

2

The Brooch of Thebes and the Girdle of Venus: Courtly Love in an Oppositional Perspective

This year (1987) in which we celebrate the one hundred and fourth anniversary of Gaston Paris's *amour courtois*, the fifty-first anniversary of C. S. Lewis's definition of courtly love as "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love," this year in which we commemorate the forty-eighth anniversary of de Rougemont's theory of the Catharist provenance of courtly love, and the twenty-seventh anniversary of Robertsonianism, this year, which finds in the Far East such an occasion, devoted to a reflection on "courtly love" as the present, compels me, before anything else, to say with Madame Sosostriis that "one must be so careful these days" in speaking of courtly love.

For, in the first place, the seemingly inevitable connections that Gaston Paris thought tenable among Chrétien de Troyes (mainly through his *Chevalier de la Charrette*), Marie de Champagne, Andreas Capellanus, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the troubadours—the connections that serve as a historical foundation on which to build the whole phenomenon called *amour courtois*—have now been seriously undermined by trustworthy historical scholarship (Benton "The Court...": "The Evidence ..."). Particularly crucial is the status of Andreas Capellanus, the codifier of the *Ars honeste amandi*, from whom actually derives C. S. Lewis's definition of courtly love: it is now generally accepted that a certain Andreas serving in the court of Champagne has but a very tenuous link with the author of *The Art of Courtly Love*. And this recognition, in its turn, has had the further effects of bringing into doubt the historicity *The Art* had been offered as proving, including the belief in the so-called

“Court of Love” and the sublime practice of the illicit liaison. One could say now, even at the risk of sounding trite, that “*amour courtois*” as Gaston Paris saw it is *not* a peculiar incident of the Western Middle Ages or, as is often designated, “*cette invention du XIIe siècle*” (Henri-Irénée Marrou/Henri Davenson 99) but a nineteenth-century invention of his own.

Secondly, C. S. Lewis’s impressive characterization of courtly love as “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love” (2) not only has become suspect and questionable, as is noted, because of its dependence on Andreas Capellanus but also is shown (by Talbot Donaldson 156–57) to be precisely not in accord with what he himself dealt with as Middle English literature, which, we are told, is outstanding in its lack of interest in and handling of “Adultery.” (I will come back to this point later.)

Thirdly, the question of the vexed origins of courtly love, broached in a sense by de Rougemont with some audacity, has since been very much entrammelled with varieties of theories, ranging from Hispano-Arabic, Celtic, Christian, to universalism of the sort.¹ The matter being intercultural, to have one’s say in this controversy means to be a polyglot: Henri-Irénée Marrou, a champion of the Christian/Western-origin theory, describes perhaps one of the typical scenes of scholarly controversy when he recalls his dispute with H. R. Nykle, a supporter of the Arab-origin theory: “nous échangeons des invectives, tour à tour en français, en anglais, en occitan du XIIe, et pour finir en sanscrit” (Marrou 118). Why they could not afford to use Arabic is a mystery one had better keep intact with due respect to Marrou, but anyway such a scene of controversy is daunting enough to keep any non-polyglot from inadvertently meddling with the question of origins.

Fourthly and lastly, there is the Robertsonianism that “any serious work written in the Middle Ages that does not overtly promote St. Augustine’s doctrine of charity will be found, on close examination, to be doing so allegorically or ironically” (Donaldson 159). Since “courtly-love” literature is regarded, with no difficulty, as serious work written in the Middle Ages, it comes as no surprise, for example, that Andreas can be actually read, if ironically, as a good disciple of St. Augustine. In the

1. Literature on the origins of “courtly love” has long since become more than intractable. A good attempt to put it in order can be found in Boase. On the whole, I find the “source-hunting” scholarship less fruitful than the universally oriented (see Dronke esp. 1–97).

same vein, it is small wonder that a conclusion Robertson has reached is to consider the concept of “courtly love” itself an impediment to the understanding of medieval texts in general (Robertson “The Concept. . .”). One is reminded with some relief, however, of the tautological fact that the number of those who cling to the Robertsonian exegesis is fortunately limited to tenacious Robertsonians, and the number is not threateningly large.

These are some of the representative reasons why any medievalist must be careful and at the same time cannot help being bewildered these days in dealing with courtly love. And as a truly bewildered and would-be careful medievalist, let me take up the second point again as a point of departure, i.e., the problematic of Adultery in C. S. Lewis. As has been noted, we can find a fine critique of this matter in Talbot Donaldson’s elegant essay, “the Myth of Courtly Love”;

C. S. Lewis, on the second page of that brilliant and influential book *The Allegory of Love*, lists the characteristics of courtly love, with admirable clarity and emphatic capitalization, as “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love.” What a wonderful beginning! I know of no sentence that has cast a deeper spell on readers, or has drawn more students to the Middle Ages, or has befuddled them more. Lewis goes on to discuss Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus (from whom, indeed, he derived the definition), and the expectant reader is not disappointed. But only Lewis’s craft as a writer can make one fail to notice that in the remainder of a large book—from page 44 through page 366—there is very little adultery: of the four essential characteristics of courtly love the most exciting seems to have been still-born. (156)

In Donaldson’s view Lewis committed a couple of errors : one is Lewis’s acceptance, then current, of Andreas Capellanus as a trustworthy codifier, or representative ideologue, of courtly love mainly on the basis of circumstantial evidence which seems readily to confirm the much-wished-for historical connection between Andreas, Marie de Champagne, and Chrétien de Troyes; the other is Lewis’s failure to substantiate “the most exciting” of the four essential characteristics, i.e., adultery, in Middle English literature. Donaldson continues,

Even in Chaucer's *Troilus*, which provides the climax of the medieval part of the book [*The Allegory of Love*], concerns the love of a bachelor for a widow. And, as a number of scholars led by Gervase Mathew have pointed out, in Middle English literature up to Malory adultery is a very minor motif. Indeed, illicit love of all kinds is apt to get perfunctory treatment in medieval England, so that naughty couples in the continental vernaculars are sometimes made to dwindle into marriage by their English redactors. Notable adultery in Middle English is mostly in Chaucer, and it is mostly of the fabliau type. (156)

In its broad outlines, this witty and pertinent remark could not possibly be bettered, but there seem to be a couple of details that require and deserve some reflection: one concerns the "naughty couples in the continental vernaculars" said to be sometimes made to dwindle into marriage in Middle English literature, the other Chaucerian adultery, said to be exceptionally notable in Middle English and "mostly of the fabliau type."

It seems noteworthy here that the late medieval literary state of affairs is taken, on the whole, in a rather simple binary opposition between continental adultery and English marriage. Crude as it is, this is a picture which comes out of Donaldson's proper analysis of Lewis's book, and with its general validity, including the assessment of Chaucer's notable characteristics, I have no mind to take issue. Admitting this broadest outline, however, I think it is interesting and not totally useless to turn the tables and try, in the reverse perspective, to seek marriage in the continental vernaculars and adultery in English, particularly, an instance of non-fabliau-type adultery in Chaucer. And this, surprisingly, is not difficult to do.

Let me begin with "marriage in the continental vernaculars." If as a prime instance of the "naughty couples in the continental vernaculars" Lancelot and Guenevere, as they appear in Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, can be adduced, and I presume it is most likely, then, by the same token, as an unforgettable instance of faithful lovers who accomplish marriage after going through various ordeals, the hero and heroine of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* are adducible, as they appear in the title roles. Furthermore, the same author's *Cligès*, albeit an ostensible fabrication making an antithetical use of the *Tristan* legend, is a good testimony to the twelfth-century multifarious consciousness of love,

where an adultery-oriented narrative structure is capable of being channeled into a marriage-oriented one.

Although the single instance of *Erec et Enide*, it must be admitted, can hardly speak for the case of "marriage in the vernaculars," this recognition of coexistence in Chrétien de Troyes of ideal marriage and ideal adultery seems to be very important. Particularly so in connection with "courtly love" because "*amour courtois*" in its inception, as we have noted, was conceived as a historical construction with five pivots, i.e., Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, Marie de Champagne, Andreas Capellanus, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the troubadours. The inference goes that since the Countess of Champagne did have a chaplain [capellanus] named André, and since Chrétien wrote that the Countess of Champagne wished him to undertake to write a romance, *Chevalier de la Charrette*, giving him both its *matière* and *sens*, Marie the Countess of Champagne then was probably a patron of Andreas Capellanus, the author of *The Art of Courtly Love*, and Andreas therefore must have known Chrétien: besides since Marie was a daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, celebrated patroness of troubadours, she must have patronized some troubadours. Thus is proven, allegedly, the historical transmission of the Provençal ideal of troubadours to the northern court, along with the occasion of both its codification and its application to romance-form. This beautiful proof more or less hinges on the wishful identification of a chaplain named André at the court of Champagne with our Andréas Capellanus, and as luck or bad luck would have it, it is now generally understood that these two Andréas are better regarded as separate. The chances are very slight, in consequence, that Chrétien could have known Andreas; and if that is the case, our image of the extent of the "courtly-love" hegemony must undergo some change in the direction of dissemination and the cohabitation with other types of love. This tentative outlook, which precludes the monopoly of "courtly love" and allows of its cohabitation, is in fact at one with the increasingly-confirmed scholarly attitude toward the so-called "twelfth-century Renaissance," which is multifariously characterized by such a variety of issues as Chartrian Neoplatonism, the Crusades, the renewal of the Roman political ideal, the introduction of Arab science, and, of course, "courtly love."² Grant-

2. Literature on "the twelfth-century Renaissance" is by now enormous. For a useful and wide-ranging treatment see Benson and Constable.

ed that “courtly love” should be *une* “invention du XIIIe siècle,” it is by no means the sole and exclusive invention. It is in this multiplex perspective of the century that both *Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Erec et Enide*, instances respectively of “naughty couples” and “marriage in the continental vernaculars,” must be considered.

If *Chevalier de la Charrette* is closely bound up with “courtly love” so that it can be seen even as a manifest instance of the historical phenomenon, then in the same way *Erec et Enide* is shown to be affiliated with “Chartrian Neoplatonism,” another significant movement relating to “*amour*” of the twelfth-century.

To sum up the story : in the first part of *Erec et Enide* Erec marries Enide, who helped him in avenging the wrong he received from a knight called Ider, whom Erec had met while in chase of the White Stag. In the second part, the connubial bliss deprives Erec of his sense of knightly duty. But hearing Enide deplore this, Erec rides out with her for adventures and trials for each to be convinced of his prowess and her fidelity. After successfully going through a mysterious adventure called the Joy of the Court, Erec finally is crowned, together with Enide, on the death of his father.

Celtic elements indubitably abound, indeed; but together with its pivotal idea of “faithful marriage” implicit in the plot, the outstanding final Coronation scene is distinguished by ideas originating elsewhere than “courtly love.” And particularly noteworthy is the description of Erec’s coronation robe and the sceptre; the *descriptio* depends for its dignity and force on the authority of Macrobius, one of the *auctores* of Chartrian humanism.

Lisant trovomes an l'estoire
 La description de la robe,
 Si an trai a garant Macrobe,
 Qui au descrivre mist s'antante,
 Que Fan ne die que je mante.
 Macrobes m'ansaingne a descrivre,
 Si con je l'ain trové et livre,
 L'uevre del drap et le portret.

(As we read in the story, we find the description of the robe, and in order that no one may say that I lie, I quote as my authority Macro-

bis, who devoted himself to the description of it. Macrobius instructs me how to describe, according as I have found it in the book, the workmanship and the figures of the cloth.)

(Kasten ed. 6736–43; Comfort trans.)

The idea of natural order, at first partially glimpsed through Geometry, is further strengthened by the subsequent description other three fairies make of Arithmetic (6756–69), Music (6770–76), and Astronomy (6777–83). The natural order is in perfect correspondence with the cosmic harmony, which in its turn acts as a symbolic guarantee for the social order by virtue of the coronation-ritual. Similarly, the scepter endows Erec with cosmic authorities:

Li rois Artus aporter fist
 Un ceptre qui mout fu loez.
 Del ceptre la façon oëz,
 Qui fu plu clers d'une verrine,
 Toz d'une esmeraude anterine,
 Et s'avoit bien plain poing de gros.
 Par verité dire vos os
 Qu'an tot le mont nen a meniere
 De peisson ne de beste fiere
 Ne d'ome ne d'oïsel volage,
 Que chascuns lone sa propre image
 N'i fust ovrez et antailliez.

(Listen to the description of the sceptre, which was clearer than a pane of glass, all of one solid emerald, fully as large as your fist. I dare tell you in very truth that in all the world there is no manner of fish, or of wild beast, or of man, or of flying bird that was not worked and chiseled upon it with its proper figure.)

(Kasten ed. 6870–81; Comfort trans.)

This description of the sceptre, albeit brief, reminds me of that of Natura’s magnificent garments in Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*,³ where indeed are portrayed all manner of fish, wild beast, and flying bird. The

3. There seems to be no external evidence that shows the chronological possibility of Alanus’s influence on Chrétien de Troyes. Topsfield notes that it is possible when one accepts the

only exception is the portrayal of man, in whose section the tunic “suarum partium passa dissidium, suarum iniuriarum contumelias demonstrabat (had suffered a rending of its parts and showed the effects of injuries and insults)” (ed. Haring 817: tr. Sheridan 98). Obviously, this is an effect of the Fall and the cause of Natura’s complaint, which is expected to be redressed through man’s correct observance of natural procreation. And as a matter of fact, the importance and relevance of Alan’s thought for the interpretation of *Erec et Enide* is pertinently noted by Topsfield:

The Coronation scene is distinguished by its praise of worldly splendour, and knowledge, its belief in the God-given harmony of the natural order and man’s ability to discover and imitate this. This optimistic view of man’s powers and possibilities, which is characteristic of twelfth-century writers such as the later Alanus of Insulis, is hinted at in the symbolism of the coronation, of the robe and sceptre, which is part of Chrétien’s allusive style. It is also confirmed in the rest of the romance by Chrétien’s confidence in the ability of Erec and Enide to reject the forces of disorder and folly, in order to discover harmony and joy within themselves and in each other. (62)

In the mytho-allegory of Alan’s *De planctu Naturae*, we remember, the degeneration and perversion of the world, the fall of man symbolized by the “rending of Natura’s garment,” is conceived of importantly in terms of the myth of Venus’s adultery: a kind of prelapsarian golden age, represented by what may be called the preadultery family (Hymen-Venus as parents with their son Cupid), has become the lost ideal in the perverted present condition, which is represented this time by the post-adultery family (Antigamus⁴—Venus as parents with their son

“late chronology for Chrétien’s work,” which C. Luttrell offers in his *Creation of the First Arthurian Romance: A Quest* (London, 1974), ch. 3 (Topsfield 327, note 55).

4. Haring, the most recent editor, takes the reading of “Antigenius” (153) in place of “Antigamus,” which was the reading of the preceding editors (Migne col. 459; Wright 481). He writes, apparently as a reason for his reading, that “Venus, the goddess of love, wife of Hymen, commits adultery with Antigenius of low birth, the opponent of Genius, the tutelary deity.” He refers us to Martianus Capella for reference, but the latter only offers the traditional conception of Genius as tutelary deity. There is, to the best of my knowledge, no authority for the view that Hymen is Venus’s husband and Venus commits adultery

Jocus). Clearly, behind this mytho-allegory lies the mythological *locus classicus*, Venus’s betrayal of her husband Vulcan through her adultery with Mars,⁵ and it is Alan’s “metaphysical inventiveness”⁶ that transforms the goddess’s flirtation into the grand contrast of two family formations, with Vulcan replaced by Hymen and Mars by Antigamus. The idea is typical of “Chartrian Christian humanism,” which is said to be distinguished by the “special awareness of a ‘*continuité ontologique*’ [Chenu] between creation and redemption” (Wetherbee 125); redemption is seen in terms not of linear providential, sacramental history but of cosmic (i.e., harmonious) incarnation, namely, man’s *imaginative* restoration to his proper place in the natural order ordained by God. In Alan’s allegory, this cosmico-imaginative redemption is given its proper place and status, where Genius, the “priest” of Nature, in the sacerdotal robe pronounces a decree of excommunication on those who are affiliated and cling to the depravity of post-adultery family without, however, effecting real sacramental redemption.

Now if it is safe to argue, and I am sure it is, that the symbolic import of the Coronation scene of *Erec et Enide* and the mytho-allegorical drift of *De Planctu Naturae* have in common the Chartrian awareness of what can be termed “ontologico-cosmic redemption”—which in Alan is represented by a transformative extension of the celebrated myth of Venus’s adultery—, then we shall have to recognise, if indirectly, a conspicuous instance of anti-adultery-oriented aspirations in the same author who writes *Chevalier de la Charrette*, a prime instance of “naughty couples in the continental vernaculars.” And there is no insurmountable difficulty in this recognition; once a multiplex picture of the twelfth century is accepted, Chartres presents itself in its splendour as one of the centers and Champagne in its elegance as another. It may be of some interest to place

with Antigenius.

If the reading of “antigenius” has a merit, it is that of being more closely related to the whole context of the allegory, particularly to the concluding part where Genius is to appear. This advantage is gained, however, only at the cost of collapsing hierarchical distinctions among Hymen, Genius, and Natura; Genius, as the allegorical fabrication requires, must be superior in status and capacity to Hymen, while Hymen and Antigenius should remain, if not in degree but in kind, on the same footing. For this reason my preference goes to “Antigamus.”

5. See note 11 below.

6. Chenu’s words in reference to Martianus Capella (Chenu 108), but equally pertinent, I think, to Alanus also.

these two centers in a crude contrast: if Champagne was charmed by sublime adultery, Chartres by cosmic anti-adultery, or better put, anti-adulteration.

In Alan's mytho-allegorical cosmic redemption, as we have noted, the celebrated myth of Venus's adultery with Mars is employed in its transformative extension. That this interpretive analysis is not a mere modern reading is shown by its reception by Jean de Hanville, Alan's younger contemporary, who actually made another transformative employment of the myth in his *Architrenius*, an ingenious adaptation of *De Planctu Naturae*. In brief, Architrenius, the "Arch-Weeper," an adolescent who is horrified at what he takes as the corruption and vice of the world, sets out in search of Natura to take her to task. After a visit to the Court of Venus, he comes to Thule, home of the ancient philosophers, and finds Natura surrounded by them. She launches into a long description of the order of the universe to show with every authority its bounteous gifts to man. Naturally, Architrenius tries to contradict all the tenor of her long argument, but all in vain. Natura finally analyzes Architrenius's condition, and prescribes procreation, evidently on the strength of the Chartrian idea of cosmic redemption, as the cure for his distemper. She then offers him a marriage with a chaste maiden *Moderantia*, and the poem concludes with their wedding.⁷

Now this *Moderantia*, it is told, presents to her husband, Architrenius, the "cestos Veneris" (girdle of Venus). This "girdle of Venus," as it turns out, is the one which Vulcan wrought for his wife, Venus, when their love was at its height, or, put in our terms, in its "pre-adultery" state;

Nupta tibi ceston Veneris dabit, ille Diones
Baltheus, illa tuos precinget fascia lumbos.
Incudis studio sponse lucratus amorem,
Lennius hanc costo solidavit sedulus auro,

7. For Jean de Hanville's *Architrenius* and its relationships with Alanus, I am heavily indebted to Wetherbee (242–55). I am also grateful for the critical comments he gave me in personal correspondence, of which the following among others is worth quoting: "In *Architrenius* I'm not sure the religious 'continuité' is present; even by metaphorical association. So far as I can see what is special about that poem is that in it Nature is as nearly as possible self-sufficient. Man has failed in his relations with Nature, but Nature herself, with the aid of *Moderantia*, seems to be able to cure him. Of the representatives of 'Chartrian naturalism,' Jean de Hanville seems to me to be the one real naturalist."

Follibus eluctans vigiles excire caminos
Non minus ardescens Lipares quam Cipridis igne,
Dum Venus emollit operam mirando laborem.
Dum tamen insudat operi manus, oscula morsis
Lingua rapit labris plus quam fabrilia. vultu
Sit licet obscuro, claudio pede, basia carpit
Dulcia nec plure saturantur adultera melle
Nec, Pari, plus Frigiis poteras pavisse Lacenam.

(The bride [Moderantia] will give you Venus's cestus. The Venus's Girdle [baltheus], this band [fascia] will gird your loins. When Vulcan had won with his devotion his spouse's love He assiduously fabricated it from molten gold, Making efforts to keep his furnace alive all the while, the bellows always at work, Glowing no less with Cyprian than with Liparaean fire While Venus eased his labour by marvelling at his handiwork. And when she applies it for use, her mouth carries off more kisses than his, each time the lips bitten. Although he is ugly and lame, she plucks dulcet kisses and this adulteress could not be more saturated with sweet delight, nor didst thou, Paris more greatly fear the Phrygians for the sake of Helen.)

(Schmidt ed. IX. 302–13; translation mine.)

Already Venus's adultery is adumbrated and related to the historical disaster which happened at the beginning of western civilization. But this Girdle is said, if anachronistically, to command more erotic power than the originator of the Trojan war. It should not be forgotten, however, that this incomparable erotic power is supposed to be channeled into a normative institution of marriage. If erotic power represented by Venus is at once indispensable for the preservation of the species, divine or human, and destructive of the maintenance of normative order, the miracle of Vulcan's girdle consists in the integration of its control and its intensification. In fact, the normative side, which is toned down in the description quoted above, is to be emphasised in the subsequent description of the Girdle itself, so that the total effects of the *descriptio* of the

Girdle add up to “the image of natural control and fulfillment.” In this regard Winthrop Wetherbee’s eloquent analysis deserves a lengthy quotation:

[I] inscribed on this girdle are two catalogues of *exempla* of chastity, one of philosophers renowned for their resistance to Venus, the other of prodigiously faithful wives... In relation to these extremes of virtuous behavior, the frankly sexual associations of the girdle and the sexually inspired artistry of Vulcan assume a normative function, urging passionate feminine fidelity and intense masculine control into a constructive relationship... The girdle thus provides that image of natural control and fulfillment which has been strikingly absent from the poem until now, and sets the excesses of all sorts which have been illustrated in a natural perspective. This artistic resolution stands for the resolution of Architrenius’s dilemma. (Wetherbee 252–53)

In short, this Girdle of Venus, as Jean de Hanville employed it, stands for, if naturalistically, that Chartrian imaginative redemptive ideal of “*continuité ontologique*” between creation and procreation. Although Jean de Hanville offers a *Bildungsroman* version of it, Alan of Lille for his part a version of the mytho-allegorical dream vision, and Chétien de Troyes a version of romance, they all share in essence this Chartrian imaginative ideal. The divine and cosmic authorization of Erec’s kingship in the coronation scene, with its description of his robe and sceptre, the expected restoration of Natura’s order with the rectification of Venus’s adultery, and the resolution of Architrenius’s dilemma effectuated through the Girdle of Venus,—all partake in the same intellectual milieu, the imaginative vigor of Chartrian Christian Humanism, which was, along with the flowering of “courtly love,” one of the most significant cultural movements of the century.

The Girdle of Venus has a long history of its own in the literature of the West, so far as I know, from Homer through Edmund Spenser.⁸ This important theme, however, seems to be left largely unexplored. Materials at my disposal right this moment comprise the following: Homer

8. The latest instance I came across is found in Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771), ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford UP., 1987), 15: “the Cestus of Cytherea.” Its function, however, is negligible.

(*Iliad*, XIV. 214–17), Statius (*Thebaid*, V. 62–3), Lactantius Placidus (in *Statium Thebaidos*) [through Boccaccio (*Genealogie deorum gentilium*, III. 22)], Jean de Hanville (as seen above), Boccaccio (*Ibid.*, IV. 47), and Spenser (*Faerie Queene*, IV. v. 3–4). Lack of space does not permit any detailed analysis and account here, but this much, at least, can be said from these materials: although as it first appeared in Homer the Girdle of Venus was an insidious device, which would provide its wearer with “allurement of the eyes, hunger of longing, and the touch of lips that steals all wisdom from the coolest men” (Homer 336) — and this charm was used by Hera to raise in Zeus hot desire to make love to her nakedness so that she might infuse warm slumber over his shrewd heart—, yet the later authors from Statius onward treated it chiefly as a corrective device which promotes the marital cause of fidelity and chastity.⁹ Thus in Statius the “iugalis cestos” (nuptial girdle) (*Thebaid*, V. 62–3) of Venus is removed when she is determined to make barren the marriage chambers of the Thracians in revenge for their want of respect to her; in Boccaccio (IV. 47) “Venerem cingulum est dictum ceston quod ipsa fert ad legitimos coitus; cum vero in illicitos tendit, cingulum deponit, et sic illi solutis vestibus in illicitos ire coitus ostendebant” (the girdle of Venus is called cestos because she puts it on for the sake of legitimate union; but, when she is in for illicit amours, she unties the girdle, and thus the garments, being taken off, evidently show that she is on her way to illicit amours) [trans. mine]. And finally in Spenser it presents itself as one

9. In the thematic history of “the girdle of Venus” the introduction of, and intermingling with, Christian elements would pose interesting questions. A good point of departure for such an inquiry can be found, I think, in “the gyrdyl of clennes and chastyte” as it appears in “the Passion Play.” On the occasion of “the last supper” it is mentioned by Christ in his teaching as to how the paschal lamb be eaten-teaching “be gostly interpretacyon”:

The gyrdyl, that was comawndyd here reynes to sprede,
Xal be the gyrdyl of clennes and chastyte,
That is to sayn to be contynent in word, thought and dede,
And all lecherous levyng cast yow for to lie.

(“The Passion Play I” in *Ludus Coventriae*: Happé ed. 448)

* Another point of departure, more provocative and promising and to a large extent already substantiated by R. A. Shoaf, is found in “the green girdle” of Sir Gawain (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 1846–54 & c). This approach is to see “the girdle” as a function of religious, social, economic and literary formations, i.e., as a sign (in the strong sense of the word) of the human condition. See Shoaf’s powerful and precise formulation of the case (Shoaf, esp. 66–76).

Florimell has lost:

That girdle gaue the uertue of chaste loue,
 And wiuehood true, to all that did it beare;
 But whosoeuer contraire doth proue,
 Might not the same about her middle weare,
 But it would loose, or else asunder teare.
 Whilome it was (as Faeries wont report)
 Dame *Venus* girdle, by her steemed deare,
 What time she vsed to liue in wiuely sort;
 But layd asyde, when so she vsed her looser sport.

Her husband *Vulcan* whylome for her sake,
 When first he loued her with heart entire,
 This pretious ornament they say did make,
 And wrought in *Lemno* with vnquenched fire:
 And afterwards did for her 'loues first hire,
 Giue it to her, for euer to remaine,
 Therewith to bind lasciuious desire,
 And loose affections streightly to restraine:
 Which vertue it for euer after did retaine. (IV. v. 3–4)

The significance of this girdle of chastity to the whole structure and meaning of *The Faerie Queene*, together with its concomitant ideal of marriage, as I have argued elsewhere (Takada 17–33), is unexpectedly great. For our present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that the girdle of Venus, as it appears in *The Faerie Queene*, serves as the symbol of a lost ideal, which can be restored only in the world of romance, the faeryland of Florimell, who is ultimately to recover it. There are associated with it a sense of loss and the subsequent desire for its imaginary restoration, and this association, importantly, is not fortuitously made but structurally derives from a mythological base and perhaps unconsciously draws on some traditional ideas. By some traditional ideas I mean such as characterised by Chartrian Neoplatonism, and by the mythological base I mean the celebrated myth of Venus's adultery with Mars. In fact, Spenser's girdle of Venus is said to have been found by Florimell where Venus had left it behind as she went off to Mars. This myth, as we have

seen, provided a sort of deep structure for the allegorical compositions of both Jean de Hanville and Alan of Lille. Also we have shown that the latter's cosmic redemption has close bearings on the composition of *Erec et Enide*.

To sum up thus far: beginning with the search for the "marriage in the continental vernaculars" in a tentative effort to strike the balance against the generally accepted picture and conception of "courtly love," we have found its instance in the same author who was actually employed to play a crucial part in the establishment of the concept of "amour courtois." And since the instance of *Erec et Enide* is strongly reminiscent of Chartrian Neoplatonism, in particular, such as represented by Alan of Lille, we have examined some of its relevant aspects. The examination has revealed as a kind of deep structure the myth of divine adultery and its imaginary restoration in a sacramental marital ideal. As it turned out by the curiosity of history, this structure, registered in the symbol of "the girdle of Venus," came to the surface, embodying itself in "Florimell's girdle" in the non-continental England of the late sixteenth century. C. S. Lewis, I must add, called it "married love"/"romance of marriage" (340).

Let me now turn to the other assignment of my strategy, i.e., to see an instance of non-fabliau-type adultery in Chaucer, if only to disturb the accepted understanding of "courtly love," with its provenance in the twelfth-century France on the one hand and its watered-down, revisionist legitimization as marriage in middle English on the other. The instance we look for, our case in point, is not far to seek and, in fact, can be found precisely in Chaucer, namely in his *Complaint of Mars*.

Setting aside the controversial question of its relationships with *The Complaint of Venus*,¹⁰ *The Complaint of Mars* stands us in good stead offering itself as an illuminating, if unique, example of adultery not only in Chaucer but also in middle English in general. Furthermore, it is an outstanding instance in the whole literary history of the myth relating to Venus's adultery with Mars. The myth, originating ultimately from Homer (*The Odyssey*, VIII. 266–366) and transmitted by the Romans,¹¹ enjoyed a long and durable popularity, at least, up until the Renaissance,

10. For the thesis that the two poems were designed as a sequence, see Rodney Merrill.

11. Among others, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV. 169–89; Idem, *Ars Amatoria*, II. 561 ff.; Idem,

and its indelible traces are pointed out to be detectable as late as in Zola's *Assommoir* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Serres 41; Hinz & Teunissen).

In connection with the theme of adultery *The Complaint of Mars* commands our attention, at least, in the following four points. [1] Not long after Chaucer's death it was interpreted by John Shirley, the copyist, as a personal, historical allegory of the illicit liaison between John Holland, Duke of Huntingdon, and Isabella, Duchess of York.¹² [2] Venus and Mars are primarily considered planetary deities, with the result that the place of assignation for divine adultery, conventionally the marriage chamber of Venus and Vulcan, is here significantly transferred to the zodiacal house of Taurus, "The chambre... Depeynted was with white boles grete" (85–6),¹³ and that, in the inevitable contradiction between astrological conjunction and wilful assignation ("That by her bothe assent was set a stevene": 52), the favorite issue in the Middle Ages of "fate and free will" comes to be incorporated in the myth.¹⁴ [3] Some of the accepted characteristics of "courtly love," such as the "ennobling effects" of bitter-sweet love and the imminent presence of the jealous guardian "gilos; jealous," are noticeable in the *raffinements* and courtly enslavement of Mars (32–49), and in the sense of imminent danger brought about by the threatening approach of Phebus (81).¹⁵ [4] For the expression of Mars's heavy plight of love, the motif of "the brooch of Thebes," another piece of work made by Vulcan in connection with Venus's betrayal, — and the other motif of the present paper reached at long last—is employed with superb irony.

Space does not allow me to elaborate on each of these four points in

Tristia, II. 295–96; Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII. 370–93. Further medieval transmission and transformation of these loci classici was dealt with in, "Vulcan Cuckolded by Mars: A Mythological Soap Opera and Its Significance in Late Medieval Literature," which I read on an occasion of the Harvard Seminar on Medieval Literature, 3 February, 1986.

12. For a full study of the myth as a background for *The Complaint of Mars*, see Wood (108–41).

13. For a succinct critique of the interpretation of "historical allegory" kind, see Wood (103–8).

14. For the problem of "free will and destiny," see Owen.

15. Phebus here is a beautiful mixture of various elements: the revealer of the liaison in the myth of Venus's adultery with Mars, approaching Dawn in the "aubade," and the "gilos/jalous" of "courtly love."

any detail. It is necessary for our present purposes, however, to discuss [4] in relation to [3] because "the brooch of Thebes," as will be seen, functions as a foil against which Mars's imagination, nurtured up by "courtly love," is to be measured and seen as deceived. Mars's devotion and servitude to Venus are so complete, even to the point of ludicrousness, that he ends up with his unconscious projection of the Blessed Virgin onto Venus.

I yaf my trewe servise and my thought
For evermore-how dere I have hit boght! —
To her that is of so gret excellence
That what wight that first sheweth his presence,
When she is wroth and taketh of hym no cure,
He may not longe in joye of love endure. (167–72)

and in the last stanza,

Compleyneth eke, ye lovers, al in-fere,
For her that with unfeyned humble chere
Was evere redy to do yow socour. (290–93)

Such devotion, such reverence to Venus cannot but remind us of St. Bernard's prayer to Mary in the last canto of *Paradiso* (12–18).¹⁶ In this sublimated image of Venus that Mars makes for himself, "the brooch of Thebes," an established historical motif, works as a kind of yardstick against which is to be measured the perversity of Mars's imagination. In his

16.

Donna, se' tanto grande e tanto vali,
che qual vuol grazia e a to non ricore,
sua disianza vuol volar sanz' ali.

La tua benignity non pur soccorre
a chi domanda, ma molte fiata
liberamente al dimandar precorre.

(Lady, thou art so great and so availest,
that whoso would have grace and has not recourse
to thee, his desire seeks to fly without wings.

Thy loving-kindness not only succors him who asks,
but oftentimes freely foreruns the asking.)

(*Paradiso*, trans. with commentary by C. S. Singleton. [New Jersey: Princeton UP., 1975]).

heavy plight Mars asks himself, “To what fyn made the God that sit so hye, /Benethen him, love other companye”: 218–19). To this self-posed question, he answers that “Hit semeth he tahh to lovers enmyte, /And lyk a fissher, as men alday may se, /Baiteth hys angle-hok with som ple-saunce”: 236–38). “The brooch of Thebes,” Mars says, is of such a sort which drives one mad with its bait of beauty. But, the brooch itself, according to Mars’s logic, is not to blame because any beauty, though it may well make one mad, cannot possibly be the real cause of the resultant unhappiness and disaster. What is really to blame, instead, should rather be sought in the maker of beauty, “he that wroghte hit” (259) / “the worcher” (261). And if “he that wroghte hit” is Vulcan in the case of the brooch, by the same token in the case of Venus it is precisely “he that wroghte her” (267) that must be taken to task, not Venus’s beauty.

Mars’s logic is simple and straightforward: the alluring object, be it a baited “angle-hok,” “the brooch of Thebes,” or “Venus,” is not to blame for the resultant states of affairs; what is really to blame is the one who made them with some aim in mind, be he Jupiter, Vulcan, or God. It may come as no surprise, therefore, that as one of the pagan deities Mars should take God to task, nor is it surprising that as a courtly lover at Venus’s service he should put the blame not on her but on her parent; it is, however, simply preposterous that Mars should accuse Vulcan, “the worcher” of the brooch of Thebes, of the dire consequences given rise to by the brooch, because it was none other than the adultery of Mars and Venus that actually occasioned its creation. To take revenge on their adultery, Vulcan forged it with every care so that it would be baleful to the receiver (in Chaucer’s rendering, “he that wroghte hit enfortuned hit so /That every wight that had hit shulde have wo”: 259–60). The first receiver was Harmonia, daughter of Mars and Vulcan, as Statius tells in the *Thebaid* (II. 269–73);

Lemnius haec, ut prisca fides, Marvortia longum
furta dolens, capto postquam nil obstat amori
poena nec ultrices catigavere catenae,
Harmoniae dotale decus sub luce iugali
struxerat.

(The Lemnian [Vulcan], so they of old believed, long time distressed at Mars’ deceit and seeing that no punishment gave hindrance to the dis-

closed amour, and the avenging chains removed not the offence, wrought this [the brooch of Thebes] for Harmonia on her bridal day to be the glory of her dower.)

This brooch, usually called that of Thebes, like the girdle of Venus we have traced, has a long tradition of its own, which dates back to Homer’s “khruson timênta” (the prized gold) received by Eriphyle (*Odyssey*, XI. 327). Homer’s version had been transmitted by Apollodorus and Pausanias in Greek, and in Latin by Ovid and Statius, with whom it received significant treatment. The later authors on this theme, such as Servius, the first Vatican mythographer, Boccaccio, and Dante were all under his influence.¹⁷

To turn back to pick up the thread of our argument: such was the original cause of the fabrication of the brooch that Mars, at least, could possibly have no justification in accusing Vulcan of his retributive design.¹⁸ And this *non sequitur* precisely is a measure of the depravity and perversity of Mars’s imagination—imagination nourished on “courtly-love” ideals. The irony is that, living in the world of “courtly-love” ideals, or if you like, “*interpelle*” to be in the discursive ideology of “courtly love,” Mars is blind to his perversity and goes on to fabricate unconsciously for himself an austere image of Venus, which approximates to the Blessed Virgin.¹⁹ But in the meanwhile, Venus, free on her own, has found another paramour, Mercury.

The Complaint of Mars, being itself an ostensible, if transformed, version of the Venus-Mars adultery, adultery *par excellence*, provides us with a unique instance of “adultery in Middle English.” It is also an unusual instance of adultery in Chaucer as it is not of a fabliau type. True, it is

17. For these mythological antecedents of “the brooch of Thebes,” see Hultin (63–65). For the persuasive argument that Criseyde’s brooch is the same as the “brooch of Thebes” of the *Thebaid*, see Anderson (127–28).

18. Cf. Hultin’s revealing statement: “Mars has unwittingly revealed to us the destructive nature of the affair, through his reference to an object which gains existence only because of his determined will to remain faithful to Venus.” (66)

19. Cf. Merrill: “It is important to see how Mars’ own ignorance of his high application is functional. His emotional need, combined with his rhetorical appeal for justification... has caused him to project a lady whose perfection are contradicted even by his own deepest sense of her, to say nothing of the ‘objective’ truths of her mythical capriciousness and cruelty.” (42)

humorous and, to some extent, even ludicrously ironical: but its irony and humour, it is worth noting, depend for their effects essentially on the “courtly-love” ideals, what C. S. Lewis characterised as “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love.” Lewis’s characterisation as we have noted, has become untenable as such, in particular as regards the historical dimension which “Adultery and the Religion of Love” connote. But, taken as a set of literary conventions, it has not completely lost its practical validity and usefulness. It can be said, then, with due reservation that *The Complaint of Mars* could and should have been adduced by Lewis to substantiate his definition of “courtly love” in its non-historical aspects. Indeed, its characteristic irony and complexity might have stood in the way, and yet it was the example of adultery *par excellence*—adultery shown (Donaldson 156) to be peculiarly still—born in Lewis’s book.

Adultery is as old as civilization, and these two concepts have been closely bound from the time of Helen of Troy until the present day, when it is not particularly shocking to come across such a book as *The Civilized Couple’s Guide to Extra-marital Adventure*.²⁰ Adultery, to be sure, is not coterminous with “Courtly Love,” though the former is undeniably one of the most important elements of the latter. “Courtly Love” is often said to be an “invention of the medieval West.” This is a die-hard view, which apparently has a good chance of being continuously insisted on as long as the dominance of the western civilization is to be maintained. But, as we have seen, if “courtly love” is an invention of the twelfth-century Europe, there is by the same token another invention of related interest, i.e., “Chartrian Neoplatonism,” which is characterised by the “*continuité ontologique*” between creation and procreation, where the marital redemption surmounts the cosmic adulteration. In our map of new reading “the girdle of Venus” stands for it. It is important, I believe, to keep in mind this antithetical movement, another invention of the medieval West, in juxtaposition with “courtly love.” I hope this reminder is as disturbing as another: that the insipid marital legitimization of continental adultery is not the sole concern of Middle English literature, nor its fabliau-type parody the sole business of Chaucer. Moulded as it is in

20. By Albert Ellis, New York: Peter H. Wyden, 1972. It contains a bibliography extending to no less than nine pages. For a stimulating discussion on adultery, civilization, and art, see Tanner, esp. Introduction.

a characteristically ironic mode, *The Complaint of Mars* provides a superb instance of courtly adultery in Middle English. In Mars’s perverse imagination, befuddled by “Humility, Courtesy, and Adultery,” Venus is sublimated into the Blessed Virgin and his own responsibility for the creation of the brooch of Thebes is shuffled off onto Vulcan’s shoulders. Again in our map, this instance of courtly adultery is registered by “the brooch of Thebes.” Both motifs, “the brooch” and “the girdle,” turn out to be, with some felicity, the gifts of Vulcan in connection with Venus’s adultery with Mars.

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