

• CHAPTER IV •

Subtle Clerks and Uncanny Women



THE WONDERS of Chaucer's tales, his flying horse and healing sword, shape-shifting fairy, beloved elf-queen, and illusionist clerk, draw on some of the most familiar manifestations of magic in romance. Magic is a generic marker that signals the inferiority of romance in the hierarchy of genres. The persistent claim leveled against romance magic is that it evades the genuine concerns of the world in favor of seductive falsehoods. Louise Fradenberg begins a study of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* with Bishop Hurd's account of the "magic of the old romances" dissolved when reason "drove them off the scene, and would endure these *lying wonders*, neither in their own proper shape, nor as masked in figures."¹ Hurd's association of magic and falsehood echoes that of medieval writers for whom religious literature offered truth and salvation in place of the fable, folly, and lies of romances. In *Insular Romance* I have argued that the "lying wonders" of romance can comment on political and social concerns; here I argue that magic becomes in romance a means of expressing gender difference. Participating in the cultural construction of gender and at the same time moving against its restraints, the deployment of magic in romance is far from irrelevant to worldly concerns.

Magic is for the Middle Ages on a continuum with philosophy and science, but in romance it can be rather narrowly defined as the manifestation of powers that are not directly attributable to Christian faith, yet are so far beyond the ordinary course of nature as to be inexplicable according to its laws (see Kieckhefer; Peters; Thorndike; on romances see Carasso-Bulow; Kelly, 146-204).

¹ Fradenberg, "Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy," 31 (his italics). Fradenberg, 34n.9, points out the similarity of Auerbach's view that "the courtly romance is not reality shaped and set forth by art, but an escape into fable and fairy tale" (*Mimesis*, 138).

Shape-shifting, divination, and the fabrication of objects that extend human capacities are common expressions of magic in romance. The *House of Fame* divides its description of magical powers into three categories, those of illusion, spell casting, and natural magic:

Ther saugh I pleye jugelours,
 Magiciens, and tregetours,
 And Phitonesses, charmeresses,
 Olde wicches, sorceresses,
 That use exorsisacions,
 And eke these fumygacions;
 And clerkes eke, which konne wel
 Al this magik naturel,
 That craftely doon her ententes. . . .
 Ther saugh I Colle tregetour
 Upon a table of sycamour
 Pleye an uncouth thyng to telle—
 Y saugh him carien a wynd-melle
 Under a walsh-note shale. (1259-67, 1277-81)

"Colle tregetour" and the opening group of entertainers "pleye," whereas the clerks of natural magic "konne wel" how to use astrology "craftely" to accomplish their will (here, to control health). Set against both groups of men are the women who use spells and rituals, and whose source of knowledge is occulted, attributed neither to skill nor to study. Although all three groups are obviously allied to some degree, the general distinction drawn here between masculine skill and knowledge and the more occulted feminine power that I will call uncanniness persists in the romance genre.

From the perspective of gender, magic has two characteristic expressions in romance. Magic associated with masculine concerns and characters is learned, is clearly hostile or helpful, and strives to confer on the individual subject an autonomy and completeness that we have seen to be chimerical in masculine identity as romance develops it. In association with the feminine, magic expresses the ambiguous danger and pleasure of intimacy between the sexes. The mirror brought to Cambyuskan's court points toward this distinction. The emissary who brings the mir-

ror from the "kyng of Arabe and of Inde" (V 110) at first explains to Cambyuskan that it will reflect approaching adversity "Unto youre regne or to youreself also, / And openly who is youre freend or foo" (V 135-36), but goes on to present the mirror to Canacee because it can show "any lady bright" what her suitor's true feelings are (V 137-45).

As the mirror slips from appearing to be a gift for Cambyuskan to being instead Canacee's gift, a single token defines masculine concerns as public and feminine concerns as intimate. Further, the mirror is broadly appropriate to woman in signifying for medieval writers her identification with her external appearance, with the beauty that makes her the object of the male gaze. The mirror carried by Oiseuse in the *Romance of the Rose* can equally stand for woman as image and for the feminine role as mirror to men in courtship, preparing for the connection between the pool of Narcissus and the lady's eyes.² For Luce Irigaray too the mirror is an image for woman, specifically as perceived by man: the mirror indicates that man knows himself both by observing what he is not, in the objectified woman, and by seeing himself reflected in woman (*Speculum*, 133-46). The mirror as the emissary first represents it to Cambyuskan elides the feminine by reflecting men to men directly and by predicting affairs of state rather than revealing affairs of the heart. This first version of the mirror's capacity expresses the tendency of masculine magic in romance to seek a self-sufficiency and control beyond the usual contingencies of social and intimate relations. Feminine magic, as suggested by the insights about suitors that Canacee's gift can show to any lady, reintroduces the complexities of relationship and puts suitors at a disadvantage even as it serves intimacy. For Irigaray the feminine mirror is concave, taking its shape from the woman's face and challenging as well as reflecting the masculine: "But perhaps through this specular surface which sustains discourse is found not the void of nothingness but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillating and incandescent concavity, of language also, that threatens to set fire to fetish-objects and gilded eyes" (*Speculum*, 143). The woman-mirror, at first providing the validating re-

² For the mirror's association with the "stereotypical courtly lady" and further possibilities for the mirror's meanings see Hult, 221-23 (quotation at 222).

flection of man, becomes a burning glass capable of destroying what it has sustained. In romances, women who wield magical power typically are men's sustaining intimates and their endangering opposites, in uncanny combinations of the alien and the familiar.

"ARTES THAT BEEN CURIOUS"

One sort of magic in romance is practiced by "clerkes that been lykerous / To reden artes that been curious" (V 1119-20). The arcane knowledge of these clerks expresses and promises access to the autonomy that male characters seek in romance. Magic of this kind responds to two problematic aspects of masculine identity in romance as outlined in the first chapter above. The ideological demand that a knight or aspirant to knighthood achieve an independent, self-contained, heterosexual identity generates courtships that figure identity as a process of alienation from woman, the foreign, the animal; all that can be made exterior to masculinity marks off where it is to be found. Identity is thus purchased at the cost of isolation and diminishment. The chivalric communities of romance, by recognizing their members in relation and opposition to one another, constrain self-determination from another direction. Identity becomes subject to reputation in the chivalric sphere, and contrarily to narcissistic isolation in the sphere of courtship. The "artes that been curious" attempt to alleviate the constraints on heterosexual masculinity by serving that role's claim to autonomy and self-determination. Although magic finally has little to do with masculine achievements, the desires it expresses importantly characterize masculinity in romance.

Clerical magic resembles applied science in attempting to control the natural world and extend human capabilities. Romances typically attribute the fabrications of magicians to their wisdom and wide learning as well as their specific training in magic. Merriam Sherwood provides examples of automatons such as flying horses and warning devices that are fine machines operated by magic, and notes the medieval association between such creations and the Orient, a place of both science and wonders. Robert Hanning discusses marvels in romance with reference to the term *engin*, which reflects the admixture in clerical magic of technique

and artfulness in meanings that range from "machine" and "invention" to "cleverness" and "deception" (*Individual*, 105-38). For Chaucer the term of choice is "subtil," also widely applied in romances to clerks of magic. *Cleomadés* compares the magical gifts presented on the king's birthday to similar wonders made by Virgil such as the mirror in Rome to which Chaucer refers (V 231):

Mout ot en Virgile sage honme
Et soutieu, car il fist a Ronme
Une chose mout engingneuse
Mout soutieu et mout merueilleuse. . . . (1723-26)

[Virgil was a very wise and subtle man, for he made in Rome a most clever thing, most subtle and marvelous.]

Virgil's subtlety includes working "par nigromance," by conjuring of spirits, as do the men who constructed the king's gifts: "clerc furent de grant afaire / d'astronomie et d'ingromance" (they were clerks of high station in astronomy and necromancy) (1735, 1830-31). Fabricating Chaucer's flying horse, "maad moore subtilly" than the crowd can comprehend, required its maker to know "ful many a seel and many a bond" (V 222, 131). The "subtil clerk" of the *Franklin's Tale*, also called a "magicien" and a "philosophre," is similarly learned in astronomy although he uses "magyk natureel" rather than invoking spirits (e.g., V 1125, 1184, 1261, 1572). For these subtle clerks magic facilitates the application of scientific theory to particular uses. Clerical magic has masculine associations with learning and worldly effectiveness, and its practitioners are predominantly male.

Chaucer's tales leave unanswered just what kind of magic their philosophers are practicing. It has been proposed that the Clerk of Orleans is merely a "tregetour," a banquet-hall illusionist who only calculates when a high tide will occur, but to so argue is to choose one assertion about his magic from a conflicting set of assertions in the tale.³ Aurelius's brother remembers the Clerk of Orleans as one who was learning the "particuler sciences" of "magyk natureel," preparing for the astronomical calculations

³ Background for the allusions to "tregetours" (V 1141) is provided by L. H. Loomis, "Secular Dramatics," and by Braswell. On the possibility of a high tide covering the rocks, see Spearing, ed., *Franklin's Prologue and Tale*, 16, 50-54, and Luengo.

the Clerk later performs (V 1122, 1125). However, the brother expects the Clerk to accomplish only a tregetour's mechanical illusion (V 1138-64). The narrator also describes his magic as mere sleight of hand in his censorious account of the "illusion / By . . . apparence or jogelrye" that the rocks have disappeared (V 1264-65), but the Clerk's prescience about his visitors—"he tolde hem al that was in hire entente" (V 1178)—suggests remarkable powers of divination. This range of information leaves the Clerk's magic in some measure undefinable, as do the conflicting explanations in the *Squire's Tale* for the magical gifts. The foreign knight who declares that the horse's maker "knew ful many a seel and many a bond" (V 131) has not clarified for editors whether natural magic or conjuration is at issue; the assembled crowd anticipates Aurelius's brother by invoking "an apparence ymaad by som magyk, / As jogelours pleyen at thise feestes grete" (V 218-19).⁴ The conflicting explanations again obscure the nature of the magical operations performed.

Obscuring how magic functions is one way of insisting on its inaccessibility to ordinary understanding and its superiority to everyday contingencies. Yet narrators are also at pains to establish some degree of detachment from clerical magic. The double movement of insisting on the validity of magic and yet disengaging from it, which parallels the gendered function of clerical magic as a source of masculine autonomy that does not finally guarantee it, returns us to the problems of tone in the *Squire's* and *Franklin's* tales.

The *Squire's* thinly developed relation to his tale argues that features of tone such as the narrator's attitude toward the "lewed peple" (V 221) and the startling juxtapositions of wonder and demystifying explanation are better referred to the tale itself than to the *Squire's* psychology.⁵ Jennifer Goodman has shown that the *Squire's Tale* draws on late medieval composite romances for its

⁴ On natural magic versus conjuration as the referents of "many a seel and many a bond" see the notes to V 131 in the *Squire's Tale*, *Variorum Edition*, and in the *Riverside Chaucer*.

⁵ Recent assessments of Chaucer's plans for Fragment V in relation to manuscript discrepancies are Lawton, 106-29; Pearsall, *Canterbury Tales*, 14-23; and Cooper, *Canterbury Tales*, 217-18, 230-32. The dramatic reading of the *Squire's Tale* as a distortion of romance suited to a young and inexperienced teller is illustrated by Miller.

projected vast scale, its interlaced adventures of several family members, its motifs (even when these may have more distant Oriental analogues), and its "distinctive taste for a combination of the fantastic and minute realism" (130; see also Hornstein). Even closer to the *Squire's Tale* than the English composite romances cited by Goodman are Girard d'Amiens's *Meliacin* and, to a lesser extent, Adenet le Roi's *Cleomadés*.⁶ These works illustrate a generic attitude to magic that does not depend on a particular narrator's psychology. A first tendency in narrating clerical magic is to insist on its mystery as well as its science. Concluding the lengthy account of Virgil's fabrications that provides background for the magical gifts to the king, *Cleomadés's* narrator comments on "lewed peple":

Gent de petit entendement
Demandent a la fois comment
Tels choses pueent estre faites
Que je vous ai ici retraites,
Aucun en sont tout esbahi.
Et savez vous que je leur di?
Je leur di que nigromancie
Est mout merueilleuse clergie,
Car mainte merueille en a on
Faitte pieç'a, bien le set on. (1639-48)

[People of little understanding ask all at once how such things as I have described to you here can be made, and some are completely in fear of them. And do you know what I say to them? I say to them that necromancy is a most wonderful study, because from it many marvels have been made for a long time, as is well known.]

Far from explaining clerical magic, the narrator insists on its inexplicability, on the "merveille" of "merveilleuse clergie" that

⁶ *Meliacin* and *Cleomadés* arise from two different versions of an ultimately Oriental tale, according to their editors: *Cleomadés*, 610-41; Aebischer. Girard d'Amiens and Adenet le Roi both appear to have visited England under Edward I, and Froissart's reference to *Cleomadés* in his *Espinette amoureuse*, written just after his years in service to Queen Philippa, has suggested that the romance may have been current in England in Chaucer's youth. Oriental associations of the *Squire's Tale* (but not its derivation from composite romance) were outlined by Braddy and more recently by Melitzki, 140-60.

places it beyond ordinary comprehension. Wonder, rather than attempted explanation, is the right response.

The *Squire's Tale* also takes this position. The Squire's throng begins by expressing wonder at each gift:

But everemoore hir mooste wonder was
How that it koude gon, and was of bras . . . (V 199-200)
And somme of hem wondred on the mirour . . . (V 225)
And oother folk han wondred on the swerd . . . (V 236)
Tho speeke they of Canacees ryng,
And seyden alle that swich a wonder thyng
Of craft of rynges herde they nevere noon . . . (V 247-49)

But subsequently the people displace wonder with scientific explanations, historical analogies, and concrete fears. Concealed enemy soldiers in the horse, the science of optics, and the technology of glassmaking and "hardyng of metal" (V 243) reduce clerical magic to the merely learned; a few brief allusions to Greek myth and "fairye" (V 201) divorce "merveille" from "clergie" and relegate the former to the long ago and far away. The narrator's position, here as in *Cleomadés*, is that the answer to how such things can be made is beyond the reach of such explanations: these things "been maad moore subtilly / Than they kan in hir lewedenesse comprehende" (V 222-23). Narrator and people finally return to wonder in the passage describing how to operate the brass horse:

Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras
That syn the grete sege of Troic was,
Theras men wondreden on an hors also,
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho. (V 306-9)

The clarity of the instruction to "Trille this pyn, and he wol vanysse anoon" contends with the narrator's "The hors vanysshed, I noot in what manere" (V 328, 342) as if to insist on a residual mystery within the masterful construction. This close echoes the wonder first experienced when the "strange knyght" arrived: "In al the halle ne was ther spoken a word / For merueille of this knyght; hym to biholde / Ful bisily they wayten, yonge and olde"

{V 89, 86–88}. Silence and “merveille” acknowledge the superiority of clerical magic to ordinary understanding.

Despite the narrator’s insistence on the wonder of clerical magic, there is also a hint of detachment in the closing observation that the “hors vanysshed, I noot in what manere, / Out of hir sighte; ye gete namoore of me” (V 342–43). This is less the silence of wonder than of dismissal.⁷ *Cleomadés* ends the list of Virgil’s wonders on a still more detached note: “De ce plus vous ne parleroie, / Qui croire m’en veut si m’en croie / Et qui ne le veut si le laist” [I won’t speak to you of this any more; whoever wants to can believe me and whoever doesn’t want to can drop it] (1835–37). The *Franklin’s Tale* moves from detachment to condemnation of “swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces / As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes” (V 1292–93). I have argued above that, in conjunction with other features of his narration, the Franklin’s condemnation of magic can be read as a criticism of the romance genre’s commitment to “lying wonders,” but romance narrators do express a range of reservations about magic that contrast with their insistence on wonder. *Meliacin* illustrates a detachment similar to that in the *Franklin’s Tale*:

En icel tenz en augories
 Creoit on et en sorceries,
 En avisions et en mençonges.
 Et li clerc haut homme restoient
 Qui de ces ars s’entremetoient.
 Et quant il estoient trouvé
 Bon clerc et sage et esprouvé,
 Phylozophes les apeloient
 Cil qui lor granz oevres looient. . . .
 Des deablies qu’il usoient
 Et de lor mauveses aprises
 S’en estoient lor oevres mises
 En auctorité et em pris. (172–80, 186–89)

[At that time people believed in auguries and sorcery, in visions and lies. And the clerks who set themselves to these arts held high re-

⁷ Stillwell, 177, 181, argues that violations of “unity of tone” (the crowd’s amazement, the narrator’s demurrals) distinguish the *Squire’s Tale* from “a typical romance”; I believe shifts in tone, narrative detachment, and other ironic effects are characteristic of romance.

spect. And when they were found to be good clerks, wise and proven, people who praised their great works called them philosophers. . . . On account of the deviltries they practiced and their evil knowledge their works were held in authority and high esteem.]

The location of lies and sorceries in a pagan past together with the condemnation of philosophers’ “evil knowledge” anticipates the Franklin’s comments on his philosopher’s “japes and his wrecchednesse / Of swich a supersticious cursednesse” (V 1271–72). And yet in both cases the story outruns the commentary. In *Meliacin* there are good magicians (two whose gifts win them daughters of the king in marriage) who are distinguished from the bad (the third magician, whose ugliness expresses a treacherous heart). The story’s emplotted version of the merit of philosophers escapes the comments on their uniformly evil ways, just as Chaucer’s depiction of the Clerk’s scientifically orthodox astrological calculations moves beyond the comments on his “supersticious cursednesse.”⁸

In summary, there is a double focus to the presentation of clerical magic in romance that both strives to preserve wonder from the demystifications of the ignorant and, contrarily, assumes tones of detachment, doubt, and even condemnation. That both wonder and detachment characterize narration echoes the role of clerical magic as a source of great power that does not crucially drive masculine self-advancement or determine events.

The power of clerical magic lies in expanding the realm of possibility. Rather than propelling protagonists beyond the competitive chivalric circle altogether, clerical magic offers assistance in meeting the concrete challenges presented there. The *Franklin’s Tale* introduces the expansive identity of magic with a trompe l’oeil description in which the border between reality and illusion is at first imperceptible:

Doun of his hors Aurelius lighte anon,
 And with this magicien forth is he gon

⁸ On the accuracy of the scientific description see Eade; on the tone of the condemnation, Eade notes that “neither Chaucer nor anyone else could reasonably describe the Toledo Tables as designed for ‘supersticious cursedness’” (69). On a book of divination assembled and partly written for Richard II, the *Libellus Geomancie*, see Mathew, 40–41.

Hoom to his hous, and maden hem wel at ese.
 Hem lakked no vitaille that myghte hem plese.
 So wel arrayed hous as ther was oon
 Aurelius in his lyf saugh nevere noon.
 He shewed hym, er he wente to sopeer,
 Forestes, parkes ful of wilde deer;
 Ther saugh he hertes with hir hornes hye,
 The gretteste that evere were seyn with ye. (V 1183-92)

The forests and parks seem on first reading to be features of the magician's well-arrayed property rather than of his art, since the account postpones the information that "yet remoeved they nevere out of the hous / Whil they saugh al this sighte merveillous" (V 1205-6). The gradual progress from the initial sight of forests and parks which could be taken for real estate to the evident illusion of Dorigen dancing with Aurelius proposes that magic can expand reality toward the fulfillment of desire. The magician grounds this proposal in his clerical learning by making his presentation "in his studie, ther as his bookes be" (V 1207, 1214). A similar continuum from the real to its magical extension is evident in the horse of the *Squire's Tale*, which combines an appearance "so horsly, and so quyk of ye / As it a gentil Poilleys courser were" (V 194-95) with extraordinary speed, endurance, and maneuverability. Again the presentation focuses on desires fulfilled in the horse's capacity to "beren youre body into every place / To which youre herte wilneth for to pace" (V 119-20).

Beyond these concrete benefits, magic offers protagonists access to the exotic. For readers, too, magic is the central expression of Oriental and Celtic exoticism in romance. Because romance associates the exotic with the feminine, as Canacee's adventure will illustrate, the genre invites readers to align themselves with masculine protagonists whose encounters with the alien in all its manifestations express desires for self-extension and completion as well as for control.

Jacques Le Goff studies the Orient as "le monde clos de l'exotisme onirique de l'Occident médiévale" (the closed world of the medieval West's exotic dreams) and associates it with the Celtic world as a second "horizon onirique" ("L'Occident médiéval," 246, 263). These are dreamed places in their conjoined inaccessibility and desirability, sites for the projection of European fears

and longings. R. W. Southern and Anthime Fourrier specify the Orient as a place of scientific and mechanical marvels such as gems of wonderful power, strange races of animals and humans, and automatons; the Breton world by contrast partakes of "la féerie et le mystère" (Fourrier, 12; see also Sherwood, 571-72, 574-75). Romances both manage and indulge the exotic in generating images of it, just as romances' plots invite protagonists to appropriate the exotic to their own desires. The Clerk of Orleans's magic cannot be written off in the narrator's references to heathen tricks, but the Clerk and his magic are nonetheless creations of Christian poetic art that serve its purposes. In the *Squire's Tale* also, literary representation of the exotic is less a matter of rejection than of a narrative distancing that asserts control over the exotic. Even *occupatio* can work to contain the challenge of foreign custom:

I wol nat tellen of hir strange sewes,
 Ne of hir swannes, ne of hire heronsewes.
 Eek in that lond, as tellen knyghtes olde,
 Ther is som mete that is ful deynte holde
 That in this lond men recche of it but smal;
 Ther nys no man that may reporten al. (V 67-72)

"Strange sewes" and "som mete" evoke ignorance and repulsion as does the refusal to go into detail, but the narrator suppresses those responses by asserting that efficient storytelling governs the evasion. The cultural distance between narrator and Tartar court redoubles when into that already exotic space rides an emissary from Middle India whose words and bearing recall the other "horizon onirique," the Celtic: "Gawayn, with his olde curteisye, / Though he were comen ayeyn out of Fairye, / Ne koude hym nat amende with a word" (V 95-97; see Whiting). This hyperbole, even as it layers one exotic world on another, draws on familiar conventions about Gawain and courtly speech that make the superlatively rich and strange scene of the *Squire's Tale* accessible to its readers.

For Edward Said, the literary constitution of exoticism as a site of desire and control adumbrates the colonial encounter. Said labels the cultural idea of the East "*Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place

in European Western experience. The Orient is . . . its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other." Inventing literary images "was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient" through "domestications of the exotic," Said argues (1, 60). John Fyler independently describes the narrative process in the *Squire's Tale* as "domesticating the exotic" and stresses the desire to appropriate that complements the desire for control. Only partially successful, the tale's tendency to demystify its marvels "shows how fully romance reflects a basic human desire for reintegration, for abolishing the distance caused by alienating categories; and it also shows how vigorously such categories resist their own dissolution" ("Domesticating the Exotic," 21). To introduce gender into this valuable framework for considering the exotic, we should note that romance attributes the longing for reintegration to male characters and resistant alienness to female ones, such that the desired and elusive exotic constitutes a sexually charged dynamic central to courtship.

Canacee's much-stressed womanhood signals not only her distance from the male narrator or author but also the relation between femininity and other aspects more obviously alien to masculinity such as the foreign and the animal. The multiplication of exotic registers in Canacee's adventure is governed by its association with women in several generalizing statements that frame the episode: Canacee is "ful mesurable, as wommen be"; her sympathy arises from her gentleness and "verray wommanly benignytee"; she and all her women lament the falcon's plight; the mew constructed for the falcon is lined in blue velvet "in signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene" (V 362, 486, 633, 645). Fyler notes the appropriateness of this gendered narration to the tale's concern with all forms of the exotic: "When a young noble male European imagines the sentiments of a *gentil* female bird 'of fremde land' (429), as these are made evident in her colloquy with a Mongolian princess, we are assured that a basic impulse of romance, asserting and then overcoming distance, is being pushed to its farthest limits" ("Domesticating the Exotic," 13). Canacee's encounter with the falcon makes the exotic available in a series of metaphorical shifts from animal to human and from species to species. The falcon speaks "in hir haukes ledene" of her bird suitor who, a tiger in doubleness, falls to his knees in false prom-

ises to her (V 478, 543-44). In such passages the magical ring seems to be translating from several registers of the exotic at once.⁹ Indeed, Chaucer has translated the whole story from *Anelida and Arcite* to the wild kingdom (Alfred David points out that the falcon's tale is "the identical story recycled—with feathers") so that the ring can retranslate it into human speech (110). Identified with the lamenting falcon through her gentle sympathetic femininity, Canacee is an instance of the exotic for the narrator. Within the tale as well her relation to clerical magic differs from the masculine relation in that she moves toward subjective knowledge of relationships in her adventure, rather than toward a masculine appropriation of the exotic into self-advancement. Her adventure will be resolved through masculine intervention, "by mediacion of Cambalus," and through the chivalric courtship for her hand waged by "Cambalo, / That faught in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee er that he myghte hire wyne" (V 656, 667-69).¹⁰

For male protagonists, romance figures an evocation and control of the exotic that answers desires for autonomy. The emissary's account in the *Squire's Tale* emphasizes that the magical gifts have pragmatic uses. The devices, however mysterious in themselves, will perform predictably for their owners: "This is a verray sooth, withouten glose; / It failleth nat whils it is in youre hoold," the emissary declares of the sword (V 166-67). Clerical magic is similarly facilitating in the *Franklin's Tale*. Aurelius is cut off from Dorigen not only by her demand for a supernatural performance but more generally by the hierarchizing differences courtship asserts between men and women. Clerical magic responds to the alienating limitations of courtship and the inaccessibility of woman by providing access to an exotic field that overlaps with that of the feminine in its strangeness and surpassing of rational explanation. The *Knight's Tale* identifies the exotic

⁹ Further examples are the tiger who would weep if he could (V 419-22) and the exemplum of caged birds (V 607-20) in which "tenor and vehicle, number and gender keep reversing and dissolving into each other" (Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic," 17).

¹⁰ The overlapping names of Canacee's brother and suitor, whether or not they imply an exotic acceptance of incest, bring the tale back from its excursion into the alien feminine to the masculine characters' relations with one another.

with the feminine most overtly, in the narrator's refusal to recount Emelye's rite of bathing: "But hou she dide hir ryte I dar nat telle / But it be any thing in general; / And yet it were a game to heeren al" (I 2284-86). The evasion is not paralleled in the accounts of Palamon's and Arcite's rites in the temples of Venus and Mars, suggesting that Emelye's gender intensifies her rite's exoticism. At the same time, the narrator's aside that "it were a game to heeren al" indicates that appropriation is as good as accomplished, identifying the feminine with the exotic both as mystery and as target for narrative domestication. A similar identification is implicit in the *Franklin's Tale*. Aurelius turns to supernatural powers to overcome the vast distance he perceives between his humble suit and Dorigen's resistance. Entreating Phoebus Apollo's aid in completing Dorigen's task, Aurelius evokes a gendered heaven in which the feminine moon follows after the masculine sun in her desire to mirror his rays (V 1045-51). This image of a heavenly masculine autonomy finds earthly expression in the Clerk's ability to manipulate his knowledge of the moon:

[He] knew the arisyng of his moone weel,
 And in whos face, and terme, and everydeel,
 And knew ful weel the moones mansioun
 Acordaunt to his operacioun. . . . (V 1287-90)

The Clerk's manipulation of "his moon" replaces Apollo's influence over Lucina as the means of accomplishing Dorigen's task, while the moon's importance to the Clerk's illusion sustains the association between the distant heavens and the feminine gender. In allying himself with the magician's astrological manipulations, Aurelius gains an experience of the exotic that parallels the success he hopes to achieve with Dorigen. In romance generally, magic is a compensatory exotic that extends men's capacities in the direction of their desires, toward the alien space that femininity most importantly occupies. Insofar as this self-expansion depends on the aid of magicians—and Aurelius's dependence is particularly clear at the tale's close—it is recuperated into masculine interrelations. The magician's reappropriation of his horse, together with the hero's bride upon it, similarly reminds Meliacin and Cleomadés that their access to magic is contingent on the magician's will. Although a struggle of masculine wills is central

to these plots as to that of the *Franklin's Tale*, the attraction of magic for striving suitors records a desire to control the exotic and incorporate it into identity despite identity's very foundation on expelling the exotic into the realm of the Other.

Clerical magic proposes an escape from a related paradox of masculine identity explored in the first chapter, according to which identity depends on recognition by the chivalric community yet the demand of the community is for a self-established identity independent of all others. Identity is caught between contrary demands of reputation and autonomy, so that masculine desire takes on such convolutions as Aurelius expresses in his complaint to Dorigen: "I wolde that day that youre Arveragus / Wente over the see, that I, Aurelius, / Hadde went ther nevere I sholde have come agayn" (V 969-71). Although Arveragus has undertaken the journey "to seke in armes worshipe and honour" (V 811), in Aurelius's lament his rival's lonely self-hazarding models independent chivalric identity in contrast to Aurelius's involvement in rivalry and the dependence of his success on usurping Arveragus's place. One source of the lyric lover's perpetual sorrow is not simply his choice of a distant and difficult object but his involvement in rigorously social measures of merit that compromise the ideal of an autonomous self even as they confer social recognition on the effort to construct that self.

Aligning himself with Arveragus and competing with him for Dorigen, Aurelius responds to the elements in Dorigen's reply that would make his courtship most analogous to that of Arveragus: her resistance and her promise to love him "best of any man" (V 997) if he accomplishes a supremely difficult task. Although Dorigen's concern is for his rival's safety, to Aurelius the task resembles Arveragus's long courtship and "many a labour, many a greet emprise" (V 732) through which he won Dorigen. In this light the task of removing the rocks along Brittany's coast would surpass conventional achievements in kind and difficulty, demonstrating Aurelius's superior worthiness. Aurelius measures his position and actions against those of Arveragus in his initial and final interviews with Dorigen (e.g., V 1526-44, 1604-5), but the "monstre or merveille" (V 1344) that the magician produces for Aurelius frees him temporarily from comparison. When Aurelius

reports that "I have do so as ye comanded me" (V 1333), it seems that magic has raised individual achievement beyond the reach of competition.

Yet magic does not finally provide the freedom from interpersonal contingencies that it seemed to promise. The feat itself is suspect, an illusion whose duration of "a wowke or two" (V 1161, 1295) is ephemeral next to the tale's chosen measure of meaningful time, "a yeer or tweyne" (V 809, 813, 1062, 1102). By the time it is performed, the feat is irrelevant to Arveragus's safety, it involves Aurelius in a further competition among men rather than setting him beyond rivalry, and it does not bring Aurelius union with Dorigen despite having fulfilled her command in the eyes of all concerned. These developments follow the genre's understanding of how magic is related to heroic endeavor. Helen Cooper has shown in a survey of romances and lays that the magical objects, potions, and capabilities introduced as aids and solutions tend not to be called upon, to be unimportant to plot, or not to function. She concludes that magic illuminates and exacerbates personal quandaries rather than evading them as may be the case in ballad and fairy tale: "the process of turning tale into romance requires something more. Magic that does not work, by definition, has little to do with plot; but it can be used in a different way—used psychologically, rather than magically" ("Magic," 134). On the Clerk of Orleans's feat she remarks that "the question at issue is not whether the magic has worked or not, but how this will make everybody behave" (141). In a fine study of chivalric consciousness Anne Middleton makes the similar point that the Franklin discredits magic in his tale because "the will to produce such heart-ravishing appearances is seen as destructive rather than creative of communal faith and accord. In his tale patience and pity are the only salutary forms of 'magic naturel'" ("War by Other Means," 130). The genre's resistance to magical solutions in favor of interpersonal negotiations returns protagonists from the illusion of transcendence to the demands of community.

The magical gifts in the *Squire's Tale* also seem prepared to enhance human capacities beyond compare, but the tale's analogues go on to reveal that the gifts have little significance to events. The analogues could well illustrate Philippe Ménard's ob-

servation on Chrétien de Troyes's use of marvels: "tout au long de ces romans le réel est singulièrement présent et le merveilleux furtif" (throughout these romances the real is strikingly present and the magical is fleeting) ("Chrétien de Troyes et le merveilleux," 58; see also Carasso-Bulow). The horse and sword have specifically gendered power in that both are metonymic for chivalric masculinity. Their broader cultural associations with male sexuality and willfulness underlie more prominent and genre-specific associations with knighthood, adventure, and noble rule. Horsemanship is the costly skill that distinguishes the highest military ranks; the sword is a similarly prestigious possession associated with ascendancy to knighthood.¹¹ Often given names of their own, a knight's horse and sword stand for his capacity to sustain and forward his chivalric privileges. The magical horse of the *Squire's Tale* prepares for far-flung adventures and miraculous escapes, again expanding the individual protagonist's capacities in the direction of autonomy. The magical sword expands the ordinary properties of swords in the relevant direction for chivalric plots, in that it adumbrates forgiveness as well as force. Like Cambuskan who is "pitous and just, alwey yliche" (V 20), the sword promises to express mercy as well as power. Yet in so doing the sword turns from being a token of autonomous invincibility to reintroducing chivalric relationship, and even to recalling that wounding as well as healing establishes relations among knights. The flying horse also turns from providing independence in *Meliacin* and *Cleomadés*: its maker quickly reappropriates it to his own evil designs, and the young lovers must spend years going about the world by ordinary means in search of their kidnapped sweethearts. A little statue of a man with a trumpet that replaces the magical sword in *Meliacin* and *Cleomadés* is just as marginal to events: in *Meliacin* the figure apparently fails to warn of treachery and in *Cleomadés* it blows its warning trumpet when the young prince first gets on the horse and again when his bride is stolen, but everyone is too excited to notice.¹² In both cases magic again

¹¹ Some cultural associations for horses are traced in Robertson, 30, 194, 253-55, 394, 476. On horses and swords in relation to knighthood see Keen, 16, 47, 50, 64-65, 71-75, 103.

¹² *Cleomadés*, ll. 2407-24, 5661-66; in *Meliacin* the figure does help Meliacin's father resist an invasion (73-74).

returns protagonists from the promise of independence to the constraints of life in a chivalric community.

Clerical magic has many further uses in romance, from expressing the parallel alchemy of poetry writing to resisting Christian hegemony. Insofar as clerical magic directs itself to masculine identity in romance, it addresses the tension between a private desire for autonomy and a chivalric community that assigns identity in relation to others. It further responds to a desire for the exotic arising from the alienation of the feminine that characterizes chivalric courtship. But clerical magic illuminates rather than revises the masculine predicament, clarifying the difference between private desire and public demand and the distance between courtly suitor and exotic beloved.

UNCANNY WOMEN

Women who wield magical power in romances are the intimates of male protagonists, their lovers and mothers and aunts. Male clerics and enchanters provide aid or resistance in magic that is uncomplicated by intimacy. Although clerical magic can establish deeper connections between men than the merely professional, as Aurelius's closing interaction with the Clerk of Orleans illustrates, these connections, like the magic that instigates them, are unambiguous in their expressions and implications. Women's magic has an element of ambivalence that expresses femininity's compounded attraction and danger in romance. Whereas men master magic as an exceptionally difficult science that they can then freely deploy, women's magic is less often learned than inherited, imposed by enchantment, or of unexplained origin, and not always under their control.

Of course there are some partial exceptions to this generalization. The ugly magicians in *Cleomadés* and *Meliacin* demand marriage in return for their art as do the feminine grotesques who seek intimacy in other romances, but the ugly magicians' motives are unambiguously evil rather than potentially or partially benevolent. Merlin changes his shape, a typical expression of feminine magic's ambiguity, but his learned identity and his involvement in public and political matters contrast with the more hidden workings and intimate preoccupations of uncanny women. The few masculine fairies of romance, whose otherworldly origin and

inborn rather than clerical magic are more typical of the genre's feminine figures, are restricted to the roles of lost father and peripheral challenger.¹³ A few women such as Morgan le Fay and Melior of *Partonope of Blois* receive clerical training in magic, but Morgan is hostile and helpful by turns or even simultaneously, and Melior's power has a crucial limitation that puts it in her lover's control rather than her own.¹⁴ The differences between magical effects attributed to clerks and to women in several Middle English romances provide a context for considering how the *Wife of Bath's Tale* involves magic in its depiction of gender.

One might suppose that a fairy mistress or spell-casting mother is simply superior to a mortal one, her protection more extensive and her beauty nearer perfection. But in these romances superiority is only half the story. Sometimes a magical mistress's protection is contingent on a prohibition that is broken: Sir Launfal tells of Tryamour, Raymondin peeks at Melusine on a Saturday, Partonope whips out a lantern to see what Melior looks like, and whether willingly or unwillingly, the lady vanishes. Her magical protection has a catch. Richard Coeur de Lion's mother, a beautiful infidel, is a good wife and mother until forced by her husband to see the elevation of the Host, upon which she flies up through the roof and disappears forever. Or, as in *Dame Ragnell* and the lady of Synadoun in *Lybeaus Desconus*, a beautiful shape may belatedly revise a "forshapen" body that is repulsively animal. Melusine's misshapen children as well as her own weekly transformation into a lamia, half serpent and half woman, betray the incompleteness of enchanting beauty. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* juxtaposes the aged Morgan to the young wife who may be

¹³ Harf-Lancner surveys male fairies, 63-74; for an overview of Merlin's appearances see MacDonald.

¹⁴ R. S. Loomis, 105, quotes Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee on Morgan's contradictory manifestations: "I have seen a good many kinds of women in my time, but she laid it over them all for variety." Paton provides a wealth of detail, although my argument opposes her thesis that the fairy of romance is "superior to human blemish, contingency, or necessity, in short, altogether unlimited in her power" (5). Harf-Lancner's premise is that fairies are of two types, that of the conquering and controlling Morgan who ravishes heroes to the otherworld and that of the submissive Melusine who marries a mortal and serves him with her magic; my argument is that conquest and submission, benevolence and malevolence, and other oppositions are more importantly confounded than distinguished in fairies of romance.

her double, and finally traces the adventure's seductive dangers to an aunt to whose chimneyside Gawain is invited to come home. Does Morgan more accurately threaten Gawain's life or nurture his growth? Are Dame Ragnell and the Wife of Bath's old hag truly ugly and aggressive or truly beautiful and obedient? Such bivalence is irreducible in romance and it is gendered feminine. Through an uncanniness that opposes yet is subsumed within intimacy, romances express the difference that marks the idea of woman, the marginal position of woman in narrative, and her resistance to both appropriation and dismissal.

Sigmund Freud's essay on the uncanny, "Das Unheimliche," comments on contradictions within femininity in the course of a much broader discussion of the psychological bases for artistic effects. Freud's translator points out that her "canny" means "cozy," "gentle," "familiar," "safe," but also "endowed with magical or occult powers," that is to say, "uncanny" (219, 222). Similarly, Freud notes that "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*," or uncanny (226). The negative term arises and resides within the positive. This lexicographical enfolding resonates with representations of the feminine in romance, where the lover's intimacy with woman is nonetheless estranged by gender difference. Here is a first element of woman's difference in romance, that within her intimacies there is something occulted and unpredictable. Both the gorgeous fairy mistress who vanishes and the repulsively "forshapen" woman who declares her love dramatize the contradictions inherent in the desired and alien feminine.

Freud relates the aesthetic perception of uncanniness in literature and in experience to the process of repression: "the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it." Freud illustrates with the common declaration of male patients "that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning" (245). The return of the repressed has wider implications for romance as a literature of masculine identity-formation, but

for my immediate concern with the articulation of feminine uncanniness, Freud's illustration suggests that we consider the lexical field of Middle English *queynt*. In addition to its occasional euphemistic reference to female genitalia, *queynt* encompasses some of the same meanings and ambivalences as the modern *canny/uncanny*.

The coexistence of positive and negative valences in *queynt* can be broadly illustrated in uses of the formula "queynt of ginne," which signifies trickery or spell casting when applied to male adversaries, and great skill when applied to protagonists. Lybeaus Desconus seeks to rescue the lady of Synadoun from two magicians who have immured her in a "palys queynte of ginne . . . be nygremauncye / Y-makeþ of fayrye" (Cotton MS, 1701, 1705-6). The magicians taunt the merely mortal Lybeaus to fight his best by using the same formula: "Fy3te þou most wyth vs! / Queynte þou art of gynne / Yf þou þat lady wyne" (Cotton MS, 1836-38).¹⁵ Very occasionally heroes are "queynt" in the sense of clever or subtle rather than simply strong and skillful, but it is primarily in women that "queyntise" moves easily from refinement to deception and spell casting. In *William of Palerne*, the queen who at her marriage is "corneys and convenabul and . . . comen . . . of gret kin, and koynt hireselve"—that is, irreproachably aristocratic—is soon transforming her stepson into a werewolf "with hire connyng and hire queynt charmes" (4089-90, 4136). All the court ladies and demoiselles of *Kyng Alisaunder* who dress "in faire atyre, in dyuers queyntise" (Laud MS, 173) are fashionable and pleasing, as is Bertlak's lady when she takes her place in church "coyntly" (*Sir Gawain*, 934). On the other hand, Morgan's "koyntyse of clergye, bi craftes wel lerned" tricks Gawain in a mode he calls feminine: "myn honoured ladyez" are typical in that they have "koyntly bigyled" him "þur3 wyles of wymmen" (2447, 2412-15). Gawain voices a slippage between the term's positive and negative connotations, a slippage that coincides with the move from woman's decorative appearance to her hidden nature. In medieval rather than Freudian terms,

¹⁵ Contrast such fabliau protagonists as the Miller's Nicholas, whose "queynte cast" (l. 3605) is clever rather than confrontational. Another intriguing exception to the gendered connotations of *queynte* is Dame Ragnell's assertion that men use "flatryng and glosyng and queynte gyn" to court women (*Weddyng of Sir Gawen*, l. 416).

Adam's long-lost trust in Eve returns to fallen man, weaned from that trust, as an uncanny experience of indeterminately pleasing and misleading "queyntise." In Gawain's postlapsarian perception, woman is disconsonant with man because disconsonant in her very nature.

Some romances insist on the alienness enclosed in the apparently accessible mistress's body through prohibitions on looking, touching, and speaking that limit lovers' access and eventually threaten to deny access altogether. Melior's magic craft was itself concealed, practiced only in a chamber "preuely" for her father's household, "þorowe wych mony man was blynte." She can conceal Partonope and herself from the public eye as long as she remains concealed from Partonope; her power ends "for ye haue sene me a-yen my will."¹⁶ Launfal's Tryamour is available to him in any "derne stede": "Well priuily I woll come to þe / No man alyue ne schall me se" (354-57). She too moves away when exposed by the lover, although she eventually revises her withdrawal by feasting the male gaze—"Sche dede of here mantyll on þe flet / þat men shuld here beholde the bet"—and blinding the doubting Guinevere (979-80). In these texts the attempt to restrict access seems as inherently feminine as the lover's disobedience or curiosity seems masculine: Raymondin finally looks at Melusine on a Saturday by poking a hole in the door of her retreat with his sword. The knights who persuade Richard Coeur de Lion's father to detain Cassodorien in church until the elevation of the Host promise that "þou schalt se a queynte brayd" (*Richard*, 216). The "queynte" response they anticipate might lexically refer to a trickiness, or hiddenness, or elegance, or sorcery in Cassodorien that will now be seen by the assembled knights. The ambivalence of the term *queynte* stresses her unknowability within the articulation of male curiosity.

The "queynte fantasy" Alison attributes to all women in her prologue makes axiomatic their difference from the men who pursue or refuse them:

I trowe I loved hym best, for that he
Was of his love daungerous to me.

¹⁶ *Partonope*, ll. 5936, 5945, 5979. Melior's account of her magical practices uses many images of concealment and secrecy (ll. 5933-79).

We wommen han, if that I shal not lye,
In this matere a queynte fantasye:
Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we,
Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle. . . .
This knoweth every womman that is wys.

(III 513-20, 524)

Here as throughout the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, woman's desire appears to be irreducibly at odds with her situation. But wise women deploy a second-order "queyntise" to achieve their ends: Alison wins the "daungerous" Jankyn in marriage with falsehoods and veiled allusions, the first of which, "I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me" (III 575), preempts masculine wariness of woman's uncanny charms. When duplicity becomes her mode of interaction, difference has fissured the feminine itself.

In feminine magic, romance mystifies the antifeminist topos of woman as contradiction and self-contradiction. The old hag's courtship in Alison's tale reworks the canny deceptions Alison uses to win Jankyn into the uncanny ability to shape-shift. According to Freud's model, the hag's shape-shifting can draw an uncanny effect from a plot in which "the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality. . . . It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices" ("Uncanny," 244).¹⁷ Moreover, when the masculine wish becomes substance, the accessible body remains *unheimlich* insofar as repression has distanced it from familiarity—or, in the medieval terms suggested above, the reincarnated Eve cannot return man to prelapsarian trust but instead embodies an uncanny vacillation between accessibility and strangeness. The hag's second shape, together with her supplementary arguments concerning low birth and poverty, do not ac-

¹⁷ Freud's essay restricts uncanny effects in fiction almost entirely to works that "move in the world of common reality" such that introducing the supernatural provides a disorienting contrast similar to that produced by lived experience (250). However, he notes that the class of uncanny effects "which proceeds from repressed complexes is more resistant and remains as powerful in fiction as in real experience" (251).

comply with substitutions but only destabilizations. This is perhaps more evident in the hag's words than in her body. Her curtain lecture does not favor lowborn poverty over gentle wealth but questions the validity of divisions between these categories, reinterpreting the distinction between poverty and wealth, for example, through paradoxes that resist distinction: "he that nocht hath, ne coveteth have, / Is riche, although ye holde hym but a knave" (III 1189-90). Wealth and poverty become mobile doubles of one another rather than isolated states. The hag's bodily transformation is analogous:

And whan the knyght saugh verrailly al this,
That she so fair was, and so yong therto,
For joye he hente hire in his armes two.
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,
And she obeyed hym in every thyng
That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng. (III 1250-56)

How distinct is this young and fair appearance from the ugly old age that it revises? Despite the fairy's claim to a prelapsarian perfection, to equal any wife "syn that the world was newe" (III 1244), a residual presence of the old body within the new is to be suspected. The metaphor for the knight's joy, "his herte bathed in a bath," carries the Wife of Bath's fallen body back on the scene, and the assertion that "she obeyed hym in every thyng" slips into the Wife's combative prayer for "grace t'overbyde hem that we wedde" (III 1260). The knight's bliss does not encompass the full narrative effect of the transformation. As with the argument about gentility and wealth, submissive beauty becomes in this shape-shifting a category that admits its opposite, as low birth has invaded gentility and poverty has paradoxically become a species of wealth. Shape-shifting pleases the "worldly appetit" (III 1218) of the knight but again emphasizes the uncanny indeterminacy of the feminine.¹⁸ We have seen a similar process at work in the search for "what thyng that worldly wommen loven best"

¹⁸ Heng, "Feminine Knots," argues that in *Sir Gawain* femininity is "plural, heterogenous, and provisional, elusively reforming elsewhere just as it might seem most fixedly locatable" (502).

(III 1033), in which the cacophony of possible answers yields to a single response, yet "sovereignty" is itself multiple and indeterminate in meaning. For the *Wife of Bath's Tale* as for other Middle English romances, woman's uncanniness lies in her difference from men but also in an inner differing that defies understanding.

One consequence for this femininity is displacement to the periphery of the narrative. The strangeness inherent in the uncanny becomes emplotted; woman instigates or occasions masculine discoveries and developments whose scene is marked off from and by femininity. Sir Thopas exaggerates the effect in requiring only the idea of an elf-queen for inspiration. In the course of their second interview Gawain takes the Green Knight to be his ally (confessor, host, and fellow knight all in one) and traces the threat and shame of the adventure to the quaint beguiling of "myn honoured ladyez." The relation Gawain finds between them and biblical temptresses who specialize in pratfalls further contrasts them to the Green Knight, who articulates Gawain's adventure as a happy fall into proven excellence among knights.¹⁹ Twice refusing to be reconciled with his feminine adversaries, Gawain makes evident that the homosocial power of this last encounter is based in discounting women: best to love them well and not listen to them, Gawain concludes, "luf hom wel, and leue hem not" (2421).²⁰ The lady's green girdle is but a trace denoting an absence; despite its earlier status as a feminine garment, now the Green Knight declares "hit is my wede þat þou werez, þat ilke wouen girdel." Negotiating the girdle's signification takes place between the two men, and ultimately it joins the men of the Round Table together in a new brotherhood (2358, 2516-20). These closing negotiations transform Morgan's uncanny intervention into an instance of dif-

¹⁹ For some critics Gawain's speech is out of keeping with his courtesy and the poem's thematic structure. Mingled appreciation and wariness do, however, characterize Gawain's encounters with Bertilak's wife, and the moral and gendered distance taken from women in Gawain's speech counterbalances the common ground of chivalric morality that Gawain and the Green Knight share in the closing encounter. Sheila Fisher reviews critical reactions to the speech, 92-93 and 105n.

²⁰ Sedgwick demonstrates the importance in modern literature of bonds between men that are formed in rivalries over women.

ference not so much from as within man: the uncanny contradictoriness attributed to woman brings to light more meaningful tensions in chivalric identity. Knotting the girdle crosswise over his surcoat as a heraldic bend, Gawain charges the pentangle worn "in bytoknyng of trawþe" with "þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne" (626, 2509). His "vntrawþe" modifies his "trawþe" as his own self-difference; woman becomes the adventure through which his self-difference was revealed to him.

Similar narrative developments characterize other romances in which uncanny women exercise their arts. Melior articulates her own silencing when, after losing her magical ability, she becomes the object of many suits and laments to herself that "Men mowe speke and sende with penne and Inke / What they wole, and women mow but þinke" (*Partonope*, 10783-84). Sidelined, she can only hope that Partonope will be able to win her hand in the decisive tournament. Dame Tryamour of *Sir Launfal* keeps her magical power yet makes of herself a mere surface, a body whose only gestures are to reveal itself (riding into court and removing her mantle) or conceal itself (blinding Guinevere and departing). Tryamour does deliver a speech defending Launfal from Guinevere's accusations, but the speech merely glosses the decisive visual proof that Launfal has no need of another lover. For some readers, Marie de France's *Lanval* and the two Middle English works related to it are wish-fulfillment fantasies that express Launfal's masculinity; for other readers, the works' Celtic motifs and narrative structures are primary.²¹ Whether one construes the need that brings the fairy mistress into being as Launfal's or the narrative's, it is a curious irony that the forces generating her must finally make her the object of the court's gaze in order to establish Launfal's identity as a knight of honor and substance. Such narrative objectifications and silencings make a space for the dramatization of masculine interactions, self-difference, and self-development that are the deepest concerns of romance.

The context of romances in which women wield magical power highlights a resistance in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* to effacing fe-

²¹ Good examples of psychologically oriented readings are Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters"; Hanning and Ferrante, ed., *Lais of Marie de France*, 123-25. Examples of analyses focused on narrative patterns are Ménard, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, and Sienaert.

male characters and concerns. In contrast, *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* exaggerates to the point of burlesque the opportunities provided by the plot for subordinating the apparently powerful woman to masculine interactions. To mention only the most salient efforts in this direction, Arthur's adversary Sir Gromer Somer Jour poses the question of what women most desire not in response to a crime against women's sovereignty but to take Arthur's life over a land dispute; the question has no educative intent and indeed is meant to be unanswerable. Sovereignty is not a meaningful problem but a rhetorical ploy, a way of encompassing all possible answers to the question under a single term. As Dame Ragnell puts it, "there is one thyng is alle oure fantasye . . . For where we haue souereynte alle is ourys"; Arthur presents the answer after all other possibilities as the trump that will "rule the, Gomer syre" (420, 425, 472). Ragnell then demands Gawain's hand of Arthur, focusing the plot on the devotion between Arthur and Gawain: "for your love I wolle nott spare," Gawain promises Arthur, and Arthur responds, "My worshypp and my lyf thou savyst for-euere, / Therefore my loue shalle nott frome the dyssevyr" (371, 375-76). Ragnell must win sovereignty over her husband to break the spell on her body, but she subsequently attributes the question to her wicked stepmother and makes a conventionally feminine plea for mercy on Sir Gromer, denying that her goal was really to win a sovereign position. The *Weddyng of Sir Gawen* drives the uncanny woman from the high status her lifesaving knowledge might assign by conceiving that knowledge as a mere trick of rhetoric, by orienting the plot around male animosity and friendship, and by identifying sovereignty simply as a spell-breaker rather than a condition Ragnell herself seeks.

In each respect the *Wife of Bath's Tale* by contrast allows prominence to issues that the text defines as feminine: the worth of women's sovereignty, its relation to rape and marriage, and whether obedience somehow resides within it. Incorporating these issues gives them weight even though their problematic, transgressive framing reasserts the subordination implicit in the romance conception of femininity. The tale's attraction to the subordinated feminine puts a comic spin on the transition "this knyght, of which my tale is specially" (III 983) as it pulls us away

from the long excursus on women's multiple desires. Further, in contrast to Dame Ragnell, who in the end denounces her grotesque body and demands as involuntary manifestations of her stepmother's spell, Chaucer's hag focuses contradictory feminine traits in one figure. She unites a Morganic power over life and death, a submissive, protective desire like Melior's or Tryamour's to marry and to please, and an educative role with the recreant knight that the queen also occupies in the tale. The hag's multiply charged identity compels attention even as it illustrates the unresolvable contradictions that relegate the feminine to liminal positions in romance.

A decisive distancing of the feminine does, however, take place in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* through the association of magic with a lost past. "I speke of manye hundred yeres ago" (III 863), the Wife begins, and the elf-queen is the first instance of the past's distant uncanniness. Louise Fradenberg has shown in the course of placing the *Wife of Bath's Tale* at the conjunction of feudal and capitalist worlds that the romance genre and the concept of woman share absence and alienness at that conjunction, when "the new 'everyday reality' will construct the category of the past as coterminous with the equally fantasmatic category of the woman" ("Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy," 33). Within the already nostalgic world of romance, the hag's time-bending transformation from old to young removes her even further from "everyday reality." The anonymous maiden's fleeting and violated body at the tale's beginning is finally more substantial than the fairies' shifting and disappearing ones.

Yet women's uncanniness represents a complication in the narrative processes that use the feminine to define and concentrate on the masculine. I have argued, for example, that the hag's aged body lingers residually in the young body designed for the knight, such that the knight's bliss does not encompass the reactions invited by the tale's end. Freud's account of an uncanny experience with women can extend this point. "As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small

houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny," he continues, and he locates the source of that feeling in his "helplessness," more precisely in "an unintended recurrence of the same situation" ("Uncanny," 237).

Freud's narrative shares three features with adventures of romance that I have been examining. To begin with the second in the order I have followed, women appear to be peripheral to narrative significance. The perspective is that of the disoriented traveler, and the articulated significance of his adventure is "unintended recurrence"—that is, neither desire for the painted women nor the women themselves figure in the adventure's importance. But would the experience of recurrence have been uncanny if painted women had not been its unintended goal? If the triple return had been to the post office or a central square, would the episode not have been irritating or simply unmemorable rather than disturbing? Women are not so clearly insignificant to this adventure as they are displaced from their centrality at the point of triple return by the interpretive claim that the returns were unintended and were themselves, as process, the source of uncanniness.

Despite the interpretive claim, Freud's narrative effectively configures the women in two ways familiar from romance, through difference from the adventurer and from themselves. Their inviting paint and their self-exposure in the windows are in conflict with the traveler's involition and with their own domestic situation—in a "provincial" town, a "narrow" street, inside their "small" houses. The eruption of woman's sexuality in this foreign yet domestic scene is a return of the repressed analogous to the traveler's uncontrolled return to their small houses. In romance, uncanniness could describe any moment when women seem not to be fully domestic and appropriated, nor clearly beyond the pale morally and socially, but moving somewhere in between.

That indeterminacy makes uncanny women resistant to dismissal and to appropriation alike. In Freud's adventure, dismissing the painted women from significance by locating uncanniness in "unintended recurrence" requires suppressing the possibility of masculine desire, indeed requires suppressing masculine subjectivity altogether. The traveler's reaction to these provincial women is apparently irrelevant, yet their transgressive sexuality resists erasure from the calculus of uncanny effects. Gawain attempts to dismiss uncanny women from his adventure in similar fashion, by aligning the "honoured ladyez" with temptresses of the past and asserting his independent experience of "cowarddye and couetyse." These are masculine failures, Gawain declares, sins against "larges and lewte that longez to knyghtez," the business of Bertilak and himself rather than of women (2374, 2381). Bertilak invites Gawain's interpretation by presenting his own actions as if they were independent of Morgan's designs: "I wrozt it myseluen," he says of the lady's temptations, and "I halde þe polysed of þat plyzt" (2361, 2393). The text's contradictory indications, that Morgan designed the adventure and that her relation to Gawain encompasses enmity and familiarity both, express the limitations of Gawain's and Bertilak's claims.

Uncanniness equally resists inclusion. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, although not strictly invoking feminine magic, builds a tension between expressed masculine interpretations and wider textual implications that centers on the scene in Diana's temple.²² Diana does not promise aid to Emelye, reinforcing the submission to marriage that the gods will decree, but Diana's message takes an uncanny power from her knowledge of what is "writen and confermed" (I 2389) before Mars's gift of victory to Palamon and the dispute among the gods have taken place. The following chapter frames in terms of adventure the tale's effort to fit Emelye and Diana into the Athenian world picture, and the counter-movement that denies their full appropriation.

Magical ability frustrates as well as forwards women's constitution as private treasure and public ornament for men in romance. For example, feminine magic expresses and is even inter-

²² On a number of literary associations between Diana and fairies in medieval literature, see Paton, 228-47.

changeable with the potential for sexual license. Raymondin's brother, persuading Raymondin that he must find out what Melusine is doing on Saturdays, says the rumor is that either she is a fairy or she is committing adultery: "I wot not to whiche of bothe I shal byleue," the brother concludes, but the two accusations might be considered one, that Melusine is not entirely known to her husband, not entirely in his charge (296). Melior falls under similar suspicion for not allowing Partonope to see her. Apparently succumbing to his mother's suspicion that Melior may be concealing a devilish shape, Partonope confesses to the bishop, "Off a synne I moste me shryue. / A loue I haue, wyche in my lyue / Wyth myne eyen yette neuer I seye" (5756-58).²³ The fairy mistress in the Launfal texts exemplifies inappropriation of another kind, in that she sets her status as treasure against her status as ornament. She is totally available to Sir Launfal in secret places but adamantly unavailable in public. Saving Launfal entails reversing those conditions, withdrawing from Launfal in private for the space of a year but then unveiling her body to the court. Perhaps all such oppositions can be dissolved in the fairyland to which they escape, as in the unmagical perpetuity of Melior's marriage to Partonope, but in the romantic space preceding resolution, women's magic complicates their intimacies with men.

Although the *Wife of Bath's Tale* begins by relegating the elf-queen to a distant past and ends by asserting her appropriation to the knight's desires, an association between magic and sexual license pushes against containment. At the outset the Celtic fairies and their Christian exorcists come to resemble one another as if the task of exorcism were not quite achieved: the friars who visit all the elfin haunts are oddly weightless, "as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem" (III 868), and their sexual aggressiveness is a vestige of wilder spirits:

For ther as wont to walken was an elf
 Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself. . . .
 Wommen may go saufly up and down.
 In every bussh or under every tree

²³ Marie de France reverses the genders in this plot of suspicion and shape-shifting in *Bisclavret* (*Lais*, 61-71).

Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.

(III 873-74, 878-81)

The friar follows in the footsteps of an elf who persists in the Christian image of the incubus and its imitator the friar. Sexuality moves irrepressibly across genders from the elf-queen and her company (ladies all when they later appear) to the ravishing friar and knight, and back again to the hag who smiles as her captive husband "walweth and he turneth to and fro" (III 1085). These crossgenderings recall the carnival spirit in which the feminine grotesque usurps masculine sexual aggressiveness.²⁴ The hag's ability to enforce sovereignty, in physical terms at least, further associates woman's empowerment with an unrestrained exercise of female sexuality. The connection between feminine magic and sexual license emphasizes the freedom from containment that each implies. Even at the tale's conclusion this fairy wife like others of romance is not entirely in her husband's control, bound only by her own will to obey.

In Middle English romances, then, the possibility of intimacy with woman does not cancel her strangeness. These narratives trace the manifold difference in woman, her consequent liminality, yet also her consequent resistance to dismissal on the one hand and to appropriation on the other. Uncanniness expresses particularly well the troubling oppositions that mark the feminine at the deepest levels of conception: we might say that shape-shifting naturalizes woman's contradictoriness, and that magical power essentializes her otherness. Feminine uncanniness is enfolded in intimacy as the *unheimlich* depends for its sense on the *heimlich*: woman once familiar and domestic now also disturbingly *unheimlich*—not at home, on the margins, undomesticated, unfamiliar.

²⁴ See chapter 3, pp. 126-31.

Adventure



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. The French noun *aventure* has from before the twelfth century implications of fate and foreordination, as does its use in English, but its dominant later medieval meanings revolve around chance and accident (see Godefroy, Kurath). Romance draws on both senses of the noun in foregrounding the unexplained strangeness of adventurous encounters yet intimating that they have a hidden design. Morton Bloomfield, using adventure to define the difference between romance and other genres, recognizes this double sense of adventure in describing "inexplicable events which seem to have their center above and beyond the poem. . . . Something is happening about which we cannot be clear" (106). Magic and divine forces have a place in adventure not only to signify that apparently random encounters partake of some larger mysterious design but also to heighten the value of characters' success at encountering the unknown. Douglas Kelly argues that it is not merely "aventure" but "aventure merveilleuse" that marks romance, that there is an exceptional quality about the unmotivated challenge whether in its magical or divine origin, its reversal of natural law, or merely its extreme difficulty (146-204). Only beginning with the wonder of talking to birds, the Squire promises to go on "To speken of adventures and of batailles / That nevere yet was herd so grete merveilles" (V 659-60). Thopas's dream of an elf-queen, the Wife of Bath's knight's encounter with a shape-shifting creature, and the "monstre or merveille" of the disappearing rocks in the *Franklin's Tale* (V 1344) instantiate the extraordinary nature of adventure in many romances.