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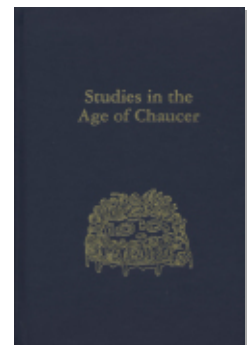
*Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* by  
L. O. Aranye Fradenburg (review)

Bruce Holsinger

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if indeed Troy marks England's move toward nation as ambivalent, more might be made of the fractious fantasies of dissolution, dismay, and disunity embedded in the Trojan inheritance.

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L. O. ARANYE FRADENBURG. *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer*. Medieval Cultures 31. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Pp. viii, 327. \$19.95 paper, \$59.95 cloth.

While psychoanalysis has a long and distinguished history in medieval studies, no medievalist has advocated as passionately for its indispensability to historicist literary study as L. O. Aranye (formerly Louise) Fradenburg. *Sacrifice Your Love* takes as its premise Lacan's ethical dictum from the seventh seminar (itself preoccupied with the medieval): "The only thing of which one can be truly guilty is of giving ground relative to one's desire." Humanity's moral sense, Lacan avows, derives from the dialectic of sacrifice and enjoyment at the center of Western ethical thought, from Aristotle to Kant, from Abelard to Nietzsche: "restraint, sacrifice, duty, 'containment,' *are* forms taken by desire" (p. 7), as are compensation, self-denying charity toward others, the act of giving in, or indeed the art of almost getting what one (thinks one) wants. *Jouissance* in this worldview is less pleasure or fulfillment and more a kind of "dirty immanence," in Georges Bataille's phrase, that never resolves the ethical confusion of desire and abnegation.

*Sacrifice Your Love* is a deductive book, and those predisposed against psychoanalytic approaches to literary study may resist Fradenburg's forthright enlistment of their psychologies and desires. The book's guiding thesis—"what we think we ought to do—even the very idea that we ought to do certain things—is always intimately related to our desire" (p. 2)—suggests that Fradenburg's central object of scrutiny will be not simply the desire of medieval subjects; rather, *we* are the subject of this book: *our* obligations, *our* modes of sacrifice and enjoyment. This *we*, though, does not exclude Chaucer and his contemporaries, and despite the strategically essentializing risk it takes, the untroubled use of the first-person plural throughout the book should not be read as ahistorical. To the contrary: *Sacrifice Your Love* is intended as a contribution

to the writing of “the history of our sensibilities” (p. 2), a history that demands a disinvestment in what Fradenburg calls “alteritism.” The notion that the Middle Ages is inexorably “other” to modernity has led to a fair measure of intellectual dishonesty: “What respect do we show the Middle Ages when we say that responsibility involves understanding the Middle Ages exclusively on its own terms, and then insist . . . that only postmedieval alteritist views of time and methods of knowledge production are capable of the attempt?” (p. 65).

In order to appreciate what this book is trying to do, we must first understand its rhetorical and critical style. Fradenburg’s many paraphrases of psychoanalytic thought are most often presented as gnomic proclamations of psychic quiddity; the book’s most riveting pages are also those in which psychoanalysis is made to speak with an analytic veracity few others would allow it. Indeed, Fradenburg inhabits her psychoanalytic idiom so forthrightly, so unapologetically, that the book has the effect of subsuming even a resistant reader into its Lacanian *habitus*. It is in this sense that we must comprehend the caliginous pleasures of Fradenburg’s prose as integrally related to the relationship she outlines between desire and sacrifice: as she points out more than once, enjoyment is emphatically not synonymous with “ease,” a sentiment illustrated through an abundance of neologism and syntactical ingenuity that, in her unrelentingly Lacanian argot, comes to feel almost intrinsic to the subjects at hand. For these and other reasons, Fradenburg emerges in this book as in many ways a more profound Lacanian than Lacan himself. She is certainly a more profound and subtle Lacanian reader, and as a psychoanalytic explicator of Chaucer she is without peer.

While *Sacrifice Your Love* presents itself as simultaneously a psychoanalytic intervention into medieval historicism and a study of Chaucer, Fradenburg could have done more to clarify the relationship between its two aims. The meta-theoretical conversations take up nearly a third of the book, and while the author wonderfully illuminates the diverse role of sacrifice in Chaucer’s poetry, it is difficult to discern how her prescriptive arguments concerning method and critical self-consciousness relate to the conventionally Chaucerian readings that make up chapters 2 through 6. As a result, the Chaucer chapters have a strangely isolated feel, and Fradenburg’s larger disciplinary arguments concerning popular medievalism, alteritism, and the ethics of historicism have no immediately apparent bearing on her discrete treatments of Chaucer.

This does nothing to detract from the interest of these chapters them-

selves, which a review of this length risks simplifying. Chapter 2 unfolds an intricate account of medieval and modern theory of tragedy not so much as genre, but as a mode of ethical practice that demands “prosthesis” in the face of tragic situations such as courtly love. The “rendering of courtly love as tragedy” gave medieval aristocratic culture “powerful . . . ways of defining subjectivity, sociality, and their interdependence.” Chaucer’s retelling of the story of Ceyx and Alcyon is thus “structured as a series of survivals” precedent to modern theories of tragedy, with all the sentimentality and “power of miniaturization” that accrues to them by the eighteenth century. Chapter 3, “The Ninety-Six Tears of Chaucer’s Monk,” takes a very different approach to tragedy, suggesting that the often “sodomasochistic” spectacle of the tragic as well as the “association of tragedy with critical moments in the history of responsibility” can do much to explain the construction of historical events such as the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 as “tragedies” by their chroniclers. *The Monk’s Tale’s* “empty but exigent formality” speaks the dark truth both of the tragic itself and of Chaucer’s larger project of collection and collocation: “The borderline between heterogeneous association and mass groupification haunts not only the Monk’s performance but *The Canterbury Tales* as well” (p. 150).

The three subsequent chapters scrutinize chivalry, sacrifice, and desire in *The Knight’s Tale*; charity, ethics, and the role of the neighbor or *Nebennensch* within the “ethical structure of courtly love” (p. 186) informing *The Legend of Good Women*; and *Troilus and Criseyde* and the “failure” of tragedy to effect final resolution. The book’s epilogue reads the movie *Babe* in light of “the tropes of antiutilitarian medievalism in the nineteenth century” (p. 239), taking the film as an allegory for the susceptibility of contemporary medieval studies to the utilitarian demands of the market university. As Fradenburg asks near the end of the book, “We need to decipher in medieval studies’ *self*-marginalization both the destructivity within us and the enjoyment produced by our management of it, by the rarefaction of our phantasmatic modes of triumph over deadlines: medievalism’s gift of death” (p. 252).

That Fradenburg is capable of discerning the death drive of our discipline in a movie about a pig’s wish to avoid butchery points to the indisputable originality of *Sacrifice Your Love*, an originality that might have been enhanced had Fradenburg taken on more directly the many alternatives to the models of sacrifice, ethics, and desire proffered in this book. Her extensive engagement with the ethics of the *Nebennensch*, for

example, makes no mention of the far-reaching challenges Emmanuel Lévinas has posed to Lacan's ethics of neighborliness. The book also resists placing its findings on the ethics of sacrifice and desire in dialogue with the long scholarly tradition on psychoanalytic ethics, from L. S. Feuer to Ernest Wallwork to John Rajchman, whose influential work on Lacanian ethics and the historical logic of sacrifice tells a very different story from the one Fradenburg relates here.

These quibbles take nothing away from Fradenburg's accomplishments in this book. Psychoanalytic medievalism has reached its apogee in *Sacrifice Your Love*, which will set the course for work in this Chaucerian subfield for many years to come.

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DOUGLAS GRAY, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. xxvii, 526. \$95.00.

*The Oxford Companion to Chaucer* is a remarkable and henceforth indispensable book for all interested in Chaucer. It is written in a direct, plain style free from jargon and fads, available to the nonspecialist and useful to the specialist alike. It is pleasant to be able to add a fact that was not available until July 2004, namely, Professor Linne Mooney's virtually certain identification of Adam Sciveyn, previously unknown, as the recorded scrivener Adam Pinkhurst. This was announced in a splendid lecture at the New Chaucer Society meeting in Glasgow in July 2004, soon to appear in *Speculum*.

For anyone wishing to annotate a Chaucerian text, most of the work is done here. The basis is a splendidly empirical Oxford emphasis on the meaning of names, but it extends to eighty-seven admirable brief essays each of up to a couple of thousand words on such general topics as The Ages of Man, Estates Satire, Folk Tale, Friendship, Penance, Rhetoric, Romance, along to Wine, Women, Youth: all concise, witty, and well balanced. The only serious omission is Honor, clearly a slip because in the entry to *The Knight's Tale* there is an asterisk as pointer to Honor as a general topic (p. 272). There are even two sections amounting to some three thousand words picking a path through the minefields of Chaucer Criticism old and new, paying appropriate justice to, for example, Mus-