to the most significant "Shakespearean" intervention in the dramatic text to this point and its appearance on the heels of one of the play's most confounding passages, it seems likely that Shakespeare would have made at least minimal revisions to the Gower chorus prior to storm and shipwreck.

And what ensues in this fell storm
Shall for itself itself perform.
I will relate, action may
Conveniently the rest convey,

51. I acknowledge the reciprocity of this phrase with the "showing" and "telling" Marjorie Garber attributes to Gower in the *Pericles* chapter of *Shakespeare After All* (759).

Which might not what by me is told.

In your imagination hold

This stage the ship, upon whose deck

The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speak.

(*Per.* 3.0.53-60, *my emphasis*)

Unless Shakespeare had a reciprocal, truly collaborative relationship with the original playwright in the creation of *Pericles*' dramatic text—which Bullough, Cooper, and Garber doubt, but Gossett supports in the current Arden edition⁵²—there is little possibility that the latter would have revised his misappraisal of an audience's imaginative faculties. However the project came into Shakespeare's hands, I speculate that the Gower choruses were the first material he began to rework; this reworking may have piqued his deeper interest in both the Apollonius story, a presence in his early work not yet revisited. Within the realm of possibility, too, is a subtle reconnection with Chaucer. The Man of Law, introducing his prologue and tale, praises Chaucer for not telling "cursed stories":

“But certainly no word ne writeth he
Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,
That loved hir owene brother sinfully—
Of swiche cursed stories I sey fy!—
Or ellis of Tyro Appollonius,
How that the cursed kyng Antiochus

52. Bullough writes, "*Pericles* is probably a piece conceived, planned and perhaps written by someone else, which Shakespeare undertook to improve and did so perfunctorily (maybe in haste) except for the second half where the themes aroused his interest and so led him largely to rewrite and (in the brothel scenes) to replace the original material" (6.373). Cooper adds, "Gower was not so familiar a resource by this time to make knowledge of his works commonplace; but *The Comedy of Errors* attests to Shakespeare's long-standing familiarity with him. . . . However the text of *Pericles* evolved, its Gower would be Shakespeare's own, and the play therefore indeed, as its Cambridge editors describe it, 'the product of a single creative imagination'" ("Worthy," 106). Garber alludes to a similar distance between the originating playwright and Shakespeare as reviser: "It seems clear from internal evidence that the first two acts of *Pericles* were written by someone else, probably George Wilkins" (757).

Birafte his doghter of hir maydenhede,
That is so horrible a tale for to rede...”

(MLT 2B.77-84)

Concerned as the Man of Law is with current literature and morality, one presumes he means Gower’s versions of the Canace and Apollonius stories, though he could just as well, as a university man, be referring in general to late-medieval appropriations of Ovid and Xenophon. As a practical adjunct to these speculations, Shakespeare certainly recognized the need for fresh composition rather than revision. With lines 58-60, he thoughtfully and efficiently bridged the gap between the willfully archaic didacticism of earlier scenes and the emotional immediacy of the tempest to follow:

The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges
Which wash both heaven and hell, and thou that hast
Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,
Having called them from the deep. O, still
Thy deafening dreadful thunders; gently quench
Thy nimble sulphurous flashes!

(*Per.* 3.1.1-6)

Positioned at the fulcrum between *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, this passage suggests that images of storm and shipwreck were so central to Shakespeare’s conception of irreconcilable loss as to be second nature. Compare this epic apostrophe with 2.1, apostrophized and yet more earthbound in sound and sense:

Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of heaven!
Wind, rain, and thunder, remember earthly man
Is but a substance that must yield to you,
And I, as fits my nature, do obey you.

(*Per.* 2.1.1-4)

These lines reside firmly in pre-revision territory, following the Apollonius narrative, particularly Twine's version as in his "novelization" *The Painfull Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre*, rather closely in language and tone. Lest I present their composer as some sort of counter-productive nemesis, the simple, straightforward rendering of man's submission in the battle against nature, analogous to Providence in the first playwright's estimation, entirely befits a young Pericles on his first misadventure whose losses to date have been personal rather than cosmic. I suspect that the character of Pericles in the initial draft developed in massive leaps, rather than gradually, from one misadventure to the next, remaining a monolith of virtue throughout.

Though not as publicly as Spenser or Jonson, Shakespeare positioned himself within the English storytelling tradition, transposing the formal, courtly delivery of Chaucer and Gower to the more socially inclusive milieu of the London stage. In many ways, the public theatre audience mirrored the Chaucerian gamut of character and circumstance. What are the significant purposes and effects of allowing the source author not only to speak on his own behalf but to tell his own story? Does the author have a better chance to be heard outside of the public stage? What, then, of conspicuously eliminating him from the narrative equation because of his "greatness"? I fully agree with scholarly assertions that Fletcher wrote the Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Would Shakespeare feel the need to justify the absence of the Poet from the stage, let alone draw attention to it? *Henry V's* Chorus appropriates the author's narrative and poetic voices, and the same can be said for the several, hybrid voices of Gower in *Pericles*. The play thrives upon and derives its unique style from examples of show-and-tell, with the first playwright exemplifying "ocular" truth and Shakespeare the "aural". The shift to indoor,

intimate theatres like the Blackfriars—where a more sophisticated audience might have been seeking the “serious play” exemplified by Chaucer and apparently striven for by Shakespeare—may well shed additional light on this notion. One possibility is to focus early modern attitudes toward Chaucer and Gower into this spotlight: Gower wore his sources and sententiousness on his sleeve and, according to Sïan Echard, was revered throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for his learning and philosophical insight (16-17). Chaucer, while he made no less use of Ovid, Horace, et al, made a crucial distinction. As with the Monk and Troilus, Chaucer converts the Gowerian authoritative poet into a character distinct from himself or his self-representations as Chaucer the Poet. The original playwright’s approach alternates between what he perceives as Gower’s own and what he thinks Shakespeare would do with the material. The poet-playwright’s passages tend to advance Gower within the continuity of his Chaucerian work. It is a relatively simple matter to discuss *Pericles*’ Gower choruses in terms of their inherent orality and medieval authority, but the intricate ways in which rhetoric, lament and appeal function in the world of the play present a sound basis for future study. That said, it is possible to read *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in terms of what *Pericles* is and its presence on the stage in stark terms of what *Pericles* is not.

Throughout his career, Gower worked in French and Latin where it suited his material. Chaucer, once he had “Englissed” the French and Latin narrative genres (the dream vision, the fabliau, *de casibus* tragedy) began to reinvent them into a more direct prediction of “English” narrative and literary character. His nearly universal appeal to early modern playwrights,⁵³ whose audiences resembled nothing so much as Chaucer’s

53. The opening chapter of Ann Thompson’s *Shakespeare’s Chaucer* presents an immaculately detailed account of the early modern Chaucerian zeitgeist.

narrative cross-sections of estate, gender and worldview, must have felt at least as complete, as definitive, as Shakespeare's subsequent influence upon English literature of all genres. While I generally agree with Kathryn L. Lynch's illuminating speculation on the collaborative relationship between Shakespeare and Fletcher while composing *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, I differ with the fine points of her discussion:

[The] play thus begins like a hall of mirrors, proleptically, as all prologues do, encompassing its own future performance and collapsing time as Modesty blushes in advance of her own future violation, in a perpetual retrospective search for origins. In this hall of mirrors, Shakespeare and Fletcher reflect Chaucer, Chaucer reflects Petrarch, Petrarch reflects his source Boccaccio—and each reflection is also a self-conscious distortion.

(“Three Noble Kinsmen,” 79)

The Chaucerian scenes attributed to Fletcher imitate rather than “reflect,” to use Lynch's operative term, their source and its author. The closest Fletcher comes to reflecting Chaucer—and this is not to denigrate his contribution but to distinguish it as meaningfully from Shakespeare's as possible—is his perverse mirroring of a Shakespearean heroine in a Chaucerian setting, the Jailer's Daughter. As archaic tropes go, it is particularly Fletcherian that this avatar of Emilia remain nameless, ever allegorical. The play opens with an explicit denial of the playwrights' ability to imitate, let alone channel, the exalted voice of their source, and yet significant moments of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* attempt to imitate their analogues in *The Knight's Tale*. Other moments simply paraphrase, rather than adapt from page to stage, Chaucer's narrative. Imitation, in spite of its foregrounded impossibility, is a major feature of the play; Lynch describes as reflection what feels to me an echo.

But in a performance context, Lynch's conflation of word-turned-illusion offers a

fascinating insight to a turning point in early modern theater. It is hardly splitting hairs to distinguish the audible from the visual in poetry, the spoken from the evoked. Given the still-evolving traditions of the early modern stage and those aspects of staging and performance already become commonplaces, perhaps the last thing on a dramatic poet's mind when conceiving a play for the public stage was stage picture.⁵⁴ Even metaphorical halls of mirrors must be carefully arranged to afford equivalent reflections as the subject transits them physically or imaginatively. In this way, Shakespeare and Fletcher appear utterly aware of the Gower/Chaucer distinction noted above with regard to *Pericles*.⁵⁵

Donaldson reads *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as “that most distressing of plays . . . in which the dark side that Shakespeare saw in *The Knight's Tale* when he was writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is fulsomely re-expressed” (50). Of the collaboration of Fletcher and Shakespeare, Thompson observes:

In *Troilus*, Shakespeare's overtly satirical approach transformed the material, whereas in telling the story of Palamon and Arcite it is Chaucer who takes the more comic approach, mocking and deflating his subject-matter, and forcing the reader to see it with detached irony, while Shakespeare treats it seriously. In doing so he is occasionally at odds with his collaborator, who, without copying Chaucer's irony, nevertheless adopts a much lighter tone, thus setting up the many tensions and inconsistencies within the play. . . . Shakespeare and Fletcher clearly saw completely different things in *The Knight's Tale* and dramatized it in quite independent ways.

(166-7)

54. This is especially intriguing when we consider that the thrust stages and triple-tiered seating areas of public theatres afforded more potential audience points-of-view than the later, proscenium-based performance spaces of the private playhouses, precluding universal blocking.

55. The presence of Chaucer on the stage, which the Prologue dismisses as impossibility, curiously echoes the exclusion of divinity—though not divine authority—from the stage in reaction against the mystery plays. Emrys Jones discusses the mystery/morality play tradition, as well as its potential influence on Shakespeare and points of contact with his dramatic work, in *The Origins of Shakespeare*.

Helen Cooper agrees with Thompson on a number of points, yet discerns a unified, philosophically complex relationship between Chaucerian source and the resulting dramatic adaptation, while setting the scene for a relaxed and coordinated collaboration:

The playwrights add a subplot, of the Jailer's Daughter who engineers Palamon's escape from prison, and of a country morris-dance that fills out Chaucer's May observances; but otherwise the plot, the structure, the characterization, and the ideas of the play are all closely derived from the Knight's Tale. Derivation in this instance, however, does not mean copying. It is rather that the play enters into a continuing and detailed dialogue with its original. The Knight's Tale is a poem about the intellectual, human and theological problems that until this century were held to be the paramount questions of human existence: issues of free will; providential justice; rationality, affection and passion in both men and women. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* not only carries over these problems but makes them sharper; the untied thematic ends of Chaucer's original are not just left loose but rendered jagged. ("Jacobean Chaucer," 189)

Where Fletcher-attributed passages regularly drop in or rephrase entire scenes from Chaucer, much in the mode of Shakespeare setting North or Holinshed in blank verse, the majority of Shakespeare-attributed scenes appear to have been composed not only without reference to the source-text but without an edition of Chaucer in the room. Relying again on his expansive memory of Chaucer, Shakespeare's scenes reject imitation and direct-source adaptation in favor of an authentic Chaucerian intellectual energy. Drawn from the poet-playwright's entire experience of the poet rather than merely The Knight's Tale, his strongest sequences in *Kinsmen* thrive as *Troilus and Cressida* did upon subtle Chaucerianisms. In 3.1, his Arcite emotes as one who has read of Chaucer's Emelye and idealized an iteration of her from the memory of that reading:

Oh, Queen Emilia,
Fresher than May, sweeter
Than her gold buttons on the boughs, or all
Th' enamelled knacks o'th' mead, or garden—yea,
We challenge too the bank of any nymph
That makes the stream seen flowers: thou, oh jewel
O'the' wood, o'th' world, hast likewise blest a pace
With thy sole presence.

(TNK 3.1.4-11)

The passage, almost a prayer, corresponds with Arcite's song in "observance to May":

"May with alle thy floures and thy grene,
Welcome be thou, faire, fresshe May,
In hope that I som grene gete may."

(KnT 1.1491-1509)

There are also direct correspondences with Emelye's powerful first appearance in the garden and its analogue in the play.⁵⁶ The trees and gardens evoked in that earlier scene are now tailored and adorned, via the pun on "gold buttons," to complement her emergence from Arcite's (and the playwright's) memory. Ovidian reflections of nymphs and flowers in water recall and promote Chaucer and Shakespeare's shared wellspring of inspiration. Shakespeare continues the theme of metamorphosis as regenerative force, transmuting Emilia's beauty to gemstone, bridging a gap between natural and "civilized" worlds more pronounced in the seventeenth than the fourteenth century. Arcite's poetic leaps from one image set to the next suggest a constructed memory of all that Emilia represents, not merely what she signifies in the May so vital to Chaucer's realization of her. These effects are complicated and intensified when one recalls Chaucer's account of

56. This is particularly true of the trope-like "Till it fil ones, in a morwe of May, / That Emelye, that fairer was to sene / Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene, / And fressher than the May with floures newe— / For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe, / I noot which was the fyner of hem two" (KnT 1.1034-9).

Arcite's May ritual, familiarity with which Shakespeare may have expected of a goodly portion of his audience:

And for to doon his observaunce to May,
Remembryng on the poynt of his desir,
He on a courser, startlyng as the fyr,
Is riden into the feeldes for to pleye,
Out of the court were it a myle or tweye.
And to the grove of which that I yow tolde
By aventure his wey he gan to holde,
To maken hym a gerland of the greves,
Were it of wodebynde or hawethorn leves,
And loude he song ayeyn the sonne shene...

(KnT 1.1500-9)

The young knight rides his horse deeper into the forest, that archetypal discovery space of medieval romance and proof of knighthood, almost like Dante's pilgrim in his post-*Inferno* ability to find out the light in encroaching darkness. Since the quest space of romance is individual in spite of the fact that no knight can really go it alone, Arcite's meeting with chivalric destiny must both depend upon and destroy Palamon, his complement and opposite. These vital details are not lost on Shakespeare, whose Palamon emerges fettered from the underbrush, gladly suffering love's martyrdom, to challenge the well-accoutered knight-errant Arcite.

Unconvinced that Fletcher and Shakespeare's kinsmen have much reciprocity with Chaucer's knights at all, Richard Hillman writes:

Precisely by endlessly aspiring and failing to measure up to the inherited images of romance perfection, these pale Jacobean imitations deconstruct the very business of image-making. They [Palamon and Arcite] are Renaissance constructs trapped by their own appropriation of a

fantasised Mediaeval past . . . the dramatists went beyond shifting the Tale's emphasis; they entered into a dialogue with it that produced a radical discontinuity—an effect, incidentally, that is erased by presuming their satirical reading of the precursor romance. (140-1)

Helen Cooper situates *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as unique among the plethora of Chaucerian contemporaries enumerated by Ann Thompson. Rather than “press toward a full resolution of the problematic elements that are central to their Chaucerian source poems” as Fletcher’s contribution to the *Four Plays, or Moral Representations, in One and Women Pleased*, “it seems to have been the unresolvable problems in the Knight’s Tale that caught the attention of the playwrights” (“Jacobean Chaucer,” 190). Where Cooper is keen to synchronize the poetic agendas of Shakespeare and Fletcher and produce a deliberate and unified work, and Hillman finds disjunctions of tone, character and appropriation resulting in “radical” divergence from their Chaucerian source, I suggest that the playwrights’ divergent approaches to Chaucerian source material are the foundation of *Kinsmen*’s persistently enigmatic virtues and vices alike. The accepted attributions to Fletcher demonstrate an urge to reconcile and unify that, while undercut by their juxtaposition with Shakespeare’s more deliberate approach to the Knight’s Tale, is a direct extension of his work with the Franklin’s Tale⁵⁷ and precursor to his liberal appropriation of the Wife of Bath’s Tale.⁵⁸

57. Cooper notes that “Chaucer’s concluding question as to which of his male characters was the ‘mooste fre’ could have no place in the Field-Fletcher version; the men have all disgraced themselves to some degree, and only Dorigen has set an unambiguous moral standard” (“Jacobean Chaucer,” 195). Why does she then proceed to assert that Fletcher and Shakespeare saw eye to eye on the ideal stage-bound representation of Chaucerian narrative?

58. “The riddle that Silvio is set” in Fletcher’s *Women Pleased* “after being arrested for his attempted elopement is the same as in the Wife of Bath’s Tale—to find what women most desire; and the answer is the same too, to have their will. But this potential promotion of female sovereignty is again rendered safe by Fletcher, both by the phrasing of the riddle and by the twists of the plot.” (Cooper, “Jacobean Chaucer,” 191-2). How did an adapting playwright with such a penchant for oversimplifying the potential meaning of his source material work comfortably with Shakespeare, who built a career out of

Fletcher introduces the Jailer's Daughter subplot to parallel the folly of courtly love exemplified by Palamon and Arcite, but it mutates into a series of descants on Shakespearean standards from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Ophelia and beyond. It is possible that if Fletcher wrote the prologue as is generally suggested, his approach to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* turns it into an insincere promise of reverence, almost a Neoclassical joke. Without attributing her creation to either playwright, Cooper assesses the Jailer's Daughter's thematic centrality alongside her dramatic irrelevance:

In marked contrast to Emilia, she knows exactly which of the cousins she loves; Arcite never gets so much as a mention from her after she first corrects her father as to which of them is which . . . What she does not do is provide any resolution to the main plot ("Jacobean Chaucer," 198-9).

Perhaps Fletcher wrote primarily to justify the dichotomy of approach between his and Shakespeare's contributions, the latter seemingly so reverent of their source—as the style of his previous Chaucer adaptations demonstrates in abundance—that the undisputed scenes make nary a direct reference to them beyond narrative context. Fletcher's Act 4, with its bawdier than bawdy bed-trick on the Ophelia-esque Jailer's Daughter, in many ways echoes the perverseness of the prologue, pushing the serious play of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s final scenes into the realm of comedic juxtaposition. This resonates with Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (with Thersites rather than Pandarus bridging tragic-comedic extremes) but without unifying the dual plots. All indications are that, by this point, Shakespeare had fully assimilated his Chaucer, rendering few texts more significant for him than his Chaucerian memory-text.

broadening the possibilities of his narrative sources? The compromise only functions in Fletcher's play because, as Cooper observes, "this apparent sellout to conventional misogynist views . . . is not supported by the action of the play itself" (192). This further defines the creative divide in *Kinsmen* that Cooper otherwise astutely presents as the core of a successful adaptive collaboration.

Perhaps the strongest distinctions between Fletcherian and Shakespearean approaches to presenting Chaucer in the *Kinsmen* are the degrees and kinds of interaction the lovers are afforded with their audience. Cooper continues:

Unusually both for a woman and for a character from a subplot, she is given most of the play's soliloquies, being completely alone in her love (Palamon never so much as acknowledges her existence until he is about to be executed after losing the battle). (198)

If we follow the standard attribution, it appears Fletcher created an inexplicable tension the Jailer's Daughter as a Chaucerian martyr for love, more an Ariadne than an Ophelia. But his insistence on a dual homage to such heroines of Shakespearean comedy as *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* Hermia and *All's Well That Ends Well's* Helena infuses that seeming seriousness with the self-conscious irony of the Prologue.

Fletcher presents his Jailer's Daughter as a kind of untouchable crowd-pleaser, more sensual and sexually aware than Shakespeare devises in her most passionate and distracted moments. As such, she becomes an object of ridicule easily tumbled in a bed-trick:

. . . I pitied him—
And so would any young wench, o' my conscience,
That ever dreamed, or vowed her maidenhead
To a handsome young man. Then, I loved him,
Extremely loved him, infinitely loved him!

(*TNK* 2.4.11-15)

Always inward and reactive, predisposed to describing her inner states, this Daughter also demonstrates awareness of her connection to any number of Shakespearean heroines and victims, among them Lucrece and Cressida. Present in only a scene or two,

Shakespeare's version the young woman allows her to interpret the world of the play and narrate her perceptions for the auditor, demonstrating that the insanity of love is relative. In doing so, she reveals that her concern for Palamon is rooted in realities literal and figurative—his post-jailbreak condition and the dangers ever a-lurking in the nighttime forest of medieval romance:

I have heard
Strange howls this livelong night; why may't not be
They have made prey of him? He has no weapons;
He cannot run: the jangling of his gyves
Might call fell things to listen, who have in them
A sense to know a man unarmed and can
Smell where resistance is.

(*TNK* 3.2.11-17)

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between Palamon and Arcite in Chaucer, but more so in Fletcher and Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare's Lysander and Demetrius, public opinion from Theseus on down describes them as eminently worthy and utterly interchangeable; when love's thunderbolt marks them as undifferentiated opposites, Palamon claims first sight and invokes Venus Ourania while relative latecomer Arcite claims to be the truer lover on the basis of his earthbound (and therefore more murderous) desire. Fletcher plays with this notion, emphasizing that their only difference is the cause of their love-longing, not its intensity or their own childishness. Donaldson addresses this in terms of what he sees as a very palpable difference between them:

. . .the real reason Arcite had to pray to Mars in the older form of the story was that he had to fulfill his character by praying for the wrong thing, victory instead of Emily (A 2420). This is a relatively minor need in Shakespeare's version of the story, from which such ironies have been

eradicated. The prayer his Arcite makes is straightforward bloody praise of the god: Emilia is the prize that must be “dragg’d out of blood” (V.i.43) and, hence, Arcite needs Mars’s help. (69)

Fletcher seems particularly keen on developing this opposition, pressing his Arcite to eat Hamlet’s proverbial crocodile in response to his rival’s every declaration of purpose.

When in a fit of pique, the eye-struck Palamon asserts,

Put but thy head out of this window more
And, as I have a soul, I’ll nail thy life to’t.

Fletcher’s heart-struck Arcite retorts:

Thou dar’st not, fool, thou canst not, thou art feeble.
Put my head out? I’ll throw my body out
And leap the garden, when I see her next,
And pitch between her arms, to anger thee. (*TNK* 2.2.215-20)

Like Hamlet and Laertes in Ophelia’s grave, or Ajax and Achilles playing Thersites against each other, there seems no end to the out-facing possible when men at cross-purposes agree to disagree. Arcite will use Palamon’s joyful resignation to imprisonment as a means of torturing him from without, a reaction against the prison of his own freedom as noted in Chaucer:

How greet a sorwe suffreth now Arcite!
The deeth he feeleth thurgh his herte smyte;
He wepeth, wayleth, crieth pitously;
To sleen hymself he waiteth prively.
He seyde, “Allas that day that I was born!
Now is my prisoun worse than biforn;
Now is my shape eternally to dwelle
Noght in purgatorie, but in helle.
Allas that evere knew I Perotheus!

For elles hadde I dwelled with Theseus,
Yfetered in his prisoun everemo.

(KnT 1219-1229)

Fletcher turns Arcite's unwanted freedom into obsessive interiority and a definitive means of distinguishing him from his cousin. An agent of Mars pursuing desire, Arcite's passions can be resolved only through violations, incursions, break-ins, while Palamon comprehends breaking out as a literal and metaphorical path to desire. Neither is attuned to self-awareness, only external identities acquired through Emilia's recognition, enforced by one divinity or the other, of their love for her. For Shakespeare, the monolithic nature of the cousins' passions has changed little since he presented them as Lysander and Demetrius. It may well be the one element of *The Knight's Tale* the poet-playwright did not reimagine in the transition from comedic fantasy to dramatic romance. As in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare keenly dissects the paradox of medieval mindsets in the modern world but, despite his precision, prefers his findings messy, echoing the Chaucerian penchant for meaningful disorder with uncanny effortlessness. Chaucer's knights, fully adult at the nexus of Classical narrative and late-medieval knighthood, become in Fletcher and Shakespeare's conception schoolboys armed to the teeth with rhetoric and steel. Both playwrights are so resolved in their readings of Chaucer and knightly misconduct that they become a bit like Palamon and Arcite themselves. Shakespeare is Palamon, attempting to sum the world of the *Knight's Tale* up in a subjective, cynical glimpse through his prison window, whereas Fletcher is Arcite, pledging a return to the Chaucerian womb, presenting things in the manner he imagines they used to be read. Their initial meeting in the forest outside Athens provides a case in point:

This Palamoun, that thoughte that thurgh his herte
He felte a coold swerd sodeynliche glyde. . .
He stirte hym up out of the buskes thikke
And seide: “Arcite, false traytour wikke,
Now artow hent, that lovest my lady so,
For whom that I have al this peyne and wo. . .
I wol be deed, or elles thou shalt dye.
Thou shalt not love my lady Emelye.”

(KnT 1574-88)

This Arcite, with ful despitous herte,
Whan he hym knew, and hadde his tale herd,
As fiers as leon pulled out his swerd,
And seyde thus: “By God that sit above,
Nere it that thou art sik and wood for love,
And eek that thou no wepne hast in this place,
Thou sholdest nevere out of this grove pace,
That thou ne sholdest dyen of myn hond.”

(KnT 1596-1603)

Fletcher presented a relatively straightforward reading of their earlier confrontation in prison,⁵⁹ infusing their dispute with the self-consciously romantic naivete of Romeo, with all the attendant dilatory explanation of the lover’s soul that entails. Shakespeare embraces Palamon’s fettered freedom to explore the mechanisms of chivalry that rationalize his claim on Emilia and otherwise incongruous rejection of his boon companion:

Traitor kinsman,
Thou shouldst perceive my passion, if these signs
Of prisonment were off me and this hand

59. Cf. KnT 1033-1201.

But owner of a sword! By all oaths in one,
I and the justice of my love would make thee
A confessed traitor! Oh, thou most perfidious
That ever gently looked, the void'st of honour
That e'er bore gentle token, falsest cousin
That ever blood made kin: call'st thou her thine?

(*TNK* 3.1.30-8)

Against the boyish, romantic antagonism Fletcher derives from Chaucer, Shakespeare revisits the politeness of their courtly origins, now forced, giving a civilized sheen to uncivilized motives and affording the boys another bone of contention. Shakespeare seems bent, against both Chaucer and Fletcher, on justifying the unthinking Palamon and Arcite's respective claims on Emilia by turning them into bantering wits. Thus Palamon contends:

Most certain
You love me not, be rough with me and pour
This oil out of your language. By this air,
I could for each word give a cuff, my stomach
Not reconciled by reason.

(*TNK* 3.1.101-5)

Arcite concurs with his rival while claiming moral, social and authoritative advantage over him, echoing the more sophisticated one-up-manship of the Franklin's master storyteller over the Squire's aspiring one. Here, too, Shakespeare finds reciprocity with his collaborator, locking into the enjambment so characteristic of Fletcher's dramatic poetry and suggesting the rhythms of Chaucerian disruption:

Plainly spoken,
Yet pardon me hard language. When I spur
My horse I chide him not; content and anger

In me have but one face.

(*TNK* 3.1.105-8)

In spite of her optimism regarding the Fletcher-Shakespeare collaboration, Cooper detects unrest, albeit from a different quarter than those noted by Thompson, Donaldson and Hillman:

. . .Shakespeare and Fletcher show signs of disagreeing over the nature of Emilia more than anything else in the whole collaboration, with Shakespeare steering her toward preserving the ‘virgin’s faith’ of her mind whatever the plot may impose on her, and Fletcher promoting a change of heart to a more conventional image of nuptial womanhood. So in Fletcher’s Act IV, she is prepared to be in love with both the cousins rather than with neither (IV.ii.1-54); in Shakespeare’s Act V, when she believes Palamon must die, she regards the only advantage in remaining alive herself as being that she can comfort Arcite for the loss of his friend (V.v.141-44). In the work of both dramatists, however, her linguistic habits consistently show her identifying herself by gender, as she frequently appeals to a sisterhood of women or a standard of female judgment in a way that one would think of as more twentieth-century feminist than seventeenth-century Amazon.

(“Jacobean Chaucer,” 200)

If we follow Cooper’s reasoning here, then the Jailer’s Daughter becomes for Shakespeare a lower-class affirmation of Emilia and for Fletcher a comic contradiction of what Palamon and Arcite see when they look upon the garden from their prison window.

Both playwrights gear the Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian elements of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to divergent audiences: Fletcher courts a general audience out for a lark and a laugh with the odd flash of Chaucer recognition, while Shakespeare is frequently forced to differentiate between identical heroes and convince the audience that, for all her

shows of madness and sensitivity—not to mention Fletcher’s insistence that she is—the Jailer’s Daughter is not Ophelia. Yet these apparent cross-purposes, though they cause consternation for scholar and auditor alike, may prove superficial when illuminated by close, detailed readings of Fletcher and Shakespeare attributions side-by-side with *The Knight’s Tale*.

Among Shakespeare’s collaborators and contemporaries, disparate attitudes toward adaptation abound. For reasons unclear beyond the simplification of staging—for these changes do little to increase dramatic verisimilitude—early modern playwrights tended to transplant their source-narratives elsewhere. George Chapman built the romantic plot of *Sir Giles Goosecap* from *Troilus and Criseyde*, reset Chaucer’s serious matter as a comedy of humours and transferred the action from Troy to England (this last a logical Chaucerian move). Similarly, Fletcher set *Women Pleas’d*, largely derived from the *Wife of Bath*’s conspicuously Arthurian tale (with nods to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*), in contemporary Florence. Perhaps this is why the play appears more rooted in the Italian tradition than the Chaucerian. The more difficult to attribute Fletcher/Field collaboration *The Triumph of Honor* (of the *Four Plays in One*) situates Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale* during Rome’s conquest of Athens. Why deemphasize Chaucer’s Arthurian setting, where a French knight seeks glory in Britain, or supplant the poet’s English *auctoritee* for an artificial Classicism? The only reason would seem to be for the sake of transplanting yet another product of the Anglo-French narrative tradition into an over-valued past. While these tendencies suggest that Shakespeare’s contemporaries and later writers had also incorporated Chaucer into their frames of authoritative reference, the seeming disregard for setting as a vital component of storytelling denudes these source narratives

of their links to literary tradition rather than successfully time-warping them into the early modern era.

In *Troilus*, Shakespeare built the prototype of his romances, tragicomedies in every sense save those prescribed by his successor in the King's Men, John Fletcher, mingling Chaucerian romance as counterpart and counterpoint to its martial backdrop. With *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare successfully fused this innovative style—deeply entrenched in the English literary past—with the seriousness and purpose of his greatest tragedies while looking forward to the time-warping, travelogue-styled narratives of *Pericles* and, to a lesser extent, *The Winter's Tale*. Rooting *Troilus* and *Antony* in a medievalized Classical world very like Chaucer's presentation of similar material in *The House of Fame*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight's Tale* and elsewhere, Shakespeare sought to transcend his contemporaries' appropriations of the literary past and, as Chaucer and Gower had done in the late fourteenth century, compose distinctively English poetry. The clashes of style and content in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Pericles* derive in part from Chaucer's and Gower's readings of the antique world, filtered through Shakespeare's particular reading of medieval literary constructs and his conception of *auctoritee*.

The ultimate result of this ongoing project to comprehend the English literary past and his position within it strikes me as the poet-playwright's own brand of post-early modernism. A persistent need to repurpose—if not, for the sake of his audience, to reject outright—the well-worn theatrical tropes and modes of interpretation relied upon by many early modern playwrights, including Fletcher and Wilkins, characterizes Shakespeare's dramatic approach from his earliest work for the stage. His contributions

in any collaborative situation reveal themselves through their insistence on wholeness through pluralities of character, narrative verisimilitude and poetic authority. More than theatrical pomp or a winking familiarity with audience expectations, Shakespeare sought emotional resonance. This is not to say, if there was room for a wink in all that resonance, that he stoically refused to indulge himself or his audience; this willingness may very well be what makes Shakespeare “Shakespeare” and Chaucer “Chaucer.” Among the poet-playwright’s great inheritances from Chaucer was the realization that even the most tenuous or anachronistic juxtaposition of storytelling elements can, when it functions in service of character or narrative, create new ways of hearing and reading, new versions of human truth that take their places within the tradition even as they renovate them.

The generic confluences and tonal shifts of *Pericles* and the later plays seem side-effects of those clashes Shakespeare constructed deliberately in *Troilus and Cressida*. The remoteness of traditional, Classical sources and authorities from seventeenth-century English experience—as well as contemporary yet foreign sources such as the Italian *novella*—makes reconciling them to conceptions of early modernity a straightforward exercise. There can be no disjunctions or anachronisms for an audience that regards the play it hears as an artifact of antiquity or a souvenir from a faraway land. What results, however, is a sort of temporal parallax. The more accessible the source or authority, particularly in the potential relationships of Chaucer and Gower to the early modern stage, the more difficult and potentially disjunctive the end product is likely to be.

EPILOGUE
“HEIGH FANTASYE AND
CURIOUS BISYNESSE”

The era of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower—a distinctively English echo of Petrarch and Boccaccio—represents a significant weigh-station (perhaps the only, excluding Sidney and Spenser) en route to the playwrights of early modern London. Secular drama as yet unformed, perhaps undreamt and even inconceivable outside of the Latin and Greek-by-way-of-Latin Classics, the most profound narrative poets used verse forms to establish character, present relationships between them, and maintain palpable and meaningful tension between storyteller and narrative. Shakespeare’s usage of these elements suggests that, by their kaleidoscopic distributions of individual narratives across multiple storytellers, points of view, and character voices, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and key sections of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* were more inherently dramatic than anything staged at York or Wakefield. Along with Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, Shakespeare may have recognized in the medieval stage a void that needed filling and, simultaneously, a commercial venue in which to advance the traditions of their Classical and medieval forerunners.

Hardly exclusive of the discussion raised in Chapter One, connections between Shakespeare’s dramatic output and the dramatic innovations of Chaucerian narrative, mediated by the Mystery play tradition, lie compellingly beyond the parameters of this study. Though its key source is Chaucer’s mannered, incisive *The Legend of Good Women*, Shakespeare’s “Pyramus and Thisbe” in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* echoes the forced rhyme and doggerel verse of the Mysteries, themselves often as

unintentionally irreverent of their subjects as those of Chaucer-the-Poet's *Sir Thopas*.⁶⁰

If we follow the useful speculations of Emrys Jones, Stephen Greenblatt, and others, the young Shakespeare may well have experienced the Coventry cycles, staged for the last time in 1579, finding in them representations of the Biblical world filtered through a storehouse of medieval thought. As Jones put it, "Shakespeare was exceptionally well-placed to catch by the tail the vanishing eel of medieval dramatic tradition" (33); that the poet-playwright did not have textual access to the cycle plays makes an even stronger case for his poetic and dramatic memory.

Shakespeare's integrations of mystery-play commonplaces suggest that he knew the format and its evocative power well. That he developed these devices throughout his career, regardless of dramatic genre, and parallel to his Ovidian and Chaucerian proclivities, indicates a sensibility borne of and honed upon dialogues with the past. Herein lies a compelling focus for future study: to chart the dialogic interactions of Chaucer with Ovid and Shakespeare with Chaucer. At the first juncture we can locate medieval English mediations of Classical authority and, at the latter, their myriad poetic uses. Beyond this nexus lie possible Shakespearean appropriations of Ovids pre-mediated by Chaucer and co-mediated by Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare's most significant contemporary influence. This near-polarity of Chaucer's authoritative comedic sensibility and Marlowe's Classical seriousness informed Shakespeare's development from neophyte to poet-playwright. During that decades-long transition, Shakespeare inverted his approach, exploring the inherent seriousness of Chaucer and manifest irreverence of Marlowe without violating his youthful conceptions of them.

These strong connections between Shakespeare's narrative poems and his profoundly

60. Donaldson keenly elucidates this point in *The Swan at the Well*, 13.

Chaucerian worldview prophesy the “dramatic romances”⁶¹ and *King Lear*’s unique influence upon them. Shakespeare not only revisited Chaucerian romantic modes, themes and situations he had earlier assayed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but also began increasingly to set his plots—at least in the abstract—closer to home, whether mapping the subtext of English prehistory in *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, or navigating the mytho-historical waters charted by Chaucer in *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Man of Law’s Tale*. This latter, a Chaucerian prehistory of Christianity in Britain, may illuminate *King Lear*’s relation to the *Histories* and, furthering the case for Shakespeare as assimilator and sometime cryptomnesiac, narrow the play’s long, ambiguous list of possible sources. *Lear* strikes me as a literary and historical descendent of Roman tragedy that, while building upon the tragic strains of Chaucer’s *Troilus*, sounds a death-knell for Ovidian transformations of either the Chaucerian or Marlovian school. It is also the first and last of Shakespeare’s tragedies to integrate the comic and the tragic in service of character and narrative—in general the strongest point of contact and speculative interaction between Shakespeare and Chaucer. In this light, *The Winter’s Tale* reads as a tragicomic echo of *King Lear*, its miraculous Ovidian ending a Chaucerian inversion of *Lear*’s apocalypse.

The struggles of plays such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Pericles* against the boundaries of genre and the confines of the early modern stage suggest that, as Shakespeare’s art matured beyond genre-specific works, he turned increasingly to Chaucer not merely for source material but mentorship, as Dante to Virgil, Marlowe to Ovid, Kyd to Seneca, and Chaucer himself to Boccaccio. While the narrative poems

61. Marjorie Garber’s coinage positions Shakespeare’s late romances, perhaps incorrectly dubbed “tragicomedies,” as unique within his oeuvre in addition to establishing them as a serious revisitiation of a lost genre (755).

contain the source code of Chaucer's literary *auctoritee* in Shakespeare's early career, the later plays herald a rebirth of Chaucerian tragicomic romance and reveal the playwright's perspective on the medieval world. Shakespeare's copious allusions to Chaucer, reevaluations of Chaucerian themes, and even a marked Chaucerian presence in Shakespearean works not traditionally associated with Chaucer suggest connections more intimate and complex than have yet been illuminated.

Eluding definition and yet well within these parameters is the possible "presence" of Chaucer in Shakespearean plays that cover not only a significant period of his lifetime but events in which the poet may have been intimately involved even when absent from the courts of Richard Plantagenet and Henry Bullingbrook. That no poetic presence materializes in the profoundly poetic *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*⁶²—and that such does materialize as the Chorus in their capstone, *Henry V*—is as potentially telling as the absence of all but the most oblique references to these events in Chaucer's surviving oeuvre.

62. Falstaff is an intriguing exception. He often seems to have stepped from Chaucer's fictional world into Shakespeare's historical fiction, though as more of a humanizing force than poetic voice.

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