Inventing Womanhood

Williams, Tara

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Williams, Tara.
Inventing Womanhood: Gender and Language in Later Middle English Writing.
The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/24284.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24284

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=859798
NOTES

Introduction

1. Illis diebus orts est rumor et ingens clamor in populo eo quod ubi hastiludia prosequebantur, quasi in quolibet loco dominarum cohors affuit, quasi comes interludi in dierum et mirabilis apparatu uirili, ad numerum quandoque quasi xlx. quandoque x. dominarum, de speciosioribus et pulchrioribus, non melioribus toctis regni, in tunicis partitis scilicet una parte / de una secta, et altera alia secta, cum capucis breuius et liripis ad modum cordarum circa capud adolutis, et johnis argento uel auro bene circumstipatis in transverso uenteris sub umbilico habentes cultellos quos daggerios velaliter dicunt, in powchis desuper impositis. Et sic procedebant in electis dextraris uel aliis equis bene compris de loco ad locum hastiludiorum. Et tali modo expendebant et deuastabant bona sua, et corpora sua ludibris et securilosis lasciulis uexitabant, ut rumor populi personabat.

Et sic nec Deum uerebantur, nec uerecundam populi uocem erubescebant, laxato matrimonialis pudicie freno. . . . Sed Deus in his sicul in cunctis aliis affuit mirabili remedio, eorum dissipando dissolucione. Nam loca et tempora ad hec uana assignata, imbrium resolucionem tonitribui et fulguris coruscacione, et uariarum tempestatum mirabili ventilacione preoccupuit.

2. My interest in gendered language thus separates this project from Catherine Cox's Gender and Language in Chaucer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), which is focused on gender and textuality or, in other words, on the more symbolic deployment of the feminine.

3. This argument is also supported by the term womankind, which—although first used in the thirteenth century—also began to appear more widely in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.


7. Although Seth Lerer’s *Inventing English: A Portable History of the Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) appeared after I had titled this project, both titles reflect this sense of English as a language that is not simply evolving but also being created consciously through a variety of specific texts and circumstances.


13. Warren’s work has been particularly important in this regard.

14. As David Burnley points out, there is a relationship between language and perception specifically associated with these three female roles: “The triplet maiden, wife, widow, which

15. The historical changes in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries affected not only gendered language but also the language and imagery needed to describe political power; see Lynn Staley, Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); and Paul Strohm, Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).


19. Shannon McSheffrey has persuasively argued that Lollardy drew more men than women because “Lollards most virulently attacked precisely those aspects of late medieval Catholicism that . . . were both attractive to, and to a large extent created by, women,” such as the cult of saints (Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420–1530 [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995], 138). The claim that heresy empowered women rests on the Lollard argument that any good person could be a priest; however, because the Lollards rejected transubstantiation, the priestly role did not have the same significance in their view that it had in Catholicism. Rather than valuing women more highly, the Lollard position on female priests devalued the role of priests. Furthermore, although there were Lollard female preachers, there is no definitive evidence that there were female priests. See Margaret Aston, Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion (London: Hambledon Press, 1984).


22. Burnley goes on to note that “The same situation may, however, arise more slowly as the
product of cultural evolution, and in either case, if the deficit occurs in some highly structured area of the lexis, it is often referred to as a ‘lexical gap’ (“Lexis and Semantics,” 489).

23. Chaucer and Gower are also the first known writers in English to use Femenie (to name the land of the Amazons) and among the first to use feminine. Chaucer has the earliest recorded usage of wifehood and wifely, while Gower has the first of sisterhood. “Wommanhede,” “femininite,” “Femenie,” “feminine,” “wifhode,” “wifli,” and “susterhede,” Middle English Dictionary (Middle English Compendium), <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med>. All subsequent references to the MED will be to this version unless otherwise noted.


25. Cannon, Making of Chaucer’s English, especially pp. 55, 77, and 120.


27. “Manhede,” “moderhede,” and “faderhod,” MED.

Chapter One


2. See, for example, Catherine Sanok’s exploration of Chaucer and hagiographic exemplarity in Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), chs. 2 and 6; and Claire Waters’s consideration of Chaucer in relation to medieval preaching in Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), chs. 2 and 7. Susan Phillips is interested in Chaucer’s adaptation of gossip as a literary strategy as well as his representations of the concept in Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), ch. 2.

3. In his latest book, Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Alcuin Blamires suggests that “what is needed now is a period of consolidation, defining gender formulations in Chaucer’s poetry with greater precision in relation to the various medieval discourses through and against which his formulations are positioned” (3). This chapter advances that aim by considering “gender formulations” through the lens of gendered language.


7. The project of defining womanhood is an interesting corollary to an investigation of knighthood, which many critics have read as the purpose of the tale. See Laurel Amtower, “Mimetic Desire and the Misappropriation of the Ideal in the Knight’s Tale,” Exemplaria 8.1 (1996): 125–44; and Lee Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), ch. 3.


10. “Femenie,” Middle English Dictionary (Middle English Compendium), <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med>. All subsequent references to the MED will be to this version unless otherwise noted. Gower also uses this term.

11. The Knight does use the term “Amazones” once (880), but it seems to refer to the land or the people as a whole (syntactically equivalent to “Arthenes”) rather than to the sisters specifically.

12. This contrasts sharply with the tale’s epigraph from Statius’s Thebeid, which describes the “Scithian folk,” lacking any specific gender reference.


14. Abby Wettan Kleinbaum argues that “in the hands of Chaucer and Boccaccio . . . [the Amazons’] image was even further weakened: they were shorn of their warrior determination and prowess.” She goes on to say that in the Knight’s Tale, Hippolyta “is only incidentally an Amazon. It is her sister Emily who is a beauty and neither woman has formidable strength. Hippolyta is just the woman whom Theseus happened to marry, and she is hardly noticeable. Her Amazon past is far behind her, and she is a dutiful and obedient helpmeet” (The War against the Amazons [New York: New Press, 1983], 61).


17. This is a common feature of Amazon stories: “solitary images were passed on rather than
the image of a collective horde of women who could have conquered men or held their own as peers” (Weinbaum, *Islands of Women*, 11).


21. This does not discount the possibility that the tale is more interested in the relationship between these two suitors than in their love for Emelye; see John M. Bowers, “Three Readings of the *Knight’s Tale*: Sir John Clanvowe, Geoffrey Chaucer, and James I of Scotland,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.2 (Spring 2004): 279–307.

22. See line 1452. In Chaucer, there are two suitors, but in Boccaccio there are three.

23. Mandeville explains that the women have “lemanys to whom they may gon to whan they lestyn to haue bodily lykynge of hem” and that sons are killed or given to their fathers while daughters are raised as Amazons (*Mandeville’s Travels*, 85).

24. Elizabeth Robertson considers the different meanings of virginity in pagan and Christian cultures, suggesting that “Emelye wishes to make such a choice of [Christian contemplative] religious life, but that choice has no practical legitimacy in the world of Athens” (“Marriage, Mutual Consent, and the Affirmation of the Female Subject in the *Knight’s Tale*, the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and the *Franklin’s Tale*,” in *Drama, Narrative, and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Wendy Harding [Toulouse, France: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003], 183).

25. Elizabeth B. Edwards reads Emelye and Palamon’s marriage as accomplishing the work of mourning in the *Knight’s Tale*; their marriage also supplants the mourning and Emelye’s participation in the more recognizable rituals of mourning is obscured (“Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and the Work of Mourning,” *Exemplaria* 20.4 [Winter 2008]: 361–84).


27. Similar descriptions of Emelye wounding the men reappear later in her absence, part of the prelude to violence between Palamon and Arcite (1567–68).


30. Havely, *Chaucer’s Boccaccio*, 113. “...e in man dui / istral dorati tene” and “Si, e’ m’ha piagato in guisa tal che di dolor m’acora” (*Teseida*, III.16 and 17).

31. Havely, *Chaucer’s Boccaccio*, 113. “Io non so che nel cor quel fiero arcieri / m’ha saettato, che mi to’ la vita” and “sì m’è fissa nel cor la sua figura, / e sì mi sta nell’animo piacente” (*Teseida*, III.20 and 21).

I polita era a maraviglia bella;  
e di valore accesa nel coraggio;  
ella sembiava matutina stella  
o fresca rosa del mese di maggio;  
giovine assai e ancora pulcella,  
ricca d’avere, e di real legnaggio,  
savia e ben costumata, e per natura  
nell’armi ardita e fiera oltre misura. (*Teseida*, I.125)
37. The Knight expends more lines commenting on the length of his tale than covering the events he will not describe, ten total (875–76, 885–92) versus eight total (877–83).
39. The problem is complicated, of course, by the fact that most of Chaucer’s female fictional characters are upper class and others (like Alison in the *Miller’s Tale* or the Wife of Bath) are presented in contexts or genres where feminine virtue is less directly invoked.
40. Hansen points out that “the Theban widows, who are represented as proper, submissive, defeated, and dependent . . . thus serve as a crucial part of the narrative strategy that defines Woman.” She also notes the parallel between the widows’ scene and the intercession scene that I discuss here, though not in the same detail or to the same end (*Fictions of Gender*, 218 and 220).
41. Wallace argues that the *Knight’s Tale* presents a version of polity in which the autocratic ruler does not allow himself to be counseled by a consort (*Chaucerian Polity*, 107 and Chapter 4: “No Felaweshipe”: Thesian Polity, *passim*). While this is true to a large extent, it is also true that several of the decisions in the story—including the decisions to battle Creon and to spare Arcite and Palamon—are influenced by the interventions of women. Similarly, Fowler contends that the tale implicitly critiques the model of conquest by showing how it endangers the social bonds—especially marriage—that would be formed through consent (“Chaucer’s Hard Cases,” 132–33). Jill Mann, on the other hand, argues that Chaucer presents the quality of pity—exhibited by Theseus as well as by the women—as an heroic virtue appropriate to both men and women (*Feminizing Chaucer* [Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2002], 134–42).
42. The intercession scene is frequently discussed by critics. See, for example, Wallace’s discussion of Hippolyta’s silence and Thesian polity (*Chaucerian Polity*, 104–5 and 119) and Crane’s discussion of the scene (*Gender and Romance*, 22).
43. Havely, *Chaucer’s Boccaccio*, 121. “Non piaccia a Dio che sia / ciò che dimandi, ben che meritato / l’aggiate per la vostra gran follia” (*Teseida*, V.91).
44. Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 116. Invoking postcolonial theory, Keiko Hamaguchi reads this scene as an instance of mimicry and also suggests that such mimicry indicates that the Amazons’ assimilation is incomplete (“Domesticating Amazons in *The Knight’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 [2004]: 342–46).
46. Strohm, “Queens as Intercessors,” *Hochon’s Arrow*, 95 (emphasis in original).

48. See, for example, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender, ch. 7; Mann, Feminizing Chaucer; 114–25; and Carolyn Van Dyke, “The Clerk’s and the Franklin’s Subjected Subjects,” Studies in the Age of Chaucer 17 (1995): 45–68.


50. David Wallace has argued that Chaucer exploited the contradictions in Petrarch’s version of the story in order to critique the tyranny associated with Petrarch; here I read some of the same aspects of the tale as allowing Chaucer’s examination of the category of womanhood (Chaucerian Polity, ch. 10). Mark Miller also examines these extremes through a philosophical lens (Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the Canterbury Tales [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], ch. 6).

51. Hansen and, to a lesser extent, Dinshaw and Wallace see Walter as primarily a reactionary, while those who focus on the marquis and his possible motivations, such as Kathryn L. Lynch, “Despoiling Griselda: Chaucer’s Walter and the Problem of Knowledge in The Clerk’s Tale,” Studies in the Age of Chaucer 10 (1988): 41–70; Andrew Sprung, “If It Youre Wille Be: Coercion and Compliance in Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale,” Exemplaria 7.2 (1995): 345–69; and Thomas A. Van, “Walter at the Stake: A Reading of Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale,” Chaucer Review 22.3 (1988): 214–24, tend to flatten out the complexities in Chaucer’s portrayal of Griselda. Many of these readings have been influenced by Robert O. Payne’s early interpretation of the tale as a “sentimental experiment” in which Chaucer seems to be “working toward a . . . moral statement which will be immediately apprehensible emotionally and nearly incomprehensible by any rational or intellectual faculty” (The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer’s Poetics [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963], 164). In such a reading, there is no need to seek intelligibility in either Walter or Griselda. By contrast, I will argue that Walter plays a vital role in the construction of Griselda’s exemplary womanhood; if Griselda is a mediating figure, then Walter necessarily becomes slightly more rational or at least intelligible.


56. Winstead, Virgin Martyrs, especially pp. 83 and 85.


58. For example, Morse observes that Chaucer was “the first to set her [Griselda] against the antifeminist type of woman, perhaps in the translation itself, certainly in the responses he invents to the tale at its end” (“The Exemplary Griselda,” 55).

59. Susan Crane observes that “Griselda’s imagined performance of marriage articulates
social understandings of wifehood” and that “Chaucer’s version sharply interrogates women’s place in marriage. Chaucer took that cue from the French versions of the tale, which are particularly concerned to model conduct for women” (The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity during the Hundred Years War [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002], 29). I agree, but would add that Chaucer also takes his cue from contemporary hagiography, from which the tale draws.


62. Petrarch, Epistola, in Severs, Literary Relationships, 288; for an alternate version, see Farrell and Goodwin, “The Clerk’s Tale,” 129 and 26n. In the Decameron, the story is addressed to women but has a mixed audience and is on the topic of governance. De Mézières follows Petrarch in offering Griselda as a female and human model. Le Ménagier presents the story in a conduct book for a young wife, but the writer asks his wife not to take it as an example for herself (Severs, Literary Relationships, 22). The play is written “in order that people can use [it] as a mirror, and in order that those ladies who are visited by adversity can bear it with patience” (Brownlee, 876; see full reference below). Note that all of the French versions rely (directly or indirectly) on Petrarch rather than Boccaccio. For a discussion of the differences between some of these versions, see Kevin Brownlee, “Commentary and the Rhetoric of Exemplarity: Griseldis in Petrarch, Philippe de Mézières, and the Estoire,” South Atlantic Quarterly 91.4 (Fall 1992): 865–90.

63. This is particularly interesting because one possible antecedent of the tale, Cupid and Psyche folktales, could involve human protagonists of either sex/gender. However, this proposed precursor (Griffith’s) is no longer widely accepted; William E. Bettridge and Francis L. Utley suggest “The Patience of a Princess,” which does depend on a female protagonist, instead (“New Light on the Origin of the Griselda Story,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 13.2 [Summer 1971]: 153–208).

64. Bronfman, Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale, 17.

65. See, for example, Mann: “the most obvious testimony to Griselda’s strength is the tale’s ending. . . . For it is not Griselda who gives way under the pressures of her trial, but Walter. . . . [T]he story does not simply illustrate the virtue of patience; it shows that patience conquers” (Feminizing Chaucer, 119; emphasis in original).

66. Dante Alighieri, La Vita Nuova, ed. and trans. Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 46–47: “In quello punto dico veramente che lo spirito de la vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera de lo cuore, cominciò a tremare si fortemente, che apparia ne li menimi polsi orribilmente; e tremando disse queste parole: ’Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi.’”


68. Havely, Chaucer’s Boccaccio, 113.

69. See especially Morse, “Exemplary Griselda.”

70. Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. G. H. McWilliam (New York: Penguin,

71. McWilliam, Decameron, 785. “Io ho trovata una giovane secondo il cuor mio, assai presso di qui” (Ottolini, Il Decamerone, 666).


73. Walter’s first sight of Griselda seemed to validate her “wommanhede,” since it was the basis of his choice. However, he insists on excessive submission from her as a condition, which suggests that her behavior may be in doubt.

74. For instance, Dinshaw grounds her reading in the trope of *translatio*, titling the relevant chapter “Griselda Translated” (*Sexual Poetics*, ch. 5). Wallace also makes important use of the trope in his reading of the tale (*Chaucerian Polity*, ch. 10), as does Emma Campbell in “Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation in the Tale of Griselda,” *Comparative Literature* 55.3 (Summer 2003): 191–216. Crane is an exception; in *The Performance of Self*, she investigates Griselda’s clothing as a material expression of identity and its role in the ritual of marriage (29–37). Andrea Denny-Brown also considers the material aesthetics of the Clerk through this scene and the tale’s general preoccupation with clothing in “Povre Griselda and the All-Consuming Archewyve,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 77–115.

75. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrocento,” in her *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 245. Consciously or not, Chaucer’s emphasis on clothing and dowry echoes some of the issues in medieval Italian wedding customs, which are appropriate to the story’s Italian setting and provenance.


77. Crane goes on to argue that this reclothing “leaves visible a residual self that remains unincorporated” (*Performance of Self*, 33).


80. The undoing of the translation does not work; as she walks home, her father tries to cover her with her old coat “But on hire body myghte he it nat brynge, / For rude was the clooth, and moore of age / by dayes fele than at hire mariage” (915–17).


82. “Lust” is reiterated as the term for Walter’s self-interested desires; Griselda is grieved to leave her husband but does so, “abidynge evere his lust and hi s plesance” (757) and when she returns to prepare for the new wife, Walter directs Griselda to array the chambers “in ordinaunce / After my lust” (961–62).

83. The son was two years old when he was taken away (617) and is seven when he returns (780).


85. Morse sees the people not as a crucial part of Griselda’s testing, as I argue, but as themselves subject to a similar test: “The testing of Griselda proves to be also the testing of the people,

86. Alcuin Blamires, the only other critic to have paid substantial attention to this phrase, reads the meaning of “wommanheede” in this scene differently:

Womanhood remains unexplained here and seems at first sight peculiar. In conventional Middle English, a test of someone’s manhode would signify a test of his courage. However, from a question asked at 698–9, about what more a stern husband could do “to preeve hir wyfhod and hir stedefastnesse”, it seems that in The Clerk’s Tale Griselda’s “wifehood” and her “steadfastness” are symbiotic: one might conjecture that her womanhood and her steadfastness are similarly meant to be symbiotic in this tale. That is to say, in “assaying” (investigating the quality of) Griselda’s womanhood, Walter is investigating the degree of stabilitas in her, he is determining the level of unchangeability in her because this was the supreme criterion for assessing women in a culture obsessed with feminine “weakness.” (Blamires, The Case for Women in Medieval Culture [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 167–68)

The question of Griselda’s womanhood is broader, however; it is not only about her stabilitas, but also about her ability to combine different models of femininity while maintaining appropriate feminine virtues to an exemplary degree.

87. “Let those who believed the opposite know me painstaking and testing, not impious. I have proved my wife rather than condemning her [Sciunt qui contrarium crediderunt me curiosum atque experientem esse, non [impium]; probasse coniugem, non dampnasse]” and “I did what I did only to test and try you [moy avoir fait ce que j’ay fait pour toy approuver et essaier tant seulamente]” (Farrell and Goodwin, “The Clerk’s Tale,” 128–29 and 164–65). See also Severs, Literary Relationships, 286 and 287.

88. Laura Ashe argues that Griselda actually transforms Walter through her reading of her husband as good and his love for her as powerful: “Ultimately, Griselda’s reading of Walter is powerful enough to become his salvation. . . . [S]he reads him as beneficent and just: and so he is saved from himself” (“Reading Like a Clerk in the Clerk’s Tale,” Modern Language Review 101.4 (October 2006), 942–43).

89. These multiple endings of the tale have invited multiple interpretations. Many critics have discussed the envoy in response to Muscatine’s view of it as a comic strategy (French Tradition, 197). For the connections to (and distinctions from) Petrarch that Chaucer constructs, see Wallace, Chaucerian Polity, 293; and Campbell, “Politics of Translation,” especially pp. 211–14. The multiple endings have also produced divergent interpretations of the tale’s treatment of women (and specifically Griselda). Dinshaw suggests that the Clerk “addresses himself, finally, not to another man—he does not pass his text on from clerk to clerk—but to women” (Sexual Poetics, 152), while Hansen argues that “the Clerk’s humorous ending deflates rather than protects Griselda’s virtue. . . . [He] devalues and dismisses the feminine powers of silence without liberating women from the complementary myths of absence or excess” (Fictions of Gender, 205). For an overview of the polyvalent morality of the tale, see J. Allan Mitchell, “Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale and

90. We might read “secte” as “sex” or as a more exclusive subset of that sex. The latter reading is best supported by the text and by the later address to “archewyves,” another Chaucerian coinage that seems to describe a particular group of women (1195).

Chapter Two


5. Choosing to write the *Confessio Amantis* in English, Gower manipulates the vernacular to achieve both precision and ambiguity. Götz Schmitz contends that Gower’s “main concern is with the ambiguity of words and with the danger inherent in the fact that words can be used to both good and evil ends” (“Rhetoric and Fiction: Gower’s Comments on Eloquence and Courtly Poetry,” in *Gower’s Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Peter Nicholson [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991], 128). However, in constructing an idea of womanhood that is performative rather than innate, Gower exploits ambiguity in language to reflect ambiguity in nature. On this issue, ambiguity is productive as well as dangerous.

6. In the *Confessio*, *wommanhiede* variously signifies virtue, an association with maidenhead, a contrast to manhood (manly courage contrasted with womanly dread, for example), a tempting quality of sinfulness, and, most broadly, possession of a feminine nature. An important pattern of usage develops, however, as Gower employs womanhood as a focus for his ideas about the multiple manifestations of human nature.

7. Watt contends that the *Confessio Amantis* “deliberately encourages its audience to take risks in interpretation, to experiment with meaning, and to offer individualist readings. Indeed, insofar as it does not always give satisfactory answers to the moral questions it raises, and at times obfuscates rather than clarifies, it can be seen to pursue a negative critique of ethical poetry” (*Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], xii). In a larger sense, this is certainly true, but in the specific case of his treatment of female victims, I believe that Gower takes an important—and unusual—approach toward their suffering as an index of immoral behavior. My interpretation comes closer to Elizabeth Allen’s view that Gower’s “moral poetry does not simply strive to legislate or ‘correcte’ human behavior, but seeks to engage his readers in the experience of conscious and deliberate moral choice” (“Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble with Reading,” *ELH* 64.3 (Fall 1997), 627–28).
8. There are eleven appearances in the frame versus thirteen in the tales. A large number of the tales discussed in this chapter, however, come from Book V of the _Confessio_; the adaptation of financial sins to love relationships creates interesting disjunctions that hint at the “value” of womanhood and its significance to both romance and the concept of manhood.


12. This may be because Chaucer envisions the word as having a definition beyond the Wife of Bath’s own ideas or experiences or because he does not want her to be one of the speakers who contribute to defining the term. Her ideas about what it means to be a woman certainly contrast with the characteristics and virtues Chaucer associates with *womanhood* elsewhere in the *Canterbury Tales*.

13. *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, 998, 1000, and 1005. The word “wyf” is being used in the general sense of “goodwife,” meaning “woman” rather than designating marital status.

14. Interestingly, the knight himself is originally described as “wifles”—this descriptor occurs even before his name is given (I, 1411).

15. Genius applies it to the Sirens, for example (I, 495).

16. Although it is difficult to ascertain how a pun like this would have worked in a primarily oral literary culture, it certainly exists in the written text and might have been conveyed through pronunciation or enjoyed by readers or the writer himself.

17. In Chaucer’s version of the story, it is at this moment that the loathly lady appeals to the queen to enforce the knight’s promise and announces her wish that he marry her. In the *Confessio Amantis*, Florent leaves the court to return to the woman, already knowing that he must marry her.


19. Gower also compares her to a Moor (I, 1686), another method of dehumanizing her and emphasizing that she inhabits the border between human and creature.

20. In his edition of the *Confessio Amantis*, Russell Peck glosses this line as a pun. At this point, however, the “best woman” reading seems less viable—there has been no evidence either of the knight’s feelings or of the woman’s nature that would justify that interpretation as anything more than a distinctly secondary alternative. The pun is stronger in its earlier appearance (which Peck does not note). John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 67n.


22. In making the jump to the fifth book, I pass over ten intervening occurrences of *womanhood* (including some that will be explored later in this chapter), but I trace a trajectory of usage that has its own coherence.

23. Here I disagree with Karma Lochrie, who claims that Genius “trivializes rape and the woman’s suffering in particular” (Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999], 218). His representation of suffering is crucial to the text, although Amans fails to read and react to it.

24. The shape of the narrative as the Tale of Tereus rather than the Tale of Philomena reveals Gower’s focus on male behavior rather than female characters in this and other stories. By con-
In contrast, it is The Legend of Philomela in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women.

Chaucer’s version of the story in the Legend of Good Women includes quite similar animal imagery in describing the rape—an event that was perhaps more comfortably and more effectively described by way of a predator–prey simile—but only at this moment rather than throughout the story as in Gower’s version.

Carolyn Dinshaw argues that “making the rape seem unusual, the result of a single, even inhuman, desire” protects the patriarchal system from analysis and “keeps us from seeing other victimizations of women” (“Quarrels, Rivals, and Rape: Gower and Chaucer,” in A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck, ed. Juliette Dor [Liège, Belgium: University of Liège Press, 1992], 119 and 118). While I agree that Tereus’s beastliness protects manhood from critique, I believe it also heightens readers’ sense of the women’s victimization.

As in the Manciple’s Tale, there is a pun here on bird/bride.

The Legend of Philomela, in the Legend of Good Women, in Riverside Chaucer, 2328–29.

The revenge also points up Tereus’s unkind and unnatural behavior by forcing him to do something against “kinde” (V, 5905).

Pity was also the crucial characteristic by which Hippolyta validated her womanhood in the Knight’s Tale, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Interestingly, Genius’s description of the vice includes not only rape (deluding and having sex with a woman as if she were a shepherdess, “For other mens good is sweete” [V, 6118]) but also concealing the rape from one’s unsuspecting wife. The husband or father is often figured as the victim of this crime; rape takes something away from the man who “owns” the woman by diminishing her “value.” Gower’s perspective on rape as robbery is unusually woman-centered, first in identifying the raped woman as a true victim of the crime, but, more remarkably, by considering the wife of the rapist rather than the husband or father of the raped woman.

See also Nicola F. McDonald, “Avarice and the Economics of the Erotic in Gower,” in Treasure in the Medieval West, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler (York, UK: York Medieval Press, 2000), especially pp. 152–53. This article contains an interesting discussion of Book V to which much of my thinking is indebted, although McDonald focuses on the disjunction Book V creates between “Christian and erotic codes of conduct” (152).

Genius clearly declares Cornix as the winner, saying, “The faire Maide him hath ascaped, / Wherof for evere he was bejaped” (V, 6215–16).


Genius then tells the tale of the Chastity of Valentinian, which is a more conventional treatment of male chastity. Although it is difficult to be certain, Gower’s use of “maidehiede” rather than “maidenhiede” or “maydenhede,” which consistently appear elsewhere in the text, may represent a lexical distinction between masculine and feminine states of virginity.

Watt considers some of these same tales in her examination of “transgressive genders” such as effeminacy and female masculinity, but she does not go so far as to suggest that these identities show the basic categories of manhood and womanhood as performative rather than innate, nor does she consider their overlap with beastliness (Amoral Gower, ch. 6).

Achilles does so by practicing “Honour, servise, and reverence” and adopting a “sobre and goodli contenance” (V, 3001 and 3005).

For hert, see earlier in this same tale (IV, 7178 and 1991) as well as I, 371 and 2299; V, 7401; and VIII, 2160. For herte, see Prologue 111, 155, and 184 and examples throughout the remainder of the text.

41. Here Gower, like Butler, challenges the idea that "certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be false or derivative, and others, true and original" and seeks "to open up the field of possibility for gender" (*Gender Trouble*, vii–viii).

42. Lochrie believes that even after they have had sex, "Achilles is still identified with his cross-dressed womanliness" and "there is no suggestion by Genius that the sexual act changes Achilles's identity" (*Covert Operations*, 216–17). Although Achilles still demonstrates womanhood by day, I would argue that this passage suggests a change in his identity at some level—and perhaps recalls the similar proposed conditions of the loathly lady's transformation in the Tale of Florent.

43. Deidamia's son by Achilles is mentioned but is born outside the bounds of this tale. In addition to the interesting ambiguities it raises, this incident may reassure the reader that Achilles's womanliness is a social performance and that his sexual performance, by contrast, is indisputably masculine. He may be acting like a woman but, as this scene demonstrates, he is not becoming one.

44. If we read this tale as one in which Achilles's manly nature cannot be suppressed, then that nature is tied to war—he chooses the battle gear and this choice leads to his involvement in the Trojan War. Given Genius's negative comments on war and violence elsewhere in the *Confessio Amantis*, this vision of manly nature appears problematic.

45. Elizabeth Allen suggests that Gower manipulates the representation of incest in Book VIII to encourage readers to construct their own moral code rather than simply identifying with and imitating moral characters or behavior; here, same-sex desire may work similarly. Allen, "Newfangled Readers in Gower's 'Apollonius of Tyre'," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007): 419–64.

46. Diane Watt argues that Iphis is an example of how Genius "does not exclude women from masculinity, but rather allows the masculine woman to exist as a positive exemplary model and distinct gender category" ("Gender and Sexuality in Confessio Amantis," in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Sian Echard [Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004], 207). In this case, however, that category is collapsed back into traditional ones.


48. Amans refers to the unnamed lady in this way in III, 541.


51. Kurt Olsson argues that Amans, responding to the tales of Iphis and Araxarathen and Pygmalion, "refashions his lady accordingly, fitting her variously to the types of gentle woman presented in these two tales" ("Aspects of Gentilese in John Gower's Confessio Amantis, Books III–V," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989], 260). In my reading, Amans responds to these stories by recognizing the possibility of blaming the lady for her behavior; he does not change his view of her, only the way in which he is willing to express it.

53. Jenny Rebecca Rytting, for example, identifies the *Confessio* as a marriage manual but does not explore the implications of this for Amans or his lady. Rytting, “In Search of the Perfect Spouse: John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* as a Marriage Manual,” *Dalhousie Review* 82.1 (2002): 113–26.


57. James T. Bratcher suggests that Gower revises his sources to include a pun on *brydel* that “deepens the pathos of the lady’s fate, the price of her having tarried too long before seeking marriage.” If this is the case, then it resembles Gower’s use of the *beste* pun in the Tale of Florent. Bratcher, “The Function of the Jeweled Bridle in Gower’s ‘Tale of Rosiphelee,’” *Chaucer Review* 40.1 (2005), 110.

58. Conor McCarthy argues that Gower “offers marriage primarily as a remedy for lust, as something that can make love *honeste*, rather than as something good in itself”; in my view, these tales suggest that marriage is a virtuous responsibility (“Love and Marriage in the *Confessio Amantis*,” *Neophilologus* 84 [2000], 495).


60. One exception is McDonald, who notes in regard to a later passage, “Amans’s deep-seated desire to hold the lady fast, to wield her according to his own will, is one of the more unpleasant, even disturbing aspects of the lover’s character. It is also one aspect of his myopic pursuit that is explicitly condemned by Genius as sinful, avaricious behavior” (“Economics of the Erotic,” 151).


62. These accusations differ significantly from Amans’s earlier suggestion that the lady might be guilty of homicide, which was couched in terms of potentiality rather than actuality and hewed closer to romantic rhetoric. His accusations in Book V are direct and disturbing, distant from romantic convention.

63. In the tale of King, Wine, Woman and Truth in Book VII, the argument that woman is strongest runs thus: “The king and the vinour also / Of wommen comen bothe tuo; / And . . . manhede / Thurgh strengthe unto the womanhede / Of love, wher he wole or non, / Obeie schal” (VII, 1875–80). Here again, the ambiguity of the language suggests both that men are subject to women in love and that a man’s manhood becomes like womanhood in the process.

64. Genius will explain in Book VIII that men who do not obey the laws of marriage are like
beasts (VIII, 159–63). Although most of the book will be devoted to the specific issue of incest, this comment is part of the more general introduction to the book.

65. In the Romance of the Rose. Reason urges the lover to rule his heart rather than letting it rule him, but Reason is overthrown. Venus’s intervention contains the same message but is more successful: reason is restored and both the text and Amans are lifted out of romance.

66. Peck points out in the introduction to his abridged edition of the text that the question recalls Boethius’s Consolation and that this is the proper answer (“Introduction,” Confessio Amantis, xiii).

67. Alceste was also a paragon of womanhood in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women.

Chapter Three

1. I have come across the term in Hoccleve’s “Balade to the Duke of York” (l. 30) and in the final envoy to Lady Westmoreland in the Durham ms. of the Series. It also occurs in the Kingis Quair (l. 814).


4. This epithet is the knight’s description of the lady (John Lydgate, Temple of Glas, ed. J. Schick, EETS Extra Series 60 [1891; London: Oxford University Press, 1924], 1. 766). All subsequent references to this text will be parenthetical by line number.

5. Scanlon and Simpson’s “Introduction” provides an excellent overview of the critical history (John Lydgate, ed. Scanlon and Simpson, i–11).


7. Two exceptions are J. Allan Mitchell, “Queen Katherine and the Secret of Lydgate’s Temple of Glas,” Medium Aevum 77.1 (2008), 64–66; and Larry Scanlon, “Lydgate’s Poetics: Lauration and Domesticity in the Temple of Glass,” in John Lydgate, ed. Scanlon and Simpson, 87. Mitchell argues that the poem alludes to the clandestine marriage of Henry V’s widow, Katherine of Valois, and so the unnamed restriction is her delicate political position; Scanlon points out that the constraint is unspecified.


10. The modern adoption of this assumption dates from Pearsall; previous critics were not as uniform in reading the lady as married. Alain Renoir, for example, believed that the lady was complaining against the conventions of courtly love, which would not allow her to demonstrate
her feelings. Arguing that Lydgate held a kind of protohumanist attitude toward women, Renoir claims that in the Temple of Glas, Lydgate “shows us the woman suffering . . . because she is an individual human being who bruises herself against a convention which expects her to pretend aloofness before her lover, while every emotional impulse in her urges immediate submission to the flesh” (Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate [London: Routledge, 1967], 93).


12. Pearsall, John Lydgate, 107. This group of stanzas is present only in one group of manuscripts. See Temple of Glas, p. 14. Pearsall believes this version to be an earlier one but, in his “Introduction,” Schick identifies this interpolation as a corruption rather than an original section of the poem (xlix) because these stanzas seem inconsistent with the lady’s voice (1). These variations suggest that this passage, which describes the subject of the lady’s complaint, is a problematic section for scribes/readers.

13. Pearsall, John Lydgate, 108. Even if we accept this as an earlier version, it does not directly mention a husband; however, the hint of marriage is stronger.

14. There are seven instances of womanbed (266, 288, 766, 931, 975, 1117, and 1386) and four of womanhede (746, 875, 1065, and 1207).

15. The dreamer describes the lady’s

. . . gret semelines,
Hir womanhed, hir port, & hir fairnes,
It was a meruaile, hou euer þat nature
Coude in hir werkis make a creature
So aungellike, so goodli on to se,
So femynyn or passing of beaute. (265–70)

The dreamer describes the knight similarly:

Me þouȝt he was, to speke of semelynes,
Of shappe, of fourme, & also of stature,
The most passing þat euir ȝit nature
Made in hir werkis, & like to ben a man;
And þerwith-al, as I reherse can,
Of face and chere þe most gracious. (556–61)

The resemblances are apparent, but the first passage is only a small part of the representation of the lady while the second passage is the majority of the knight’s.

16. This may be a sign of Gower’s influence, although the Confessio does not present Venus as an overt model of womanhood.

17. See also Crockett, “Venus Unveiled,” 77–81, for an ironic reading of the religious symbolism.

18. Theresa Tinkle, Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 49. Tinkle argues that poets, like mythographers, work with these various possible meanings. She specifically discusses Lydgate’s deployment of Venus in the Temple of Glas and elsewhere:

[T]he Temple of Glass initially refers to Venus, quite sketchily, as the anadyomene: “she sate fleting in the se” (53). The lovers in the poem describe her as a planet, a star of comforting light. The narrator eventually depicts Venus as a unified carnal and
spiritual force, a planetary goddess holding tightly to the fiery chain of eternal love. None of these descriptions gains a mythographic commentary, and each complicates the deity’s import. The Venuses of *Troybook, Reason and Sensuality,* and *Temple of Glass* exemplify once again the range of refugurations and reinterpretations possible even for one writer. . . . Lydgate continually describes and deciphers the deities anew, combining and revising traditions to suit his immediate purposes. (132)

19. Nor is a husband or marriage directly invoked when the two lovers are joined at the close of the vision.
21. As Torti points out, by focusing on the lady’s perspective, Lydgate creates a new vision of love, “not to be looked at only from the point of view of the man imploring a woman made of ice, but from the woman’s point of view as well” (Torti, “Atwixen Two,” 229).
22. The knight begins his complaint, “Allas! what þing maþ þis be, / That nou am bound, þat whilom was so fre, / And went at large, at myn eleccioun: / Nou am I cauȝt vnder subieccioun” (567–70).
23. This is my primary point of disagreement with Scanlon, who argues that Lydgate empowers the lady by prioritizing her desire (“Lydgate’s Poetics,” 86 and 91).
24. It is uncertain here whether womanhood would constrain any woman’s response in this situation or whether it is the lady’s class position (as a “quene of womanhed”) or even her earlier exchange with Venus that binds the lady specifically.
25. In fact, part of the lady’s response to the knight is physical: her “femyny[ni]te” is revealed in her face (1045). The knight’s plea literally brings forth her femininity. This suggests that the lady may be responding according to social convention—ideals of femininity—rather than personal desire.
26. Accepting the adultery reading of the poem, Tinkle interprets this final scene differently: “Venus’s chain binding these lovers together contrasts with another chain binding the woman, an image of her present unavailability. The two chains picture an opposition between natural desire and legal duty, between natural and human law. Venus takes the side of natural desire, and nature here accords with eternal love” (*Medieval Venuses*, 154).
27. This interpretation brings us back to the Petrarchan take on Griselda. We might view women as traditional/archetypal subjects and hence read their situations as that of any subject—i.e., constrained by subjecthood rather than specifically womanhood. However, because the poem is so focused on the lady and on womanhood, and on the differences between the constraints experienced by the lady and those experienced by the knight, I read the *Temple of Glass* as focusing on the more specific issue of womanhood.
32. *Troilus and Criseyde* in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mif-
flin, 1987), I, 283; III, 1302 and 1740; IV, 1462; and V, 473.

33. Fox notes that Henryson’s use of the word may recall Chaucer’s use of the word to describe Criseyde, but he does not explore the significance of this connection (Henryson, Poems, p. 346 n88). C. David Benson notes another usage by Henryson that expands on rather than critiques Chaucer’s meaning: the term “parliament” (Benson, “Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson Did to Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde,” in Writing After Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century, ed. Daniel J. Pinti [New York: Garland, 1998], 236).


36. Derek Pearsall provides a typical formulation: Henryson is “determined that Chaucer’s heroine should be brought to the bar of judgment. He plucks her out of the kindly oblivion in which Chaucer had left her, makes a spiteful insinuation about her subsequent career, loads her with infamy, punishes her, and then, as if under challenge to prove that humanity is never irredeemable, redeems her” (Pearsall, “Quha Wait Gif All That Chauceir Wrait Was Trew?: Henryson’s Testament of Cresseid,” in New Perspectives on Middle English Texts: A Festschrift for R. A. Waldron, ed. Susan Powell and Jeremy J. Smith [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000], 173). Felicity Riddy argues that “Henryson’s version of the harlot’s ruin is not simply antifeminist but is used to shore up one kind of femininity against another: the ‘worthie women’ of the final stanza against the ‘giglot’” (“‘abject Odious’: Feminine and Masculine in Henryson’s Testament of Cresseid,” in The Long Fifteenth Century, ed. Helen Cooper, Sally Mapstone, and Joerg O. Fichte [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 242). Lee Patterson sees Cresseid as “sluttish” (“Christian and Pagan in The Testament of Cresseid,” Philological Quarterly 52 [1973]: 698) while R. James Goldstein describes Henryson as “misogynistic” (“Writing in Scotland, 1058–1560,” in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed. David Wallace [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 241). At best, Henryson’s narrator is echoing Chaucer’s. After various comments on this subject (see pp. 163, 169–70, and 174, for example), Gray concludes his study of the poem by stating that “Pite, that great expression of love, is continually present—in the comments of the narrator, in the kindness shown to her by the human characters in the story . . . [L]ove and human affection assert themselves” (Robert Henryson, 207–8). Fox argues that Henryson “understood and imitated Chaucer’s narrator” in his vacillation from condemnation to sympathy and that Henryson’s narrator is “impassioned by sympathy for the wronged Cresseid” (“Introduction” in Henryson, Poems, xciii and 346 n89–91).


39. Elizabeth Allen, False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature
40. Benson argues that “Lydgate approached Chaucer’s story of *Troilus and Criseyde* as a scholarly commentator ready to annotate, reinforce, and provide his readers with the historical context to Chaucer’s work; Henryson’s response is to exploit in his own original way Chaucer’s innovative literary devices, including the characterization of Criseyde. It is as if each were attempting to rectify a different absence in *Troilus* ("Critic and Poet," 228). I agree with the broad outline of Benson’s argument, but whereas Benson sees Henryson as straightforwardly giving Cresseid’s side of the story, I see him using the depiction of Cresseid to critique Chaucer. Benson argues, “Henryson’s Cresseid not only transcends Lydgate’s antifeminist cliché but also becomes in some ways more interesting and certainly braver than Chaucer’s heroine” ("Critic and Poet," 239).

41. At one point, Troilus even comments on the difficulty of interpreting Criseyde’s beautiful face: “Though thyr be mercy writen in youre cheere, / God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!” (III, 1356–57).

42. III, 4436–38 and 4441–43.

43. It is the second, non-Chaucerian account of “the fattal destenie / Of fair Creisseid, that endit wretchitlie,” which the narrator picks up after Chaucer’s “quair,” that prompts the narrator to ponder the veracity of Chaucer’s version (62–63).

44. Pearsall claims this lament is “famously queasy” and the narrator’s “professed sympathy is deeply suspect” ("Quha Wait Gif," 174). Gray suggests that in this passage Henryson is “echoing Chaucer’s words on Criseyde (V, 1093–99),” which were referred to above (Robert Henryson, 173). Rather than echoing Chaucer’s words, however, Henryson is illustrating where and how they fell short.

45. Gray, *Robert Henryson*, 170. Henryson connected the epithet with Chaucer’s version of Criseyde when he named “fair Creisseid and worthie Troylus” (42) as the subjects of Chaucer’s “quair” (40).

46. Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate also used this specific phrase, so it has been connected to the idea of womanhood from its inception. See, for example, Chaucer’s “Womanly Noblesse” (28); Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (V, 6182); and Lydgate’s *Life of Our Lady* (I, 182; and V, 383) and *Temple of Glas* (1207).

47. Riddy, “Abject Odious,” 246. It is not entirely clear whether Cresseid exchanged her femininity for filth or whether she changed it with filth, but the context favors the latter interpretation.

48. This phrasing recalls the more positive translation of Griselda in the *Clerk’s Tale*.

49. This sets up a situation parallel to that of Chaucer’s narrator, who hid behind his sources to excuse his inability to explain what happened to Criseyde more fully. Because her blasphemy is the immediate cause of her punishment, it is true that if she hadn’t blasphemed then she might not have been punished by the gods. But Henryson’s narrator has encouraged readers to see Criseyde’s treatment as so unfair that she can hardly help crying out against it.

50. Boffey claims that “The projection of her disfigured self as a ‘mirror’ to warn others of the physical decay that awaits them is also here perhaps not entirely altruistic; Cresseid seems partly to seek consolation in anticipating the fragility of others’ beauty” ("Literary Testament," 55).

51. See Patterson, “Christian and Pagan,” for example.

52. See Fox, “Introduction,” in Henryson, *Poems*, xciii; and Patterson, “Christian and Pagan,” 705. The form does vary slightly (in the antistrophe, for example), but this is the dominant stanza type.
53. The text ends just after Anelida concludes her complaint and it may be that Chaucer has written himself into a situation from which it is difficult to imagine what the next step would be. What might a woman like Anelida do after making this complaint, having rejected the traditional alternatives of pleading with her lover or telling her story to others?

54. Lesley Johnson argues that Cresseid’s “leprosy, which literally produces the conditions of old age, gives Cresseid the privileged position of ‘advanced time’ from which, detached from, yet still inside the worldly frame, she may undercut the heroic sweep of epic history with more mundane insights into worldly mutability” (“Whatever Happened to Criseyde? Henryson’s Testament of Cresseid,” in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1990), 314. We might read Cresseid’s death as a kind of ultimate extension of this position.

55. The epitaph is usually read as significant primarily because it effectively shuts the door on Cresseid’s life and story. See, for example, Boffey, “Literary Testament,” 53 (“[Troilus’s epitaph] stresses at once Cresseid’s physical degeneration and the possibility that her story, given visible form in the written letters, may have some kind of salutary afterlife in the minds of its readers.”); Craun, “Blaspheming,” 39 (“[The epitaph] records not her infidelity in love but the bare facts of her physical degradation and death.”); and Johnson, “Whatever Happened,” 317 (“Cresseid’s epitaph . . . provides no further clue to what should be made of Cresseid’s history other than restating her story in its most abbreviated form”).

56. *Womanhood* is also used by other Scottish writers of the same period; for instance, it appears in the *Kingis Quair* (814), *Hary’s Wallace* (V, 691), and several of Dunbar’s works (*The Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, 77 and 315; “[In Prays of Woman],” 11; and “[To a Ladye.] Quhone He List to Feyne,” 9 and 39).

57. _The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida* (V.ii.152).

Chapter Four


6. Nicholas Watson makes a similar point, though more broadly, in “The Middle English


9. This language also found its way into the Church as an institution; Jeremy Catto notes, “In the new occasional offices [in the fifteenth century] of the Five Wounds, the Crown of Thorns (*Corona Domini*), or the Compassion of the Virgin, mediations on the Passion of Christ were given liturgical expression, drawing on the same fund of religious feeling and sometimes on the same language as the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich” (“Religious Change under Henry V,” in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G. L. Harriss [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], 109).


11. Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 164. There have been studies that treated the language of the text in order to draw conclusions about how and where different manuscripts originated (see, e.g., Riddy “Self-Textualization”), but Julian’s methods of expression and articulation are more recently coming to the forefront in work by critics such as Watson and Jenkins in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich* and Jennifer Bryan in *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), ch. 4. In their edition of *A Book of Showings*, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh do provide a brief appendix listing rhetorical figures employed by Julian (Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. Colledge and Walsh, 2 vols., Studies and Texts 35 [Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978], 735–48). Robert Stone’s *Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970) compares the styles of Julian and Margery, but is dated in its attitude toward the latter.

12. Julian’s ideas have also been privileged over her language in popular reception (literary as well as religious); for considerations of this largely postmedieval history, see Sarah Salih and

13. These and all future parenthetical references are to the Watson and Jenkins edition.

14. R. N. Swanson comments on this problem: “The ‘mystical’ writers, such as Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and Julian of Norwich, grappled with the problem of expressing a tradition of Latin spirituality in English, and had to stretch the language considerably (although in less mystical treatises the writers worked largely within the extant vocabulary)” (Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989], 263).


17. “Fulhede,” Middle English Dictionary (Middle English Compendium), <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med>. All subsequent references to the MED will be to this version unless otherwise noted.

18. By contrast, Margery Kempe uses only a few -hed(e) words, and those seem to be established terms rather than of her own coining. Generally speaking, the language of Margery’s Book is less inventive and varied than Julian’s. Margery uses Godheed and manhood most often; childhod several times; and maydenhed, wodedwode, and presthoode twice each. As an interesting aside, none of the terms appears prior to the seventeenth chapter, the one that precedes the chapter in which Margery describes her visit with Julian. The terms do not appear in clusters, as they do in the Shewings, but Godheed often appears with references to the manhood or childhod of Christ. Most of Margery’s -hed(e) words are religious by denotation or connotation.


20. The Sloane manuscript was the basis for two modern critical editions of the long text: Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Crampton, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993); and *Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (1976; Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 1989). In the newest edition, Watson and Jenkins combine features from multiple manuscripts but argue convincingly for the linguistic accuracy of Sloane: “There is thus much to be said for following many of Sloane’s word choices, which tend to be more consistent than Paris’s, are generally northeastern in character, and are often supported by Additional, sometimes by Westminster, and sometimes by irregular forms in Paris. . . . In matters of diction, the analysis clearly favors S’s readings over those of P” (“Introduction,” 37). Colledge and Walsh’s earlier critical edition, however, used the Paris manuscript. The linguistic patterns I note here are also present in Paris, although somewhat less pronounced. Colledge and Walsh even note that “throughout, Julian shows marked preference for abstract nouns in ‘-head’” (*A Book of Showings*, 309n). The primary difference between the two versions is that in the Paris manuscript some of the -head words have the -ness suffix instead (particularly the more unusual and isolated words, such as “irkhede” and “bolnehed”); this difference may be dialectical or a modernization imposed by the Paris scribe. The patterns I note here apply generally to both manuscripts.

21. See, for example, “plentuoushede” (147) versus “plentuous” (149) or “irkhede” (123) versus “irkenes” (175). Some of this may be attributable to scribes, but the substantial number of appearances of -hed(e) forms at the moments I note later and the appearances of other forms at other moments suggest that the choice of forms has significance beyond being a purely personal or regional pattern of usage.

22. There are a number of common terms with the -hede ending, including fatherhood, man-
hood, widowhood, and maidenhood, but it is less common to create adjectives or abstract nouns by pinning the -hedē suffix onto a word rather than, for example, -ness.


25. In what seems to be an earlier usage, Gower employs the term in his *Confessio Amantis*. Chaucer does not use it.


30. We might also see Julian's revisions as maternal—she nurtures and shapes the text.


32. The long text appears to have been written about twenty years after the short text, although Watson has argued for a reversal of this chronology in “Composition.”


36. Both Julian and Margery also invoked Mary Magdalene (and leveraged her connection to the corporeal) to develop their spiritual authority, as Theresa Coletti has shown in *Mary Magdalene*, 77–84.

37. Because the visit seems to have taken place in 1412 or 1413, it is unlikely that Margery influenced Julian’s thinking in or writing of her *Shewings*, even if we accept Watson’s later date of composition for the long text.


40. Caroline Walker Bynum negotiates this problem more carefully than most, admitting that Margery “takes such [sexual and maternal] images to heights of literalism” but rejecting the view that her “cuddling with Christ in bed is simply a case of an uneducated woman taking literally metaphors from the Song of Songs” (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* [New York: Zone Books, 1991], 41 and 44). For Bynum, however, these images from affective piety reveal Margery’s conventional interest in the humanity of Christ; they are not original or strategic because “Margery, for all her fervor, her courage, her piety, her mystical gifts and her brilliant imagination, cannot write her own script” (41).


44. Virginia Burrus, The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1. Burrus does suggest that this eroticism was the product of particular historical circumstances, perhaps explaining why Margery’s case is uncommon among medieval devotional writers: “The ascetics of late antiquity cultivated purposeful disciplines of embodiment and textuality, pedagogy and prayer, which freed desire from the constraining and often violently oppressive structures of familial, civic, and imperial domination” (161). It is also worth noting that none of Burrus’s texts was the product of women; perhaps it was easier for men to use this kind of concrete sexual imagery.


49. This tradition dates back to at least the twelfth century; see, for example, Luigi Gambbero, Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 169, 178–79, and 186–88; and, for a popular study, Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), ch. 8.


52. For an exception, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 2004), ch. 1. She notes the importance of motherhood in the Book but does not examine how Margery uses her own physical motherhood to create authority for herself nor how she mixes maternal with sexual imagery (although McAvoy separately discusses images of prostitution in the text).


54. Goodman, Margery Kempe and Her World, 67.


59. Bridget of Sweden does experience a difficult childbirth, but Mary appears and takes away the pain so that Bridget’s experience of giving birth mirrors Mary’s own painless labor (Bridget of Sweden, Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations, ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris and trans. Albert Ryle Kezel [New York: Paulist Press, 1990], 76).

60. Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 89.

61. Bridget of Sweden, Birgitta of Sweden, 148 (see also pp. 77–78).

62. Bynum suggests that the dangers of marriage and motherhood were serious enough to explain some women’s desire for chastity and continence (Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 226). Dyan Elliott terms the impulse toward chastity “a revolt against the reproductive imperative” (Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993], 5).

63. See “privete (n.)” in the MED.

64. Such figurative interpretations are also orthodox. See Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. and ed. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 89 n5.

65. This interpretation is reinforced by Christ’s comment earlier in the text that it is “no synne” for Margery to continue to have sex with her husband because “I wyl that thow bryng me forth mor frwte” (59).
66. Margery’s suggestion that both physical and spiritual offspring are desirable and that the latter is somehow dependent on the former departs from typical representations. Hali Meidhad, for instance, sharply contrasts the experience of physically bearing children (which involves “sore sorhfule angoise”) with producing spiritual offspring (which is restricted to a virgin, who “ne swinke[eth] ne ne pineo[eth]”) (Bella Millett, ed., Hali Meidhad, EETS 284 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], 18 and 20).

67. Herlihy, Medieval Households, 123. Geoffrey Chaucer’s Prioress’s Tale provides one example of a mother in this role and also draws comparisons with Mary; see Bruce Holsinger, “Pedagogy, Violence, and the Subject of Music: Chaucer’s Prioress’s Tale and the Ideologies of ‘Song,’” New Medieval Literatures 1 (1997): 157–92.

68. While Julian of Norwich is also interested in both motherhood and Mary, and also uses these concerns as authorizing strategies, critics have most heavily emphasized the former in her text. See, for example, Ritamary Bradley, “The Motherhood Theme in Julian of Norwich,” Fourteenth-Century English Mystics Newsletter 2.4 (1976): 25–30; McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, ch. 2; and Maud Burnett McInerney, “In the Meydens Womb: Julian of Norwich and the Poetics of Enclosure,” and Andrew Sprung, “The Inverted Metaphor: Earthly Mothering as Figura of Divine Love in Julian of Norwich’s Book of Showings,” both in Medieval Mothering, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996). For more general discussion of how both male and female mystics made use of maternal imagery, see Bynum, Jesus as Mother, ch. 4.

69. Bynum, Holy Feast, 269. Gambero notes, however, that the human aspects of Mary were becoming more emphasized at the end of the Middle Ages; he suggests that the faithful imagined Mary “as a Mother, smiling as her Holy Child embraces her” and, during the Passion, as “a Mother who cannot bear the overwhelming sorrow that has befallen her” (Mary in the Middle Ages, 255–56).


71. Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy: Paradiso, Vol. III, Part 1: Text, trans. with commentary by Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), Canto XXXIII; and Geoffrey Chaucer, “An ABC” and Canterbury Tales, in Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), hereafter referred to parenthetically by line number. Jaroslav Pelikan notes that these two aspects of Mary—as Mediatrix and as Mater Dolorosa—were the most important contributions of the later Middle Ages to Christian teachings about Mary; he observes “a close correlation between the subjectivity of the devotion to Mary as the Mater Dolorosa and the objectivity of the doctrine of Mary as the Mediatrix” (Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996], 125–26 and 136).

72. For more on the varied paradoxes mobilized in portrayals of the Virgin Mary in medieval literature, see Teresa P. Reed, Shadows of Mary: Reading the Virgin Mary in Medieval Texts


78. Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 89. Other female spiritual figures, such as Marie d’Oignies, were also associated with excessive weeping, but their tears and suffering are not connected with Mary’s. For Marie’s case, see Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liege: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d’Oignies* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 93–95.


81. Alternatively, Jeffrey Cohen suggests that Margery’s cries represent “vocalizations [that] might be understood as a bodily response to the inadequacies of language, communicating on her behalf what words might or could not” (*Medieval Identity Machines*, Medieval Cultures, vol. 35 [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 162).

82. Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, 81. Beckwith does also suggest that this embodied strategy ultimately provides a way to move past the body: “By approximating herself to Christ, misrecognising herself in him, by living a life which is itself a mimesis and remembrance of the Passion, the female mystic may gain access to the Word” (“A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe,” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986], 54).


85. Bridget of Sweden has a similar episode with one of her sons, Charles, but it is narrated by the Virgin Mary as she tells how she attended his judgment after death; there is no direct discussion of Bridget’s concern for Charles beforehand or of how her community perceived this (although, according to Mary, a devil does colorfully decry Bridget as a “cursed sow . . . who had a belly so expansive that so much water poured into her that her belly’s every space was filled with liquid for tears!”) (*Birgitta of Sweden*, 187).

86. The vow of chastity Margery takes is an important part of this process, as are her various mentions of how she is revolted by the prospect of sex with her husband or other men. Her recurring fear of rape as she travels signals her desire to preserve the transition she has made while also indicating that this is not completely under her control.


88. Margery’s literalism might also be read in the context of the particular kind of spiritual life she develops, rejecting enclosure in favor of wandering the world. Beckwith points out that “Margery’s book is a devotional work which does not exclude the material context of its
piety... Margery was a religious woman who refused the space traditionally allotted to religious women—the sanctuary (or imprisonment) provided by the anchoress’s cell or the nunnery. Her lack of circumspection, her insistence on living in the world, enables the social dimension which makes her mysticism distinctive” (“A Very Material Mysticism,” 37). See also Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, ch. 4.
89. See note 40.
90. Elsewhere I have argued that Margery’s deployment of widowhood and wifehood represents a similar manipulation of female roles and similarly signals her active role in shaping the *Book*. Williams, “As Thou Wast a Wedow: Margery Kempe’s Wifehood and Widowhood,” *Exemplaria* 21.4 (Winter 2009): 345–62.
96. This is a dominant theme in the *Book* and is also observed by others; one clerk affirms, “he had nevyr herd of non sweche in this worlde levyng for to be so homly wyth God be lofe and homly dalyawnce as sche was” (85).
97. These problematic characteristics of Margery and her text may be partly responsible for Sarah Rees Jones’s provocative contention that the text was a fiction “written by men, for men, and about men.” Jones argues for locating the text not in the tradition of female autobiography but instead “within the general tradition of clerical chastisement through the medium of lives of holy women” (“A Peler of Holy Church’: Margery Kempe and the Bishops,” in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. [Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000], 391 and 382).
102. While references to mystics as mothers of Christ, and to God or Christ as mother, occurred elsewhere—most famously in Julian’s *Shewings*—Margery’s role as mother of God is unusual. On the distinction between God as mother and Christ as mother, see Ricki Jean Cohn, “God and Motherhood in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Studia Mystica* 9.1 (1986): 26–35.
103. Bynum argues that gender and gendered characteristics are relatively fluid for medieval
writers (Jesus as Mother, 163).

104. Previous studies have paid little attention to this, but Staley does note that Margery slips from third to first person pronouns during her visit with her husband to the Bishop of Lincoln (Dissenting Fictions, 79).

105. When Margery negotiates with her husband over chastity, she is referred to as “hys wyfe” (37), but this is a more isolated example and she is the “creatur” for the rest of that chapter.

Conclusion


2. One exception to this trend is Femenie, which retains its narrow primary meaning as a name for the land of the Amazons.


6. Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions, ed. M. A. Manzalaoui, EETS 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 12–13. This usage of womanhood is unusual not only in relation to other occurrences of the term but also in relation to other Middle English translations of the Secretum Secretorum. See, for instance, the parallel sections in the “Ashmole” version (106–7) and the translations by Johannes de Caritate (200–1) and Robert Copland (380–81). In each case, small voices have negative connotations and are associated with lying, but they are neither characterized as feminine nor connected to womanhood.

7. The MED makes this distinction in its second set of definitions for “wommanhede,” which include “the qualities belonging to or characteristic of a woman, womanliness, femininity; also, effeminacy [quot. c1400].” The single quote offered as evidence of usage for “effeminacy” is this one from Secretum Secretorum. Middle English Dictionary (Middle English Compendium), <http://ets.umd.umich.edu/m/med>.


10. This convention can be traced back to the fourteenth century, when Chaucer also employed it (and prefigured the more general usage of *womanhood* that it later entails) by naming a lady “Sovereign of beauty, flower of womanhood” in the envoy to “Womanly Noblesse” (*Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987], 28).


13. *Secular Lyrics*, 200–2, i. 33.


16. *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part II: Secular Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS 192 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 379–81, ii. 29–30. Lydgate uses the term with varying degrees of generality in other courtly poems, including “The Complaint of the Black Knight” (1. 501); “The Floure of Curtesye” (1. 154); “A Gentlewoman’s Lament” (1. 4); “A Lover’s New Year’s Gift” (1. 29); “The Servant of Cupyde Forsaken” (1. 37); and “Beware of Doublenesse” (1. 5).


18. As Helen Maurer observes, Margaret’s “experience pushed the limits of the gender system that she and her contemporaries accepted and acknowledged” (*Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* [Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2003], 4). Margaret was not the only woman in her family whose experiences pushed those limits, however; see p. 23. Nancy Bradley Warren has linked Margaret to Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc (both also often seen as problematically powerful) (*Women of God and Arms*, ch. 3).

19. Anthony Gross suggests that Margaret’s attempt to gain the regency may have been heavily influenced—even instigated—by her advisors (*The Dissolution of the Lancasterian Kingship: Sir John Fortescue and the Crisis of Monarchy in Fifteenth-Century England* [Stamford, UK: Paul Watkins, 1996], 51–57).

20. Her letter appears in the “Life of Sir John Fortescue,” put together by his nineteenth-century descendant, Lord Clermont, as the preface to *The Works of Sir John Fortescue, Knight, Chief Justice of England and Lord Chancellor to King Henry the Sixth*. The “Life” collects a number of letters to and from Fortescue, including one from December 1463 or 1464 that he wrote to the Earl of Ormond with directions for a trip to Portugal to seek assistance for Henry VI. This letter encloses a second missive with instructions to the earl from Queen Margaret (Thomas Fortescue Clermont, “Life of Sir John Fortescue,” in *The Works of Sir John Fortescue, Knight, Chief Justice of England and Lord Chancellor to King Henry the Sixth* [London: Printed for private distribution, 1869], 26).

21. A 1456 letter in the Paston collection from John Bocking to Sir John Fastolfe famously describes Margaret as “a grete and strong labourid woman, for she spareth too peyne to sue hire


24. *Ipomadon*, 1. 118.


26. The most significant recent treatment of Capgrave, Winstead’s *John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century*, includes substantial analysis of the *Life* and its representations of intellectualism, sovereignty, and virginity.

