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Anelida and Arcite

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Anelida and Arcite comes to us wrapped in three mysteries. Its origins. Its endings. Its in-between. At first glance, these mysteries might seem so encompassing that they prevent our understanding *Anelida and Arcite* in any meaningful way. Rather than surrender, I suggest we embrace these mysteries and discover what essential questions they ask us to consider. In this way, they provide a useful approach for reading this fascinating, yet enigmatic, poem.

Regarding the its origins, we do not know when the poem was written. For many years, the general consensus placed the poem's composition early in Chaucer's career—in the 1370s—because of its extensive metrical experimentation. This argument assumes that metrical experimentation is the sign of a novice versifier, not the sign of an accomplished prosodist eager to master multiple metrical forms. Deeming the poem an early work because it is experimental, and thereby experimental because it is an early work, creates a circular logic that undermines a firm dating. If we abandon that circularity and instead examine the poem through its literary sources, we can broadly date its composition between 1373 and 1400. The earlier date rests on the poem's debt to Boccaccio's *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia* (ca. 1340-42), which Chaucer may have first encountered during his Italian travels, first to Genoa and Florence for an international trade mission in 1373 and then to Milan and Pavia for secretive diplomatic meetings in 1378. The latest date of composition comes with his death around 1400. That's a wide period, encompassing most of Chaucer's career. If he wrote *Anelida and Arcite* soon after his Italian trips, then only a few works predate it. But we have no way of knowing at this point how much time separated his first reading of *Teseida* and his composition of *Anelida and Arcite*. Rather than trying to pinpoint the poem's date of composition, a better question asks, What are its sources? With that question, we can see that it engages with a wide range of sources that Chaucer was accumulating in the 1370s and 1380s, many of which provided contradictory answers to questions that inform his verse.

A second mystery concerns whether or not the extant poem is complete. The version that appears in most modern Middle English editions—and that is provided in your translation—comprises 357 lines. These lines neatly divide into two major sections, frequently labeled in fifteenth-century manuscripts as “The Invocation and Story” (lines 1-210) and “The compleynt of

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Anelida the quene upon fals Arcite” (lines 211-350), followed by a final seven lines promising more details. Presented with this promissory fragment, we can easily declare the poem “unfinished.” If, however, we turn back to those fifteenth-century manuscripts, we learn something different. In some manuscripts, only “The Invocation and Story” or only “The Complaint of Anelida” is given. Of the twelve surviving manuscripts (a number attesting to the poem’s popularity in the fifteenth century), only four include the concluding stanza with its promise of more. Given Chaucer’s trouble with endings throughout his *oeuvre*, we can read this promissory coda in several ways: Chaucer planned to add more to the poem but never did, he wrote more but those additions have been lost, or a scribe deemed the poem lacking and tacked on this promise (either hoping to come across the “missing lines” or letting his audience know that he recognized the poem’s faulty ending). If, however, we ignore those final seven lines, the two major sections have enough structural integrity either to stand alone as two separate works or to fit together as a single work. Although this mystery of the poem’s ending also remains unsolved, it does invite us to consider how the two major sections (“The Invocation and The Story” and “The Complaint of Anelida”) create a whole that both invites a promissory continuation and does not need one.

The third mystery concerns what actually constitutes *Anelida and Arcite*. As I’ve already indicated, the manuscripts are inconclusive, with some providing both major sections together, others supplying both but interrupting them with other verse, and others providing only one section or the other. Moreover, those that offer both “The Story” and “The Complaint” together do not offer a consistent order. So, while many show the order accepted in modern editions, others reverse that order, with the “Complaint” preceding the “Story.” This mystery might be the most easily solved. If we remember that Chaucer was deeply influenced by the French *dits amoureux* tradition, which often prefaced the lover’s complaint with a contextualizing narrative (making the lover’s first-person utterance more specific, less general), then we can justify reading the two sections in the order given in your edition. Nevertheless, this uncertain relationship between the two sections reminds us to consider more carefully the connections—as well as the disjunctions—between the two major sections.

These issues cannot—and need not—be neatly resolved here. So this Introduction’s discussion will deal with the three mysteries in this provisional way: *Anelida and Arcite* is a mid-career, experimental effort; the two major sections provide us with a complete work, thereby making the promissory (and probably spurious) coda unnecessary; and “The Invocation and Story”

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precedes “The Complaint of Anelida.” We need not stop our inquiry with these provisional answers to the poem’s three textual mysteries. Indeed, we should approach *Anelida and Arcite* as a useful gateway to exploring those recurring aspects of Chaucer’s poetic *oeuvre* that the textual mysteries point to: his juxtapositions of French, Italian, and English sources with striking, non-European details; his exploration of a wronged woman’s limited (legal) options; and his metrical experimentations. Together, these aspects help us see Chaucer wrestling with a paradox: Anelida’s complaint against Arcite—the very vehicle by which Chaucer expresses her anguish—illustrates how women such as Anelida discover that, despite its potential poetic and emotional power, language (whether literary or legal) provides few remedies for the powerless. Simultaneously, he illustrates how the fictitious prison of *faux*-translation liberates his versification and poetics. A technique he uses to great advantage in *The Canterbury Tales*, *faux*-translation allows him to displace responsibility and tell his reader “Blameth nat me” (1.3181). In *Anelida and Arcite*, he creates a “newe” work by covertly assembling multiple literary cultures, languages, and other novelties, all while claiming adherence to a revered, historical precedent. As a result, this account of a wronged woman, whose words offer emotive expression but no means of redress, provides Chaucer opportunities to explore the powers of language as to both imprison and catalyze.

French, Italian, and English Sources

As is true with most of Chaucer’s poetic corpus, we can observe him importing French, Italian, and English narrative elements and poetic techniques into *Anelida and Arcite*. From the French, the poem borrows the courtly style, narrative structure, and Ovidian epistolary laments. The French courtly style marks poems designed for aristocratic diversion, a purely aesthetic practice that draws attention to its technical virtuosity and deploys a host of riddles, *double entendres*, allegory, and allusion. That style bursts forth in the opening stanzas with such lines of lapidary quality as “Singest with vois memorial in the shade.” The *dits amoureux* composed by Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Froissart provide the model for *Anelida and Arcite*’s structure: a lyric complaint embedded in a narrative. And the *Ovide moralise*, medieval French translations of Ovid’s fictional letters written by wronged women to their faithless lovers, provide a precedent for Anelida’s fictional letter to Arcite. Although Chaucer is best remembered as an English poet, his entire output is infused with French influences of this sort, an unremarkable fact when we

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remember the close cultural ties between England and France throughout the late-medieval period, especially at the royal courts that employed Chaucer.

What is remarkable, however, is the deep influence of *trecento* Italian literature. Before Chaucer traveled to Italy in the 1370s, we have no evidence of an Englishman reading Dante, Petrarch, or Boccaccio. While Chaucer's *The House of Fame* signals his first encounter with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Anelida and Arcite* records his ongoing engagement with *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia* (1339-1341), Boccaccio's recasting of Statius' *Thebiad*. The Italian influences announce themselves in the Invocation. In addition to crediting (misleadingly) Statius as his source, Chaucer opens with the Roman poet's epic machinery in *Thebiad*, invoking Bellona and Pallas Athena as his muses ("Be present and my song continue and guy" [6]); Chaucer's verse also follows the epic model of Boccaccio's *Teseida* and invokes Mars ("Thou ferse god of armes" [1]). Chaucer bookends Anelida's complaint with a line "So thirleth with the point of remembraunce" (211 and 350), echoing Dante's "*la puntura della rimembranza*" [the prick of memory] (*Purgatorio* 12.20). By yoking French romances and Italian epic, Chaucer followed the literary vogue he encountered at Bernarbó Visconti's northern Italian court.

As we see elsewhere in Chaucer's verse, the thread connecting the French and Italian literary traditions in *Anelida and Arcite* is English common law's distinctive set of legal phrases and formulas. Whereas Chaucer populates other works with judges, plaintiffs, and defendants bringing forth their attorneys, complaints, petitions, and judgements, the legal thread in *Anelida and Arcite* is more subtle. Here, we witness Chaucer weaving together narrative structures and iconographic motifs—the familiar French romance and the grandiose new Italian heroics—with England's staid juridical terms and tropes. Together, they reimagine the jilted lover's epistolary lament as a wronged plaintiff's legal complaint. When seen as emerging from the English legal tradition, the complaint allows Chaucer's audience to recognize (if not sympathize with) Anelida's limited options for redress.

Into this weave of French, Italian, and English, Chaucer stitches exotic dazzle. Set in Thebes, the story features female characters from Scythia and Armenia, regions encircling the Black Sea and associated in the late-middle ages with the riches and goods brought overland to Europe on the Silk Road. After briefly introducing the reader to Scythia's intrepid Amazons—Hippolyta and Emily—the poem presents Anelida, a character not found in any of his sources, and makes her the displaced "quene of Ermony" (71-72), a reference that echoes the contemporary situation of Levon

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VI, the deposed king of Armenia who was King Richard II's long-term guest and sometime ally in the 1380s. Like the contemporary exiled aristocrat, Anelida provides an ancient version of the displaced cosmopolitan unable to avail herself of the foreign land's laws and legal formulas.

Along with these outside influences is another possible set: Chaucer's own *The Knight's Tale* and *The Squire's Tale*. Told by father-son pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, the first draws heavily on Boccaccio's *Teseida* and features Arcite in a much different guise; the second includes a female falcon whose complaint is very reminiscent of Anelida's. The resonances across the three poems have been used to posit the sequence in which these texts were written. Looked at carefully, though, these propositions are more circular than definitive.

Rather than tug at the strands of influence in order to uncover a date of composition for *Anelida and Arcite* or to plot this poem on a fixed chronology of Chaucer's poetic career, it is more useful to think about the poem's composition in another way. We should see the threads creating the warp and weft of *Anelida and Arcite* as having been gathered over many years from many places. Though the result might be a messy and imperfect weave, the roughness allows us to see how he was working out the contradictions he found across his sources.

A Woman Wronged and Her Limited Options

Most broadly, *Anelida and Arcite* breaks into two components—"The Invocation and The Story" and "The Complaint of Anelida." These components are further divided into a series of seventy-line sections, and further divided into stanzas that display an array of metrical virtuosity discussed in my next segment.

Providing much of the poem's narrative thrust, the first component begins with "The Invocation." The narrator calls upon "Mars the rede" (1) to guide him as he Englishes out of Latin the story of "quene Anelida and fals Arcite" (line 11). And a translation of a Latin source seems exactly what we are going to receive. Immediately following the "Invocation" are three Latin lines from Statius's *Thebiad* describing Theseus's journey home to Athens from war against the Scythians (12.519-21). Chaucer's English story then begins with a stanza providing a fairly close translation of those lines:

Whan Theseus with werres longe and grete

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The aspre folk of Cithe had overcome,
With laurer corouned in his char gold-bete,
Hom to his contree-houses is he come,
For which the peple, blissful al and some,
So cryden that to the sterres it wente,
And him to honouren dide al hir entente. (22-28)

As might have been predicted, Chaucer continues his English text, describing Theseus' triumphant passage through Thebes accompanied by his army, his newly conquered wife Ipolita, and her younger sister Emelye. Rather than continue to follow his Italian source (Boccaccio) or his Latin source (Statius) as *they* follow Theseus "toward Athenes in his wey rydinge" (46), our narrator chooses to pause for a while in Thebes, the classical symbol of discord, faithlessness, and civil conflict. Here, boiling rages have incited slaughter and left the city desolate and open to Creon's tyranny. The stage has been set for a battle over the control of Thebes.

This brief epic opening is, too, abandoned when the narrator pauses again, this time to write about "quene Anelida and fals Arcite" (49). Anelida, "the quene / Of Ermony" (72), is also in Thebes. We're told that she's one of the "noble folk [who] wer to the toun y-drawe" (70), her situation perhaps akin to those of cosmopolitan medieval aristocrats who traveled from one city to another, relying on the magnanimity of their hosts—such as Levon VI of Armenia, the deposed king who toured Europe between 1382 and 1393 seeking help from Christian allies in order to regain his kingdom. This Anelida, a character with no literary precedent, surpasses Penelope and Lucretia in their virtues, and her beauty delights, we are told. Arcite, who appears in both Statius and Boccaccio but not in this guise, was "double in love" (87), crafty and cunning enough to convince Anelida of his fidelity. She pined for him when he was absent, but he only pretended to love her, telling her that he would die for love of her. Truehearted, she believed his false words and gave him everything she had. She hid nothing from him, sharing all her thoughts and personal correspondence with him. Even though he jealously accused her of flirting with other men and she drove herself crazy trying to convince him otherwise, she loved him and devoted all her thoughts and emotions to him. The reader learns before Anelida does that the purpose of Arcite's false accusations was to hid his own infidelity. To distract Anelida from the fact that he has turned his eyes and his affiliation to another, unnamed woman, Arcite uses what we now identify as

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“gaslighting”—a form of psychological manipulation that causes the target to doubt her own memory, perception, and judgment. Thus manipulated and misused, Anelida suffers greatly from his accusations, while Arcite remains entirely undisturbed by her misery. The tables turned on him, though, when his “newe lady” (183) treated him with the same disdain, and he served her to no avail. Summing up this threesome, the narrator closes “The Story” by telling us, “The kinde of mannes herte is to delite / In thing that straunge is, also God me save, / For what he may not gete, that wolde he have” (201-203). Despondent and aware that her options were limited, Anelida decides to write a complaint addressed to “hir Theban knight Arcite” (210).

Although modern editors continue to follow W. W. Skeat’s (1835-1912) decision to identify the sections of “The Complaint” as a Proem, a Strophe, an Antistrophe, and a Conclusion, none of these labels appear in the manuscripts. A more telling approach sees “The Complaint” as a variant of a standard document found in Medieval English common law, the legal complaint (or petition), comprising five basic elements: a courteous opening address; a formulaic phrase in the third person (like “beseketh” or “sheweth”); an identification of the complainant and her legal status; an exposition where the petitioner lists the wrongs for which they seek remedy; and a closing statement of the remedy sought. Anelida’s complaint roughly follows this standard order. This formula, however, is obscured by Anelida’s self-interruptions, her backtracking, and her contradictions, all of which reflect her “awhaped countenance” (215).

Anelida’s complaint skips the courteous formalities and moves immediately to identifying herself in the third person—“That serveth love” (217)—and then moving in the second stanza to briefly describing herself and her legal status. Telling us that she “wot myself as wel as any wight / For I loved oon with al my herte and might / .../ And called him my hertes lyf, my knight” (220-223), she identifies herself through her own self-knowledge and through her relationship to Arcite, who “ageyn his trouthe hath me plight / For evermore, his lady me to kythe” (227-228). In these ways, Anelida identifies herself as the complainant in this case against Arcite.

From here, she begins an exposition of his trespasses, succinctly summarized as “he is fals, allas, and causeless” (229). Though her complaint is studded with legal terms—such as “pleyne” (237, 238), “vouche-sauf” (254), “causeles” and “cause” (257), and “adversitee” (258, 276)—her confusion and her distrust of the limited mechanisms for seeking remedy are immediately manifest when she interrupts her complaint by saying, “of al this I not to whom me pleyne” (237). Unlike

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the standard legal complainant, Anelida doesn't have the legal recourse of a courtroom, and turning to Arcite seems counterproductive.

She wonders why she should “pleyne.../ Unto my fo that yaf myn herte a wounde / And yet desyreth that my harm be more” (238-240). However, once she realizes that there is “noon other helpe” (242), she switches her address to Arcite, indicated by the second-person *ye*, and asks him “wher is become your gentillesse[?]” (247), giving details of his mistreatment of her (but with no indication of another woman being the source of his absence). In one of the poem's two long, sixteen-line stanzas, she prefaces the remedies sought by appealing to his “manly reson” (259), which should show how illogical is his cruel disdain for her.

Then, she warns him about the repercussions of his continued perfidy: Not only does her loyalty deserve better, but his reputation will suffer when it's learned that he “love[s] a newe and [has] been untrewē” (274). This line is her first (and only) indication that Arcite has turned to a new woman. She seems to conclude her complaint with a clear statement of her requested remedy: “Yet come ageyne, and be al pleyn som day / And than shal this, that now is mis, be game / And al foryive, whyle that I live may” (278-280). Come back and be true, she pleads, and all will be forgiven.

Her complaint, however, does not end here, and she reconsiders the terms of her petitioning complaint. Continuing to address Arcite, she realizes the irrationality of the remedy she seeks. How can she ever be certain of his fidelity? And because she cannot depend on his being true to her, she imagines her death as her only alternative. Remembering that she has already murdered herself with “privy thought” (291), she tosses that option aside, saying her suffering has been enough already. In suing for his love, or begging for his forgiveness (when she is, in fact, guiltless), she would not only betray herself but also reap no gain from the effort. She realizes that “ful longē agoon I oughte have taken hede” (307). Expecting Arcite to return and be her faithful lover is a fool's errand, she seems to conclude.

Fewer than twenty lines after rejecting the option of begging his forgiveness, she pivots and asks “Have I seyde ought amis, I preye? / I not; my wit is aweye” (318-319). Only in her dreams does his “figure / Bifore [her] stant, clad in asure, / To profren eft and newe assure / For to be trewe, and mercy me to preye” (329-332). Throughout her rambling complaint, we have watched Anelida interrupt herself, repeat herself, become disoriented, and suddenly change course. Though she begins as an epic character, her emotions are not expressed with an epic's terse epigrams or

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finely polished lyrics. In this break with epic precedents, Chaucer translates his heroine's emotions into turmoiled language of the *dits amoureux* tradition.

The Complaint's concluding stanza admits that her petition will not provide her ease as long as memories of Arcite continue to torture her. "The Complaint of Anelida" closes with her resigned to her plight. He will never return and be faithful, and she will return where her complaint began: continuing to be tortured by the "point of remembrance" (211 and 350), the sharp prick of memory. Whereas a legal complaint *should* initiate action—that is its purpose, after all—here Anelida's complaint simply stops before returning to where it began, the "point of remembrance." The complaint is the only tool she has—she follows the legal rules for obtaining recourses—and yet it is ineffective, thereby inviting us to wish for more, a wish that some of Chaucer's earliest readers made real by adding the promissory stanza. Unable to achieve any redress for Arcite's trespasses against her, the complaint halts the narrative with its circularity and apparent stasis. Able to remember everything yet understand nothing, Anelida has nothing but her undelivered (and perhaps undeliverable) complaint.

Metrical Experimentation

To convey Anelida's emotional turmoil and mental confusion, Chaucer brings to bear an array of stanza lengths, metrical lines, and rhyme schemes, many of which he learned (and then adapted) from his French and Italian contemporaries. For instance, "The Invocation and Story" is 210 lines of rhyme royal. These thirty stanzas, each with seven decasyllabic lines rhyming *ababbcc*, predominately rhyme with words rooted in English's Germanic lexicon rather than its Romance acquisitions, illustrating that fourteenth-century English language's adaptability to the metrical and semantic lessons Chaucer was gleaning from his Latinate sources. After the steady metrical presentation of "The Invocation and Story," "The Complaint of Anelida" abruptly shifts to longer stanzas and fewer rhymes modeled on French complaints using the otherwise uncommon sixteen-line stanza with two rhymes (*aaab aaab bbba bbba*) and a mixture of four-syllable lines with octosyllabic or decasyllabic lines. Chaucer imitates this French model in two of the complaint stanzas (258-271 & 317-32), precisely replicating the rhyme scheme but combining both (and only) octosyllabic and decasyllabic lines. The remaining stanzas in Anelida's complaint shift slightly from this model and comprise nine lines, also with two rhymes (*aab aab bab*). In "The

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Complaint,” the stanzas are filled with *rimes riches* (rhyming homonyms), a stanza of monorhyme, and stanzaic forms mirroring one another. Anelida’s complaint begins and ends with the same line, completing the complaint’s circular path. Some of these elements, such as the longer line and use of stanzas, appear in Chaucer’s other poetry. Others, such as the sixteen-line complaint stanza, appear here and nowhere else.

It is a dazzling display, but to what purpose? While we can view this metrical mélange as being akin to a needlepoint sampler displaying all the “stitches” he has mastered, such a limited perspective underestimates the degree to which Chaucer understood meter as a direct way to create and convey meaning. To see how he links meter and meaning, we can look at two stanzas, one in the “The Story” and one in “Anelida’s Complaint.”

Towards the end of “The Story,” the narrator describes Anelida’s anguish over Arcite’s betrayal:

She wepeth, waileth, swowneth pitously,
To grounde deed she falleth as a stoon;
Craumpissheth hir limes crookedly;
She speketh as hir wit were al agoon;
Other colour than ashen hatsh she noon,
Noon other word speketh she, moche or lite,
But “Mercy, cruel herte myn, Arcite!” (169-175)

Here, we see Chaucer taking advantage of the metrical regularity defining the previous twenty-three stanzas —what has been called a “plain style” of “well-balanced lines” evoking dullness and weariness rather than sympathy with the plight of a wronged woman. In abrupt contrast, this stanza’s first line, with its firm end-stop, introduces four more lines, each one bringing the reader into the drama of Anelida’s anguish. The first line whisks us along with its five iambs and alliteration. The second line cause us to stumble momentary with its three unaccented syllables between “fall-” and “stoon.” The third line throws us to the ground, combining a shorter nine-syllable line with a crooked metrical line introduced by a heavy-footed “Craumpissheth.” As we read the line, we physically feel Anelida’s grief. The next three lines continue the metrical

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irregularity, until the final line returns us to five iambs, her message loud and clear, and demonstrating Chaucer's ability to meld his message to the meter.

The second stanza, one of many we could examine in "Anelida's Complaint," doubles-down on her efforts to impose meaning on her experience and seemingly concludes her complaint with a warning and her requested remedy:

My swete fo, why do ye so, for shame?
And thinke ye that furthered be your name,
To love a newe and been untrewē? Nay!
And putte yow in sclaunder now and blame,
And do to me adversitee and grame,
That love yow most—God, wel thou wost—alway
Yet come ageyne, and be al pleyn som day,
And than shal this, that now is mis, be game,
And al foryive, whyle that I live may. (272-280)

Nine lines each perfectly streaming five iambs might initially make this stanza seem undistinguished. The *aabaabbab* rhyme scheme, though tight, sheds little light beyond the rhyming pair *shame* and *name*. But if we take a closer look, we notice that within each line is another series of rhymes falling on the fourth and eight syllables of each line: *fo/so*, *ye/be*, *newe/untrewē*, *yow/now*, *me/-tee*, *most/wost*, *ageyn/pleyn*, *this/mis*, *yive/live*. Again, beyond a being a virtuosic display of versification, how does this double rhyme scheme convey meaning? First, by drawing attention to some significant antitheses and links, this additional rhyme scheme presents Anelida's only acknowledgment that Arcite has set his heart on someone "newe." Before this assertion, the narrator has informed the reader of Arcite's other woman, but Anelida has rested her complaint's case on his inexplicable, unprovoked mental and emotional cruelty. Unless she acknowledges the other woman's draw on Arcite, his behavior can make no sense to her. But here, at the moment she mentions the other woman for the first and only time, the double rhyme embedded within each line mimics what Anelida would otherwise deny: there's more going on than she wants to acknowledge.

Exotic Novelties

Among those things going on that Anelida doesn't want to acknowledge is her paradoxical complicity with "newfangledness" (141), a complicity she shares with Chaucer. While her complaint targets Arcite's desire for a "newe" love, it also transforms England's worn legal forms and terms with an infusion of imported metrical and rhetorical fireworks, thereby creating "newe" forms of English verse.

The crux of the poem's interpretation rests on two rhyming words: "trewe" and "newe." Peppered throughout the poem, and repeatedly placed in positions that accentuate their rhyme, they require us to consider their unstable semantics. "Trewe" can mean loyal, conforming to one's troth (or oath). Because Arcite has repeatedly made claims about Anelida's behavior and intentions that she knows are untrue, her wish that he be "true" surely points to her desire that he stop gaslighting her. "Newe" points to the deictic and unstable nature of newness, a semantic instability Anelida cannot escape. She, herself a "quene of Ermony," bears a title that in Chaucer's day associated her both with the glittering exoticism of the Silk Road and the dangers of Asian empires. Armenia was the linchpin connecting Mediterranean merchants and Asian traders, and it was Christianity's last kingdom staving off Mongol and Mamluk control of western Asia. For Chaucer's readers, the "quene of Ermony" would have evoked a Christian stronghold recently vanquished, as well as the treasures and wealth that passed through that ancient kingdom. A stranger in Thebes, Anelida was once herself "newe." As the poem shows us repeatedly, in and of itself newness is not bad. But newness is easily recast as "old" and replaced by something newer. Those who seek "newfangledness" are easily lured away by the newest morsel to capture their attention.

When we read *Anelida and Arcite*, we see Chaucer in the process of exploring what it *really* means to create something new via translation. His is not an enterprise with the modest claim of moving meaning—unscathed and unmarked—from one language to the next. He realizes that translation has no patience with modest changes. The entire translation is a text that didn't exist before: *all* the words are added; *all* the words are different. A translation is a new text that never existed before. Knowing that opens up all sorts of opportunities for Chaucer. After starting the epic machinery that opens Boccaccio's *Teseide*, he seems to wonder, What if I focus on only Arcite? What if he had earlier affairs before the Theban wars? What if an Armenian queen

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(possibly exiled from her own kingdom) were there? Aware that translation, at its heart, creates new texts, Chaucer pushes aside any questions of (re)creating an English text equivalent to his Italian sources. He does not, however, abandon the useful guise of translation. Although the resulting poem is not a translation *per se*, he presents it as one because translation justifies his generic explorations and metrical swagger. He can present his verse as fully outside his creative agency while making full use of the choices his international, intertextual collection supplies. And, as *Anelida and Arcite* explores, the literary restrictions he claims for himself allows him to explore the legal restrictions in which women find themselves.

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