Passionate, eloquent and determined: Heroines' tales and feminine poetics

Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture
read 12 April 2016

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Abstract: This article studies a group of romances, appearing first in French in the mid-12th century in the *Roman d'Eneas*, and later in Anglo-Norman and Middle English (including *Ipomadon* and *William of Palerne*), in which the heroine is given priority over the male protagonist in falling in love and acting to bring that love to fruition. These relationships are aimed at marriage and, very often, procreation, in a way that opens the potential for the founding of a dynasty; they thus go against received ideas of both courtly love and antifeminism. The texts are characterised by long soliloquies given to the heroines that anticipate the Petrarchan discourse of desire, though here it is distinctively feminine and carries the hope of fulfilment; and fulfilment and mutuality are in turn given their own distinctive, mimetic form of poetry.

Keywords: medieval romance, Anglo-Norman romance, Middle English romance, feminine poetics, Petrarchism, *Roman d'Eneas*, *Ipomadon*, *William of Palerne*.

The heroines of this paper's title appear in a group of stories, of romances, that upset a good many of our received opinions of the Middle Ages. These romances require a rethink of our ideas of medieval women, or of how women could be thought of by medieval men; and with that, they upset our assumptions about the ethical thought of the period, and its rigid opposition between reason and the passions. They contradict many of our notions about medieval love, and misogyny; and not least, they offer a new perspective on the poetics of love and its association with the male voice. The authors who wrote these romances take no notice of Aristotle's dictum that women, being imperfect males, were inferior to men; or if they do notice it, they do so only to dismiss it. Their heroines do not act as if they were subordinate to men either politically or in the family; and indeed as heiresses, as many of them are, they carry real political power. They also fall outside the medieval misogynist discourse (or outside

our summary version of it) that divided women into virgins and whores, and which therefore potentially condemned all women in secular life. That discourse commonly also denounced women, through the person of Eve, as the source of all the sin in the world.[1] These heroines do not at all obviously follow the homilists' injunctions to women to be chaste, silent, and obedient,[2] based as those are on the assumption that any woman who was not chaste, silent, and obedient must be sexually voracious, endlessly loquacious, and out of control. It is true that women, and wives in particular, were subject to a barrage of what we would describe as trolling abuse, though it was directed at the sex as a whole more often than at individuals; but these heroines exist almost entirely outside the binaries of that discourse.

The first term of praise for women saints, the only women universally acknowledged as ideal, was often therefore that they were manlike. There was, however, a recognised set of virtues, including mercy, pity, and long-suffering, that was especially associated both with women and with Christ, as Jill Mann has demonstrated (2002: 105–28). The most quintessentially woman-related adjective, 'womanly', was itself most often used as a term of praise, collocating with words such as 'truth', 'nobility', 'benignity', and 'pity'.[3] Chaucer speaks of Criseyde's 'womanly noblesse'; Hoccleve asserts that pity and mercy are 'ful couenable / And pertinent … unto wommanhede'.[4] Some of those may sound rather passive as virtues, but the word could also indicate something daunting, as it does in the case of Jereslaus's wife, in Hoccleve, who sends a would-be seducer packing with a 'womanly nay' (XXII.11). It appears in a similar context in the prose *Frederyke of Jennen*, a text that is one of the sources for the wager in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, where the seducer figure, the forerunner of Iachimo, does not dare even proposition the wife 'bicause that he founde her so womanly in her behavoure'.[5] The heroines of this paper, it is true, are still maidens rather than women in medieval terminology, 'women' generally being reserved for the next stage of life, for wives—maidens have not yet 'put on perfection, and a woman's name', as Donne put it in his 'Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn' (ed. Smith 1976: 133); but they are, so to speak, young women in training. 'Womanly' may not be an adjective that we use very often in the 21st century, and there might be some hesitation over using it as a feminist term, just as 'virtue' is not a 21st-century term; but both matter in the endless medieval debates over secular women's capacity for goodness.

[1] Blamires (1992) gives a comprehensive anthology and commentary.
[2] The triplet was given currency by Hull (1982), in her account of early modern books for women, but the same principles were strenuously advocated by medieval homilists.
[3] *Middle English Dictionary* (2001 and online), s.v. womanly.
[4] Chaucer (1988), *Troilus and Criseyde* I.287; Hoccleve (1970), XXII stanza 2 (*Jereslaus's Wife*).
[5] Bullough (1975: VIII.66, chapter heading). The English text was first published in 1518.

The stories at the centre of this paper only rarely engage with those debates directly; but since they start from the assumption that womanliness *is* a good thing, together with the young women who embody it, they represent an important way of thinking that deserves more attention.[6] These heroines' tales first emerge in French in the mid-12th century, in the 1150s, at the very inception of romance as a new genre that emphasised ideas of subjecthood and emotion. All the earliest texts were written in French, that being the original meaning of 'romance': a romance language, the French vernacular. The late 12th century was moreover the time when France and England largely shared a court culture and language. Angevin culture reached its peak under Henry II, who ruled not only England but much of modern France too—or rather, he ruled a swathe of those French territories by virtue of his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who did much of the ruling herself, and did her very best to rule Henry as well. Eleanor was distinctly not silent or obedient (nor, as many contemporaries complained, womanly either). It would overstep the evidence to make a direct association between the more visible presence of women in the late-12th-century courts and the particular heroines of these stories, but the fact that the authors were writing with mixed or female audiences in mind, and on occasion for female patrons, encouraged the shift from the solidly martial masculinity of the *chansons de geste* to the more heterosexual world of romance. The shared cross-Channel culture meant that these heroines' tales were written in both continental French and the insular version of that, Anglo-Norman. On the continent, however, they came to be displaced in the early 13th century by a different kind of story: stories of what we still tend to call courtly love, *amour courtois*. The term is rare in Old French and non-existent in Middle English; it was adopted by Gaston Paris in 1883 (523) to describe the adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere as presented by Chrétien de Troyes in his *Chevalier de la Charrette*, and popularised in England in the 1930s by C. S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love*. Even in Chrétien, however, the story of Lancelot is an outlier, though later French writers of romance, like French novelists, loved the adultery model and deployed it generously. Romances written in England, initially in Anglo-Norman, later in Middle English, by contrast used it very rarely. An alternative version of Lancelot from the 1190s, almost certainly Anglo-Norman in origin though surviving only as the German *Lanzelet* of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, presents him as the lifelong love of a lady named Iblis, and Guinevere as entirely faithful to Arthur.[7] The more familiar story of Lancelot and Guinevere as lovers is barely mentioned in English before the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* of *c.*1400, and it was not given a full English treatment until the very end of the Middle Ages, by Sir

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[6] The most comprehensive presentation of the medieval case for women is Blamires (1997), though he concentrates on the pro- and antifeminist debates.

[7] Ulrich, ed. and trans. Meyer (2011). It should be noted that Lancelot is very much less faithful to Iblis than she is to him, though they finish up together; but Guinevere is not involved.

Thomas Malory. The love interest in Chrétien's other romances, and in the heroines' tales that are my concern here, focused strongly on faithful love leading to marriage, and they therefore carried a degree of ethical relevance that the more extreme fantasy of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* did not (Crane 1986: 134–46). At best, the adulterous Guinevere was to be wondered at rather than imitated: *admiranda non imitanda*, in the maxim more often applied to women saints or martyrs, though the wonder at Guinevere was of a rather different quality.

In earlier French romance, and in its Anglo-Norman and Middle English descendants, the heroines are presented as being much closer to possible role models, despite not fitting the exemplars offered by many clerical writers. The women at the heart of these stories disrupt that dichotomy of virgin and whore, and of the ideal woman as being chaste, silent, and obedient. It is one of the striking characteristics of these heroines that far from being silent, we hear their voices as much as we do the heroes', whether in internal soliloquy, or in dialogue with their lovers: their speeches, indeed, constitute a kind of feminine poetics, on which more below. Obedience is likewise rarely on display. In choosing their own husbands, they typically go against the wishes of their parents in a way that demands assent from the audience, just as when a woman displays her particular devotion to Christ by insisting on her vows to Him as overriding her duty of filial obedience (a recurrent feature of saints' lives, though it happened in real life too, as the biography of the early-12th-century Christina of Markyate demonstrates (ed. Talbot 1959)). Despite that disobedience to her parents, moreover, her love is likely to be shown as fully in accord with the larger importance of the family or the dynasty—family being perhaps the one medieval institution that was even more important than the Church. Chrétien's romances again display the range of possibilities. Most of his lovers aim at marriage. The Fenice of *Cligès*, who is forced to marry against her will, explicitly rejects the model of Tristan and Isolde (Chrétien ed. Poirion (1995): *Cligés* 5243-7) and manages to retain her virginity for her beloved, enduring gruesome tortures along the way; the Enide of *Erec et Enide* has to prove her love against the express commands, not of her father, but of her husband, by repeated acts of disobedience, and approval of those acts comes close to being the very point of the work. Such apparent insubordination serves as an important complicating factor in what might otherwise seem a universal scheme of morality for women. Neither of those romances was given an English version, but the same principles, of resistance to parental wishes in particular, are generously in evidence in insular romance.

Chastity is a more complex issue, as these heroines are represented as highly sexual individuals—but that is not in itself offered as bad, for all the antifeminist propaganda that deplored female sexuality. 'Chaste' in Middle English carried the meaning of 'faithful to one's husband' as well as 'celibate', and in that sense these women are emphatically chaste: their aim is always marriage, and the texts often go out of their

way to emphasise that the lovers refrain from sex until their wedding night. God had created humans as sexual beings, as both Augustine and Aquinas pointed out.[8] They also pointed out, however, that what was wrong with sexual passion was its opposition to reason, and the only way to reduce its element of sinfulness was for it to have the sole aim of producing offspring. The readiness with which these romance heroines become pregnant puts them on the good side of the line, but a wish for children does not figure in their monologues describing their desire, and neither does reason—except in instances that look more like wishful thinking than anything the homilists might approve of:

> Ressone wille, it is not to layne,
> He shuld not love but he be lovyd agayne.
>
> > (*Ipomadon*, ed. Purdie 2001: 1031–2)
>
> (Reason desires—it's not to be hidden—that he ought not to love
> unless he is loved in return.)

Such dominance of emotion is not, however, held against them, and indeed the course of the narrative demonstrates that such heroines are making a better choice than they know. The orthodox medieval line on sexuality was not that it was wrong: it was what you did with it that mattered. Even women saints, the vast majority of whom retained their virginity, were not presented as eliminating their sexuality; rather, they set all that capacity for desire onto Christ, who was the most desirable of lovers or husbands. The nun was quite literally the bride of Christ. As good post-Freudians, we are likely to think of that as repression or at best sublimation, but for anchoresses and women mystics, that sublimation was the very point—hence the, to us rather startling, eroticism of the language they sometimes used about Christ. When the Victorian translator of the early-13th-century *Hali Meidenhad*, 'holy virginity', reached the point where the nun or anchoress goes to heaven and her beloved consummates his love for her, the translator abandons modern English for Latin, as if he wished to protect wives, daughters, and servants from corruption (Cockayne & Furnivall 1886: v, 38). Continental women mystics writing in the 13th century, notably Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg, take this union with Christ a step further, so that their language presents a mutual and fully sexual passion.[9]

For the vast majority of the population, however, sexuality took secular forms. In the late 12th century, at approximately the same time as the formative years of romance, the Church made a number of changes in its doctrine of marriage. One of

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[8] Aquinas 1920: II–II,153, which itself cites Augustine's *De bono coniugali* (full text ed. Walsh 2001).
[9] See e.g. Hadewijch trans. Hart 1980: 66, 281; Mechthild trans. Tobin 1988: 62. Margery Kempe's later experience of being bedded by Christ is displaced into his words to her, and puts her into a more subordinate role (ed. Windeatt 2000: 196).

these was Alexander III's pronouncement, building on the work of the jurist Gratian, that the one essential for a valid marriage was the consent of the spouses, a move that had the potential to make the woman's will equal to the man's (Aquinas 1920: Supplement 45,1; Brundage 1987: 234–46; d'Avray 2005: 124–9). Mutual consent went hand in hand with the pastoral promotion of the idea of marriage as a sacrament. It seems unlikely to be coincidental that secular literature promoting love and marriage was emerging in the same period. One romance, the *Jehan et Blonde* of Philippe de Rémi (French of *c.*1250, but closely modelled on Anglo-Norman), spells out the link when the priest asks the lovers to confirm their consent in the course of the marriage service, a question, as the author notes, that is in their case completely redundant.[10] Marriage showed its sacramental character above all through the couple's faithfulness in loving, chastity as sexual virtue: hence the line in Philosophy's hymn to love in Chaucer's translation of Boethius, that the same principle of love that binds the universe also 'knytteth sacrement of mariages of chaste loves' (Chaucer 1988: *Boece* II m. 8, 22–3). The Church normally confined its approval of sexuality, even within marriage, to the aim of procreation. Only rarely is love-making celebrated for its own sake, but it does happen. There is, for instance, a remarkable passage in the late-14th-century *Cleanness* ('Purity'), in which God Himself speaks in celebration of the joys of sex:

> Þe play of paramorez I portrayed Myseluen,
> And made þerto a maner myriest of oþer.
>
> > (Andrew & Waldron (eds) 2007: lines 700–01)
>
> (I Myself devised the play of love, in a manner most joyful of all
> things.)

It is, the poet has God say, the next best thing to the joys of Paradise. He does note that the lovers should be 'true' and should have 'tyȝed hemseluen … honestly' (702, 705), but the caveat receives much less emphasis than the panegyric to sexual pleasure. This is the kind of joyous sexuality celebrated at the end of the heroines' tales, though God is generally left out of it at that point. Procreation, however, may well figure: offspring are the essential point of the ancestral romances, those that celebrate the origins of a dynasty, and even in more fictional or legendary stories they are likely to get a mention. Ulrich's Lanzelet and Iblis, for instance, have three sons and one daughter, who inherit the four kingdoms that the couple have themselves inherited (Ulrich 2011: 9374–85). The presence of a strong founding mother, a 'mega-mother' (Maddox 2000: 172), is a striking feature of ancestral romances, but these mothers are

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[10] Philippe de Rémi ed. and trans. Sargent-Bauer 2001: 4739–50. *Jehan*, along with its principal model the Anglo-Norman *Guy of Warwick*, belongs to a different but related group of romances in which the heroine is initially reluctant before wholeheartedly reciprocating the hero's love.

themselves heroines whose stories chart their passionate faithfulness to the man they have chosen. It is, furthermore, the women who do the choosing. Just as women saints show the depth of their love for Christ by keeping faithful to him despite parental or political disapproval—at its extreme, to the point of martyrdom—so the trials and hardships endured by many of these heroines in support of their choice demonstrate the absoluteness of their commitment.

It was also in the 12th century that inheritance patterns were changing in some parts of Europe, England in particular, so as to give daughters the right to inherit if a man had no sons; and so heiresses appear on the scene just as the bride's as well as the bridegroom's consent becomes the key to marriage. Those combined changes, over inheritance and consent, potentially gave women powerful political and erotic patronage. Life itself was by no means always like that. At least in some areas, the position of women who were not heiresses seems to have worsened, though with something of a bounce upwards either side of 1200;[11] but romances exploited the ideas to the full. The best kind of romance heroine was both an heiress, and chaste in the sense that she moves in the course of the romance from sexual innocence to faithful and emphatically passionate love.

In contrast to the preconceptions we have of romance heroines' passivity, these women know what they want and set out to get it. They are far from being damsels in distress (though they may have such moments): they are quite capable of rescuing their distressed lovers if circumstances require, as a range of heroines demonstrates from the Ydoine of *Amadas and Ydoine* to Britomart in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. They are likewise far from being the commodified objects of the male gaze, as the presentation of women in modern literature and film is often accused of being (Mulvey 1989: 14–26). 'Looking' is indeed a notable trope of these romances, but the heroines instigate much of it themselves. They are women with their own agency, even their own subjecthood. Much has been written about the emergence of the individual in 12th-century Europe, but that individuality is usually discussed in male terms (Morris 1972; Bynum 1980). These romance heroines, however, share in that key moment in the history of selfhood, and the history of emotions. The texts in which they appear are almost all by male authors, but the length and detail devoted to their heroines, and the engagement with their point of view, demand a generous empathy from their readers or listeners, whether male or female.[12] Such a presentation is not therefore just poetic cultural capital accruing to a clever poet among his own homosocial group, as

[11] Marriage and inheritance practices varied widely across Europe; see further d'Avray (2005), and in relation to southern France Paden (1989: 1–19).
[12] Gaunt (1995: 71–85) stresses by contrast the exclusive dependence of such plots on male interests; while not denying the force of his argument, I find it too sweeping compared with the balance of content within this group of romances.

tends to be true of the love-lyric poets, whether the trouvères or the later Petrarchans (Gaunt 1995: 122–58). Within these romances, the heroines are allowed, as it were, their own autonomous existence. Their stories offered women a secular model of good womanhood with which they could identify; and in the process, they showed male audiences women whose actions and feelings demand respect and assent. These heroines are the literary ancestors—the direct ancestors, given how many of the English texts were sufficiently long-lasting to become copy for printers eager to find material for their presses—of Shakespearean heroines such as Rosalind, or the Thaisa of *Pericles* (Cooper 2004: 264–8, 409–29). Their stories are, furthermore, well worth reading in themselves, and not just for what they show about their culture or on account of the distinction of their descendants.

TELLING TALES

The first of these 'heroine's tales' appears in the 1150s, in one of the earliest texts in which it is possible to measure the separation of the new genre of romance from the male-oriented epic on the Classical model or the home-grown French epics known as the *chansons de geste*. This is the *Roman d'Eneas*, a French retelling of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It was widely known on both sides of the Channel, and was strongly influential in the development of Anglo-Norman and later Middle English romance. The text has a particular link with Britain, in that it often appears in its manuscript history as a pre-quel of Wace's Norman *Brut*, which was itself a rewriting of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*; and Geoffrey, and Wace after him, have Britain founded by Brutus, a descendant of the lines of Aeneas and his wife Lavinia.[13] It may be for that reason that the author of the *Roman d'Eneas* makes not Dido but Lavinia, his Lavine, the heroine of his version, she being the heiress of king Latinus, and whose marriage to Aeneas established him in Italy. Virgil has only minimal interest in her. At the very start of his work, he notes how Aeneas seeks 'Lavinian shores', 'Lavinia … litora' (*Aeneid* I.2 3), but it is unclear whether the reference is purely topographical, after the city of Lavinium, or is making her a metonym for the land she brings with her. When Chaucer translates that phrase in his *House of Fame* (148), he turns it into 'the strondes of Lavine', changing her from an adjective back into a person. Her only actual appearances in Virgil are once to blush, and once to tear her hair. The Lavine of the French *Eneas* could hardly be more different. She makes her first appearance in a discussion with her mother when she expresses her anxiety that she does not know

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[13] On the manuscript history, see the edition by Salverda de Grave (1964: iv–v). The precise relationship of Brutus to Lavinia varies with different traditions; he is sometimes represented as her direct descendant, but Geoffrey makes him her great-nephew.

what love is; so how can she love Turnus, the suitor whom her mother insists she is to marry? Her mother tells her that she will know what love is when she feels it. Eneas, meantime, is besieging Latinus' city, and Lavine, gazing out of a tower window, sets eyes on him and falls in love.

> Amors l'a de son dart ferue;
> ainz qu'el se fust d'iluec meüe,
> i a changié cent foiz colors:
> or est cheoite es laz d'amors,
> voille ou non, amer l'estuet.

<div align="right">(Salverda de Grave (ed.) 1968: 8057–61)</div>

> (Love struck her with his arrow. Before she moved away [from the window], she changed colour a hundred times. Now she has fallen into the snare of love; whether she wishes to or not, she has to love.)

She responds to this new experience in a long soliloquy of some 400 lines, which continues through a sleepless night. She notes that she is both healthy and ill, chilled and feverish; she longs to flee but does not want to; she suffers bitterness without sweet, and she condemns Love as a tyrant. Despite knowing of her mother's implacable hostility, she concludes with a passionate declaration of fidelity, that she will never change:

> A toz jors serai vostre amie,
> ja vostre amor ne changerai;
> soiez segur: se ge vos ai,
> ja n'amerai home fors vos.

<div align="right">(8376–9)</div>

> (I shall be your love forever, and never change my love for you.
> Be sure of this: if I have you, I shall not love any man but you.)

What the author of the *Roman d'Eneas* was doing was strikingly original. It is often claimed that he found precedents, not in Virgil, but in Ovid, who does indeed give plenty of analyses of women in love; but they are not in fact very like this. In the *Metamorphoses*, the most detailed women's reactions are about not love but sheer lust; and in the *Heroides*, the weight falls on their stories rather than their emotions—stories of the unkindness of the men who have abandoned them. His poems on the art of love concentrate more on seduction techniques rather than this kind of analysis of women's inner lives. In the *Eneas*, the style and content and the sheer length of Lavine's soliloquy are very different, not least in the way her innocence and bewilderment at this new experience are at the fore as she holds a debate with herself. The end result of that debate is that she writes a message to Eneas declaring her love, wraps it around the shaft of an arrow and has an archer shoot it to his feet, in a literalisation of the

metaphor of the arrow of the God of Love, the *dart* with which she has herself been shot. Only then does he look up to the tower and see her, and fall in love himself. He is given his own, shorter, passage of inner soliloquy after that, and he too has a bad night, and his own inner debate. In due course, he kills Turnus and demands the hand of Lavine; and after another shorter soliloquy apiece, they are married.

The presentation of Lavine signals a number of new directions in medieval literature, and not just because it is a key part of one of the earliest romances. It is unashamedly focused on the woman rather than the man; and it presents her very sympathetically. It has to do so, perhaps, as Lavine was the supposed founding mother of various western European nations. It is still possible to argue that it is antifeminist, on the grounds that this early detailed psychological study inside a woman's mind is all about her love for a man; but Lavine would emphatically pass what is known for modern films and stories as the Sexy Lamp Test (that is, shiny and curvaceous but with no mind of its own), as devised by Kelly Sue DeConnick. This runs, 'If you can replace your female character with a sexy lamp and the story still basically works, maybe you need another draft.'[14] The *Roman d'Eneas* in effect provides that other draft for the *Aeneid*: Lavine could not be replaced with any figure that did not have both mind and agency of her own. Her soliloquy indeed contains rather little about Eneas. It is much more an act of *self* analysis, and, given the length of that self analysis, the audience is compelled to empathise—they are not given the space not to react favourably. The antifeminism that colours so much medieval writing is introduced later only in order to be dismissed: Eneas briefly tries to remind himself that women are evil, but he refuses to entertain the idea, as if the author wanted to exorcise any such notion from the audience's minds. The author, in other words, is clearly aware of the 'woman debate', but he overwrites it, with the effect that the romance occupies a space outside that debate; and what he keeps is also offset by the accusation of Lavine's mother that Eneas is only interested in boys (discussed in Gaunt 1995: 71–85). It is notable too that far from Lavine's being the female object of Eneas's gaze, he is the object of hers. Gazing in medieval romance can go in both directions, but often, as here, it is led by the woman (Camille 1998: 34–9; Cooper 2004: 234–9). That does still not necessarily make it feminist, since it no doubt fed men's vanity or fantasy to think they might be gazed at longingly by a beautiful heiress; but the narrative gives Lavine, and many heroines after her, a great deal of agency. Here, that shows in her devising a means (the arrow) to get Eneas to look at her, and in her refusal to yield to her mother's threatening demands that she must love Turnus instead.

The language of Lavine's soliloquy probably strikes postmedieval readers as rather conventional. Conventions, however, etymologically 'things agreed', often become

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[14] There are other less polite phrasings; this is from the Wikipedia article on the better-known Bechdel Test (accessed 15 May 2016), which provides its context in feminist film criticism.

conventional because they are true. It is extraordinarily difficult to describe in words what it feels like to fall in love, and Lavine, as one of the first examples, offered a model for later writers. Something similar is found again not long afterwards in Thomas of Britain's *Tristan*. This too was written in French, but it is part of the same cross-Channel culture, as Thomas's cognomen indicates. Here, Isolde's reaction to drinking the love-potion is a long speech on how love affects her, as she tries to explain her love-sickness to Tristan, and perhaps to herself, in wordplay on love, bitterness, and the sea: amer, to love; amere, bitter; la mer, the sea.[15] Tristan in turn echoes that, but he comes second to her: she is the one who is given priority. This vocabulary and the experience it describes, not least the paradoxes of bitter sweetness and the metaphor of the sea to describe emotional disorientation, are most familiar now from later literature, as a male discourse of love as experienced by Petrarch or Chaucer's Troilus (for whom Chaucer borrows it from Petrarch, *Troilus* I.400–20). Rhetorically, we might put much of Lavine's or Ysolde's speeches into a box labelled 'Petrarchan paradoxes', but there are major differences. It is only in later literature that they come to be associated specifically with a male point of view, and where the love is predicated on unfulfillable desire. There is a strong case, in fact, for rethinking them as initially created for women.

The idea that setting her eyes on a handsome man can knock a woman off her feet hardly makes a text woman-friendly, let alone pro-feminist. It does indeed have a strong potential for being male narcissism. That something more, or other, than that is happening here is confirmed by an Anglo-Norman writer from just slightly later in the 12th century, this time a woman, Marie de France. She adopts this same pattern for one of the women in her lai of *Eliduc*—or rather, in her lai of 'Guildelüec and Guilliadun', that being its more appropriate name, she tells us, as it is the women who are central. In this poem, Guilliadun is the heiress figure. Like Lavine, she reacts to the hero first, and love strikes her through her eyes:

> Icele l'ad mut esgardé,
> Sun vis, sun cors e sun semblant;
> Dit en lui n'at mesavenant,
> Forment le prise en sun curage.
> Amurs i lance sun message,
> Que la somunt de lui amer.[16]

> (She looked at him intensely, his face, his body, his whole appearance; she thought there was nothing unbecoming about him, and he impressed her *corage* [willed emotion] greatly. Love directed his messenger to her, and summoned her to love him.)

[15] The Carlisle Fragment lines 33–63, ed. I. Short (Lacy (ed.) 1998: 173–83); Tristan's reply is at lines 64–71.
[16] *Eliduc* lines 300–5, in Marie de France ed. Ewert (1944).

She too lies awake all night, and in the morning sends Eliduc a ring and a girdle as love tokens; and we are invited, unproblematically in gender terms, to identify with her. There is still a problem, though it is of a different kind. Unknown to her, Eliduc is married already, to a lady who also loves him—the Guildalüec of Marie's alternative title. The result is a kind of Dr Zhivago triangle, demanding sympathy for the husband and for both women, and so contrasts with the more usual romance situation in male-authored narratives of a woman with competing suitors. The story does nonetheless manage a kind of happy ending, again engineered by a woman—by Guildalüec, the wife, who is moved to cede her place to the maiden in an act of generosity and pity; and that is why the lai ought to be named after its dual heroines. That ending also points to another characteristic of these heroines' tales, which is how often the women are crucial to bringing about the happy ending. It is of course such concluding happiness that qualifies these texts as romances; but it is striking how often within the stories, it is the women who make things work out.

The model of the heroine's falling in love at first sight and then conducting an extended debate with herself was immensely influential. It is present in Ulrich's *Lanzelet*, presumably drawing on his Anglo-Norman source, where Iblis first sees her destined lover in a dream, and her debate, in which her emotions do battle with and overcome her wisdom, follows as she realises the full consequences of her father's insistence that he will fight to the death with any suitor (4214–40, 4372–06). A closer imitation of the *Eneas* model appears in the *Ipomedon* of Hue de Rotelande, or Rhuddlan, in the Welsh marches. Written in Anglo-Norman in the 1190s, this was adapted into Middle English three times in the 14th and 15th centuries. Hue was writing for a male patron as well as for women readers (he mentions both), and he was much more aware of the whole phenomenon of what we would now call antifeminist discourse, bringing it into his authorial interjections into the text at frequent intervals. He still, however, largely keeps it at a distance from his own heroine. She is called La Fière, the proud lady, and she has to learn better; but Hue does not turn his story into a morality tale. His comments are more of the ironic or salacious kind—he keeps, so to speak, winking at his male readers behind her back (Crane 1986: 161–74). Ipomedon's attractiveness to various other ladies besides her certainly moves into male narcissism, or wishful thinking; but the Middle English versions simply omit such comments, in a way that separates the romance off from the debates over the goodness or otherwise of women. Even the Anglicisation of her name makes a difference: La Fière becomes the Fere, and in Middle English 'fere' carries the meaning of 'companion', 'mate', or 'spouse'. It is as if her change of heart might be already implicit in her name, from pride demanding submission to equality in love.

The earliest of these adaptations, into tail-rhyme, gives a particular emphasis to the heroine. She is not only an heiress, but an heiress who has already come into her

own: she is a ruler in her own right, of Calabria, part of the Norman kingdom of Sicily at the time Hue was writing. She has sworn, because it was already the romance thing to do, to love only the man of most prowess, and at first Ipomadon, who arrives at her court as an anonymous stranger, does not seem to possess any prowess at all. She falls in love with him nonetheless, again through a process of looking and soliloquising, in the course of which her pride is very much (and very consciously, on her part) dismantled. When he sits in front of her in the court, she gazes at him fascinated, then is overcome with embarrassment as she realises that she may be giving herself away. Here, her look is reciprocated instantly, but it is still hers that is given priority:

> How so it be, this lady yenge
> Makythe many a love lokynge,
> But foly thoughte sche non,
> And yet she thought it dyd here good;
> That full wele vnderstode
> The chyld Ipomadon.
> He caste her many a lovely loke;
> Full well that lady vndertoke
> That he wyth love was tane.
> She drede that it shuld ryse þorow chaunse
> Sum slavnder thorow countenavnce,
> He lokyd so here vppon.

<div align="right">(Purdie (ed.) 2001: 809–20)</div>

> (However things were, this young lady kept giving him amorous
> glances, but she had no improper thoughts—yet she thought it
> did her good; and the young Ipomadon well understood that. He
> cast many a loving look at her; the lady perceived very well that he
> had fallen in love. She was afraid lest by chance their behaviour
> might give rise to slander, he looked at her so intently.)

The looking here is mutual, but it is the Fere who continues to get the most emphasis in what follows. Like Lavine, she retreats to bed to spend a sleepless night, and to engage in a hundred-line debate with herself about what she is doing, striving (as she puts it) with her own heart (1037). Ipomadon follows that up with a pillow soliloquy of his own that mirrors hers; but again it is hers that is given primacy, just as her act of looking is. Even in Hue's version, the length and weight of La Fière's internal soliloquies resist a solely male-oriented reading. Ipomadon himself, however, will not let himself be seduced by any of his would-be mistresses, in any of the versions. Chastity, that passionate faithfulness to one's chosen sexual partner, is a principle for the hero as well as the heroine. That the lovers' aim here, as in almost all Middle English romances, is marriage, is often cited as sign of the shift from the courtly level

of French romance to a more middle-class, bourgeois English ideology. That is, however, much too simplistic, as the preponderance of marriage in Chrétien's romances shows. Ipomadon is finally revealed to the Fere as himself heir to the kingdom of Apulia (another Norman province), so what is at issue, again, is dynasty, even if the dynasty here is fictional. The sexual attraction between the lovers serves genealogical purposes as well as maintaining an ethic fully in keeping with broader Christian culture. In that sense, these lovers are both *admiranda* and *imitanda*, to be both wondered at and imitated.

It was the standard practice of Middle English adaptations of Anglo-Norman and French romances to abbreviate their originals: to tighten the stories, and to cut elaboration of expression to something much more concentrated, conveying the same intensity of feeling but in tighter compass. There is one romance, however, that allows its heroine a particularly lengthy internal debate: not a metrical romance this time, but the alliterative *William of Palerne*, translated in the mid-14th century from a French original of *c*.1200 (Bunt (ed.) 1985: 14–21). Originally written for a female patron, 'la contesse Yolent', in England it acquired the patronage of the earl of Hereford; so although it belongs to the context of a regional court rather than the royal Windsor, it can hardly be described as bourgeois. Its earliest known English title conjoins its heroine with its hero, as 'William and Melior', and Melior, as heroine, fully deserves that joint billing. The story tells how William, son of the king of Sicily, is carried off as a baby by a werewolf. He is found by a cowherd, and later taken in by the emperor of Rome and brought up alongside his daughter Melior. In due course, she falls in love with him, lies sleepless in bed and has a long internal debate about her feelings. This runs to some 140 long alliterative lines: considerably longer, and carrying greater emotional weight, than its French original. Her soliloquy starts with what we would again want to think of as Petrarchan paradoxes:

> Seþþe sike I and sing samen togedere,
> And melt neiȝh for mourning, and moche joie make.
>
> (Bunt (ed.) 1985: 433–4)
>
> (Hence I sigh and sing both at once, almost melt for grief and
> make great joy.)

She then moves into a long debate on whether to blame her eyes or her heart for her love, a rhetorical motif that itself goes back earlier into the Middle Ages. Some versions of it are overtly moral, deploring passion and extolling reason (Hanford 1911: 161–5); but many, like Melior's, are very different. Soredamors, one of Chrétien de Troyes' most attractive heroines, is given a soliloquy along similar lines (Chrétien 1995: *Cligès* 458–527)*,* and it was still a familiar trope when Shakespeare wrote his sonnet, 'Mine eyes and heart are at a mortal war'—a poem that again represents the

male capture of a motif established early for women's voices. Despite these antecedents, Melior's voice in her soliloquy rings true as that of a very young woman out of her depth in love. Once again here, the emphasis falls on *looking*, on the female gaze (Cooper 2006: 35–7) (the relevant phrases are italicised):

> Prince is none his pere, ne in paradiȝs non aungel,
> as he semes *in mi siȝt*, so faire is þat burne.
> I have him portreide an paynted in mi hert wiþinne,
> þat he sittus *in mi siȝt*, me þinkes, evermore …
> Þeiȝh I winne wiþ mi werk þe worse evermore,
> so gret liking and love I have *þat lud to bihold*,
> þat I have lever þat love þan lac al mi harmes …
> Whom schal I it wite but *mi wicked eyiȝen*,
> *þat lad myn hert þrouȝ loking* þis langour to drye?
>
>   (Bunt (ed.) 1985: 443–6, 451–3, 458–9)
>
> (No prince is his equal, nor any angel in paradise, as he seems in
> my sight, so handsome is that man. I have drawn and pictured
> him within my heart, so that it seems to me he always stays in my
> sight. … Were I to be worse off for ever because of what I do, I
> have such great pleasure and love in looking at that man that I
> had rather have that love than be without all my troubles. …
> Whom shall I blame but my wicked eyes, which through gazing
> brought my heart to suffer this grief?)

The orthodox moral versions of this debate cast the eyes as wicked for leading the heart into sin, so that both need to be tamed by reason. Melior decides halfway through her soliloquy that 'bi resoun' her eyes are at fault (461), but she goes on to argue that William's virtues make him the ideal, and therefore rationally acceptable, object of her love; and although this may sound like special pleading, her love is far from being condemned. On the contrary, she recurrently appeals to the Blessed Virgin and to Christ, and the whole romance endorses that idea of divine approval (Dalrymple 2000: 64–81). She ends her soliloquy:

> I sayle now in þe see as schip boute mast,
> boute anker or ore or ani semlyche sayle;
> but heiȝh hevene King to gode havene me sende,
> oþer laske me liif-daywes wiþinne a litel terme!
>
>   (567–70)
>
> (I sail now in the sea like a ship without a mast, without anchor
> or oar or any fit sail; but may the high King of heaven send me to
> good harbour, or speedily cut short the days of my life!)

And in due course, with the recurrent implication of God's help, the lovers do indeed come to a good haven.

William and Melior is a romance that is entirely delightful. The translator is always aware that the whole story is on the edge of humour, but that humour comes across principally as sympathy for young lovers out of their depth. That tone of real but not too serious sympathy extends to all the other characters in the story, not least the women. After Melior herself, her cousin Alisaundrine is foremost among these: when her father wants to betrothe Melior to the son of the emperor of Greece, it is she who arranges for the lovers to elope disguised in white bearskins—a camouflage that works just as badly as one would expect, despite their being given help by the werewolf. Another of these positively portrayed women is William's widowed mother, the queen of Sicily, who is ruling her country very competently herself in the absence of her son, the heir. More surprisingly, the sympathy ultimately extends to a wicked stepmother, who it turns out has enchanted her stepson into werewolf form (so the werewolf himself is friendly). Even she, however, is allowed to repent, to turn the werewolf back into his human shape, and both are welcomed back into the court. The romance ends with an unusual degree of harmony. Melior's marriage to William is fully endorsed, after many setbacks, by her father, and he also gives her a long passage of good advice on the qualities and actions required from her in her role as queen of Sicily, or indeed as empress of Rome as she becomes when William is chosen to succeed her own father. Her capacity for passionate love becomes the foundation for successful rule.

Unlike Eneas and Ipomadon, William takes just a little time to respond to Melior's love, but some heroines have to work much harder to get their lovers to reciprocate. This is especially likely to be true if the woman is a Saracen; and since Saracens were safely outside the Christian ethic, authors had more freedom to portray how they might act (Weiss 1991). Such women still display intense faithfulness, and they aim at marriage (after they have been duly converted), but their wooing techniques take longer and are much more transgressive. The Sultan's daughter Floripas in *The Sowdone of Babylon* falls in love with one of Charlemagne's twelve peers, Guy of Burgundy, after her father has taken them all prisoner; releasing them involves her pushing her uncooperative governess out of the window into the sea, and braining their jailer with his bunch of keys (Lupack (ed.) 1990). Guy, the object of her passion, is perhaps unsurprisingly less enthusiastic than most heroines' potential husbands. Josian, heroine of the perennial English favourite *Bevis of Hamtoun*, is likewise the daughter of a Saracen king. Bevis has had to flee from England, and he establishes himself at her father's court. Josian is watching from the castle window when Bevis slays a particularly fearsome boar, and she exclaims

> Al þis world ȝif ich it hedde,
> Ich him geve it me to wedde;
> Boute he me loue, icham ded …
> Loue-longing me haþ be-couȝt.[17]

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[17] Kölbing (ed.) (1978), lines 893–5, 897 of the Auchinleck version (main text).

> (Even if I had all this world, I would give it to him if would marry
> me; unless he loves me, I shall die. … Love-longing has entrapped
> me.)

This is one of the earliest uses of that most expressive of phrases, 'love-longing': a phrase very often associated with women's emotions. Bevis refuses her advances until she agrees that she will convert; but she still has a particularly hard challenge to win him, as she is twice married against her will to other husbands, one of whom she disposes of by hanging him from the bed-rail on their wedding night; and she proves her continuing virginity to a rather sceptical Bevis by her immunity to attack by lions.

FEMININE POETICS AND THE DISCOURSE OF DESIRE

This pattern of the heroine's love and its expression preceding the hero's is found widely; and the woman is given precedence not just in terms of the story, but in the history of poetics. Lavine and Ysolde precede Lancelot and the whole male-centred courtly love phenomenon of the disdainful lady as the object of the poetry of desire. Their soliloquies can create an inherently recognisable feminine discourse passed on from text to text, and which, given their chronological priority, may well have inspired, or at least influenced, the similar expressions of male love that are so much more familiar to us now. We should perhaps be thinking of the prehistory of Petrarchan poetics not so much as a Provençal troubadour or French trouvère lyric tradition, but as a feminine poetics created in 12th-century narrative and passed on from there into lyric and sonnet. There are, however, crucial differences from Petrarchist lyric, quite apart from the romances' privileging of the woman's point of view. One is that lyric is always public: its first-person expression is composed to be performed before an audience, whereas the fiction of the third-person narratives is that the soliloquies remain as private and unspoken thoughts. A second but not unrelated difference from lyric is that the love is to be reciprocated—and that requires the full narrative context in which the monologues come embedded, with its promise of fulfilment. Much French, Provençal, and Italian lyric poetry gets its energy, and indeed much of its point, from the fact that it describes desire infinitely deferred, allowing the emphasis to fall on the rhetoric more than on any authenticity of feeling. The songs in women's voices of the northern French *trouvères* and Occitan *trobairitz*, whether one is looking at female poets (as often appears to be the case) or men ventriloquising female voices, also differ in both focus and method from the narratives.[18] Their speakers will voice regret at losing a potential lover, or debate issues of love (Doss-Quinby *et al.* 2001: 126–40; Kay 1990: 101–11), but they do not engage in the kind of inward emotional analysis,

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[18] On the difficulties of identifying female authorship, see Doss-Quinby *et al.* (2001: Introduction), Zufferey (1989) and Kay (1990: 84–6).

complete with paradoxes, that the romances provide. Their subject-matter is of a more public interest suited to their mode of performance, and so effectively rules out the silent interiority of the romance monologues.

When love is reciprocated in the romances, the rhetoric changes too, to a poetics of mutuality and equality, where the woman's love and the man's are set in a kind of duet or counterpoint, so that they share the same verbal or emotional patterns: where the hero echoes what the heroine has done or said, and where often the two parts of the duet finally come together in a single harmony. That the heroine speaks first and her beloved echoes her is true of almost every romance mentioned so far. Eneas goes through a love-torment parallel to Lavine's after he has eventually seen her; Tristan repeats back to Ysolde her wordplay on seasickness and bitterness and love; Ipomadon has a sleepless night and a short soliloquy paralleling the Fere's. That paralleling and echoing of the poetry is especially clear if they fall in love simultaneously. The phenomenon is most familiar to us now from Shakespeare, who gives it its greatest moment in *Romeo and Juliet* when the lovers meet at the ball, though there it is Romeo who speaks first. The couple share a sonnet, speaking alternate quatrains, in a way that expresses poetically the mutuality of their love, their voices and emotions all sharing the same wavelength. Middle English romance often compresses this process, and at its most concise may express it in terms of action rather than words, so that falling in love is represented through an echoing of action as well as speech, though the heroine is given attention first. The example from *Ipomadon* discussed above ('How so it be, that lady yenge …') demonstrates how this works. Here, the Fere's 'love lokynge' at Ipomadon; her inner thoughts (that looking at him 'did her good'); his return gaze; and her social embarrassment, almost panic, that they may be noticed, are all condensed into a single verse—but the close paralleling of those nuanced reactions, perhaps barely perceptible intradiegetically beyond the lovers' own consciousnesses, does all that is necessary for the readers or audience to register that the emotion is mutual. This same mutuality appears even in the *Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, who is not normally thought of as being particularly interested in the expression of feeling. He is very much a writer of action rather than emotion, but emotions in his work are often coded by actions. Speech itself can become a form of action, as what in other writers might be introspection or inner monologue is replaced by spoken words. This is what happens when La Bele Alys first sets eyes on Sir Alysaunder when she sees him jousting:

> And than she lepe oute of hir pavylyon and toke sir Alysaundir by
> the brydyll, and thus she seyde:
> > 'Fayre knight, of thy knyghthode, shew me thy vysayge.'
> > 'That dare I well,' seyde sir Alysaundir, 'shew my vysayge.'
> > And than he put of his helme, and when she sawe his vysage

> she seyde, 'A, swete Fadir Jesu! The I muste love, and never
> othir.'
> 'Than shewe me youre vysage,' sayde he.
> And anone she unwympeled her, and whan he sawe her he
> seyde, 'A, Lorde Jesu! Here have I founde my love and my
> lady!'[19]

They each ask of the other to 'tell me your name', with Alys leading; and the passage ends 'So there was grete love betwixt them.' Each request and action and response exactly reciprocates the other's. Knights regularly take off their helmets in romances, but how often does a lady unwimple? And that moment of lifelong commitment is sacramentalised by the lovers' mutual invocation of Jesus.

The ultimate expression of such mutuality comes when the lovers finally consummate their love, and the parallel or echoing poetics combine into one: where the lovers' separate 'she' and 'he' become a single equal 'they'. French and Anglo-Norman have a particularly concise grammatical way of expressing this, as they can form verbs with the prefix 's'entre', 'between each other', so making each lover occupy both the subject and object position of the verb. So in Marie de France's *Eliduc*,

> Lur anels d'or s'entrechangerent
> Et ducement s'entrebaiserent
>
> (701–2)

—literally, 'they interchanged each other rings of gold, and sweetly interkissed each other'. The lovers of Hue's *Ipomedon*, in bed after their long-delayed marriage,

> se entre'aiment tant par amur
> Ke il se entrefoutent tute jur,
>
> (Hue 1979: 10515–16)
>
> (loved and desired each other so much that they made love to
> each other all day long).

The effect is impossible to replicate exactly in English, though Chaucer elaborates on the same underlying idea of mutuality in his simile of Troilus and Criseyde winding each other in their arms like the woodbine entwining the tree (*Troilus* III. 1230–2). The final proof of such mutuality, however, for those lovers who aim at marriage, comes on the lovers' wedding night. The dominant theory of conception in the Middle Ages was inherited from Galen, who taught that the woman as well as the man produced seed (Salisbury 1996); so the best and surest way to conceive was through simultaneous orgasm. The final demonstration of mutual bliss was therefore that a child should be conceived at the lovers' first consummation. This is what happens in *Bevis of Hamtoun*,

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[19] Malory (ed. Vinaver 1990: 645), X.38–9 in Caxton's numbering. Caxton also inserts an extra phrase (incorporated in Field's 2013 edition) that very slightly disrupts the manuscript's cleanness of parallelism.

when Bevis and Josian 'in fere', together, conceive two children on their wedding night (Kölbing (ed.) 1978: text O, 3220–1). Guy of Warwick, one of the most notable English dynastic heroes, and his bride Felice, whose initial hesitation about committing herself fully to her suitor sets her outside the group of forward heroines, similarly show the strength of their passion when they are finally married:

> So it bifel that first night
> That he neyghed þat swete wight,
> A child thai geten y-fere.
>
> (Wiggins (ed.) 2004: 223–5)
>
> (So it came to pass on the first night that he approached that
> sweet creature, together they conceived a child.)

The trope makes a pointed contrast with the ladies who take lovers other than their husbands, Isolde or Guinevere, who remain childless and so do not disrupt the dynastic line; Guy and Felice by contrast were for long accepted as the historical ancestors of the later earls of Warwick.

That trope of the fruitful reward of desire did not die out in the Middle Ages. It appears in some versions of one romance that overarches the whole period covered by this paper: the story of Apollonius of Tyre, best known now through the version co-authored by Shakespeare, where the protagonist's name is changed to Pericles and that of his wife to Thaisa. The story goes back very early, to the 6th century or before; and it survives, according to Elizabeth Archibald's count, in 43 versions in Latin and various vernaculars down to *Pericles* itself (Archibald 1991: 6–9, 182–216). Shakespeare knew it in two versions, one from the late 14th century by John Gower, one from the 1570s by Lawrence Twine. In every version, the pivotal moment of the narrative occurs when the Thaisa figure falls in love with Apollonius/Pericles, who has arrived at her father's court incognito after being shipwrecked. Although no author gives her a soliloquy comparable to Lavine's or Melior's, her feelings are the same, and Gower, in established Middle English fashion, gives a 30-line account of those feelings, though in a narrative third person (2000: VIII. 834–63). She is sleepless, she blushes and goes pale, she feels hot and cold, and falls ill; and in all the versions, it is she who acts to resolve things. When she is asked to choose between a slate of rival suitors, she writes to her father that she will marry the shipwrecked man or no one. For once in romance, her father is delighted; and Apollonius/Pericles, who up to this point has seen himself simply as an outcast, agrees with enthusiasm. The intensity of their mutual love is confirmed on their wedding night, when, as the Chorus of *Pericles* puts it,

> by the loss of maidenhead
> A babe is moulded.[20]

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[20] Scene 10a.10–11 in the Wells and Taylor edition (Chorus to Act 3.10–11 in editions that provide act and scene numbering. The following quotation is alternatively Act 5 scene 3, line numbering variable.)

The rest of the story will be familiar: husband and wife are separated, and both she and their child are believed dead; but at the end, despite the machinations of various evil women and men, the family is reunited. Thaisa by this time is a nun in the temple of Diana, goddess of both chastity and childbirth; and uniquely in Shakespeare, perhaps in all of romance, she recognises her long-lost and much-changed husband by the desire she feels for him.

> If he be none of mine, my sanctity
> Will to my sense lend no licentious ear
> But curb it, spite of seeing.

> (22.49–51)

But he is indeed hers, and her 'sense', a sensual desire that is crucially different from licentiousness, does indeed override her 'sanctity', and rightly so. The heroine's desire operates to confirm the whole trajectory of the story towards its happy ending.

Shakespeare is a good point on which to end this paper, not only because he presents so many desiring heroines—not just Thaisa, but Julia, Helena, Rosalind, Perdita and more—but because their reception history has been more accepting of them than it has of their medieval forebears. Even those whose stories do not end happily (Juliet, Desdemona) do not invite blame from the audience, even though their sources take a more judgemental line. The broad context of patriarchy is the same in both periods, and in both it is possible to argue that the plots are 'between men' with the women as little more than counters in that negotiation (Sedgwick 1985). Shakespeare, like the romance writers, was working within a broader context of misogyny, but all their texts resisted easy submission to that antifeminism, however much some of their male characters may share it. Also like the romance writers, Shakespeare offered a view of women with both agency and interiority. Their texts present their heroines' sexuality as deeply grounded in their sense of personal and moral integrity, as expressed in passionate faithfulness to the men they choose as their husbands: a life as freely chosen as any modern sexual liberation, or arguably more so insofar as it went against the temper of contemporary propaganda. Like his medieval forebears, Shakespeare was happy to give a number of his heroines intense expressions of their desire, though they are more inflected by specific dramatic circumstance: Helena's monologue lamenting her unreturned love, Juliet's passionate soliloquy as she waits for Romeo to come to her bed. It may have been because early modern audiences had acquired a familiarity with such ideas through the prints of Middle English romance that Shakespeare could assume a readiness on the part of theatregoers to sympathise with the figure of the passionate young woman, and to find in her a model of womanhood more desirable, and ethically deeper, than mere chastity, silence, or obedience: a model of passion, eloquence, and determination.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses her thanks to the British Academy, and especially to the Medieval Section, for the invitation to give the 2016 Gollancz lecture on which this paper is closely based.

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