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Resistance to Chaucer in *Tottel's Miscellany*

This paper includes material which will be published in the chapter 'Chaucer's Presence in *Songes and Sonettes*' in Stephen Hamrick (ed.), *Re-reading Tottel's Miscellany* (Ashgate, forthcoming 2013).

In some respects, *Tottel's Miscellany* is a profoundly Chaucerian collection. In its interest in Petrarch and courtly love poetry, it follows a trajectory set by Chaucer, and it is saturated with words and tropes from a wide range of Chaucer's writing.

The fact that Chaucer had a strong influence on the collection is not surprising. In 1557, when *Tottel's Miscellany* was first published, Chaucer's reputation had been high for a century and a half, and he was embedded in print. The *Canterbury Tales* had already been printed in four different editions,[1] and the first complete edition was printed by William Thynne in 1532, two more editions by Thynne appearing in 1542 and 1545.[2]

Chaucer's prestige is explicit in the *Miscellany*. In Surrey's elegy to Wyatt, 'W. resteth here, that quick could never rest', Chaucer's role is to stand as England's greatest poet – until he is displaced by Wyatt. Wyatt is characterized as 'A hand, that taught, what might be said in rime:/That reft Chaucer the glory of his wit' (13–14).[3] Chaucer is thus invoked as a pillar of the literary tradition in which Surrey wishes to locate Wyatt.

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[1] See James Simpson, 'Chaucer's presence and absence, 1400–1550' in Jill Mann and Piero Boitani (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 251–69, p. 269, note 21.

[2] For a discussion of sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer, see Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 109–43. See also Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473–1557* (Oxford University Press, 2006), and Simpson, 'Chaucer's presence and absence'.

[3] This and all subsequent quotations from the *Miscellany* are from Amanda Holton and Tom MacFaul (eds.), *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others* (London: Penguin, 2011).

Yet Chaucer's role in the *Miscellany* is not a straightforward one. Surrey's comment that Wyatt 'reft Chaucer the glory of his wit', which both lauds and resists Chaucer, is a microcosm of the way Chaucer is treated throughout the book. Remarkably, only one of Chaucer's poems is included in the *Miscellany*, the moral ballade 'Truth' (poem 207),[4] and it is found in the 'Uncertain Authors' section. This may be because the editor was genuinely unsure of its authorship, but given that the text was probably taken from Thynne's edition of Chaucer, it is more probable that the poem was deliberately anonymized in the interests of foregrounding Surrey and Wyatt, and in a sly challenge to Chaucer.

As this suggests, the poetry of the *Miscellany* interacts with Chaucer's work in a conscious and purposeful way. Some of the most important aspects of Chaucer's work are strongly resisted in the *Miscellany*, either ignored, dismissed or challenged. These elements include Chaucer's sympathetic engagement with women, particularly wronged women, and his interest in female speech and particularly female complaint.

Gavin Douglas, objecting to Chaucer's pro-Dido retelling of the *Aeneid*, famously charged Chaucer with being 'evir... all wommanis frend'.[5] This sympathy for women is absent from most love poems in the *Miscellany* which are almost exclusively male-voiced lyrics preoccupied with the pain inflicted on the lover by a lady who is frequently unfeeling, cruel, or faithless.[6] These poems only very rarely show Chaucer's compassionate engagement with the plight of the Petrarchan mistress. Chaucer is particularly alert to the manipulation and blackmail of women possible within *fin'amor* and the rhetoric of the male lover, something which is certainly not foregrounded in the *Miscellany*. The accusatory manipulative speeches uttered by men in the *Miscellany* have their counterparts in Chaucer, but they are often embedded there in contexts which reveal the woman's reluctance, shock and fear.[7] What is more, words and

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[4] The choice of a moral poem is interesting given that Chaucer's major influence on the other poets in the volume is as a poet of love and springtime, and given that he wrote love lyrics which could have been included. The selection reflects the emphasis with which many sixteenth-century readers read Chaucer; as Alison Wiggins has shown, sixteenth-century annotations on editions of Chaucer show particular interest in his work 'as a source for sententious wisdom'. See Alison Wiggins, 'What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Printed Copies of Chaucer?', *The Library*, 9 (2008): pp. 3–36.

[5] Gavin Douglas, *Eneados* I, Prologue, 449.

[6] See, for instance, poem 187, Vaux's 'O temerous tauntres that delights in toyes', and poem 109, Wyatt's 'Suffised not (madame) that you did teare'.

[7] See, for example, the *Franklin's Tale* 1339–49, which describes Dorigen's response to Aurelius:

she astoned stood;
In al hir face nas a drope of blood.

images Chaucer often associated with suffering vulnerable female lovers and predatory deceitful men are in the *Miscellany* repeatedly usurped to describe female duplicity and male suffering and victimhood. Particularly noticeable is the redeployment of the words 'change' and 'newfangle(ness)', and of images of baits, hooks, nets, and traps.

This lack of sympathy, and a cold scepticism about female fidelity, can be seen in the pairing of poems 154 and 155, which strongly recall and resist Chaucer. The former is titled 'The lover here telleth of his divers joyes and adversities in love and lastly of his ladies death', and C. S. Lewis accurately describes it as 'almost exactly an abridged version of the mourner's narrative in the *Boke of the Duchesse*'.[8] This parallel is strengthened by the subject of the following poem, 'Of his love named White', which begins 'Full faire and white she is, and White by name'. The lady in the *Book of the Duchess*, who commemorates John of Gaunt's wife Blanche, shares this name: 'goode faire White she het;/ That was my lady name ryght' (948–9). However, despite similarities in name and beauty, the two ladies are very different. In Chaucer's poem, the Black Knight's grief for his deceased lady White is intensified by his certainty of her fidelity. In the later poem, however, the speaker crows over his cuckolding of White's husband, the 'nerer gaser' (7) who is treated with 'chilling cold' by the lady.

It is difficult to see the placing of this 'White' poem with poem 154 as anything other than a deliberate recalling of Chaucer's poem. Yet the nature of lady White in poem 155 is provocative. Is the fidelity of Chaucer's lady White being brought into question, with the implication that the Black Knight is deluded, his complaint and grief ironically misplaced? If so, this is a cynical and misogynistic comment on the faithlessness and unreliability of women, and the sincere abusable love of men. And if we read it in those terms, it is also a

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She wende nevere han come in swich a trappe.
'Allas,' quod she, 'that evere this sholde happe!
For wende I nevere by possibilitee
That swich a monstre or merveille myghte be!
It is agayns the proces of nature.'
And hoom she goth a sorweful creature;
For verray feere unnethe may she go.
She wepeth, wailleth, al a day or two,
And swowneth, that it routhe was to see.

This, and all subsequent quotations from Chaucer, are from Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

[8] C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 238.

challenge to Chaucer, perhaps a knowing suggestion that he too is the fond dupe of women.

Another important way in which Chaucer's interest in and sympathy for women is manifested is his use of female voices. For Chaucer, women's voices and particularly women's complaints are so absorbing that at times a narrative seems to be provided for the sole purpose of setting up a female lament, and after it has been delivered, the rest of the poem shrivels away, interrupted or abandoned; we see this in the *Squire's Tale* and in *Anelida and Arcite.*

In sharp contrast to this, there are only a handful of women speakers in the *Miscellany*, and when female voices do occur, they are usually restricted, featuring unreliably within a poem voiced by a man, or tied tightly into a dialogue with a man's voice in a debate in which the man either sets the terms of the argument, and/ or wins it. This debate can take place either between poems or within them. An example of the latter is poem 113, Wyatt's 'It burneth yet'. This is a dialogue between a lover and his lady, in which the lady is brought round to the lover's point of view. The poem begins with the lover's description of his burning desire, and the lady's attempt to get him to take responsibility for his suffering (she asks 'What may I do, if thy self cause thy smart?', 6). Finally she is worn down, and agrees to accept his love: 'Thou wilt nedes so: be it so: but then be trew' (30). Where Anelida forges her own stanza forms in her complaint, the lady in Wyatt's poem is forced to fall in with her pursuer's ottava rima stanzas. Her opposition might be figured through her use of *b*-rhymes in contrast to his *a*-rhymes, but it is he who introduces the *c*-rhyme in each case, deciding when the run of cross-rhymed couplets will come to an end, and she has a structural obligation to echo his *c*-rhyme with her own. In the final stanza, she does not even have this: her turn to speak is usurped by the triumphant final line, 'Thus, hartes be wonne, by love, request, and mone', which may be spoken by the male lover in a self-satisfied vein, or by a narrative voice approving of the lover's technique.[9]

The first woman speaker in the collection is the speaker of poem 17, Surrey's 'O happy dames', entitled in the *Miscellany* 'Complaint of the absence of her lover being upon the sea'. An interesting feature of this poem is its relationship to *Heroides* II, the letter from Phyllis to Demophoon, the ultimate source for the poem. What is missing from Surrey's poem is the Ovidian

[9] Rebholz considers this poem 'one of the most amusing seduction poems of the century', presumably because of the ease with which the lady's objections are shot down. See Ronald A. Rebholz, 'Love's Newfangleness: A Comparison of Greville and Wyatt', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 11,1 (1978), 17–30, quotation from p. 20, fn 10.

material identifying the classical story, resulting in a much less specific lament, an effect supported by the decontextualizing title which the compiler of the *Miscellany* has added. This shearing has two effects. Firstly, it removes the power of the Ovidian female speaker to take possession of a famous story and re-narrate it from her own perspective. Secondly, it removes the attack on the treacherous male character who caused the suffering, and in *Heroides* II, that attack is made in anger as well as sorrow. Ovid's text is about a woman betrayed and deserted by a reprehensible man. Surrey's is about a woman who is worried about her sea-going lover.

It has been suggested that Surrey wrote both this poem and poem 19 in the voice of his own wife during his military service at Boulogne in 1546; if this is the case, Surrey's usurpation and sanitation of Phyllis' voice, raging and protesting about her betrayal by her lover, is even more remarkable. He is not only taking over Phyllis' voice, he is also occupying the persona of another woman, his wife, in order to write about himself.[10]

The two poems which resemble Chaucer most strongly in their use of female complaint occur in the Uncertain Authors section. The speaker of poem 192, 'To love, alas, who would not feare', protests about her abandonment and compares herself to Dido, a figure entirely absent from the rest of the *Miscellany* except for her brief scene-setting appearance in the first line of Wyatt's 'Song of Iopas'. The speaker of this poem imagines herself, dead from grief at her abandonment, being a lesson to others. She hopes '[t]hat by my death al men may say,/ Lo women are as true as they' (47–8). Unfortunately, however, this

[10] Tottel clearly identifies the writer of this poem as Surrey, and its speaker as a woman, but there has been debate about the gender and identity of both speaker and composer. Jonathan Goldberg, who appears to consider that the gender of the speaker is an indication of the gender of the poet, advances the peculiar argument that because this poem appears in the Devonshire MS in the hand of Mary Shelton – a fact which others dispute – it is likely to have been composed by her. See Jonathan Goldberg, 'The Female Pen: Writing as a Woman', in Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy J. Vickers, *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 17–38. For a more subtle and convincing discussion, see Elizabeth Heale, '"Desiring Women Writing": Female Voices and Courtly "Balets" in Some Early Tudor Manuscript Albums' in Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 9–31. Heale points out that over-focusing on the gender of the author can lead us 'to obscure a more interestingly gender-fluid use of amorous topoi in the period. In the social circumstances in which these poems circulated, poems lamenting a beloved's absence offered a conventionally female subject position as easily appropriated by men wishing to please female companions or patrons, as, potentially, by women able to participate by composing balets themselves' (pp. 13–14).

message is thoroughly muffled by the volume of male speakers making very different claims.

Poem 259, 'A cruell Tiger all with teeth bebled', is another poem which shares some of Chaucer's interests but which is uncharacteristic of the *Miscellany*. Here the female speaker describes how she was raped when a virgin, and how she and her unborn child were then murdered 'for cloking of his crime' (15). The poem's description of a degrading and deadly assault on a woman is matched by the choice of form: a 15-line poem amounting to a distorted sonnet (the poem rhymes *ababbcbcbcbcbdd*). Heather Dubrow argues that the sonnet is 'the verse form now considered one of the central markers of Petrarchism',[11] and it is appropriate that this violently anti-Petrarchan episode is expressed through a disruption of the form. However, again her protests are diminished by the volume of complaining male voices which surround her. She may accuse her killer of being a 'cruell Tiger', for example, but there are so many more instances of male voices associating women with tigers that her protests are hard to hear.[12]

Not only does the *Miscellany* include very little in the way of female voices, two particular poems by Surrey appear to level a deliberate challenge to the claims of female complaint in the *Squire's Tale*. This tale features a very distressed female falcon, who utters a long complaint about her ill-treatment by a tercelet, who has won her love and then abandoned her for a kite. This complaint, uttered by a bird fainting from loss of blood where she has savaged herself with her own beak, is one of Chaucer's most moving, and it is interesting that Surrey appears to take issue with it.

The complaint of the falcon seems to be answered by a male voice rebutting her accusations in two of Surrey's poems. In poem 25, 'Though I regarded not', the speaker denies that he has been inconstant, commenting

> ... were my fancy strange,
> And wilfull will to wite,
> If I sought now to change
> A falkon for a kite. (5–8)

[11] Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.6.
[12] In poem 115, for instance, the lady is a 'Fierce Tigre' (15); in poem 82, the lady seems to have been nourished by tigers (line 11).

The pairing of falcons and kites is not a poetic commonplace; an EEBO search up to Surrey's death yields only three hits, all from lists of birds deemed unclean in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Surrey's reference to the exchange of a falcon for a kite therefore seems likely to be a direct response to the falcon's lament in the *Squire's Tale*. This is reinforced by the fact that 'wilfull will to wite' also seems to echo Chaucer's falcon's claim 'my wyl was his willes instrument;/ This is to seyn, my wyl obeyed his wyl' (568–9).

Traces of the falcon's lament can also be discerned in Poem 4, 'Such waiward waies hath love', which can be read as another, less straightforward, response to the falcon. From line 9, the speaker describes how love has caused him to leave a successful situation and turn to a hopeless one:

> From easy ford, where I might wade and passe ful wel,
> He me withdrawes, and doth me drive into a depe dark hel,
> And me withholdes, wher I am cald, and offred place:
> And willes me that my mortall foe I doe beseke of grace.
> He lettes me to pursue a conquest welnere wonne,
> To folow where my paines were lost, ere that my sute begonne. (9–14)

This could easily read as the response of the tercelet, uneasily wriggling to find an excuse for his desertion of the loving falcon (the 'conquest welnere wonne') for the harsh cruel kite. Notably he blames the abstract entity 'love' for his change of heart.

Chaucer's falcon dwells on the deceit of the tercelet, expressed through a series of metaphors of concealment: although the tercelet was 'ful of treson and falsnesse' (506),

> It was so wrapped under humble cheere,
> And under hewe of trouthe in swich manere,
> Under plesance, and under bisy peyne,
> That no wight koude han wend he koude feyne,
> So depe in greyn he dyed his coloures.
> Right as a serpent hit hym under floures
> Til he may seen his tyme for to byte ... (507–13)

And Surrey's speaker picks up on these metaphors. The theme of colour and dyeing is common to both texts; the tercelet covers treason 'under hewe of trouth' while Surrey's speaker deliberately displays 'painted thoughtes' (20) in his face. Both use the image of the concealed serpent; the tercelet hides his true

self 'as a serpent hit hym under floures', while Surrey's speaker is familiar with the way 'under the grene the serpent how he lurkes' (23).

Both poems use the proverb about a dog being beaten in front of a lion to teach the lion to behave. The application of the proverb is explicit in the *Squire's Tale*: the falcon hopes 'for to maken othere be war by me' (490). Surrey's use of the proverb seems a deliberate recalling of Chaucer, but in Surrey it is unclear whether the lover is trying to align himself with lion or whelp, and to what end. The most striking aspect of Surrey's use of the proverb is the way it is encased in a declaration that the speaker *knew* 'how the Lion chastised is by beating of the whelp'. There is a strong emphasis in Surrey's poem on what the speaker knows about love ('I know' occurs 14 times), and what this emphasis reflects is a insistent attempt to possess all aspects of the experience of love. The application of the proverb does not matter to the speaker; what matters is his determined attempt to assert himself over the voice of the female falcon, and so to wrest the experience and expression of love and betrayal away from the female.

In many respects, then, *Tottel's Miscellany* has very different interests from Chaucer, and both passively and actively takes issue with his work. In particular, it withstands his interest in female suffering and women's voices. In this respect, it is characteristic of other early print miscellanies. Elizabeth Heale argues, '[a]s the early Tudor balet moved from manuscript to print, so it became an almost exclusively male-voiced genre with the female-voiced poems of passion and retaliation largely silenced.'[13] And with this muting of women's voices, some of the most characteristic of Chaucer's interests also faded away.

[13] Heale, 'Desiring Women Writing', p. 26.