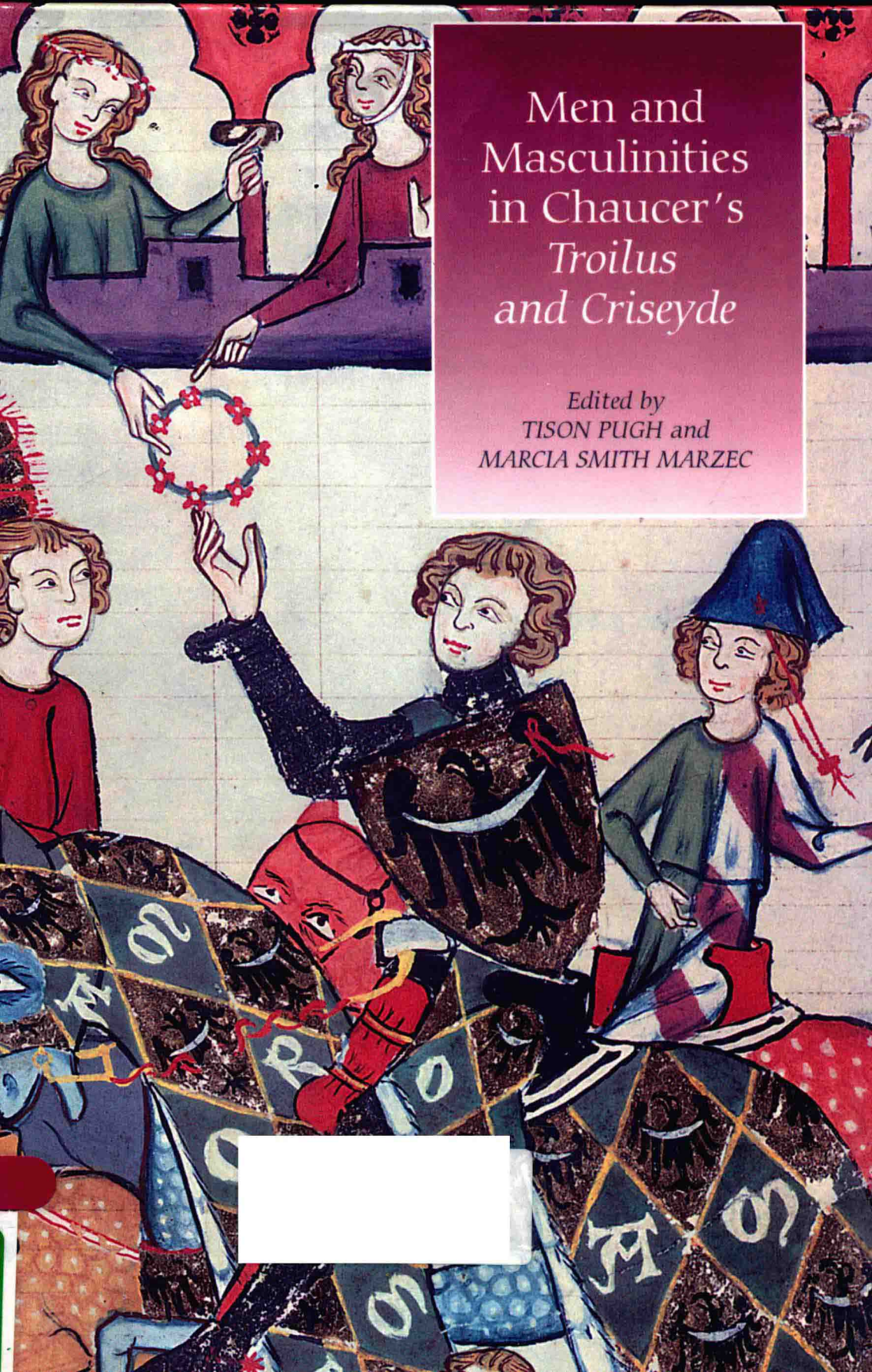

Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Edited by
TISON PUGH and
MARCIA SMITH MARZEC

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Abbreviations

BMMA	Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York: Garland, 1997)
ChauR	*Chaucer Review*
CIMM	Jacqueline Murray, ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York: Garland, 1999)
CTC	R. A. Shoaf, ed., *Chaucer's* Troilus and Criseyde*: "Subjit to alle poesy": Essays in Criticism* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992)
CTEC	Stephen Barney, ed., *Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1980)
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	*English Literary History*
ETC	Mary Salu, ed., *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979)
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JMEMS	*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*
MC	Peter Beidler, ed., *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the* Canterbury Tales *and* Troilus and Criseyde (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998)
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
MH	*Medievalia et Humanistica*
MM	Clare Lees, ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)
MME	D. M. Hadley, ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1999)
MP	*Modern Philology*
NPC	Cindy Vitto and Marcia Smith Marzec, eds., *New Perspectives on Criseyde* (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 2004)
PLL	*Papers on Language and Literature*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
SAC	*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
SP	*Studies in Philology*
YLS	*Yearbook of Langland Studies*

All quotations of Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). In quotations of medieval literature, we have used modern equivalents for medieval letters.

Contents

Introduction: The Myths of Masculinity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

TISON PUGH, MICHAEL CALABRESE and MARCIA SMITH MARZEC

What is a man? What groups together approximately half of the humans on this planet, in contrast to the other half? Jacqueline Murray states it bluntly, noting that the male genitals are "inextricably linked to a man's sense of self and his masculine identity."[1] Although this formulation may appear somewhat stark, it is not to be left aside, for the physical form upon which masculinity is enacted and thus reproduced must be taken into account in analyzing the intersections between masculinities (the cultural constructions of gender in relation to male bodies) and men. Beyond the physical presence of genitals on male bodies, men are also expected to perform sexually in the enactment of masculinity.[2] Confronting these bald facts helps us to achieve the goals of masculinity studies, one of which is, as Murray states, to "reinsert men into the picture, men *qua* men, men in their historical and cultural specificity."[3] Thus, we see that penises – those floppy appendages, subject to irrepressibly awkward and sometimes invited tumescence – matter; they make men, and although we need not dip too deeply into psychoanalysis in this brief introduction, they also highlight fundamental biological differences between men and women that influence other factors of personal identity. In offering this volume of essays, *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's* Troilus and Criseyde, we hope to continue the ongoing process of understanding the ways in which gender and sexuality underpin (and at times undermine) human relationships.

Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde explores issues relating to the male characters and the construction of masculinities within Chaucer's masterpiece of love gained and love lost. The volume addresses the questions of what it means to be a man in the Middle Ages, what constitutes

1 Jacqueline Murray, "Introduction," *CIMM*, p. xv.

2 The history of performance anxiety is worthy of its own study. To look at one brief example, Shannon McSheffrey explores the "importance of virility and sexual prowess in male reputation" from a case in London in 1515 in which "Robert Harding testifies that he had bedded the 'whore' Katherine Worsley simply to prove that he could, because otherwise Katherine might tell women in the parish that he was impotent and scuttle his courtship of a wealthy widow" ("Men and Masculinity in Late Medieval London Civic Culture: Governance, Patriarchy, and Reputation," *CIMM*, 243–78, at p. 265).

3 Jacqueline Murray, "Introduction," p. x.

masculinity in this era, how masculinities are culturally constructed (despite their cultural contradictions), and how gaps between historical men and literary representations of men enable fantasies of male identity to flourish; it seeks to advance scholarly understanding of the themes, characters, and actions of *Troilus and Criseyde* through the hermeneutics of medieval and modern conceptions of masculinity. For example, Troilus is subject to multiple and conflicting interpretations, especially in regard to the intersections of his masculinity with his sexual performance, his masochistic suffering, and his embodiment of a heroic ethos second only to his brother Hector's. Likewise, Pandarus plays on the borders of normative male identities, especially in regard to the latent homoeroticism in his relationship with Troilus. Minor characters such as Hector and Diomede give Chaucer room to consider further the range of masculine behavior and to establish comparative touchstones through which to analyze the masculine behavior of his protagonist. Even Criseyde has a place in this collection, for if gender is socially constructed, we can examine her masculinity in terms of how she oscillates between gendered positions ostensibly suggestive of feminine and masculine behaviors; we can also use her relationships with the male characters as a lens for examining the creation and maintenance of masculine identity. In sum, the circulating masculinities of *Troilus and Criseyde* structure much of the meaning of this enigmatic text; this collection of essays expands critical discussions of the ways in which Chaucer depicts contradictory models of masculinity within his re-creation of the Trojan world.

Since Clare Lees's *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, numerous important studies of medieval men have appeared that query the cultural meanings of maleness in the Middle Ages, including Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler's *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, D. M. Hadley's *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, Jacqueline Murray's *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, Ruth Mazo Karras's *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, and William Burgwinkle's *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature*.[4] These studies analyze men from a variety of perspectives, but they unite in underscoring the necessity of looking for various masculinities and the diversity of their embodiments rather than at an overarching sense of masculinity. Refuting decades of scholarship that viewed maleness as an unproblematic reflection of the ruling half of the aristocracy, scholars now demand a new perspective by "revis[ing] the emphasis on 'hegemonic' males – the kings, princes, lawmakers, and so forth – that can obscure the rich and varied evidence for men's history in ways similar to the better-known silencing of women's history."[5] As is well understood, a scholarly emphasis on hegemonic masculinity marginalizes women, and this

[4] Citational information for the essay collections of Lees, Cohen and Wheeler, Hadly, and Murray are available in the "Abbreviations" section, p. ix. See also Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) and William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[5] Clare Lees, "Introduction: Men's Studies, Women's Studies, Medieval Studies," *MM*, xv–xxv, at p. xv.

dynamic must be investigated and exposed if we are to understand the ways in which women's experience has been obscured from the historical record; similarly, nonhegemonic men often suffer under cultural constructions of dominant masculinity in which they cannot participate, and so too must these dynamics be explored in all of their sociohistoric complexity if we are to comprehend who benefits and who loses from ideological constructions of gender.

As the most significant effort to date in Chaucerian masculinities studies, Peter Beidler's *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the* Canterbury Tales *and* Troilus and Criseyde includes many remarkable essays and has greatly advanced gender criticism of Chaucer's works. Masculinity studies tend to proceed with caution because some scholars feel that feminist readers will see the study of men as somehow antithetical or hostile to feminist projects. Consider, therefore, Beidler's prefatory apologia: "It goes without saying – but let me say it anyhow – that it is not part of our project to 'erase' women by spending all these pages on masculinities."[6] One sees eight years later a similar disclaimer by Ruth Mazo Karras: "It should go without saying – but perhaps does not – that a feminist scholar's writing a book on men and masculinity does not represent a recantation of feminist views."[7] In this climate of politicized caution, it is apparent that masculinities studies must acknowledge the need for continued focus on feminist studies. Studying men is not an attempt to turn the tide back against women but to advance the study of both genders – as well as the contested cultural space between them – and their role in building men and women.

As masculinities studies emerges not simply as another critical approach that manufactures politicized readings according to canned rhetorical models but as a valid historical inquiry into human lives not studied or understood during or before feminism, one hopes that these *apologiae* will no longer be necessary. Additionally, like many masculinities, feminist, and gender studies in the 1980s and 1990s, Beidler's volume relies on the assertion that "Chaucerian masculinity is more a matter of gender than of sex. That is, masculinity has little to do with one's biology but much with one's reaction to and relations with others."[8] Hadley avers that "it has come to be accepted that gender is socially constructed,"[9] and Karras likewise declares "'[m]asculinity' does not refer to the male body, whose biological and anatomical features remain relatively constant among different men and over time, but rather to the meanings that society puts on a person with a male body, which do change over time."[10] As is apparent from these citations, Judith Butler's theories of gender as a performative system of meaning informs much literary analysis, as she trenchantly observes that gender creates a double bind of identity enacted both consciously and unconsciously:

6 Peter Beidler, "Introduction," *MC*, 1–5, at p. 3.

7 Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, pp. 18–19.

8 Peter Beidler, "Introduction," p. 3. This is not true of all the essays in *Masculinities in Chaucer*, but it is asserted by Beidler as one of the "most general theses" of the volume (p. 3).

9 D. M. Hadley, "Introduction: Medieval Masculinities," *MME*, p. 1.

10 Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 3.

> If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.[11]

The ideological forces that create and regulate identities require people – in both their consciousnesses and their bodies – to enact genders, but this does not therefore construe gender as a "natural" and "true" representation of reality. Gender can be understood as a biologically inflected mythology of identity, one grounded in a body that nonetheless reveals the at times arbitrary connections between bodies and genders.

The distinction between nature and nurture is critical to understanding the ways in which gender roles conscript and coerce "appropriate" behaviors, but this distinction potentially excludes the realities of the body, which has, for its part, also been one of the major concerns of medieval studies in the past twenty years.[12] We seem to have a sense that gender is constructed solely to preserve oppression and patriarchy: as the evolutionary psychologist Anne Campbell puts it, "the prevailing dogma is that the distinction between men and women is a collective and tyrannical fiction."[13] Social roles make demands of both men and women, but the roles may, far from being entirely arbitrary or perniciously designed to oppress women, be rooted to some degree in biology, physical strength, sex drives, and the different roles in procreation and competition, as has been studied widely in the scientific community. Campbell addresses both the naiveté and the political opportunism of those who belittle biology in favor of social construction and relativistic arguments about sexual roles and behavior.[14]

Performative and citational analyses of gender should not thus be discarded but further investigated, and the same holds true for studies of sexuality. The dominant models of sexuality in the twenty-first century – heterosexuality and homosexuality – ask us to see a great divide between desires, culturally lionizing the former and typically casting the latter with suspicion, if not outright

[11] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1. See also her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[12] Recent studies of the body in the Middle Ages include Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005); Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Burr Litchfield (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton, eds., *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000).

[13] Anne Campbell, *A Mind of Her Own: The Evolutionary Psychology of Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1.

[14] See, in particular, her introductory chapter, "Biophobia and the Study of Sex Differences," pp. 1–33, which summarizes the debates about sex typing, social conditioning, and human biology, as well as Simon Baron Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women, and the Extreme Male Brain* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

denigration. Transporting modern notions of sexuality back to the Middle Ages carries enormous hermeneutic risks, and scholars such as Karma Lochrie and James Schultz warn that today's sexual models cannot be used to analyze sexualities of the Middle Ages: "it seems reckless, to say the least, for medievalists to continue to use the crude, ham-fisted concept of heteronormativity to describe medieval sexualities and desires," declares Lochrie.[15] Schultz agrees: "The Middle Ages had no notion of sexual orientation."[16] Modern sexual norms cannot be ahistorically transported to the past to make sense of a past that is so different from our present.

But if sexual orientation was not a category of interest to the people of the Middle Ages, sexual activity was, and scores of writings document the ways in which sexual acts and actors were praised and condemned, celebrated and mocked. We must try to recapture the different constructions of sexual normativity in the Middle Ages within their proper social contexts, whether, for example, the "aristophilia" Schultz documents in courtly literature or the continued focus on disruptive sexualities in monasteries.[17] Lochrie and Schultz are correct that heteronormativity, as we understand the term today, did not exist in the Middle Ages, but codes of normativity in relation to sexuality certainly did exist, as penitential manuals, law codes, and the literary record attest. With *Troilus and Criseyde*, the problems of defining normativity – whether the normativity of gender or of sexuality – in relation to any code of conduct becomes increasingly difficult because we must also contextualize which normative codes Chaucer might be employing for his tale: those of the fourteenth-century English court as filtered through centuries of French romances and French courtiers, or those of his re-creation of classical Trojan society as mediated through his sources? Does Chaucer write the masculinities of *Troilus and Criseyde* looking through the lens of fourteenth-century Catholicism, or of English civic culture? The various mythologies of masculinity generated within each of these overlapping yet discrete arenas testify to the complexity of pinpointing masculinity and its effects. With so many competing and, at times, complementary mythologies about the meanings of maleness, it becomes difficult, and possibly counterproductive, to isolate a dominant model of Chaucerian masculinity, as this could obscure the ways in which multiple masculinities function together.

What scholars of medieval gender and sexuality are faced with, then, is the murkiness of the past. Its genders and sexualities are recognizably different from our own, yet, adding another level of complexity to an already rich amalgam, our

[15] Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. xvii.

[16] James Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 57.

[17] See James Schultz, "Aristophilia," in *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, pp. 79–98. For disruptive sexualities in monasteries, see such studies as Christopher Jones, "Monastic Identity and Sodomitic Danger in the *Occupatio* by Odo of Cluny," *Speculum* 82.1 (2007): 1–53; V. A. Kolve, "Ganymede / *Son of Getron*: Medieval Monasticism and the Drama of Same-Sex Desire," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 1014–67; Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

own experiences with our genders, bodies, desires, and sexualities necessarily provide another filter through which to view the past. Particularly for readers of literature, such a dual perspective can be more liberating than limiting. We want to understand the Middle Ages on its own terms, but that does not therefore entail the need to experience literature as it was experienced by its original audience. Rather, the perpetual anachronism inherent in any act of reading – in that every time a text is picked up subsequent to its penning, it is a little bit further from its historical circumstances – creates a new space to consider gender and sexuality in the past in relation to gender and sexuality in the present.

To study gender and sexuality, then, is to study a cultural mythology peculiar to its time and place that nonetheless bubbles with meaning in relation to both its past and its future. Mythologies matter: they comprise the spoken and unspoken guidelines of a society, yet they rarely communicate precisely. Roland Barthes claims that "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion."[18] Scholars must simultaneously decode and pierce these mythologies to deflate them of their sacrosanct status while nonetheless recognizing the significance of their cultural work. This is the perspective we adopt in this volume: that the mythologies of gender and sexuality in general, and of masculinity and normative sexuality in particular, matter, but these mythologies must be explored if one is to understand other mythologies as well. As Holly Crocker declares, one of the most pervasive mythologies of masculinity limns it as invisible and thus as completely natural: "As *the marker* of the ordinary, masculinity gathers material power by putting on the veil of visible neutrality."[19] Normative masculinity proceeds through the invisibility made possible by mythology, and in this system, the visible are the different, the Other(ed). The marginalized are no less mythic, and the contributors to this volume, despite their kaleidoscopic variety in theoretical approaches, unite in tackling the cultural myths of masculinity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The first two essays of *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's* Troilus and Criseyde look at the meaning of masculinity in relationship to constructions of monarchy and sovereignty. In "'Beautiful as Troilus': Richard II, Chaucer's Troilus, and Figures of (Un)Masculinity," John Bowers examines Chaucer's depictions of masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde* and certain *Canterbury Tales* as mirroring the suspect masculinities of Richard II's court. Citing Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*, which describes Richard as "beautiful as Troilus," Bowers argues that the elegant but sexually inept young Troilus impugns the masculine performance of Richard in his own marriage. In "The State of Exception and Sovereign Masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Robert Sturges approaches his subject from the perspective of Giorgio Agamben's political theory, investigating the operation of a specifically sex-linked biopolitics in Chaucer's poem. Sturges concludes that the poem can be seen as both resisting and reinforcing sovereign male power, and he discusses the meaning of this ambiguity in relation to definitions of masculine privilege.

[18] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), p. 129.
[19] Holly Crocker, *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 1; her italics.

Troilus's masculinity is frequently questioned, and the next four essays address this character in his somewhat contradictory roles as romance lover and epic hero. Responding to recent criticism that castigates Troilus for his famous swoon and suggests his sexual inadequacy, Gretchen Mieszkowski, in "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," traces the history of the male swoon in romance literature of the Middle Ages to defend Troilus from aspersions against his masculinity. She explains that the faint was geared to show Troilus's sensitivity and spiritual greatness, as well as the magnitude of his love. Examining the allusions to Hector in *Troilus and Criseyde*, as well as the character's actual appearances, and drawing upon the audience's knowledge of the character from other, earlier medieval treatments, Marcia Smith Marzec argues that Chaucer uses the hero Hector as Troilus's foil to illustrate the inverse relationship between martial and sexual prowess. Her essay, "What Makes a Man? Troilus, Hector, and the Masculinities of Courtly Love," shows that sexual involvement outside marriage weakens and feminizes a knight. James Paxson contrasts markedly "male" activity regarding the tracing or realizing of architecture and building (in the architecture of Pandarus's house) with the poem's enshrinement of nonsanctioned activities that define the lover as lover. His essay, "Masculinity and Its Hydraulic Semiotics in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," reveals that the semiotically charged moment of the lover Troilus's spilling of ink and tears onto his initial letter to Criseyde, collated with his correspondent male and dominant action upon his desires, programs the poem's opposition to the biophysical paradigm of potential masculinity through biblical allegory. In "Masochism, Masculinity, and the Pleasures of Troilus," Holly Crocker and Tison Pugh explore the dichotomy between Troilus's masochistic pain and the readers' desire for pleasure. Troilus's pain in courtly love, as well as the ways in which Chaucer hints that Troilus discovers some latent pleasure in his pain, structures the unfolding narrative and multiplies readers' pleasures.

Criseyde's vexed relationship to men and masculinities serves as the basis of the two following chapters. In "'The Dreams in Which I'm Dying': Sublimation and Unstable Masculinities in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Kate Koppelman investigates Criseyde and her particular relationship to the creation and maintenance of masculine identity throughout Chaucer's poem. As a focus of the males' sublimated desires and the locus of their sense of identity, Criseyde reveals (through her fears, dreams, and reading) the fantasies that highlight the instability of those masculine subject positions that look to her for confirmation and sanction. In "'A Mannes Game': Criseyde's Masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Angela Jane Weisl examines Criseyde's occupation of the male space of the narrative that is vacated by Troilus through his courtly love behavior. The essay maintains that Criseyde is condemned in the later books because of her acts of self-protection and that the condemnation results not from her rejection of her position as the masculinized lady created by the romance genre, but rather in her at least partially successful attempt to preserve it.

In many ways, spectatorship is a gendered act, and the subsequent two essays of *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's* Troilus and Criseyde explore the dynamics of vision and masculinity in the text. In "Troilus's Gaze and the