Recently the learned and classicizing aspects of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* have received more favor than the tale's affiliations with romance. A. C. Spearing argues in his *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* that "we must recognize in Chaucer, wherever we look, a contempt for romance of all kinds." A. J. Minnis, Derek Brewer, Robert Frank, and J. A. Burrow have also noted Chaucer's lack of interest in or sympathy for romance, especially for its narrative illogicalities and unmotivated marvels. Much in *The Knight's Tale* is not best understood in terms of romance; for example, emphasizing Chaucer's classicism illuminates ideas about order and justice in the tale, and mythographic analyses consider Chaucer's use of Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Yet readers have long recognized that the romance genre informs *The Knight's Tale* more fully than any other genre. Spearing concurs with earlier critics in calling the tale a "classical" or "philosophical romance," a generic modification that simplifies and clarifies plot and makes wonders explicable or historicizes them "as part of the religion of the classical past." Chaucer's generic revisions, in this view, free *The Knight's Tale* from disorder and irrationality, precisely the qualities that characterize romance from the classical perspective.

I believe that Chaucer’s sense of romance illogicalities and marvels contributes to his treatment of gender, justice, and order in *The Knight’s Tale*. The scene in Diana’s temple, which seems from classical and Boccaccian perspectives to be marred by a number of compositional weaknesses, is particularly meaningful when considered in terms of romance conventions. In this scene and beyond, romance informs the tale’s representation of Emelye as an occasion for adventure and courtship. Both Emelye and Diana contradict the tale’s governing ideals and structures and do so in the unmotivated mode of romance. Emelye expresses a desire not to love or be loved that may seem simply coy, but that does not make easy sense in relation to her other manifestations in the tale. Diana’s manifestations are similarly imponderable. Around both figures Chaucer has generated illogicalities from Boccaccio’s more coherent presentation. The omens Diana shows Emelye, for example, predict a future that Diana should not know. Chaucer attributes an unexplained prescience to Diana by moving the scene in her temple from its place following the gods’ determinations in the *Teseida* to a moment preceding Arcite’s prayer to Mars and the ensuing dispute among the gods. This and several similar compositional adjustments to the *Teseida* might be thought careless or insignificant for their illogicality, but I would like to reconsider them as aspects of a romance sensibility that permeates *The Knight’s Tale*.

Diana tells Emelye that the omens on her altar reveal “thyn aventyre of love” (line 2357). “Adventure” evokes both the Boethian hierarchy of apparent causes, as a near synonym for “sort” and “fortune,” and the generic field of romance, as the term of choice for encounters with the unknown. Diana’s uncanny foreknowledge in this scene strengthens the term’s romance associations over its rationalized philosophical ones. The significance of adventure in romance differs, indeed reverses, the significance assigned it in Boethian philosophy, where all apparent accidents are subsumed in a providential design. A few illustrations may clarify how differently adventure signifies in romance and how romance prepares Emelye’s and Diana’s roles. My examples do not imply Chaucer’s direct knowledge of particular romances; the idea of adventure is so pervasive in romance that particular illustrations are everywhere available.

Adventure is the critical term in arbitrary, the random, and the unromance from the clear necessity of hagiography, and the ins encompasses a persistent generic reverse and to answer each voice of threatening, magi simply adversarial. Sometimes a directly adversarial. Sometimes a *Erec et Emide* kills three or five at his defeat of Yder son of Nut, his final combat with Mabonagrain, it out to be knights rather like *Erec* allies. Bevis of Hampton defeats a man across Europe as faithfully and him. In Sir Gawain and the *Green* Gawain proves to be strangely bene ambiguous and ineffable that corn Courtship, whose vocabulary is adventure of many romances. Step tion of courtship is precisely the ori isolation of love lyric and the monol a dialogue between the lover and t “subjects love to interpretations ot. placed on it by the bemused lover ir of the beloved may be the first inr monologism of the lover.” Alterit unpredictable and exotic forces en which like the beloved both resis combat but also contact with the ai the animal. These adversaries may ture often culminates not simply : marrying the woman, seizing the er pagan, taming the animal. At the c validity inheres in that strangeness o: expanding and transforming the he

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romance illogicalities and marvels. Justice, and order in The Knight’s Tale seems from classical and Boccaccio letter of compositional weaknesses, is red in terms of romance conventions. informs the tale’s representation of courtship. Both Emelye and Diana Is and structures and do so in the ye expresses a desire not to love or be it that does not make easy sense in the tale. Diana’s manifestations are the figures Chaucer has generated different presentation. The omens Diana future that Diana should not know preiscence to Diana by moving the wing the gods’ determinations in the ite’s prayer to Mars and the ensuing several similar compositional adjustment careless or insignificant for their insider them as aspects of a romance j’s Tale. on her altar reveal “thyn aventure of kes both the Boethian hierarchy of for “sort” and “fortune,” and the m of choice for encounters with the knowledge in this scene strengthens its rationalized philosophical ones. Manche differs, indeed reverses, the philosophy, where all apparent accident design. ‘A few illustrations may clarify romance and how romance prepares stories do not imply Chaucer’s direct idea of adventure is so pervasive in are everywhere available.

Adventure is the critical term most specific to romance, indicating the arbitrary, the random, and the unmotivated that divide the experience of romance from the clear necessities of epic struggle, the transcendent assurance of hagiography, and the instructive designs of chronicle. Adventure encompasses a persistent generic tendency to counter one position with its reverse and to answer each voice with its contradiction. Yet in romance encounters with threatening, magical, or exotic forces do not tend to be simply adversarial. Sometimes a knight such as Erec of Chrétien de Troyes’s Erec et Enide kills three or five attacking villains, but more important are his defeat of Yder son of Nut, his long joust with Guivret le Petit, and his final combat with Mabonagrain, in which the anonymous adversaries turn out to be knights rather like Erec himself, even potential companions and allies. Bevis of Hampton defeats a pagan giant, Ascopart, who then follows him across Europe as faithfully and meekly as Guy of Warwick’s lion follows him. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight the magic that seems to doom Gawain proves to be strangely benevolent. Adventure has an element of the ambiguous and ineffable that complicates its challenge.

Courtship, whose vocabulary is so often that of combat, is the central adventure of many romances. Stephen Nichols believes that the representation of courtship is precisely the origin of romance, the point at which the isolation of love lyric and the monologism of earlier narrative poetry yield to a dialogue between the lover and the resisting, unknowable woman who “subjects love to interpretations other than those flattering constructions placed on it by the bemused lover in his solitary lyric reverie. The voice of the beloved may be the first intimation of alterity intruding into the monologism of the lover.” Alterity extends from women’s voices to the unpredictable and exotic forces encountered in other adventures, forces which like the beloved both resist and attract the hero. Adventure is combat but also contact with the alien-a woman, an enemy, the pagan, the animal. These adversaries may remain irreversibly strange, yet adventure often culminates not simply in conquest but in appropriation—marrying the woman, seizing the enemy’s lands and titles, converting the pagan, taming the animal. At the culmination as throughout, adventure’s validity inheres in that strangeness or alienness which provides occasions for expanding and transforming the heroic self.

The context of adventure clarifies why romance constructs gender primarily as difference. Further, the constitution of a “masculine” heroic and narrative perspective specifies the nature of “feminine” difference as that which is beyond the hero’s experiential knowledge and the plot’s discursive anticipation. Jean-Charles Huchet concludes that in *Enéas*, Lavinia “incarne l’altérité dont le héro et le roman ont besoin, qui pour voyager, qui pour écrire. La prise en compte de la femme par le roman ne s’est jamais donnée pour la reconnaissance de la spécificité d’une différence, mais pour l’introduction en son sein d’une métaphore de l’altérité qui permette de parler et au roman de s’écrire.”

Woman lies outside the narrative trajectory and the lover’s understanding. She is the locus of the impossible demand, the uncanny intuition, the unimaginable passion. Narrative and lover move toward encompassing her through adventure: *Ipomedon* both fulfills and deconstructs La Fiè’s demand that the hero become the best of knights; Chrétien’s Lancelot wins mercy from an all-knowing Guinevere; and in countless romances women who, like Emelye, embody love and impersonate Venus occasion plots concerning their lovers’ courtship and experience of love. Romance configures women in terms of male desire, as fundamentally different from men yet ultimately appropriated by them.

“Ye sleen me with youre eyen, Emelye”

Courtship in *The Knight’s Tale* begins with Palamon and Arcite interpreting their own desire as the onslaught of a life-threatening adventure. From their first sight of Emelye the lovers perceive her attractiveness as aggression. Their unreturned gaze upon her becomes her act upon them: “I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye / Into myn herte, that wol my bane be,” Palamon declares, and Arcite later echoes, “Ye sleen me with youre eyen, Emelye! / Ye been the cause wherfore that I dye” (lines 1096-97, 1567-68).

The narrator’s presentation is rhetorically consonant with the lovers’ in these respects. He praises Emlye’s beauty; he compares her to an angel and cannot judge between the rose and her complexion, rather as Palamon compares her to Venus and cannot distinguish between her womanhood and divinity; and he concurs with the lovers’ sense of victimization by love: “with that sighte hir beautee hurt me sore, / That, if that Palamon was wounded sore, / Arcite is hurt as moot as he, or moore” (lines 1114-16).

In terms of romance’s conventions of courtship, whether *The Knight’s Tale* narrator is at every moment the Kr created before the composition of mingled presence is not relevant. "I culine throughout, and when Em narrator and lovers helps naturalize license their consequent passivity w Palamon and Arcite experience some years. It may seem that their unchanging experience of desire, b garyn wal” (line 1060) has more m ing. Later the disguised *Accitea* love only in the name Philostrate an and Arcite perceive Emelye as all-po imprisonment by love, but the dist the experience of love as their own *Gaston* Paris or a C.S. Lewis the 1 improvement; recent and not ent. that the lady’s apartness allows lov selves onto the concrete distance se the unresponsive passivity of the b lover’s sense of improvement may l lover and lady remains crucial to the experience. Palamon and Arcite ar Emelye is “my lady” or “thy lady” b their love (lines 1581, 1617, 1619). answering devotion. Arcite at the Palamon at his marriage. The “av moments of outcome-as each sui reveal-whereas the narrative as a aventure of love, their imaginativ and their participation in the even: (lines 1609, 1853).


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narrator is at every moment the Knight or entirely a Chaucerian narrator created before the composition of The General Prologue or a complex mingled presence is not relevant. The narrating voice is importantly mascu-line throughout, and when Emelye first appears, the consonance of narrator and lovers helps naturalize the lovers' sense of victimization and license their consequent passivity with regard to Emelye herself.

Palamon and Arcite experience Emelye in lyrical self-absorption for some years. It may seem that their imprisonment enforces a distant and unchanging experience of desire, buth their prison “evene joynant to the gardyn wal” (line 1060) has more metaphorical than circumstantial meaning.’ Later the disguised Arcite enforces silence on himself, expressing his love only in the name Philostrate and in compliants voiced alone. Palamon and Arcite perceive Emelye as all-powerful and free in contrast to their own imprisonment by love, but the distance they maintain from her identifies the experience of love as their own and not hers. Why exclude her? For a Gaston Paris or a C.S. Lewis the lady’s apartness encouraged the lover’s improvement; recent and not entirely incompatible interpretations are that the lady’s apartness allows lovers to project what is lacking in themselves onto the concrete distance separating them from their goal, or into the unresponsive passivity of the beloved lady.8 In the latter readings the lover’s sense of improvement may be delusory, but the distance between lover and lady remains crucial to the claim that male desire is an improving experience. Palamon and Arcite are willing to die to determine whether Emelye is “my lady” or “thy lady” before she has responded in any way to their love (lines 1581, 1617, 1619). In the end each man does win Emelye’s answering devotion, Arcite at the time of his victory and death and Palamon at his marriage. The “aventure of love” is Emelye’s only in the moments of outcome-as each suit ends, which is what Diana’s omens reveal-whereas the narrative as a whole concerns Palamon’s and Arcite’s adventure of love, their imaginative engagement with an idea of Emelye and their participation in the events that will “darreyne hire by bataille” (lines 1609, 1853).

7 See, for example, V.A. Kolbe, Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 85-105.
The difference between male and female experiences of courtship generates adventure in romance, although Chaucer perhaps heightens from the norm Palamon's and Arcite's expressions of embattled helplessness on the one hand and their functional independence from their beloved on the other. Her lovers' detachment determines a social passivity in Emelye as in other heroines, but feminine passivity is less important to understanding romance than is the striking difference that woman embodies in the genre despite her relative inaction, despite a process of courtship that absents her from the narrative and reconstitutes her to the specifications of her lovers' desire. In her configuration as a ground of adventure for male protagonists the beloved lady acquires an oppositional identity that challenges courtship. Emelye's most overt opposition, her assertion to Diana that "I / Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf, / Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf" (lines 2304-2306), exemplifies a perpetual contradictoriness that makes her finally indecipherable. Emelye is the most evident instance of a multivoiced ambiguity that characterizes The Knight's Tale and that for romance has its origin in gender difference. Theseus as well as Emelye speaks differently from the lovers, but Theseus's perspective is normative insofar as it tallies extensively with the narrator's perspective and invokes common sense, chivalry, and an idea of order.

Emelye's resistance, like adventure itself, is unmotivated: acquiescing to Theseus's plan for giving her away but then praying to remain a virgin, lamenting Arcite's death but then loving Palamon, she is as diffused in her scattered manifestations as the subdivided heroine of The Romance of the Rose. Several explanations might be proposed for Emelye's dispersed gestures, and I review them briefly in sequence to suggest that Emelye is constituted by unverifiability, rather than by the text's validation of one explanation over another.

Some readers conclude that Emelye "fears the primal curse of childbearing" or "is afraid to enter on the next stage of life, marriage, with all that that signifies": she is an affectionate but timid young woman. Boccaccio's Emilia, so young that "non chiede amore intero," fits this explanation in asking Diana for protection from both men yet admitting that, if she must have one, "io non so in me stessa nominare, / tanto ciascun piacevole mi pare." Emelye, in contrast, is unexplained. Given that she represents virginity as her chosen way of life, her prayer is in itself unmotivated. On the scant evidence of the tale (line 1748) in chivalric literature masculine warmaking and justice v mercy. Emelye's prayer for virginity of Amazonian life that for I requiring "virile animo uomini express an Amazonian sensibility, by encompassing a "womanly" requ (line 23 17) and by aligning isolated enjoinder rather than with "virile" ag.

A third version of Emelye's beha glosses the "frenzied ye" she casts as "For wommen, as to speken in cor Fortune" (lines 2680-82). The corrupted texts, including Hengwrt, Ellesmere, Chaucer's, it seems to come to us as copyist's attempt to make sense of reversals as inexplicable at the same time integrates her role of misogyny in romance, whi

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11 Boccaccio, Teseida, 1.24.
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quotations are taken from Giovanni Boccaccio, ceto Limentani, vol. 2 (Verona: Mondadori. virginity as her chosen way of life and expresses no desire at all for her suitors, her prayer is in itself unambiguous and considered, however much it differs from her expressions elsewhere. But in the absence of textual cues it is possible to imagine her motive to be a momentary fear or coyness.
On the scant evidence of the tale, we could just as plausibly (or implausibly) say that Emelye is Athenian in manner but still Amazonian within, behaving properly to all appearances but tacitly maintaining her independence and her “compaignye” of maidens for as long as possible (line 2307). In this view the plea for mercy on Palamon and Arcite in which Emelye participates would illustrate the braking function of “verray wommanhede” (line 1748) in chivalric literature as in history, a function that provides masculine warmthaking and justice with opportunities for peacemaking and mercy. Emelye’s prayer for virginity would in contrast recall the independence of Amazonian life that for Boccaccio was unnaturally masculine in requiring “virile animo uomini fatti, non femine.”11 If the prayer does express an Amazonian sensibility, it neutralizes Boccaccio’s condemnation by encompassing a “womanly” request for “love and pees bitwixe hem two” (line 2317) and by aligning isolation from men with chastity and maidenhood rather than with “virile” aggression.
A third version of Emelye’s behavior might be based in the couplet that glosses the “freendlich ye” she casts on Arcite at the end of the tournament: “For wommen, as to speken in comune, /Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune” (lines 2680-82). The couplet does not appear in several manuscripts, including Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and Cambridge Gg.4.27; if it is Chaucer’s, it seems to come to us sursature, or it might represent an early copyist’s attempt to make sense of Emelye. 12 Linking Emelye to Fortune explains her reversals as inexplicable-determined by mere accidents — and at the same time integrates her inexplicability into the tale’s broader concern with the place of accidents in the providential scheme. In this reading Emelye presides over the circular tournament ground as Fortune over her wheel, or at most as Venus over lovers and Diana over maidens — apparently mistresses but finally handmaidens of destiny. The couplet’s dubious authority is appropriate both to the tale’s evasion elsewhere of interpretative comment on Emelye and to the suppressed but still operative role of misogyny in romance, where the challenge a beloved lady em-
bodies can seem at once an inspiration and a capricious folly typical of womanhood.

These explanations are obviously not compatible in most respects, and they illustrate how Emelye’s unmotivated nature can make her a site for our projections of motive as she is for her lovers’ (e.g., “Venus, if it be thy will...” “She that dooth me all this wo endure / Ne reccheth nevere...,” lines 1104, 2396-97). Explaining Emelye’s few manifestations in terms of each other is so conjectural that her significance is surely not in any unified personality but in her very contradictions. That is where all critical attempts to understand her coincide: She is changeable, and in that she is feminine—she is like “wommen, in commune.” In relation to her lovers she is both attractive and resistant, elusive and threatening, as befits the terrain of adventure in romance.

“But hou she dide hir ryte I dar nat telle”

The scene in Diana’s temple clarifies that Emelye’s strangeness is not idiosyncratic but feminine. Complementing Emelye’s desire that Palamon’s and Arcite’s love be extinguished or turned away from her are indications that her opposition is related to her gender, to a community of difference. Her only words in the tale are spoken as part of a maidens’ ritual that sets her apart from men. The narrator’s refusal to describe Emelye’s rite of bathing may express a distance from the pagan past, as Spearing and Minnis argue, but since other pagan rites and myths are described without demur, the narrator’s “I dar nat telle” (line 2284) suggests that in this case gender distances him from the rite. His refusal resonates with Acteon’s punishment for seeing Diana bathing. The narrator avoids making Acteon’s error, as if recalling the painted depiction on the temple wall (lines 2065-68):

There saugh I Attheon an hert ymaked,
For vengeaunce that he saugh Diane al naked;
I saugh how that his houndes have hym caught
And freeten hym, for that they knewe hym naught.

Emelye’s bathing ritualizes a division between female and male that her Amazonian past, her prayer for virginity, and Diana’s vengeance on Acteon reinforce. Although the assertion (1:2286) does not take the situation set up to continue in a closing explanation meneth wel it were no charge: / But ; lines 2287-88). The meaning of “at his la to imagine?), but more important between the maidens in Diana’s ter edits out Emelye’s body. The prohib transgressive pleasure in “it were ε feminine separateness and adumbr: I believe that the gendered narr: sexual connotation of the word gu Emelye’s prayer and its answering ( queynte cannot carry a prurient sec term can be a sexual euphemism onl led to expect the obscenity and hear, we are led to expect the obscenity, Queynte has primary meanings that “peter” or “pussy.” Benson argues that function euphemistically by replacir scene, queynte means here only 2333-37):

But sodeynly she sayd
For right anon oon o
And quyked agayn;
That oother fyr was q
And as it queynte it

The context does not equate the w referents do not always behave so pol to come forward. I believe that pun: double obstacle of syntax (queynte ir nominal) and the absence of obscen ing to Benson, punning is impos.


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reinforce. Although the assertion that “it were a game to heeren al” (line
2286) does not take the situation seriously, the rite’s gendered oppositions
continue in a closing explanation cast in the masculine: “To hym that
meneth it were no charge; / But it is a good man been at his large” (lines
2287-88). The meaning of “at his large” is problematic (out of prison? free
to imagine?), but more important is the vaguely antagonistic distance
between the maidens in Diana’s temple and the masculine observer who
edits out Emelye’s body. The prohibition implicit in “I dar nat telle” and the
transgressive pleasure in “it were a game to heeren al” both recognize
feminine separateness and adumbrate its violation.

I believe that the gendered narration in the temple scene invokes the
sexual connotation of the word queynte, which is repeated five times in
Emelye’s prayer and its answering omens. Larry Benson has argued that
queynte cannot carry a prurient second meaning in this scene because the
term can be a sexual euphemism only when the context invites it: “If we are
led to expect the obscenity and hear queynte instead, we have a pun. Unless
we are led to expect the obscenity, no pun is possible with this word.”14

Queynte has primary meanings that are not euphemistic, like the modern
“peter” or “pussy.” Benson argues that, since the word queynte does not
function euphemistically by replacing a sexual term in the temple of Diana
scene, queynte means here only “strange” and “extinguished” (lines
2333-37):

But sodeynly she saugh a sighte queynte,
For right anon oon of the fyres queynte
And quyked agayn, and after that anon
That oother fyr was queynt and al agon;
And as it queynte it made a whistelynge,

The context does not equate the word with its sexual referent, but such
referents do not always behave so politely as to sit still until expressly invited
to come forward. I believe that punning occurs in this passage despite the
double obstacle of syntax (queynte in adjectival and verbal form rather than
nominal) and the absence of obscene meaning for entire phrases. According
to Benson, punning is impossible in these circumstances, but his

14 Larry Benson, “The ‘Queynte’ Punnings of Chaucer’s Critics,” in Paul Strohm and
Thomas J. Heffeman, eds., Studies in the Age of Chaucer: Proceedings, no. 1, 1984:
Reconstructing Chaucer (Knoxville, University of Tennessee, 1985), pp. 23-47 (quotation at
p. 45).
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closing paragraph illustrates on the contrary that a generally suitable context invites obscene connotations:

should [those finding obscene puns in Chaucer] publish, should they expose themselves in public, let us screw up our courage. Let us say with the accused in Trial by Jury: “Be firm, be firm, my pecker.” And let us collectively put an end to the punsters!15

“Let us screw up our courage” is only an approximate pun, depending for its obscene implication on context and the euphemistic sense of the morpheme screw alone, not on the phrase’s syntax (“screw up”) or an evident obscene meaning for the entire phrase. But the exhortation is clearly a double entendre and would make an entirely recognizable medieval one; Charles Muscatine notes Gautier le Leu’s puns on con within verbs such as consentit and conquis; Frederick Ahl analyzes many approximate puns in Ovid, Isidore of Seville, and other Latin authors; R.A. Shoaf writes of “the dual and duel of sounds” in John the carpenter’s unconscious pun “Alas, now comth Noweis flood” (line 3818).16

Following Benson’s exhortation that we “screw up our courage,” I suggest that in Diana’s temple double meaning does arise from the conjunction of context and the morpheme queynte. The narrator’s opening recognition of gender difference and his double assertion that “I dar nat tellle and yet it were a game to heeren al” prepare rhetorically for a pun. The context is that of a prayer for virginity that is being answered in the negative; Emelye admits the relevance of her lovers’ “hoote love and hir desir” (line 2319) but seeks to withhold her body from them as from the sight of all men during these rites. Even (or especially) her refusal itself invites the unruly connotation from the morpheme’s many repetitions. If the passage were modern and the omens were five talking pussycats, even the most sober readers might sense a surreptitious unveiling of the female body that was earlier forbidden to us. The tale’s normative perspective is masculine, Emelye’s rites are feminine, and the disparity between perspective and rites makes

15 Ibid., p. 47.


Diana’s temple a scene of different masculine experience of love in r

Outside the temple Emelye is 1833, 3062, 3075), recuperated amon and Arcite initiate and Thv she dissent from courtship, in the Diana. The context of Emelye’s re for the disparity between her pet

To this analysis it might be o Acteon, in praying to Diana “As ire, / That Attheon aboughte illustrating particular gender div tween her fate and Acteon’s may a Acteon reiterates gender differen

The trope of asking divine prot record parallels Palamon’s request haddest to Adoon” (line 2224) at my pyne / For thilke pyne and brendest” with desire for Venus (i winning Emelye with reference to for aid in remaining a virgin wi

Still, it might seem more appro new Daphne than as a new Acte
c terms of Palamon and Arcite’s c reinterprets the familiar poetic ir trated in the allegorical frame for 13 1-13) and in many contem
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Prayer. The parallel Emelye dra gender-neutral in terms of her sit.

17 See Marcelle Thébaux, The Stag of N.Y., and London: Cornell University Pre
the contrary that a generally suitable ns:

15 in Chaucer] publish, should they expose r courage. Let us say with the accused in Trial .” And let us collectively put an end to the

r an approximate pun, depending for its nd the euphemistic sense of the mor-
rase’s syntax (“screw up”) or an evident brase. But the exhortation is clearly a an entirely recognizable medieval one: 
Leu’s puns on con within verbs such as h analyzed many approximate puns in Latin authors; R.A. Shoafwrites of “the the carpenter’s unconscious pun “Allas, 18).16
hat we “screw up our courage,” I suggest ning does arise from the conjunction of r. The narrator’s opening recognition of sertion that “I dar nat telle and yet it etorically  for a pun. The context is that ing answered in the negative; Emelye 
roote love and hir desir” (line 2319) but em as from the sight of all men during efusal itself invites the unruly connota-
pitions. If the passage were modern usycats, even the most sober readers ng of the female body that was earlier rive perspective is masculine, Emelye’s ‘y between perspective and rites makes


Diana’s temple a scene of difference that clarifies woman’s absence from the masculine experience of love in romance.

Outside the temple Emelye is Theseus’s “suster” and Arcite’s “wyf” (lines 1833, 3062, 3075), recuperated into the program of courtship that Palamon and Arcite initiate and Theseus modifies. Only in the temple does she dissent from courtship, in the company of maidens and the presence of Diana. The context of Emelye’s resistance suggests that her gender accounts for the disparity between her perceptions and those of her suitors.

To this analysis it might be objected that Emelye aligns herself with Acteon, in praying to Diana “As keepe me fro thy vengeauce and thy ire, / That Attheon aboughte cruelly” (lines 2302–2303). In a scene illustrating particular gender divisions, the equivalence Emelye finds be-

between her fate and Acteon’s may seem out of place, but in effect the story of Acteon reiterates gender difference with peculiar force.

The trope of asking divine protection with reference to the divinity’s own record parallels Palamon’s request that Venus aid him “For thilke love thow haddest to Adoon” (line 2224) and Arcite’s request that Mars “rew upon my pyne / For thilke peyne and thilke hoote fir In which thow whilom brendest” with desire for Venus (lines 2382-234). The two men ask for aid in winning Emelye with reference to stories of divine passion, and Emelye asks for aid in remaining a virgin with reference to a story of divine chastity. Still, it might seem more appropriate for Emelye to imagine herself as a new Daphne than as a new Acteon. How is his situation like Emelye’s? In terms of Palamon and Arcite’s courtship, Emelye’s fear of Acteon’s fate reinterprets the familiar poetic image of courtship as hart hunting, illustrated in the allegorical frame for The Book of the Duchess (lines 348-86, 13 11-13) and in many contemporary works.17 The image of lover-hunters in pursuit of the woman’s heart reverses the aggression that Palamon’s and Arcite’s images attributed to Emelye’s wounding beauty. More important, the specific instance of Acteon’s death alters the conventional image of love’s hunt from a desirable to a horrifying situation: according to the story Emelye chooses, her very identity is in jeopardy, her pursuing lovers bestial and unable to perceive her humanity. The Acteon story’s underlying analogies with courtship’s hunt give it particular appropriateness to Emelye’s prayer. The parallel Emelye draws between herself and Acteon is not gender-neutral in terms of her situation; indeed, Emelye’s reinterpretation

of love's hunt by means of Acteon's story sets her again in gender-determined opposition to the lovers.

"Smokynge the temple"

The scene in Diana's temple is further set against the normative masculine world of the tale by the goddess’s uncanny prescience. Like a heavenly Cassandra, Diana is unable to affect the course of events that she foresees. She recounts Emelye’s fate as a decision beyond herself and seems forbidden even to articulate all she knows, yet her knowledge is peculiarly complete. One of the fires on Diana’s altar seems to go out, then burns again; the other fire goes out, and bloody drops run from the extinguished sticks. Emelye weeps in alarm, and Diana comes to console her (lines 234–57),

And seyde. "Doghter, stynt thyn hevynesse. Among the goddes hye it is affermed. And by eterne word written and confermed, Thou shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho That han for thee so muchel care and wo, But unto which of hem I may nat telle. Farwel, for I ne may no lenger dwelle. The fires which that on myn auter brenne Shulle thee declaren, er that thou go henne, Thyne aventure of love, as in this cas."

Boccaccio’s gloss to the omens notes that the first fire represents Palamon’s briefly quenched and then rekindled hopes when Arcite wins the tournament but then dies, and the second fire represents Arcite’s death. The meaning is easy to deduce, recalling similar wonders in the Aeneid, Metamorphoses, and Inferno, but it is obscured in The Knight’s Tale by a double displacement: Diana’s words connecting the two suitors to the two fires follow the omens’ appearance on the altar, rather than preceding it as

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19 Editors also note the inversion of order than preceding the omens; on both record: Clarke, ed., The Canterbury Tales, 3 vol. Bennett, ed., The Knight’s Tale, 2d ed. (Lor ed., The Knight’s Tale) (Cambridge: Cami Kövesz, “Canterbury Tales, A 2349-52.” A 2281n.; Bennett, ed., Knight’s Tale, p. 13
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entani, ed., Tutte le opere, 2:484; see also the versiDEL蓟; and Chaucer has shifted the whole scene in Diana’s temple from its chronologically plausible site in the Teseida to a much earlier moment, before Arcite’s prayer to Mars, the dispute between Venus and Mars in heaven, and Saturn’s ominous forecast of a solution that will settle the dispute.

Yet Diana asserts that as in the Teseida the fires on her altar reveal the future. I believe that Chaucer’s relocation of the scene responds to a romance imagining of the “aventure of love,” and particularly to adventure’s components of the mysterious and the unmotivated. Diana’s foreknowledge does not submit to rational explanation. Some editors propose that Chaucer relocates Boccaccio’s scene in order to place it at Diana’s astrological “houre inegal” (line 2271), between the hours of Venus and Mars.19 I have not found any analysis of the resulting prevenience of Diana’s omens, omens that in Boccaccio merely report the solution that has just been worked out among the gods. We might dismiss the omens’ revelations in Chaucer as a compositional error introduced by the relocation of the scene, but Chaucer’s further relocation of Diana’s speech, to follow rather than precede the omens, suggests that his reorderings are deliberate attempts to render the omens wonderfully strange, and strangely out of place. Deliberateness is perhaps the wrong characterization for a compositional process that introduces inconsistencies and errors into a handsomely ordered tale. This process more sensitive to mystery than to accuracy might account as well for the erroneous translation of Boccaccio’s “fu mondo il tempio e di ëbei drappi ornato” into the wonderfully evocative “Smokynge the temple, ful of clothes faire” (line 2281). Most editors posit that Chaucer mistook fumondo for fumando; in contrast, J. A. W. Bennett suggests a deliberate attempt to condense Boccaccio’s long account of sacrificial fires into one phrase.20 Between simple mistakes and deliberate revisions is the romantic possibility of meaningful error, an errant uncanniness that helps make Diana’s temple a site of women’s difference. According to Spear, The Knight’s Tale has a “classical simplicity and rationality of structure” in

which there are "no narrative complications, no irrelevancies, none of that procedure by digression that is the typical method of medieval romance." 21 Certainly The Knight's Tale is handsomely designed, and its romance "complications" and "irrelevancies" are part of that design, introducing oppositional voices that interrogate the tale's most fully articulated visions. 22 Just as Emelye's desire not to be loved confuses the image of courtship in the tale, Diana's reply disrupts the progression of surrounding episodes, not only chronologically but metaphysically. Diana should not know the outcome at this moment, and more important, she should not know it at any moment.

Diana's assertion that there is an "eterne word written and confirmed" does have precedent in The Knight's Tale. Often characters vacillate between resigning themselves fatalistically to a fixed destiny and applying to capricious gods who may be swayed to intervene in earthly events. Arcite muses that love has wounded him so terribly "that shapen was my deeth erst than my sherte" (line 1566), yet he asks Mars to intervene in the tournament. Palamon believes that the future is "written in the table of athamaunt" (line 1305) but asks Venus to intervene. Reading The Knight's Tale for its classicizing but Christian perspective, Minnis and others make sense of the tale's metaphysical scheme by establishing a distinction between the capricious accidents that the gods seem to control and God's serene providence that guides the universe but that even Theseus's final speech can barely articulate. Thus Theseus's positive vision of a "wise purveiunce" (line 3011) informing the universe can be reconciled with the squabbles among the gods and the resolution cobbled together by Saturn: from Chaucer's Christian perspective, as in Theseus's partial understanding, events apparently at the whim of the gods are in fact providentially designed. The characters in the tale, Minnis concludes, are "benighted pagans, wasting their devotions on false gods. The implicit Christian standard in The Knight's Tale is thereby indicated, and a focus provided for Christian distrust of the 'rytes of payens.'" 23

Diana's words to Emelye break down these metaphysical distinctions. Providence is within Diana's purview, an "eterne word written and con-

21 Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance, p. 39.
22 A complication similar to Diana's foreknowledge but much smaller and without narrative implications is the depiction of Caesar's and Nero's deaths on the walls of Mars's temple (A 2031–38); see also n. 25 below.
23 Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, p. 135; see also Kolve, Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative, pp. 136-49.

firmed" in the pagan heavens, "ar eternal word and the accuracy of I and capricious behavior of the god chronologically in relation to the· until Saturn brings about his cata in a harmonious sempiternal orde.

Diana is Emelye's celestial const through her contradictory manifestio diction of the celestial order that i the temple, Diana like Emelye Athenian court that Theseus made (line 1682) in sociable hunting p: the temples of Mars and Venus : coral" (line 1910), suggesting that fight under the red banner of Retrospectively it seems that Emt red-and-white flowers she wove to concord in marriage that is more Diana's connections to concord, n images of her vengeance and chan she transforms her victims. In a fi: change are themselves reversed in

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23 Brooks and Fowler, “Meaning,” p. 127; Spearing, ed., Knight? Tale, p. 181. There is a muted suggestion that Venus in some sense knows the outcome as well, in that her omen to Palamon “shewed a delay” (line 2268) that presages the lapse of time between tournament and marriage. Although Venus does not elsewhere seem prescient (perhaps because of her association with Palamon rather than a feminine cult), her omen suggests like Diana’s a gender-related foreknowledge.
I would like to emphasize that prescience, because it is a complication that typifies the procedure of romance. Like Emelye’s resistance to love, Diana’s foreknowledge exemplifies the genre’s juxtaposition of contradictory voices, which, to quote Stephen Nichols again, “calls into question the very possibility of erecting a unified philosophical system within the romance narrative. The dialectical indeterminacy of romance made it by nature a genre subversive of the privileged discourse requisite for unity in the totalizing systems favored by medieval society.”

Two privileged discourses are at issue in Diana’s temple, that of chivalric courtship and that of metaphysical order. Although The Knight’s Tale cannot be treated solely in terms of the romance genre, courtship and social order are central concerns of that genre, not least because they are central to the validation of the nobility as the estate that “does justice and keeps it.”

In romance (as in wider cultural expressions) the nobility’s ordering and rationalizing identity is specifically masculine. Chivalric courtship designs sexual relations and dynastic succession through heroic adventuring: Palamon, Arcite, and Theseus all assume that Emelye will marry and disagree only on how to “darreyne hire.” Social and metaphysical ordering in romance involves distinguishing what is just, virtuous, or Christian from the unjust, evil, or pagan. Again Palamon, Arcite, and Theseus are aligned in their preoccupation with such distinctions, from the first dispute over priority in love to the final discourse on heavenly and earthly order.

It is particularly Chaucer’s identification of feminine positions located outside the masculine designs of courtship and social order that connects The Knight’s Tale to an idea of romance. Emelye’s experience of courtship differs from that of her lovers: she prefers not to be won and prays to remain a virgin. Her prayer immediately meets omens of refusal that Emelye might indeed understand as a phallic drama of impregnation. In these smoky intimations the romance dynamic of feminine aloofness overcome by persistent courtship is elevated to the status of holy mystery and foreordained design.

Yet Emelye’s pleading for virginity reveal in courtship a coerciveness and respect for providence. Her words collapse the Christian universe, according a leaking intimations of chaos into here as elsewhere, not just an anachronistic exploration of accid

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in Diana’s temple, that of chivalric order. Although The Knight’s Tale romance genre, courtship and social not least because they are central to the tale’s metaphysical distinction between the classical gods and Christian providence. Her words collapse the antique heavens into the medieval Christian universe, according a providential design to the former and leaking intimations of chaos into the latter. The Knight’s Tale becomes, here as elsewhere, not just an antiquarian exercise but a subversively anachronistic exploration of accident and disorder in all or any time.

The feminine ritual in Diana’s temple contradicts the tale’s rituals of courtship and justice, not in open argument and refutation but surprisingly and mysteriously. In such adventures romance questions its every ideal and refuses a reductive evasion of difference. To deny The Knight’s Tale its romantic complications and irrelevancies is to mute the tale’s most profound interrogations and to elide its gendered oppositions.

Yet Emelye’s pleading for virginity and her terrified weeping at the omens reveal in courtship a coerciveness that contradicts Palamon’s and Arcite’s stances of respectful worship. Similarly, Diana’s serene prescience disturbs the tale’s metaphysical distinction between the classical gods and Christian providence. Her words collapse the antique heavens into the medieval Christian universe, according a providential design to the former and leaking intimations of chaos into the latter. The Knight’s Tale becomes, here as elsewhere, not just an antiquarian exercise but a subversively anachronistic exploration of accident and disorder in all or any time.

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