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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes how medieval society understood the way gender characteristics were composed and balanced in a person by applying classical theories on biology, the humors, physiognomy, and astrology to medieval literary characters. These theories indicated that a tempering of masculine and feminine characteristics in a person led to a well-rounded and balanced individual and challenges the belief that medieval society had more rigid gender constructions. Through the application of these classical theories I first analyze male medieval literary characters that display hypermasculine characteristics extremely harmful to society, which lead to acts of rape and excessive violence, in the *Reeve's Tale*, the French pastourelles, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the *Knight's Tale.* Effeminate characteristics in male characters help to illustrate the variation in types of gendered characteristics in Chaucer's Absolon, the Squire, and Sir Thopas. Emasculated and feminized characters also offer ways masculinity and femininity are composed in *Piers Plowman,* Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee,* Lancelot in Chretien's *Knight of the Cart,* and Marie de France's title character in *Lanval*; both latter narratives deal with male submission to a woman of higher status. Finally, I will argue that the rehabilitation of figures like the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* was important to medieval society and reflective of a return to balance, and also how Chaucer's Troilus illustrates what a balanced medieval literary character looks like. These examples help to provide a more accurate picture of how gendered characteristics were developed by medieval authors.

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Introduction: Representations of Male Medieval Literary Characters and the Medieval Understanding of Gendered Characteristics

This dissertation looks at the gender characteristics of medieval literary characters and their relation to medieval understandings of how gender was determined. Studying specifically the literary representations of hypermasculine, effeminate, and emasculated men, I aim to show that at least some medieval authors had a complex view of gender and challenged gender stereotypes. Much scholarship on medieval literature has detailed masculine and feminine characteristics, especially in the context of social and cultural distinctions, but none has attempted to accurately describe how medieval thinkers understood the foundation for and expression of these characteristics. Medieval theories on biology and behavior can help us to understand what medieval beliefs were on gender characteristics, but they do not present the whole medieval picture. This study considers class, literary genre, and social aspects as determiners of gendered characteristics in medieval literary characters, although it is neither defined nor organized by those categories solely. Instead, this study considers that medieval authors present such characteristics in challenging and unusual ways, and it offers a new perspective for reading these characters that is more accurate than previous modern analyses. Looking at the characteristics of gender in medieval literary characters shows a more precise and nuanced way of understanding these figures that are not bound by one category. Authors like Chaucer challenged stereotypical characterizations of gender while also acknowledging them. Characters like the Troilus, Absolon, and Chaucer's Host are perfect examples of challenging and embodying those stereotypes.

My aim with this dissertation is to show the degree and variety of ways in which both masculinity and femininity are commingled in medieval male literary figures and to consider

how a medieval audience might have understood such compositions of gender characteristics. The purpose of unveiling literary gender characteristics is to provide a less anachronistic look at how medieval society perceived the gradations of masculinity and femininity in a given person, a perspective that does not rely on modern assumptions or stereotypes. One such anachronistic view is the application of modern theories on sexuality, such as queer theory, to medieval texts. These theories are meant to challenge the modern normative views placed on medieval culture and society, but they also superimpose ideas that need to be addressed. Throughout this dissertation I will analyze applications of queer theory to medieval literary figures to specifically locate the anachronisms included in those readings and emphasize the combination of gendered characteristics in a character. I believe this approach offers a more accurate view of medieval understandings of the many representations of masculinity and femininity. Instead of looking only at the ways in which certain literary figures invert gender norms or distance themselves from those norms, we need also to consider that medieval thinkers would have understood that gender characteristics were not necessarily tied to biological gender, and that extreme femininity was not healthy for women and hypermasculinity was not healthy for men. Rather, I will argue, they appreciated that a healthy personality, male or female, depended on an admixture of feminine and masculine characteristics. The real issue was finding an appropriate balance.

The composition of gender characteristics has been discussed by a variety of theorists, some of whom identify effeminacy in men as a marker of homosexuality. This dissertation will analyze the application of queer theory to medieval literary characters, but it will not rely on all of its tenets to explain characteristics such as effeminacy. In his landmark study *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault explains the markers of effeminacy as "idleness, indolence, refusal to engage in the somewhat rough activities of sports, a fondness for perfumes and adornments,

softness" (*Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* 85). These characteristics were not true for all time periods. The ancient Greeks believed that a man's masculinity depended on whether a man was active or passive in same sex relations. If a man "yielded to the pleasures that enticed him," such as the passive act of sodomy, they were seen as immoderate and thus feminine (ibid.). This notion of masculinity does not address the understanding of gendered characteristics in the medieval period. Furthermore, effeminacy cannot be a marker of the homosexual identity for medieval society because that cultural identity did not yet exist. Foucault locates the first appearance of the homosexual identity "in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature" (*Volume 1: An Introduction* 101). He does not mean that same-sex desire, acts, or love did not previously exist, only that the cultural identity of homosexuality was not present. Indeed, Foucault indicates that in the nineteenth century "a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'" (ibid.). These social controls included psychological designations deemed to define homosexuality as a perverse identity.

Foucault credits Carl Westphal with defining, within medical and psychiatric terms, the first classification of a homosexual identity. In 1870 Westphal describes the homosexual identity as "a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy[1] onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Westphal qtd. in Foucault, 1. 43).

[1] For the medieval period, sodomy had a variety of meanings and interpretations that William Burgwinkle says "ranges from being a simple description of homoerotic relations or attractions to a theological category synonymous with the sinful. Sometimes discussed by medieval authors as a universal category that can be intuited, it is just as often considered an attribute or attitude, a disposition or location (in the sense that one can be in "the occasion of sin"), which favors sinful activity" (*Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230,* 3).

Same-sex acts evolved into a characteristic and ultimately an identity. But the language, it is clear, indicates that this identity has negative consequences. It marks a change in social perception—from abhorring the act of sodomy, or any other non-normative act, to abhorring the individual and the identity. Foucault finds that “legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied” and that non-normative sexual practice and desire was “annexed to mental illness” (1. 36). Identifying perversions suggests that “a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described” and that the treatment of these perversions fueled professionals to develop a “whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination” (ibid.). Many of the nineteenth-century medical texts indicate that the homosexual identity was linked to atypical gender characteristics, specifically “inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself” (Foucault, 1. 43). Medieval understandings of gender and sexuality did not consider a homosexual identity and the recent onslaught of theories that portray this analysis seem inherently flawed. A more accurate approach to medieval thoughts on gender is to consider compositions of characteristics rather than a person’s identity.

A striking modern theory of how gender characteristics are composed in a person is Carl Jung’s concept of archetypal figures. Jung argues that both men and women have archetypal figures that exist to oppose the physical gender of a person. The *anima* is the feminine characteristics in male psychology and the *animus* is the male characteristics in female psychology (Jung 93). Jung discusses the ways in which the anima/animus incorporates gender characteristics that cross their respective genders:

> The complementary character of the anima also affects the sexual character, as I have proved to myself beyond a doubt. A very feminine woman has a masculine soul, and a very masculine man has a feminine soul. This contrast is due to the fact that a man is not

> in all things wholly masculine, but also has certain feminine traits. The more masculine his outer attitude is, the more his feminine traits are obliterated: instead, they appear in his unconscious. This explains why it is just those very virile men who are most subject to characteristic weaknesses; their attitude to the unconscious has a womanish weakness and impressionability. Conversely, it is often just the most feminine women who, in their inner lives, display an intractability, an obstinacy, and a willfulness that are to be found with comparable intensity only in a man's outer attitude. These are masculine traits which, excluded from the womanly outer attitude, have become qualities of her soul. (101-2)

He indicates that the “anima contains common human qualities the conscious attitude lacks" (101), which is a general overview of something much deeper and more layered. The problem, of course, is that Jung simplifies gendered characteristics that stand in opposition to a person’s physical gender and he plays into the stereotypes of gender characteristics treating them as universal truths with no variations. Take, for example, Jung’s hypothetical construction of a possible anima: if "the persona is intellectual, the anima will quite certainly be sentimental" (101). The archetype is contrasted to the persona in fixed terms that do not reflect any movement. Other statements describe the anima as “a clearly defined entity with a character that, very often, is autonomous and immutable. It therefore lends itself very readily to characterization and description" (101). The anima is usually "complementary to the character of the persona" (101). Such generalities leave us to speculate about characteristics that are specifically opposed to a person’s physical gender and whether these strict constructs of persona and anima are not more fluid. Though problematic for a number of reasons, Jung’s theories do recognize that gender characteristics are not solely defined by the external, physical gender of a person. I

adduce his theories by way of analogy; they are not a defining cornerstone of this dissertation. But he does highlight an idea that can be applied to medieval understandings of gender characteristics.

A better understanding of non-conforming gender characteristics can be achieved through Judith Butler's theories. Butler challenges the categorical analyses of earlier theorists like Freud, Lacan, and Riviere that reduce gender identification to a "heterosexist framework that carves up genders into masculine and feminine and forecloses an adequate description of the kinds of subversive and parodic convergences that characterize gay and lesbian cultures" (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 66). Masculine and feminine characteristics are not exclusive to a certain sex, and they are not only a modern construction. Medieval authors constructed characters with a mix of gender characteristics to enrich and realistically portray characters.

To understand the complexities of gender characteristics first we must define the difference between sex and gender. The conflation of gender and sex is often difficult to negotiate and Butler draws the distinction that sex is not reliant on gender. Building on Foucault's theory that social and political power produces subjects, Butler proposes that "the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (*Gender Trouble* 6). Sex becomes the physical body and gender is made up of the characteristics that are not inherently assigned to a specific masculine or feminine body. Instead, social and cultural influences, like Foucault's judicial laws and legal language, shape which genders perform which characteristics (*Gender Trouble* 6-7). We can, of course, identify in literary figures a number of gendered characteristics that reflect stereotypes in different cultures and time periods. Gender stereotypes and the expected characteristics that are normally

associated with them may have resemblances through different time periods, but we cannot assume that they are exactly the same. Butler allows that the distinction between sex and gender is always culturally constructed, but she argues that sex and gender are also independent of each other. When the "constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (*Gender Trouble* 6). Butler argues that we must divorce sex from gender and as "a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts" (*Gender Trouble* 7).

In her book, *Testosterone Rex,* Cordelia Fine argues that the "familiar, plausible, and powerful story of sex and society" that embodies the argument of biology, nature, history, and society all point to the natural difference between the sexes and also between the genders (21). But that natural difference is not completely tied up in specific gender constructions and characteristics. Fine argues that "we all agree that 'nature' and 'nurture' interact with our development" but there are many other factors that lead to an individual's "essence" (23-24). There is sex, "the timeless, unchanging seed from which either male or female developmental program unfurls" (23). There is experience, which plays "a secondary role in the individual's developmental journey to a male brain and male nature, or to a female brain and female nature. Of course there is variability—not all men are identical, or are all women" (23). I take from Fine's argument the concept of many factors playing a role in gender construction, which can also be extended to the concept of gender characteristics. For medieval society gender

characteristics were a composition of qualities in an individual. The more balanced an individual is the more productive they are for society.

The notion that gender is not determined naturally but performed in response to cultural norms is important to this study and will be looked at more throughout this dissertation. The important distinction I will make for this dissertation is to equate gender with characteristics that authors like Chaucer are constructing in terms of medieval culture. Those characteristics do not rely on the physical sex of a person, nor do they depend on modern views of sexuality and gender. Chaucer and his contemporaries constructed literary figures to reflect, challenge, and reinforce medieval cultural influences. Previous arguments have reflected on the historical and cultural aspects that influence Chaucer's characters; this study aims to further those ideas while simplifying the reasons medieval authors may have had for writing these characters in such a way. Butler was not working with medieval texts, but she was identifying theories that can be applied to many time periods, whereas other theories, such as queer theory, have more anachronistic views.

Butler also warns that we cannot solely look at gender as a product of a culture; instead we have to consider the "very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" and remember that sex is different because it is inherently a "gendered category" (*Gender Trouble…*7). When looking at medieval literary characters we must explore how masculine and feminine features and behaviors work together in a character to offer a more complex figure that reflects medieval culture. As Butler explains,

> [g]ender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes. To assume that gender always and exclusively

> means the matrix of the "masculine" and "feminine" is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance. (*Undoing Gender* 42)

Medieval authors did not see gender characteristics as an indicator of social/sexual identity, such as homosexual or heterosexual. Gender characteristics were most likely understood in terms of biological theories. This approach calls into question whether medieval literary figures like the Wife of Bath are purely social constructions or based principally on a male definition of women's normative gender characteristics. In the same vein, is it useful to rely on effeminate characteristics of a figure like Absolon in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale.* Is Absolon an effeminate stereotype? He also has masculine characteristics that complicate reading him only as effeminate. Chaucer certainly blended gender characteristics to provide a more accurate representation of individual human beings. We must look at how medieval society understood male feminization instead of inserting our own modern assumptions, and that some forms of male feminized characteristics were revered and even ideal in certain circumstances. To do that, it makes more sense to look at male feminized performance through medieval lenses.

It is not only important to look at male feminized literary characters. To understand how the balance of characteristics were addressed in medieval society we must also look at what happens when an individual's characteristics are not in balance. Hypermasculinity is one such imbalance of characteristics that poses a threat to society. What exactly is the hypermasculine figure? Modern psychology has coined the terms "hypermasculinity" and "hyperfemininity" to identify extreme behaviors, like violence and submission, that are tied to gender.[2] Of course,

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[2] In "Measuring a macho personality constellation" Donald L. Mosher and Mark Serkin detail the results of their study conducted on hypermasculinity in 1984. Measurements of "hyperfemininity" define the construct as a

these are a bit stereotypical and often reflect a simplistic binary that equates men with strength and women with weakness, but there is some validity in this theory for the purpose of understanding how modern assumptions simplify medieval understanding of gender. The stereotypes have been acknowledged by many scholars who indicate that they are prevalent and the result of a patriarchal, heterosexual dominance throughout history. Although these stereotypes existed in the Middle Ages as well, medieval literature also represents healthy compositions of both masculinity and femininity.

Modern psychological theories on machoism, or masculine behavior, discuss how the extremes can pose potential threats to society. Researchers like Bron B. Ingoldsby use the term macho to identify specific cultures like the Latin-American community where macho behavior and characteristics are highly prevalent (57-8). John Archer uses the term “hypermasculine” instead of “macho” to “avoid association with a specific culture or cultures” when discussing extreme behavior and characteristics (526). Extremes in masculine behavior include “fascination with violent sports—football, rugger, boxing and wrestling” (Ryder 709), “a view of danger as exciting” (Mosher “Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation” 151), and excessive sexual behavior along with sexual objectification of women. (Ingoldsby, 58; Mosher “Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation” 151). Although these interests are not necessarily markers of extreme and dangerous characteristics, they do begin to move from mere masculine behavior and into hypermasculinity when types of aggressive behavior begin to threaten society.

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submissive quality that allows for varieties of masculine domination. Studies done by Sarah K. Murnen and Donn Byrne highlight the ways in which "hyperfemininity" affects women. Though both "hypermasculinity" and "hyperfemininity" are modern psychological terms, they are useful for analyzing medieval literary characters in relation to conventional gender characteristics. These definitions are restrictive, and modern, but serve to identify the long associations between stereotypical perceptions of gender and what gender characteristics are deemed culturally acceptable. My point is to show how medieval authors like Chaucer challenged those stereotypes with his rich combinations of masculine and feminine characteristics, in both male and female characters, while also acknowledging that they definitely exist.

Male testosterone levels can be linked to this aggressive behavior. Cordelia Fine discusses the effect testosterone has on individuals: "Testosterone affects our brain, body and behavior. But it is neither the king nor the kingmaker—the potent, hormonal essence of competitive, risk-taking masculinity" (23). Still, hypermasculinity is masculinity to the extreme that is caused by several components in an individual. This can also relate to medieval society. The composition of humors, as well as other factors that can be internal and external, combine in help to form an individual's gender characteristics. For the purpose of this study I will define "hypermasculinity" as a violent extreme of masculine behavior where feminine characteristics are diminished, or where feminine characteristics have not tempered the hypermasculine characteristics. In Chapter Two, hypermasculine examples will serve to demonstrate that a balance of these gender characteristics was regarded as beneficial to individuals and to society as a whole. Rape and other extreme violent behavior of males goes beyond mere masculine characteristics, ones that are deemed acceptable to society, and is considered hypermasculine.

In Chapter One I establish the theory I am using to analyze both hypermasculine and effeminate male literary characters. First, I will discuss what it meant to be masculine in medieval society. After establishing the definition and construction of medieval masculinity, I will investigate how medieval science, especially humoral theory, explained biological composition. By looking at the medieval way of understanding how a person's disposition was determined, we can infer how they might have looked at gender composition. Medieval science included biological gender among the composition of things.[3] We also know that there were theories on how gender was determined, usually through placement of the fetus in the womb, theories intimating that gendered behavior was not either masculine or feminine but a

[3] For more on the medieval scientific views on biological gender see Joan Cadden's *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

modulation between these two poles. Such a view explains not only male and female genders and even hermaphroditism but also the distribution of traits associated with gender. These theories indicate that medieval people could have related gender characteristics to other somatic compositions. This potential provides a basis for the hypothesis that medieval authors understood that no person was purely masculine or feminine, that personality types existed in a continuum between these two basic characterizations.

Balance of conventional gender traits was not a topic addressed by medieval scientists, but the analogy of humoral theory would have allowed the medieval mind to understand the importance of tempering conventional gender traits. "During the Middle Ages, each person was thought to have his or her own individual healthy balance of humors, referred to as one's temperament or complexion" (York 8).[4] William Burgwinkle reports that the theories on how gender was conceived mostly revolved around the "placement of the fetus in the womb" (41).[5] For medieval minds, placement in the womb also explained gender anomalies like hermaphroditism. This theoretical framework indicates that the tempering of masculinity with feminine qualities in men was not restricted to the modern era; it also occurred in medieval literature. Medieval thinkers understood that hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity impacted societal situations, and the ideal was a more moderate gender balance in both men and women. This study hopes to give a more nuanced medieval understanding of gender in the face of inaccurate modern assumptions.

Modern perceptions of male effeminacy often lead to discussions on homosexuality; this linkage may not be completely appropriate to medieval culture. The Middle Ages could also look

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[4] See William York, *Health and Wellness in Antiquity through the Middle Ages;* also H.F.J. Horstmanshoff's *Blood, Sweat, and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe.*

[5] For details on how gender was conceived in the uterus see Burgwinkle's *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature* (40-45); Kudlein "The Seven Cells of the Uterus: The Doctrine and its Roots." (3).

at effeminacy in men as a way of tempering hypermasculinity. Medieval romances idealize knights who temper hypermasculinity with feminine characteristics in order to accommodate the civilized society of the court. In Chapter Six and Eight of *The Art of Courtly Love,* Andreas Capellanus dictates rules of behavior for men in civilized courtly society. In such society men must subordinate themselves to a woman of higher status. Civilized behavior mingled with military violence is central to the *Knight's Tale.* The tale offers a good example of the ways civilized behavior manifests itself in medieval literary texts, and how hypermasculine behavior is tempered with femininity for the civilized courtly society.

In Chapter Two I explore the hypermasculine figure, a necessary step prior to looking at effeminacy in men. Figures of the hypermasculine, manifest mostly in violent behavior, provide a point of reference from which to look at effeminate male literary characters and understand why authors like Chaucer tempered masculinity with feminine characteristics. Chaucer's Miller embodies the elements that can be equated with hypermasculinity. The same characteristics can be found in the historical figure of the knight. Brief examples of how knights existed in medieval society and how they were portrayed in medieval literature present the problem that they posed for society. In the historical figure of the knight, we see violence both on and off the battlefield and, sometimes, the tempering of military prowess with wisdom. One sort of violence is rape. Knights who rape women violate the courtly rules to practice an egregious form of hypermasculine violence. There are depictions of such behavior in the French pastourelles and in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*.

In Chapter Three I discuss variations of characteristics and behavior of male effeminacy and emasculation to show that there is not just one kind of feminine trait in medieval male literary characters. Just as there are variations of hypermasculine behavior and characteristics,

there are variations of feminine characteristics and the behaviors they produce. Literary characters like Chaucer's Squire, Sir Thopas, and Absolon illustrate these variations of feminization. Emasculation also suggests an imbalance in characteristics. Chaucer's Pardoner is emasculated by the Host and the final passus of *Piers Plowman* addresses impotence as emasculating. Finally, I will also examine the positive forms of male feminization in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee,* Chretien's *Knight of the Cart,* and Marie de France's *Lanval,* each of which deal with either the importance of men listening to feminine advice or male submission to women of a higher status. These examples demonstrate my point that male feminization can take many forms reflective of how medieval society understood how males can be infused with feminine characteristics and actions.

In my fourth and final Chapter I will illustrate the importance medieval society placed on rehabilitating males who exhibit hypermasculine behavior and characteristics, such as rape and other violent acts, and integrating them back into society. I will examine the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and how he can be brought back into society after such a heinous act. The tale takes for granted the value of rehabilitating transgressors of normative laws and rules. And rehabilitation implies the possibility of achieving balance, not only in gender characteristics themselves, but in those whose gender characteristics cause societal harm.

In addition, I will look at the tempering of gender characteristics in *Troilus and Criseyde.* When the tale begins Troilus is a heroic, masculine military figure who scoffs at men who are in love. His masculine characteristics are later tempered with feminine characteristics, blending both masculine and feminine to create a figure fully engaged in the courtly love rules. Chaucer allows the audience to witness the progression of Troilus' blend of masculine and feminine characteristics. Though we read little of Troilus as a Trojan war hero, and though he is briefly

identified as someone who thinks love makes men weak, nevertheless, he discovers his feminine side and is tempered by it when he falls in love with Criseyde. As a foil for this new Troilus, Chaucer later presents the Greek warrior Diomede. When Criseyde is removed to the Greek camp, Diomede begins his campaign to win her. Diomede's reasons for pursuing Criseyde, I will argue, reveal his hypermasculine qualities and reinforce the ideology of male dominance and female submission. The contrast between Troilus and Diomede offers a look at what Chaucer was doing with tempered gender characteristics in contrast to hypermasculine behavior.

I believe we need to analyze specific contexts of medieval literary characters to offer a more nuanced look at how medieval society might have understood concepts that we take for granted, like sexuality and gender. What I intend to show with these chapters is that medieval society understood gender composition as a matter of proportions without resulting to strict categorization of either masculine or feminine. Instead, I will illustrate how medieval society understood the overlap of gender characteristics in individuals and knew that a balance of these characteristics were important to medieval society. It is important to note that terms like "balance" and "tempering," though not ideal or accurate when discussing gender characteristics in a modern sense, are completely appropriate when discussing how medieval society understood the composition of gender characteristics. These terms also offer a more accurate depiction of medieval gender theories than modern queer or gender theories. The fluidity with which these literary characters are tempered with gender characteristics shows that the medieval mind encountered and thought about how gender was composed in an individual.

Chapter One: Medieval Gender Characteristics: Biological Gender, Humors, Physiognomy, and Astrology

The primary focus of this chapter is to lay out the groundwork on medieval understandings of how gender-related personality traits were determined and composed in an individual. According to medieval writings on gender and characteristics of personality, masculine and feminine features were not restricted to people of the respective sexes; that is, feminine characteristics were associated not only with women, and masculine characteristics were associated not only with men. We can also understand that masculine and feminine characteristics combined peculiarly in each individual to produce unique composites with varying proportions of these characteristics. These proportions can be understood in terms of a spectrum of gender characteristics that potentially allows for an infinite combination of qualities. Rather than looking at effeminate men as an identity, and as such excluded from the normative patterns of gender, we can look at effeminacy in men as a common characteristic, varying only in the mode or the degree of its manifestation. To show that medieval thinkers looked at gender characteristics in this way, we need to investigate the theories of human formation available during the time period.

It is important to recognize that medieval society viewed gender characteristics as balancing agents designed to temper extremes of behavior. For example, a twelfth-century Latin translation of fourth-century texts[6] indicate that a human individual, and animals as well, had a mixture of gender traits:

[6] *Anonymous Latinus* combines the work of three classical physiognomists, Loxus, Aristotle, and Polemon. Twelfth-century physiognomists accepted these theories and translated their work into the *Anonymous Latinus.* Important to note, Loxus is associated as a source for theories on animal physiognomy and Aristotle and Polemon are associated with signs and human physiognomy (Repath 550-1).

> …[A] good character cannot be composed unless it takes manliness from the masculine type of appearance and wisdom from the feminine. And so when there are many conflicting signs, a pronouncement must be made according to those things which are either greater in number or clearer or more significant; for the many are to be preferred to the few, the clear to the obscure, and the more significant to the less. But according to the proportion of the opposing signs, those which persist will be softened. (Repath 563)

The opposing signs, including those associated with gender, are meant to work together to create a balance. That balance requires effeminacy in men as a balance to the dangers of extreme masculine behavior, a topic that will be addressed in Chapter Two. For this chapter I will be demonstrating that physical forms of gender are not the only determiners of gender characteristics and that medieval beliefs on gender characteristics are based on a number of varying possibilities.

Medieval medical theories on gender characteristics encompass five categories of analysis: distribution and timeliness of sperm in the course of fertilization, physical placement of the fetus in the womb, combination of humors in a body, physiognomy, and astrological influence. Though physical gender is separate from characteristics of personality, it is important to show the medieval understanding of how physical gender was determined. One determination of physical gender is based on conditions affecting fertilization and placement of the fetus in the womb. The side of the womb in which the fetus develops was thought to be important; so too the temperature and humidity of organs and body parts. Composition of gender characteristics are influenced, in part, by the composition of humors that determine certain traits in an individual. The physical composition, or physiognomy, of a person also influences and reflects his or her personality traits. In physiognomies, not only is the physical make-up of an individual important

in determining gender characteristics, but also the way a person walks and speaks, amongst other things, reflects the gender characteristics of that individual. These compositions illustrate how subtle physical influences can help to determine gender characteristics.

In addition to physical influences, there are other influences that can affect the gender make-up of an individual. Astrology can be sectioned into two categories, natural and superstitious. Natural astrology is defined as astronomy and includes the nature of the stars, planets, and the like (Wedel 27). The other, superstitious astrology, a term introduced by Theodore Wedel in his book *The Medieval Attitude Toward Astrology: Particularly in England*, deals with the planets, stars, and constellations as having influence over someone's body and soul (Wedel 27). Astrology was utilized just as much as it was scrutinized in the Middle Ages; Isidore of Seville examined astrology in all forms while accepting aspects of it (Wedel 27-28). Of course, individual freedom of will also played a part in a person's characteristic make-up; choices make a difference. The influence of astrology did not mean that people acted without choice according to their astrological sign and their tendencies toward certain behaviors. Astrology is just another influence on gender characteristics and not a definite framework for individuals. What medieval understandings of astrology indicate for us is that there were numerous possibilities believed to have some influence on gender characteristics, and that these worked together and not in a hierarchy. While it isn't clear what exact influence astrology was thought to have on everyday medieval life, we do know that authors such as Chaucer based some of their literary characters' traits on astrological influences.[7]

What these theories have in common is variations in the composition of gender characteristics in an individual which informs medieval understandings on the subject. By

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[7] In "Boccaccio and the Stars: Astrology in the *Teseida"* Janet Levarie Smarr confirms that character traits are influenced by astrology.

investigating these theories and their references to gender characteristics I plan to show that there are numerous variations of traits composed in an individual that blur the usual masculine or feminine associations. Variability in the composition of characteristics is not detailed in discussion of gender, but it is an important feature in the medieval understanding of gender characteristics and the fluidity of their composition. I will focus on effeminate characteristics for the most part and examine passages in medieval medical texts that concern human generation. In addition, I will investigate the physiognomies of literary characters such as Chaucer's Reeve and the astrological influence that subtends the Wife of Bath's physical features and personality.

Even though there are 'types' of people, individuals are unique and we cannot rely on modern theories of identity to fulfill our understanding of medieval beliefs on gender characteristics.[8] Medieval science offers a much more compatible application to how medieval society understood these and also reveals the more fluid attitude that medieval society had toward gender characteristics in individuals. This fluidity explains the mingling of feminine and masculine characteristics in a binary form to create a multitude of combinations that complicate the usual stereotypical characteristics that are associated with either masculine or feminine. The combinations and degrees of variation are infinite and illustrate how medieval thinkers believed there was a sliding scale of characteristics that could manifest in an individual depending on the influence of these categories.

Medieval theories on gender characteristics were translated into Middle English from Latin and Arabic texts. These Arabic texts, which preserved the Greek classical tradition of medicine, were translated into Latin by medieval authors and became the sources for medieval medical texts (Mellyn 290). It is likely that medieval authors, like Chaucer, would have had

[8] For a more complete discussion about modern identity theories and their application to medieval gender characteristics, see the introduction.

access to Latin translations of these medical texts. Texts by Constantinus Africanus could have easily passed through Chaucer's hands with his connections and presence in court. Indeed, Latin translations of Arabic texts found their way to England as early as the twelfth century. These Arabic texts had their own "glosses and commentaries from Arabic-language authors, some of whom, notably Avicenna, Albucasis, and Rhases, became authorities in their own right" (Gottfried 7). Rhazes (Rhases or Razis) not only translated but also practiced Greek medical theory, including humoral theory (Reisman 55).[9] The works of these Arabic physicians were obviously known to medieval authors like Chaucer.

The *Compendium Medicinae*, written prior to 1250 by Gilbertus Anglicus, who was England's first noted writer of medical treatises, details Latin medical practices. The fifteenth-century Middle English translation of his Latin treatise demonstrates the interest in medical information outside of the university that had been building over one hundred years (Getz xi). Though the Middle English translation is from the fifteenth century, and Chaucer would not have seen it, he did know of Gilbertus Anglicus: Chaucer included him among the famous medical minds listed by his "Doctour of Phisyk." The growing interest in medicine outside the university illustrates the demand for knowledge and ensures that Chaucer, a man in contact with medical writers and their texts through the courtly world, would have known these theories.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer mentions a variety of sources that the Physician is familiar with:

> Wel knew he the olde Esculapius
>
> And Dyscorides, and eek Rufus,
>
> Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,

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[9] Rhazes first suggested the "idea of a process of fermentation in the blood as a cause of infectious diseases" (Reisman 51) and "was the first to introduce chemical preparations…into the practice of medicine" (Reisman 52).

Serapion, Razis, and Avycen,

Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,

Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn.

(*General Prologue* ll. 429-434)

Chaucer could have come into contact with a variety of texts by any of these authors, but whether he actually did or not has yet to be discovered. In *Chaucer's Physician: Medicine and Literature in Fourteenth-Century England,* Huling E. Ussery argues against previous scholarship that identifies John of Arderne as a possible model for the characterization of Chaucer's Physician due to similarities shared by the Physician and Arderne. These similarities led some to believe that John of Gaunt was a patient of Arderne, who was "attached to his household" (63).[10] Ussery finds no evidence that Chaucer was introduced or connected to Arderne or any other doctor mentioned, such as Gaddesden (62-3). Even if we cannot pinpoint Chaucer's exact contact with notable physicians of the time, the important thing to remember is that Chaucer would have had access to medical texts, and given this type of access, we can begin to see Chaucer as a type of middleman who could have relayed some of these scientific theories through his writing, thereby bringing them to a wider audience. Even if a medieval person was not privy to the terminology and the exact science of beliefs on gender characteristics, they could have known the basics.

That basic medieval understanding of gender characteristics was much more complex than the usual binaries of masculine and feminine characteristics, which have been discussed in terms of moving beyond their usual physical associations. That is, the physical markers

[10] A variety of reasons add up to the hypothesis that Chaucer's Physician could be based on Arderne. For the purpose of my argument, it is enough to state that Chaucer would have been in contact with physicians and medical treatises.

associated with men and those with women are only one dimension of gender. The physical indicators of masculinity and femininity, such as sexual organs, breasts, facial and body hair, served as physical markers of gender but also of masculinity and femininity. Body hair production "followed from the physiological characteristics of the male, and the links between male maturity, the growth of the beard, and the ability to produce semen [which] created a bridge between sexual maleness and gender-linked virility" (Cadden 181).[11]

There are two categories of physical or biological determiners of gender and gender characteristics, placement of the fetus in the womb and conditions that affect fertilization. These medieval theories, based on classical thought, describe ways that gender was determined. Of course, variability is limited with respect to physical forms of gender, in contrast with the composition of characteristics that are combined in an individual. The variations in anatomical gender are: male, female, hermaphrodite, or natural eunuch.[12] The physical make-up of an individual contains a multitude of gender characteristic combinations within. It is imperative to examine these medieval biological theories to get a better understanding of how medieval authors developed the mix of gender characteristics in their literary characters.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Arabic versions of ancient medical treatises based on Hippocratic and Galenic theories were translated into Latin. Translations by medical students and teachers such as Constantinus Africanus were associated with the medical school of Salerno in Italy (Siraisi 97). At this school these treatises aided in the development of theories on anatomy and sex organs (Jacquart 35). Among the classical theories on anatomy and medicine that were studied and practiced in Salerno were the theories of Galen, Macrobius, and

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[11] Cadden cites from *Secreta mulierum minor,* Cambridge University, Trinity MSS O.2.5, fols. 13ov-13Ir, and R.14.45, fol.25r and from Hildegard, *Causae et curae,* bk. I, p. 18.

[12] The natural eunuch is mentioned in many of the treatises; there is not a detailed account of the difference in characteristics of a natural eunuch and a castrated eunuch.

Hippocrates, the last of whom believed that there were important developmental stages in the "seventh day of conception and by the seventh month in gestation" (Jacquart 34-35). Theories on how physical gender was determined mostly involved the "placement of the fetus in the womb" (Burgwinkle 41).[13] Placement in the womb also determined gender anomalies like hermaphroditism. It was believed that the uterus had seven cells,[14] three on the right side that produce male embryos, three on the left that produce female embryos, and the center cell, which produces hermaphrodites (Kudlein 415). Development of the physical sexes were believed to form on specific sides because, for male embryos, the right side was close to the "warm and humid liver," and for female embryos, the left side was close to "the cold and dry spleen" (Kudlein 417, quoting from *De Spermate*). The persistent association of warmth and humidity with males and cold dryness with females translates to other theories on gender and gender characteristics.

A variety of other factors were also believed to determine the sex of a fetus. Thomas Aquinas states an Aristotelian theory that falls in line with theories from Augustine and the Old Testament that suggest strong male sperm creates males and weak sperm creates females (Burgwinkle 40). Jacopo of Forli, a fifteenth-century physician in Padua, influenced by Aristotelian views of conception, reintroduced an idea that was earlier promulgated by Giles of Rome: that there were ten causes that produced a male child. These causes included the quality and quantity of sperm from the father (male sperm), age of the father, and sperm from the right testicle (Cadden 197). The suggestion that "male sperm" creates a male child brings up the question of female sperm. Hippocrates and Galen argued that women also produce sperm, a

[13] For details on how gender was conceived in the uterus see Burgwinkle's *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature*; Kudlein "The Seven Cells of the Uterus: The Doctrine and its Roots."
[14] The theory that the uterus had seven cells is based on "Pythagorean tradition of numerological speculation" (Jacquart 34).

theory that began to gain wide acceptance and was "generally preferred over Aristotle's one-seed theory by the thirteenth century" (Burgwinkle 41).

> If more of the female sperm settles on the right side of the womb the result, quite logically, is a manly woman (or virago). Conversely, if the female seed settles on the left side of the womb but the male seed still outnumbers it, the result is an effeminate man. Only when equal amounts of seeds from both partners settle in the middle chamber would the result be a hermaphrodite. Thus we have a tempered essentialist paradigm in which both placement and seed quantity determine the sex and gender of the fetus. This model implies that there are at least five naturally occurring gender permutations available: women, manly women, men, feminine men, and hermaphrodites, though it is not at all clear what the gender characteristics of the sexual category of hermaphrodite might entail. (Burgwinkle 41)

Though these theories seem to focus on only five permutations of physical gender, it also harbors the possibility of a larger spectrum of possibilities. In any case, these classical and medieval beliefs on creation of gender and gender characteristics challenge societal norms of a strict masculine and feminine binary.

This classical theory about female sperm was influential on medieval medical theory. In *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages,* Joan Cadden draws attention to an early thirteenth-century medical treatise used for instruction at the medical school of Salerno; it was called the *Prose Salernitan Questions,* a series of questions followed by the answers. A portion of the treatise attempts to answer the question of how girls and boys are biologically determined in the womb, and how their composition of masculine and feminine traits develop. The language reinforces the gendered associations of characteristics indicating that "a manly woman [femina

virago]" or "an effeminate man [vir effeminatus] will be born" depending on the side of the womb the fetus is formed in (201)[15]. This general association between gendered characteristics and anatomical gender only allows for a manly man, manly woman, feminine man, feminine woman, or hermaphrodite. But this rigid construction is then complicated with gender characteristics, which will be discussed further down.

More female sperm will produce an effeminate male and more male sperm will produce a masculine female. Where the sperm lodges itself determines physical gender while the amount determines characteristics. The amount is never given a specific measure—indeed, measure would have been impossible—which implies the potential for an unlimited variation of gender characteristics within each of the five permutations. There is not just one composition of characteristics that manifest in the categories of effeminate men, or manly women, just as there is not a set composition in women, men, or hermaphrodites. Furthermore, it would be reductive to believe that medieval society considered these five categories as fixed. The literature of the period reveals the fluidity of variations within each of these categories and the nuanced ways that authors dealt with these characteristics.

There are other hints of subtle variability as well. Temperature of a man's testicles and penis were also believed to have an effect on determining gender characteristics. For instance, according to Constantinus Africanus's *De Coitu*, the more warmth and humidity (moistness) a man has in his testicles and his penis, the more likely that he will be masculine and lecherous. A man "with cold testicles will be effeminate and without desire" (Delany 57-8). Coolness or warmth combined with moistness or dryness is related to desire, sex of the child, and gender characteristics. For the most part, cold, dry conditions produce effeminate qualities. This

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[15] Cadden quotes from Brian Lawn's edition of *The Prose Salernitan Questions Edited from a Bodleian Manuscript (Auct. F.3.10).* Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi 5. London: British Academy at Oxford University Press, 1979.

continues the association of moist and humid with masculine characteristics and male physicality and cold and dry with feminine characteristics and female physicality. The testicles and the penis are the signature markers of male anatomy and the importance of their temperature and hydration signify a masculine preoccupation. Did the vagina have similar markers? Did a warm and humid vagina mean a woman was more masculine? It is unclear whether that was theorized. Most likely, the focus on the testicles and penis indicate a patriarchal influence on and dominance in anatomical theories; otherwise we would be presented with the feminine counterpart. This dominance is most likely a reason that women were believed to produce sperm, because students of medicine were more familiar with male biology.

The medieval perspective on eunuchs and their gender characteristics are mostly tied to their anatomy and identifiable features. Chaucer's Pardoner is referred to as a "geldying or a mare" (*The General Prologue* A 691), and his physical nature is associated with that of a eunuch and his behavior possibly with that of a homosexual.[16] Gender characteristics associated with eunuchs vary, but mostly result in feminine associations that do not detail any specific anatomical features. There were distinctions between a *eunuchus ex nativitate* (natural eunuch) and *eunuchus qui castratus est.* The difference is that one who is born without male genitalia is marked as a natural eunuch, as in the case of the Pardoner, it is presumed. Depending on the age of castration, a eunuch could have developed physical features related to masculinity in contrast to a natural eunuch. Though Chaucer's Pardoner and eunuchs will be analyzed further in Chapter Three, it is important to note, for the purpose of this argument, that there was a physical difference, but the gender characteristics are unclear.

[16] The gloss in the *Riverside Chaucer* indicates that a "geldyng or a mare" could be "a eunuch or a homosexual" and this will be discussed in a future chapter.

Though gender characteristics may not be fully detailed in connection with eunuchs, they are typically seen as effeminate. This effeminacy does not necessarily take a negative association even if “effeminacy was regularly perceived in the later Middle Ages as a sign of unauthorized gender...transgression (male-male erotics being considered an aspect of gender transgression) and therefore condemned, but not usually as a sign of any particular physical condition” (Sturges 37). The loss of testicles and masculinity results in effeminate characteristics, but these are not always tied to a negative connotation, as I will demonstrate in future chapters. Reducing the character of a eunuch to effeminacy due to his physicality does not consider that other factors like humors, astrology, and placement in the womb would also have some impact on the characteristics. These other factors indicate internal effeminate characteristics, which is different from the physical lack of male genitalia. The point is that there is a difference between effeminacy due to anatomy and effeminacy that is inherent to the individual's character make-up. Of course, the lack of testicles is the largest mark of physical effeminacy, but this sign is usually concealed by clothing. There are other physical associations that come with the lack of producing testosterone such as lack of body and facial hair and deepness of voice. The likelihood is that there must be some variations of gender characteristics amongst eunuchs as well.

While the binary of gender produces four possible anatomical results, according to Burgwinkle's five categories, the four humors can potentially produce an enormous set of variations, especially if one supposes that the amount of each humor in a person’s body is not calibrated by definite increments but can vary by infinitesimal degrees. These variations from the humors, as well as other influences demonstrated later in this chapter, are different in that they form subtle combinations of gendered characteristics, rather than anatomical categories of gender. Humoral theory considers not only the biological gender but also the behaviors that are

typically produced by those dispositions. Combinations of masculine and feminine characteristics blend to form different compositions of an individual, and it was believed that together sperm and the four humors influenced gender characteristics in an individual. Though humoral doctrine was generally accepted, it had no practical value and some medieval physicians were skeptical of these theories.

The author of *De Spermate* specifies that the four humors “form the sperm” and that whichever humor is dominant in the male during coitus will determine the makeup of the child (Jacquart 142). Amongst these combinations are the two extremes. The "least suitable temperament is that of the melancholic man: cold and dry,” who is often impotent and “is also characterized by an unbridled longing, and a twisted judgement which impels him to seek, under the impetus of violent desire, the qualities that he lacks. If he is not impotent, he will be lustful” (Jacquart 143). These violent desires fill in for his sexual lacking and provide a dangerous alternative that may result in rape, even if the ultimate act cannot be performed due to his impotence, or abuse and other violent actions. The “most suitable is the sanguine temperament in which warmth and humidity are dominant” (Jacquart 142-3). The “least suitable” quality of temperament does indicate variety, either impotence or lustfulness that can manifest in many forms. Impotence focuses on lack of physical masculinity. The possibility of violence, through acts like rape, can be a result of hypermasculine characteristics that result from loss of potency. It does not mean a full loss of masculine qualities, only the physical qualities associated with masculinity.

Physical and psychological impotence are different. Physical impotence results in lack of sexual activity where psychological can still lead to a man still abusing a woman for that lack of potency. My point is that this is but an example of how humors are believed to control a person’s

characteristics and the author of *De Spermate* indicates that there are “intermediary temperaments” between the two extremes of a melancholic and sanguine that indicate the makings of sexual success, which is between “desiring too much and are capable of much” and “desiring little and are capable of little” (Jacquart 143). In between are a variety of make-ups that indicate an infinite spectrum of possibilities. There is no indication in the medical literature that competing humors might dilute dominance and thus produce, for example, a somewhat melancholic man with some sanguine qualities. Still, the combination of sperm and humors indicates that, according to medieval science, they worked together to determine gender characteristics. It would be up to medieval authors to show the variations of characteristics that result from these limiting combinations of humors and sperm.

Humoral theory helps to identify the ways medieval authors illustrated these variations of characteristics. "During the Middle Ages, each person was thought to have his or her own individual healthy balance of humors, referred to as one's temperament or complexion" (York 8).[17] The interaction of these humors determined the person’s health, an idea directly based on classical humoral theories. Both Galen's and Hippocrates’ works explain that there were four humors in the body—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The composition of these humors determines a person’s physical health, but also a person’s disposition and character traits.[18] These and such texts as the *Secretum Secretorum*, and the annotations made on it by Roger Bacon*,* influenced thirteenth-century beliefs in the importance of humors and of physiognomy in the development of a person’s character (Mellyn 289-90). Such texts were

[17] See, for example, William York, *Health and Wellness in Antiquity through the Middle Ages;* H.F. J. Horstmanshoff's *Blood, Sweat, and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe.*
[18] Roger Bacon, *Secretum secretorum cum glossis et notulis.* in Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi, ed. Robert Steele (Oxford, 1920), pt. 5:165. (Mellyn 289).

translated into the vernacular "between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries…destined for courts and households" (Mellyn 294). While access to these texts was certainly limited to wealthier households with connections to the noble courts, Chaucer, being well connected, likely had access to these texts. As we shall see, there is evidence to suggest that he knew at least something about these texts.

Humors had specific domains in the body, "blood dwells in the arteries and veins; phlegm in the brain; yellow bile in the liver; black bile in the spleen" (Reisman 304). They also had qualities attached to them. While blood is moist and warm, phlegm is cool and moist. Likewise, yellow bile is warm and dry while black bile is cool and dry (Reisman 304). In the Middle Ages, a healthy person had the "proper balance or 'tempered' mixture of the qualities, hot, cold, wet and dry," which was known as a person's "*complexion* or *temperamentum*" (Jones 109). It is this idea of tempering qualities or characteristics that is of vital interest to the development of many medieval literary characters. Masculine and feminine characteristics were understood to exist together in an individual, unlike modern assumptions that pin the characteristics to a particular gender identity. Medieval understandings of gender composition arguably mirrored the perception of the balance of humors in a person's body. All humors existed in every human body, but for everyone some humors were more dominant than others. The degree of relative strengths was always variable, so the spectrum of moods and behaviors of a specific person was too. Just as one could show various degrees of anger, from irritation to rage, so too might one suppose that gender-based tendencies might be equally variable. With gender characteristics, the combinations on a spectrum are unlimited.

The combination of humors was defined in a hierarchy of importance depending on one's age. The combination of blood and yellow bile was more important to infants, but black bile was

most important in adolescents; blood in mature people; phlegm in old age (Reisman 305). Though it was thought that the dominance of a particular humor also corresponded with the season (Reisman 305), the composition of humors in a person was also considered to dominate certain character traits. "Blood makes man benevolent, jolly, simple, moderate, bland, and sleepy, or fat; yellow bile makes him unperturbed, just, lean, a thorough masticator, and of good digestion; black bile makes a man wrathful, grasping, envious, sad, sleepy, and critical; phlegm makes him vigilant, thoughtful, prudent" (Reisman 306). The humor does not correlate to one fixed character trait; instead there are numerous possibilities that can be combined in a variety of ways that offer a better indication on how medieval society understood compositions of characteristics.

While combinations of characteristics were associated with humors, there was also the belief that a single dominant humor dictated the dominant personality trait. For example, a persistent preponderance of black choler, or black bile, characterizes the melancholic personality. A temporary superfluity of it can produce sorrow out of joyful situation and even push sorrow into madness.[19] The balance of these humors was important to the development of healthy characteristics in people.

> Þise foure humours, if þey beþ in euene proporcioun in quantite and qualite, he fediþ alle bodyes þat haþ blood and makeþ hem parfite and kepiþ in þe beinge and state of helþe; as aȝenward, if þey beþ vneuen in proporcioun and infecte, þanne þey brediþ eueles. (Bartholomaeus/Trevisa, 4.6; ed. Seymour, 148, ll. 1-5).

[19] Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things,* trans. John Trevisa, Liber Quartus ch. 11; ed. Seymour, p. 161, lines 31-4.

Even proportions of the humors keep a person in good health and uneven proportions are the cause of evil in a person. It seems that there was always a possibility of having uneven proportions of the humors, otherwise there would never be a dominant trait, positive or negative. This proportional belief further illustrates the understanding of how characteristics were developed. Although these characteristics were developed in uneven ways, there was always an indication that a balance could be attained. Still, there were infinite degrees of imbalance that would inevitably affect gender characteristics in various ways.

Medieval authors were certainly influenced by medical and scientific theories, including humoral theory, and some discussed these theories in their works. In the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales,* we are introduced to Chaucer's "Doctour of Phisyk," who is said to be well versed in medicine, surgery, and astrology (lines 411-414). The doctor's knowledge of humoral theory is briefly mentioned:

> He knew the cause of everich maladye,
>
> Were it of hoot or cold, or moiste, or drye,
>
> And where engendred, and of what humour;
>
> He was a verrey parfit practisour. (ll. 419-422)

Here, Chaucer indicates the connection between temperature, bodily humidity or dryness, and the combination of the four humors in a body. These four humors combined to form the basis of a person's character.

It seems that part of the practice of humoral theory, and other medical theories, ended up confusing the patient on its effectiveness.

> It is usually assumed otherwise that in medication and surgery the effects of applying a humoral theory of the body's working to practice was to obfuscate any real understanding

> of the effects of medicine or surgical intervention, and to encourage a promiscuous polypharmacy of herbs, animal parts and minerals, alongside an unfortunate, and often lethal, enthusiasm for purging and bloodletting. (Jones 108)

This is not to say that physicians were guilty of fraudulent practice of these theories. Instead, they were so indoctrinated in the practice of humoral theory that they were unable to consider alternative methods and theories. Though these theories were widely popular in the medieval world,[20] there were some who "rejected the classical authority of Hippocrates and Galen" because they had no basis in fact except that they were thought to have worked (Jones 108-9).[21] Still, classical medical theories found wide acceptance in European and Arabian medicine..[22] Overall, it is clear that there was both acceptance and scrutiny of these medical theories.

Humoral theory helped to explain physical and psychological symptoms, but it did not reveal those symptoms. The internal causes are largely unseen but the outward signs were the province of the physiognomists. The study of physiognomy was prevalent in the Middle Ages, but there are several traditions of physiognomy in the Middle Ages and none is in complete agreement with another. I will make use of the two most prominent physiognomies: one represented in various copies of the *Secreta Secretorum* and one that is now called the *Anonymus Latinus.* While these physiognomies associate individual body features and behaviors with specific personality traits, they caution that the estimation of a person's character in fact requires a calculation of all these feature. Some of these features are weighted more than others and add

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[20] Humoural pathology was also practiced in the medieval Islamic world as well, see Emilie Savage-Smith, "Humours in Medieval Islamic Medical Practice." *The Body in Balance: Humoural Medicines in Practice. Epistemologies of Healing Volume 13.* Ed. Peregrine Horden and Elisabeth Hsu. New York: Berghahn Books. 2013. 89-106. Print.

[21] Nicholas of Poland disbelieved in humoural practices and believed in ordinary healing practices that dealt with reptile skins (Jones 108).

[22] Persian physician, Ali Ign Rabban at-Tabari, writes about the "doctrine of the three humours (phlegm, bile, wind)" (Reisman 54).

up to consonant features. These calculations again imply a wide variability of personality types, much as humoral theory does.

Medieval texts on physiognomy were ultimately based on a treatise by Polemon,[23] a second century Greek physiognomist. Polemon discussed the voice in terms of gendered characteristics—masculine, effeminate, and androgynous—using in his Greek text the word "malakos" to mean soft, which was usually associated with male effeminacy (Swain 188). To this and other terms associated with effeminate men "we are expected to apply moral characteristics associated with them" (Swain 188). Though this moralizing is certainly present, to an extent, in medieval texts, it does not serve to indicate sexual behavior or identity. Just as in the case of Polemon, who "makes good use of the masculine norm" in terms of masculine and feminine characteristics, "we should not exaggerate this use" (Swain 188-9) in medieval physiognomies. Furthermore, the context in which Polemon refers to effeminate and androgynous characteristics did not exist in the medieval physiognomy texts. Classical physiognomies were only used as a basis for medieval beliefs, and medieval society utilized and expanded on them in their own way. This difference is important because it serves to remind a modern reader that the medieval context differs from our own as well, especially with respect to social identity, such as homosexuality. Further, we should understand that feminine behavior, though viewed as negative at times, was not always tied to homosexual desire.

The *Anonymus Latinus*, which was available in the Middle Ages, is based on Polemon's theories. In the *Anonymus Latinus,* one finds the following types of movements of a man:

> The movement of the body of one man is natural, of another affected. There are three types of affected movement. One is when a man is courting honour or a position of power

[23] Polemon's treatise on physiognomy is no longer extant and we know its contents only by way of an Arabic translation and a Greek abridgement by one Adamantius.

or money or a marriage and conducts himself according to how he thinks he will be most acceptable to his betters; for he puts on the semblance of luxury and goodness and is upright or dejected or shabby or lazy or sympathetic or industrious when he thinks he should be imitating a poor man, a rustic, a miser, a little man, or a sympathetic man. The second type of appearance consists of the affectation of those who are devoted to beauty and who compose their face and whole body so that they may ensnare virgins or disturb marriages. But also those who are mad about boys or play the role of women to excite men towards them have an affected and studied body movement. The third type of appearance consists of those who are certainly deviants, but who try to remove suspicion from themselves by striving to assume a manly appearance; for they imitate the gait of a young man and strengthen themselves with a certain stiffness and strain their eyes and voice and straighten their whole body, but they are easily detected when their true nature wins through and exposes them for they often lower their neck and voice and relax their hands and feet and are easily betrayed by other passing signs; for sudden fear or unexpected joy shakes them from their careful pretense and recalls them to their own nature. Often they are detected when yawning too. Thus all the signs which are gathered from the movements of the body are to be referred to these four types: the one which is natural and true, and the three which we have established as false and simulated. (603)[24]

[24] The Latin is as follows: Motus corporis alius est naturalis, alius affectatus. affectati tres sunt species. una cum homo honorem vel potestatem vel lucrum vel nuptias captans, prout acceptissimum esse potioribus arbitratur, ita se constituit. nam et luxuriae et bonitatis similitudinem induit et erectus et deiectus est et squalidus et ignavus et misericors et industrius, ubi pauperiem, rusticitatem, parsimoniam, parvitatem et misericordiam imitandam putat. secunda species est affectationis eorum qui ad pulchritudinem student quique vultum et omne corus ita informant, ut aut virginibus insidientur aut matrimonia perturbent; sed et qui in pueros dementes sunt aut mulierum loco se ipsos constituunt, quo viros in se provocare possint, affectatum atque elaboratum corporis motum habent. tertia species est eorum qui cinaedi quidem certa fide sunt, verum suspicionem a se removere conantes virilem sumere speciem sibimet laborant. nam et incessum pedum iuvenilem imitantur et semet ipsos rigore quodam confirmant et oculos et vocem intendunt atque omne corpus erigunt, sed facile deteguntur vincente se ac nudante natura. nam et collum et vocem plerumque submittunt et pedes manusque relaxant aliisque temporariis indiciis facile produntur. nam et timor

The passage raises two questions: what is natural and true, and does "deviant" signify a sexual act or related homosexual desire or does it signify a kind of inauthenticity?

Also in Ian Repath's translation of the *Anonymus Latinus,* the Greek term "cinaedi" is used to define one who is deviant in sexual activity. Though Repath acknowledges the difficulty in translating such a word exactly, he does translate the word as deviant on a number of occasions. Take, for example, the following description of eyes: "Quick, disturbed eyes tell of a rapacious man. But those who move their eyelids uncertainly and join them with various movements of the pupils and pull the upper eyelid gently over the eyes are deviants" (Repath 585).[25] This passage, unfortunately, does not clearly indicate what defines sexual deviance. Nor is there a clear indication as to what is natural; it is just implied. The indication that a man can attract another man by affecting a variety of movements begs the question: Why does this occur? Does the subject naturally have this type of movement? (That would be an indicator of 'innate' effeminacy). Or is all such movement contrived as a signal to other men? The other complexity is defining what is deviant about this. Is affecting a movement the deviancy, being untrue to the usual movements of a man as artificially contrived movements, or is it that a man is affecting a movement to attract other men or act womanly? Either way, it does not completely coincide with modern connotations of same-sex physical identifiers like movement, because our modern indication is that it is something inherent, not an affected movement or quality. And in those inherent qualities, they are not always an indicator of homosexuality; rather they only indicate our modern stereotypes of what homosexuality is.

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subitus et gaudium improvisum ab imitatione eos procurata excutit atque ad suum ingenium revocat. plerumque etiam oscitantes detecti sunt. signa igitur omnia quae ex motibus corporis colliguntur, ad quattuor has species referenda sunt: ad unam quae vera et naturalis est, ad tres, quas fictas et simulatas esse constituimus" (602)

[25] The Latin is as follows: "Oculi citi perturbati rapacem dicunt. qui autem incertas palpebras permovent atque coniungunt sub diversis motibus pupillarum ac superius cilium molliter oculis superducunt, cinaedi sunt" (584).

The physical identifiers of deviants are as follows:

> head is inclined to the right-hand side, their collar-bones are joined, they lift their heels, they mostly have joined feet, they bleat in some degree like sheep when they talk, they look down their nose and adjust and shape their nose with their fingers, they carefully trample on and crush their spit or that of others, they often look at those parts of their own body which they find more beautiful, they frequently smile while talking, they have a voice that sounds as if it had been broken, they have separated eyebrows, they draw the upper eyelid down to cover the lower one, when they are jumping their shoulder-blades also leap forth, they move their body like women, they have crooked arms and stretch their tunic around their loins, they shout when they laugh and they frequently clasp the hands of others. (627)[26]

The Greeks called the "man who is between a man and a woman" androgynous (ανδρόγυνος) (Repath 619), and he was identified physically by his

> moist eyes which gaze impudently, his pupils dart and fly around, his brow and cheekbones are drawn in, his eyebrows do not stand still, his neck is curved, his ὀσφύς ('loins'), that is the lower part of the back, is not still, all his limbs are in an agitate state, he frequently leaps up on his toes and often raises himself on his heels, his knees knock, he mostly moves his hands palm upwards, he looks about himself, his noise

[26] The Latin reads as follows: : inclinato ad <dextrum> latus capite, coniunctis scapulis, qui extollunt calcanea, qui plerumque iunctos habent pedes, qui cum loquuntur glauciunt aliquatenus ut oves, qui narem suam respiciunt et qui narem digitis suis dirigunt atque fingunt, qui quod aut ipsi sputant aut alii sollicite calcant et obterunt, qui saepe inspiciunt partes eas sui corporis quas pulchriores sibi habere videntur, qui frequenter subrident loquentes, qui vocem tanquam perfractam habent, qui supercilia seiuncta, qui demissum superius cilium ita ut inferius occupetur, quibus salientibus etiam scapulae prosiliunt, qui movent corpus ut mulieres, qui brackia perversa habent et qui tunicam circa lumbos tendunt, qui cum rident clamant et qui frequenter manus aliorum apprehendunt" (626).

> [Latin text is *voce*] is thin as if the sound is in the throat, his voice is very prattling, sometimes not displeasing, and it makes no difference whether his voice is excessively slow or very fast. (Repath 619)[27]

In ancient Greece deviancy was not tied to effeminacy: the "[k]inaidos / katapugōn is not a sexual pathic, humiliated and made effeminate by repeated domination, he is a nymphomaniac, full of womanish desire, who dresses up to attract men and has sex at the drop of a hat" (Davidson 179). Medieval thoughts on deviancy sometimes relate to desire, sexual lust, in any capacity. Effeminacy is not necessarily related to homosexuality. The gender of the person whom the man wants to have sex with is secondary and almost irrelevant, no matter the stigma associated with same-sex desire and relations. It is the category of effeminacy that is a more appropriate medieval category for gender characteristics. The category of homosexual identity does not fit medieval society.

The science of physiognomy sought to understand the "condycions or vertues *and* man*er*es of Pepill" through the physical "makynge of body," and the appearance of the face, and the sound of the voice (*Secreta Secretorum,* Ch. 58, Steele ed. 219, ll. 25-29).[28] Furthermore, the *Secreta Secretorum*, wrongly attributed to Aristotle, mentions that the purpose of "Phisnomye is to deme vertues *and* maneris of man aftyr the conpleccion" (ll. 29-31). The *Secreta Secretorum,* the *Anonymous Latinus,* and a later work by John Metham, who makes use of the *Secreta*

[27] The Latin is as follows: "oculos habet humidos, qui impudenter intuentur, cuius quatiuntur et circumvolant pupillae, cuius frons contrahitur et malae, cuius non stant supercilia, cuius incilinata est cervix, ὀσφύς id est ima pars spinae non quiescit, cuius omnes artus incerti status sunt, qui insilit frequenter imis pedibus et calcaneis saepius insurgit, qui genua collidit, qui resupinatas plerumque manus praiemovet, qui se circumspicit, qui voce est tenui et tanquam quae insonet gutturi, cuius vox prope garrula nec ingrata interdum est nec interest an nimium tarda vox sit an praeceps" (Repath 618).

[28]For more detail on the physiognomy of man in terms of complexion, physicality, and voice, see *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*. Ed. Robert Steele. EETS es 74 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), Chapter 58, pages 219-236.

Secretorum and the *Anonymus Latinus* (the latter also attributed wrongly to Aristotle; see Craig, ed., *Metham* xxx-xxxi), are the texts that drove medieval thoughts on these ideas. These texts hypothesized about the characteristics of a person, and sometimes they brought gender directly into the analysis. Physiognomists incorporate humoral theory, complexion (see discussion above), into their analysis of variations in human personality. To frame this part of the chapter, I will begin by looking at how physiognomies and complexions are connected, then move to the voice, and finally a man's gait to determine what that reveals about effeminacy and how medieval thoughts were based on these classical ideas translated into Middle English.

Chapters 58-59 of James Yonge's translation of the *Secreta Secretorum* (1422) are devoted to physiognomy, and Chapter 58 begins with a consideration of the four humors, a passage not found in the Latin copies of the *Secreta* (*Secreta Secretorum,* Ch. 58, Steele ed. 219ff.). Embedded in these complexions are the descriptions of a man's characteristics. The sanguine man is "ruddy of colour*e*" and is known to desire the company of women (219, ll. 27-9). The "colerike [man] shulde haue yalowe coloure Sumwhate medelit w*ith* rede" (220, ll. 28-9) and described as "[d]esyrous of company / of women moore than hym nedyth" (220, ll. 17-8). In contrast, the "flevmatike [is] whyte and Pale" (220, l. 28) and has "lytill / desire company of women" (220, ll. 11-2). The melancholy man "sholde be Su*m*whate blake and pale" (220, ll. 29-30). But neither Yonge nor humoral theorists indicate that sexual preference is determined by the humors. They only mention that there is a correlation between the humors and a desire, or diminished desire, of being in the company of women. Yonge, it may be noted, does not mark the "flevmatike" as one who desires the company of men as opposed to the company of women. Instead, what this passage points out is the lecherousness of the sanguine and choleric man, the latter of which is described as liking the company of women too much. Lechery is the problem,

and women are the focus of the lechery. Furthermore, this passage does not suggest that homosexual desire did not exist, it merely references how a man's lecherous nature can be linked directly to his complexion.

The physical descriptions in the *Secreta Secretorum* begin with a brief statement about the conditions of women in relation to men. For example, women are "more febill of body and of complexcion, so in the same mane*r* / they bene endowed lasse of reyson" (226, ll. 2-3). This description of women allows the male physical descriptions of specific male body parts to be compared with those of women. A man who has "lytill fete and streyte, shorte toes and noght sinewy, and more delicious to se than stronge fette, they bene febill and feynte, and like to women" (226, ll. 10-12). Men who have fleshy ankles are "nesse [soft *or* effeminate] of corage an lyke to women" (226, ll. 18-9). The physical and psychological descriptions imply effeminate characteristics in men, but the text does not equate effeminacy with homosexual desire. We may compare Polemon's description of a eunuch of his time, as presented in the *Anonymus Latinus*. He had

> a tense brow, soft cheeks, a loose mouth, a thin neck, thick legs, thick feet as if congested with flesh, a feminine voice, womanly words, limbs, and all his joints without strength, loose and badly connected. [Polemon] says that this man suffered everything which is disgraceful by his inability to bear his desires. [29] (Repath 583)

John Metham's physiognomy likewise draws attention to physical qualities in men that are similar to qualities conventionally associated with women. Feminine characteristics are

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[29] The Latin is as follows: <tales fuisse oculi Celti cuiusdam> a Palemone quidem auctore referuntur, qui eunuchum sui temporis fuisse hunc hominem descripsit. nomen quidem non posuit, intelligitur autem de Favorino eum dicere. huic cetera corporis indicia huiusmodi assignat: tensam frontem, genas molles, os laxum, cervicem tenuem, crass crura, pedes plenos tanquam congestis pulpis, vocem femineam, verba muliebria, membra et articulos omnes sine vigore, lazos et dissolutos. hunc dicit impatientia libidinum quae turpia sunt omnia passum.

located in the chin, hands and fingers, and chine of the back, but Metham makes no indication whether he means to describe these characteristics in terms of homosexual desire. The inference could be that the physical indicators of feminine characteristics could be in both men and women; although Metham's pronouns tend to be masculine, they are inconsistent. Still, his references to feminine characteristics serve to identify a person's femininity and shows a preoccupation, apparent through the middle ages, with understanding how femininity was identified. This identification of feminine characteristics still does not relate to homosexuality and is only an indicator of gender characteristics.

In terms of having feminine tendencies, "he *that* hath a chyn *the* qwych ys very rownd betokynnyth a feynt hert *and* femynyne dysposyc*i*on. A chyn *the* qwyche ys four*e*-sqwaur*e*, *that* ys named a clouyn chyn, betokynnyth manfulnes off hert" (Metham 135). A round chin identifies a feminine disposition (faintness of heart); a chin with a dimple marks a masculine disposition described simply as "manfulnes" of heart. It can be assumed that being faint of heart is not a positive attribute, and possibly an indicator of a feminine stereotype. When Metham discusses hands and fingers, he makes no reference to negative feminine stereotypes, but he does indicate other characteristics like lechery if a man has round nails, and fearfulness and cowardice if the hand is fat with short fingers (Metham 138). Other signifiers of feminine characteristics in men are flat and soft flesh in the "chyne off the bak" and thighs with soft flesh (Metham 139). In the *Anonymus Latinus,* there are other physical indicators of effeminacy in men; it says that drier buttocks are manly; that buttocks with ample flesh show an effeminate man" (Repath 615).[30] This is most likely a nod to the stereotype that women were rounder, softer, and had more flesh, physical features that were then associated with feminine characteristics of personality.

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[30] The Latin is as follows: "idem Aristoteles dicit nates sicciores viriles esse, nates amplis carnibus effeminatum ostendere" (614).

A man's voice might also be a sign of masculine or feminine inclination. If men begin "ther speche with a sad voyse *and* ende a-loft w*i*t*h* a scharp voyse, *th*ei be fulle off wantoune dysyr*e*, *and* fulle off new affecc*i*onn*y*s. They *tha*t haue holle[31] voysys *and* speke lowe *and* fulle, w*i*th-owte brekyng or qwav*er*ryng, yt sygnyffyith a manfful hert *and* wele norturyd *and* gret wytt; and yff yt bray or be brokyn, yt syngyffye *the con*t*ra*ry" (Metham 142-43). This passage translates one from the *Anonymus Latinus*: "[t]hose who have a sharp and soft voice are effeminate. Those who produce a deep and inflexible voice as if from a cavern are manly and magnanimous in character" (Repath 607).[32] The indication is clear that there are distinctions in the sharpness, representative of a feminine characteristic, and the deepness of the voice, linked to masculinity. Still, these are broad associations that indicate a general analysis rather than a specific match to character traits. There were many other variations of characteristics that can be associated with gender.

Masculine and feminine characteristics are further complicated by the way people walk and carry themselves. Metham primarily refers to a man's gait or pace in terms of three artificial modes.[33] It is not clear if Metham is referring to unnatural as an indicator of homosexuality exactly, the insinuation is that it is also about the facade or performance one does to please certain people. "The fyrste spyce ys qwan [a man] or a woman, be-cause off hye degre, to apper*e* wyse *and* sadde, *th*ei chonge *th*er natural pase: Also *th*ei *that* dysyr*e* to p*ro*uoke me*n* to *th*er*e*

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[31] "holle" is a form of "hollow" and is meant to indicate a deeper sound that has more resonance and is associated with masculine characteristics and manliness as opposed to the supposedly higher and thinner voice of effeminate men. Metham's glossary indicates the word means "hollow." For a better understanding of what a "hollow voice" is, (see the glossary in Craig's edition of Metham), consider the following statement in the *Anonymous Latinus*: qui vocem tanquam ex concavo depromunt gravem et inflexibilem, ingenio sunt virili et magnanimi" (Those who produce a deep and inflexible voice as if from a cavern are manly and magnanimous in character"; Repath 606-607). Compare cf. *MED*, s.v. "holwe" adj., 5. as an adverb meaning "in a hollow voice" from *The Assembly of Gods,* ed. O.L. Triggs, *EETSES* 69 (1896).

[32] The Latin is as follows: "qui acutam et mollem habent vocem, effeminati sunt. qui vocem tanquam ex concavo depromunt gravem et inflexibilem, ingenio sunt virili et magnanimi" (Repath 606).

[33] Section 74 of the *Anon. Lat.* contrasts movement that is "naturalis" with that which is "affectati" ('affected').

feyrnes, for*e* to be holdyn beuteu*s* *and* lusty, *thei* chonge *th*er pase, as be *ther* ymagynac*i*on schuld be most acceptabyl in me*n*nys eye-syte" (140). This first category identifies persons who change their disposition according to what they think another might deem acceptable. The unnatural aspect seems to be linked to a person performing, or not being genuine. The second category is the artificial adjustment of one's gait: "*th*is ys *the* secu*n*de spyce; and off *th*is secu*n*de *th*ei also *that* be her dysyrys haue as gret affec*i*on in me*n* as *th*ei have in women, *and* vse fayr*e* p*er*sonys off men in *the* sted off *ther* wyuys, as *the* empor*ur* of Rome Nero dyd. *Th*o p*er*sonys dyspose *ther* gate as *th*ei seme most schuld plese beauteu*s* *y*onge men" (Metham 140). This indicates the way a man presents himself to other men with whom he wishes to have a sexual encounter or relation. Metham further observes that if a men keep "longe pasys *and* make gret steppys, thei be wele wyllyd *and* bold *and* manfful *and* fortunat. Thei *that* make smale steppys, thei be streyt kep*er*ys off money, dysseuabyl, *and* inffortunat, *and* dulle of wytt" (Metham 141). But, there was a manner of movement that combined both masculine and feminine qualities were desired: "He *that* goth demur*e*ly, and su*m*qwat bowyth *the* hed *and the* nek in hys gate, yt sygnyffyith manffulnes *and hardynes* and gentyl dysposyc*i*on" (Metham 142).[34] The combination of demurely bowing the head and neck in a man's walk is equated to masculine "*hardynes"* and gentleness (Metham 142), a necessary component for a man that is not hypermasculine.

Though Metham's work is late medieval, it does illustrate a cultural consciousness of physiognomies and characteristics that persisted in the Middle Ages. Though both humoral

[34] Section 76 of the *Anon. Lat.* states that these signs bespeak a man who is magnanimous and strong: "magnanimum...et fortem." Metham's "gentyl dysposycion" is the new or added phrase. Is it a restatement of *magnanimus* (greatness of spirit) or perhaps a reflection of demureness, of moderate and tranquil bearing? 'Gentle' can imply high social standing, membership in the right kind of family (*gens, genus*). Or it would reflect self-possession, or generosity (a minority meaning of medieval Latin *magnanimus*).

theory and physiognomical theory indicate that there was a preference to a particular dominant humor and physical feature, medieval thinkers would recognize that there would need to be a combination of humors and physiognomies to compose the entire make-up of an individual. Just as the many components of the body politic are necessary, variations of personality are necessary. Such theorizing, when applied to real world individuals, gave a basis for understanding their behavior and characteristics. It never provided an exact indication of a person's make-up, which is why we ought to think about medieval beliefs on gender characteristics as a composition with infinite combinations of traits that can cross the usual gender associations.

The variations of gender characteristics in a person are also evident in medieval theories of astrological alignments and their connection to gender characteristics. Astrological alignments, particularly the positions of the planets and the signs of the zodiac at a specific time, are literally measured in small fractions of degrees. Logic dictates that measures this small will produce subtle variations in the composition of gender characteristics and subtle differences in classes of personality. Slight shifts in celestial influences would make it possible for individuals to have very specific gender characteristics based on factors such as time and place. A person born in one geographic area at the same time as another in a different area would not have precisely the same gender characteristics. Though astrology was thought to have some impact on gender characteristics, astrological treatises treat the subject in a generalized and not very comprehensive way. What we do know is that gender was assigned to certain celestial bodies which were believed to impact gender and gender characteristics in some way. Still, there is no comprehensive study of the matter in modern scholarship that indicates an exact match up of the influence of a particular celestial dominance on gender characteristics at the time of a person's

birth. The varying influences of the planets and the zodiac further indicate that there were many influences that were believed to impact gender characteristics.

In the *Speculum Astronomiae,* a thirteenth-century text dealing with astrological principles and "the exercise of making judgments" (Zambelli 223), Albertus Magnus reports Aristotle's view that certain signs of the zodiac were masculine in gender (Zambelli 227). Along with other texts, the *Speculum Astronomiae* indicates the natural elements of signs "according to which they are said to be hot, cold, humid, dry, mobile, fixed, common, masculine, feminine" and a variety of other characteristics (Zambelli 223). Furthermore, the natures of planets are also described as being "hot, cold, humid, dry, benefic and malefic" as well as "masculine, feminine" (Zambelli 225). Temperature, humidity, gender, and gender characteristics of the celestial bodies are connected to the physical human body. Such connections are perhaps most evident in the so called Zodiac man. The influence of the signs of the Zodiac on the body are represented in medieval culture by way of the so-called "zodiac man," another uncertain determiner of gender characteristics. The zodiac man is a visual representation of a male figure showing which parts of the body are influenced by which Zodiacal signs.[35] The head is associated with Aries, the neck with Taurus, the shoulders and chest with Gemini, the lungs with Cancer, the stomach with Leo, the abdomen with Virgo, the lower abdomen with Libra, the penis and testicles with Scorpio, the thighs with Sagittarius, the knees with Capricorn, the calves with Aquarius, and the ankles with Pisces (Gottfried 181).

[35] For an illustration of the zodiac man see Chauncy Wood's *Chaucer and the Country of Stars* figure 4: Influence of the Zodiac on the Body (Pol de Limbourg). Les très riches heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry. Chantilly, Musèe de Condè, MS 65, folio14V. Photo Giraudon; J.D. North's *Chaucer's Universe,* page 200.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in his encycolopedia *On the Properties of Things,* notes the male genders of six zodiac signs, Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Sagittarius, and Aquarius.[36] Bartholomaeus expressly identifies only one sign as female, Cancer (Bartholomaeus/Trevisa, Book 8, ch.10; ed. Seymour, 468), but leaves the gender of the remaining signs, Taurus, Virgo, Scorpio, Capricorn, Pisces, unidentified (Ed. Seymour, 466-473). It is natural to surmise that if he mentions six male signs that the remaining signs would be female to balance out the gender dynamics of the signs. Three male signs are identified as firy (Aries, 466; Leo, 468; Sagittarius, 471), one as "airy" (Gemini, 467). Aquarius gets no such descriptor, and Libra is the only male sign identified as "wattry" (469), a description usually associated with female signs.[37] In *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature,* J.C. Eade identifies the masculine signs, which are the same as in Bartholomaeus, and he identifies the feminine signs, according to Ptolemy's principles, as Taurus, Cancer, Virgo, Scorpio, Capricorn, and Pisces (69). It is likely that Bartholomaeus did not designate the gender of the female signs for a few reasons. One reason might be that he did not see the need to identify them since the genders of the signs were known by the majority of his audience. Or it could be possible that he did not see the importance of feminine signs and by designating the others male, there was no need to discuss the remaining any further. In any case, even though Cancer is the only female sign identified, it is clear that there was an equal divide between male and female signs and that medieval society understood there was a clear gender distinction for each sign.

[36] From the Middle English translation of John Trevisa's work edited by M.H. Blechner and M.C. Seymour (Bartholomaeus/Trevisa Chapter Eight. Ed. Seymour, 465-472).
[37] In Trevisa's translation of Bartholamaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum,* titled *On the Properties of Things,* Volume 1, the female signs Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn are identified as earthy and cold. Cancer is watery and Scorpio and Pisces are watery and cold (466-472).

Though these signs have designated genders, there is very little evidence that dominating signs and planets were believed to influence gender characteristics in a person. It is difficult to determine whether this celestial influence on gender characteristics was understood as exact science or as superstition and folklore. For the most part, it was discussed as a vague theory that was understood to play a part in the formation of a person's destiny more so than in their gender characteristics. There has been no conclusive evidence or study that finds a correlation that specifically pins down how astrology influenced gender characteristics, but that does not mean there was no discussion about it having influence. Chaucer makes reference to astrological times in many instances throughout his works. In the *Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer begins by clarifying that it is springtime and specifically that the "tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne / Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne" (ll. 7-8). Other astrological references indicate time, as in *The Franklin's Tale*[38]; astrological influence structures the awakening of the characters in *The Knight's Tale*[39]*,* and they also indicate moments of appropriate action as in *The Man of Law's Tale.*[40] Other literary references indicate how astrology influenced the characteristics of a person, primarily through what sign they were born under and the influence of the planets during their birth, theories that Chaucer uses in his works.

Chaucer's Wife of Bath demonstrates the connection between planets, signs, and gender characteristics. To account for her personality, the Wife describes her horoscope, which involves the influences of the planets Venus and Mars, and the zodiacal sign of Taurus (the Bull).

For certes, I am al Venerien

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[38] ll. 1244-1249 indicate that it is now in December, the sign of Capricorn.
[39] ll. 2209-2372 indicate the day that Palamon, Emelye, and Arcite rise in conjunction with a particular house. For more on this see Eade's *The Forgotten Sky*, 120-122.
[40] According to J.C. Eade, ll. 295-315 Constance's father should have realized that the voyage he sends her on was not at the appropriate astrological moment. He says that "the right moment for it [the voyage] was let slip" (127). This leads to the unfortunate circumstances that follow.

In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.

Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,

And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;

Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.

(*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* ll. 609-13)

Alisoun believes that the passion of Venus and Mars influences her behavior, though in different ways. This self-analysis, however, is incomplete in that the Wife neglects the influence of Mercury as an important element. Later in her prologue, she describes the workings of Venus and Mercury in the sign of Pisces:

...Mercurie is desolat

In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,

And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.

(ll. 703-4)

These lines emphasize the extreme separation of Venereal sensuality and the Mercurial intellectual personality. When Venus is most powerful, Mercury is powerless, signifying a connection between planets and the amount of influence they have in relation to each other. Chaucer is drawing special attention to the astrological influence on the Wife of Bath’s character composition because “[p]assage near these planets, according to Macrobius, impresses upon the soul amatory passion (*epithymetikon*) and the ability to speak and interpret (*hermeneutikon*), respectively” (Astell 89). It is clear that the passion Alisoun feels is influenced by both Mars and Venus. The reference to Mercury suggests that the Wife of Bath's astrological analysis of herself is incomplete because she also has a Mercurial side. It is revealed by her rhetorical skills, her ability to “speak and interpret” clerical writings and engage her husband and the clerical

community at large. This becomes especially evident in her interpretation of the misogynistic clerical views of women. It is important to remember that Alisoun is inundated with the clerical views of women. Edward Peter Nolan reminds us that as she parodies the masculine clerical views, they are also the only views available to her and that "we are all limited to the conventions of inherited diction and rhetoric as we seek to find and speak in our own voice" (208). While Alisoun is railing against the clerical views of women she is both influenced by the passions of Venus and Mars and the intellectualism of Mercury. The composition of her personality thus is more complex, more subtle, than even she allows.

Medieval astrologists considered these influences as only part of the picture and also understood that though individuals had in-born inclinations owing to a zodiac sign or planetary influence, they also had individual choice to overcome these characteristics.

The influence of the planets might indicate that she is not fully responsible for her characteristics, but does that mean she is not fully responsible for her actions? In *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, Walter Clyde Curry suggests that the Wife of Bath may not be responsible for her characteristics. He states that "Dame Alisoun's peculiarly contradictory character lies not so much in herself as in her stars; possibly she is not to be held morally responsible for all her actions" (93). Alisoun acknowledges that she followed her own path through life under astrological influence:

> I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
>
> By vertu of my constellacioun;
>
> That made me I coude noght withdrawe
>
> My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
>
> Yet have I Martes merk upon my face

And also in another pryve place

(ll. 615-621)

Curry notices that the marks upon her body are also marks "upon her character" (94). These marks reflect the influence planets have on the body and on personality. These marks, along with fortunes and predictions, are associated with someone, particularly a woman, born in April under the sign of Taurus (Friedman 167). Alisoun's horoscope reveals character traits aligned with Venus, in which Alisoun receives her "lust" and "likerousnesse" and from Mars she receives her "sturdy hardynesse." Mars was associated with aggressive behavior and Venus was associated with love (Hamlin 161). The influence of the constellation Taurus, combined with that of the planets Mars and Venus, suggests that women "will be unchaste" (Wood 175).[41]

The Wife of Bath expresses her wisdom and fury with references to the "antagonism between Venus and Mercury" and turns the "Venusian 'ryot' and chaos...into symmetry" by appropriating "clerical status for herself" (Astell 155). She is using male dominated clerical and classical ideas of "rhetoric, logic, and grammar" to further her feminist point of view (Astell 155). This sets up a bogus association with astrological character formation, nevertheless, it does indicate a complex mixture of feminine and masculine characteristics (Astell 155). These characteristics are a tempering of masculine and feminine traits, but those are not bound by the strict gender binaries. Chaucer demonstrates Alisoun's characteristics as a blend of masculine and feminine that are removed from positive and negative constructions. Neither her masculine or feminine characteristics are meant to be viewed negatively or positively, though clerical authorities, and others, might disagree. Instead, her characteristics are meant to demonstrate how a person can register gender on a spectrum in a variety of ways. There is not a specific positive

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[41] Chauncey Wood cites *Aphorisms* of Hermes Trismegistus as a source detailing that women will be unchaste when Mars is in either of the houses of Venus (175). Hermes Trismegistus, *Centiloquium,* in the 1551 *Omnibus* volume.

or negative interpretation; rather that interpretation is posited on individual and social responses that are just as varied as the spectrum of gender characteristics. Characteristics like effeminacy in male literary characters and masculinity in female literary characters are just characteristics, no definite markers of social identity.

Though some scholars challenge Curry on some of his applications, his theory is a useful base for beginning to understand gender characteristics that has led to current scholarship and a clearer understanding of gender characteristics in the Middle Ages. Whether Chaucer presents his characters with accuracy in light of these theories is a matter for ensuing chapters. Medieval scientific theory does not present comprehensive treatments of its postulates, and certainly not as they are entailed in combination with each other. Nonetheless, medieval poets could have derived many notions of personality construction from scientific ways of identifying character make-up. Just as there is a variety of theories detailing the causes and features of gender, as demonstrated here with humoral theory, physiognomies, and astrology, so too Chaucer could have understood how those variables might have led to certain characteristic distinctions. The theories lead to an understanding of how the variables of gender characteristics worked according to medieval society's beliefs. Again, literary examples may illustrate how a medieval audience understood gender characteristics in terms of a spectrum rather than an identity. Many of the examples given brief consideration above, such as the Wife of Bath and Absolon, will be closely examined in succeeding chapters. For now, it is important to distinguish medieval thoughts on these subjects as opposed to supplanting them with our modern assumptions of gender characteristics and physical gender associations.

Chapter Two: The Characteristics and Actions of Medieval Hypermasculinity

Chapter One dealt with how classical theories on physiognomy, biology, and astrology must have influenced medieval beliefs on how gender characteristics were composed. Those various doctrines support the hypothesis that each human personality was seen to be comprised of a balance of features, including gendered features, and that the combination of gendered features might be placed on a broad spectrum of possibilities, with a conventionally understood 'pure' femininity on one end of the spectrum and 'pure' masculinity on the other. There are many examples of how medieval masculinity is characterized and many indicating the degree to which individual male personalities are modulated by feminine characteristics. Hypermasculinity manifested little or no such modulation and, as I will show, it was regarded by medieval society as problematic and potentially dangerous.

In the introduction I discuss the modern theory of hypermasculinity that has some relation to medieval aspects of hypermasculinity. For example, the hypermasculine man does not follow the normal societal rules of male conduct. His physical strength, attitude, and actions allow him the perception that he is superior to other men who might be deemed normal or weak.[42] The hypermasculine man is bigger, more powerful, and better at physical tasks. But this figure, an exaggeration of masculine qualities, is actually less than a proper man; he is incomplete because of his lack of feminine characteristics. In this chapter I will examine how medieval representations of the hypermasculine man suggest this incompleteness and, through literary examples, I will show how this character type was not considered ideal or exemplary in certain genres of medieval English literature. His masculine characteristics have become

[42] For more on the definition and discussion of modern hypermasculinity see the introduction.

enormously dominant and have pushed out the feminine characteristics that medieval society understood as necessary to the composition of a well-rounded individual.

Hypermasculinity has multiple combinations of characteristics, and violence is often associated with it. Violence itself is not only associated with masculinity, or we would not have feminine violence. Nor are violent acts a necessary component of masculinity, otherwise rape, abuse, and murder would be permissible for males. These violent acts are forms of excessive masculinity and has a spectrum of potential threats to society. Of course, violence is necessary for some figures like the knight, but violence per se is not the problem. Problems arise when it occurs outside rules and structure dictated by social norms. Medieval hypermasculinity results when little or no tempering of feminine characteristics creates an individual who is unbalanced.[43] This imbalance calls into question, just as much in the medieval period as it does now, the role of violence in the characteristic make-up of men. I define medieval hypermasculinity as a combination of various excessively masculine features of personality with actions that do physical and emotional harm to others. Sometimes the lack of feminine characteristics signifies excessive masculinity which can also incorporate violent characteristics and actions.

In this chapter I will first analyze hypermasculine characters who challenge medieval beliefs on how masculinity exists within social norms and under its control. Within that subset of hypermasculinity there are those who exhibit certain qualities that can, and in some cases do, turn into hypermasculine violence such as Chaucer's Miller and the miller from the *Reeve's Tale.* There are also physically imposing figures in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* illustrating the cultural effort to tame violence through chivalry and social order resulting from competition

[43] The term "unbalanced" applies to medieval understandings of how gender characteristics should be combined to create a balanced individual. I understand the problem this term creates for modern gender theorists. When I apply it I am referring to medieval beliefs. See Chapter One for more details about medieval understanding on the balance of gender characteristics.

between men. The need to tame violence between men is ever present in figures from the *Knight's Tale*; Palamon and Arcite's duel and Theseus's efforts to bring the violence within societal rules and laws. We see the breakdown of those laws in the violence between Mordred and Arthur in the Arthurian tales, where familial feuding surpasses any attempt at social order and leads to hypermasculine violence.

To amplify the division between masculine and feminine, I investigate hypermasculine violence against women through the Giant of Mont St. Michel's monstrous male desires, chivalry and rape in the pastourelles and *Wife of Bath's Tale,* and through other forms of assault or acquiescence in the *Reeve's Tale* and in *Morte Arthure.* These forms of hypermasculinity demonstrate physical assault and other forms of domination over women. Finally, I will show how psychological assault against women was treated in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and has similar dominating qualities found in the tales of rape discussed previously. Through these examples I argue that the characteristics of hypermasculinity were not only varied, but widely known to medieval audiences and considered undesirable traits in medieval society.

Some literary figures exhibit hypermasculine qualities that may lead to violence or that indicate they have that potential. The miller from the *Reeve's Tale* is associated with those qualities that pose an underlying social threat as is Chaucer's Miller, the pilgrim. The description of the miller in the *Reeve's Tale* says that

> As any pecok he was proud and gay.
>
> Pipen he koude and fisshe, and nettes beete,
>
> And turne coppes, and wel wrastle and sheete.
>
> (*Reeve's Tale* ll. 3925-28)

He is proud of all the masculine endeavors, fishing, wrestling, and shooting.[44] The Reeve's miller participates in masculine hobbies that become more hypermasculine as his description continues.

> Ay by his belt he baar a long panade,
>
> And of a swerd ful trenchant was the blade.
>
> A joly poppere baar he in his pouche;
>
> Ther was no man, for peril, dorste hym touche.
>
> A Sheffeld thwitel baar he in his hose.
>
> (*Reeve's Tale* ll. 3929-33)

The trenchant sword, the dagger, and knife point to his dangerous nature and his penchant for violence. That other men fear him only emphasizes that tendency toward violence and illustrates that he is a bully, "a market-betere atte fulle" (l. 3936), that "no wight hand upon hym legge" for fear of retaliation (l. 3937-38).

The pilgrim Miller has many similarities with the Reeve's miller, and he is certainly someone who has the potential for violence and who embodies hypermasculine tendencies; but they do not warrant complete social alarm. We know from the *General Prologue* that he carries a sword (*General Prologue* l. 558) that could be used, one might speculate, as protection or provocation. He is a "stout carl" who has big muscles (ll. 545-6) and who is especially skilled at "wrastlynge" (l. 548). Medieval wrestling was a violent sport "in which contestants warred against each other in violent, bloody, and often deadly struggles" (Semenza 70).[45] These details suggest that the Miller is more than masculine; he tends toward an exaggerated masculinity.

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[44] The note in the *Riverside Chaucer* indicates that the reference means shooting arrows.

[45] In "Historicizing Wrastlynge in the 'Miller's Tale'" Gregory M. Colón Semenza acknowledges preceding arguments that identify wrestling as a sport of the lower classes. He points to a 1385 ban on wrestling because of the riots that would be incited as indicative of wrestling's violent associations (69-70).

Though Chaucer provides the audience a view of over-emphasized masculinity that borders on the comical, the potential for violence is there.

Both the pilgrim and the miller from the *Reeve's Tale* demonstrate how hypermasculinity and threat of violence lurk beneath the surface of male literary characters. Though their descriptions of hypermasculinity are attributed to strength, bully-like qualities, and antisocial behavior, there are also examples of physical threats that threaten social order. But the violence of the Reeve's miller goes beyond the controlled violence of wrestling described in the Miller's portrait and into the hypermasculine violence that seriously threatens social structures and rules. Wrestling is a demonstration of physical power and the riots that would result from wrestling matches happened outside of the rules and regulations of the actual sport. The riots are what threaten society as the violence present there spills out of normal parameters. Though wrestling itself may not be hypermasculine in itself it does lead to excessive violence outside the rules constructed to contain it. Similar to how Theseus moves Palamon and Arcite's violence to a controlled "theater" where it can be controlled by rules and positioned back within acceptable masculine behavior. My point is to illustrate that physical descriptions in characters like the Miller can be combined with actions and hobbies, like a tendency toward violent sports like wrestling, along with discourse can paint a picture of the potential hypermasculine threat.

The physical description of Chaucer's Miller highlights his physique and the propensity for wrestling and physical strength serves as a kind of iconography of male hypermasculinity. The Miller is described as having excessive physical size not unlike giants. The Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one such figure whose imposing size and other physical features must be examined in concordance with the social rules of his violent game. The Green Knight, also a giant figure, has a complicated relation to the boundaries of King Arthur's courtly

society. During a Christmas banquet in King Arthur's court, he interrupts the festivities and the men wonder at his "hwe" (l. 147) for he was "oueral enker grene" (l. 150) contrasted with his monstrous "rede yȝen." (l. 304). At first reveal, his green hue and red eyes make him a monstrous figure to the court. But the anonymous writer further describes the Green Knight:

> On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
>
> Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,
>
> And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
>
> Half-etayn in erde I hope þat he were,
>
> Bot mon most I algate mynn hym bene,
>
> And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȝt ride.
>
> (ll. 137-42)

His height was large like that of a "Half-etayn" or half-giant," but he could ride a horse most elegantly.[46] The length of his limbs and strength of his body serve to set him apart from the men of the court, as does his beard, which like a "busk over his brest henges" (l. 183). The descriptions begin to reveal that he is more like a man and less like a giant and his monstrousness is initially a result of his size, his green hue, and his red eyes.

Despite his size and coloring, his attire contradicts notions of monstrosity because it has familiar qualities that the court would recognize and not label as monstrous.

> A strayt cote ful streȝt þat stek on his sides,
>
> A mer*é* mantile abof, mensked withinne
>
> With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene

[46] The *MED* defines "myriest" (miriest) as a superlative of merry or happy. Here it is meant illustrate how the Green Knight rides a horse. In their edition of *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron gloss line 142 as: "and moreover the most elegant for his size who could ride a horse" (213). The point is to illustrate the Green Knight as more of a man than a giant.

With blyþe blaunner ful bryȝt, and his hod boþe,

Þat watz laȝt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;

Heme wel-haled hose of þat same grene,

Þat spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures under

Of bryȝt golde, upon silk bordes barred ful ryche. (ll. 152-59)

His coat and mantle are fur lined and he wears green hose that extend down to his gold spurs with silk workings that look extravagant and rich. Both his waist and saddle have "oþer blyþe stones / Þat were richely rayled" (ll. 162-64). His cape, and the way it is clasped, resembles that of a king: "half his armes þerunder were halched in þe wyse / Of a kyngez capados þat closes his swyre" (ll. 185-86). The knight's large physique and his regal clothing situate him between courtly society and the wild signaling that he is not wholly uncivil and does embody certain qualities of civilized society.

The strange juxtaposition of contrasting elements in the Green Knight's description continues with the fact that

hade he no helme ne hawberge nauþer

Ne no pysan ne no plate þat pented to armes

Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwue ne to smyte;

Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe

(Þat is grattest in grene when greuez ar bare)

And an ax in his oþer. (ll. 203-8)

His lack of helmet, breast plate, and shield along with the peace offering of the "holyn bobbe" is countered with the axe in his other hand. These contrasts offer a balanced look at how the Green

Knight is both civilized yet has 'gigantic' features that pose a real threat. Here the holly and the axe coexist to reinforce that there is a tempering between violence and peace.

Everything about the Green Knight points to a figure who exists within and also apart from society. In "The Green Knight's Challenge: Heroism and Courtliness in Fitt I of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*" Greg Walker argues that the Green Knight's appearance serves to disrupt "accepted notions of knightliness" through his physical appearance and also through his challenge to the court itself (111). Though the Green Knight claims that he is there to play a "Crystemas gomen" (l. 283), it is less a game than it is a means of revealing the civilized violence of court that is still tied to hypermasculine violence. Arthur, Gawain, and the other knights all see this deadly violence as a game, which may be a product of their military training or suggest that they recognize this type of violence and that containing it within the rules provided makes it less problematic. Still, the court's belief that this is a game reflects the complicated role violence has in society.

The violence between Gawain and the Green Knight reflects the tempering of hypermasculine violence in a court setting. Here are two figures, Gawain and the Green Knight, who have the propensity for hypermasculine violence. Gawain, a knight of the round table and seasoned in the battles of the realm, and the Green Knight, an otherworldly figure who confounds the natural senses of the court with his physical characteristics and comes proposing a violent game. Like the Green Knight's physical and characteristic features, the proposed game is also a mix of the wild and civilized. It is the well-known "cortaysye" of Arthur's court that has drawn the Green Knight to propose the beheading game to them (ll. 263-64). This courtesy is extended to the actual beheading when the Green Knight lets his "naked nec to the note schewe" (l. 420) and prepares to civilly receive Gawain's blow. Rather than attacking the court the Green

Knight's more civilized form of violence is an example of how it is acceptable under rules and order.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight illustrates the cultural effort to tame violence, but it does not fully get rid of it. Violence is a necessary component of medieval society and part of the reason knights exist. It is important to remember that these knights function within dual cultural roles, that of the battlefield and also that of court. Chivalric values are meant to temper the hypermasculine qualities that knights exhibit in military situations with feminine qualities in order to appropriately function in court life. Chivalric values provided order and rules to social problems like violence. Controlling violence, not eliminating it is key to Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman's analysis of Arthurian literature. They explore the social structures of hypermasculine violence and efforts to bring it under control. This can be extended to how that violence occurs and is viewed between the genders. They are more interested in the homosocial structure of relationships between heterosexual men and how it is viewed as "a sexual economy of homosocial desire which attributes far greater value to relationships between men than it does even to the marriage of the king and queen" ("Introduction" 3). "Violence provides the foundation for an elaborate structure of exchange which determines hierarchies among men" (Finke and Shichtman "No Pain, No Gain" 119). These hierarchies are established by competition between men in a variety of ways that can involve domination over those who exhibit less masculine and/or feminine characteristics.

Finke and Shichtman argue that in Malory, Arthur sets up the masculine society of the Round Table as a way to "bring violence under the control of official institutions, not to eliminate it" ("No Pain, No Gain" 120). Controlling violence comes with rules and chivalry and can also be shaped just as masculinity is shaped by societies, history, and other influences. The

rules of courtly love literature, where “sexual economy, aggressive behavior, sexual assertiveness, and menacing speech,” are all instrumental in shaping medieval perceptions of masculinity (Connell and Baswell, quoted in Finke and Shichtman “Introduction” 3). The shaping of that perception still occurs within a structure that has rules and boundaries. This definition does not clearly indicate the moment that masculinity becomes hypermasculinity. I attach to their definition the idea that tendencies associated with masculinity become hypermasculine when they result in excessive actions such as physical brutality and rape. These actions fall outside of civilized rules and laws that are meant to govern and control this violence, all of which are a product of genetic, biological, chemical, and even astral factors as discussed in Chapter One.

There are various combinations of hypermasculine violence that need to be considered. Violence between men is one such example where order and rules are necessary, especially in the case of knights. Let us consider first the duel between Palamon and Arcite in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale.* Both men desire the same woman, Emily, and each is angry that the other will not relinquish his claim. After escaping Theseus's prison the young knights come upon each other in a field. Despite the heat of the moment, they do not abandon civility altogether. Arcite has a sword but will not slaughter his unarmed antagonist who has no armor (ll.1517-1622). Indeed, the next day Arcite brings Palamon a suit of armor so that the duel is civilized. The scene counterpoints civility and incivility. They help each other dress for battle, but there is no exchange of verbal pleasantries. The scene alternates descriptions of civil and uncivil behavior and the bitter rivalry between the two young men (ll. 1649-52). They do not greet each other but each helps the other dress for battle, as “freendly as he were his owene brother” (l. 1652). This civility does not extend into the duel:

> Thou myghtest wene that this Palamon
>
> In his fightyng were a wood leon,
>
> And as a crueel tigre was Arcite;
>
> As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,
>
> That frothen whit as foom for ire wood.
>
> Up at the ancle foghte they in hir blood.
>
> (ll. 1655-60)

The negative descriptions and animal imagery do more than define a battle between fierce foes, they describe men who are mentally unbalanced ("wood") and made savage by anger. The fighting goes beyond the extremes of a duel and into the realm of hypermasculine violence in that it is emotional, exaggerated, and without parameters.

Theseus halts the fight and makes clear that it has gone beyond the bounds of what society permits. He questions Palamon and Arcite's character by asking them "what myster men" they are who "been so hardy for to fighten heere / Withouten juge or oother officere, / As it were in lystes roially" (ll. 1710-13). Theseus indicates that without an official or judge there are no parameters and the duel cannot be legitimate. Theseus orders that the duel take place under his rules as a judge and swears on his "trouthe," as a "knyght" (l. 1855), that he will be an "evene juge" (l. 1864), and whoever wins shall have Emily as their wife (l. 1860). Violence is still a component because one of the young knights must be "deed or taken" (l. 1866) for the other to win. But that violence will now take place under the authority and rules Theseus puts in place, which makes the violence socially acceptable. The descriptions of the two young knights during their duel and the reaction from Theseus points out how complex violence was viewed to be and the need to civilize that type of behavior. Even when violence is a necessary and just reaction, it

needs to be relegated under rules and authority to ensure the control of that type of wild and unbalanced behavior.

To bring this battle into the arena of civilized violence, Theseus chooses a site that reflects variations of gender characteristics and also illustrates the struggle to bring those characteristics and associations under the rules and order of society. The civilized site for this battle is “a noble theatre” where there are “oratories thre” (l.1917), dedicated to Venus, Mars, and Diana, all representing forms, and in some cases extremes, of masculine and feminine characteristics. This is important to illustrate how masculine, hypermasculine, and feminine qualities demonstrate a more balanced space, even in the chaos, that reflects how society and individuals are a combination of gender characteristics. Theseus understands the importance of these combinations and knows that the extremes of hypermasculine characteristics need to be tempered with feminine ones. This is not to say that these combinations are in equal balance. There are infinite combinations of gender characteristics with varying results. Instead we should look at how these combinations create less extreme characteristics like hypermasculinity. Theseus’s temple reflects masculine and feminine characteristics, in the three chosen gods they represent, that when combined create a space incorporating the positive and negative attributes of all.

The chapel of Venus depicts many associations that come with love and what “loves servantz in this lyf enduren” (l. 1923), “[w]roght on the wal, ful pitous to biholde” (l. 1919), and the flattering and unflattering characteristics that accompany those subject to love:

> Pleasance and Hope, Desir, Foolhardynesse,
>
> Beautee and Youthe, Bauderie, Richesse,
>
> Charmes and Force, Lesynges, Flaterye,

Despense, Bisynesse, and Jalousye.

(ll. 1925-28)

What those in love endure represent the range of characteristics and emotions that accompany love. Though love may bring hope, pleasure, and desire, it can also bring flattery, lies, and jealousy, which are represented in specific examples.

These examples of love are classical and biblical figures who have been impacted by love in some way: King Solomon (l. 1942), a man with many wives and concubines; Medea (l. 1944), who kills her children after rejection by Jason; and Narcissus (l. 1941), who falls in love with himself. All of "thise folk so caught were in hir las" (l. 1951). These are not examples of love's triumph but of love twisted in individuals who have been ensnared by love. The characteristics of love that lead individuals to act in certain ways have a variety of culminations. Love does not share power or ensure a positive outcome:

Thus may ye seen that wisdom ne richesse,

Beautee ne sleighte, strengthe ne hardynesse,

Ne may with Venus holde champartie,

For as hir list the world than may she gye.

(ll. 1947-50)

Venus' rule is not influenced by positive or negative attributes; instead her rule is completely at her own pleasure, signifying the pure emotional reaction to her influence on others. These associations are not exclusively masculine or feminine, rather they present a balance that can be associated either gender. Though the icon of the temple is feminine, Venus as a symbol of love has associations with male and female. It does suggest how men and women have different associations with love. Medea's jealousy turns her to murder while Solomon's idea of love is to

improve the number of lovers he has. Jason and Narcissus, both succumb to love in different ways. One major point in illustrating this temple is to show the ways love influences the characteristics of men and women and how those characteristics disrupt accepted social behaviors. These characteristics are a combination of elements. Some may be inherent to the individual, some are affected by the situations they are in, and other influences might be at play as well, such as astrological and physiological. Though we are not given direct reasons for their characteristics, these possible determiners always play a role in how gender is characterized.

In contrast to Venus' temple, Mars may be taken as an emblem of hypermasculinity, and not surprisingly the altar of Mars is decorated with depictions of violence of all kinds that also illustrate social imbalance. Scenes include a "smylere with the knyf under the cloke" (l. 1999) and the "tresoun of the mordrynge in the bedde" (l. 2001) along with other figures who were also under the "infortune of Marte" (l. 2021).[47] Violent images and descriptions mark hypermasculine tendencies, that is, violence that exists outside societal rules. Hiding knives under cloaks and treasonous murder do not reflect the socially controlled violence Theseus wants to enforce but it does reflect both Arcite and Palamon's past behavior. In some depictions, the natural order is upended: a "hunte strangeled with the wilde beres" (l. 2018) and a child eaten by a sow "right in the cradel" (l. 2019). Such violence is feral rather than human, and Mars's association with these images challenges the natural order and it violates the boundaries and rules of the civilized world, upending the normal structure and order, and inviting characters like "Meschaunce," (l. 2009), "Woodnesse," (l. 2011), "Armed Compleint, Outhees, and fiers Outrage" (l. 2012). These characters and images exhibit characteristics associated with hypermasculine personalities and behavior.

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[47] The entire line reads: "Noght was foryeten by the infortune of Marte." The *MED* cites the *Knight's Tale* line A.2021 for the definition (e) "the evil power of a planet."

Hypermasculine characteristics are present in the physical descriptions of Mars himself: Mars "upon a carte stood / Armed, and looked grym as he were wood" (l. 2041-42). He projects a kind of terrifying madness. Earlier, Palamon is described as fighting like a "wood leon" (l. 1656). This phrase anticipates the description of Mars and the animal imagery in Mars's temple. Beside Mars is a wolf with "eyen rede, and of man he eet" (l. 2047). The wolf's red eyes mark the beast as preternaturally savage, especially when paired with the consumption of man. Recall the Green Knight, whose red eyes place him in the untamed category to contrast his civilized characteristics and descriptions. There are no such mitigating features in the case of the wolf and the similarities in the descriptions with Mars are meant to indicate that this untamed violence is dangerous, and deadly, for man.

There is little or no representation of feminine gender or characteristics in Mars's temple. Where Venus's temple shows how different characteristics are influenced or reflective of love, Mars's temple is purely a masculine construct. Furthermore, the masculine associations in Mars's temple are hypermasculine and violent, which threaten the balance of characteristics desired for a functioning society. One might compare Medea's own violence with the depictions of Mars. Though her violence is not hypermasculine, it is a product of her jealousy, an unproductive and threatening characteristic that does lead to Jason's murder. Still, these temples illustrate how these influences affect characteristics and actions while acknowledging the existence of these extremes, which Mars's temple represents in actions and characteristics that need to be regulated under the rules and law of civilization.

As with Mars, Diana's temple too implies imbalance, though of a different sort, which is represented by nature, sexuality and birth. There are painted hunting scenes and figures "of shamefast chastitee" (l. 2055). The depictions of two are related to rape, Callisto (l. 2056), who is

turned into a bear after Jupiter rapes, and Daphne, who is turned into a tree (l. 2062) after running from Apollo. The imbalance in punishment for these women is displayed in the temple and contrasts a society that does not punish victims or in other cases banish sexual relations altogether; it regulates those relations to achieve a balance between the extremes of heightened sensuality and frigidity. Diana, in some cases, takes “vengeance” (l. 2066) out on those who anger her, such as “Attheon,” devoured by his own hounds after Diana turned him into a hart for seeing her “al naked” (ll. 2065-67). His situation, though different from that of Callisto and Daphne, also reflects an imbalance in punishment and is similar to the violence depicted in Mars’s temple.

In other representations Diana is “Lucyna” the goddess of birth. A woman in childbirth looks up to Diana and seeks her help:

> A womman travaillynge was hire biforn;
>
> But for hir child so longe was unborn,
>
> Ful pitously Lucyna gan she calle
>
> And seyde, “Help, for thou mayst best of all!
>
> (l. 2083-86)

This woman seeks Diana’s help in her time of struggle, a stark contrast to Venus and Mars who are the associated with chaotic depictions in their temples. Diana’s temple suggests flux: “the woman struggling in childbirth, the downward movement of Diana’s eyes toward the underworld” (Harrison 109). But Diana is called upon to help in tumultuous times like this one, placing order back in a life threatening episode.

Each temple reflects direct or implied characteristics, through reference to stories, actions, and descriptions and, as a whole, represents Theseus’s “moral vision” of how Venus, Mars, and Diana relate to Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye (Gaylord 174-5). The characteristics and

associations of Venus and Mars "are exclusively the unhealthy aspects of those gods as figured within the temple of the 'theater' built at Athens" (Gaylord 175). The three altars parallel the characteristics displayed by the three characters who are most affected, Arcite and Palamon, who are embroiled in love and war as part of Venus and Mars's influence, and Emelye, who is the chaste acolyte of Diana. It is through these descriptions and actions that we can discern how certain characteristics must come together to reveal a more balanced whole, even if that entire whole is not reflective of complete balance. The goal is not to depict perfection, rather to illustrate how some extremes manifest in society and what civil rules and order do to bring them under control.

The ways in which society brings characteristics to order and control is what Emelye struggles with as her desires and what society, and the gods, has deemed appropriate for her are conflicting. Emelye prays to Diana specifically appealing to her chaste qualities and asks for help revealing that she does not want a life with either Palamon or Arcite.

> Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
>
> Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
>
> Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
>
> I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,
>
> A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,
>
> And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
>
> And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe.
>
> Noght wol I knowe compaignye of man.
>
> (ll. 2304-11)

Emelye prays to the goddess who most represents chastity, but who also has imbalanced characteristics just as she herself has. Emelye wants to be chaste and also wants to maintain her love of hunting and being in the wild. These characteristics are not necessarily incongruent, but they do indicate contrasting elements of society and civility, chastity, and of the wild and untamed. This separates her from common social structures for women, being a wife and mother, and aligns her with the wilderness, which is a contrast to what Diana is about to reveal to her about her future.

Emelye's future also represents a balance or compromise of sorts. She cannot fully get her wish to remain a maiden, outside of society and within the wilderness. Just as Diana represents wilderness in some respects, she also maintains a part of societal responsibility in her status as birth goddess. Emelye lights two fires on the altar representing both Palamon and Arcite and prays that their affections be turned elsewhere or be sent "hym that moost desireth" her (ll. 2325). Both fires are extinguished and only one is rekindled (ll. 2331-36) signifying that one will remain for her to wed. The significance of them both being extinguished could symbolize that their attraction to Emelye based on sexual desire is being extinguished (O'Brien 162) and one will rekindle his love in a pure form. Though Emelye's wish is to remain a "mayden" and not a "wyf," Diana appears and delivers the decree from the "goddes hye" (l. 2349) that Emelye will marry one of the young men (ll. 2346-2352). Not the balance or outcome Emelye wanted. The manifestations of Venus and Mars in both Palamon and Arcite will be quenched because violence has been brought to order within this temple that evokes a balance of these extreme characteristics that they display.

But what is that balance? Emelye does not get her ultimate desire to remain chaste and unwed. She compromises and asks that the winner of the duel be the young knight who loves her

most. Diana does not grant her wish; instead the compromise that is suggested resembles a form of balance within society. One can argue that these rules are patriarchal and do not benefit women, after all Theseus did conquer a tribe of self-governing women and has taken the queen as his wife and is deciding the fate of Emelye, so we need to be truthful about the social gender roles, which is that female agency was complicated and, at times, still subject to patriarchal control. Still, in comparison to the other two temples, Diana best represents an extension of society in Theseus's image. Together, the temples "represent natural and potentially destructive aspects of the soul, but joined together (in the theater which they are parts) they suggest a broad picture of human nature as an ordered, balanced whole—in wholeness which has harmony and stability" (McCall 64). They represent the balance of these characteristics that when taken alone, can have a multitude of outcomes and influences. In the temple violence and desire are contained and mitigated through compromises. It is the appropriate arena for the violent and lovestruck Palamon and Arcite to fight over Emelye.

The duel between Palamon and Arcite highlights the complicated duality of violence and chivalric behaviors suited to the battlefield and to the court. A knight must be able to exist in both contexts. But what kind of behavior does a knight who is hypermasculine display? To answer this we first need to define what some of the qualities are of a medieval knight and the contrast between uncivilized and civilized violence. Richard Kaeuper argues that violence is present within the initial construction of the knightly class:

> in the [later] Middle Ages one of the greatest threats to the peace of the realm came from the day-to-day conduct of the knightly classes whose tendency to violent self-help was often proudly proclaimed and recognized as a right, rather than condemned as a crime…. In fact, these lords and gentlemen who were especially in France possessors of extensive

> rights of justice, and who even in England exercised wide authority either in their own name or as agents of the king, were all too frequently themselves plunderers, bandits, arsonists, slayers." (Kaueper qtd. in Zeikowitz 18)

The function of the knight was born out of violence, a need for nobles to maintain a presence without really being present by having surrogates, knights, collect taxes and maintain a police presence (Haidu 51-2). It wasn't until later that the church got involved indicating that male "violence needed to be controlled if Christian society was to flourish peacefully" (Bennett 72). Certainly the discussion about the problems knights pose to society led to various suggestions on how that violence could be controlled. The knight of the medieval world was sometimes considered a brute and medieval literature reflected that possible construction. Hypermasculine qualities were certainly beneficial on the battlefield, but not at court or when dealing with the public, which is when those qualities become problematic. Medieval literary representations of knights often displayed a mix of feminine and masculine characteristics to demonstrate compositions that make an ideal member of society. The real brutality of knights had to be tempered with civilizing behavior to control their predilection for violence; the knight had to be made to function as a military figure and as a civilized member of court.[48]

Jorge Abril-Sánchez argues that medieval stories of chivalry and knights were not a "soothing form of escapism" (21). Instead, they were an institutional endeavor to model knights as chivalrous beings (21-22), to define an ideal in the intersection between chivalry and violence. Historically, the knight is a militant figure fighting for a lord, protecting the noble's possessions

[48] In *Chaucer and Clothing: Clerical and Academic Costume in the General Prologue and the Canterbury Tales*, Laura F. Hodges notes that in medieval romance, the chivalric qualities of a knight were shown in their style of attire during ceremonies and other events that expressed a notion of how outside representation was thought to be internalized by the knight (1-5). A knight presenting himself at a ceremonial gathering offers the civilized portion of the figure that, one hopes, spills into the military field where chivalry dictates violence be tamed, and its rules abided.

and land. Abril-Sánchez traces chivalry's origins back to ancient Rome when "privileged groups were given the name of *equites* and they participated in the conquering campaigns of the empire riding their mounts" (22). "In the 9th century, the oath taken by a knight was central to the emergence of chivalry in Western Europe as this social contract was the agreement that cemented the military service of medieval knights to their feudal lord, or *seigneur"* (Abril-Sánchez 23-4). "Thanks to his prominence, the knight went from being a simple constituent of the structure of the army to the main heroic model of many soldiers" (Abril-Sánchez 25). The esteem in which people held these figures is the basis of Abril-Sánchez's argument for the inclusion of chivalry in Arthurian literature and nationalistic literature such as Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (21-22). But medieval perceptions of knights were not this simple. I believe there is ample evidence to suggest a duality in the figure of the knight, one making the knight an exemplar of violence, which is why Chaucer and other medieval authors bring this problem up in many of their works.

One example of the duality of knights and how hypermasculine violence can end badly is evident in both the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur.* In them, the rivalry between King Arthur and his nephew Mordred highlight the hypermasculine violence between knights and the undoing of a society. In contrast to the *Knight's Tale,* civility and society are completely undone when hypermasculine violence is displayed and with the lack of a mitigating figure like Theseus. Arthur, who may seem the likely person to take up that role is bitterly embroiled in the hypermasculine violence that is heightened by his familial ties. Mordred usurps the rule of Arthur detailing the difficulties of familial ties in ruling.

The language used in both texts detect how Mordred and Arthur's personal ties intensifies their violence for each other. Their hypermasculine violence goes beyond the mere

battlefield associations with knights. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* Arthur uses language of family ties and blood bonds to ensure Mordred's loyalty to him:

> Thou art my nevew full ner, my nurre[49] of old,
>
> That I have chastised and chosen, a child of my chamber;
>
> For the sibreden[50] of me, forsake not this office;
>
> That thou ne work my will, thou wot what it menes
>
> (ll. 689-92)

By using the language of bonds, Arthur tries to ensure that Mordred will rule loyally while Arthur is away and that he will "forsake not this office." But it also suggests that the violence they will exact will have that personal association. In the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*,

> He hit Mordred amid the breste
>
> And out at the backe bone him bore;
>
> Ther hath Mordred his life lost,
>
> That speche spake he never more;
>
> Then keenly up his arm he cast
>
> And gave Arthur a wounde sore,
>
> Into the hede through the helm and the crest,
>
> That three times he swooned there.
>
> (ll. 3392-99)

The description goes beyond identifying the point of death for both Mordred and Arthur. The emotional tie the two have heightens the violence and their killing of each other. Arthur's death

[49] Gloss in Benson and Foster's edition reads "nursling."
[50] Gloss in Benson and Foster's edition reads "blood relationship to."

blow pierces through Mordred's chest with such force that it exits through the back. Mordred, with the last of his strength strikes through Arthur's helmet delivering a fatal blow. Yes, these could be attributed to other battle depictions associated with knights, but the hypermasculine violence is tinged with the personal betrayal and hatred for one another.

Not all the hypermasculine violence is displayed on the battlefield, which could be seen as a ordered and civil endeavor. The battlefield is meant to contain such violence as opposed to the violence occurring within societal structures like the court. In the *Alliterative,* before his death, Arthur orders Mordred's children with Guinevere to be "slely slain and slongen in waters" (ll. 4320-1). It reveals a preoccupation with a sullied line of succession, especially with Arthur's impeding death and lack of an heir. Mordred's laying with Guinevere and producing an heir, something that is uncivil and outside the normal rules and order of the court, is also an example of hypermasculine violence, especially if we consider that Mordred may have possibly raped Guinevere.

Arthur's decree to murder Mordred's children and the familial strife that extends to the battlefield is beyond the normal parameters of what society dictates. The variety of elements that add to a hypermasculine reading, Mordred's usurpation and marrying/rape of Guinevere, illegitimate children, and the murder of those children, that heighten the masculine violence of the battlefield. In contrast to Thesesus's temple and his role as judge that brings violence under control, there is no order in the violence between Arthur and Mordred, and the court is left to suffer the consequences.

Mordred and Arthur's hypermasculine violence illustrates the problem it poses between two knights and how it affects the court, but also how women can be victimized by that violence. There are other examples of male hypermasculine violence in which women are the main object

and victim. Among them are giants, the uncivilized, brutish, and often violent exaggerations of the purely masculine identity. Giants in medieval literature, through physical descriptions and narrated actions, represent forms of hypermasculine threats. They pose threats of rape and of murder; threats to the fabric of society. They serve as an exaggerated depiction of how medieval society understood the problems with excessive masculine behavior and actions. Though there are degrees and combinations, these figures highlight a medieval view of hypermasculine gender characteristics.

Giants in literature often represent a monstrous counter, in size and in action, to order and civilization. In many cases they are dealers of death. Polyphemus, the Cyclops from Homer's *Odyssey*, exemplifies the uncivilized monster who threatens society. The land of the Cyclops is described as "uncivilized" and "fierce" with "no assemblies for making of laws, or any settled customs" (142).[51] The Cyclops live on an island, remote and removed from the social interaction that leads to civilized behavior. The lack of laws and order, as well as traditions that hold together a culture, contextualize the definition of what 'uncivilized' means, but it does not solely suggest a danger to civilized society. Civilization comes under threat when Odysseus and his men are directly faced with Polyphemus, who tears apart a few of the men and eats them to the horror of the rest of the Greeks (147). When the Greeks enter the land they bring expectations of civilized behavior along with them and most certainly do not get that. Polyphemus's devouring of the Greeks is a different level of uncivilized, more than just lack of rules, and reflects a real danger to the civilized world. Giants who eat men are somewhat similar to Mars's wolf who also eats men. Both figures represent the contrast to civilized rules, but the giants are more similar to humans. The wolf exists outside the parameters of society, but the giant haunts those boundaries

[51] All references to Homer's *Odyssey* are from Penguin Classics edition translated by E. V. Rieu.

with his physical similarity to humans and his language. Those similarities make his violence even more reprehensible and hypermasculine.

There are later depictions of giants that threaten the very existence of society. John Mandeville offers the following (Asma 90-91):

> And byyonde that valey is a gret ile wher that peple ben as gret as gyauntes of 28 other 30 foot longe. And they have no clothyng but beestes skynnes. And tho ete no breed but raw flessh, and drynketh mylke, and they eteth gladloker flessh of men than of other. And men sayde that byyonde that yle was another yle wher beth gretter gyauntz, for they beth of 45 other 50 foot longe, and som seyde of 50 cubites longe, but Y sey hem noght. (ll. 2524-29).

Here, giants are isolated from normative human society. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explains that giants, in the English Middle Ages, signify "those dangerous excesses of the flesh that the process of masculine embodiment produces in order to forbid; [the giant] functions at the same time to celebrate the pleasures of the body, to indulge in wine and food and sex" (*Of Giants* xiii). In Mandeville's description, the giants lack clothing, but we do not know for certain what the "beast's skins" cover. The "beast's skins" suggest that the giants exist outside the normative human realm identified not only by their uncivilized dress but also their diet of raw flesh. Giants offer an exaggerated look at how the hypermasculine figure "can consume everything with its appetite and 'produce nothing' while devouring everything" (Cohen, *Of Giants* 66). Though not all characters who possess hypermasculine characteristics consume in the same way as giants, the problem and threat that hypermasculinity poses to society is one that can include appetite that lays waste to the rules and structure of society.

The appetite for destruction heightens the giant's hypermasculine profile. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, a giant from Spain, monstrous in size, is known for eating knights "while they [are] still half alive" (165, l. 38; p. 224). Beduerus, one of Arthur's knights, scales the mountain and finds a woman who implores him to leave or the "foul monster will devour" him (165, ll. 56-7).[52] This appetite is clearly destructive and as such it is antisocial. The giant's lack of a name, he is simply called the Giant of Mont-Saint-Michel, also identifies his existence outside of society in what Cohen argues reflects a disrespect of "the privacy of other bodies in the world" and an identity that is "not relational or communal" (*Of Giants* 68). In a way, the giant exhibits dual citizenship, he is separated and segregated yet at the same time is part of the society by his intrusion and violence against it. Another monster of this kind is Grendel in the Old English *Beowulf.* Grendel, separated from the community, is aware of its members and commits violence against them. His reasons are unclear but revolve around his disdain for society as well as his wish to be a part of it. Being ostracized from society furthers the destructive appetites of these monstrous figures and, in this case, manifests as a violent consumption and murder of those in that society.

Appetite of course is not limited to ingestion. There is also sexual desire that is monstrous, and the Giant of Mont-Saint-Michel has that appetite as well. An old woman whom Beduerus finds near the giant's lair informs him that she has buried a nobleman's niece who died because she had "felt in her most tender heart such terror at his wicked embraces" (165, ll. 61-62).[53] The giant intended to rape the young niece and when "he could not inflict his foul desires

[52] The entire line reads: "I pity you, I pity you, because tonight the foul monster will devour you, in the flower of your youth." The Latin is as follows: "Miseret me tui, miseret, quia tam detestabile monstrum florem iuuentutis tuae in hac nocte consumet" (165, ll. 56-7).

[53] Latin is as follows: "recepto infra tenerrimum pectus timore dum eam nefandus ille amplecteretur" (165, ll. 61-2). Neil Wright's translation adds that the niece "breathed her last" after "wicked embraces," which most likely emphasizes that the young girl died before being raped and specifically from the threat of being raped. This is

on her" he raped the nurse (165, ll. 64-65). The threat and act of rape is such a horror to women that just the threat can cause death. The fear of rape may be amplified for a young woman, and especially for the niece if we imagine her to have been a virgin. The nurse, assumed to be older and possibly not a virgin, endures the repeated rape of the giant. The giant's rape presents us with a hypermasculine threat against female virginity and the protections societies put in place to help protect against this type of threat. Rape and the male threat against female virginity is a matter that will be discussed later.

In other treatments of the Giant of St. Michel, the rapist is identified as a monstrous "other." In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* a Templar knight tells Arthur about

> A grete giaunt of Gene, engendered of fendes;
>
> He has freten of folk mo than five hundreth,
>
> And als fele fauntekins of free-born childer.
>
> (ll. 833-5)
>
> ...
>
> The duchess of Bretain today has he taken,
>
> Beside Reines as sho rode with her rich knightes,
>
> Led her to the mountain there that lede lenges
>
> To lie by that lady ay whiles her life lastes.
>
> (ll. 852-5)

Again, the giant is identified as a killer, and "eater" of children. He has abducted the duchess with whom he intends to "lie" (i.e., rape) until she dies. Identifying the rapist as a monstrosity clearly condemns rape as antisocial behavior outside normative social practice and outside the

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supported in the Latin: "foedo coitu suo deturpare nequiuit, detestanda uenere succensus michi inuitae" (165, ll. 64-65) which I have provided as evidence.

parameters of a functioning courtly society. The giant, an exaggerated and hideous figure, is the ultimate example of hypermasculine behavior as a threat to society.

It is easy to identify how giants fit into a category of species who embody non-normative societal aspects. Their size, physical features, and violent actions are rife with monstrous characteristics and hypermasculine threats to humanity. But these imagined figures are a hyper-extension of more realistic male characters who exhibit different or more subdued, but no less dangerous and problematic, hypermasculine violence. This is clearly evident when dealing with rape in medieval literature. Rape for the Giant of Mont-Saint-Michel is mingled with appetite for destruction toward humanity in general. He eats men and women and rapes women. In other examples from medieval literature, rape is caught up with the ideals of courtly love, class, and appetite for desire.

An example of how rape is entangled with courtly love, appetite, and involving people of the lower classes is depicted in the French pastourelles, usually a knight who attacks a young peasant woman. Typically, the man begins by trying to seduce her with "flowery language of courtly love" but then "fails, and rapes her instead" (Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," 334). Andreas Capellanus provides a perception of that social circumstance suggesting that a higher born man should feel free to take a lower born woman as a lover, and Capellanus even recommends "rape to the reader of *De amore rusticorum* if he should happen to feel attracted to a peasant woman" (Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," 333).[54] Capellanus says:

> But if love of their women perchance should attract you, remember to carry them away with abundant praise, and if you find a suitable spot, do not hesitate to take what you

[54] Capellanus explains that the ideal courtly love paradigm is of a man who is in total submission to a woman of higher social status and that peasants are incapable of knowing love.

> sought and seize it in violent embrace.[55] For with difficulty will you be able to soften their rigor on the outside so much that they will agree to grant tranquil embraces, or allow you to have the desired solace, unless a fitting cure of their modesty by means of at least moderate compulsion comes first.[56] (4) We say these things not as though to persuade you to desire the love of country women, but so that if you should be stirred to love them with little foresight, you might learn with brief instruction what procedure you should follow. (quoted in Paden *The Medieval Pastourelle Volume 1* 55)[57]

Kathryn Gravdal adds that the "simple songs narrate the same event again and again: a knight is riding down the road when he sees a lovely shepherdess ("pastourelle") singing all alone. But the bucolic mode is then interrupted by an act of violence that is startling in the context of the pastoral tradition: rape" (Gravdal "Camouflaging Rape," 361). Gravdal suggests that the picturesque quality of the pastourelle setting is disrupted by the violence of rape that does not happen the same way in reality. But the point is that any setting can be disrupted by hypermasculine violence or rape. There may be different attitudes toward that upset, but the fact is that it is antithetical to what social rules and structures dictate.

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[55] John Jay Parry's translation is as follows: "do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force" (150).

[56] John Jay Parry's translation is as follows: "use a little compulsion as a convenient cure for their shyness" (150).

[57] I have included the Latin text that Paden cites before his translation as consultation since John Jay Parry has translations that vary in the previous two footnotes. I do not use the Latin text of Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love* through the rest of my dissertation and rely on Parry's translation. Si vero et illarum te feminarum amor forte attraxerit, eas pluribus laudibus efferre memento, et, si locum inveneris opportunum, non differas assumere, quod petebas et violento potiri amplexu. Vix enim ipsarum in tantum exterius poteris mitigare rigorem, quod quietos fateantur se tibi concessuras amplexus vel optata patiantur te habere solatia, nisi modicae saltem coactionis medela praecedat ipsarum opportuna pudoris. (4) Haec autem dicimus non quasi rusticanarum mulierum tibi svadere volentes amorem, sed ut, si minus provide ad illas provoceris amandum, brevi possis doctrina cognoscere, quies tibi sit processus habendus. (qtd. in Paden *The Medieval Pastourelle Volume 1* 54)

Furthermore, beyond the natural setting and beautiful scenery there is an active disruption by the rapist himself, which is suggested by Capellanus. Capellanus suggests using perfumed language and "abundant praise" that mitigates any social responsibility that the man might have because his praise indicates he is entitled to her sexually. Although a man might soften the woman's "rigor" so that she might agree to his "embraces," the intent of rape is clear. Furthermore, in discouraging men of the upper class from desiring "country women," Andreas suggests that such women are only desirable in that they can satisfy men sexually.

The following pastourelle reflects the advice of Capellanus:

"Bergiere, or est ensi:

fols sui qant plus vos pri,

c'ainz nul n'en vi joïr

de longe roterie."

Lors la trais pres de mi;

ele geta un cri

c'unques nuns ne l'oï.

(ll. 53-61) (*The Medieval Pastourelle Volume 1* 62)

'Now, shepherdess, this is how it is:

I'm a fool to beg you any more,

For I've never seen anyone who enjoyed

A long melody played on the rote."

Then I drew her near me;

She gave out a cry

But no one ever heard it.

(ll. 53-61) (*The Medieval Pastourelle Volume 1* 63)

This directly relates to Capellanus's permission to take sex from a peasant girl. Here, there is a preceding moment where the knight tries to convince her and even begs her for sex. In the end, the young girl compliments the knight and according to Gravdal it signifies a definite distinction between real rape and "its literary portrayal" that allows for the examination of the connection between a "historical institution and its literary depiction" (*Ravishing Maidens* 15). More importantly, this scene resembles how the intent of rape is the dominant hypermasculine issue.

Flowery language and praise is not always a precursor to rape. In the Old French pastourelle *Perrins D'Angeco*, the knight tries persuasion, but when that fails he moves to direct possession and rape:

Mult longuement l'alai proiant,
que riens n'i conquis;
estroitement tout en riant
par les flans la pris:
sus l'erbe la souvinai,
mult en fu en grand esmai,
si haut a crie
'bele douce mere de,
gardez moi ma chastee.'
Tant i luitai que j'achevai
trestout mon desir;

(Bartsch, 3:42, 28-38)[58]

[58] *Perrins D'Angeco* appears in Bartsch on page 295-96.

“I went on pleading with her for a long time, but got nowhere; laughing all the while, I took her tightly by the hips: I pushed her back on the grass; she was in great terror, and began to cry out: 'Dear sweet Mother of God, protect my chastity.' I struggled until I accomplished everything I wanted to do” (translation qtd. in Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens,* 107). The knight initially tries to maintain the rules and structure of courtly love (which has a kind of social sanction) but moves to rape when his desires are not given into. His violent, hypermasculine side takes over, turning simple passion into domination. Much like the battlefield, this scene represents what the winner can do in terms of overtaking and conquering. Instead of a love match, it is about overcoming the enemy.

In one pastourelle dated around 1165-1210 and attributed to Jean Bodel, a knight goes after a wolf that has stolen a sheep from a shepherdess when she promises her “maidenhead” (l. 24) if he kills the wolf. He does and comes back for his reward, she scorns him and he rapes her: “Fis en ma volenté / tant que j’oi a planté / de li en petit d’ore”; “I had my way / Until I got plenty / Of her in a short time” (ll. 65-67) (qtd. in Paden *The Medieval Pastourelle Volume 1* 72-3). In this pastourelle, the young maiden is betrothed to another young man who is waiting for her. Before she can reach her betrothed, Robin, the knight rapes her and she yells out: “Robins trop demore!”; “Robin's waiting too long!” (l. 64). Her cry could refer to the idea that her lover is expecting her and possibly is looking for her or that he has waited too long to come and find her and prevent the rape. When Robin does appear he blames the young maiden (ll. 76-78).: “Conchiez sui, / si fail a covenance; / tu as fait autre ami!” (“I am shat upon, / And I've lost what I was promised; / You've taken another lover”). What he was promised, one assumes, is a virgin wife and now he feels deceived (l. 80). Robin assumes that she is the one to blame and that

instead of rape, she has initiated or accepted consensual sex. Here, the young maiden is victimized twice, by the initial rape and then again by her betrothed blaming her.

The violence of such aggression is made even more clear in another Old French pastourelle in which the knight takes the maiden by force after she refuses his advances and promises:

> Quant je vi ke por proier
> ne por prometre juel
> ne la poroie plaixier,
> k'en feisse mon avel,
> jetai lai en mi l'erboie;
> ne cuit pais k'elle ait grant joie,
> ains sospire,
> ces poins tort, ces chavols tire
> et quiert son eschaipement,
>
> (Bartsch, 2:17, 34-42)[59]

“When I saw that neither by my pleas nor my promises of jewels could I please her, whatever my whims, I threw her down on the grass; she did not imagine she was to have great pleasure, but sighed, clenched her fists, tore her hair, and tried to escape” (translation quoted from Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens,* 110-11). This last part of the description progresses from her resigning herself to the rape to attempting to escape. It is clear that his displeasure with her refusal to accept his gifts only furthers the belief in his own mind that he is already entitled to her sexually, which relates to Capellanus' advice of taking what he came for when she refuses.

[59] This untitled Old French poem appears on pages 128-29 in Bartsch.

Pastourelles depict different scenarios for rape, but they do not remark on the social problems that rape poses. There is no retribution against the man and there is no justice for the woman. Chaucer improves this outcome by telling a tale that doesn't end with a rape but begins with one, the *Wife of Bath's Tale.* Perhaps the most well-known analogue of the pastourelle rape initiates the plot of the *Wife of Bath's Tale.* A knight finds near a river a maiden "walkyng hym biforn" (l. 886) and by "verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed" (l. 888). The demand for justice was overwhelming:

> For which oppressioun was swich clamour
> And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour
> That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,
> By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed
> Paraventure swich was the statut tho.
>
> (ll. 889-93)

The royal court cries out against this injustice, making it not only a crime against the young maiden but against society too. The crime is so serious that the knight is sentenced to death, a decision that shows rape to be a crime against not only an individual person but against society itself. But in a surprising turn of events the knight is saved by the queen, who becomes the instigator of his rehabilitation (ll. 889-98). The queen poses a question to the knight, "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren?" (l. 905). If the knight can come up with an "answere suffisant" within a "twelf-month and a day" (l. 909-10), then the queen will spare his life. After finding many insufficient answers, the knight comes upon the "loathly lady" who strikes a deal with him. She tells the knight that she will inform him of the answer if he agrees to do the "next thyng" that she will require of him (l. 1010). The knight accepts her conditions. The answer will

save his life but not rehabilitate him. It is in honoring the loathly lady's request that he may fully be integrated back into society. Through this promise, the knight is compelled to marry the lady and enters into a union that will redress the balance of masculine and feminine traits. By accepting submission to her the knight acknowledges the importance of feminine sovereignty of self. His submission could be read as a feminine characteristic and intended to counter-balance the hypermasculine tendency that led to the rape that begins the tale. The knight's lust is not the problem and does not need to be fully vanquished by way of execution or castration. Instead, the knight's lust needs to be exercised in a socially acceptable way and such rehabilitation is a possibility. As with Palamon and Arcite in the *Knight's Tale*, lust and sex are not the enemy: how they may turn into violence is the problem. We can also read his acquiescence to his wife as an acknowledgement that the feminine perspective, which the loathly lady eloquently explains to him, is productive and can improve the quality of his life. Justice comes in the form of the knight's submission to feminine authority and understanding the problems with hypermasculine actions.

The Wife of Bath underscores rape as an illicit exercise of male domination of women. In ancient days the rapists were elves and other inhuman beings. Currently it is friars who rob maidens of their virginity, a dishonor that has economic and social implications.

> “For ther as wont to walken was an elf
>
> Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
>
> In undermeles and in morwenynges,
>
> And seyth his matins and his hooly thynges
>
> As he gooth in his lymytacioun.
>
> Wommen may go saufly up and doun.

In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour."

(ll. 873-81)

The Wife of Bath identifies the danger that women face is that of dishonor through the violation of rape. The elves and fairies have all gone, but men (friars) pose the same danger.

The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is in part about the rehabilitation of the rapist knight, something that will be explored more deeply in Chapter Four. It explores socially acceptable behavior that does not eliminate male sexual aggression or stifle male libido but argues, as in the *Knight's Tale,* that male aggression and hypermasculinity need to be channeled and controlled. In the *Knight's Tale* Theseus confines violence to the arena and imposes rules that serve to keep hypermasculine characteristics under control. The Wife of Bath describes a feminine control of the hypermasculine characteristics to bring back balance.

There are, of course, gray areas where hypermasculine violence, sex, and rape are not as clear as in Monmouth, the pastourelles, and the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and need to be more carefully analyzed. In the *Reeve's Tale,* rape and violence is complicated by both intent of the perpetrators and reception of the victims. Non-violent assault is still considered a form of rape and still problematic for society. Literal rape would have been extremely problematic in medieval society because it threatened women with respect both to their health and to their virtue. In the *Reeve's Tale*, the Reeve describes a miller who embodies hypermasculine brutish qualities in response to the victimization of his wife and daughter and two clerks who demonstrate the intent of rape no matter the outcome.

Though the miller in the *Reeve's Tale* and the Miller of the *General Prologue* are not associated with rape, they are associated with hypermasculine qualities and actions. Recall the descriptions of the millers above. They are described as brutish and prone to bullying and violence. The miller in the *Reeve's Tale* is also a "Theef he was for sothe of corn and mele" (l. 3939). As in the case of giants and rapists, thieves also operate outside of social rules and laws. Millers were often associated with thievery of grain and tricking their customers, a common characterization of them in medieval society (Langdon 243-44). Aleyn and John, two clerks, believe the miller, Symkyn, has stolen their grain and they will be viewed as fools by society by being duped (ll. 4110-111). Aleyn and John discuss the legal options they have:

> For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus:
>
> That gif a man in a point be agreved,
>
> That in another he sal be releved.
>
> Oure corn is stoln, sothly, it is na nay,
>
> And we han had an il fit al this day;
>
> And syn I sal have neen amendment
>
> Agayn my los, I will have esement.
>
> (ll. 4180-86)

Aleyn climbs into the miller's daughters bed with the intent of raping her but the tale makes no mention of her resistance (ll. 4193-97) and afterward she calls him "deere lemman" (l. 4240) and tells him the whereabouts of some cakes that were made with their stolen grain (ll. 4241-4248). John tricks the miller's wife into joining him in bed where she consents to sex with John thinking he is her husband (ll. 4228-4231). In retaliation, the miller takes violent action against the two clerks. He grabs one of the clerks by the "throte-bolle" (l. 4273) and "on the nose he smoot hym

with his fest" so hard that down "ran the blody streem upon his brest; / … with nose and mouth to broke" (ll. 4275-77).

Both the clerks and Symkyn's violence is outside the bounds of civility and order, all a definite hypermasculine response. The clerks mean to circumvent the laws and take matters into their own hands. Symkyn takes vengeance on the two clerks and does not allow the systems in place to judge and sentence them. It is also problematic that Aleyn and John intend to rape the two women, and in the case of the miller's wife, she does not give consent to John. Ultimately, the miller and the two clerks employ hypermasculine responses that threaten the well-being of the women involved. That is not to say that violence was never an answer to some situations, only that when it occurs outside the bounds of normal civilization and rules it is uncivilized, wild, and dangerous. Appropriate responses would include lawful avenues to seek justice from the two men who perpetrated the offenses against the miller. These scenes complicate the previous views of rape where it is clear that the women were unwilling partners. Here, the narrative is not clear on the violence within the sex act itself. What is clear is the hypermasculine responses of both the clerks and the miller. Though it may seem the clerks are not outright rapists, does their intent suggest otherwise and suggest hypermasculine tendencies? I believe it is clear that they intended to rape these women, a hypermasculine response in itself, no matter the narrative outcome.

The problem with women being duped into sex thinking they are laying with their husband is not an uncommon theme and brings up whether this is acquiescence or a form of rape. In the Arthurian tales, rape is a recurring topic and is the very reason for Arthur's conception. In Malory's version of the tales, Uther Pendragon's desire for the duke of Cornwall's wife, Igrayne, drives him to pursue her. Igrayne, "a passyng good woman...wold not assente unto the kynge"

(Book 1, Lines 10-11). Uther makes a deal with Merlin, who disguises Uther as the duke of Cornwall to trick Igrayne into bedding him. Merlin's only demand is that the child that Igrayne shall give birth to from their union must be turned over to him. Uther agrees and sleeps with Igrayne, who believes that Uther is her husband (1, ll. 30-44). The story of Arthur is, as Finke and Shictman observe, "'structured by rape': Arthur is conceived through rape and Mordred's rape of Guinevere ends Arthur's career and life" ("The Mont St. Michel Giant: Sexual Violence and Imperialism in the Chronicles of Wace and Laȝamon" 63). Uther's hypermasculine qualities are numerous: he wages war, commits rape and does so by practicing deceit. The latter is not exclusive to men, of course women practice deceit. But when paired with rape, the deceit becomes hypermasculine as well. All this happens because he presumes that Igrayne is his to take, ultimately making Igrayne a spoil of a war won, and a victim of hypermasculine behavior.

This idea of women as spoils of war and victims of hypermasculine behavior is also treated in Malory, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*. According to Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman the struggle between Mordred and Arthur and the rape of Guinevere do more than suggest that chivalry is a fiction and that violence is a direct result of that fiction (Finke and Shictman, "Introduction" 3). It also identifies hypermasculine violence as a recurrent behavioral problem amongst knights. [60] Violence sets up a hierarchy between men who participate in the social structure that "functions as a form of what anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital, a system of social exchange in which such intangibles as prestige, status, social control--and in this case violence--serve as institutionalized (if unspoken) means of acquiring economic wealth" (Finke and Shichtman, "No Pain, No Gain" 119). This violence is exhibited between knights in a variety of ways, such as the competitive battles

[60] Finke and Shichtman use hypermasculinity as a term to specifically describe the violence of the Arthurian court.

between knights for recognition by their king ("No Pain, No Gain" 120), or in duels with knights from other realms. This violence is meant to occur in the arena of the court, "under the control of official institutions," though it does end up reinforcing the "chaos it is designed to hold at bay" ("No Pain, No Gain" 119). This type of violence can be extended to father and son rivalries that are also hypermasculine, as in the case of Arthur and Mordred. Still, hypermasculine violence is often exacted against women, or over a woman, sometimes even when it is between men.

In Finke and Shichtman's discussion, violence is relegated to violence between men, sometimes over a woman, sometimes to win recognition by their king. Often this is part of the genre. For example, in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* romance functions "as a carrier of an ideology which endorses a particular sexual economy of violent exchange in which masculinity is built around the continual circulation of women and wealth as rewards" (Finke and Shichtman, "No Pain, No Gain" 117). Though Finke and Shichtman's analysis is interesting, and while it does identify the correlation of hypermasculinity with violence, it does not fully address the medieval definition or societal impact of hypermasculinity. It is more than about wealth and rewards, it is about power and dominance, which act against those who are more submissive, no matter the gender. Finke and Shichtman's analysis also does not consider the problematic gender characteristics that accompany hypermasculinity. The violence of rape is only one aspect and what also needs to be considered is the threat to society of a variety of characters, all of which demonstrate different levels and combinations of hypermasculine characteristics.

Though rape is only one aspect of how hypermasculine men attain control and power, it provides a compelling example on the aristocratic side, especially when dealing with kings and queens. Continuing the Arthurian tradition of rape narratives, in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur,* Mordred decrees that he will take Guinevere as his wife. Rape is alluded to but not expressed

specifically. Guinevere convinces Mordred to let her and her ladies go to London for new clothes for the wedding (ll. 2990-3). Guinevere flees, fearing abduction by Mordred, a form of rape as identified in the legal descriptions.[61] When she locks herself in the Tower of London, Mordred lays siege to it (ll. 2996-3001), literally applying force to marry her, which is a form of rape.

> In sommer, when it was fair and bright,
>
> His faders wife then wolde he wed
>
> And her hold with main and might,
>
> And so her bring as bride to bed.
>
> (ll. 2986-9)

These lines suggest literal rape: Mordred may have to hold Guinevere "with main and might" (l. 2988), figuratively or physically. He will abduct his father's Queen, against her will, with the intent of raping her and impregnating her. Though Mordred's villainy has many components, it is evident that Mordred enacts hypermasculine violence that leads to the disruption of a balanced society.

In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* rape is not as straightforward. Waynor (Guinevere) is married to Mordred and produces a child.

> [Mordred] has wedded Waynor and her his wife holdes,

---

[61] The medieval definition of rape is tied up in the inconsistent languages of ecclesiastical law and secular law (Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens,* 122-3). The legal terms identifying rape in particular cases is somewhat blurry and does not give the full medieval perception of rape. In the legal documents of the fourteenth century the crime of *raptus* often refers to the abduction of a person, sometimes a man or boy but most often a woman or girl. "While rape was never legally ignored, the blurring of rape and abduction under the name of *raptus* meant that cases emphasized abduction, with or without consent, rather than sexual violence *per se*" (Saunders 62). Cases involving abduction and not rape "employ the same vocabulary as those treating rape" (Saunders 67). For example, charges of *raptus* against Chaucer brought by Cecily Chaumpaigne cannot be understood for certain as rape because the term could instead refer to vague financial matters, which makes it difficult to determine what the actual crime was (Saunders 72).

And wonnes in the wild boundes of the west marches,

And has wrought her with child, as witness telles!

Of all the wyes of this world, wo mot him worthe,

Als warden unworthy women to yeme [guard]!

(ll. 3550-4)

Again, there is no mention of rape, but it is implied and fits the legal description of rape. Mordred "holdes" Waynor as his wife in the "wild boundes of the west marches," suggesting that taking her out of civilization and has placed her in a fortified place in the wild to protect them both. The language does not indicate Waynor's willingness to marry Mordred, but possibly her acquiescence.

The language continues to indicate Mordred's control over Waynor as he has "wroght her with child," a monstrous product of their unlawful union. There is no willingness on Waynor's part to have Mordred's child, instead it was done to her, which suggests a forcible act of rape. Though we are not privy to Waynor's thoughts or a description that indicates her point of view, the acquiescence is much different than Uther's rape of Igrayne in Malory where he disguised himself through trickery and revealed to Igrayne later his betrayal. Here, Waynor seems to have no ability to fight back as she does in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* when she flees for London.

Ultimately having to deal with the result of a union that is deemed outside of civilized laws, Arthur on his deathbed demands that all of Mordred's children "be slely slain and slongen in waters" so that Mordred's wicked line might end here (ll. 4320-2). For Mordred, rape is an equalizer between him and his father. But for society's response, Mordred's hypermasculine actions have "marred us all!" (l. 3555), and illustrates just how much of a problem this poses.

Though different from Walter's case in the *Clerk's Tale,* the passage does reflect the anxiety of how to deal with a sullied bloodline, whether it is from a person of lowly class or a product of father/son rivalry.

The anxiety of how to deal with a sullied bloodline was an important aspect of literature dealing with aristocratic society. Mordred's usurpation of Arthur's throne and rape of Guinevere focuses on power and social structures. In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, power is enhanced by social position and abused by Walter, the marquis of Saluzzo, who claims to have slain his children. His appetite for control and power is horrifying as he enforces psychological domination over his wife, Griselda, instead of the physical power of giants and physically overcoming the maidens in pastourelles or Mordred's domination over Guinevere. In a way, Walter's abuse of power can be seen as "gigantic" in that his power, though not physical like giants, supersedes everyone around him. Their power is diminutive next to his and therefore he acts as the giant does, wielding his dominance through his social position. Walter's hypermasculinity is a form of aggressive self-assertion enabled by power and the fact that he is a marquis. It is a demonstration of monstrosity that the Clerk warns of and Walter's appetite for control illustrates how that behavior can be damaging.

Walter's abuse of power as marquis has two parts, his abuse as husband to Griselda and his feigned infanticide. Walter is first described as both "[b]iloved and drad" by his people (l. 69-70) and has both "honour and of curteisye" (l. 74) yet he does not consider what might happen in the future, for "on his lust present was al his thought" (ll. 78-80). Though what his people dreaded about Walter is not entirely certain at first, it does illustrate that they have mixed feelings toward him. What is clear is that Walter's subjects want him to marry and he finally concedes by marrying a peasant girl named Griselda, an act of passive aggression against his

nobles. This act of passive aggression leads to him marrying a girl who must submit to her lord and must also endure his psychological abuse.

Walter continually visits his abuse on Griselda to indicate his psychological dominance. He reminds Griselda that he elevated her from poverty and that though she is “lief and deere” to him, to his “gentils” she is not and that it is a “greet shame and wo” that Walter has married someone of lowly birth (ll. 479-83). Well into the marriage Walter decides that he wants to take a new wife, citing that his people and the pope demand it (ll. 800-02). He strips Griselda of title and regal clothing and then requests that she serve the new wife by getting the arrangements in order for their wedding day (ll. 960-66). By reminding her of her lowly station and then returning her to it, Walter has demonstrated his control of her at his whim whilst casting blame off of himself and onto his people and the church. His inability to take full responsibility for his actions reflects hypermasculine tendencies in that he wants to do damage, or test her, more than he wants to ensure her loyalty.

Walter’s monstrosity is also demonstrated in his willingness to feign the murder of his children. Walter decides to “tempte his wyf” in order to know “hir sadnesse” (l. 452). He tests her by pretending to first kill their daughter and then later their son. Walter claims that in order to keep the peace between him and his nobles (l. 487) Griselda must “assente” to what he has to do and maintain her “pacience” (ll. 494-95) and warns her:

> This warne I yow, that ye nat sodeynly
> Out of youreself for no wo sholde outreye;
> Beth pacient, and therof I yow preye.
>
> (ll. 642-44)

Unbeknownst to Griselda, both children are taken away to live with Walter's sister, a countess, and raised as nobles (ll. 589-95). Both times Griselda bends willingly to Walter's wishes and instead of feeling pleased that she has maintained constancy and loyalty, Walter begins to question whether she loved her children or that she was tricking him and held "malice" or a "crueel corage" against him (ll. 687-93). Some may read Griselda's lack of objection and her submission are due to Walter's authority over her. She has no recourse because Walter is her ruler and she comes from a poor background. Walter's control is that much more powerful, and thus hypermasculine. His apparent willingness to slay his children at the request of his nobles is as monstrous as his making up the entire scenarios to test and dominate over his wife. Ultimately Walter's monstrosity is about power, and his appetite for it parallels the appetites of giants.

The *Tale* has moments where there are clear condemnations of Walter's characteristics and behavior that goes beyond the initial description of his people loving and fearing him (11. 69-70). There is indirect condemnation of Walter when the Clerk chides all married men who "knowe no mesure, / Whan that they fynde a pacient creature" (ll. 622-23) suggesting that men in general have a tendency to abuse their power especially when they have power over a woman. The importance of the Clerk's example is more than just the abuse married men visit upon their wives if they are patient creatures. Walter exemplifies the abuse of ruling authority upon those who are under that authority. It is abuse of that power that makes this hypermasculine, over the top, and even gigantic in its destructiveness. Still, the Clerk is vague in his condemnation and makes no mention of this specific abuse of power.

Even without a direct condemnation from Chaucer's Clerk, Walter's pretense of slaying of his children is horrifying. The people of Saluzzo decry these apparent murders (ll. 722-35). Indeed, the 'deaths' of Walter's children make them similar to the victims of giants, who

wantonly harm innocent human beings and thus abjure civilized behavior. Just like the giants who pose a threat to society, Walter's monstrous actions also pose a threat to society. The Clerk does not directly call Walter's actions monstrous, it is the testing of Griselda that he is concerned with that poses a problem. Still, Walter's insistence on marrying a peasant woman, the lies he tells to remove his children are significant problems within his community.[62] Since his nobles and the people did not demand the execution of Walter's children, we need to suppose that the thought of child killing, no matter the lineage of the children, goes against their beliefs.

Walter's suggested intent to kill his children reflects the Old Testament story of Abraham who was prepared to sacrifice Isaac at God's command. In this case, Walter resembles God more closely through his patriarchal dominance. In "Reframing the Violence of the Father: Reverse Oedipal Fantasies in Chaucer's Clerk's, Man of Law's, and Prioress's Tales," Barrie Ruth Straus discusses family violence as it relates to a society that favors men in both the acquisition of a spouse and in the structure of the family itself. She argues that when Walter has children he "enacts the violence of the family laid out in his marriage agreement," referring to how he dominates over Janicula, and even Griselda, to dictate the terms of marriage (126-28). Continuing this model of violence, Walter "reveals that the nature of social fatherhood consists in the prerogative of the father to use and abuse women and children, treating both as property, with which he can do anything he likes" (Straus 128-29). This patriarchal structure, though problematic when it comes to the possibility of a powerful man abusing it, is not fully to blame

[62] In "'A Mooder He Hath, but Fader Hath He Noon:' Constructions of Genealogy in the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Man of Law's Tale*," Angel Florschuetz argues the clerk is commenting on a cultural preoccupation with political power and heirs through Walter's lie that his nobles are concerned with his children's peasant lineage. Michael Hanrahan argues that the cultural anxiety at the time of Richard II's rule and the need to produce an heir is influential to the *Clerk's Tale* in "'A Straunge Successour Sholde Take Your Heritage': The *Clerk's Tale* and the Crisis of Ricardian Rule."

for Walter's abuses; we see that there is a difference between having that power and wielding it in an abusive way.

Walter's abuse of power against Griselda, his pretended willingness to kill his children, and his manipulation of his subjects all reveal hypermasculine characteristics that are monstrous challenges to the rules and order of society. Though different than the act of murder, Walter's commands to Griselda are indicative of a psychological control that is directly tied to violence. Walter demands that Griselda submit to his wishes, however horrifying and maintain her constancy. This psychological domination is analogous to rape. When the Giant of Saint Michel causes the niece's death because of the threat of rape and then rapes the nurse, it is both a psychological and physical domination. The psychological rape of Griselda is also a form of male domination in which Walter is an abuser, a figurative rapist, in the position of power. Imagining Walter as God or as Abraham signifies how power is used and poses the question of whether it should be used. Just because Walter can have his children killed does not mean that he has a social or moral right to commit the act. The same can be said for Walter's domination over Griselda. Walter's appetite for control is as horrifying as the giants' appetite for human flesh. Walter's actions are so abhorrent that the Clerk will refrain from defending not only those acts but even Griselda's responses to them. He suggests that we cannot stand idly by as horrific acts are perpetrated.

The ways in which hypermasculinity presents itself through psychological and physical domination, which is tied to power and the various combinations that manifest within those abuses, has its roots in the various natural forces that produce it. As explained in Chapter One, humours, astrology, physiology, and physical determinants all play a role in medieval society's understanding of gender characteristics, hypermasculinity as a part of those. The ways in which

hypermasculinity threatens the parameters and boundaries of civilized normative society, like medieval gender characteristics in general, falls on a spectrum of tendencies. Uncontrolled, it can bring harm in the form of rape and other violent aggressions that counter the benefit of hypermasculine violence demonstrated on the battlefield. That harm can be alleviated when masculine and feminine characteristics are balanced within an individual. Chapter three illustrates what feminine characteristics look like in male medieval literary characters, how those characteristics can have multiple combinations, and also how violence can manifest in some of these characters.

Chapter Three: Variations of Effeminate Characteristics in Male Medieval Literary Characters

In this chapter I will discuss the variations of male effeminacy, and I will show that while some variations produced non-normative behavior that was frowned upon in the Middle Ages, others produced behavior that was widely regarded as ideal. In chapter one I analyzed the texts available to medieval society that explain the variety of theories on how gender characteristics manifested and were thought to be composed in an individual. In chapter two I argued that hypermasculine characteristics can lead to behavior seen as a threat to society whereas feminine characteristics were seen as positive attributes in that they help to achieve a more balanced composition of personality. The point of this chapter is to show that there is not just one kind of feminine trait in medieval male literary characters. Just as there are variations of hypermasculine representations, there are variations of feminine characteristics and the behaviors they produce.

To demonstrate the variations that occur in these male literary figures who display forms of feminization or emasculation I begin with Chaucer's physical descriptions of the Squire, Sir Thopas, and Absolon. Similarities and distinctions in the feminine characteristics, along with other traits, descriptions, and actions of these three characters help to shape audience understanding of them. In the case of Absolon, violence plays a role in offsetting his feminine characterization that leads to a discussion of other figures whose emasculation makes them unbalanced. Chaucer's Host emasculates Chaucer the Pilgrim in the *Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas* and also the Pardoner; the latter's emasculation is problematic for various reasons. Emasculation in the form of impotence is another important aspect to consider, a topic addressed in the final passus of *Piers Plowman.* Finally, the importance of men listening to feminine advice as a positive form of feminization is an important theme in both *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*. Such feminization is also important for Lancelot in Chretien's *Knight of the*

Cart and Marie de France's title character in *Lanval*; both narratives deal with male submission to a woman of higher status. My discussion will illustrate how feminization and emasculation can take many forms and resist strict categorization, such as associating effeminate men with weakness or homosexuality. Those stereotypical categories do not accurately depict the complexity with which medieval audiences understand the impact, and importance in some cases, of illustrating male literary characters with feminine characteristics and actions.

Before considering feminine characteristics of medieval men it is important to point out the similarities and differences between feminization and emasculation. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* to feminize is to "make feminine (in various senses) in nature or character" ("feminize," v. a.). This word is applicable to sex or gender, but more commonly it connotes the act of adding or recognizing feminine qualities in the characteristics of something, usually a person ("feminize," v. b. 2). This is a bit different from emasculation which is a removal or deprivation of masculine qualities ("emasculate," adj. a.), particularly "of vigour; weak, effeminate. ("emasculate," adj. b.). There are similarities between feminization and emasculation. In each category masculinity is changed or modified by femininity. For the purpose of my analysis the issue is always a matter of balance. Feminization adds feminine qualities to masculine ones, which suggests balance. That balance has a variety of combinations and manifestations in an individual but it does not remove any qualities as emasculation does. It is important to note that recognition of these types of balances and imbalances were pervasive in medieval thought and the examples in this chapter are not meant to be an exhaustive account, merely a sample of their representation.

Male feminine characteristics in literary figures manifest in such places as physical features, dress and style, and actions. To contextualize my discussion of these characteristics in

male literary characters, it is useful to look first at the *Roman de la Rose* to understand medieval perceptions of effeminacy in a man's style, dress, and physical descriptions. There were certainly many foppish characters who were socially accepted as feminized figures, something that scholars like Susan Schibanoff have pointed out and will be discussed later in this chapter. We see in medieval literature that feminizing men is not out of the norm, and the notion of dress and style making a man effeminate does not work in the same way that our modern perceptions might dictate. Homosexuality and modern identity culture is not the same for a medieval audience, and choice of clothing is no exception to this fundamental difference. In Guillame de Lorris' portion of *Roman de la Rose,* written in the earlier half of the 13th century the advice given to the young lover by the God of Love describes the balance of maintaining elegance:

> But he who wishes to toil in the service of love should bear himself with elegance.
> It is useless for a man who lacks elegance to aspire to love.
>
> ...
>
> Provide yourself as far as your income will permit, with fine clothes and shoes, for fine clothes and garments improve a man wonderfully. Also, you should entrust your wardrobe to an experienced tailor who can make the stitches sit properly and the sleeves fit elegantly. Your boots and your laced shoes should always be fresh and new, and make sure that they fit so closely that the ignorant will argue about how you managed to put them on and which way you got into them. (33)[63]

This passage does not indicate an effeminate style of dress that codes feminine. The emphasis on clothing quality certainly relates to a person's wealth as does entrusting one's "wardrobe to an experienced tailor." Those who can afford to hire tailors certainly enjoyed a leisurely life in

[63] All references to the *Romance of the Rose* are from the Frances Horgan English translation published by Oxford University Press based on the French edition by Felix Lecoy. Lines 2113-62 in Lecoy's edition.

comparison to that of a peasant in the field. This passage could very well signify that wealthy, noble men should display their wealth through their clothing, an image that did not specifically refer to or connote effeminate behavior. Quite simply, variations of dress, style, and behavior do not necessarily make a medieval man effeminate in ways that meet with modern assumptions.

There are sections in the *Romance of the Rose* where the God of Love does define the point at which a man becomes too effeminate after he instructs the Lover to deck himself "out in gloves, a belt, and a purse of silk," and to lace up his sleeves and comb his hair, (33); he makes the following admonition: “do not paint your face or wear make-up: only women do that, and those of evil reputations who have unfortunately found an unlawful love” (33). The God of Love places limits on men’s adornment and make-up because a painted face is womanish and associated with “evil reputations” and “unlawful love.” Of course, certain connotations attach to a man who represents himself in the same way that a woman does who seeks illicit love. Make-up transforms the man into a wanton woman.

Other medieval writers express the same attitude regarding excessive make-up on women’s faces. A sample *effictio* (physical description) by Geoffrey of Vinsauf states that a woman’s face should be “free of adornment, lovely in its natural hue” (68).[64] In *The Art of Courtly Love*, Andreas Capellanus warns that “if you see a woman too heavily rouged you will not be taken in by her beauty unless you have already discovered that she is good company besides, since a woman who puts all her reliance on her rouge usually doesn’t have any particular gifts of character” (34).[65] Capellanus advises women to seek a lover of “praiseworthy character” (34), meaning that a woman should not want a man

[64] “Geoffrey of Vinsauf: from *The New Poetry,”* trans. Margaret F. Nims, *Chaucer Sources and Backgrounds,* ed. Robert P. Miller (New York, 1977) pp 66-8. Print.
[65] All references to Capellanus’s *Art of Courtly Love* are from John Jay Parry’s translation.

> who anoints himself all over like a woman or makes a rite of the care of the body, for it does not go with a masculine figure to adorn oneself in womanly fashion or to be devoted to the care of the body. It was people like this the admirable Ovid meant when he said [*Heroides 4.75-76]*, "Let young men who are decked out like women stay far away from me, A manly form wants to be cared for within moderate limits." (34)

What constitutes "womanly fashion" is a complex idea and what excessive means for a man is vague. Advising women to seek "praiseworthy characters" who moderately care for their physical appearance is the ideal balance. Capellanus also advises both men and women not to "seek for beauty so much as for excellence of character" (34). In any case, while the feminine connotations of a man's adornment and grooming are implied and unspecific, they arguably represent a lack, or reduction, of masculinity. It is not masculine for a man to "anoint" himself with things associated with femininity and to care for his body like a woman. There are boundaries for a man to adhere to in order not to become too feminized, just as we will see there are boundaries for a man to adhere to in the courtly world if he is a knight.

Though boundaries exist that warn of men becoming "too womanish," medieval references to men who wear embellished clothing need not imply that those men are homosexual. Garrett P.J. Epp indicates that "fashionable or extravagant clothing on men was associated generally with lechery and sexual enticement," and Chaucer's Parson expresses this idea (306). Epp also argues that the 15th-century morality play *Mankind* presents allegorical figures who act to corrupt Mankind and pull him from his good work by altering his wardrobe to something more fashionable (306). Fashion, in extravagant clothing and other embellishments, is more an indicator of class, wealth, and the ability to attract an individual of the same or higher social standing. Clothing and other descriptions often temper literary characters like the

masculine knight with feminine characteristics to demonstrate that they were sufficiently balanced to participate in society.

But Chaucer's Squire is also described as having curly hair, as if it "were leyd in presse" (l. 81).[66] Chaucer is careful to balance the Squire's image with contrasting gender characteristics that offer an image of a young man who has seen battle and is also fussy about his appearance.

> Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
>
> Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede
>
> Syngunge he was, or floytynge, al the day;
>
> He was as fressh as is the month of May.
>
> Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde.
>
> Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.
>
> He koude songes make and we endite,
>
> Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.
>
> (ll. 89-96).

So, is the Squire the appropriate figure that the God of Love would approve of in terms of his style and dress? Certainly the Squire fits the idea of restrained adornments that suggest elegance rather than ostentation. Chaucer likens his adornments or embroidery to a meadow of fresh flowers in May, alluding to his youth. In *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower,* William George Dodd argues that the Squire's clothing represents "the freshness of his nature" (233) and Charles

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[66] The significance surrounding the Squire's curly hair has been discussed by Henry J. Todd who indicates that the Squire's image in the Ellesmere manuscript shows curly hair (229); Leigh Hunt maintains that this description is not uncommon for young men (97); Walter W. Skeat identifies that the 'presse' is actually the instrument that curls Absolon's hair (10); Emil Markert asserts that aristocratic young men often wore curly hair as a fashion statement (19); in *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty,* Walter Clyde Curry finds that curly hair was an important aspect of beauty for both men and women (31-32). Others, like Jill Mann believe that it might seem to us the Squire is a "dandy," but we have no definitive proof of his vanity (19); John Gardner argues that the line is ambiguous and Chaucer only hints at the possibility that the Squire spends time curling his hair (b 233).

A. Owen Jr. believes that the clothing and embroidery also reflect a fresh, spring-like character (229). Others such as Emil Markert contend that embroidered clothes were in vogue (17). Henry J. Todd argues that the Ellesmere image of the Squire shows that the embroidery is not excessive (151). But G. K. Chesterton believes Chaucer was criticizing the Squire's attire as foppish (64-65), and Albert C. Baugh and William Spencer both discuss the excessiveness of the Squire's fashion and embroidery (Baugh 239; Spencer 151-52). When looked at in contrast to the Knight, the Squire might appear excessive, but I would argue that the contrast meant to be drawn is between an older man and a youthful one. The Squire's description does not fully mark him as a foppish character. When analyzed in connection with other characters, such as Absolon, whom I will discuss later, the Squire does not fully adopt the feminizing adornments the God of Love warns of and is appropriately feminized.

Still, further scholarship on Chaucer's description of the Squire does point to a certain over abundance of feminization. The Squire's fashion has been linked to satiric estates literature where knights were ridiculed for their style of dress and hair. In *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, Jill Mann connects the Squire's dress to the writings of St. Bernard (12th century), who criticizes the pressing of hair as well as length of sleeves and robes (119). Mann also notes that moralists link the artificial curling of a man's hair with his desire to impress women, as in the writings of Nicholas Bozon (early 14th century). Some medieval writers, Mann allows, "use carefully-arranged hair as a sign of foppishness in general" (119). A man's preoccupation with his hair appears to be a feminizing behavior because it is in analogue of how women focus on their appearance.

The Squire inhabits a space between masculinity and femininity, defined by both the courtly love and chivalric codes that a good medieval knight should represent in literature. Still,

there are uncertain aspects of his characteristics that some consider more childlike than feminine. Vincent DiMarco has argued that scholarship depicting the *Squire's Tale* as the product of an immature narrator who performs an "unintentional parody" of courtly romance does not go far enough (330). DiMarco characterizes the *Squire's Tale* as Chaucer's experiment with "romance motifs in an experimental tale of science fiction" (330).[67] The awkward amalgamation of elements in the tale has an analogue in the Squire, who is still not fully formed as an adult aristocrat. What Vincent DiMarco says about exploring the tale further can also be applied to the Squire as a character. The Squire is not only a representative of the new courtly masculinity, he is also a product of noble and courtly culture as well as a tempered masculinity. His "crulle" hair (l. 81) offers a feminized style, but one that does not transgress the God of Love's warning in the *Romance of the Rose.* The real issue lies in whether the Squire uses a "presse" (l. 81) to set his curls. The implication that his hair has been set with a curling press (iron) suggests a bit more attention to style than typical ideas of masculinity might allow.

The Squire's fashion choices are not his only feminizing feature; his achievements include singing, dancing, drawing, and writing. These practiced skills are not necessarily feminizing, but considering his profession and in light of the possible hypermasculine violence displayed by knights, as discussed in chapter two, these pastimes serve to temper his masculine qualities. On the one hand, he shows evidence of military prowess: he is "wonderly delyvere, and of greet strenghte," and he has acquitted himself well in at least three battles (ll. 84-87).[68] The audience is meant to look at the Squire's portrait along with his actions and size him up against

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[67] For more on the Satire of the *Squire's Tale* see M. C. Seymour's "Some Satiric Pointers in the *Squire's Tale*", *English Studies* 70 (1989): 311-14. For more on the Squire as a story teller see D.A. Pearsall, "The Squire as Story-Teller", *University of Toronto Quarterly* 34 (1964): 82-92. For discussion on the decline of chivalry in the *Squire's Tale* see Satley J. Kahrl. "Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline of Chivalry", *Chaucer Review* 7 (1973): 203.
[68] All references to Chaucer's works are from *The Riverside Chaucer,* Edited by Larry D. Benson.

other literary masculine characters, especially within the *Tales* Chaucer's Knight. His singing, dancing, drawing, and writing are activities that contrast with his profession and offer balance between masculine and feminine qualities. It is important to look at the entirety of these figures for a more complete view.

The entirety of the Squire's portrait provides a positive influence that feminization can have on a character. In *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio*, Susan Schibanoff discusses the Squire as a figure of "positive feminization" precisely because he is not associated with "overt suggestion of homoeroticism," such as sodomy as we will see later in the case of the Pardoner (48). She reflects on the rise of both "courtly and homoerotic literature during the high Middle Ages" and how that rise of courtly does not include negative depictions of male feminization that allude to homoeroticism or more specifically sodomy, the latter a charge that always "trumped feminization as a male virtue" (48). Instead, most of the courtly literature, according to Schibanoff, idealizes the feminized male who is not portrayed negatively because he "achieves heterosexual union with a woman" as opposed to those who are associated with homoeroticism and sodomy (48). Here she emphasizes the difference between effeminate behavior associated with a sexual act and effeminate features that are not. I add to Schibanoff's argument that it is not only about the feminized male achieving heterosexual status, it is also about the balance created in characters like the Squire who more accurately reflect medieval society's understanding of the need for balance of gender characteristics in an individual. This is especially true for literary characters like the knight whose profession comes with the possibility of excessive masculine traits.

Chaucer's Sir Thopas, like the Squire, has feminine traits meant to balance out the masculinity of his profession. Again, all the descriptions are not solely feminizing, but they are

meant to be read in the entirety of his characterization. In the tale itself, the visual description of Sir Thopas's features are often associated with descriptions of young women,

> Whit was his face as payndemayn,
>
> His lippes rede as rose;
>
> His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
>
> And I yow telle in good certayn
>
> He hadde a semely nose.
>
> His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun,
>
> That to his girdel raughte adoun;
>
> His shoon of cordewane.
>
> Of Brugges were his hosen broun;
>
> His robe was of syklatoun,
>
> That coste many a jane.
>
> (ll. 725-35)

His golden hair, red lips, and white face[69] are not exclusively female attributes as Alice M. Colby observes. Some descriptions of red and white in a face can indicate a sign of youthfulness (Colby 46). Still, Curry argues that there are no descriptions of handsome men's lips in Middle English literature similar to the description of women's lips (*The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty* 66). The description of Sir Thopas is reminiscent of the amplification of feminine beauty that Geoffrey of Vinsauf provides in *The New Poetry*. Geoffrey describes the physical beauty of

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[69] In *Speaking of Chaucer,* E. Talbot Donaldson argues that in the case of Absolon in the *Miller's Tale* "in possessing a 'rode'–that is, a peaches-and-cream complexion recommended by fourteenth-century Elizabeth Ardens, Absolon places himself in the almost exclusive company of Middle English damsels" (21). In *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty,* Walter Clyde Curry says this complexion could be applied to women, children, and sometimes men (93).

a woman beginning with her head and moving down the body, a rhetorical device of description starting with the head and moving down the body.[70] The description of Thopas follows this type of rhetorical strategy of description but the feminizing elements contribute to dissonance rather than balance in Thopas's characterization.

There is much irony in the *Tale of Sir Thopas* quite apart from the mix of masculine and feminine physical characteristics. Sir Thopas is described as a skilled hunter (l. 736) and "good archeer" (l. 739), and he is very good at "wrastlyng" (l. 740). While hunting is an aristrocratic activity, archery and wrestling are not the usual pastimes of knights, they do offer a fuller view of Sir Thopas's various interests. Recall that the Miller from the *General Prologue* also delights in wrestling, a violent, masculine sport, it is unsuited to the masculinity of knighthood and thus undermines the coherence of Thopas's character. What does illustrate Thopas's status as a knight, somewhat, is that he comes upon a giant, "sir Olifaunt" (l. 808), while in search of an "elf queene" (l. 799) through the "contree of Fairye" (l. 802). Chaucer describes Sir Thopas' preparations for battle with Olifaunt in an arming scene. Thopas calls his "mynstrales, / And geestours for to tellen tales" in his "armynge" (ll. 845-7). Thopas asks specifically for tales of "Romances that been roiales, / Of popes and of cardinals, / And eek of love-likynge. (ll. 848-50). It is ironic that Thopas focuses on romances of atypical heroes like popes and cardinals instead of brave knights fighting giants and rescuing maidens. These are not the sort of protagonists one expects from a romance but also not indicative of feminization exactly. What it does highlight is that the type of stories he wants before going into battle diverge from expectations, just as his hobbies do.

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[70] "Geoffrey of Vinsauf: from *The New Poetry,"* trans. Margaret F. Nims, *Chaucer Sources and Backgrounds,* ed. Robert P. Miller (New York, 1977) pp 66-68. Print.

The masculine symbolism of the battle clothing is tempered with the feminine adornments, much like the Squire's embroidery. While dressing Thopas servants bring him "sweete wyn" (l. 851) and other "roial spicerye" (l. 853) before he puts on his clothing made:

> Of cloth of lake fyn and cleere,
>
> A breech and eek a sherte;
>
> And next his sherte an aketoun,
>
> And over than an haubergeoun
>
> For percynge of his herte
>
> (ll. 857-62)

On top of his shirt and pants he wears a quilted jacket and finally chain-mail to protect his heart during battle. Arguably the arming scene implicitly should confirm the protagonist's masculinity, but the armor is odd, adorned with a "Jewes werk," and his "cote-armour" is "As whit as is a lily flour" (ll. 866-7). The descriptions add elements of extravagance and finery. His name, which has been linked to the jewel topaz, is also representative of this finery.[71] Along with "the features

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[71] There are only a few examples of the name Thopas attributed to male literary characters, but not in Middle English Romances. For the most part it is usually attributed to females (*Sources & Analogues* 655). Skeat argues that it is an appropriate name for Chaucer's "mock hero" (*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,* 6 vols. Oxford, 1900, Vol. V. 183) A. C. Baugh adds to Skeat's interpretation that Thopas was an "excellent title for such a gem of a knight" (V. 183) by saying that there is no other symbolism "that need be supposed" (*Chaucer's Major Poetry* 347). Others have attributed topaz as a "symbol of chastity" (Woodburn O. Ross, "Possible Significance of the Name *Thopas*" *Modern Language Notes* 45 (1930): 172-4). Other scholars also discuss his name as a symbol of chastity: F. N. Robinson in the explanatory notes of his 1957 edition of *The Canterbury Tales* identifies that the name could suggest "further symbolism of purity, inasmuch as topaz was worn by young girls as a charm against luxury" (737); Charles Dunn argues that "the name suggests the gem of chastity" (*Chaucer Reader* 50) as does E. Talbot Donaldson, who clarifies that the name Topaz symbolizes, "a stone of chastity" (*Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* 935); Robert A. Pratt also notes that the gem was a "symbol of chastity" in *The Canterbury Tales* (161);). John Conley argues that the association of Topaz with chastity is incorrect for various reasons including Chaucer's use of emerald representing chastity in the *Prioress's Tale* ("The Peculiar Name Thopas," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976): 42-61.

of the typical heroine of a courtly romance", a white face, red lips, and a comely nose (ll. 725-729).[72]

The two literary conventions of *descriptio* and the "arming scene" in Sir Thopas challenge the traditional way to describe a woman and a man. In *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in the Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and Other Works,* Laura F. Hodges notes that:

> Sir Thopas bears the distinction of being Chaucer's only knight-protagonist who is thoroughly identified by name, geographic origin, and two complete costumes, one in *descriptio* depicting dress for courtly wear, and one for combat, in a scene modeled on the conventional literary arming scene describing, among other things, his identifying coat of arms. (141)

The dual outfits illustrate his dual function as part of the court and as part of the military. There are different expectations for each leading to his display of feminine and masculine characteristics.

The combination of masculine and feminine associations in Sir Thopas continues in the following description: "he was chaast and no lechour, / And sweete as is the brembul flour / That bereth the rede hepe" (ll. 745-7). His chasteness is confirmed and his disposition is sweet, features familiar in descriptions of women in medieval literature. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen characterizes much of the description in Sir Thopas as reminicent of "the *effictiones* of romance, those long narrative catalogs that describe a (feminine) body by breaking it into beautiful fragments" ("Diminishing Masculinities in Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas" 145). Chaucer's use of this descriptive technique sets Thopas apart from other knightly figures, yet at the same time the

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[72] In "The Chaste Sir Thopas" Ruth Van Arsdale responds to George Williams who claims that the name Topaz (Thopas) was "a protection against sensuality" and usually given to women (Williams qtd. In Van Arsdale 146).

description hints at other knightly figures who are described as having feminized characteristics. Tison Pugh acknowledges that

> [b]ecause blazons, through their focused attention on the harmonious mixture of white and red on the beloved's face, conventionally praise a woman's beauty, this celebration of Thopas's beauty effeminizes him. In this application of a feminized rhetorical trope to his hero, Chaucer sets the stage for the tale's impending collapse of heroic masculinity. A quick comparison to a blazon of female beauty, such as the description of Beauty in Chaucer's translation *Romaunt of the Rose* (1006-32), illustrates for students the feminine charge to the depiction of Thopas's attractiveness. (Pugh 118)

Pugh relies too much on the complexion of a face with red and white mixed as only representative of a woman's beauty. Though it can also signify a youthful complexion, the more important take away is that Thopas's portrait relies on a mix of masculine and feminine characteristics in order to illustrate a type of feminization that is important to descriptions of young knights. He is not quite as balanced as Chaucer's Squire in his gender characteristics because they are incomplete.

Referring to Thopas as a child makes him somewhat ridiculous, more of a caricature than the Squire, less so than Absolon as I will discuss shortly. But these childlike references are certainly meant to diminish his masculinity. Some scholars have argued that Thopas's diminishing masculinity is actually a strategy to make him more childlike. David Raybin argues that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is a children's story, an "extended experiment in writing for and about children" (225). Raybin argues that the placement of the tale, between the *Prioress's Tale* and the *Tale of Melibee,* demonstrates that Chaucer was experimenting with how to write for children (231). According to Raybin, putting children into tales demonstrates that they were for children,

who like to see themselves in stories (Raybin 225). In addition, Raybin also asserts that Thopas lacks knowledge of geography, when the narrator claims he misrepresents the distance between England and Flanders to be long when it is short, is also indicative of his childlike qualities (232). It is difficult to uncover if this lack of knowledge is related to youthfulness, childishness, or the inability to discern distances.

Further criticism that describes the *Tale of Sir Thopas* as a "'childish fantasy,'" or "'nursery rhyme,'" is also made by Lee Patterson, who argues that Thopas's childlike dreams for an elf queen are "entirely appropriate in that a child should dream of an elf queen—just as appropriate, in fact, as that a childlike 'popet' should look 'elvyssh'" (Patterson 131). Such characterizations as these suggest a lack of masculinity. Patterson admits that "an elf is not the same as a child" and that being a child is not the same as being childlike (Patterson 131-32). Still, these two descriptors are diminutive in nature and suggest a lack of adult masculinity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that "[m]asculinity shrinks . . . to divorce gender from the dangers of sexuality. The male body is diminished in 'Thopas' to keep it safe from the possibility of sex" (*Of Giants* 100). True, Thopas is referred to as a child (l. 817; l. 830), though only after the "greet geaunt . . . Olifaunt" (ll. 807-8) addresses him as a "Child" (l. 810). This reference is most certainly meant to degrade Thopas and exaggerate his youthfulness and inexperience in the face of an opponent.

When looked at in connection to each other, these factors may lead to looking at Thopas as a child, but the Middle English definition of "child" also includes a "youth of noble birth" and an "aspirant to knighthood" or a "knight or warrior" ("child" 6 a & b, *MED*).[73] It is plausible that Thopas is a young knight who would also appeal to young children without having to be

[73] In Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, Absolon is described as a "myrie child" (l. 3325) and Chaucer also references two Middle English romances of "Horn child" (l. 898) in *Sir Thopas*. These references indicate male youthfulness.

completely “childlike.” If Thopas is either a young inexperienced knight, or a child, there are still elements of femininity infused that remove him from the masculine, or hypermasculine, characteristics of some other knights in medieval literature. Chaucer’s use of ‘child’ typically (though not always) carries its modern meaning. I believe that in this instance “child” is more appropriate as a reference to a young, inexperienced knight. When combined with the rest of the information we know about Thopas, Chaucer’s use of the word ‘child’ does not negate masculinity, but does diminish his masculinity.

So far, physical descriptions and associations reveal a mixing of gender characteristics in Thopas, but what are we to make of his search for a “supernatural” woman? There is significance in Thopas's search for love outside of his world because "in this world no womman is / Worthy to be" his wife (ll. 791-92), so instead he will search for an "elf-queene" (l. 790). He even goes so far as to exclaim that he will forsake all other women (l. 794). George Williams claims that Thopas "refuses to love any woman" (Williams 147), suggesting that an elf queen is not a woman by definition but an otherworldly figure, outside normal human male/female categories. But that is not entirely accurate and even if we play with the category of woman and argue that Thopas’s yearning for an elf queen does not signify a human woman, the elf queen is nonetheless a female figure. He is not searching for a male elf which would suggest same-sex desire, something that Williams’s analysis implies. Taking into account his childlike characteristics, it is more likely that Thopas is inexperienced with love due to his youthful characteristics and naïve behavior. Ruth Van Arsdale observes that “Chaucer's tale itself describes Sir Thopas as ‘Chaast and no lechour’ (line 745) even though maidens sigh for him. He is young and his chasteness or lack of lechery may come from his inexperience and from his age. His hunt for the elf-queen makes him appear more in love with love than with a woman; on the other hand, he is searching

for a queen, not a queer" (Van Arsdale 148). His effeminacy is not tied to a man; rather it balances the potentially excessive masculinity associated with his profession.

Though incomplete, the *Tale* offers a look into how the emasculation of Thopas relates to his search for a woman outside normal social boundaries. The *Tale* is interrupted before Thopas can return to fight Olifaunt and then possibly enter into the dwelling of the elf queen (ll. 814-15). Chaucer's sources for Thopas all deal with a young man who happens on a fairy queen and is enamored with her or an elf knight who is summoned by a woman. Chaucer diverges from those sources and has Thopas actively search for a fairy queen because no other woman is worthy of him. What Chaucer is really doing is flipping the feminine and masculine constructs within the source stories. Analogues such as Marie de France's *Lanval*, which I will discuss later, tell of a happenstance meeting of a knight and a fairy queen. In *Thomas of Erceldoune,* a knight also happens upon a fairy queen by accident. In volume three of the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Stith Thompson cites a variety of texts that include themes where a female wishes or performs some action that brings a male fairy lover to her (Thompson 40). There is no reference to a motif that discusses a man in search of a fairy lover. The motif that is identified in the *Index* appears in a tale called The Elfin Knight; a woman wishes for a knight who is blowing a horn and after she expresses her yearning aloud, he comes to her (Child 6-16). There could be cause to consider how Thopas might be aligned with the woman who calls for a lover, although he is searching for an elf queen, a more active endeavor.

My point in identifying the feminized characterizations and emasculations of both the Squire and Thopas is to illustrate that it is important to look at the whole portrait. But when that portrait is incomplete, or a bit unbalanced, the result is a character like Thopas, whose development is aborted and his maturity not as complete as the Squire. Though his

characteristics do not create a caricature on par with Absolon, his incompleteness results in a ridiculous character, even when looking at the entire portrait. But his characterization does not move into the negative category of feminization. Physical descriptions, actions, associations, and other features help us to better understand Chaucer's meaning when dealing with men who exhibit these characteristics. That meaning uncovers a nuanced look at medieval society and the complexities of gender that we may too quickly categorize as negative and therefore read the entire character as negative. These feminized characters are not the only example and others are not always so balanced.

One such example of imbalance is Chaucer's Absolon, whose gender characteristics have similarities in physical descriptions and style of dress to indicate a mix between masculine and feminine features that might reflect certain positive attributes. But Absolon's actions toward women prove more complicated in reading any positive feminization. It might seem at first that Absolon's squeamishness about "fartyng" (ll. 3337-38) is meant to raise questions about his masculinity, as does his obsession with his hair and attire, but we need to look beyond our modern notions of what makes a man masculine or feminine. As explained in chapter two, Absolon's actions show a range of both masculine, hypermasculine at times, and feminine traits that Chaucer wants to draw attention to so that a more complete picture of this complex character is understood.

Chaucer's description of Absolon is similar to that of the Squire in the *General Prologue*. His hair, like the Squire's, is curly, but Chaucer gives it more attention: it is also "gold" and "strouted as a fanne large and brode" (ll. 3314-5). While the Squire *might* curl his hair, Absolon definitely styles his. His part is "straight and evene" (l. 3316). But comparisons also highlight contrast. The Squire's appearance is qualified by his military activity, whereas the feminine

implications of Absolon's hair and appearance do not have the ballast of an impressively manly profession. Moreover, Absolon's hair is compared to that of the son of the biblical David, Absalom, whose hair was taken to represent excess as well as beauty (Beichner, "Absolon's Hair 233). Paul E. Beichner argues that Absalom's hair would have signified beauty in the Middle Ages through excessive care taken to manage it and the descriptive convention of feminine beauty it resembles, as well as "the catalogue of types in *Ubi sunt* poems" and that Chaucer used Absalom as the basis for his "effeminate dandy" ("Absolon's Hair" 233). Beichner goes so far as to say that in comparison to Alisoun, who is "very unladylike" in her rejection of him, "Absolon indeed is more ladylike" because of his characteristics ("Characterization in the *Miller's Tale*" 119). But these "ladylike characteristics are unflattering and are not used the same way as the feminine characteristics of the Squire and Sir Thopas.

Though initial descriptions target Absolon as effeminate or foppish and our modern assumptions might feminize Absolon because of the appearance of his hair, in medieval society this physical feature would not be a definitive indication of feminization. For example, in the *Roman de Troie*, Hector, the great champion of Troy, is said to have hair blond and curly, "blont e cresp" (l. 5333). Hector is decidedly not an effeminate character. Instead his lovely hair suggests a feminine characteristic meant to be interpreted with other physical descriptions, actions, and characteristics. The same approach should be applied to Absolon, whose "ladylike" associations are varied and also compounded with a practice of violence. But the composite, as we shall see, produces a very different result.

In addition to his feminized physical features, Absolon's clothing relates to the extravagance depicted in the Squire and Sir Thopas's, though they are not an exact match. For example, his shoes are embellished with "Poules wyndow corven" in them (l. 3318), which can

be linked to the embellishments and adornments described in both portraits of the Squire and Sir Thopas. The rest of the description can be related to the restrictions listed above from the God of Love's discussion in *The Romance of the Rose*:

> In hoses rede he wente fetisly.
>
> Yclad he was ful small and proprely
>
> Al in a kirtel of a light waget;
>
> Ful faire and thikke been the poyntes set.
>
> And thereupon he hadde a gay suplys
>
> As whit as is the blosme upon the rys.
>
> (ll. 3319-24)

The red hosiery, the tailored light blue tunic, and the ultra-white vestment all indicate the extravagant care Absolon takes in his appearance. Though the surplice is a proper vestment for a clerk, Chaucer is clear to indicate that it is as white as a flower, another sign of Absolon's obsession with his appearance. In comparison, the Squire's attire is clearly extravagant and detailed as well, but when combined with others details about him, his feminine characteristics have a different resonance than those of Absolon.

Absolon's style of dress, like his hair, seems to be excessive but not completely out of the realm of masculinity. In *Chaucer and Clothing*, Laura Hodges argues that Absolon's dress may be identified as "foppish or dandified" in contrast to the style of Chaucer's pilgrim the Clerk and that Absolon's attire and description "illustrates the principle behind the 1442 complaint about clerks at Fotheringhay College wearing 'their dress after the manner of lay-folk to the scandal of the clerkly order and the college'" (171). To throw light on this vague description of what type of dress was deemed inappropriate, Hodges cites dress rules at New College, Oxford, which restrict

"red or green shoes secular or curved…belts or girdles decorated with gold or silver…either outside or inside the university and the city" (172).[74] It is not exactly clear if the restrictions were due to the feminine associations of the clothing or the extravagance. Either way, it does suggest that the church was aware of how inappropriate the clothing was to the clerkly profession.

Absolon's voice also suggests confusing feminine characteristics that remind us of the physiognomic associations discussed in chapter one. When Absolon sings songs, it is in "a loud quynyble" or high range (l. 3333). His high voice, together with his squeamishness and his child-like crying at the dismissal by Alison (l. 3759), suggests that he is a "potentially androgynous or infantile" character (Turner 292). According to physiognomies, having a small voice can be a sign of lechery[75] and of being lustful and womanizing.[76] Our modern instinct would take his high pitched voice to indicate a feminine voice or the voice of a castrato (Robinson, Ian. *Chaucer and the English Tradition* 92), or even a homosexual, an interpretation I will discuss later in this chapter. But the medieval association is much different.

There are a few ways in which we can interpret Absolon's physical depiction, his characteristics, and actions. In "Rough Girls and Squeamish Boys: The Trouble with Absolon in *The Miller's Tale*," Greg Walker argues that all of his characterizations serve to feminize him, but also that he "troubles the boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine,

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[74] Hodges quotes from Edith Rickert citing from *The Ancient Laws of the Fifteenth Century, for King's College, Cambridge, and…Eton College.*

[75] See chapter one on the physiognomy of the high voice that indicates a wanton desire. Thomas B. Hanson cites from John Metham that a high voice, or small voice, can signify lecherousness (482).

[76] C. David Benson and Richard Firth Green both indicate that effeminate characteristics and physiognomy can relate to a man's lustful and womanizing qualities. Benson draws connections between Absolon's voice and the Pardoner's voice both indicating the small and gentile quality that is often associated with homosexuality and being a eunuch. But Benson identifies other instances where a man's voice is similarly described with no homosexual association, such as Chaucer's Nicholas in the *Miller's Tale* who is described as "being as meek as a maiden" (l. 3202) (340-41). Green argues that the Pardoner's effeminacy is principally symbolic: mercy was seen as a feminine trait, and the Pardoner's business is a parody of the "Christian virtue of mercy" (356). Therefore, according to Green, the discussion of the Pardoner's previous references to sex and love of a woman, along with physiognomies, suggest that the Pardoner's "marks of effeminacy…are emblems of his carnality" (357).

adult and child" (61-2). Martin Blum asserts that the problem with Absolon is that his masculinity is stripped, making him childlike (46-9). Though analyzing Absolon as "childlike" provides a useful lens at reading his characteristics and actions, it is not a complete picture. We must also look at contexts such as religion and violence and how they might influence our view of this character. Walker also argues that Absolon is not the feminized figure of romance or the fabliau; instead he is from the "realm of popular religion" (63) rife with institutional anti-feminist rhetoric and even violence. A necessary connection to understanding Absolon is that he is part of this anti-feminist, patriarchal system, the same one that informs the Wife of Bath's husband, Jankyn, on how to view and treat her. Violence is part of that tradition; though it may not be explicit, it does occur and we see the culmination of anti-feminism and violence in Absolon.

Absolon's violence is mingled with his feminine characteristics to offer another possible combination of gender characteristics in a male literary figure. In fact, Absolon's abilities, actions, and characteristics have a range of interpretations. He has many professional and artistic abilities that do not clearly identify him as anything other than skilled and talented. He can "laten blood, and clippe and shave" (l. 3326), as well as "maken a charter of lond or acquitaunce" (l. 3327). He can "trippe and daunce" (l. 3328) and "pleyen songes on a small fiddle" (l. 3331). Chaucer also takes great care to tell us that the taverns Absolon frequents with his "solas" (ll. 3334-35) always have a "gaylard tappestere," or pretty barmaid (l. 3336). He has an eager eye for the "wyves of the parisshe" (l. 3342), especially Alison (l. 3343). His interest in Alison, and the other wives, might be interpreted as flirtatious or sexual, but it never seems to go anywhere. He takes no offering from any woman for "curteisie" (l. 3351), evidently hoping to get into at least one woman's good graces (there is no report of such an outcome). These references to Absolon's attraction to or contact with women are illuminated by Alison's rejection of him,

which allows the audience to understand Absolon as an eager but ineffective wooer of women. On the other hand, it also serves to complicate the way he later takes his revenge against her.

The depiction of Absolon thus far is entirely external, but Chaucer also intends to delve into the much darker inner-workings of his character. Absolon's "own elevated opinion of himself and his skills as a lover" (Cornelius 101) are surface projections to hide the truth that he is unskilled and naïve. Absolon cultivates a superficial appeal, but the audience surmises the motive for his courtesy toward women. Absolon stands in stark contrast to "hende Nicholas" (l. 3199), who knows of "deerne love" (l. 3200), and the audience is encouraged to see a significant difference in how the two clerks approach women. Absolon seems to respect women, but he offers to pay Alison for sex (l. 3380), while Nicholas seems to like secretive games. Both seem to play a typifying role, Absolon as feckless lover and Nicholas as lusty and sly.

Absolon is an ineffective wooer of Alison, who is married to John and having sex with Nicholas. Absolon sings to Alison while she is in bed with John who makes a comment to Alison (ll. 3366-3369). Absolon is completely oblivious or does not care whether John hears it or not, unlike Nicholas who is covert with his trysts with Alison. Absolon sends gifts to Alison (ll. 3378-379) that do not compare to her love for the "hende Nicholas" (l. 3386). Absolon certainly tries but might be accused of trying too hard. He even enlists others as "by meenes and brocage" (l. 3375) to convince her that he could be her servant (l. 3376). He puts it all out in the open for all to see, including her husband. But that is not the primary reasoning that Alison is unmoved. It is his characteristics that lead to his feckless attempts at wooing her. His singing is awkward, he is too dandified, and he goes to the extreme with his affection. Chaucer uses a proverb that highlights an element of Absolon's problem: "Alwey the nye slye / Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth" (ll. 3392-393). At other times, Absolon's description makes it seem he is more interested

in himself than Alison, or any woman. He “kembeth his lokkes brode, and made hym gay” (ll. 3374), to heighten his appeal, which does not seem to appeal to what Alison wants in a lover and it seems Absolon has not considered her desires. This is what he thinks represents effective wooing and it leads to his humiliation and then his violent reaction.

Absolon’s humiliation is a large part of the comedic force in the *Tale.* He becomes so enamored with Alison that he comes to her window in the dead of the night to ask for a kiss. Alison, who has been having sex with Nicholas, tricks Absolon into kissing “hir naked ers” (ll. 3732-4). Nicholas expresses his delight in the humor of the trick and thereby reveals the joke to Absolon: "A berd! A berd!" (l. 3742).[77] In any case, Absolon is “forced to confront the very object of desire he has long sought—a naked woman” (Cornelius 101). Absolon is not amused by the humiliation of having kissed her anus, by being made the butt of a joke, and by learning that Alison has taken a lover. This makes him angry and "on his lippe he gan for anger byte" (l. 3745). This anger leads to a vengeful decree that he shall “quyte” Alison (l. 3746), reminiscent of the Miller’s promise to “quyte” the Knight in response to his tale (l. 3746). Absolon’s earlier attempt at mimicking a genuine lover now transforms into his attempt at being a powerful man who cannot be trifled with and who will resort to violence for the purpose of his revenge. He performs both forms of imitation badly. His plan is to acquire red-hot metal with which he could ‘brand’ Alison’s rump (l. 3755).[78] Clearly he intends violence against her. Absolon’s vengeance on Alison complicates our understanding of his feminine qualities. If his effeminacy was

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[77] Louise M. Bishop argues that this scene signifies Absolon's confusion regarding female anatomy and suggests that misunderstanding about the female body results from the medieval social tendency to keep it secret (231). Bishop furthers her argument by saying that Nicholas' anus is another confusion of orifices that can be linked back to Exodus and God showing Moses his back parts (232). This correlation does not make sense in terms of Nicholas' anus as he has not been penetrated, but branded as previously pointed out.

[78] The tool Absolon borrows from Gerveys is a plough share intended to be used to brand and not sodomize as some have argued.

uncomfortable to read in the beginning, Chaucer amplifies that discomfort by Absolon's violent reaction.

There is a different complexity working in Absolon's turn to violence than there is in the violence of the rapist knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale,* which will be discussed in chapter four, or in the violence that Jankyn inflicts on the Wife of Bath. Arguably Alison has no right to humiliate Absolon, and her action could possibly reflect much of the misogynistic rhetoric of his profession, though this idea is somewhat vitiated by the fact that Alison is sleeping with a cleric. It may be that his humiliation is amplified by his failure as flirt and wooer of women. In some ways he has put Alison on such a high pedestal that in his love-besotted imagination she might even parallel the Virgin Mary, who is so exalted by his faith. At one point he kneels to Alison (l. 3723) just as one might kneel to the Virgin Mary (Beidler 221-2). But foremost he is playing the role that courtly love dictates. After he kneels he refers to himself as "a lord at alle degrees" (l. 3724), rhetoric that belies any humble associations with his kneeling. Absolon's violent reaction is due to his humiliation and that is why Absolon feels the need to punish Alison. What his humiliation never suggests is that his sexuality, or sexual orientation and identity, is in question. Rather, it is tied to his desire to play the role that Nicholas enjoys.

Of course, Absolon is no better at vengeance than he is at the art of love, proceeding blindly in both. He kisses the wrong end of Alison and scalds the wrong end as well. When Absolon returns with the hot coulter, it is Nicholas who sticks his backside out the window and unexpectedly takes the brunt of Absolon's vengeance. On the basis of this scene some scholars have redirected Absolon's sexual orientation by alleging an allegorical sodomizing of Nicholas. In "Queer Punishments: Tragic and Comic Sodomy in the Death of Edward II and in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale"*, Kathleen A. Bishop develops a connection between Edward II, alleged to have

been sodomized and murdered with "a red-hot iron" (16), and the *Miller's Tale,* "where Absolon sodomizes his rival Nicholas" (16). Her interpretation depends on “a commonplace tenet of queer theory that a sexual act per se need not transpire . . . to be viewed through the lens of same sex desire” (16-17). Though I understand Bishop’s insistence that sex acts and desire be understood differently, there are vague associations as to what constitutes desire and the meaning of sexual acts. Sexual acts are more than just physical just as desire is more than just physical, and the ambiguities ought to discourage facile interpretations such as the imputation of homosexual desire in Absolon. Readings such as Kathleen Bishop’s mistakenly suppose that there is “most certainly . . . an 'act' to analyze. The emotional impact of the brutal image of one man sodomizing another with a foreign object transcends time periods" (22). But the modern assumption that this scene is about sodomy and homosexuality not only misreads the line but mischaracterizes Absolon and his sexuality.

It is not only the branding that some associate with Absolon’s homosexuality. Frederick Turner asserts that Absolon is “an expert hairdresser, a profession anciently associated with sexual ambiguity,” and he argues that Absolon’s revenge is “a symbolic act of homosexual rape” (292). What Turner and Bishop fail to understand is that Absolon’s feminizing qualities in themselves are not automatic markers of homosexuality. Absolon’s effeminacy has nothing to do with homosexuality. We have many more markers of Absolon’s heterosexuality, despite his feminine characteristics, than we do of his homosexuality. As I have discussed, masculinity and femininity are demonstrated in different combinations in an individual and do not indicate a modern identity such as homosexuality. Bishop does not outright call Absolon effeminate; she does refer to him as a "local boy who is much less butch than Nicholas" (20). Bishop indicates his effeminate qualities in connection with an allegedly homosexual act that does not occur.

Actually there is no connection between the act and Absolon's sexual orientation or identity, as can be shown through analysis of the instrument itself and the intended target, which is not Nicholas.

First, the instrument of Absolon's violence should not be read as a tool that is used to sodomize Nicholas. The textual evidence of the wound says that an expanse of Nicholas' skin came off his rump, making evident that he is branded, not skewered: "Of gooth the skyn an hande-brede aboute / The hoote kultour brende so his toute" (l. 3811).[79] He is permanently marked (Olson 229) but not sodomized. Thus there is no allegory for homosexual sodomy. The second point in removing a homosexual reading is that Absolon wants to exact his revenge against Alison, not Nicholas. Elaine Tuttle Hansen contends that Absolon's violence makes his effeminacy more prominent because he can't even exact revenge against a woman, and she asserts that Absolon is forced "to engage unwittingly in an act that must suggest sodomy" (232).[80] Hansen does acknowledge that Absolon's inability to exact revenge against his intended target, Alison, is itself a sign of inadequacy and even effeminacy. But Absolon's effeminacy is not tied to his violence; after all, fecklessness is unrelated to gender. Rather, the focus of analysis should be on his intent, which is to exact revenge on a woman. His intent should be read as a type of masculine, misogynistic response to female sovereignty. She refuses him and he believes that she has no right both to refuse and to humiliate him. His violence has similarities to violent actions against women such as rape, and though his fecklessness is funny and meant to amuse

[79] One of the *MED* definitions of "toute" is "the buttocks, rump" and not the "anus" and in fact "toute" never means "anus." "Buttocks" stems from the more generalized meaning relating to things that protrude or are round.
[80] Elaine Tuttle Hansen in a footnote argues that "[w]hat Absolon does to Nicholas also imputes to homosexual acts the displacement of violence against women, and this perception might be explored more fully in a discussion of representations of the complicated relations between misogyny, male homosexuality, and homophobia" (232). This is misleading because Absolon's intended target is Alison, not Nicholas.

the reader, Absolon offers a problematic view of how men treat women. He also exemplifies the imbalance of certain feminine and masculine qualities in a male literary figure.

The difference between effeminacy and homosexuality is clearly the problem with some analyses of Absolon. Let us consider another example. In "Women's 'Pryvetees' and Fabliau Politics in the *Miller's Tale,*" Karma Lochrie asserts that Absolon's revenge is "ambiguously directed at both Alison and Nicholas, both genitals and mouths. His attack with the hot colter is aimed blindly at whatever thing appears at the window. The 'hint of sexual violence' underlying Absolon's attack is both homosexual and heterosexual at the same time, since Absolon does not know the object of his hatred" (301).[81] But are we certain that Absolon's retribution is aimed at both? The offense against him involves Alison's private parts, not Nicholas's. He has no reason to believe that his return would elicit Nicholas' backside rather than Alison's. Absolon seems to be an ardent wooer of women, but the façade of his gallantry is marred in two ways, by effeminacy and by violence against a woman.

Overall, the problem with Absolon is that the composition of his gender characteristics and the violence he exacts throw his portrait off balance. Chaucer moves from Absolon's physical description to his actions showing that variations of characteristics can have social repercussions. His effeminacy is awkward and comical at times while his masculine tendencies, also comical at times, are made problematic by the violence that he intends against a woman. Though his violence is different than that of the rapist knights discussed in chapter two, it is no less troubling and dangerous to society. Chaucer wraps the violence in this tale in humor that also highlights the problems that gender characteristics pose when misaligned. This is how medieval society would have initially read Absolon's character. That is not to say that the

[81] Lochrie cites Winthrop Wetherbee's argument detailing Absolon's actions and their sexual connotations in *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 59.

reading would have stopped there. Just as there are many variations of characteristics in an individual, there are many receptions and understandings of characters like Absolon. My point is that medieval society would have understood that a mixture of gender characteristics was inevitable but not always beneficial or without some problem.

Absolon's imbalance of characteristics is due to his feminization and also his adopting misguided masculine tendencies in response to his humiliation in a tale where the audience is meant to laugh at his feminization. Imbalance occurs in other areas of Chaucer's *Tales* as well, especially in emasculated male literary figures. Previous examples illustrate feminine qualities that are added to masculine ones sometimes creating a balance of characteristics, sometimes an imbalance. Emasculation, a lack or removal of masculine features, produces a different form of imbalance. Emasculation itself takes several different forms as well: metaphorical emasculation through humiliation by those who are physically or psychologically more powerful; old age that brings the loss of male functions; lack of genitalia, whether by birth defect or by castration. Chaucer's Host practices metaphorical emasculation when he humiliates Chaucer the Pilgrim in the *Prologue to Sir Thopas.* The Pardoner exemplifies both metaphorical and physical emasculation, as does *Piers Plowman,* whose male protagonist is emasculated physically by his age and psychologically by his wife. These examples demonstrate how emasculation, different from feminization, functions as a removal of or threat against masculinity, throwing off the balance that feminine qualities bring to other literary characters.

In the *Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas* the Host, Harry Bailey, metaphorically emasculates Chaucer the Pilgrim by calling his masculinity into question. Harry's question,

“What man artow?” (l. 695) begins a discussion of Chaucer's anti-social behavior (l. 704)[82] but also challenges his masculinity. First of all, the Host’s teasing belittles Chaucer:

> This were a popet in an arm t'enbrace
>
> For any womman, smal and fair of face,
>
> He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
>
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.
>
> (ll. 701-4)

A *popet* is a small doll, and the image expresses the Host’s sardonic view of Chaucer’s stature. Also, comparing Chaucer to an elf is not meant to characterize Chaucer positively. These descriptions are meant to call Chaucer’s behavior into question and his manliness, which the Host associates with size, implying Chaucer is unmanly. The Host’s aggression is also a masculine response that serves to emasculate Chaucer.[83]

The Host’s belittling continues when he learns that Chaucer’s tale will unimpressive, an old "rym lerned longe agoon" (l. 708-9); the Host states, perhaps with a smirk, that we are about to hear "Som deyntee thyng" (l. 711). Modern glosses of the word "deyntee" vary here. The gloss in the *Riverside Chaucer* proffers "excellent" while the Harvard Chaucer Online simply respells as "dainty." The *OED* attributes a positive connotation to the fourteenth-century definition: "[v]aluable, fine, handsome; choice, excellent; pleasant, delightful" ("dainty"). But it also cites Wycliffe's *Bible* in 1382 for the meaning “delicate” (*“*dainty"). When considering the entire line, "Som deyntee theyng, me thynketh by his cheere" (l. 711), we may suppose that “cheere” (countenance, expression) recalls the recent focus on Chaucer's appearance. Harry’s raillery is

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[82] The line is "For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce" (l. 704). The gloss in the *Riverside Chaucer* translates "dooth he daliaunce" as "is he sociable" to which the first part of the sentence clarifies that he was not sociable to anyone.

[83] The Host compares his own ample waistline with that of Chaucer’s as part of the physical description (l. 700) but does nothing to soften the sardonic views expressed.

undoubtedly an attack on Chaucer's "suspect masculinity" (Pugh 118).[84] The tale's flaws lead the Host to stop Chaucer from finishing it. The Host silences him with a final emasculating comment: "Thy drasty ryming is nat worh a toord" (l. 930).

The Host is not immune to emasculation himself and divulges as much to his fellow pilgrims. After Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee,* the Host wishes that his own wife could have heard this tale because "she nys no thyng of swich pacience / As was this Melibeus wyf Prudence" (*The Prologue of the Monk's Tale* ll. 1895-96). He claims that when his wife is offended by others she accuses him of not defending her (ll. 1901-05) and calls him a "milksop, or a coward ape" (l. 1910) who is "overlad with every wight" (l. 1911). These insults, he says, prompt him to take care of the situation, but they also cause him distress because, he says, someday he will have to kill one of his neighbors to assuage her anger (ll. 1914-18). Despite his posturing as a formidable man, he refuses to stand up to her because she is strong and knows how to fight (l. 1921). In effect, his wife is more aggressive, more masculine, than he is.

The Host's own emasculation might be the cause for him to emasculate others, just like the bully who formerly was bullied himself. In the *Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale,* the Host opens hostilities by calling the Pardoner "beel amy" ('fair friend'; l. 318), which may express scorn and could imply something about the Pardoner's effeminacy (Ross 35). When taken in conjunction with the Pardoner's description in the *General Prologue* it could further the "Pardoner's aura of problematic sexuality" (Leicester 173). The Pardoner most likely recognizes the Host's contempt. At the end of his tale, the Pardoner offers all the pilgrims a relic to kiss, for a "grote" (l. 945), that will help to absolve them of their sins in case of an accident during the

[84] Pugh also refers to an implication regarding Chaucer's "sexual proclivities." It is not clear, however, what Pugh means..

journey (ll. 932-40). The Pardoner then suggests that the Host should start because "he is moost envoluped in synne" (ll.941-42), an obvious slight on the Host's spiritual integrity. The Host launches his own insult, likening the Pardoner's testicles, "coillons," to relics, which the Host would like to "kutte" off and enshrine "in an hogges toord!" (ll. 952-5). The threat, or joke, alludes to the Pardoner's apparent eunuchism and is meant to emasculate him figuratively through exposure. Recall that in the *General Prologue* the Pardoner is said to have the look of a "geldyng or a mare" (l. 691), a eunuch or a female horse, a point I will expand on further down. One must note that he is one or the other, not both, and the Host's insult clearly aligns with "geldyng" and questions the Pardoner's physical, and sexual, masculinity.

In an effort to bring the two men together the Knight intervenes and suggests that the two men kiss and make up (ll. 962-7). They do kiss and ride off, which is somewhat surprising considering the insults thrown back and forth and how "wrooth" the Pardoner had been (l. 957). The Host's mock threat of violence serves to emasculate the Pardoner and question his functioning sexuality. The emasculation and verbal violence is de-escalated by the Knight, a figure who is presented as wise and well-rounded but who is also a military figure prone to violence by profession. Because of the Knight's intervention, the Pardoner and the Host are coaxed into a truce that is then sealed with the kiss. One would initially think of the kiss exchanged between the two figures as a threat to masculinity and a possible indication of same-sex desire. Instead, what it does propose is that this violent response on behalf of the Host is not socially acceptable, which is why the Knight has to step in.

What begins as a competition between two men arguably insecure in their masculinity soon escalates to threats of violence and emasculation yet ends in homosocial comradery. Harry's easy machismo may irritate the Pardoner, who tries to pass himself off as a ladies' man.

The Pardoner has to work harder to maintain the façade of his masculinity while knowing that he is probably not all that convincing. On the other hand, Harry is henpecked by his wife, which may lead to his overemphasizing his own masculinity and ridiculing others who lack it. Still, social mores afford Harry more masculine consideration than granted to the Pardoner, leaving the subtleties difficult to untangle.

The exchange between the Host and the Pardoner is not the only place where the Pardoner is emasculated. In *The General Prologue*, Chaucer alludes to the social rejection of emasculated men who actually lack genitalia by emphasizing Pardoner's physical features and possible eunuchism. This focus on the Pardoner's body does connect to his profession in the church, but that profession is not a positive social outreach. Instead, he abuses his ecclesiastical role to exact vengeance on the society that rejects him. In *Piers Plowman* when Will seeks revenge, Kynde urges him to "wende into Unite" (l. 204), that is, to unite himself with Holy Church in order to learn to love. Chaucer's emasculated Pardoner joins the Church in order to enact his own desires, not to learn to love. Will is directed by nature, and it may be that Nature has affected the Pardoner as well. Possibly it was Nature that gave the Pardoner a voice "as smal as hath a goot" (l. 668) and a face so lacking a beard that was as "smothe it was as it were late shave" (ll. 669-90). His unhealthy "lokkes" of hair are "yellow as wex" (ll. 675-7) and hang around his shoulders in "colpons"(l. 679), or stringy strands. In this case physical description is not enough to signal the Pardoner's emasculation, Chaucer adds one more identifying feature to his gender ambiguity: "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare" (l. 691). In *The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How it Matters*, Monica E. McAlpine argues that the negative connotation does not solely rely on the Pardoner's description as a "geldying or a mare." It also relies on his profession, "for the danger lies not in any particular sexual definition but in the manner of

relating the Pardoner's sexuality to his spirituality" (10). Selling pardons, though officially sanctioned, is considered by some to be theologically unsound. Furthermore, he uses his profession to peddle false relics, undeniably fraudulent, which positions him as an evil religious figure of an ambiguous sexual nature.

Modern associations of emasculation with homosexuality, especially in the case of the Pardoner, have become more pervasive. McAlpine argues for the Pardoner's homosexuality by ascribing to his implied eunuchism the same meaning born by the modern stereotype of the "effeminate male homosexual." In her opinion this modern construction is not anachronistic for a medieval audience. She argues that Chaucer and some of his contemporaries attempted to "explain homosexuality to themselves and that they failed to dispel the mystery it presented to them" (10). This argument begs the question of what constitutes a homosexual for a medieval audience and thus is unproductive. It is anachronistic to suggest a medieval audience had the same social views of homosexuality as we do now.[85] These anachronistic views have led theorists like Glenn Burger to rephrase the concept of homosexuality as "queer" and lump it together with all non-normative sexual behavior. [86]

Keeping Foucault's argument in mind helps formulate the problem within the theoretical constructs attempting to assign modern assumptions to medieval society: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now [late 19th century] a species" (Foucault 1663). The label "homosexual" is for medieval purposes anachronistic because it suggests a community

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[85] As previously mentioned, Carolyn Dinshaw has argued for Chaucer's description of the Pardoner as a removal from the "patriarchal—and heterosexual—hermeneutic altogether" (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* 25). Here, Dinshaw is discussing textual interpretation and manufacturing of texts as both patriarchal and heterosexual.
[86] One of the premises in Burger's *Chaucer's Queer Nation.*

that did not exist at that time. What does make sense in terms of the medieval is a discussion about the ways in which emasculated and effeminate men connote positive and negative associations.

McAlpine's connection between the Pardoner's physical oddity and his pedaling of false relics is useful in terms of arguing for a hostile reaction to the Pardoner. He is described as making more money in one day than a poor parson makes in "monthes tweye" (ll. 702-4); furthermore, by feigning "flaterye and japes, / He made the person and the peple his apes" (ll. 705-6). He is a figure existing outside the physical norms for gender who is further complicated by his sleazy pedaling of lies and trinkets. In "Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale," Steven F. Kruger proposes that the problem with identifying the Pardoner as gay is that it connects his despicable lifestyle with a possible intention that Chaucer is writing him out of homophobia, possibly his own (121). What further describes the Pardoner in a negative light is the song "Com hider, love, to me" (l. 672), which the Pardoner sings to his "compeer" (l. 670), the Summoner, another figure in a profession that is rife with dishonesty and deceit. Though we cannot be certain that Chaucer means to imply physical intimacy between the two characters, Kruger does bring insight into the fact that these are not positive depictions, partly due to their sexual connotations.

Those sexual connotations, such as sodomy, are not always aligned with every effeminate male character. In *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio,* Susan Schibanoff highlights the difference in how the Pardoner is a "negative feminization" in contrast to the “positive feminization” of the Squire (48). She argues that the Squire is “devoid of homoerotic overtones” specifically because those overtones have been “displaced elsewhere, namely, onto the characterization of the Pardoner (48). Recall the previous discussion about “positive

feminization" as lacking any connotation to homoeroticism or sodomy and "negative feminization" suggesting a clear link to either of those. In the Squire's case, sodomy is not hinted at; in the Pardoner's case it is. Schibanoff also straddles the line between modern and medieval understandings of homosexuality. For Schibanoff it was possible for medieval people to appreciate the difference between feminization as positive and sodomy as negative. To say that some literature of the high Middle Ages has homoerotic leanings superimposes modern constructions on the medieval mind, a notion that Burgwinkle brings up and that is previously discussed in the introduction and chapter one.[87] What we can be certain of is that Chaucer's Pardoner and Summoner practice professions that are associated with dishonesty. Also, they have ugly physical characteristics along with an ambiguous suggestion as to their sexual practices, which possibly suggest sodomy, a difference between the act and the person. I believe it is the balance and imbalance of gendered features, balance in the Squire, and imbalance in the Pardoner, that promote negative and positive connotations.

Physical emasculation is not only the removal of male genitals, there is also emasculation in the form of impotence. *Piers Plowman* provides an example in which age renders a man impotent. This same passage also illustrates metaphorical and psychological emasculation. In Passus XX, Will the narrator exclaims that Elde (Old Age):

> ...leyde on me with age,
>
> And hitte me under the ere; unethe may Ich here.
>
> He buffeted me aboute the mouthe and bett out my [wangtethe]
>
> And gyved me in goutes; I may nighte go at large.
>
> And of the wo that I was in my wyf had reuthe

[87] See Introduction and chapter one for Burgwinkle's argument about "queer" readings of medieval texts.

> And wisshed ful witterly that I were in Hevene.
>
> For the lyme that she loved me fore and leef was to fele
>
> On nyghtes namely whan we naked were,
>
> I ne myght in no manere maken it at hir wille,
>
> So Elde and [heo] sothly hadden it forbeten.
>
> (XX. ll. 189-98)[88]

Evidently Will's masculinity is undone in several ways: through the natural process of aging, here described as a physical assault; through metaphorical victimization; and through impotence, both general physical incapacity and specifically sexual incapacity. Will's wife's snide, albeit funny, wish that Will die and go to heaven adds psychological emasculation and implies that she is superior to Will because she still has her sexual appetite. James J. Paxson highlights the physical damage that has been made on Will by both Old Age and his wife, Kit, by equating feminization and emasculation. In "Piers Plowman": The Copula(tion)s of Figures in Medieval Allegory," Paxson describes this scene as a conjoined beat down of Will by both his wife and Elde and that his impotence is related to both heterosexual and homosexual "overstimulation" of his penis (22). Because the personification of Elde is male, Paxson employs a queer reading of this scene that leads to a "loss of the power of normative copulations between male and female" and is compromised by the male figure of Elde (22). This reading suggests a feminization of Will when, in fact, it is emasculation, a removal of his heterosexual functioning that is emblematic of his masculinity and an essential part of him. For Paxson, the queer reading is both a removal from normal heterosexual function, which may be true, but is complicated by the broad use of

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[88] All references from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* are from the B text in the Norton Critical Edition.

the term queer. Would medieval audiences have read the scene this way? After all, Old Age affects all of Will's body, not just his penis.

Again, emasculation is treated as a removal of masculinity leading to the imbalance of Will's character, though here it is through the natural stages of age. The principal emasculation of Will is the removal of normative sexual functioning. Elde's gender is merely an accident of personification; old age per se has no gender. Will's emasculation, though from a natural occurrence, is negative in his plea for vengeance. Will asks for Kynde to "Awreke me if yowre wille be" (l. 203). His plea to Nature is not to recover his potency; it is to get vengeance for what he has become. Most men cannot accept the loss of sexual function, though it is natural with age, something the author indicates with Will's plea for vengeance. Of course, Will's desire for vengeance is really a plea for the restoration of his potency, of 'natural' strength that is a gift of Nature (Kynde), who does not restore Will's vigor but advises Will to "Lerne to love" (l. 208). Will's loss of virility brings with it loss of masculine physical identity, and this result in some ways feminizes him. But his inability to perform as a man is not replaced by femininity rather, his lack of masculinity negatively mirrors femininity. In contrast, when Kynde does not restore Will's vigor but advises him to "Lerne to love" (l. 208), there is a feminization in terms of the advice that Kynde's offers, which implies a positive substitution. We can see the same dynamic of feminization tempering hypermasculine pursuit of vengeance in the advice Prudence gives to Melibee.

Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* demonstrates the need for men to listen to female advice, especially when dealing with violence, and involves male submission to women through that advice. Submission to women is a form of feminization that takes positive connotations and helps to mitigate masculine violence and other forms of imbalance. Simply paying heed to

women helps to repair unbalanced masculinity. Scholars have addressed the theme of wise counsel in *Melibee*.[89] The *Tale of Melibee* starts with a violent act against the title character. Three of Melibee's enemies have "betten his wyf, and wounded his doghter with fyve mortal woundes in fyve sondry places" (l. 971). Melibee is overcome with weeping when he believes his daughter, Sophie, has been killed and that weeping becomes more intense when his wife, Prudence, beseeches him to stop (ll. 974-975). Though his daughter is not dead and Prudence says that Sophie "shal warisshe and escape" (l. 982), she also adds that "al were it so that she right now were deed, / you ne oughte nat, as for hir deeth, yourself to destroye" (VII 983). Melibee's weeping is not regarded as unmanly or feminine[90] but paying heed to his wife's advice could be seen as a positive feminine attribute. Prudence recalls the words of Ovid suggesting that a mourning person, in Ovid's scenario a mother mourning her child, be allowed to weep for a time "and thanne shal man doon his diligence with amyable wordes hire to reconforte, / and preyen hire of hir wepyng for to stynte" (ll. 976-78). She allows Melibee to cry and then begins to advise him why it is important that he should stop. Prudence recalls Paul's writings to the Romans that "attempree wepyng be ygraunted, outrageous wepyng certes is deffended" (l. 988), and she also reminds him that it is important to govern oneself by wisdom, not sorrow (l. 992). She suggests that he put together a "greet congregacion of folk" (l. 1003) to help him determine a course of action (ll. 1007-09).

Prudence's counsel does not rely on the congregation. Instead, she walks Melibee through the process of decision making, biding time so that a rash decision is not reached and later

[89] In "The Political Meaning of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee,"* Gardiner Stillwell argues that one theme of the tale is that of "the excellence of woman as counsellor" (434) in a period of time where Richard II received bad counsel and women like Queen Anne helped make peace between London and Richard (443). For more on Prudence as a virtuous and good woman see Elizabeth Lunz "Chaucer's Prudence as the Ideal of the Virtuous Woman," and Denise N. Baker "Chaucer and Moral Philosophy: The Virtuous Women of *The Canterbury Tales."*

[90] Crying was not considered unmanly or feminine in the Middle Ages. For more on male crying see Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears.*

regretted. The various members of the congregation offer their advice, which heavily favors revenge against those who have wronged Melibee. This preponderance sets the stage for debate between Prudence and Melibee, which occupies the majority of the tale. Its theme is the importance of waiting and making a more informed, calculated plan.

Melibee listens but declines her advice because the congregation would consider him a fool; also, he asserts his belief that "alle women been wikke, and noon good of hem alle" (l. 1057). Prudence attacks the all-encompassing view that women are wicked and their advice should not be considered. Her defense is bolstered by examples of women who have given wise counsel, including Rebekka, Judith, Abigail, and Hester (ll. 1097-1101). The biblical heroines all counseled men, but Judith also represents a woman who then gained mastery over men in some way. Judith slays Holofernes and frees the Bethulians from occupation. Though Judith does not advise Holofernes—the Bethulians are the ones to benefit from her counsel—it is important to note in her story that a woman physically overcomes a male authority figure. Though it is true that Judith overcomes Holofernes because of he is inebriated and thus reduces the impact of her physical domination, one might consider that Holofernes impairment evens the odds of the physical inequality. Prudence does not illustrate physical domination over men, yet she offers these examples of female superiority over men that Melibee cannot refute.

Prudence proceeds to argue that if women were "not goode, and hir counsels goode and profitable" then "Lord God of hevene wolde nevere han wroght hem, ne called hem help of man, but rather confusioun of man" (l. 1105-6). After Melibee

> hadde herd the grete skiles and resouns of dame Prudence, and hire wise informaciouns and techynges, his herte gan enclyne to the wil of his wif, considerynge hir trewe entente, and conformed hym anon and assented fully to werken after hir conseil, and

> thonked God, of whom precedeth al vertu and alle goodnesse, that hym sente a wyf of so greet discrecioun. (ll.1871-74)

On Prudence's advice, Melibee sends messengers to those who injured their daughter to tell them that he wants "pees and accord" and to invite them to come see him (ll. 1796-98). The "trespassours" were "right glad and joyeful" when they heard of Melibee's desire to make peace (ll. 2000-04). Their welfare is also affected by Prudence's counsel. In effect they too will be redeemed by feminine counsel, rehabilitated from their hypermasculine violence.

At the beginning of the tale Melibee's behavior exhibits hypermasculine characteristics; he turns toward vengeance and violence. The rhetoric Melibee uses, expressing his wounded pride more than his grief and pain, reflects a hypermasculine response to the hypermasculine violence of his enemies. Melibee is unable to hear Prudence's advice and though he knows it to be true he says his "herte is troubled with this sorwe so grevously that I noot what to doone" (l. 1001). But that description is deepened with anger when he addresses the congregation to seek their advice. Melibee's voice and speech "semed that in herte he baar a crueel ire," and he told the crowd that he wished to start war against his enemies (l. 1009). One purpose in identifying his speech as motivated by "cruel anger" is to complicate his motive for war. Melibee's initial anger can be explained by his grief and pain—one might say heated things in his circumstances—but it goes beyond grief and actually reflects his wounded pride. It is excessive, and excess is an essential feature of hypermasculinity. Melibee pushes grief into violence because he has the means to make war happen.

For the most part, the (male) congregation supports the call to war, fueling Melibee's hypermasculine response. But in the end, Melibee changes his mind, with the counsel of his wife, and forgives the men who wounded his daughter. The change in the attitudes and behavior

of both Melibee and his enemies result from feminine advice and counsel, another example of how male aggressive tendencies need to be tempered with femininity. Here, war is averted and society can progress. The *Tale* is a lesson in why masculinity needs the balance of femininity.

In her article "Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the Melibee," Carolyn P. Collette argues that Chaucer's Prudence is "a form of female aristocratic virtue" (419) and that Chaucer follows his source texts in exemplifying the importance of female counsel for men (424-25). Collette's point is that *Melibee*, just like its source texts, is "designed to instruct aristocratic women" (419). The instruction of *Melibee* can have a second function, to teach men to receive advice from women. In the example from *Piers Plowman* discussed earlier, Kynde refuses to restore Will's vigor and advises him to learn to love. Prudence not only argues against Melibee's aggressiveness—it is unproductive and dangerous—she also replaces it with something like love, convincing Melibee to seek peace with his enemies.

Female advice does not always suggest a pleading with men to listen and consider a reasonable, more temperate response. Sometimes female advice takes the form of an order that comes from a woman who is of a higher status than the man. One arguably masculine, even hypermasculine, character in the Arthurian tales is, of course, Lancelot. Though Lancelot is feminized from the very start of the *The Knight of the Cart*, Chretien de Troye and his audience know Lancelot to be an incomparable warrior. His prowess as a knight means that his feminization needs to be enhanced further; it is not enough that he submits to a woman of higher rank. Early in the narrative, Guinevere is captured by Meleagant and Lancelot searches for her. When he finds her, she ignores him because he had previously hesitated to get into a passing prison cart (211),[91] in order to travel to find and fight for her release. His hesitation is a sign, to

[91] All references to *The Knight of the Cart* are from the translation by William W. Kibler.

her, that it is not enough to suit her and that he must further demonstrate it. When he does finally come up against Meleagant his fighting is "so fierce and courageous that Meleagant realized the deadly seriousness and began to fear him" (253). Lancelot's hypermasculine violence is thus on display, but more importantly it is controlled by Guinevere, who directs Lancelot to "restrain himself" (254). Though Chrétien may be satirizing the extremes of courtly love, he does present an example of its feminizing effect.

Lancelot's submission during the battle is still not enough for Guinevere to accept his submission. Because of Guinevere's request of Lancelot's restraint during the battle, Meleagant still "struck Lancelot repeatedly" (254) and could have killed him, something Lancelot brings up to her later (262). After the battle the king, Meleagant's father, brings Lancelot to Guinevere who replies "He cannot please me, sire. I have no interest in seeing him" (256) because his submission is still unacceptable to her. Lancelot's shame and submission is compounded by Guinevere's constant refusal to see him, which leaves him in various states of distress that ultimately lead to attempted suicide (260). When finally she agrees to see him, he asks her why she had refused him all these times. Guinevere expresses her displeasure that he had hesitated to get into the cart (262). The hesitation suggests that Lancelot momentarily gives priority to his honor, not to his love and devotion to Guinevere. His pride, another example of hypermasculinity, needs to be tempered by Guinevere's femininity to which he submits. This is just one last demonstration of the feminizing effect of the courtly love pact and Chretien's acknowledgment that the ferocity of knights, especially one as fierce as Lancelot, benefits from male submission to feminine authority because it tempers his hypermasculinity.

Lancelot's submission suggests that tamed ferocity is better than untamed ferocity, even when the taming is ridiculous. A different but equally odd sort of female taming of the male has

no relation to male violence though the one tamed is a knight in King Arthur's court. Lanval, the title character in Marie de France's Arthurian tale (12th century), is a knight whose military activity is never displayed. Still, Lanval submits to a female character, a fairy, and that submission has definite benefits.

Lanval's place within Arthur's court is strangely problematic. He has been forgotten by the king and is disliked by his fellow knights. Marie explains why:

> For his valor, his generosity,
> his beauty, his prowess,
> most people envied him;
> many a one pretended to love him
> who wouldn't have complained for a moment
> if something bad had befallen the knight.
>
> (ll. 21-26)[92]

Lanval's isolation leads him to ride off alone into the countryside. This separation heightens his readiness to submit to the otherworldly maidens whom he encounters. While Lanval reclines by a river, two beautiful women approach him and bring him to the fairy's lavish tent, a feminine space that counters the masculine structure of the court. Lanval embarks on a love affair with her in which she dictates the rules. She gives Lanval riches and dotes on him in a reversal of

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[92] All references to Marie de France's *Lanval* are from Claire M. Waters translation with side by side Anglo-Norman text based on British Library MS Harley 978. The Anglo-Norman reads:

> Pur sa valur, pur sa largesce,
> Pur sa beauté, pur sa prüesce
> L'envioënt tut li plusur;
> Tel li mustra semblant d'amur
> Se al chevaler mesavenist,
> Ja une feiz ne l'en pleinsist.

dominant gender roles. When she declares he must leave she warns, and even orders, him that he cannot tell anyone about their affair. Should he reveal the secret, he would risk never seeing her again (ll. 143-49). She describes their relationship in a courtly love fashion that presents her as the dominant female dictating the guidelines of the relationship, and Lanval as subject to her rules. Her dominance is not based on her being a fairy whose supernatural power surpasses that of humans. Instead, her power and dominance are based on being a female sexual partner and willing Lanval to submit to her.

The concept of submission to a woman is described in detail by Andreas Capellanus in *The Art of Courtly Love.* In the chapter titled "The Rules of Love," Capellanus describes a number of elements that make courtly love achievable. The rules are usually described in terms of the male lover's service to a woman, but they also deal with general rules such as "public love rarely endures" and "a true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved" (185). Making their love public will ruin the affair, a rule described in Capellanus as a request of the woman. The many rules reflect the contract between Lanval and the maiden that he ends up betraying, by breaking the rule of keeping the affair secret. These rules set up the necessary balance of feminine and masculine, in both the man and the woman, required for a love contract to be effective and beneficial to both parties. Those feminine and masculine characteristics are mingled within each providing a balance that can have a variety of possible combinations. Here the fairy queen exhibits some masculine characteristics in her demands and Lanval exhibits feminine characteristics when he submits to her. In some ways, Capellanus's rules demonstrate male dominance over women, as discussed in chapter two. On the other hand, Capellanus's rules demonstrate how feminine and masculine characteristics, behavior, and actions in an individual can be composed and also be beneficial to courtly love relationships.

When Lanval returns to the Arthurian court the queen approaches him in hopes of beginning an affair with him. Lanval refuses and tells her that he has "no desire" to love her because he does not want to betray his faith or his king (ll. 270-72).[93] The queen becomes enraged and accuses him of having "no interest in that pleasure"; that is, desire for women (ll. 277-80)[94], a remark that serves to position him awkwardly in terms of feminine and masculine qualities. His feminizing submissiveness to the maiden has in the story no negative connotation, but there is a negative force in the queen's accusation that he is attracted to men, desiring the companionship of knights over the love of a woman, and/or lacking the desire for women altogether. The queen says:

> People have often told me
> that you're not interested in women.
> You have shapely young men
> and take your pleasure with them.
> Base coward, infamous wretch,
> my lord is very badly repaid
> for allowing you to remain in his presence;
> I believe that he will lose God by it!
>
> (ll. 279-86)[95]

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[93] The Anglo-Norman reads: "Jeo n'ai cure de vus amer, / Lungement ai servi le rei; / ne li voil pas mentir ma fei." Translation: "I have no interest in loving you. / For a long time I have served the king; / I don't want to betray my faith to him."

[94] The Anglo-Norman reads: "Lanval," fete le, "bien le quit, / vuz n'amez gueres cel delit." Translation: "Lanval," she said, "it's quite clear to me / you have no interest in that pleasure."

[95]
> Asez le m'ad humme it sovent
> Que des femmez n'avez talent.
> Vallez avez bien afeitiez,
> Ensemble od eus vus deduiez.
> Vileins cüarz, mauveis failliz,
> Mut est mi sires maubailliz

In anger he responds that he knows “nothing / about that line of work”[96] he loves and is loved by “one who should be valued more highly / than all the women [he knows]” (Cele ke deit aver le pris / Sur tutes celes que jeo sai) (ll. 294-95). Lanval does not stop with a general assertion that his lady is better than any women he knows; he goes on to insult Guinevere by saying that any of his lady’s servants,

> ‘even the poorest maid,
>
> is worth more than you, lady queen,
>
> in body, face, and beauty,
>
> in manners and goodness.’
>
> (ll. 299-302) [97]

Lanval becomes angry, over masculinized, in defending himself against an accusation that distorts his composition of gender characteristics and actions that were being established with his submission to the maiden. First he rejects the imputation of homosexual behavior which could be meant to emasculate him in a socially demeaning way. While he defends his masculinity, he breaks the rules of courtly love by revealing his love. In this sense his self-defense is hypermasculine. It breaks a promise of self-control and upsets the balances of his personality.

> Que pres de lui vus ad suffert;
> Mun escïent que Deus en pert!

[96] “That line of work” refers to the accusation that Lanval entertains young men and takes pleasure from them, a sexual reference. The Anglo-Norman reads: “‘Dame,’” dist il, ‘de cel mestier / ne me sai jeo nïent aidier.’” Translation: “‘Lady,’” he said, ‘I know nothing / about that line of work.’”

[97] The Anglo-Norman reads:

> ‘Tute la plus povre meschine,
> Vaut meuz de vus, dame reïne,
> De cors, de vis e de beauté,
> D’enseignement e de bunté.’

Lanval is slated for trial for insulting the queen, an act that implicitly shames the king as well, and it is not until the final moment before the verdict is read that Lanval's lover comes to his rescue and addresses the king in her firm defense of Lanval's remarks to the queen. She further describes the queen's wrongdoing and, with the king's consent, she sweeps Lanval up onto the back of her horse to take him to live in Avalon (ll. 620-41). Once the power dynamic of the fairy's dominance is reinstated and Lanval is humbled and feminized, he can live out the rest of his days with his ideal beloved. It is that submission to a woman that keeps his masculine qualities in balance.

The concept of balance in gender characteristics may seem foreign to modern thoughts and gender theories that rightly resist ideas of positive and negative feminization, especially in men. But our modern theories are not applicable to how a medieval audience would have thought about gender characteristics. All the available theories on gender development available to medieval society point to a balance in humours, astrological influences, and fetus development. It makes sense that a balance would also apply to how gender characteristics are illustrated in medieval literary characters. The variety in compositions of gender characteristics that these characters demonstrate is just as fluid as when modern theories are applied to them. Furthermore, gender characteristics that are described in male literary characters have variations that do not consistently match up to expected gendered interpretations. To designate a character as masculine or feminine reduces that character to the most simplistic interpretation when in actuality there are many components to be considered in the composition of gender characteristics. Medieval authors composed literary characters in the same way medieval society saw individuals composed. Certainly they saw that violence was not a behavior confined to the physically masculine character.

Throughout this chapter men's feminization and emasculation often relate to female characters around them. And when we do not have a direct female relationship to a male character, such as the portrait of the Squire, his feminine features still signify that connection. Infusing feminine characteristics into a male literary character does suggest that these same characteristic types were also present in medieval society. That is not to say that these female characters do not demonstrate the same variety in gender characteristics. Gender characteristics, violence, and other features are not exclusive to male literary figures and is a worthy discussion that will be explored further beyond this dissertation. Before analyzing feminine characteristics, the next chapter will analyze the rapist knight in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* and his rehabilitation as a form of restoring balance to his violent hypermasculine characteristics. I will also illustrate how gender characteristics form balance in Chaucer's Troilus. These two characters demonstrate how medieval society rehabilitated those who demonstrated extreme forms of hypermasculinity that did harm to others and how balance manifested in literary characters.

Chapter Four: Achieving and Maintaining Gender Balance: The Rapist Knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and Troilus in *Troilus and Criseyde*

In previous chapters I have demonstrated medieval understandings of how gender characteristics were composed in individuals. Balance and imbalance of these characteristics had a variety of possible combinations. Extreme imbalance manifests as either hypermasculinity or as effeminacy. This chapter focuses on what a balanced character looks like. I want to stress that there is no perfect balance between masculine and feminine characteristics. Rather, one finds that persons who combine such characteristics tend to be more civilized and socially more well adjusted. In this chapter I analyze two important concepts that lead to one such individual. First I will argue that the rehabilitation of figures like the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* was important to medieval society and reflective of a return to balance, and second I will examine Troilus to illustrate what a balanced medieval literary character looks like.

To demonstrate how important rehabilitation was I will look at the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Medieval rape, as discussed in chapter two, was complicated to understand. *The Wife of Bath's Tale* explores how the rapist knight can be brought back into society after such a heinous act. The tale takes for granted the value of rehabilitating transgressors of normative laws and rules. And rehabilitation implies the possibility of achieving balance, not only in gender characteristics themselves, but in those whose gender characteristics cause societal harm.

The second part of this chapter will delve into Chaucer's Troilus, a literary character who exemplifies balance of masculine and feminine characteristics. This is not to say that Troilus is perfectly balanced; rather the combination of gender characteristics in him reflects what medieval society sought in the avoidance of extremes such as hypermasculinity. Troilus, a

warrior in the Trojan army, exhibits how feminine characteristics work to temper his potentially excessive masculine traits. He is immersed in war with the Greeks, and war, as I have previously established, promotes hypermasculine tendencies. But his love for Criseyde softens these tendencies and brings Troilus into balance. It is important to note in Troilus the adjustment of his gender characteristics throughout the tale; they are in continual balance.

Troilus and the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* are just two examples of how a balance of masculine and feminine characteristics might be achieved. Clearly the rapist knight's hypermasculine characteristics pose a danger to society and need to be balanced by feminine characteristics to neutralize that threat and also to reflect the importance of a healthy mix of gender traits. His story also shows us that medieval society did not fully cast off every individual who acted out their hypermasculinity. In fact, rehabilitation of the rapist knight was of social importance that utilized education as a key component of the punishment that finally results in an enlightened and more socially acceptable character.[98] This transformation emphasizes feminine tempering of his hypermasculine traits.

First let us determine the hypermasculine qualities of the young knight. We know that he is a “lusty bachelor” (l. 883) but this description alone is not a marker of his hypermasculinity. In fact, there are no additional descriptions and we “must look to the action to understand the quality of the knight” (Lucas 33). The primary ma

rker of his hypermasculinity is the rape itself. He sees a maiden and by “verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed” (l. 888) despite all that she could possibly do: “maugree hir heed” (l. 887). R. J. Blanch observes that the narrative of the rape and its aftermath “calls attention to three significant questions—the nature of the assailant's crime, public reaction to the transgression,

[98] Nicholas Orme argues that the main theme of the tale is the loathly lady's education of the knight (56).

and corporeal punishment for the criminal" (41-42). These three highlight that the rape was a violent act and recognized as such by societal laws.

Though the use of force is clear, how egregious is it within medieval society? Carolyn Dinshaw infers that in order to take the girl's virginity the "knight has stripped her of her protective garments" (127). Thus she emphasizes that the rape was forceful, but her purpose is to offer a critique of how medieval society treated feminine bodies. Though the treatment of feminine bodies is not the focus of my argument, it does indicate a male view of entitlement to use female bodies sexually. Angela M. Lucas notes that the rape is especially ugly because it steals the girl's virginity from her (33-34). Chaucer's use of the word force is enough to indicate a severe rape and in light of her resistance, Lucas's note that these lines have an "ugly" quality indicates, in my opinion, hypermasculine violence.[99] By raping her, the knight has taken one of the few things that can make her future certain, her virginity. It is her virginity that protects her with the future benefit of marriage.

Further highlighting the severity of the knight's hypermasculine behavior is the association of rape and power. Elizabeth M. Biebel eliminates two of Nicholas Groth's theories on motives for rape, anger and sadism but acknowledges that he demonstrates power over his victim because the young rapist knight, like power rapists, "uses just enough force to subdue his victim" (71). His rape does not indicate anger or sadism, "we are not given evidence of the

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[99] Suzanne Edwards argues that the *Statute of Rapes* in the fourteenth century indicates that there was a difference acknowledged between violent and non-violent rape, the latter referring to a young woman who goes against her patriarch's wishes for legal marriage. Edwards argues that this is meant to devalue "feminine agency and [claim] the illegibility of feminine desires unmarked by suffering" (4). That is to say that it was a law to protect the financial interests of patriarchs who would benefit from marriage unions. If the young woman eloped or had sex with someone outside of marriage, the statute could be used to gain financial compensation (5-8).

knight's excessive brutalizing of the maiden" (71).[100] Chaucer qualifies the misuse of this power through the public condemnation of the rapist knight in the tale, though the condemnation is further complicated by the uncertainty of the maiden's social status. Recall the class distinction that both the pastourelles and Capellanus address, discussed in chapter two, which suggests that rape by a noble man against a woman of a lower class is acceptable, but in the *Wife of Bath's Tale,* the rapist knight rapes a young maiden, not identified as a woman of noble birth, and the public outcry is swift and harsh leaving the impression that rape is an antisocial action that needs to be punished in some way. These two examples are representative of the complex interrelation of class, economics, power, and gender has on issues like rape. Though in some cases noble men are given written approval to rape a peasant maiden, Chaucer condemns this through the omission of the maiden's social status.

Editors Mark Allen and John H. Fisher provide a detailed survey of critics who argue over the social status of the maiden in the Variorum Chaucer edition of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. William P. Albrecht, Donald C. Baker, Virgil R. Albertini, and Diane Andrews Henningfeld argue that the maiden is indeed a peasant while Joseph P. Roppolo, Gordon Hall Gerould, and Margaret Hallissy do not believe any evidence supports that assumption (227). George R. Coffman and Bernard F. Huppé agree that the maiden is a peasant by noting that the passage reflects Capellanus's rules that the rape of a maiden by a nobleman was permissible (227). Dorothy Colmer and Velma Bourgeois Richmond also believe the maiden is a peasant and argue that the rape is Chaucer's way of discussing the struggles of social class (227). Helen Cooper

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[100] Biebel also links the young knight's "social isolation" to characteristics of power rapists due to the lack of control he might feel in the structure of the feudal system (72). This argument that indicates his "social isolation" is murky to say the least. We have no indication in his description that he is isolated from the other knights or the court itself. Unlike the title character of Marie de France's *Lanval* who is described as being isolated from the court, in this instance those details are lacking in the narrative and do not rely on his isolation from the court.

does not read the maiden as a peasant and argues that the tale is about the difference between genders (227).[101] No matter the social status of the maiden, the public outcry is evident, sparking the knight's punishment and redemption.

The public acknowledges the egregiousness of the violent act through their public calls for justice that requires capital punishment:

> For which oppressioun was swich clamour
> And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour
> That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,
> By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed
> Paraventure swich was the statut tho.
>
> (ll. 889-93)

Though there is no specific identification of who is making this "clamour" or demand for justice, the implication is that it is some form of the public. They may be the members of the court, judicial officers, or the lay public at large. The point is that the passage indicates there were many who voiced outrage at such a crime and demanded the knight be punished. The outrage also signals that the act itself was far outside the bounds of civilized behavior and rules of law, which is precisely what hypermasculine violence tends to do. There is evidence that the outcry is part of a public form of protest. R. J. Blanch argues that the outcry "may be identified with the 'hue and cry' outlined in English common law" as a "vocal form of social protest" by the citizens.[102] Though sources like Capellanus argue that the rape of a peasant maiden by an

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[101] Page numbers refer to the survey of criticism located in the Variorum edition.
[102] Wim Tigges maintains that the tale emphasizes rape as a serious crime because of the public outcry (97), yet he notes that it is "not so much that rape is a capital crime…but that what women do definitely not desire is to be raped" (101) Corrinne Saunders notes the public outcry as an example of justice in cases of rape but that justice is negated by the second chance given to the knight (125-26).

aristocratic man can be acceptable,[103] Blanch finds that Capellanus's treatise represents a social trivialization of rape whereas English Law deemed rape a felony (42). The public outcry in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* suggests that rape is criminal and punishable by death when perpetrated by a man against any woman regardless of her stature or class.[104]

Though the king follows the law and sentences the knight to death, the queen and her ladies intervene on the knight's behalf. This intervention sets the young knight on the road toward rehabilitation. The queen and the ladies pray to the king that the young knight get a chance to redeem himself (ll. 894-96). The knight is condemned to death under the laws that Arthur ought to uphold, but evidently these laws can allow for redemption and then rehabilitation. Arthur pronounces that the knight is at the mercy of the queen "to chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille" (l. 898). Arthur acknowledges female authority in this matter by placing the decision into the hands of Guinevere. But this female intervention has stipulations that require the knight to uncover what women desire most, otherwise he will be put to death as originally ordered.

Female intervention on the behalf of men is a form of feminization that illustrates the importance of balance and tempering of characteristics. Just as the rape in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is a form of hypermasculine violence, the death sentence to be imposed by Arthur can also be seen as a masculine response that needs tempering with feminine guidance. It is a means of adjusting the hypermasculine and masculine perspectives and personalities with feminine characteristics that offer a more balanced individual. To compare another example of feminine intervention, allow me to discuss Ypolita in the *Knight's Tale*, a queen who also intervenes on

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[103] See chapter two for more on Capellanus's argument on the class distinctions of rape deeming acceptable instances where a noble man can rape a peasant woman.
[104] For more on rape and medieval law see Joseph Allen Hornsby's *Chaucer and the Law,* pp. 115-121.

the behalf of men who exhibit hypermasculine tendencies. Like Arthur, Theseus has sentenced Palamon and Arcite to die for violence that transgresses social rules and laws.[105] The pleas and weeping of the queen and her ladies cause Theseus to have compassion (ll. 1767-71), illustrating how feminine intervention can turn rash, male decisions toward calmer, socially beneficial reconsiderations. Theseus's hypermasculine response to the dueling knights is tempered by feminine intervention that connects to his own feminine qualities of gentleness and understanding. Theseus remembers "loves peyne" and "hou soore it kan a man distreyne" (ll. 1815-16). The intervention of the queen and other women softens Theseus's harsh masculine response and rather than sentencing them both to death he comes up with a compromise. This initial compromise does not exclude death (see *KnT* I 1857-59) but brings it under social control and regulates it so that it is not unfettered and uncivilized. Theseus will later (see ll. 2537-64) try to diminish the possibility of death during the combat. Thus violence is brought under social control. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the compromise also does not exclude death. Guinevere does not offer the rapist knight a full pardon of his death sentence; there are stipulations. He must go on a quest to determine what women want most, ultimately submitting to Guinevere's demand and also listening to what women have to say. The first of his requirements is to submit to women.

Rehabilitation of the rapist knight depends on whether he can be educated. The queen sets the young knight on a quest to save his own life through learning about female sovereignty. The queen poses a question to the knight, "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren?" (l. 905). If the knight can come up with an "answere suffisant" within a "twelf-month and a day" (l. 909-10), then the queen will spare his life. In order to uncover the answer to the queen's question

[105] For a more detailed account of the hypermasculine violence of Palamon and Arcite see chapter two.

the young knight must listen to what women's answers are. He gets a myriad of replies and could not find any "two creatures accordynge in-feere" (l. 924), proving his quest is not going to be easy. His listening to these desires acts as a form of submission to feminine perspectives and experiences. The variety of responses educate him on women's thoughts on the subject. Though he has been given the choice to investigate, the only alternative is death. It might seem that the knight is just wanting to be told the answer and not critically thinking about the subject, which hinders his education. But when he meets the loathly lady his education on the matter is elevated. In addition, his submission to women, previously in the form of listening to the answers from women, now becomes a submission of his person.

The loathly lady does not simply give him the answer, which would do little to properly rehabilitate him. Instead she strikes a deal with him. She tells the knight that she will provide the answer if he agrees to do the "next thyng" that she requires of him (l. 1010). The knight accepts her conditions blindly, known as the "rash boon." The answer will save his life but not rehabilitate him. It is in honoring the loathly lady's request that he may fully be integrated back into society. At first he pledges to her that he will do what she requires of him if it lies within his ability (ll. 1009-11), a point that allows him to have a possible exit strategy. But when she asks him to marry her, he begs her to "chees a newe requeste" and "lat [his] body go" (ll. 1060-61). He must now subjugate his body to the loathly lady, in a non-violent reversal of the way he dominated and violated the maiden. He laments that his family will "evere so foule disparaged be" (l. 1069) because of this union. Previously he has submitted his emotional and mental self while listening to what women desire most, but now he must also submit his body and socially commit to her.

The loathly lady intensifies the knight's punishment, ensuring that he experiences submission on a deeper level. To get the knight to submit, the loathly lady must convince him by using sources, much as Prudence did in the *Tale of Melibee.* Just as he listened to the variety of female responses, the knight now listens to the loathly lady's feminine counsel. He attempts to argue and plead against her demand for submission because of her lineage, ugliness, and age (l. 1100-101). She rebuts his case by citing Christ's nobility as what should be claimed in place of ancestral lineage (l. 1117-18). She continues, citing Dante (1125-32), Seneca, and Boethius (ll. 1168-70) as proof that nobility has no necessary relation to wealth or status. Like Prudence, the loathly lady cites sources to prove her argument and to accentuate the reasoning for taking counsel from women. She argues that her old age and ugliness will be able to "fulfille [his] worldly appetit" (l. 1218) and keep her a "trewe, humble wyf" (l. 1221), acknowledging beliefs that beauty and chastity do not necessarily go hand in hand.

The loathly lady's demonstration of intellectual prowess stands in opposition to the knight's reductive focus on her looks, age, and presumed social status. When he raped the young maiden we can assume that he did not look beyond her physical features or think beyond his physical appetite. His focus on the physical, a woman's beauty and his own carnal desires, is part of the problem and partly what the loathly lady is trying to change in him. Her feminine counsel continues when she attacks "the characteristics which keep the Knight from being truly noble" (Roppolo 267). His protest that she is "so lough a kynde" (l. 1101) and that she is "so loothly, and so oold" (l. 1100) represents a lack of nobility that goes hand in hand with his hypermasculine characteristics and violence, which are also not noble qualities.

To fully realize his noble qualities he must accept her "wise governance" (l. 1231), which will trigger his conversion into a chivalrous young man (Salter 9), and thus his masculine

characteristics are tempered with feminine ones. His submission functions in a variety of ways. Incorporating feminine characteristics, he submits to her as a man and as a noble, "actively placing the decision in the hag's power and also offering her the opportunity to actively choose at the same time" when he says "Cheseth yourself which may be moost pleasance" (McKinley 365). That is, he puts the choice of whether she should be young and beautiful or chaste and true in her hands, which emphasizes his transformation from a hypermasculine threat to society to a figure of "true gentilesse" (Salter 9).

The knight's rehabilitation is not the result of discovering what women truly desire; that is only one step in the process. Instead his rehabilitation comes after he fully submits to the loathly lady, demonstrating his willingness to understand what women desire and also his willingness to give up some of the power he had previously. Though his desires are clear, that he would want both a chaste and beautiful wife, he does not impose this desire as a requirement. He transforms from rapist, one who is indifferent to what a woman wants, to a man who lets a woman decide his fate. This is the pivotal moment where his hypermasculine qualities become neutralized by feminine influence and he can be rehabilitated back into society.

A problematic aspect of the Knight's submission and his acceptance of feminine counsel is his reward: a beautiful, young woman who "obeyed hym in every thyng / That myghte doon hym pleasance or liking" (ll. 1255-56). Some might argue that justice would be better served if he had to marry the woman in the form of the loathly lady. This tale is not about justice. If justice were a factor in this tale the young maiden's rape would have been specifically mentioned in terms of the punishment and compensation to her family, for loss of her virginity as a marketable marriage match, according to medieval law. Instead, the maiden and her family's justice are simply ignored just as the knight's capital punishment is temporarily set aside with the

possibility of a full pardon. Still, even with these facts, the knight is still offered the ability to be pardoned, suggesting that he will be able to integrate into society.

One of the major points of this lesson is for him to see women differently than as objects of his lust and desires, and the ending complicates that lesson. The Wife of Bath's perspective is also troublesome for the message in this tale. She wants a husband who is both meek and "fresshe abedde" (l. 1259), which the knight becomes. Her perspective is also a form of surface level objectification and suggests she wants to be the object of lust as well as to be in control of it. With that said, I maintain that the point of his lesson is directly related to the need for his hypermasculine qualities to be tempered with feminine ones so that he can be integrated back into society. This is the heart of the story's political allegory, which is separate from what the tale reveals about the complexities of sovereignty, lust, and objectification in the Wife of Bath and the characterization of the rapist knight and other figures from the tale.

Finally, the rapist knight is not punished with removal from society through imprisonment, banishment, or death. Though death is discussed, through feminine intervention he is allowed to redress the imbalance of his characteristic, or at least to reform his behavior. It is important to remember that the knight's lust is not the problem and does not need to be extinguished by way of execution or castration. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* does not argue for the elimination of male sexual aggression. Rather, it argues, as does the *Knight's Tale,* that male aggression and hypermasculinity need to be channeled and controlled. Each tale describes an achievement of masculine-feminine balance.

I believe a large portion of the medieval population clearly understood the problems hypermasculine behavior and the imbalance of gender characteristics posed to society. The threat of rape was a problem medieval society grappled with. But I also believe they understood the

possibility, in some cases, for rehabilitation. Along the road to rehabilitation, some stories like the *Wife of Bath's Tale* delve into the importance of feminine counsel and advice that can be beneficial and necessary in controlling excessive and destructive behavior. Balance of gender characteristics is inherent in the idea of rehabilitating the rapist knight, but balance is also an important aspect of some male literary characters who have not exhibited hypermasculine tendencies.

We can look at Chaucer's Troilus for a literary portrayal of a balance between masculine and feminine gender characteristics in a man. In Troilus as in other men one does not find a perfect balance of masculine and feminine characteristics. In *Troilus and Criseyde* Troilus is "part of a knightly community" (Aers, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity* 119) and has the potential for hypermasculine qualities that knights often exhibit. But we see in him the complexity and the struggle of masculine and feminine characteristics. We can identify Troilus's masculine and feminine qualities through tracking his responses to love, a point I will later analyze. What Chaucer reveals in Troilus is a complex composite of masculine and feminine characteristics. Excessive masculine and feminine traits do not dominate Troilus. They are not absent, but they are kept in check throughout the oscillation of his emotions and never do they become negative or dangerous.

Throughout the story Troilus shows a mix of feminine and masculine qualities, some of which are easily identifiable while others are more difficult to pin down or are inaccurately attributed to a certain gender. Some of his qualities may reflect cultural stereotypes while others resist those connections with assumed genders. Though Troilus demonstrates a balance of characteristics, some scholars have argued about the nature of his character. In *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity,* David Aers calls Troilus a narcissist partly for his masculine

identity, which he has in common with other knights (120-21) and also for objectifying Criseyde (124).[106] D.W. Robertson has also described Troilus as self-centered, "hypersensitive, sentimental," and as "a romantic hopelessly involved in a lost cause" (497). C.S. Lewis argues that though Troilus embodies "the medieval ideal of lover and warrior", (195) he agrees that Troilus is self-centered and "throughout the poem, suffers more than he acts" (194). Holly Crocker argues that Troilus needs Criseyde, who represents a feminine ideal, to validate his own masculinity and nobility and that the "poem is highly invested in protecting his idealized status" ("How the Woman Makes the Man" 140). Crocker claims that the poem feminizes Troilus through "the structure of sexual difference that orders his culture" (140-41). Moncia McAlpine asserts that Troilus's love for Criseyde begins as a "narcissistic infatuation," but changes to a more mature love later in the poem" (177). Marilyn Reppa Moore also maintains that Troilus undergoes a transformation, or "conversion," from his callous self-centeredness to being devoted to Criseyde after he sees her and falls in love (44). "We can see the extent to which Chaucer characterized Troilus as virtuous in love. Troilus's love for Criseyde results in a reformed Troilus, not a debased one" (Moore 44).

These varying opinions certainly have some overlap in their observation that initially Troilus is self-centered. Still, there are differences. The narcissism associated to Troilus when he scoffs at other lovers is more about his naiveté about lovers in general. He does not really know about lovers or their characteristics and the self-centeredness is more associated with a youthful ignorance rather than a cynical view of love. Later, Troilus's narcissism is connected to love, it is

[106] In his article "The Self Mourning-Reflections of *Pearl,*" David Aers argues that Troilus cannot "mourn…the loss of Criseyde in a way that allows a detachment from his idealized image of her, an idealization that has been one of the traditional ways of controlling women in the interests of masculine self-identity" (55). Instead of rescuing her, Troilus is depending on Criseyde to escape from the Greek camp (Aers 54-55). This might also reflect another form of Troilus's feminine qualities.

not completely self-centered. The ideal romantic relationship is about mutual gratification and regard for each other. Troilus's self-centeredness does not necessarily mean he is purely masculine. It is more valid to say that his feminine features were dormant until he saw Criseyde. His feminine qualities were activated by love sparking his transformation through three different descriptions of his characteristics. First, his physical descriptions, military associations, and his views toward love and lovers illustrate masculine qualities that have the potential to transgress into hypermasculinity. Second, his love for Criseyde brings out characteristics that soften that initial masculine perspective on love, keeping it from becoming excessive, but that does not mean that his love for her brings out purely feminine characteristics. There are masculine traits embedded in his suffering. Finally, his loss of Criseyde and his masculine anger toward Diomede demonstrate how his psychology does not always maintain a balance between masculinity and femininity but oscillates between them. This balance offers a more complex figure who is struggling within and who embodies medieval beliefs on compositions of gender characteristics.

The image of Troilus at the religious festival in Book One and later during the triumphant ride through the city after the battle in Book Two offers a look at some of his masculine characteristics. In Book One, Troilus leads the young knights in a procession where he exhibits masculine gender characteristics that identify him as an "active, free, predatory subject, an identity dependent on the simultaneous construction of 'feminine' identity as passive, powerless subject" (Aers, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity* 120).

> This Troilus, as he was wont to gide
>
> His yong knyghtes, lad hem up and down
>
> In thilke large temple on every side,
>
> Byholding ay the ladies of the town,

Now here, now there; for no devocioun

Hadde he to non, to reven hym his reste,

But gan to preise and lakken whom hym leste.

(I. 183-89)

Here, Chaucer emphasizes “Troilus’s arrogance, pride, and lack of devotion” (Moore 48). He has no interest in the women who may be watching him and even carefully watches for interest amongst his knights. Amidst the retinue he plays the role of heroic leader. His identity is directly tied to his role as a knight.

Although Troilus’s image as a masculine warrior is infused with feminine qualities, his initial views on love and those of his fellow knights reflect masculine disdain. As Troilus leads his “yonge knyghtes” in the festival, he watches to see if their gaze lingers on any of the women in the crowd, which he considers “folye” (I. 183-194). Should any "knyght or squyer of his compaignie / . . . syke, or lete his eighen baiten / On any womman that he koude espye (I. 191-194), Troilus would then launch into a diatribe against men who are foolish in love.

And seye hym thus, “God woot, she slepeth softe

For love of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte!

I have herd told, pardieux, of youre lyvynge,

Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,

And which a labour folk han in wynnynge

Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;

And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces.

O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!

Thar nys nat oon kan war by other be.”

(I.195-203)

In Book Two, Troilus is again directly tied to his role as a knight as he returns from war with the Greeks:

This Troilus sat on his baye steede

Al armed, save his hed, ful richely;

And wownded was his hors, and gan to blede.

On which he rood a pas ful softely

But swich a knightly sighte trewely

As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,

To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille.

(Book II. 624-30)

The "knightly sighte" of Troilus returning from the war, still armed and with a wounded horse, strengthens his masculine affiliation with Mars and with war.

In this procession from the battlefield Troilus is still armed and the horse is still bleeding. The display calls attention to the masculine endeavor of war and the approval of the crowd who look upon his physical prowess, which demonstrates that his masculine traits are exemplary of knighthood:

So lik a man of armes and a knyght

He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse,

For bothe he hadde a body and a myght

To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse

And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,

So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he,

It was an heven upon hym for to see.

(II. 631-37)

He has the physique and power of a knight, and he has "heigh prowesse" as well as other masculine associations. The entire description suggests that those who view him are fortunate to gaze upon him as it was "heven" just to see him in his glory. The entire description displays the adoration of masculinity. His exemplary descriptions as an archetype of a masculine knight continues in the next section:

His helm tohewen was in twenty places,

That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde;

His sheeld todasshed was with swerdes and maces,

In which men myghte many an arwe fynde

That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rynde.

(II. 638-42)

His accessories show the effects of war. His armor is in bad shape, illustrating his participation in the battle and highlighting the masculine, probably hypermasculine, results of war.

These masculine characteristics present in Troilus are, however, also infused with a softer description through the eyes of Criseyde. As the crowd cheers for Troilus, Criseyde is lovestruck and exclaims, "Who yaf me drynke?" (l. 651), indicating the powerful and romantic impression that Troilus makes on her. She is immediately attracted to him physically, which precedes her assessment of his other qualities. Part of her attraction is due to Troilus's masculine characteristics, yet, as we soon see, his noble, more refined characteristics, his physical attributes and masculine harshness of a medieval knight, are what particularly attract Criseyde.

… his estate, and also his renown,

His wit, his shap, and ek his gentilesse;

But moost hire favour was, for his distresse

Was al for hire, and thoughte it was a routhe

To sleen swich oon, if that he mente trouthe.

(II. 660-64)

The reasons she is moved begin with his status, intellect, and physique. But chiefly what moves her the most is Troilus's refined sensibility qualities that manifest in his distress over her. In addition to his 'distress,' which implies vulnerability, his 'gentilesse' implies refinement and civility. Instead of expressing pleasure in this, she expresses sympathy. Chaucer's use of the word "favour" helps to define Criseyde's attraction to Troilus. The *Middle English Dictionary* cites Chaucer's use of "favour" and all its variations within the *Canterbury Tales* without a direct mention of this passage in *Troilus and Criseyde*.[107] Chaucer's use of "favour" indicates how Troilus's characteristics are received by Criseyde. The combination of qualities that are arguably gendered in modern society as well as medieval society is what makes Troilus desirable, and a heroic romantic male character.

Troilus's initial views on women remind us of Diomede's views on Criseyde later in the poem. Diomede calculates how to win Criseyde:

Yet seyde he to himself upon a nyght,

"Now am I nat a fool, that woot wel how

---

[107] The first two *MED* entries provide senses that are appropriate for Criseyde's sentiment in this passage. 1 a) Disposition to act to another's advantage; sympathetic or friendly regard; good will; grace or benevolence (of God, a superior); esteem (of the multitude); propitious regard (of Fortune); (b) disposition to approve; assent, sanction; (c) good graces. 2 (a) The manifestation of good will, sympathetic regard, or the like; an act of good will; **don** or **shewen favour**; (b) help, assistance, aid, support; succor, relief; (c) *poet.* one who shows good will or renders assistance; benefactor, helper. Denotations 1 and 2 both suggest that sympathy plays a part in Criseyde falling in love with Troilus.

> Hire wo for love is of another wight,
>
> And hereupon to gon assaye hire now?
>
> I may wel wite it nyl nat ben my prow,
>
> For wise folk in books it expresse,
>
> 'Men shal nat wowe a wight in hevynesse.
>
> (V. 785-91)

Diomede's internal dialogue resembles Troilus's earlier designation of women as "prey" in Book One. Diomede acknowledges her grief and that she loves someone else and that men might not win a woman who grieves for another. Both men use excessive masculine views of domination over women to illustrate how women in general, or Criseyde specifically in Diomede's case, are to be treated and won over. In Diomede's case, he goes further, designating himself as a "conqueror" if he could win her over at such a difficult time in her life. Though there are differences between the two men, Troilus's early views on women illustrate a trait that bends toward hypermasculinity.

But how hypermasculine was Troilus before he saw Criseyde? Troilus's diatribe is primarily directed at men who are victims to both love and to women, but it is based on masculine assumptions, even stereotypes of women. His concentration on male victimization in love might indicate his lack of perspective and knowledge or possibly his indifference to women's feelings. These masculine assumptions draw attention to the characteristics that need to be tempered with feminine ones. He does not exhibit the hypermasculinity of the rapist knight; his rhetoric is callow but not threatening. The only indication of masculine violence that we could see comes from the fact he is a knight. We have as yet no description of his performance on the battlefield. Instead, we see his lack of sensitivity and vulnerability, his lack of feminine

qualities. To see what hypermasculinity actually looks like one need only to examine the character of Troilus's eventual rival, the Greek Diomede.

Like Troilus, Diomede is a masculine figure who is characterized as a decorated war hero, but there are some distinctions to be drawn. First, consider their physical descriptions. Diomede's masculine physicality is given greater emphasis. He is "prest and corageous" (V. 800)

> With sterne voice and mighty lymes square,
>
> Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous
>
> Of dedes, lik his fader Tideus.
>
> And som men seyn he was of tonge large;
>
> And heir he was of Calydoigne and Arge.
>
> (V. 801-805).

Diomede's physical description is more detailed differently than Troilus's. Troilus's physicality is not as specific in terms of his physical strength. He is described as having "body and a myght" and "hardynesse," suited to his boldness, but his physical features are different from Diomede's.

> And Troilus wel woxen was in highte,
>
> And complet formed by proporcioun
>
> So wel that kynde it nought amenden myghte;
>
> Yong, fressh, strong, and hardy as lyoun;
>
> Trewe as stiel in ech concicioun;
>
> Oon of the beste entecched creature
>
> That is or shal whil that the world may dure.

> And certeynly in storye it is yfounde
> That Troilus was nevere unto no wight,
> As in his tyme, inno degree secounde
> In durryng don that longeth to a knyght.
> Al myghte a geant passen hym of myght,
> His herte ay with the first and with the beste
> Stood paregal, to durre don that hym leste.
>
> (V. 827-40)

Troilus certainly has the strength and physique of a knight, but it cannot be compared to that of a giant; Troilus makes up for that deficiency with his spiritedness. Instead, Chaucer focuses his description on the state of Troilus's damaged armor. The descriptions characterize Diomede as being powerful in size and stature whereas Troilus is described as athletic and tall. The descriptions give Diomede a more masculine connotation than Troilus.

Though Diomede's physical description does not indicate hypermasculine characteristics or behavior, he is revealed to be a duplicitous schemer in his pursuit of Criseyde, which can serve to identify him as a more hypermasculine character. Pandarus is the duplicitous schemer leaving Troilus unmarred by that characteristic though he enlists Pandarus's help. There is a different connotation to the way Pandarus schemes on Troilus's behalf and the way that Diomede schemes. Diomede's scheming is meant to be disingenuous in a more sinister way, a point that I will explore later. Though Troilus's naiveté in the beginning does not suggest a correlation to feminine characteristics, it does serve to soften him in contrast to Diomede.

As Criseyde leaves Troy in the exchange for Antenor, Diomede begins scheming at how to approach her. He concludes that it would not be prudent to "speke of love or make it tough" (V. 101) because he suspects there is another man.

> For douteles, if she have in hire thought
> Hym that I gesse, he many nat ben ybrought
> So soon awey; but I shal fynde a meene
> That she naught wite as yet shal what I mene.
>
> (V. 102-105)

Right away Diomede is thinking about Criseyde and the possibility of her having another lover. Here, it is not clear if he wants her as a wife, or merely as a lover, but his observation of the situation sets him apart from the lovelorn Troilus. His pursuit of her gains momentum when he tells her that if he can

> any thyng hire ese, that she sholde
> Comaunde it hym, and seyde he don it wolde
>
> For treweliche he swor hire as a knyght
> That ther nas thyng with which he myghte hire plese,
> That he nolde don his peyne and al his myght
> To don it, for to don hire herte an ese;
> And preyede hire she wolde hire sorwe apese,
> And seyde, "Iwis, we Grekis kan have joie
> To honouren yow as wel as folk of Troie.
>
> (V. 111-9)

His pledge to her as a knight implies that he adheres to an honorable code of ethics, one that impels him to set right her "harmes" (V, 139). Furthermore, he expresses sympathy: if he cannot provide relief he would be "sory for [her] hevynesse" (V, 140). His acknowledgment that her "sorwes be for thynges grete" (V, 136) gives the appearance that Diomede is comparable to Troilus in terms of sensitivity, and it reminds us of Criseyde's sympathy for Troilus's distress over her. His altruism, of course, is mere pretense. Chaucer allows us to hear Diomede's inner thoughts as he begins to consider the best options for going after Criseyde. This insight not only encourages distrust but also allows the reader to see Diomede as a foil to Troilus. The two knights display competing masculinities. What Diomede is truly offering Criseyde is masculine protection in her situation and his strategic sensitivity is revealed in the way he appeals to her. Troilus's sensitivity is feminized by the passivity inherent in the courtly love construction. Diomede's sensitivity to Criseyde's situation is expressed in a possibly masculine promise to resolve her problems. This promise, however, is qualified by a revelation to the audience.

Diomede's internal monologue reveals his plan:

> …in his herte he thoughte
>
> That she nas nat withoute a love in Troie,
>
> For nevere sythen he hire thennes broughte
>
> Ne koude he sen hire laughe or maken joie.
>
> He nyst how best hire herte for t'acoye.
>
> (V. 778-82)

He infers that her lack of laughter and joy is precisely due to having a lover in Troy. He begins to think his plan might be foolish because her "wo for love is of another wight" (V, 787) and it might not be the best choice to pursue her because it might not be to his advantage (V, 788-89).

He cites evidence for his disadvantage from "wise folk in bookes" who express that 'Men shal nat wowe a wight in hevynesse" (V, 790-91). But he shows his true reasoning why he wants to woo Criseyde. It is not to comfort her or bring her ease. Instead he counters this literary advice as follows:

> whoso myghte wynnen swich a flour
>
> From hym for whom she morneth nyght and day,
>
> He myghte seyn he were a conquerour
>
> (V. 792-94)

Diomede's hypermasculine qualities are revealed to the audience and they are summed up in one word, "conquerour." His language becomes dominating and threatening as he thinks of courtship as if it were a military campaign. For Diomede, Criseyde is a conquest and her love for someone else might make his conquest of her more impressive.

Troilus and Diomede practice two very different representations of masculinity. "Diomede is empowered, but a predator; Troilus is vulnerable, but a hero" (Crocker, "How the Woman Makes the Man" 162). They are vastly different in their approaches to love. Diomede's is militant and has nothing to do with whether Criseyde loves him or he loves her. Instead, it is about his ability to overcome and dominate. Troilus, though initially he scorns love and other men who succumb to it, is ultimately changed by his feelings for Criseyde. He does not plot and scheme like Diomede, though he gets Pandarus to do that for him, and his feminine characteristics begin to balance his previous hypermasculine tendencies. Diomede undergoes no comparable change of perspective.

Troilus's transformation does not mean that his feminine characteristics overtake his masculine ones. Rather, they bring into balance the masculine characteristics he previously

demonstrated. This is apparent in the ways in which Troilus's suffering, which may be associated with feminine characteristics, balance out his other masculine tendencies. It is important to note that the scholarly discussions by Holly Crocker, Tison Pugh, and Jennifer Garrison remark on how Troilus's suffering can be masculine and passive.[108] I argue that it is not so much about masculine, passive suffering but about the ways in which feminine and masculine characteristics balance out an individual. Love pangs are neither masculine nor feminine. Each gender suffers them.

While Crocker, Pugh, and Garrison all present a view of suffering that is not feminized, Garrison takes this view and links Troilus's masculine suffering to his interior rhetoric of courtly love. Jill Mann contradicts this notion observing that Troilus "is divested of the coerciveness characteristic of the 'active' male, and that his unreserved surrender to the force of love is for Chaucer not a sign of weakness but of a generous nobility" (*Geoffrey Chaucer* 166). Though Crocker, Pugh, and Garrison do not suggest that surrender to love is a sign of weakness, they do

[108] I add Crocker, Pugh, and Garrison's full discussion in this footnote rather than in my text because their arguments are not exactly clear. In "Masochism, Masculinity, and the Pleasures of Troilus," Crocker and Pugh argue that Troilus's transformation "dismantles an elite model of manhood, for it is in contrast to his suffering that Diomede's prevailing methods of courtship appear as predatory exercises of masculine aggression." They refer to Troilus's status as "culturally privileged" as a way to indicate the relation between class and masculinity and that Troilus is part of an "elite masculine" culture and he "gains a redemptive power from the experience of suffering" (96) and therefore gives him an elevated status to the other warriors and knights and maintains his masculinity within the endurance of that suffering in the elevated status (83). That suffering "consolidates a rarefied formulation of masculinity in which [Troilus's] endurance of pain is identified as a defining experience for the culturally privileged male" (Crocker and Pugh 83). Their arguments are made unclear by their loose associations with what constitutes masculinity and femininity in medieval society. Instead, I feel they try to complicate general and modern assumptions of how suffering might be inverted from a feminine association to a masculine one. Jennifer Garrison describes a difference between his masculine public persona and the interiority of Troilus's suffering. His interiority is his private self, it is a matter of public versus private (Garrison 330-332). Garrison argues that Chaucer critiques aristocratic culture through Troilus's interiority and that he criticizes an "aristocratic culture obsessed with masculine interiority" (343). According to Garrison, the masculine ideal that society is obsessed with is of "an interior self whose desire can be performed and fulfilled without regard to political consequences" (343). Troilus made his interior identity as a courtly love individual apparent when he "bursts out into his lyrical, narrative-halting *Cantici Troili* at three times over the course of the poem" (Garrison 323). The social and political consequences for Troilus are embedded in what Garrison calls the "English and Trojan aristocratic masculine ideal—a successful military and political leader who nonetheless has an internal emotional life completely divorced from the public sphere and political events" (328). "Troilus's obsession with his own internal state [is] both socially and politically corrosive" (Garrison 321).

refer to Troilus's suffering as passive, which can be stereotypically associated with femininity. Mann suggests that stereotypical active and passive gender roles become blurred when dealing with courtly love rules and that Troilus is a feminized hero (*Geoffrey Chaucer* 168). In light of those rules, we can see that Troilus resembles Lancelot in his "reverent humility" and adherence to a "so-called 'code of courtly love'" (Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* 95). Mann also notes that Troilus "is feminised not only in his reverence for a woman but also in his vulnerability and sensitivity of feeling" (*Geoffrey Chaucer* 166). Considering other literary figures who suffer in Chaucer's canon, like Griselda and Constance, Troilus's suffering shows "no division between active male and suffering female" (Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* 169). Mann's reference to "active male" and "suffering female" points to a long held belief in male/female distinctions.

What is key for Mann's reading of a feminized Troilus is that she positions him "in a feminine role," likening him to the "women of Ovid's *Heroides*—abandoned and betrayed by his lover, immobilized, frustrated of action and movement, finding relief only in memory, lamentation and fruitless letter-writing" (*Geoffrey Chaucer* 168). Mann continues her analysis by invoking Roland Barthes' argument that:

> Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so. . . . it follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love.
>
> (Barthes qtd. In Mann *Geoffrey Chaucer* 168)

What I want to focus on is that if Troilus is exhibiting sensitivity toward Criseyde as part of this code, his behavior suggests merely a tempering of his masculinity. Troilus's masculinity is not completely gone, it is brought into balance with feminine characteristics and this recalibration creates the appearance of transformation. Reading Troilus's suffering as purely masculine is limiting and we need to consider that the softening of his views on love is representative of a feminine tempering of his masculinity. Therefore, even if there are indications that his suffering is a sign of privileged masculinity, feminine characteristics are what brought him to that change in his character.

Admittedly, the identification of feminine and masculine characteristics is neither simple nor easy. The point, however, is that balance of characteristics, to a large degree, has a positive outcome. Troilus's masculine and feminine characteristics are not tipped too far in either direction. Instances like Troilus's weeping could be viewed as feminizing, or negative, when they are more complicated than easy gender designations. Troilus has moments where he is so lovesick that he does not know if he should "wepe or synge" (II. 952); compare Book III, line 64 when "it semed as he wepte almost" at the sight of Criseyde. Weeping is a recurring action for Troilus in his lovesick state. Mary Carruthers notes that "Troilus's near-constant weeping is one of his most remarked-upon traits in this poem, always judged negatively" (12). Embedded in this idea that weeping is a negative trait is its association with feminization of the male. Carruthers argues that because of monastic beliefs and writings that discuss tears as helpful at combatting a monk's "spiritual dryness," identified as a "great enemy of monastic discipline" (8), Troilus's weeping is a positive benefit and not necessarily feminine or masculine.

Tears and weeping had many masculine associations. Tom Lutz points out that in classical texts, men did not "faint from their tears" and, unlike women, "more often" used tears

as "a spur to action" (62), though sometimes they were required to "hide their tears" as in the case of Achilles, who set off alone in an instance of weepiness (Lutz 62). Still, "Heroic epics from Greek times through the Middle Ages are soggy with weeping of all sorts" (Lutz 62). From *Beowulf* to *The Song of Roland* there are many instances of warriors who weep (Lutz 62), and there was no indication that these tears had a feminizing connotation. The notion "that tearlessness was the height of male stoicism and virtue" is a relatively recent phenomenon. "The prohibition against male tears, in fact, only takes center stage in the middle of the twentieth century, and even then it was not fully observed, as we can see in the weeping of film stars and crooners" (Lutz 62). Lutz's analysis requires that we associate tears, crying, and weeping all together without any context. Though Lutz's medieval references are somewhat sparse and he does not cite any specific Chaucer references, he does illustrate the notion that tears were not a feminizing issue. We might assume right away that a weepy Troilus means he is acting like a woman or is feminized, but weeping is neutral, neither feminine or masculine.

Another supposed marker of Troilus's feminization is his swoon (*TC* 3.1086-1120). Troilus's swoon occurs directly before he spends the night with Criseyde, indicating that he has an overwhelming feeling of emotion. His swoon is the result of seeing Criseyde cry, bringing the "crampe of deth, to streyne hym by the herte" (III. 1071).

> Therwith the sorwe so his herte shette
>
> That from his eyen fil there nought a tere,
>
> And every spirit his vigour in knette,
>
> So they astoned or oppressed were.
>
> The felyng of his sorwe, or of his fere,
>
> Or of aught elles, fled was out of towne;

And down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne.

(III. 1086-92)

Jill Mann reminds us that this is the only instance of Troilus swooning, and it is important to remember that because it "is sometimes casually multiplied and generalized" as indicative of his feminization (Mann "Troilus's Swoon" 319). Still, his swoon can be seen as a way of balancing out his masculinity and is similar to other knights in medieval literature who swoon in the course of courtly love. Mann argues that "Troilus's swoon is comparable…to the madness suffered by romance heroes—Yvain, Lancelot, Tristram; whatever the difference between the situations in which their madness occurs, those situations are all marked by an irresolvable disorder in the outside world to which the knight opens up his being, with a resulting dislocation of mental order…and is a mark of the hero's nobility of nature that he does not try to evade or diminish the horror of his external situation" (Mann, "Troilus's Swoon 328). Much like weeping, swooning is not necessarily a marker of feminization, but it does offer a contrast to Troilus's masculine views of love prior to being lovestruck.

So, neither weeping nor swooning are gender specific acts as Criseyde also swoons in Book IV. The way these acts are associated reflects how masculine characteristics were tempered by feminine qualities. Criseyde calls attention to his inability to become the masculine lover she needs him to be. She asks him to tell her the "fyn of his entente" (III. 125). She needs to know his intentions because he has not made his role as the man clear to her. He has been unable to take the role that courtly love rules dictate and to be what Criseyde needs. "Troilus's inability to sustain an active male role necessitates the intervention of his un-courtly double, Pandarus, who promises to restore Troilus to a state of potency and plenitude" (Margherita 256). That "potency" is not purely masculine, it has feminine characteristics as well.

There is a feminine tempering in Pandarus's explanation for helping Troilus, "'to a wreche is consolacioun / To have another felawe in his peyne'" (I. 708-09). His only wish is that Criseyde improve Troilus's mood to save his life (II. 360-62). It is not a hypermasculine endeavor to win and dominate Criseyde. Later, Pandarus begs Criseyde to end Troilus's suffering, one way or another:

> Therwith his manly sorwe to biholde
> It myghte han mad an herte of stoon to rewe;
> And Pandare wep as he to water wolde,
> And poked evere his nece new and newe,
> And seyde, "Wo bygon ben hertes trewe!
> For love of God, make of this thing an ende,
> Or sle us both at ones er ye wende."
>
> (III. 113-19)

Troilus's "manly sorwe" is not 'spin' to disguise his unmanly ineptitude or purely feminized characteristics. It is a combination of characteristics that reflect a genuine understanding of Troilus's condition. In the same consideration, Pandarus's weeping also incurs a genuine discomfort for his friend's condition. It is not to persuade Criseyde to do something she is completely against. Criseyde is in an active role as it is up to her to grant her love to Troilus. This request places both Pandarus and Troilus in the passive role. This complicates usual stereotypes of gender roles that only offer strict binaries with no room for alternative analyses. It is difficult, and stereotypical, to indicate that his suffering is solely feminine. There are many considerations to be taken into account, and I maintain that we need to read the entire scope of the shift in Troilus's character to see how he becomes a more complex figure.

Troilus's suffering is not the only manifestation of his change. His devotion and love of Criseyde is also representative of masculine and feminine tempering. Troilus's behavior "demonstrates his conversion to the benefit of the common good" (Moore 47). The balance of gender characteristics benefits the common good. Forms of hypermasculinity produce social harm. This common good suggests the "social and ethical importance" associated with the "ethos of devotion" (Moore 47). The masculine/feminine balance in Troilus is even more evident when Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus loves her (II. 319) and that he is a "trewe man, that noble gentil knyght" (II. 331). Here again we see the contrast between Troilus as a smug warrior and smitten lover. Chaucer uses the contrast of the courtly world and the military world to indicate how knights had to modify or temper their characteristics. Of course, these could also be inherent qualities in a person. The point is that Chaucer means to explore the ways in which masculine and feminine characteristics are manifested.

I argue that we see a balance between masculine and feminine characteristics in Troilus. Recall Jill Mann's discussion of a Troilus feminized but not made 'womanish' by his waiting and suffering. He becomes balanced on a spectrum of masculine and feminine characteristics. This, paired with his masculine desire for vengeance on Diomede, reveals a more complete composite of gender characteristics in Troilus. Again, this does not mean that Troilus is perfectly balanced in his masculine and feminine characteristics. There is simply more balance in his psychological make-up than there had been previously.

In Book Five, Troilus's characteristics are no longer in a process of rebalancing as previously demonstrated. His sorrow is balanced out by rage and then acceptance, even though he does not fully understand Criseyde's infidelity.

Allas, I nevere wolde han wend, er this,

That ye, Criseyde, koude han chaunged so;

Ne, but I hadde agilt and don amys,

So cruel wende I nought youre herte, ywis,

To sle me thus! Allas, youre name of trouthe

Is now fordon, and that is al my routhe.

(V. 1682-87)

He acknowledges that he could understand her infidelity if he had done something to provoke it. His remark, however, is not an angry one. He then retreats back into sorrow when he regrets that Criseyde has ruined her good name. His anger with Diomede is, of course, a completely masculine response but his worry about Criseyde's reputation suggests a more feminine understanding. It is representative of the softening that he has demonstrated throughout his transformation.

It might be argued that Troilus simply displaces his anger: instead of repudiating Criseyde he directs his anger at Diomede. His anger is redirected in part because he can understand Criseyde's situation in some respects, but also because Diomede is the efficient cause of her infidelity. His masculine anger comes out as he asks for God to help him get revenge:

'Now God,' quod he, 'me sende yet the grace

That I may meten with this Diomede!

And trewely, if I have myght and space,

Yet shal I make, I hope, his sydes blede.

O God,' quod he, 'that oughtest taken heede

To fortheren trouthe, and wronges to punyce,

Whi nyltow don a vengeaunce of this vice?

(V. 1702-708)

Though his anger toward Diomede might seem like hypermasculine violence, it does not have the same negative social connotations that the violence of rape has or even the duel between Palamon and Arcite. Troilus prays that God allow him in battle to exact revenge on Diomede. Recall that in the *Knight's Tale* violence is made more socially acceptable when Theseus acts as regulator and places the violence in an appropriate arena. For Troilus, God is that regulator and the war is the acceptable context. Troilus is not pursuing Diomede outside of any parameters that dictate where violence should occur and whether it should or not.

The point of these two scenes is that there is no excessive demonstration of either masculine or feminine behavior. Of course, rage and revenge can be associated with women as well. But as demonstrated in chapter two, excessive violence is a trait of hypermasculinity, lacking any feminine characteristics which might temper it. Troilus demonstrates reserve and calculation in his anger toward Diomede instead of allowing his rage to escalate. Still, these two scenes are not meant to characterize Troilus as a man of exemplary virtue. His balance of masculine and feminine characteristics in itself does not have moral value. Medieval society judged behavior, not proclivity.

The point is that masculine and feminine characteristics are not easily determined and that variations can be viewed in many different ways. Troilus is not presented as a one-dimensional character with either masculine and feminine characteristics. Descriptions of him as knight and as lover blur those lines, but we do get the sense of a definite mix of traits that make him a more well-rounded human being, one who illustrates what medieval society understood about the composition of gender characteristics. The rapist knight and Troilus are not meant to demonstrate the only ways medieval authors created characters who reflect rehabilitation and a

balance of gender characteristics. Like many of the characters in Chaucer's works, as well as those in many other medieval works, they offer a look at how important balance of gender characteristics was to medieval society, even when those characteristics are not in perfect balance. Furthermore, this balance does not confine these characters to strict binary patterns of masculine and feminine, but rather they show a fluidity of how masculine and feminine characteristics could be combined. And they allow us to understand medieval personalities without delving into modern theories of identity or sexuality that would have been anachronistic for medieval society.

Coda

When I began investigating topics for a dissertation, I was interested in how Queer Theory was being applied to medieval literary characters. One such piece of scholarship, Glenn Burger's chapter in Steve Ellis's *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, discussed how the term "'queer' signals a desire for more fluid, dynamic subject positions than those made possible by the binaristic thinking of home-hetero, gay-straight, lesbian-gay man, and so on." (437). I was initially intrigued by the premise and how modern identity culture could intersect with medieval beliefs. In the *Oxford Guide*, Burger applies this model to Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* to demonstrate how the social relations of a bourgeois household and the marketplace relates to the emerging economy of female sexuality (439). Burger's argument becomes more complex and harder to follow aimed at demonstrating how queer theory "remains intent on exploring the crucial and disruptive role that perverse pleasure plays in the relationships between desire and power" and also "emphasizes the processes by which queer subjects become integral to a dominate heterosexuality's construction of the natural and unnatural, centre to margin, inside and outside" (438). As useful as that might be, I found it hard to apply this to my own readings of medieval literary characters. My questioning of the application of "queer theory" to medieval literature led me to researching gender characteristics, effeminacy, masculinity, and hypermasculinity.

Though these modern theories are useful, they did not fully explain to me the ways in which medieval society understood gender characteristics. That is why it was necessary for me to research classical theories on how physical gender and gender characteristics were formed that were the basis for medieval understandings on the subject. I understand there will be arguments about whether this constitutes a literary analysis. I argue that though these are scientific theories

they were assuredly known in some form to a wide population and necessary to fully develop in order to understand how I am analyzing the literary characters. Authors like Chaucer employed these theories in their constructions of literary characters making it a necessary component in order to accurately analyze the literature.

It might seem that this dissertation follows the current cultural debate about toxic masculinity and the ways in which male attitudes, characteristics, and violence impact society. I must admit that the current discussion was in the back of my mind while researching and studying this dissertation. Still, I maintain that the focus was to uncover how medieval society grappled with gender characteristics and how they may have challenged certain constructions such as solely associating masculinity with power and femininity with weakness. Though these constructions are basic, I wanted to show how masculinity has many forms and combinations that break those stereotypical constructions. The focus in these chapters is on male literary characters but this project has the potential for expansion in two major areas of analysis, the investigation of medieval female literary characters and expanding the scope to early modern literary figures.

To fully analyze gender characteristics in medieval literary figures we need to turn to female examples who demonstrate masculine characteristics. This will help to explain the ways in which combinations of feminine and masculine characteristics were combined in characters. Violence, or the propensity for violence, can also reveal hypermasculine characteristics. Analyzing figures like Judith, in the old English poem and in Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*, and Zenobia in the *Monk's Tale,* help to develop a different perspective on how masculine characteristics we thought might be gendered male can develop in female characters. Violence is also a major theme in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and the *Clerk's Tale.* Chaucer developed more

complex characteristics in his female literary figures who demonstrate both feminine and masculine characteristics and also exact or react to violence.

Both Judith and Zenobia offer views of women who have masculine associations. Judith is physically described as female while Zenobia has more masculine features. Judith plays the role of military leader, rallying the Bethulians against the Assyrians, and also beheads Holofernes that employs both feminine and masculine characteristics. It will be useful to further analyze her role in Anglo-Saxon culture and what her mix of gender characteristics represent. Zenobia is described as participating in traditional masculine endeavors and is physically described as having masculine features. Both characters offer a rich discussion on the admixture of traits to balance out the previous focus on male characteristics.

The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* combines masculine and feminine characteristics as well as acts of violence to further complicate our understanding of medieval gender characteristics. Some scholars have posited purely masculine readings to the *Wife of Bath* while others have maintained her feminine side. When looking at how violence manifests in female literary figures the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* tells us how masculine and feminine characteristics can both influence violence in the Wife of Bath's rhetoric against male authority and her husband's abuse. Since violence is a primary part of this dissertation, it will be useful to analyze how violence affects our reading of female characters and how it functions differently from hypermasculine violence. This analysis includes not only the Wife of Bath, but Judith and Zenobia as well.

Masculine characteristics in women do not always manifest as violent actions but they do suggest or reflect violence in many cases. Chaucer's Griselda is one such case where a woman has been faced with the masculine violence of her husband, the young lord Walter, and through her own patience and resilience becomes a more effective monarch than him. It will also be

important to investigate Griselda's response to Walter's violence and whether her reaction can be read as masculine. We also need to discuss the monstrosity of Griselda's reaction to the death of her children and whether that can be analyzed in terms of masculine or feminine characteristics. These examples will complement earlier discussions of male effeminacy and hypermasculinity.

It would also be useful to extend these classical theories on how gender characteristics were determined to Early Modern literary figures such as Spenser's Britomart from the *Faerie Queen*. Britomart presents a mix of masculine and feminine characteristics that would help to extend the discussion beyond medieval society. Many scholars have commented and analyzed on her masculine characteristics and her representation of a masculine warrior, as well as her armor, style of dress, and her interest in love.[109] Her mix of feminine and masculine characteristics offer a balance similar to the discussion of literary characters occurring throughout this dissertation.

Of course there are other characters in the medieval and early modern periods to broaden the scope of this project beyond the dissertation. This project lays the foundation to further the discussion on how gender characteristics were understood to develop in individuals. This will be fundamentally important if we are to move beyond anachronistic theories, though flashy and tempting they may be, into more accurate representations of medieval and early modern beliefs and practices.

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[109] See Judith H. Anderson's "Britomart's Armor in Spenser's *Faerie Queen:* Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration"; John C. Bean's "Making the Daimonic Personal: Britomart and Love's Assault in *The Faerie Queen"*; Donald Stump "Fashioning Gender: Cross-Dressing in Spenser's Legend of Britomart and Artegall."

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