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"EVERE AN HUNDRED GOODE AGEYN OON BADDE": CATALOGUES OF GOOD WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

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"Evere an Hundred Goode Ageyn Oon Badde":
Catalogues of Good Women in Medieval Literature

by

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INTRODUCTION

In Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, the God of Love asserts to the doubting narrator that books "of sundry wemen" contain "evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde." When Cupid calls to witness "God, and alle clerkes eke,"[1] we have reason to suspect irony on Chaucer's part. Medieval clerks, and men in all times who believe that the life of the spirit entails rejection of the body, view women as enemies allied to the flesh. Virtually every medieval author, working from classical and Christian precedents, wrote antifeminist satire. Among those who wrote "of sundry wemen," Cupid mentions Ovid and St. Jerome as holding up the standard of true wives and clean maidens; here again irony is apparent, since Ovid is best known for describing the art of seduction and Jerome for preaching the abhorrence of women's charms. Through the irony involved in this passage, Chaucer enables his readers to see the humor of the Legend; yet the issue is complicated by the fact that the passage is not simply an ironic statement contrary to fact.

Social conditions in the fourteenth century led to a renewed search for secular values, which in turn stirred new attempts to praise women. Women were enjoying a higher status in many spheres. Feminist scholarship has revealed

the extent of middle-class women's participation in trades and guilds--and thus, their economic importance--to have been much more extensive than was formerly realized.[2] According to historian Mary Beard:

> Smith's English Gilds [based largely on fourteenth-century records] contains accounts of the structure, functions, and proceedings of about eighty-five gilds. In at least seventy-two of them women were members on an equal basis with men. . . . In some of the other gilds a slight qualification was placed on widows; they were accepted if their husbands had been gild men. . . . in innumerable cases, widows carried on the craft in which their husbands had been active, being directly familiar with it as a household industry at which they had themselves labored. . . .[3]

Eileen Power comments that

> . . . there was hardly a craft in which we do not find women. They were butchers, chandlers, ironmongers, net-makers, shoe-makers, glovers, girdlers, haberdashers, purse-makers, cap-makers, skinners, bookbinders, gilders, painters, silk-weavers and embroiderers, spicers, smiths and goldsmiths among many other trades.[4]

The economic importance of women in all times has increased in inverse proportion to the numbers of men available to do the work. Thus, the outbreaks of bubonic plague across Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century, which in some places wiped out up to half the population, must have helped to draw women into the work force.

Not only the middle-class woman of the fourteenth century experienced heightened status as a result of economic importance; the "almost uninterrupted series of wars and rebellions"[5] in that century saw to it that many noble

women ran their husbands' estates in their absence. "The improved education of women might be attributed to the constant preoccupation of their men by military service."[6] For both the guilds-woman and the lady of the manor, reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, as well as a good deal of managerial skill, were often necessities.[7] Also, "the new jurisprudence, which in certain cases allowed a daughter to inherit the throne and a widow to take over a great feudal estate, may have contributed in a general way to the increased prestige of the female sex. . . . "[8]

The improving economic and legal status of women fit in with some more general trends taking place in the fourteenth century. The rise of the middle class and increasing social mobility; the decline of the medieval church with its established hierarchies, including that of male and female; the intellectual shift toward reason and the revival of classical learning and ideals; and a new expression, more in words than actions, of reformist zeal in all spheres[9]--all contributed to the growing secularization of life and thus to a reassessment of women's roles. Defenses of women written at this time were newly able to work against the long-standing assumption that women are evil or that, if they are good, it is only because they are chaste. This belief is expressed succinctly in Jerome's statement (which I will discuss later) that, while men can be considered "virtuous" for their achievements in politics, warfare, and

oratory, woman's only virtue is chastity.[10] Early medieval defenses most often share this assumption, exempting a few women from general condemnation on the grounds of their virginity or chastity, their martyrdom, and their shared sex with the Virgin Mary. Fourteenth-century authors sought to enrich their defenses by widening their definitions of "virtue" and extending their range of examples.[11] In so doing, they turned back--paradoxically enough--to Ovid and St. Jerome.

The literary treatment of women from the very earliest times has produced what could be called a chaos of paradoxes. Attempts to praise women make very unlikely--and quite contradictory--sorts of assumptions. Praise for virginity is the most common, but another type of praise reasons that since the word _virtus_ comes from _vir_ (man), a "virtuous" woman is manly. Jerome's choice of exemplary pagan women in the _Epistola Adversus Jovinianum_ reflects both these beliefs. Yet another type of praise finds that women attach more importance to love than do men, and so exalts women's faithfulness in love; Ovid's _Heroides_ are an example. All of these ideas about women stem from classical and early Christian tradition, and all were often placed in juxtaposition by later authors seemingly oblivious to the contradictions implicit in them.

In order even to approach an understanding of the paradoxes in the _Legend of Good Women_, one must examine this

chaos of paradoxes from which it sprang and to which it often threatens to return. The supreme artistic representation of these paradoxes is not the Legend, however, but another of Chaucer's works--The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. She is a creation of antifeminist satire, of men so confused about women that they could not decide whether to depict them as repulsive viragoes or as irresistible seductresses and so--losing sight of the impossibility of the combination--made them both. The Wife herself is both, and she calls attention to the paradox of her nature:

> For certes, I am al Venerien
> In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
> Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
> And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
> Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
> Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!
> (609-614)

Both the Legend of Good Women and the Wife's Prologue and Tale exemplify the inability of medieval man to think clearly about medieval woman. The jumble of paradoxes found in medieval defenses of women does not form a neat pattern yielding a resolution, perhaps because the discrepancies between what the authors themselves wanted in women, what the Church told them they ought to admire in women, and what experience taught them they could find in women remained irreconcilable.

Fourteenth-century catalogues of noble pagan women collectively form one of the few concerted attempts to praise women for any quality other than chastity. Although

their authors often express acceptance of chastity as the most important standard of goodness for women, they use the catalogue technique to explore alternate or additional (and occasionally incompatible) forms of virtue in women. The catalogue, by Utley's definition, is a "compilation of examples, making its appeal not to logic but to symbolism."[12] The compilations range in length from a few lines--really just a list of names--to hundreds of pages. Because of the evocative quality of the catalogue, the names and stories had to be familiar; thus, most of the women used as examples come from classical mythology and history.

As a result of the artificial, rhetorical nature of the catalogues, they are too often dismissed as embellishments and overlooked by critics. Proof of critical neglect lies in such assertions as Robert Frank's that, when Chaucer set out to tell the stories of Medea, Cleopatra, and company in the Legend of Good Women, they were unfamiliar and shocking to his audience.[13] An examination of catalogues of exemplary women in classical and medieval literature proves that this assertion is far from accurate; the heroines were familiar not only from classical sources but from the works of such popular medieval authors as St. Jerome, John of Salisbury, Jean de Meun, Boccaccio, Machaut, LeFèvre, Deschamps, Christine de Pisan, and Chaucer himself. Frank's misunderstanding exemplifies a general tendency of critics to skip over catalogues--in fact, the catalogue is one of

the last medieval literary techniques still to be regarded as quaintly conventional and thus undeserving of critical attention. A study of catalogues of exemplary women proves rewarding in many ways, however. It can not only revise our ideas of audience expectations by revealing the stories' popularity, but suggest a new understanding of medieval authors' attitudes toward their classical sources. No "authorities" are more contradictory--even self-contradictory--than those telling the stories of exemplary women, as we shall see in the following chapters. Moreover, consideration of the catalogues in context most often reveals not rhetoric unrelated to the work as a whole, but the isolation and exploration of an important theme or themes. Long catalogues that are independent works, such as De Claris Mulieribus, form their own unity by interweaving repeated themes; thus, they construct a whole in which each part gains by association with the others.

The artificiality of these lists of women's names from classical literature may make them seem remote and merely decorative, but the same quality enables their authors to tell stories and explore possibilities that would have been out-of-bounds for contemporary Christian heroines, let alone real women. Women warriors and queens, women who kill their men or choose to live without them, women who break society's laws to follow their passions--all can appear as examples of commendable strength of mind and purpose.

Logically, such praise fails to convince; symbolically, however, the examples are effective. The fact that the catalogues operate symbolically rather than logically also accounts for the great adaptability of the heroines. A catalogue written to reveal the evils of women and a catalogue praising their virtues could contain many of the same examples.[14] This adaptability of "evidence" to an author's point of view in a given work is a result of the rhetorical nature of the catalogue technique in medieval literature. The judgment of good or evil comes first, and details are selected and arranged as proof of that judgment.

My first chapter examines classical catalogues of women, particularly those of Ovid and Vergil, with an eye both to their techniques and to their ideas about women. I then turn to St. Jerome, whose catalogue of noble pagan women in Adversus Jovinianum represents a transition between classical and medieval catalogues, and to the literary background of the fourteenth century which encouraged the catalogue to flourish.

Notes

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 273-307.

[2] See Eileen Power, Medieval Women, ed. M. M. Poston (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975); Mary Beard, Woman as Force in History (New York: Collier, 1946); Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," PMLA 94 (1979), pp. 209-222; and Sylvia Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval England (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 172-73.

[3] Beard, p. 234.

[4] Power, pp. 59-60.

[5] Joseph R. Strayer and Dana C. Munro, The Middle Ages (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 461.

[6] Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952), I, p. 213.

[7] Power, pp. 42-50.

[8] Hauser, p. 213.

[9] Strayer and Munroe, pp. 461-70, 536-37.

[10] Jerome, Epistola Adversus Jovinianum, in Patrologiae cursus completus ser. Latina (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1890), XXIII, col. 294.

[11] Catalogues of women from classical literature never disappeared from medieval literature; the Romance of the Rose (thirteenth century) and John of Salisbury's Policratus (twelfth century) contain notable examples. However, most of the catalogues were used to illustrate women's vices rather than their virtues. The tendency to praise women seems to have increased dramatically in the mid-fourteenth century.

[12] Francis Lee Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1944), p. 44.

[13] Robert Worth Frank, Jr., Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 26, 34-35.

[14] Two outstanding examples are Dido and Semiramis. See Pat Trefzger Overbeck, "Chaucer's Good Woman," Chaucer Review 2 (1967), p. 83; Irene Samuel, "Semiramis in the Middle Ages: The History of a Legend," Medievalia et Humanistica 2 (1944), pp. 32-44; and John M. Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 33-34.

CHAPTER I

"MULIERIS VIRTUS PUDICITIA"

When Agamemnon, using the examples of Clytemnestra and Helen, warned Odysseus in the underworld not to trust Penelope, he was helping set a precedent to be followed for more than 2,000 years. Most classical catalogues of women warned men to beware of them. With Christianity, the warnings took on an even more horrific note: women's snares endangered not merely men's lives, but their souls. Both classical and Christian traditions allowed for certain exceptions, however; chaste wives were praised as rare commodities, and virgins as links between the human and divine. Medieval poets also adapted the late classical glorification of romantic love between the sexes in their praise of courtly love, thereby muddying the waters even further. Then, in the fourteenth century especially, such classical anomalies as the warrior queen and the Amazon began to experience a wide-spread popularity. The compounding of quite diverse literary influences made it possible for all of these conflicting images of women to play their parts in the catalogues of good women.

The earliest extant catalogues of women are found in the works of Homer and Hesiod. Hesiod's Catalogue of Women

survives only in fragments; it was

> a series of genealogies which traced the Hellenic race (or its more important peoples and tribes) from a common ancestor. The reason why women are so prominent is obvious: since most families and tribes claimed to be descended from a god, the only safe clue to their origins was through the mortal woman beloved by that god. . . .[1]

As might be expected, given this role, the women are praised for their beauty, their union with gods, and their famous offspring. Homer's catalogue of the women whom Odysseus sees in Hades, "consorts or daughters of illustrious men,"[2] also emphasizes these attributes. Odysseus, telling of the sight, begins with "that princess of great ladies, Tyro, Salmoneus' daughter . . . and queen to Kretheus. . . . " Her sons by Poseidon were founders of noble lines. Antiope, Alkmene, Megare, Epikaste, and others follow, with the stories of their fateful loves. Last comes "Eripyle, who betrayed her lord for gold."[3] Odysseus breaks off, saying that "the hour for sleep has come." Alkinoos, his host, urges him to continue, and he does so: "Other and sadder tales there are to tell, of my companions, of some who came through all the Trojan spears, . . . only to find a brutal death at home--and a bad wife behind it."[4] The story of Eripyle's deceit thus leads, after a brief interruption, to the stories of two more false wives, Clytemnestra and Helen. The shade of Agamemnon reveals his fate at the hands of his wife, and Odysseus responds, "'Myriads died by Helen's fault, and Klytaimnestra plotted against you

half the world away.'" Agamemnon warns Odysseus by these examples to "'indulge a woman never, and never tell her all you know,'" for "'the day of faithful wives is gone forever.'"[5] Although his condemnation of wives is applicable to many women in the Iliad and the Odyssey, and certainly to Clytemnestra and Helen, Agamemnon's words lose some of their force even in the immediate context of their retelling. Before speaking with Agamemnon in Hades, Odysseus had been reassured by his mother's shade that Penelope remained faithful.[6] When Odysseus tells the story to Alkinoos and his court, the queen Arete is present; she has been described to Odysseus as a woman so wise and virtuous that "no grace or wisdom fails in her."[7]

Rather than passing judgment on womankind as good or evil, the catalogues of Homer and Hesiod demonstrate the inescapable fact of women's importance in society. A man's choice of wife can literally be a matter of life and death, especially if he must go away to war for a long time, leaving her in de facto control of his property. A good wife is a good investment. Like the wife in Proverbs 31:10-12, "she is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life."[8] If the stories of children fathered by gods upon mortal women represent anything more than attempts to glorify one's lineage, they may refer to women who, having erred,

remained in the marital fold. Such a woman's pregnancy could be explained as resulting from union with a god, temporary by its very nature and so posing no threat to her husband. A wife's desire for a mortal man might lead her to want to be with him rather than her husband; thus, it might inspire deceit, theft, and murder. The Odyssey vividly contrasts its good and bad women, especially Penelope and Clytemnestra, and this carefully placed catalogue contributes to the effect and points up the underlying lesson.

The most influential of the classical catalogues of women upon medieval authors were those by Vergil and Ovid. Vergil's catalogue, in Book VI of the Aeneid, names the women with Dido in the lugentes campi; it is five lines long. Ovid's Heroides "are letters from legendary women to absent husbands or lovers," of which "the form is rather that of the dramatic monologue than the epistle."[9] They are almost three thousand lines long.[10] On the face of it, one may seem to be stretching a point to call them by the same name, but both of these catalogues list a group of famous women with some reference to their stories, which are expected to be familiar to the reader. In both, the authors play upon the reader's knowledge of the story to achieve their desired effects.

In Book VI of the Aeneid, Dido, now in Hades, is seen one last time by Aeneas whose desertion has caused her to commit

suicide. Dido's shade is described in terms which recall her reactions to Aeneas' leave-taking in Book IV: then she was aversa, "turned away," volvens oculos, "rolling her eyes," luminibus tacitis, "with silent eyes," and accensa, "inflamed."[11] She vows vengeance, but, breaking off, she turns from his eyes and from the light of day (auras . . . fugit seque ex oculis avertit et aufert, 388-389). As a shade, she is still ardentem, "burning" (VI, 467), still aversa, still avoiding his eyes (solo fixos oculos tenebat), still silent. These verbal echoes suggest that the sight of Aeneas brings back the moment of his desertion; it is almost as if she had "died" at that moment and has been "living" it ever since. Her love and hate for Aeneas, both implied in the reference to "burning," continue. Her confinement to the secreti calles and the myrtle wood (myrtle sacred to the dead and to Venus) is not so much a punishment as a confirmation and continuation of her own choice.

With Dido is a group of women quas duras amor crudeli tabe peredit (whom harsh love with cruel ruin destroyed, VI, 442). The catalogue of great ladies whom Odysseus sees in the underworld may have served as a model for this passage, as Dido's turning away from Aeneas echoes Ajax' refusal to speak to Odysseus. As Jaques Perret observes, "la société des héroïnes qui accompagnent Didon aux enfers n'a pas été composée sans dessein."[12] Traditionally, three--Procris, Evadne, and Laodamia--are innocent victims of

love, while three--Phaedra, Eripyle, and Pasiphae--are gross offenders against nature. However, in the larger context which Perret sees at work in this scene, all are "victimes en partie volontaires de la plus touchante, peut-être, mais aussi de la plus damnable erreur,"[13] for they allowed passion to destroy them. Dido is likewise a woman whose being has been absorbed by passion. The last of the group, Caenis, contributes a different emphasis to the characterization of Dido. Caenus, according to the stories, was changed from a woman to a man during his lifetime; only in the Aeneid has his form changed back to female in Hades. Perret sees this double metamorphosis as "la projection ou répresentation au plan physique de ce que fut au plan morale la destinée de Didon."[14] He traces the transformation of Dido from "la tendre vierge donnée a Sychée" to "un chef (dux femina facti, v. 364)" carrying out the masculine role of city-building, to, in Hades, a "jeune fille" once more united with the husband of her youth.[15] While I agree in general with Perret's interpretation, I do not see Dido in Hades as a "jeune fille," but as a woman still in the throes of thwarted passion; and I see a suggestion in the figure of Caenus of more than the transformation from female to male and back.

According to Ovid, Caenis was a beautiful maiden who wished to remain a virgin but was overpowered by Neptune. In response to his promise to grant her anything she wanted,

she replied, magnum . . . facit haec iniuria votum, / tale pati nil posse; mihi da, femina ne sim: / omnia praestiteris[16] (This injury calls forth the great desire that I be unable to suffer so; grant to me, that I not be a woman; you will have given me all). This choice represents in a very emblematic way the betrayal of self to passion which the six other women and Dido herself have committed. The mention of this one iuvenis quondam, nunc femina (once a young man, now a woman, VI, 448) emphasizes the fact that the lugentes campi appear to contain only women. Caenis was a victim of rape, and she chose never again to be a victim, although the choice meant rejecting her sex. Women are, of course, the usual victims of sexual attack, but the other women in the Fields of Mourning are victims not of others' passion but of their own. It may be remarked that Tiresias, the prophet who was sought by Odysseus in Hades and whose story is also told by Ovid in the Metamorphoses, underwent a double transformation from male to female and back. When asked by Jupiter and Juno whether men or women enjoy sex more, he replied that women do--nevertheless, he changed back to a man voluntarily when the chance arose! The presence of Caenis in the lugentes campi points up the fact that women are considered more susceptible to love's pleasure and--especially--to love's pain. These are women who destroyed themselves for love; their "prophetess" destroyed her true sexual nature to avoid such a fate in life,

although she cannot in death.

The unexpressed moral of this passage, one feels, would have been approved of by Jerome. In her role as chaste widow and dux . . . facti, Dido is exercising her essential feminine virtue and a masculine one as well. The second depends upon the first. When love for Aeneas leads her to violate her sworn faithfulness to Sycheus, the loss of chastity renders her unable to perform her masculine function. If Dido had not killed herself, it is clear that she and her country would be open to attack from neighboring kings, particularly Iarbus, because of her ruined reputation. Dido's place in Hades, like that of Caenis, emphasizes the feminine quality of her suffering in life and in death. Aeneas sees no other women in Hell, either in Tartarus or in the Elysian fields; the other two women who are mentioned, Helen and Clytemnestra, would be prime candidates for the lugentes campi.

Simply stated, Vergil's use of the catalogue contributes to his characterization of Dido by associating her with women whose stories say something about the nature of one kind of love. Some have been considered "good" by tradition, some evil. Vergil does not state judgment, but lets their appearance together suggest that they represent varying aspects of the same flawed passion, and that this passion has some inherently feminine quality. This use of the catalogue for characterization and illustration was

picked up by medieval authors in their plethora of *exempla*; so was its "message" about women. Ovid also presents the stories of women wronged by, and often wrong in, love, while refusing to offer any authorial condemnation or exculpation. Ovid composes imaginary letters, mostly from women to men whom they believe to have jilted them. The women's stories are all familiar, so that the reader knows the outcomes while the women, at the imagined moment of composition, do not. Howard Jacobson, in *Ovid's Heroides*, describes the effect of this "introduction of mythic material within the exclusively first-person format" as bringing about "the necessary duality" between "'objective' events and individual perspective."[17] Rarely does Ovid contradict the "facts" of the stories; rather, he presents them through the emotional perspective of a given participant at a given moment. In reading the accusations of Penelope against Ulysses, for example, we feel the shock of seeing a familiar situation from an unfamiliar vantage point. Even in this archetype of the faithful wife, love alternates with rage, self-righteousness with suspicion as she recalls her fears during the siege of Troy, relives the moments of reunion granted to other wives, regrets the fall of Troy (*utilius starent etiamnunc moenia Phoebi . . . scirem ubi pugnares*[18]; better the walls of Apollo stood even now . . . so that I would know where you are fighting), imagines Ulysses mocking her unsophistication to amuse a new lover.

Dido's letter to Aeneas, Heroides VII, is especially important both in comparison with Vergil's Dido and in its influence upon treatments of the character in medieval literature. The letter begins with an admission that all hope is already lost, so that perdere verba leve est (to lose words is light, VII, 6). The struggle of hope against despair persists throughout the letter, however, as does the emotional conflict between pride and self-abasement. Pride speaks through words of love--ego, quae coepi (neque enim dedignor) amorem (I, who began, and do not feel ashamed for it, our love; VII, 33), and through words of anger--vive, precor! . . . tu potius leti causa ferere mei (live, I pray! . . . you rather shall be known as the cause of my death; VII, 63-64). Yet, these assertions are punctuated with moments of self-abnegation, as when she says that she is not worth enough (non sum ego tanti, VII, 45) for Aeneas to risk his life to leave her in anger, or when she accepts the penalty she owes to pudor (VII, 97). In her last plea to make Aeneas stay, she combines pride and self-abasement. in offering her wealth, her city, and herself, if not as bride then as hostess, to Aeneas: dum tua sit, Dido quidlibet esse feret (so long as she is yours, Dido will endure to be what you will; VII, 168). Ovid's treatment of Dido does not differ from Vergil's in any of the facts, but, by catching her at a moment when hope and despair are at war in her heart, Ovid makes his heroine more pitiable

because weaker. As Jacobson says in examining Dido's letter, "We have here no dux femina facti."[19] We do know, from Vergil's story and from glimpses that the letter affords us, that Dido is (or has been) resourceful and courageous; she is weak only by virtue of her passion. The letter, like Vergil's lugentes campi, traps her in her own thought-processes in the moment when she lets passion destroy her.

This anguished shifting from one state of mind to another, sometimes rational and persuasive, sometimes emotional and self-defeating, persists throughout the Heroides, whether the speaker is maiden, wife, widow, or illicit lover. Ovid's purpose seems as much to depict minds in the process of thinking as to portray differentiated characters. The restlessness and tension of these letters resembles that of Medea's famous monologue in the Argonautica of Apollonius,[20] and this extreme emotionalism is so closely associated with women in literature and life that the Heroides "are not rarely praised as acute portraits of the feminine psyche."[21] In discussing the psychological realism of the poems, Jacobson observes that these "powerless women who are helpless to influence their own lives must resort to vicarious (and futile) acts to provide psychic satisfaction in the absence of potency, be it weeping, complaining, or verbal expression."[22]

It should be remembered that the "helplessness" is a factor more of the moment of passion than of the women's

characters--Medea, Dido, and their fellows are not ineffectual people. There is, however, something fundamental in the nature of these women and of their passion which renders it impossible for them to escape this "moment." Thus, Ovid's Heroides are populated with women for the same reason that Vergil's lugentes campi are: women are the "natural" victims of passion, not only as objects of men's lust but as prey of their own conflicting and finally overwhelming emotions. The poetic treatments of the women evoke pity, but it is pity not unmixed with contempt. The "reduction of great, sometimes cataclysmic, events and myths to the narrow egocentric world of the heroine"[23] makes the Ovidian complaints seem at times petty and hysterical. Eleanor Winsor Leach finds in Ovid's characterizations of the Heroides a humorous intent based on his disapproval of the women and of the Augustan values--"loyalty," "simplicity," "good faith"--of which they are extreme, indeed perverse, examples. She quotes Ovid's own condemnation, voiced in Ars Amatoria, of some of the heroines: Quid vos perdiderit, dicam; nescistis amare; / Defuit ars vobis; arte perennat amor (What will destroy you, I will tell you; you have not learned how to love; / the art has failed in you; love survives by art.) (III, 41-42). Of this passage in relation to the Heroides, she says:

> All the Heroides shared one defect; they were women who did not know the art of love. Ovid goes on to say that they might well have taken a few lessons

> from himself, the magister amoris, the teacher of the art of light love and deception to Roman girls. The poet's criticism of his heroines belies the things which the Heroides have to say for themselves in their letters. There all of these women are quite sure that they do understand love. All of them boast of their loyalty, their simplicity, and their confidence; and on the basis of these merits they put their lovers ethically in the wrong.[24]

Ovid's own view may be described as pro-feminist, in that he disapproves of the women's readiness to forsake all for love. This disapproval is not voiced directly in the Heroides, although a reader may infer it from the overwrought emotionalism and distorted perceptions shown by the women. Ovid's medieval audience was thus free to draw its own conclusions from the heroines' complaints. It appears in some cases the medieval writers sympathized with the women more than Ovid himself may have done, although this very sympathy implies belief in women's weakness. If the medieval catalogue in defense of women "is ultimately derived from Ovid's Heroides,"[25] as Utley states, the defenses are as much based upon the acceptance of some anti-feminist ideas as upon the rejection of others. The Heroides and their medieval descendents--Chaucer's Good Women, for example--disavow that school of antifeminism which sees women as naturally unfaithful and incapable of strong feeling. Yet, they exemplify the ideas of another school of antifeminism: that women are incapable of controlled, rational thinking and are completely dependent upon men for their happiness.

The homiletic use of the catalogue by Christian writers tended, predictably, to focus on bad women:

> Every one of the major Christian writers from the first century through the sixth assumed the mental and moral frailty of women, dwelt upon the vexations of marriage, and reviled the body and sexual desire. This attitude was to pervade the medieval Church. . . . From the myth of the Fall, from the stories of Samson, David, and Solomon, from a number of apparently neutral Biblical texts, they derived the conviction that woman's attractiveness is the greatest possible peril to man's soul.[26]

It therefore appears surprising that St. Jerome, one of the best-known patristic detractors of women, includes a catalogue of virtuous pagan women in the antifeminist Adversus Jovinianum. His refutation of Jovinian's claim that chaste married people are equal to virgins in the sight of God led Jerome to draw up this list, not in defense of women but in defense of virginity.

Having argued the superiority of virginity to marriage with examples (mostly male) from the Old and New Testaments, Jerome then attempts to prove that virginity is not an unnatural state imposed by overly rigorous Christians, but that it was an especially honorable estate among pagans as well. His examples from Greek and Roman mythic history, unlike his examples from the Bible, are all female. His use of female examples from the ancients might seem to indicate an attitude laudatory toward women; it is nothing of the sort. First of all, he is limited by his sources. "Among the [Greek and Roman] gods there are no virgins.

. . . In contrast, three of the five Olympian goddesses are virgins."[27] Among mythological mortals, too, virginity seems to be extremely rare in men and is treated as either temporary or, if prolonged, as in the cases of Hippolytus, Narcissus, and Hermaphrodite, unnatural. Since Jerome is not always above bending his "facts" to suit his argument, the scarcity of virginal men does not completely account for his tactics here. Jerome has drifted, in his discussion of virginal and chaste pagans, from exposition to attack, and the enemy is sexual woman. His own appended comment reveals his concern:

> Sentio in catalogo feminarum multo me plura dixisse quam exemplorum patitur consuetudo. . . . Sed quid faciam, cum mihi mulieres nostri temporis apostoli ingerant auctoritatem; et necdum elator funere prioris viri, memoriter digamiae praecepta decantent?[28]
>
> (I know that I have said much more in this catalogue of women than custom allows. . . . but what should I do, when the women of our time quote "authority" to me, and before the first husband is buried, repeat from memory the precepts allowing a second marriage?)

He then quotes the antifeminist satire on marriage attributed to Theophrastus and convinces the reader that, to Jerome, a virginal woman is an enemy disarmed.

With this specific statement of purpose in mind, we may sense an incongruity when re-examining his list of virtuous pagan women. Although chastity in women was prized in classical times, as in most times and cultures, because it assured the bloodlines and continuation of family name and property, virginity in pagan antiquity

conveyed certain powers and privileges beyond those of chaste wifehood. Some of Jerome's pagan virgins exercised male prerogatives, such as hunting and fighting; his first examples make this point:

> Referunt fabulae Atalantam Calydoniam virginem semper in venatibus, semper in silvis, non tumentes uteros feminarum fastidiaque conceptuum, sed expeditam et castam amasse virtutem. Harpalicen quoque virginem Thraciam insignis poeta describit; et reginam Volscorum Camillam . . .[29]
>
> (Stories tell that Atalanta the Calydonian virgin was always with the hunts, always in the woods, for she loved not swelling wombs and the disgusting details of pregnancies, but unimpeded and clean virtue. The great poet also describes Harpalyce, a Thracian virgin; and Camilla, queen of the Volsci . . .)

Some were wise and gifted with prophecy, like the Sibyls, decem . . . quarum insigne virginitas est, et virginitatis praemium divinatio[30] (ten whose sign was virginity, and prophecy the reward of virginity). Others, including Cassandra, Chryseis, and innumerable priestesses of Diana and Vesta, performed special religious and civic functions. Thus, virginity, when it was honored by the ancients above chastity, gave to women an exemption from the rules of behavior laid down for their sex, and was rewarded with privileges not usually accorded to women. The fact that virginity was not honored in men may suggest that abstinence from the natural functions of one's sex gave one the qualities of the opposite sex. (Ovid's story of Hermaphrodite corroborates this idea.) Thus, these virgin women performed "manly" roles, while virgin men were considered incomplete

and perhaps effeminate. While manly women were laudable, weak, effeminate men were contemptible to the ancients. Jerome, of course, would not have approved of women priests and warriors, nor would he have held such an attitude toward male virgins, in his time. By using these examples of strong pagan virgins, however, he is passing on the classical view of these women as admirable figures to secular medieval authors. He is also confirming the lessons which could be drawn from the Heroides and the lugentes campi: women cannot accomplish anything when they are acting like women and responding passionately to men.

An explanation of the discrepancy in the number of virgin goddesses (three of five) and gods (none) by Sarah Pomeroy sheds some light on the attitude of Jerome as well. She states:

> Psychoanalytic criticism of classical literature suggests that the very fact of asexuality provides the reason for Athena's constructive and friendly relationships with most of the major Greek heroes. . . . . According to this theory, the fear of mature female sexuality meant that these men could feel secure only with a virgin.[31]

Compare Katherine Rogers' assessment of Jerome's attitude toward women:

> [He] reveals a curious split between real admiration for virgins and widows who abstained from remarriage--women seen as spiritual objects--and distaste for them as sexual objects. . . . while St. Jerome esteemed certain women, he exalted them at the expense of their sex. His violent deprecation of women's most important and most prized biological function [i.e., childbearing] is at least an indirect expression of strong hostility.[32]

Some antifeminists claim that her sexual and procreative functions are a woman's only virtue; Jerome feels that abstinence from these functions is a woman's only virtue:

> Viros consulatus illustrat; eloquentia in nomen aeternum effert; militaris gloria triumphusque novae gentis consecrat. . . . Mulieris virtus proprie pudicitia est.[33]
>
> (The consulship ennobles men; eloquence raises an eternal name; military glory and a triumph immortalize a new clan. . . . The virtue of a woman is exclusively chastity.)

The consulship, eloquence, and military glory are honors exclusive to men, while the virtue of a woman is exclusively chastity, or purity (pudicitia derives from pudor, shame). Jerome believes that chastity is a "special" virtue in women because, unlike men, they are able to possess no other virtue. Those pagan women who followed the hunt or acted as priestesses and prophetesses are all very well to Jerome as examples of virginity, but he would not have wished to encourage such masculine activities among contemporary women.

Following (whether directly or indirectly) Jerome's precedent, most fourteenth-century catalogues of good women put the burden of proof upon pagan examples. Deborah and Judith, good Hebrews, make frequent appearances on the lists. Apparently, though, these authors believed the qualities of a good woman, in any save a saintly sense, to be somewhat different from those of a good Christian. Recourse to the stories of classical authors, especially Ovid, gave medieval composers of catalogues subject matter relatively familiar

to their audience; thus, a name and a few details could be used to suggest a whole story. The distance in time and place from contemporary women allowed a much wider range of action for female characters and a greater freedom in dealing with sexual mores. Of course, the "authority" of such diverse figures as Ovid, Vergil, and St. Jerome constituted a decisive factor in the choice of examples. It is easy to see how the imposition of a judgmental framework, common to the rhetorical technique of medieval catalogues, upon the pagan, amoral content of many of the stories creates a tension between frame and content in the catalogues in defense of women--when women like Semiramis and Medea appear in the lists as "good" women, for example. As can be seen in the varying attitudes of the different authors toward their heroines, there is much room for definition and redefinition of the qualities making up a good woman and of the relative presence or absence of these qualities in the women themselves.

The opposing views of woman in medieval literature as either angelic and inspirational or diabolic and corrupting have recently been recognized as "different faces of the same coin,"[34] "two sides of the same bias."[35] Both are efforts to keep women at a distance, to prevent them from challenging men on their own soil. Both would today be considered antifeminist in nature, for they are the products of masculine imagination, whether of the dream of "courtly

love"[36] or the nightmare of antifeminism. Medieval works in defense of women, the vast majority of which were written by men, often put definite limitations on the kinds of women to be exonerated from the general degradation of their sex. Virginity is, as has been mentioned, the most frequently stated prerequisite. Some add praise for women who exhibit "manly" qualities, an adjective (Lat. virilis) used to encompass both physical courage and spiritual fortitude. This quality, however, can make its proponents nervous unless it, too, is found in combination with chaste behavior. A third group defended by the poets derives from that martyrology of passion of which the Heroides is an influential example. This group, unlike the other two, presupposes not virginity but its corollary: women's weakness in the face of their passion. Again, one can see the division of roles described by Pomeroy, as well as the fear of woman as a sexual being.

Neither life, nor art, although it seeks to correct the imbalances of life, can long maintain a neat partitioning of "good" and "evil." Although seeing courtly love and antifeminism as two sides of the same bias helps to correct the division of the subject into a strict "either-or" dichotomy, the image leaves no middle ground, no room for a blurring of distinctions. The very fact that there was a debate during the Middle Ages, which became particularly lively in the fourteenth century, over the status of women indicates

genuine opposition not reckoned with in the metaphor of the two-faced coin. To follow that image to its logical conclusion is to argue, as its author does, that all medieval literature in praise of love and women is intended to be ironic and that "medieval romances of Courtly Love," including Troilus and Criseyde "are, in fact, a part of the antifeminist propaganda of the age."[37]

This kind of statement debases literature; it belongs to the school of thought that would rewrite the Greek myths to equalize men's and women's roles. The witch-hunters of antifeminism, not the authors of romance and myth, are the true propagandists. Of course, if we apply today's social standards to medieval literature, it will appear biased against women. However, the participants in the literary debate concerning woman's place at least pretended that the argument was real, for its own sake if not for women's. The debate (in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries) over the Roman de la Rose, spearheaded by Christine de Pisan, eloquently argues the reality of the question and its importance for women of the time. Eileen Power speaks of the many "poems and prose tales in praise of women. Biens des Fames sprang to counter the Blastanges de Fames and Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women to match the books 'of wikked wives.'"[38] Determining the sincerity of defenses of women can present problems to the reader, for reasons which I have suggested. The authors often do not seem to be able to

decide if there are virtuous women, or even to determine the grounds on which the decision should be made.

Scholarship on women in medieval literature has tended to accept the battle-lines drawn for debate and has divided its subject accordingly, studying either antifeminist satire or the literature of courtly love. Bringing the extremes together as two sides of the same coin has added a necessary caution, but removes the possibility of a middle ground and, by reducing all literature to antifeminism overt or covert, is absurdly simpleminded and anachronistic. It is true that works in the defense of women and those against women utilize some of the same exempla, and that they share some preconceptions about women--preconceptions which we can easily label misogynistic. That the techniques of satire and defense have much in common should come as no surprise, for the same authors wrote both, sometimes in the same work. Boccaccio wrote the first collection of biographies for and about women, De Claris Mulieribus, but others of his works, such as the Corbaccio, are blatantly antifeminist. Eustace Deschamps, inventor of the Nine Female Worthies, is best known for Le Miroir de Mariage, a satire of women and marriage. Chaucer uses the catalogue of women for defense in the Legend of Good Women and for blame in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" (although, of course, we must consider the contexts).

Oddly enough--or perhaps it is not so odd--these names are an abbreviated "who's who" of the poets of courtly love. They adapted some of its conventions in their works of defense, which usually contain descriptions of or allusions to the beauty of the heroines and often portray them in romantic situations with courtly terminology. This fact may seem to provide grist for the mill of those who see praise of women as disguised antifeminism, and in some cases of course they are right. It is necessary, however, to study individual authors and their works in detail, in relationship to each other, and in context of the whole range of debate, before any judgment about the sincerity of their defenses can be made. The judgments of the authors as to what constitutes a "good" or "bad" woman at any given point in their works are highly individual, even capricious. A study of catalogues of good women as written by Boccaccio, Deschamps, Chaucer, and Christine de Pisan is bound to turn up in each a complex set of attitudes and expectations, at once personal and cross-cultural. Detailed examination of these authors' use of classical examples in their own catalogues reveals the extent to which the paradox prevails: the issues are complicated and must be recognized as such. The coexistence of contradictory impulses must be faced, for they still affect us today. The fourteenth century's artistic search for a new range of virtues for women reflects and anticipates the widening of women's roles in

society which is still taking place today. It also helps to explain the conflicting desires and fears, both individual and social, which have hampered that process.

Notes

[1] Hesiod, Homeric Hymns and Homerica, intro. and trans. Hugh Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1914), xxii.

[2] Homer, The Odyssey, tr. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 192.

[3] Homer, p. 195.

[4] Homer, p. 197.

[5] Homer, p. 200.

[6] Homer, p. 191.

[7] Homer, p. 113.

[8] The Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 803.

[9] The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd edition, ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 764.

[10] Howard Jacobson, Ovid's Heroides (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), ix. Jacobson explains that he will deal only with "the first fifteen letters in the corpus of twenty-one commonly called the Heroides," since "the first fifteen epistulae and the last six are two distinct works. Not only were 16-21 written at a different time . . . from 1-15, but they are quite different in their form, scope and nature." I have accepted this distinction.

[11] Virgil, Aeneid 1-6, in Greater Poems, ed. J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittredge (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1895), IV, 440-476. All subsequent line references are included in the text.

[12] Jaques Perret, "Les compagnes de Didon aux enfers," Revues et études latines 42 (1964), p. 247.

[13] Perret, p. 257.

[14] Perret, p. 252.

[15] Perret, p. 252.

[16] Ovid, Metamorphoses (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1914), II, p. 194.

[17] Jacobson, p. 349.

[18] Ovid, Heroides and Amores (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1914), I, p. 14.

[19] Jacobson, p. 80.

[20] Apollonius of Rhodes, The Voyage of Argo, tr. E. V. Rien (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 130.

[21] Jacobson, p. 371.

[22] Jacobson, p. 372.

[23] Jacobson, p. 352.

[24] Eleanor Winsor Leach, "The Sources and Rhetoric of Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' and Ovid's 'Heroides,'" Diss. Yale 1963, p. 252.

[25] Utley, p. 44.

[26] Katharine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1966), p. 21.

[27] Sarah Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 8.

[28] Jerome, Epistola Adversus Jovinianum, in Patrologiae cursus completus, ser. Latina (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1890), XXIII, cols. 288-289.

[29] Jerome, col. 282.

[30] Jerome, col. 283.

[31] Pomeroy, p. 10.

[32] Rogers, p. 19.

[33] Jerome, col. 294. Compare this statement by Philippe de Navarre (c. 1260):

> Women have one great advantage: it is enough for them to cultivate a single virtue if they wish to be well thought of. Men, however, must have several if they wish to be esteemed. A man must be courteous, generous, brave and wise. But if a woman holds her body intact, all her other defects are hidden and she can hold her head high.
>
> (Philippe de Navarre, Les Quatre Âges de l'Homme; quoted in Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martinez, eds., Not in God's Image [New York: Harper and Row, 1973], p. 141)

[34] Robert P. Miller, "The Wounded Heart: Courtly Love and the Medieval Antifeminist Tradition," Women's Studies 2 (1974), p. 344.

[35] Marilyn L. Johnson, Images of Women in the Works of Thomas Heywood (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974), p. 2.

[36] The most useful definition of "courtly love" in this context is probably the most general: the exaltation of romantic, sexual passion to a desired goal in life comparable to prowess in battle and rightminded devotion in religion. The exaltation involves much transference of imagery, phraseology, and rules of behavior from one desired goal to another.

[37] Miller, p. 347.

[38] Power, p. 30.

CHAPTER II

DE CLARIS MULIERIBUS

St. Jerome's brief catalogue of good pagan women glorifies an ideal by which women who deny their sexual natures can become virtuous--that is, more like men. Jerome includes among his exemplary women many--warriors, huntresses, and priestesses in particular--whose virginity gives them masculine powers and prerogatives. Almost a thousand years later, around 1360, Boccaccio explores this paradoxical ideal of the manly woman in a collection of short biographies called De Claris Mulieribus. One of Boccaccio's late works, DCM represents the culmination of his many and varied treatments of women in romances, fabliaux, and satires. Critics disagree as to whether or not DCM constitutes a genuine defense of women. Some say that it does, others that it tries and fails; some believe that its elevation of a few women at the expense of all the rest reveals a fundamental misogyny.[1]

This diversity of opinion reflects not only the ambiguities within DCM but the ambiguous treatment of women throughout Boccaccio's works. Critics who examine his works for clues to his relationships with women in life see a movement from idealistic lover in the early romances to disillusioned misogynist in the satiric and didactic works.[2]

Boccaccio invites their interpretation by repeatedly identifying himself in his works--often in a dedication or preface--as one of the characters. He likens himself to Troilo in the Filostrato and to one of the two lovers in the Teseide. He also presents both works as attempts to win back the love of a lady called "Fiammetta," whom these critics take to represent a real woman, Maria d'Aquino.[3] In L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta, Boccaccio details the sufferings of a jilted heroine of the same name; this "elegy" has been seen as an act of literary revenge for a real injury done to the poet by "Fiammetta." Boccaccio draws even closer parallels between himself and the lover of the Corbaccio. This bitterly satiric work, rivalling Juvenal and Swift in the obscenity of its antifeminism, shows the poet as the middle-aged dupe of a conniving widow.

Thus outlined, the development of Boccaccio's relationships with women appears to follow the course described by Chaucer's Wife of Bath:

> The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
> Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
> Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
> That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage![4]

Those who take literally the existence of Fiammetta and the widow, as well as other women with whom Boccaccio claims to have had affairs, propose that when he lost all hope of being happy in love he turned against the source of his

hope and disappointment. However, critics who infer a naively romantic Boccaccio from the naively romantic heroes of his early works are ignoring other authorial intrusions which suggest a very different interpretation. Boccaccio often interrupts the action of his stories to draw some lesson about human nature, especially female, or about love. These asides are almost always satirical.

Hope Phyllis Weissman discusses the satirical force of a passage from the Teseide, a work usually considered to be a fairly straightforward romance. Boccaccio contrasts the freedom of the heroine, Emilia, with her lovers' bondage as they view her from their prison:

> . . . Emilia, overhearing their sighs, plays on with a new toy: "As it seemed to her that she knew that she was indeed liked, she took pleasure in it, and considered herself the more beautiful, and now adorned herself the more every time she returned to the garden" (Canto 19). But finally the playful freedom of Emilia becomes the occasion of her author's jealousy as Boccaccio vents his masculine resentment of the tease he has created her to be: "Almost stripped of any other worth, they [women] are satisfied to be praised for their beauty, and by contriving to please by their charm, they enslave others while they keep themselves free" (Canto 30).[5]

There has been no change of attitude forty years later, when, in De Claris Mulieribus, Boccaccio voices the same distrust of feminine beauty and charm. Discussing the beauty of Eve, he remarks that

> . . . quia inter precipuas dotes suas mulieres numerant, et plurimum ex ea glorie, mortalium indiscreto iudico, iam consecute sunt, non superflue inter claritates earum, tanquam fulgor precipuus, et apposita est et in sequentibus apponenda veniet.[6]

> (. . . because women number it among their foremost endowments, and many, by the indiscrete judgment of mortals, have already obtained glory from it, it has been treated as if it were not only not superfluous, but the most important of attainments, and it will be so treated in the following stories.)

Women's consciousness of their beauty turns that beauty into a weapon, a means to power; but this can happen only--and Boccaccio does not seem to want to admit this--because men attach such importance to it. The popular medieval and Renaissance image of Venus Armata,[7] which pictures Venus decked in Mars' arms after wearing him out with her love, may underlie Boccaccio's portrayal of such women as Iole. Iole is a warrior armed with mirabili atque constanti astutia (remarkable and sustained slyness), ficto amore (feigned love), and blanditiis atque artificiosa . . . petulantia[8] (charms and contrived . . . wantonness). Iole, intent on avenging the murder of her father by Hercules, employs her attractions in this cold-blooded manner in order to conquer the conqueror. She does not plot his death, apparently feeling that by inducing Hercules to perfume and bejewel himself, to spin, and to tell stories among the women, she has shamed him sufficiently. The anger that Boccaccio feels toward women who deliberately attract men when their own feelings are not involved has not radically increased since he vented it upon Emilia.

The ideas about women in DCM are not new for Boccaccio, but they are expressed at greater length and are systemized

as a catalogue. The catalogue form itself is not new, although it too is greatly amplified. The "romantic" Teseide and the "satiric" Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta both contain catalogues that evince more dread than delight in their treatments of love. In the Teseide, Venus' temple is painted with figures which illustrate her victories:

> Videvi istorie per tutto dipinte,
> intra le quai, con piu alto lavoro
> della sposa di Nin vide distinte
> l'opere tutte; e vide a pie del moro
> Piramo e Tisbe, e gia le gelse tinte;
> e il grande Ercul vide tracostoro
> in grembo a Iole, e Biblis dolorosa
> andar pregando Cauno pietosa.[9]
>
> (She saw stories painted everywhere, and
> among these, traced with consummate skill,
> she saw all the works of the bride of Ninus
> made clear. She saw Pyramus and Thisbe and
> the mulberries, already stained, at the foot
> of the wall. She saw the great Hercules on
> the lap of Iole among them, and sorrowful
> Byblis piteously on her way to entreat Caunus.)[10]

The deeds of Semiramis, here ironically referred to as the bride of Ninus (her husband and her son, with whom she committed incest, shared the name), include multiple cases of adultery, incest, and murder. An illustration of her story in a sixteenth century edition of DCM shows her in bed with her son; this scene was surely among those of her works depicted on the temple wall. Pyramus and Thisbe represent the sheer idiocy of love. Hercules and Iole, as we have seen, exemplify the corrupting force of woman. Byblis and Caunus are another example of incest. This ekphrastic passage illustrates the power of Venus to rule men and women alike,

destroying them or (at the end of the poem, and somewhat belatedly) fulfilling their desires. These lovers are guilty of the kind of lust which Dante personifies in Francesca and Paolo, Dido, Semiramis, Cleopatra, and the rest--"the never ending flight of those who sinned in the flesh, . . . who betrayed reason to their appetite."[11]

Boccaccio's own gloss to the scene, contained in the Autograph manuscript, makes clear his contempt for this kind of love. These explications, probably added shortly after the poem was finished,[12] utilize the common clerkly practice of upholding morality by making the sexual act appear completely repugnant. The air is beautifully perfumed, he says, but this "is a matter of necessity . . . since the act is of itself so fetid that if the sense of smell were not appeased by aromas, it would easily impede the stomach and the brain and consequently the whole operation."[13] Even more revealing is this passage celebrating the wedding night of Palaemon and Emilia:

> It is true that because of the offerings sent to the temple in the morning, it was thought that Venus, before the day turned bright, had been seven times enkindled and as many times extinguished in the fountain of love, wherein one rarely becomes a good fisherman with profit.[14]

The vaguely astrological image with which this passage opens contrasts outrageously with the obscene allusion which the whole passage is revealed to be at its closing. We might find the "joke" a little healthy irreverence, were it not

for the last line; the gloss explains that "one rarely becomes a good fisherman with profit" "because there are those who are skinned from fishing too much in the fountains of love."[15] What kind of romantic idealist concludes his description of the nuptials of his hero and heroine with a reference to venereal disease?

Robert Hollander, who has studied the Teseide in the light of Boccaccio's glosses, sees the identification of Boccaccio with its lovesick hero (Boccaccio tells Fiammetta in the dedication that he is one of the heroes; she will know which one) as ironic.

> His purpose in writing this book, as will be made plain in the concluding words of the proemio, is no other than to rekindle "la spenta fiamma" in his lady, so that she will receive him again in her bed. In short, the Teseide, at least insofar as its author would describe its purpose, is a pander. . . .[16]

The full blast of irony turned loose on love and lovers also rides down any positive moral value the poem might have. Hollander addresses this fact when he says,

> The major problem attendant upon the use of irony is that once a writer begins to be ironic, it becomes very difficult for his reader to know when (or if) he stops. Thus, while I would argue with some conviction that we should understand that Boccaccio's version of the religion of love is meant to be taken ironically, I will also admit that his irony may eventually undermine itself.[17]

The poem undercuts its own values so thoroughly that, finally, it is left without any real meaning.

Passages such as the one which ends the Teseide show Boccaccio to be first and always a satirist, drawing from classical and Christian precedents--one thinks primarily of Juvenal and Jerome--as well as from popular narrative and from life in making women its targets. It is not as a lover that Boccaccio takes himself seriously, but as a poet and thus an arbiter vivendi. If the widow supposed to have inspired the Corbaccio was amused by the advances of the "gray-haired, corpulent poet who was noted as a writer on love,"[18] it is unlikely that the poet himself did not see the comic aspects of the situation, real or fictional. There is too much humor, however grotesque, in the idea of a lover being warned off by a vision of his loved one's dead husband, "consigned" to Purgatory "to expiate the sin of having been too long-suffering in married life."[19] Boccaccio, like Ovid, means for his readers to see the face of a satirist behind the mask of a lover. By casting themselves in this dual role, both poets are able to function as a sort of Everyman, experiencing and responding to Everywoman. Boccaccio's fictional men and women, even his fictional self, are not often portrayed with psychological verisimilitude in mind. Universal types and processes--falling in love, being seduced, falling out of love--are the focus of satire, not individual personalities. One feels that Boccaccio would have had difficulty in imagining any woman who did not desire to deceive men; this satiric

bent leads him to see for a moment in Emilia--otherwise a rather attractive heroine--the embodiment of woman at her worst.

This tendency of Boccaccio to satirize women persists in De Claris Mulieribus. At one point he speaks of his desire to restrain the impulse. Speaking of Sabina Poppaea, he explains how she used the show of modesty and rectitude, together with "false tears," to attract many lovers and husbands. The last, Nero, killed his mother and his wife Octavia in order to marry Poppaea, but killed her in turn by kicking her in a fit of anger.

> Erat michi inter has Poppee fortunas quid dicerem in molliciem nimiam, in blanditias petulantiam lacrimasque mulierum, certissimum atque perniciosissimum virus credentium animorum. Sed ne viderer satyram potius quam hystoriam recitasse, omictendum densui. (p. 388)
>
> (Among these fortunes of Poppaea there was much that I could say against effeminacy, against the charms and wantonness and tears of women, a most sure and deadly poison to trusting souls. But so that I may not seem to have recited a satire instead of a history, I decided to leave them out.)

Although I am not sure what Boccaccio means by "satire" here, the distinction he makes between satire and history seems to indicate that, by history, he means the recounting of an individual's actions; by satire, he means the extending of generalizations drawn from individual actions to comment upon a whole group--here, women. Although what we think of as satire was used extensively during the Middle Ages as a didactic method, Boccaccio probably does not have

this meaning of satire in mind here. For, he does have a didactic purpose in writing De Claris Mulieribus. As he explains in the dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli,[20] he aims to teach her and other women by example:

> . . . feminea virtute et historiarum lepiditate letaberis. Nec incassum, arbitror, agitabitur lectio si, facinorum preteritarum mulierum emula, egregium animum tuum concitabis in melius. (p. 20)
>
> (. . . you will rejoice in the feminine virtue and charm of the stories. Nor will the reading, I think, be undertaken in vain if, emulating the deeds of ancient women, your extraordinary spirit is stirred to yet greater things.)

He goes on to explain that there are some thorns among the roses, but that she should learn from negative examples as well as good ones.

In this attempt to teach virtue by example, we may again think of Jerome's catalogue in connection with Boccaccio's. Jerome is careful to indicate a causal relationship between virginity and the women's exercise of masculine powers. He omits details, such as the eventual marriage of Atalanta, who heads his list,[21] which might weaken his argument. Like Jerome, Boccaccio chooses to write about women from pagan antiquity, finding them in favorable contrast to the moderns.[22] Unlike Jerome, he does not subordinate or suppress troublesome details in the interest of propounding one moral lesson. Rather, he takes each woman individually, recounting her actions and pronouncing upon them. The narratives are brief summaries, without any dialogue or vivid

description to speak of, and their static quality is relieved only when, in praising or condemning the women, Boccaccio shows some involvement with his material. Since his standards are not always governed by church doctrine, they often seem capricious.

The question of exactly what Boccaccio thought he was writing in DCM has not been satisfactorily answered, perhaps because, as his remark about satire indicates, he did not know himself. Other attempts he made to explain his purpose, such as the passage quoted above from the dedication, bear out our feelings of confusion on his part. In one sense, Boccaccio is trying to do with these lives of pagan women what earlier writers did with their saints' lives: to provide an example to be followed, an ideal to be sought after. His material is arranged like that of a saint's life; he introduces the individual example, providing a genealogy and often (though less often than the Golden Legend) an etymological explication of the person's name. The deeds or, in the case of martyrs, the sufferings of the individual are narrated. External validation of the saint follows in the forms of miracles and conversions. For the pagan heroines, external validation comes mainly from Boccaccio himself. Since he envisions having to separate the petals from the thorns for his susceptible female readers, much attention is lavished upon these final statements of judgment. Because, as I have mentioned, the stories

themselves are often presented rather blandly, these passages, which sometimes serve as occasions for Boccaccio to return to the familiar satiric mode, stand out as relatively arresting.

Confronting pagan antiquity, Boccaccio endeavors to make sense out of things which appear obscure. He employs euhemerism to explain the classical deities. In DCM, for example, he states that Venus was the first to found a house of prostitution, which she did to camouflage her own excessive lust, and was later thought of as a goddess on that account. He even speculates on which was her first husband, Vulcan or Adonis.[23] The first half-dozen famous women, after Eve and Semiramis, are the Greco-Roman goddesses and the Egyptian Isis. Boccaccio also employs etymology to break down words and names and to trace them back to their (often imagined) original meanings and significances, known to the ancients but since lost. Boccaccio's historical methods have been called "a little better than those of his day"[24]; the limitations of his method stem in part from reliance upon sources which are often unreliable and contradictory. The stories of his famous women come chiefly from historians and mythographers writing between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D. Among the historians are Livy, Pliny, Justinus, and Tacitus; collections of mythological legends and genealogies are provided by Ovid and Hyginus.[25]

One of Boccaccio's purposes in writing DCM and the other Latin works was to recover in purified form the old classical stories for the use of other poets and scholars. Boccaccio was one of the first of the Renaissance scholars to learn classical Greek and as such was fairly well-suited to the task. His preface to The Genealogy of the Gentile Gods, addressed to Hugo IV, King of Cyprus and Jerusalem, speaks of the need to "explain the meaning which wise men had hidden under this cover of absurd tales. . . . "

> Such interpretations are harder than you think; they are properly the business of a theologian, for Varro, in treating of many matters both divine and human, holds that such subjects as this constitute a sort of theology. . . . In view of such an opinion, and of the large element of absurd untruth in mythology, there is the more need of skill in separating true from false.[26]

Boccaccio might have felt a similar, if not quite so high, calling in the task of writing a collection of women's biographies. It could be said that, in writing these stories, he is not only trying to get the facts straight but to set the individual in a moral schema applicable to all women. Unfortunately, when it comes to women, Boccaccio's moral insights are indistinguishable from satire. Although the act of passing judgment and of structuring a coherent framework out of this judgment is not merely an attempt to preach, he is often guilty of knowing what the outcome of his inquiry will be ahead of time. "His moralizing is often highly conventional," and "when he moves away from tradition,

he shows doubt and even defends ideals which seem to clash. This is especially true of the ideals he proposes as models for women."[27] He structures the judgmental framework of DCM around the praise of women who transcended the limitations of their sex and so took on the masculine characteristics of moral and physical strength and courage. In the dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli, he employs etymology to make this point:

> . . . quod sexui infirmiori natura detraxerit, id tuo pectori Deus sua liberalitate miris virtutibus superinfuserit atque suppleverit, et eo, quo insignita es nomine, designari voluerit--cum andres Greci quod latine dicimus homines nuncupent--. . . (p. 20)
>
> (. . . what nature has taken from weaker sex, God in his generosity supplied to you, filled your breast with marvelous virtues, and willed you to be called by that name by which you are known--since the Greeks call andres what we in Latin call men.)

The long-standing association, stemming from etymology, of virtus, virtue, courage, with vir, man, and virilis, manly, underlies many of Boccaccio's ideas about what constitutes a good woman. In the preface to DCM, a "manly spirit" appears as the first requirement for a clara mulier and the justification for his work:

> Et si extollendi sunt homines dum, concesso sibi robore, magna perfecerint, quanto amplius mulieres, quibus fere omnibus a natura rerum mollites insita et corpus debile ac tardum ingenium datum est, si in virilem evaserint animum et ingenio celebri atque virtute conspicua audeant atque perficiant etiam difficillima viris, extollende sunt? (p. 24)

> (And if men ought to be praised when, with the strength granted to them, they accomplish great things, how much more do women, to almost all of whom is given by nature innate tenderness, a weak body, and a slow wit, if they attain a manly spirit and with swift understanding and a glorious courage dare and even accomplish very difficult deeds, deserve to be praised?)

The idea that a "manly spirit" makes a good woman is a natural corollary of the idea that woman is incomplete, imperfect man. Woman's imperfection and her resulting secondary place in the hierachy was thought to be a medical fact for countless centuries. Aristotle's The Generation of Animals, translated into Latin and "widely echoed from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries"[28] states that "'females are weaker and colder by nature; and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature."[29]

As I have said, examples of women who went beyond nature to attain virtue came to Boccaccio, as to Jerome, from pagan antiquity. Amazons, priestesses, and suicidal wives were able to subdue those natural tendencies especially endemic in women--lust, idleness, cowardice, and the desire to go on living. He explains in the preface that his work will not deal with Christian and Hebrew women, excepta matre prima. (Should Eve be called pagan, Hebrew, or Christian?) Their stories have already been told; nec equo incedere videntur gradu (nor do they seem to step to the same rung). As their goals are different, so are the forces impelling

them. Christian and Hebrew women have attained greatness by imitating their teachers (sacrosancti preceptoris tam iussu quam vestigia imitantes). The pagans act quodam nature munere vel instinctu, or perhaps cupiditate fulgoris or fortune urgentis inpulsu (p. 26) (from some gift of nature, or instinct, or desire for glory, or impulse of urging fortune). Even the saintly moderns only imitate, and they have the promise of eternal reward. The ancients, somehow raised above their sex by these mysterious inner promptings, seem by contrast to have followed virtue for its own sake.

Boccaccio's nostalgic admiration for classical heroines allows him to praise deeds in them which he would have found appalling in his own society. In that society, womanly courage is most often exemplified by characters like Griselda, whose story he tells in the Decameron. Virtue acts as the steel armor of perfect passivity, self-negation, and that rather negative quality which Jerome calls "special to women," chastity. Utley points out that sheer boredom with the good qualities safely attributable to contemporary women may have inspired medieval writers, with Boccaccio in the forefront, to retell the classical stories of manly heroines. The medieval heroine "is chaste and she is beautiful, what then? No doubt this accounts for the lists of Amazons . . . common in an age which was shocked to its marrow by the real Joan of Arc; feminists seem to have wished to bestow upon women some traits to which the more

active sex is the natural heir."[30] Boccaccio himself, one feels, would not have put it much differently. Another critic sums up DCM by saying that Boccaccio himself would not have liked "the intelligent, learned, energetic, independent, and strong-willed woman that negatively, as it were, he praises, for to him she would not seem a woman but a kind of man."[31]

Boccaccio's discussion of the Amazon Penthesilea, which I quote in its entirety, contrasts what nature and custom have made of men and women:

> Penthesilea virgo Amazonum regina fuit, et successit Orythie et Anthyopi reginis: quibus tamen procreata parentibus, non legi. Hanc aiunt, oris incliti spreto decore et superata mollicie feminei corporis, arma induere maiorum suarum aggressam; et auream cesariem tegere galea ac latus munire faretra; et militari, non muliebri, ritu currus et equos ascendere; seque pre ceteris preteritis reginis mirabilem exhibere, viribus et disciplina, ausa est. Cui nec ingenium validum defuisse constat, cum legatur securis usum, in seculum usque suum incognitum [eius] fuisse compertum. Hec--ut placet aliquibus--audita troiani Hectoris virtute, invisum ardenter amavit, et cupidine, in successionem regni, inclite prolis ex eo suscipiendi, in tam grandem oportunitatem cum maxima suarum copia eius in auxilium adversus Graios facile provocata descendit. Nec eam clara grecorum principum perterruit fama, quin Hectori armis et virtute cupiens quam formositate placere, sepissime certamina frequentium armatorum intraret; et non nunquam hasta prosternere, quandoque obsistentes gladio aperire et persepe arcu versas in fugam turmas pellere et tot tanque grandia viriliter agere, ut ipsum spectantem aliquando Herculem[31] in admirationem sui deduceret. Tandem dum in confertissimos hostes virago hec die preliaretur una, seque ultra solitum tanto amasio dignam ostenderet, multis ex suis iam cesis, letali suspecto vulnere, miseranda medios inter Grecos a se stratos occubuit. Alii vero volunt eam, Hectore iam

mortuo, applicuisse Troiam et ibidem--ut scribitur--acri in pugna cesam.

Essent qui possent mirari mulieres, quantumcunque armatas, in viros unqum incurrere ausas, ni admirationem subtraheret quoniam usus in naturam vertatur alteram, quo hec et huiusmodi longe magis in armis homines facte sunt, quam sint quos sex masculos natura fecit, et ociositas et voluptas vertit in feminas seu lepores galeatos. (pp. 134-136)

(Penthesilea was a virgin queen of the Amazons, and succeeded the queens Orithea and Antiope; however, I have not read of what parents she was born. It is said that, despising the beauty of her celebrated face and subduing the softness of her womanly body, she dared to put on the armor of her ancestors; and to cover her golden hair with a helmet; and to ascend the war-chariot and horses after the manner of a warrior, not of a woman; and to show herself extraordinary above other, past queens, in strength and in discipline.

It is agreed that her mind did not lack strength, since we read that she invented the use of the ax, unknown before her time.

She--as it pleases some to say--hearing of the virtue of the Trojan Hector, ardently loved him unseen, and because of her desire to bear of this glorious one a child to succeed other throne, was easily provoked to go to his aid against the Greeks with a very great army of her followers. This illustrious fame of the Greek princes did not terrify her, but rather, desiring to please Hector with arms and virtue as much as beauty, she very often entered into battles with the greatest numbers of armed men; she did so many great deed in a manly fashion--now throwing them down with her lance, now cleaving those opposing with her sword, now striking those turned to flee with her bow--that Hector himself, who was watching, was drawn into no little admiration of her. At length, when one day this virago was fighting against many enemies drawn together so that she could show herself worthy beyond the ordinary of so great a lover, when many of her followers were already dead, she received a mortal wound, and fell to lie wretchedly among the Greeks whom she had thrown down. Others in truth would have it that she reached Troy after Hector was already dead and in the same place was killed in a fierce battle.

There may be those who would marvel at women, however well armed, daring to attack men at all,

> unless admiration be stilled by the knowledge that nature may be altered by custom, so that she and others of this kind were at length made greater in arms than those whom nature made men, and idleness and pleasure changes into women, or rather, helmeted hares.)

Penthesilea's virtuous, manly nature is shown by her virginity, her queenship, and her courage in battle. Her womanly nature is underscored by Boccaccio's mention of her beauty and by her desire to have a child by Hector. Justinus, Boccaccio's most strictly historical source for the story, does not include this motivation, although he does describe a similar encounter between the Amazon Minithya and Alexander the Great. However, the attribution of a sexual motive to Penthesilea is found in several more contemporary sources, including the Roman de Troie and the Historia Destructionis Troiae. The familiar image of fighting men being inspired by their watching ladies seems incongruous and amusing in reverse; it would be rather humorless to criticize the scene for showing the Amazon warrior as just another woman trying to catch her man. We may find it harder to overlook the antifeminism of the closing passage, in which Boccaccio states that, just as the discipline of a warrior turned Amazon women into men, voluptuous idleness can turn men into women or--what is a bit worse--into helmeted rabbits.

The wives of the Minyans, who took their husband's places in prison and allowed them to escape in women's

clothes, provide Boccaccio with another contrast between many women and effeminate men. He praises their love and fidelity (remarking that their deed went beyond the dictates of propriety) and adds,

> Attamen, ut multa paucis claudam, has asserere audeo veros certosque fuisse viros. Meniasque iuvenes, quas simulabant, feminas extitisse. (p. 134)
>
> (But yet, so that I may close many [words] with few, I dare to assert that these women were the true and undoubted men. And the Minyan youths, whose parts the women played, showed themselves to be women.)

Again, Hypsicratea, wife of Mithridates, who cut off her hair and put on armor in order to follow her husband into battle, receives unstinting praise for her "manly spirit":

> O pectus coniugalis dulcedinis sacrarium, o inexhausta amicitie virtue, quibus quamque sanctis viribus muliebrem animum roborastis! (p. 312)
>
> (O breast, shrine of conjugal sweetness, o inexhaustible virtue of friendship, how and with what sacred strengths did you fortify that woman's soul!)

From these examples of manly women and effeminate men can be gleaned Boccaccio's ideas about the nature of women and men. "Custom" can only improve on woman's nature, apparently, as it can only detract from man's. The prototypical situation is that of Adam and Eve; their story begins the collection. Boccaccio, like so many others, imputes the whole temptation and fall of mankind to "a woman's fickleness." Faithlessness is a woman's bent, her wilful perversion of those desirable qualities, passivity

and weakness, with which she was created. All woman's attributes--beauty, vanity, idleness, timidity--are petals of the flower; deceit is the fruit. Woman tends earthward toward the material and inert, so that all a man can do--and all that a manly spirit in a woman can do--is resist this downward motion. The story of Hercules and Iole shows vividly the almost irresistible attraction of feminine matter upon masculine spirit, and Boccaccio ends the story with a searing denunciation of passion, for which stupra adulteria incestusque offerimus et obscenitatum nostrarum coronas immictimus (p. 104) (we offer acts of rape, adultery, and incest, and place upon it the crowns of our indecencies).

Boccaccio believes that nature makes women evil and that only some special conjunction of inborn gifts and rigorous training can alter that fact. He is vague about the chances of improving the nature of women, perhaps deliberately so. He uses one case in which women's position did improve to warn against any change in the status quo. When Veturia saved Rome from conquest by her son, Coriolanus, certain honors were granted to Roman women on her account. A temple was dedicated to Fortuna Muliebris, and women were allowed to receive inheritances and to wear rich garments; this, he thinks, went too far.

> Minori fuissent contente munere; . . . Sed quid? Muliebris est mundus, sic et homines muliebres. (p. 226)

> (They would have been content with the lesser reward; . . . But what can I say? The world is women's, so much so that the men themselves are women.)

When Boccaccio praises "the intelligent, learned, energetic, independent, and strong-willed woman," he is praising these qualities in virgins or chaste matrons; and, in most cases, he praises the use of these virtues in behalf of men. The same qualities can turn an unregenerate woman, prey to the "natural" female deficiencies, into a very unnatural monster. The threat of women's lustful, treacherous nature multiplies when combined with physical courage and cunning. Boccaccio's most vehement passages condemn women like Clytemnestra, of whom he says,

> Quid incusem magis nescio: scelus an audaciam? Primum, pregrande malum non meruerat vir inclitus; secundum, quanto minus decebat perfidam mulierum, tanto abominabile magis. (p. 144)
>
> (I know not which I should find greater fault with: the crime or the daring? The first, a very great evil which that outstanding man had not deserved; the second, by how much it was less proper to the perfidious woman, by so much is the more abominable.)

Like Jerome and the rest of the clerkly brotherhood from the dawn of time to the present, Boccaccio took refuge from the threat of women's seductive wiles in the concept of virginity. Given the nature of woman as they saw it, Boccaccio and Jerome were able to view the preservation of virginity in both sexes as a triumph of the spirit over the flesh--that is, of the male over the female.

Boccaccio's biographical sketch of Dido shows us again that for a woman to be considered admirable in any respect, she must first be chaste. Boccaccio begins his account by explaining that her chastity has been falsely denied:

> Huius quidem in veras laudes, paululum ampliatis fimbriis, ire libet, si forte paucis literulis meis saltem pro parte notam, indigne obiectam decori sue viduitatis, abstergere queam. (p. 168)
>
> (Indeed it pleases me to go a little beyond the bounds in true praises of her, if perhaps, in part at least, the fame of her chaste widowhood, which has been undeservedly cast down, I may be able by my few words to make clean.)

He tells how, when the king of a neighboring country desired Dido in marriage, her own people, fearing this king's wrath if she refused him, played a verbal trick on her. They made Dido admit--hypothetically--that the country's well-being should come before personal feelings; then they revealed that by her own argument she should marry this king at the price of her chaste widowhood. Dido pretended to be willing to do so; she built a bonfire to placate the spirit of her dead husband, then threw herself onto it. Boccaccio waxes eloquent:

> O pudicitie inviolatum decus! O viduitatis infracte venerandum eternumque specimen, Dido! (p. 176)
>
> (O inviolate virtue of chastity! O venerable and eternal example of unbroken widowhood!)

He then quickly turns the story of Dido's suicide into a harangue against widows who wish to remarry, sounding very much like Jerome in his comparison of this chaste pagan

with Christian women, who should have even more reason to remain chaste but do not. Boccaccio's attempts at moralizing here do not interest me, however, as much as does the radical departure of his version of the Dido story from that of Vergil and Ovid. Boccaccio is going back to Justinus' version of the story; this account places Dido's reign 72 years before the founding of Rome. Thus, Dido and Aeneas would not even have been contemporaries. Boccaccio is not quite true to his source in this particular; he has Aeneas arriving just as Dido kills herself. This departure from his source seems to be an attempt to account for Vergil's "mistake." However, as he shows elsewhere, Boccaccio is quite aware of Vergil's purpose in altering the story.[32]

Boccaccio's defense of Dido's chastity against those who had long been thought of as the authorities on the subject is important to an understanding of many treatments of classical heroines in medieval literature. Far more, perhaps, than we quite realize, medieval writers were aware that contradictions in their sources indicated the non-factual nature of much of their subject matter. I will have more to say about this awareness in coming chapters. For now, I will simply remark that the question of chastity is crucial for all the medieval defenses of women; the existence of counter-traditions claiming the chastity of Dido and Helen complicates the ability of authors to pronounce women "good" or "bad."

What may be called the "antifeminism" of DCM is in fact so deep and thorough-going an article of Boccaccio's faith that it often transcends the particularities of sex. As treated in DCM, the dichotomy between male and female ranges from an almost allegorical split between soul and body (as in the story of Hercules and Iole) to a simple double standard (as in his praise of Tertia Aemilia for countenancing and concealing her husband's adultery). Yet, he speaks so repeatedly of women becoming men and men women by their acts that the higher, male state and the lower, female state become abstractions. If Boccaccio had been asked to number the "manly" and the "womanly," or effeminate, among his contemporaries, he would probably have judged very few worthy to be called men. The rest would have to be women by default. The hierarchy, ordained by heaven and sanctioned by reason, of male and female underlying DCM is as perfect as that of Milton's Paradise, and as far removed from reality. Even though the praise of women in the work is undercut by Boccaccio's continual assertion of the natural superiority of men, the very reiteration of this assertion dulls its power. Very few of the men and women in this or any of Boccaccio's works behave as he thinks they should. So, he persists in writing satire, leaving to others the radical step of realigning the real and the ideal.

Reading to the end of DCM, we have no clear sense of where all the details and the judgments are leading. They lead Boccaccio, finally, to become rather ludicrously

enmeshed in his own contradictions. The last biography in the collection, which deals with his contemporary Joanna of Naples, demonstrates vividly the failure in practice of Boccaccio's idealized hierarchy. Joanna (Giovanna), whom Boccaccio calls Queen of Sicily and Jerusalem, inherited vast lands from her grandfather, an inheritance which other relatives tried to wrest from her by marriage or by conquest. She was married to a cousin, Andrew of Hungary, when they were children. When the couple were in their teens, he was brutally murdered. Joanna, who was pregnant at the time, was suspected of having been involved, even of having made the rope with which he was strangled.[33] "Her trial, promised by the Pope, came to nothing except a judgment which admitted probable lack of devotion to Andreas due to witchcraft."[34] Soon after, she sold Avignon to the Pope for a "bargain price."[35] She also received his permission to marry another cousin, whose brother had previously been her lover. She had, by final tally, four husbands and countless lovers, including Niccolo Acciaiuoli[36] (brother of Andrea, to whom DCM is dedicated) and even, it was rumored, Boccaccio himself.[37] She is also said to have killed her less important lovers when she tired of them, but this bit of gossip clings to all proud and sensual queens, from Semiramis to Catherine the Great. None of these popular aspersions is mentioned by Boccaccio in his blandly flattering account of her life. Still, it is easy

to believe what he says about her extraordinary "force of character": qui reges olim parvipendebant, hodie faciem irate mulieries horrescant (p. 446) (those who formerly held kings cheap, today tremble at the face of an irate woman). Departing from his usual practice, Boccaccio gracefully excuses her multiple marriages, attributing them, along with other sufferings such as enforced flight and exile, to the fault of others.

Joanna is a fitting culmination to a book of famous women for, as Boccaccio says, tandem erecto invictoque omnia superavit animo: edepol grandia necdum mulieri, sed robusto ac prevalido regi! (p. 448) (at length she has overcome all obstacles through her upright and unconquered spirit: a great thing indeed, not only in a woman, but in a powerful and very strong king). He neglects to mention that Joanna's misdeeds--even allowing for exaggeration--would also have been impressive even in a powerful king.

We will never know how much Boccaccio's praise of Joanna was inspired by the belief that art should represent ideal truths rather than mundane facts, how much by a healthy desire for self-preservation. Evidence is weighted toward the latter. One allegorical eclogue written twenty years before DCM describes the "spectacle of a just Louis marching to Italy to avenge the murder of Andreas"; in it, Boccaccio depicts Joanna as "an enraged and pregnant she-wolf."[38] Other eclogues take the opposite view of the

participants, suggesting that Boccaccio's "feelings . . . kept pace with the winning side."[39] In any case, it is fitting vindication for women that their scourge should have to bend the knee to the realities of politics, patronage, and the manly women in all her "improper" glory.

Notes

[1] DCM as a defense of women: Enid McLeod, The Order of the Rose: The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1976), p. 129. DCM as failed defense: Edward Hutton, Giovanni Boccaccio (New York: John Lane Co., 1910), pp. 240-242, and Guido Guarino, introduction to Concerning Famous Women by Giovanni Boccaccio (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963), xxvi-xxvii. DCM as veiled misogyny: Francis MacManus, Boccaccio (New York: Sheen and Ward, 1947), pp. 245-246.

[2] Catharine Carswell, The Tranquil Heart: Portrait of Giovanni Boccaccio (London: Lawrence and Wisart, 1937); she speaks of Boccaccio as learning about "woman's silly vanity, ever-lasting chatter, selfishness, jealousy, [and] unscrupulousness" (p. 106). Cf. Hutton, p. 175 ff. MacManus actually divides Boccaccio's life and works into "Early Spring," "High Spring," "Summer," "Autumn," and "Winter." The antifeminist Corbaccio opens the chapter entitled "Autumn." MacManus writes, "We may surmise that he was a man lonely enough to forget he was not the young gallant who had made conquests in Naples" (p. 204); reminded of the fact by the widow's rejection of his suit, he turns to denunciation of "love, women and their bodies in the puritanism of the disappointed man . . . " (p. 209).

[3] MacManus, p. 62. See also John Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 127-128.

[4] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 83.

[5] Hope Phyllis Weissman, "Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterizations of Women," Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. George Economou (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 98.

[6] Giovanni Boccaccio, De Mulieribus Claris, Vol. X of Tutte le Opere, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1970), p. 30. I use the title De Claris Mulieribus because it is the more common in English criticism.

[7] Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958, rpt. 1968), p. 91 ff.

[8] DCM, p. 100. Note that Iole has become confused with Omphale, whom, according to classical sources, Hercules had to serve as a slave for three years. He became enamoured of her; they switched clothes, so that he wore woman's garments and she wore his lion's skin. See Sir William Smith, ed., A Classical Dictionary (London: John Murray, 1848, rpt. 1932), p. 627.

[9] Giovanni Boccaccio, Teseide, Vol. II of Tutte le Opere, p. 475.

[10] Bernadette Marie McCoy, tr., The Book of Theseus by Giovanni Boccaccio (New York: Medieval Text Association, 1974), p. 178.

[11] Dante Alighieri, The Inferno, tr. John Ciardi (New York: Mentor Books, 1954), p. 59.

[12] Robert Hollander, "The Validity of Boccaccio's Self-Exegesis in His Teseide," Medievalia et Humanistica NS 8, ed. Paul M. Clogan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), p. 163.

[13] McCoy, p. 207.

[14] McCoy, p. 327.

[15] McCoy, p. 333.

[16] Hollander, p. 175.

[17] Hollander, p. 175.

[18] Carswell, p. 231.

[19] Carswell, p. 231.

[20] "Andrea Acciaiuoli was the sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Grand Seneschal of the kingdom of Naples. She married Carlo d'Arto, Count of Monteordorisio, and when the latter died, she became the wife of Bartolomeo di Capua, Count of Altavilla. Boccaccio was on friendly terms with Niccolò. . . . " Guido Guarino's note, p. xxxiv of DCM.

[21] Jerome's omitted (or mistaken) details include Atalanta's eventual marriage; Claudia's identity as a matron, not a virgin; Dido's affair with Aeneas (he mentions it elsewhere); Teuta's marriage; and Valeria's subsequent marriage to Sulla. See Volume VI of A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Father of the Christian

CHAPTER III

"PREUSES, BONNES, ET VERTUEUSES"

Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus acts as a turning point in feminist literary history. These stories provided strong evidence that some women among the ancients could do what men did. As a result of Boccaccio's own ambivalence, however, they left open the question of whether contemporary women had these "manly" powers and should exercise them as the exemplary pagan women were shown to do. Some later writers followed Boccaccio's retreat into an idealized pagan antiquity, in which fictional women could be manly without posing a threat to contemporary society. One writer, Christine de Pisan, rejected this view; to her, the stories represented a genuine possibility for contemporary women.

Mainly as a result of Christine's drawing it into the open, the conflict between these two views--the antiquarian and the (relatively) feminist--of Boccaccio's noble pagan women became most explicit first in France. De Claris Mulieribus was picked up by French authors soon after its completion around 1360, and was already extremely popular among them when the first French translation appeared around 1400. Boccaccio's stories gave a new twist to the old debate about women, so that no satire on women was complete

without a palinode praising women's virtue with reference to some of his examples. As Marie-Josèphe Pinet, a biographer of Christine de Pisan, points out, "Il est juste de faire remarquer qu'en France même et par les antiféministes, les femmes illustres sont amplement citées."[1] Pinet attributes to Boccaccio the leading role in this phenomenon. Attempts at defining a good woman by example had previously been limited mainly to pious references to the Virgin which would silence all argument.[2] When authors extended the practice, using Boccaccio as their chief source, they often left implicit many biographical details which would contradict what they claimed to be proving--the goodness of women. Some saw the inconsistencies among different versions of a character's story and, like Boccaccio, tried to resolve them. Some used the inconsistencies as opportunities for the imagination to roam. Of the many who, in the centuries following its composition, wrote catalogues based on De Claris Mulieribus, I will discuss several which share use of a small group of queens and warriors, mainly from Boccaccio, who are among the most "manly" and most challenging to established roles of all the exemplary women. I will focus in particular upon Eustace Deschamps and Christine de Pisan, who best exemplify the polarization of antiquarian and feminist points of view.

Deschamps, a prolific balladeer and author of the antifeminist Miroir de Mariage, assembled the Nine Female Worthies or neuf preuses to parallel the better-known neuf preux.[3] This group of heroes was popularized around 1310 by Jacques de Longuyon in a courtly poem called Les Voeux du paon (the vows of the peacock), in which they epitomize the chivalric virtues.[4] Three of the group are pagans--Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar; three, Jews--Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus; and three, Christians--Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon. This list, though often parodied and added to in subsequent centuries, was seldom changed.

The exact qualities suggested by the word preux have been debated. Most instances of the adjective preux in Old French literature find it used together with other adjectives such as sage (wise, self-governing), cortois (courteous), and vaillant (strong, valiant). The noun it most often modifies is, not surprisingly, chevalier (knight). Modern dictionaries of Old French use these same words to define preux. When applied to women, preuse appears together with sage again, belle, and enseignees (well brought up).[5] Although the etymology of preux is also subject to debate, most scholars agree that preux (other spellings include prod and prouz) derives from the Latin prodest, "it is profitable."[6] Thus, shades of meaning of preux (useful) and prouesse (usefulness) depend upon

context. In the Song of Roland, for example, "because the most useful and advantageous man is the most courageous one, the epithet prouz e vaillanz (3186) is practically tautological."[7] In speaking of a counselor, however, and away from the context of battle, prouesse may signify wisdom, while the prouesse of a saint may refer to his Christian virtues such as humility and poverty.[8] This contextual coloring, according to Pierre Guirard, enables a woman to be called preuse, "dans la mesure où elle administre sa maison avec sagesse, sait se comporter dans le monde avec experience et honnêteté."[9]

The Larousse Dictionnaire de l'ancien français gives two meanings for prodome or preu d'ome, both derived from appearances of the word in the Song of Roland: "homme de valeur" and "homme probe, sage, loyal."[10] Since a knight's "valor" and his "value" are inextricably linked, and both ultimately depend upon his loyalty, the distinction between these two meanings is blurred. Preux seems never to have been used of a man who merely possessed physical courage. Prodefeme or preudefame is given one definition, based on an occurrence of the word at the end of the twelfth century: "femme probe et sage, serieuse, modeste."[11] Although it is difficult to disentangle the original sense in which the word may have been used from philologists' conceptions of what a "worthy woman" should be, it is clear that a woman did not have to be warlike or in any way masculine to be

preuse. Marie de France describes several of her heroines as preuse, although none ever wields a sword.

An even sharper contrast, heightened by Chaucer's irony, appears between masculine and feminine uses of the equivalent adjective in Middle English. Chaucer's Knight is made "worthy" (five times over) by his love of chivalry and its attendant virtues; the Wife of Bath "was a worthy womman al hir lyve: / Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve."[12] If the phrasing does not come right out and say that she was worthy because she had had five husbands, it certainly implies such a connection.

When Deschamps set out to select nine women to parallel the neuf preux, he had three possible criteria. He could have selected from illustrious pagan, Hebrew, and Christian women the nine who best exemplified the traditional feminine connotations of preuse. Or, he could have chosen queens who paralleled the Worthies in sovereignty if not in chivalry. Or, he could have done what he in fact did--sacrificed the symmetry of three pagans, three Jews, and three Christians to choose nine of the fiercest of pagan warrior-women. This choice exemplifies what I have called in Boccaccio's case a "retreat" from the implications of strong, independent women who are the equals of men. Deschamps relegates these qualities to women of a very remote time and place, whose behavior in many instances has little to recommend itself to men or women.

Although Deschamps certainly knew De Claris Mulieribus, he probably got the names of the preuses from an intermediary source, Le Livre de Leesce (c. 1372) by Jehan LeFèvre. Leesce (happiness) purports to be a palinode in which Jehan, who had translated the antifeminist Matheolus into French, writes over 4,000 lines of "apology" to women. The tedium is relieved by his use of exempla. Medea, Circe, and Dido appear as examples of women's largesse.[13] The pregnancies of these and other heroines as a result of exercising this virtue invite comparison of them with betrayed farm girls. LeFèvre deals with Pasiphae's lust for and copulation with a bull--an act which the Wife of Bath calls "a grisly thyng"--by denying the story: Ce ne peut estre vray, c'est fable . . . Comment pourroit femme souffrir / Qua un torel voulsist offrir / Le noble sexe femenin?[14] The common examples of incestuous passion, including Myrrha and Byblis, also appear only to be dismissed as fables. LeFèvre is briefly raised above the level of hack by his ingenuity in having it both ways. He defends women in a straightforward manner by telling stories illustrating their virtues, some of which, as in the examples of largesse mentioned above, are suspect in themselves; he also defends women by telling detailed stories of their excessive or unnatural lusts, then denying that the events ever took place. His tactics occasion a serious doubt; if these particular stories are only fables, perhaps all classical examples are equally

fabulous. Whatever belief LeFèvre might have held as to the ultimate truth of these old stories, his treatment of them here is surely tongue-in-cheek.

In the number de preuses, / De bonnes et de vertueuses, LeFèvre lists avec Lucresse et Penelope the names of Sinope, Hippolyta, Menalippe, Semiramis, Thamyris, Penthesilea, Teuta, Lampedo, Deipyle, et d'autres dames plus de mille, / Renommes de grant prouesce. . . . [15] Marie-Josèphe Pinet remarks of this list that "il semble bien que le De Claris n'était pas inconnu de l'auteur."[16] The two heroines who were not treated by Boccaccio were easily accessible elsewhere, Deipyle in the popular Roman de Thèbes and Teuta in Pliny's Historia Naturalis. De Claris Mulieribus, which as we have seen repeatedly equates virtue with manliness and praises women for their manly spirits, may have been the origin for this connotation of preuse. LeFèvre, however, seems to have meant preuse as no more than a synonym for bonne and vertueuse, judging by his inclusion of Lucrece and Penelope. It remained for Deschamps, reading LeFèvre's list in context of Boccaccio's views on women, to see the women's worth as stemming not from their good qualities as women or as human beings but from their resemblance to men.

Of these women, Semiramis, queen of Assyria, was famous for her military conquests and notorious for her sexual ones. She is said to have killed her husband Ninus[17] (for whom she built the famous "Ninny's tomb"[18]) and to have

gone on to seduce many men, among them her own son. She invented the chastity belt to prevent her maids from enjoying his attentions while she was away fighting. One story says that while her maids were dressing her hair she was called away to battle and then conquered Ethiopia before finishing her coiffure.[19] This story is supposed to show how highly she valued masculine pursuits over trivial, feminine ones, and it is often represented in tapestry and illumination, in which she appears as a young, beautiful blonde.

Teuta, queen of Illyria, killed two Roman ambassadors who accused her of harboring pirates, and waged war on Rome until she was defeated. Pliny tells her story and describes the two statues Rome erected to the memory of the ambassadors.[20] Teuta has often been praised for her chastity, but accounts do not always agree on whether it was maidenly or "wifly chastitee"[21] that she achieved.

Thamyris, queen of Scythia, killed Cyrus of Persia in battle. She cut off his head and stuffed it into a bag full of blood, saying that she would thus quench his thirst for slaughter. Her representations in art resemble those of Judith holding the head of Holofernes; she is regally dressed and wears a look of quiet satisfaction as she grasps the head by its hair.[22]

Deipyle was the wife of Tydeus, goriest of the Seven Against Thebes. (He was struck dead by Athena when she saw him gnawing the brains of an enemy.) Her role in the

Thebaid is minimal, but it was expanded in Le Roman de Thèbes, which has her and her sister Argia helping Theseus to destroy the town. Some of her husband's reputation may have rubbed off on her; in addition, Statius describes the sisters as looking like Minerva and Diana, which may have suggested the addition of warlike attributes in later versions of the story.[23]

The remaining five of Deschamps' heroines are all Amazons. Of them, Hippolyta is probably the best known today. Hercules had to take possession of her girdle as one of his labors, which is a great compliment to her prowess. Theseus helped him and got Hippolyta as his prize.[24] Penthesilea fought for the Trojans, some say because she wanted to have a child by Hector. She was killed by Achilles (or, in some versions, his son Pyrrhus), who mourned her beauty and courage. Marpesia and Lampedo count as one heroine, for they appear interchangeably in the early lists. One would stay home and rule while the other made war on the neighbors.[25] Menalippe and Antiope (or Sinope) are apparently related to Hippolyta and are sometimes confused with her in the girdle episode.[26]

The stories of the Amazons and attitudes toward them represent the most persistent tradition of women warriors in western literature. Accounts vary, but most agree that their nation developed when a group of women, having lost many of their husbands in war, killed the rest to avoid

jealous quarrels and formed their own warrior state. They cut off their right breasts in order to shoot a bow and arrow and mated periodically with neighbors to produce children, of whom the boys were killed and the girls raised to fight.[25] Such a "splendid race of women"[28] could be admired, but only at a distance. The revulsion which the Amazons often inspired in male authors persists in modern commentaries. The Oxford Classical Dictionary says that Amazons "are always situated on the borders of the known world" and represent "nothing more than the common travellers' tales of the distant foreigners who do everything the wrong way about." Therefore, "attempts to find a sociological significance in the legend . . . are mistaken."[29] A study of the Amazons written in 1910 explains that since "the juste milieu is never a strong point in feminine nature, . . . fighting woman becomes an 'unholy terror,' something particularly abhorrent to those fresh from casting off the fetters of barbarism."[30] Both these appraisals agree in their assumption that women do not belong on the battlefield and that those women who do take part in battle are also capable of self-mutilation and infanticide.

Strictly speaking, only five of Deschamps' heroines are Amazons, but all could be called Amazonic in context of the balades in which they appear. Although he does little more than mention the heroines, he stresses their courage, their cruel hearts, and their subjugation of their

enemies. His descriptions of their personalities do not differentiate among them nor between them and their male counterparts, as we see in his Balade 403:[31]

S'Ector li preux, Cesar et Alixandre,
Deiphile, Tantha, Semiramis,
David, Judas Machabée, qui tendre
A subjuguer vouldrent leurs ennemis;
   Joshué, Panthasilee,
Ypolite, Thamaris l'onnourée,
Artus, Charles, Godefroy de Buillon,
Marsopie, Menaloppe, dit l'on,
Et Synope, qui orent cuers crueulx,
Revenoient tuit en leur region,
Du temps qui est seroient merveilleux.

Si fist par lui Hector mourir et rendre
.XIX roys deffendant son pais;
France conquist, Angeterre sceut prendre
Cesar; par luy fut Pompée fuitis;
   Alixandre avironnée
A du monde la terre et conquestée;
Semiramis midi, septemtrion,
Ethiope mista sugettion,
Et Babiloine, ains trecer ses cheveulx;
Mais eulx, veans la persecucion
Du temps qui est, seroient merveilleux.

Deyphile fist ardoir et emprandre
Thebes la grant; Tantha Rommains soubmis
A pluseurs fois; . . .
. . . .
. . . Mais se preues et preux
Pouoient vir la tribulacion
Du temps qui est, seroient merveilleux.

Au roy Priant Panthasilée entendre
Contre Gregois voult et servir jadis,
Et Ypolite osa bien entreprandre
Contre Herculès et Theseus hardis,
   Ceuls soubmist sa renommée;
Et Thamaris la force a subjuguée
Du roy Cyrus; . . .
. . . .

Duc Godefroy de touz n'est pas le mendre,
Jherusalem conquist et le pais
Marsopie; . . .
. . . .

Synope royne clamée
Fut a ce temps, de Femenye née
Menalope, subjuguerent maint bon;
Mais qui verroit le mal, le traison,
Les faussetez et les gens convoiteux,
Qui au monde regnent et leur renon,
Du temps qui est seroient merveilleux.
(lines 1-26, 32-41, 46-48,
50-56 of 61; I have omitted
lines discussing only the men.)

(If Hector the worthy, Caesar and Alexander,
Deipyle, Teuta, and Semiramis,
David, Judas Maccabeus, who wished
To hold their enemies in subjugation,
Joshue, Penthesilea,
Hippolyta, Thamyris the honored,
Arthur, Charles, Godfrey of Bouillon,
Marpesia, Menalippe, it is said,
And Sinope, who had cruel hearts,
All returned to their regions,
At these present times they would be astonished.

Hector himself caused to be killed and to surrender
Nineteen kings in defending his country;
Caesar conquered France, and he managed
To take England; by him was Pompey put to flight.
By Alexander was the whole world
Traversed and conquered;
Semiramis subjugated the south, the north,
And put Ethiopia under subjugation,
And Babylon, before she finished dressing her hair;
But, seeing the persecution
Of these present times, they would be astonished.

Deipyle caused to burn and be taken
Thebes the great; Teuta subdued the Romans
On several occasions; . . .
. . . .
. . . But if these heroines and heroes
Could see the tribulation
Of these present times, they would be astonished.

For King Priam, Penthesilea formerly vowed
To serve and give aid against the Greeks;
And Hippolyta dared well to fight
Against Hercules and Theseus the hardy;
Her renown subjected them.
And Thamyris subjugated the army
Of King Cyrus; . . .
. . . .
Duke Godfrey of all is not the least;
Jerusalem he conquered and the land
Of Marpesia; . . .

. . . .
Synope was proclaimed queen
At this time; she and Menalippe,
Of Femenye born, subjugated many good peoples;
But if they saw the evil, the treason,
The falseness and the covetous people
Who in the world reign and their renown,
At these present times they would be astonished.)

A short biography of Deschamps in the Oeuvres complètes explains his choice of heroines as based on their warlike and "lordly" qualities. They were not only brave women, as many Hebrew and Christian women were; they were leaders, as few Hebrew and Christian women could be. Balade 403 emphasizes these qualities in both preux and preuses; however, it ends with an envoy which extends their worthiness into the moral realm:

Princes, se ceuls qui orent si grant nom
N'eussent tendu a ce qui estoit bon,
Leurs renoms fust en ce monde doubteux;
Or ont bien fait et pour ce les loon;
Mais se tout vir pouoient par raison,
Du temps qui est seroient merveilleux.)
(56-61)

(Prince, if those who had such a great name
Had not held to that which is good
Their renown in this world would be doubtful;
Now they have done well and for this we praise them;
But if all were able to see by reason,
At these present times they would be astonished.)

Deschamps seems to be simply ignoring the fact that the collective reputation of his heroines is indeed dubious. Similarly, Balade 93 opens with an address to all eighteen worthies which in truth applies only to the men:

Venez a moy, li hault prince ancien,
.IX. hommes preux, et .IX. femmes de terre,
Trois Sarrasin, trois Juif, trois Crestien:[32]
. . . .

(Come to me, exalted princes of old,
Nine worthy men, and nine women of sovereignty,

Three Saracens [pagans], three Jews, three Christians. . . .)

The fact that the neuf preuses are all pagan and most of questionable character has the effect of distancing and undercutting their achievements, making the desire for power and government in women seem pagan at best. Thus, the choice of heroines reflects the time-honored distrust in which Amazonian women have been held. Their manly virtues make them unnatural women, as does their freedom from men's domination, whether by chastity or promiscuity. However, tapestries, sculptures, and illuminations show the heroines in a more attractive light. They are beautiful, young, and armed in the height of martial elegance. All eighteen worthies often appeared in pageants and processions, such as the one honoring Henry VI of England "on the occasion of his entry into Paris, in 1431."[33] It is tempting to see the conjunction of masculine and feminine attributes in the preuses as representing an early instance of praise for the androgyne, one who possesses the best of both sexes. Both verbal and visual depictions lack the artistry necessary to convey such a complex idea, however. The most attractive depictions tend by their very prettiness to reduce the heroines to mere make-believe. Although the Nine Heroines may have been admired as a fashion throughout the fifteenth century, it is doubtful that they would have been offered or taken as models for female behavior.

In order to judge fairly the neuf preuses as they appeared circa 1390-1400, we must briefly look ahead to the Renaissance. My previous argument about what Deschamps could have done but chose not to do is strengthened by the fact that later writers exploited possibilities which he rejected. John Ferne's The Blazon of Gentrie, which appeared in England in 1586, contains a very different group of heroines. Ferne's prose work is a dialogue between representative members of (male) society, including a Knight, a Herald, an Antiquary, and a Plowman, on subjects of arms and chivalry. The Herald describes a coat of arms:

> "Truely it is the coat of Semyramis Queene of Ascalon and Babylon. Well, although Tabardes, haue beene fit alwayes for women, to set their Armes vpon (representing a garment, which in olde tymes, was worne of that sexe) yet vnto Semyramis, you might haue allowed, a shield of the best manere: sithens that she abandoned, all feminine attyre: for shee inuented firste, the vse of breeches, and betooke her selfe, to the speare and shield. She is one, of the nine worthies, of that sexe."[34]

The Knight responds eagerly: "'What? Haue you found worthies amongst women? I neuer heard thereof before.'" The Antiquary steps in to explain that they were nine women "'almost equiualent, to those valiaunt worthies, that were men,'" of whom "'three were Gentiles: three were Iewes: and three were Christians.'" He lists the Gentiles (pagans) as Minerva, Semiramis, and Thamyris; the Hebrews as Jael, Deborah, and Judith; and the Christians as Maud (or Matilda), countess of Anjou, Elizabeth (Isabella), queen of Aragon,

and Joanna, queen of Naples (last of Boccaccio's famous women). The Antiquary goes on to describe some of the war-like activities of each.[35] The Plowman bursts in--"'Byr Lady, . . . I rather woulde haue herd, some thing sayd, of gentle and meeke women: for it is euill examples, to let them vunderstande, of such sturdye and manlye women, as those haue beene.'"[36]

Compared to the pagan heroines of Deschamps, these exemplary women more closely correspond to the Nine Male Worthies; again, however, we find worthiness equated with manliness--the women are "almost equivalent" to the men because they rejected feminine pursuits and chose masculine ones. A warning is voiced against the bad example which the Nine present to contemporary women. Significantly, however, Ferne puts this warning in the mouth of the Plowman, suggesting that such a reaction is considered discourteous and crude. This interpretation is reinforced somewhat by the author's compliment elsewhere to Queen Elizabeth as "Elizabeth our Hester, Delbora, and Iudith."

Although there has been a discernible movement toward more acceptable heroines, as is shown by the inclusion of Biblical heroines and figures from recent history, Ferne's list of worthies contains only one English woman. Its most recent members had died a hundred years before, and, as we have seen, the reputation of Joanna rivals that of Semiramis herself. With Thomas Heywood, whose book The Exemplary

Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the Most Worthy Women of the World appeared in 1640, we have a group of women specifically presented as national heroines. Heywood lists and identifies them himself:

> Deborah the Prophetesse, and a mother in Israel;
> Judeth of Bethulia, the widow of Manasses;
> Ester, the Queene of King Ahashueroth, and neece to Mordecay the Iew;
> Bonduca, or Boadicia the Dowager Queene of Prasutagus King of the Iceni, one of the kingdomes of the British specterchy;
> Penthesilea, the warlik Queene of the Amazons, and friend to Hector of Troy;
> Queene Artemesia, wife to Mausolus King of Caria;
> Elphleda, Daughter to King Alfred, and wife to Etheldredus, Duke of Mercia, or Middle England;
> Queene Margaret, daughter to the king of Cecile and Hierusalem, and wife to Henry the sixt king of England;
> Elizabeth, Queene of England, France and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith.[37]

The distancing we found in earlier groups gives way to a strong nationalistic pride in valiant women. Four of Heywood's nine are British. Elizabeth herself, whom Heywood passionately admired, is included, only thirty-seven years after her death. The inclusion of Margaret is rather surprising, as she is viewed with disfavor in most accounts of her dealings with her husband. Heywood, however, seems to approve of her loyalty to her son and of her "incomparable magnanimity" and "masculine spirit." We notice in his introductory list a new stress upon the women's relationships with men--as wife, daughter, widow, or "friend"; this new emphasis seems, in contrast to Deschamps' treatment of the Nine Heroines, to downplay their Amazonic qualities.

Heywood shows his heroines functioning in feminine as well as masculine roles. Only for Elizabeth is this elaboration omitted, perhaps because none was suitable, perhaps because none was needed.

As with earlier illustrations of the Nine Heroines, Heywood's Nine are depicted in costumes which combine their masculine and feminine attributes. They wear elaborate feather hats or jewelled headdresses; their gowns are richly trimmed and revealingly cut. Each holds a sword, sceptre, or other emblem of power; Judith, as usual, holds the head of Holofernes. These Heroines may be introduced as wives, mothers, and so forth, but they clearly possess power in their own right.

Despite the movement toward acceptance of women in powerful positions revealed by comparison of Heywood's Female Worthies with those of earlier writers, Heywood's attitude toward women is hardly progressive. Just as Boccaccio did three hundred years before, and just as Ferne did in 1586, Heywood praises his worthy women by calling them "manly." When introducing a digression on Amazons, Heywood states that "all these Heroyicke Ladies are generally called Viragoes, which is derived of Masculine Spirits."[38] The introductory poem to Heywood's piece on Deborah is especially revealing:

> He, that made man the womans Head, that she
> Despis'd of her Superiour might not be
> Raised from her sex brave Dames (by text allowed)
> Least she might prove dejected, or he, proud.[39]

Although Heywood's heroines are anomalies and expected to remain so, he does offer them as a sort of example to ordinary women. Rather than treating his heroines as Amazons banished "to the borders of the known world," Heywood brings them into British history, thus indicating a move toward the acceptance of some women alongside men in war and government.

Perhaps it will be objected that Heywood's heroines are finally supporters of the male status quo, using their power, in most cases at least, to perpetuate government by their male relatives. Still, reading their stories and seeing their proud and regal images, we can envision in this last group of heroines a glimmering of hope, voiced so much earlier by Christine de Pisan, that women could gain respect for their achievements in any field of endeavor without being viewed with suspicion by the male inhabitants of that field.

Although she accepted traditional females roles, Christine broadened them in La Cité des Dames by including a serious treatment of some of those same women warriors made popular by Boccaccio and Deschamps. Christine was writing when the popularity of De Claris Mulieribus was at its peak in France, and she relied heavily upon it as a source book. She began her literary career as a disciple of Deschamps, conforming to his rules of prosody rather than to those of other contemporaries.[40] As Marie-Josèphe Pinet points out, Christine must have known his balades on

the subject of the neuf preuses, but she "n'a rimé aucune ballade en l'honneur" of them.[41] Pinet suggests that this is because Christine "n'a jamais traité ce thème, qu'on trouve plusieurs fois chez Deschamps, des gloires humaines que la mort met à néant."[42] This silence on the subject of the neuf preuses is even more surprising when one realizes that seven of them appear in close proximity in the Cité des Dames. It is tempting to agree with Pinet and to speculate further that Christine realized the implications of Deschamps' choice of heroines, and did not approve. She takes great pains in the Cité to answer all charges, explicit in Boccaccio and implicit in all those who used Boccaccio without correcting him, against the heroines. She repeatedly stresses the connection between the capabilities of these and other warrior-women, queens, and Amazons, and the capabilities of modern women. Later in life, Christine proved true to her convictions when she applauded the actions of Joan of Arc.

Le Livre de la Cité des Dames opens with a penetrating and psychologically convincing self-portrait. Christine, already an established woman of letters, is looking for relief from study and comes upon a volume of Matheolus. She disclaims ownership of the offending work, saying that it was avec autres livres m'avoit esté baillié si comme en garde[43] (among other books left in my care). She said she believed that the book spoke well of women; if this statement

can be taken as at all literal, she may have been confusing LeFevre's retraction of his translation of Matheolus with the translation itself. The two works were usually bound together, and Le Livre de Leesce has been cited as a source for the Cité (pp. 127-128). At first she is angered by the antifeminist satire of Matheolus, yet even such confidence as is needed to sustain anger dissolves when she thinks of the great numbers of men who dispraise women. Although their assertions seem untrue, the collective voice of anti-feminism is sanctified by the venerable, indeed immemorial, nature of some of its spokesmen. She begins to doubt her own judgment until, falling into une grant desplaisance et tristesce de couraige (p. 620). She asks God why he chose to make such an abominable creature as a woman. Quickly, however, her good sense returns to her in the form of three allegorical figures. Dame Raison, whose symbol is a mirror, represents self-knowledge and the fulfillment of one's proper role. Dame Droiture, who carries a ruler, seems to repre-sent a more externalized form of earthly "rightness," while Dame Justice, with her measuring vessel, embodies divine justice (p. 67). Together they exemplify in reverse the progression through which Christine has just travelled; from self-doubt and questioning of women's roles (je pris a examiner moy meismes et mes meurs comme femme naturelle, et . . . des autres femme, p. 618) to the final despairing challenge of God's purpose.

These allegorical figures request that Christine join them in building a city where women can be safe from anti-feminists' attacks. Literal actions and materials used in constructing the walls and buildings of a medieval city acquire symbolic meaning. Some of the women who could be expected to inhabit the city instead form the very stones with which it is built. The image is appropriate; the noble pagan women about whom Boccaccio and others wrote do function as the foundation for Christine's defense and exaltation of women. Semiramis herself is the first stone. Raison explains that this grant et large fosse was chosen par les signes d'astrologie, but it is hardly a coincidence that, after Eve, Semiramis is the first of Boccaccio's famous women. She was, Raison continues, femme de moult grant vertu . . . et fort couraige es entreprises et exercité du faiz des armes (p. 677). So far, Christine's account tallies with those of Boccaccio and others. However, she goes on to state that Ninus, her husband, was killed in battle, not by Semiramis herself as some say. She does not mention that Semiramis tricked her people into following her by wearing men's clothes. Boccaccio makes much of this deception, which points up both the people's reluctance to accept a woman as leader and her use of that most womanly quality, deceit. Most radical of all is Christine's defense of Semiramis' incestuous relationship with her son.

> Bien est vray que plusieurs luy donnest blasme--et a bon droit luy fust donne se de nostre loy eust este--de ce que elle prist a mary un filz qu'elle avoit de Ninus son seigneur. Mais les causes qui la murent ad ce faire furent deux principalles: l'une qu'elle ne vouloit mie qu'en son empire eust autre dame couronnee que elle, laquelle chose eust este se son filz eust espouse autre dame, l'autre estoit qu'il luy sembloit que nul autre homme n'estoit digne de l'avoir a femme fors son propre filz. Mais de ceste erreur, que trop fu grande, ycelle noble dame fait aucunement a excuser pour ce que adonc n'estoit encorse point de loy escripte: ains vivoyent les gens a loy de nature . . . n'est pas doubte, que se elle penssast que mal fust ou que aucun blasme luy en peust encourir, qu'elle avoit bien si grant et si hault couraige et tant amoir honneur, que jamais ne le faist. (p. 680)
>
> (It is true that many blame her--and rightly, if she had been of our law--because she married that son whom she had had with her husband Ninus. But there are two main reasons why she did this: first, that she did not wish any other woman crowned in her empire except herself, which would have happened if her son had married another woman; second, that it did not seem to her that any other man was worthy to marry her save her own son. But for this error, which was very great, this noble lady had something of an excuse in that there was not yet any written law [governing morality]; for people used to live by the law of nature . . . there is no doubt, that if she had thought she did wrong or any blame would be attached to her, she had so grand and elevated courage and such love of honor that she never would have done it.)

From Semiramis, Christine logically moves to the Amazons and lays several stones at once. Raison has already compared their future city to the nation of the Amazons, the only difference being that their city will last forever. Droiture makes the same comparison later:

> Et ores est un nouvel royaume de Femenie encommencie; mais trop plus digne que celluy de jadis, car ne couvendra auz dames ycy herbergiees aler hors de leurs

> terres pour concepvoir ne enffanter nouvelle heritieres. . . . car assez souffira pour toujours mais de celles que ores y mettrons. (p. 815)
>
> (And now is the new realm of Feminie begun; but it is much more worthy than that of former times, because the women lodged here will not have to leave their lands to conceive and to give birth to new heiresses . . . because those already here are enough to suffice for all time.)

Christine's Amazons, unlike Boccaccio's, lost all their young men; there is no mention of their killing left-over husbands. Male children conceived in temporary unions would be returned to their fathers. These Amazons, like Boccaccio's, do cut off one breast (this "fact," thought to have been the etymological source for the word Amazon, would have been hard to deny[44]). Humorously, and this detail may be unique to Christine, the nobles d'entre elles lost their left breasts, a porter l'escu, while aux non nobles the right breast was removed pour traire de l'arc (p. 682). She mentions in particular the rulers Lampedo, Marpasia, and Sinope, who had such grant et hault couraige que jour de sa vie ne se daigna coupler a homme, ains remaint vierge tout sa vie (p. 683). Thamyris, whose victory over Cyrus has already been noted, is mistakenly included; the mention of her motive of revenge for her son makes her inclusion rather surprising. Menalippe and Hippolyta take their familiar roles in the story of Hercules and Theseus. Penthesilea sur toutes porta la couronne de scens, de pris, de vaillance et de prouesce (p. 694). She journeyed to Troy to help

Hector but arrived after his death. Christine describes the rich trappings of his bier and includes Penthesilea's eulogy, delivered for many lines tout en plourant. Determined to avenge him, the Amazon rushes into battle, is victorious for a time, then falls at the hands of Pyrrhus. Other warlike women whose stories form the basis of the city include Zenobia, Artemesia, Camilla, and Berenice.

The bold example provided by these women is tempered somewhat by the dialogue between Christine and Dame Raison which follows. Although, as Raison says, women's physical weakness is balanced by the greater potential strength of their understanding, men's duties and education enable men to learn more. Christine asks why girls should not be given such advantages. Raison replies that il n'est pas neccessite a la chose publique. . . . Il souffit qu'elles facent le commun office a quoy sont establies (p. 722). This passage adds a caution to what has gone before as well as introducing what comes after, a catalogue of women enluminees de grant science (p. 722). Here we see that Christine's concern is first for the smooth functioning of society, and only second for the realization of women's potential achievements in areas dominated by men. Unlike Boccaccio, Christine does not denigrate women's traditional roles. Susan Croag Bell compares Boccaccio's treatment of Cornificia with that of Christine to point this up:

> In his portrait of Cornificia, she "rejected the distaff and turned her hands . . . to writing Heliconian verses. . . . She brought honor to womankind for she scorned womanly concerns and turned her mind to the study of the great poets." Christine paraphrased Boccaccio but simply spoke of the praise he had for the woman who leaves her customary work to apply her wit to study and learning.[45]

Bell believes that, in addition to Christine's respect for "conventional female work,"[46] her own experience led her not to recommend a scholarly life to women. Bell argues suggestively that Christine felt a "painful estrangement from society resulting from the fact that she was not merely a scholar, but a female scholar; not merely studious, but a studious woman."[47] To Christine's mind, education should enhance women's performance of their roles and inculcate moral and religious virtues. Any extension of women's rights and powers should be built on this foundation. Although she believes in the equality (one sometimes feels, the superiority) of women's spiritual and mental powers, she sees them as ordained for different ends from those of men. However, despite her insistence on the value of women's traditional work, the many examples she provides of women doing the work of men seem to leave such a possibility open to women.

When the city has been finished, Dame Droiture names the residents, beginning with loyal wives. Significantly, the first four are also warriors. Hypsicratea, wife of Mithridates, fought in men's clothes alongside her husband.

We have seen Boccaccio's fervent praise of her manly spirit; Christine includes a translation of his apostrophe to her breast, beginning O pectus coniugalis dulcedinis sacrarium. However, she does not repeat his account of Mithridates' cruel treatment and subsequent murder of his wife. Triaria, wife of Lucius Vitellius, and Artemesia, wife of Mausolus, also fought at their husbands' sides. Argia (sister of Deipyle), acting in defiance of Creon's edict, found her husband's body at Thebes and gave it rites of burial; she and other women then set fire to the city (p. 820 ff.). Coming first among the secular entrants into the city, these women clearly represent one ideal form of attainment in women: the ability to balance the duties of a wife with those of a warrior, that most masculine of all roles. This view of a virtuous woman contrasts with Jerome's belief that "the virtue of a woman is . . . purity."[48] Clearly, Christine would like to extend the range of a woman's possible virtues.

Following the dictates of fashion, Christine offers Dido, Medea, Thisbe, and Hero, among others, as examples of fidelity in love. However, Christine carefully points out that while telle folle amour may prove the women's constancy and thus the possibility of faithfulness in women in general, their constancy is misdirected. This kind of love is tres perilleuse et dampnable, and it always leads to a bad end (p. 820 ff.).

Part III of the Cité has Dame Justice telling the stories of female saints and martyrs who will inhabit the city, beginning with the virgins. They are ugly stories, full of mutilations, rapes, and lives miraculously prolonged despite stabbing, boiling, and decapitation. The emphasis upon men's cruelty and women's virtue is a matter of course; the lines of conflict are drawn between pagan and Christian. Still, the zeal of pagan emperors to pierce and defile virgins' bodies recalls what we have said before about men's fear of the almost supernatural power associated with virgin females. This power is confirmed by the miracles which follow. The Virgin Mary herself, given permission by the Trinity, will inhabit the city (p. 974 ff.). Her inclusion represents partly the logical end of all those arguments which defend women by saying that Christ's mother was a woman. It is also the ultimate validation of Christine's city, since the walled and fortified "city of ladies" is clearly chastity itself. As Marina Warner says in her study on the Virgin, "the image of the virgin body was the supreme image of wholeness, and wholeness was equated with holiness."[49] Mary is called "a 'closed gate,' a 'spring shut up,' a 'fountain sealed.'"[50] Thus, the common medieval device of the allegorical city has here a significance for each of its inhabitants and for all women. To Christine, virginity is not the only type of wholeness, though it is the primary one. Self-knowledge (Raison), fulfillment of one's role (Droiture),

and attainment of spiritual and moral rightness (Justice) endow each woman with the fortification of integrity, "wholeness," represented in the gates and walls of their city.

Christine's advice to women at the end of the Cité makes this lesson clear. Married women should be subject to their husbands, whether good or bad. Virgins should remain chaste and avoid temptation. Widows should be prudent and self-effacing. The pragmatism of this advice may not be at first apparent, but Christine's rationale for similar advice in Le Livre de Trois Vertus, discussed by Bell, makes it clear:

> . . . Christine suggested that wives who did not love their husbands should pretend to do so. . . . A wife who openly showed her dislike of her husband diminished him in the eyes of the world and thus undermined her own position. Moreover she suggested that however badly husbands treated their wives, the latter should keep the peace of the marriage and do their duty in all things. For, she maintained, there are three benefits to be derived: "(1) doing one's duty is good for the soul; (2) good wifely behavior is honored by the world; and (3) rich husbands who have mistreated their dutiful wives are usually conscience stricken on their deathbeds and direct their wills to their widows' future well-being."[51]

As the Wife of Bath argues, a practical and shrewd approach to marriage can be a means to independence for women.[52] Having advised the three groups individually, Christine makes her concluding remarks of the Cité to women in general. She reiterates the dangers of illicit love. As delightful as it can be made to seem in theory, it never is so in

practice. Each woman has a chance to prove or disprove antifeminist allegations by her own conduct, and men should never be given a chance to boast:

> O! mes dames, fuyes, fuyes la folle amour . . . Fuyez la! Pour Dieu, fuyez! Car nul bien ne vous en pueent venir. . . . Souviengne vous, chieres dames, comment ces hommes vous appellent frailles, legieres et tost tournees; . . . (p. 1035)

It is against the supposed frailty and lightness of women that the whole work, with its exempla, its dialogues, and its direct preaching, fights. Christine calls for tough-minded good sense on the part of her readers. Her own level-headed nature makes her accept women's roles as society has ordained them; she works with these roles, not against them (p. 1035). The ubiquity of antifeminist satire in the Middle Ages must have strained the good humor of many intelligent women. Christine is remarkable not only for endeavoring to correct its excesses but for maintaining a gracious wit (most of the time) when faced with unreasoning prejudice. The clever and sometimes earthy quality of her argumentation can be seen in the letters she wrote in connection with the debate over the Romance of the Rose, a work she felt to be antifeminist and immoral in effect if not in intent. She never loses sight of the whole, so that her feminism is tempered by nationalism and by the love of peace and home traditionally associated with women. Far from disavowing this association, she relies upon it to make her points. It would be naive for modern women to wish

that she had gone further in advocating reform: she could never have obtained the ears, much less the patronage, of so many royal personages male and female if she had sought to overthrow what was thought of as the divinely ordered state of things.

Notes

[1] Marie-Josèphe Pinet, Christine de Pisan (Paris: Honore Champion, 1927). p. 366 (note).

[2] There were exceptions to this very general rule. Guillaume de Machaut wrote catalogues including Dido, Ariadne, Phaedra, and Medea, among others, in Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne and Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre, both before 1350.

[3] Deschamps is referred to as the probable originator of the neuf preuses in Eustace Deschamps, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. XI (Paris: Didot et Cie., 1878), pp. 226-227. See also Pinet, p. 413.

[4] James J. Rorimer and Margaret B. Freeman, The Nine Heroes Tapestries at the Cloisters (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1960), p. 4.

[5] Frédéric Godefroy, ed., Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française (Paris, 1889, rpt. New York: Kraus Reprints, 1961), VII, pp. 397-400.

[6] George Fenwick Jones, The Ethos of the Song of Roland (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 397-400. See also W. Meyere-Lübke, Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. A. Scheler's Dictionnaire d'étymologie française offers the alternate possibilities of derivation from Lat. probus (upright) and prudens (wise).

[7] Jones, pp. 21-22.

[8] Pierre Guiraud, L'ancien français (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 5th ed., 1975), p. 21.

[9] Jones, pp. 21-22.

[10] A. J. Greimas, Dictionnaire de l'ancien français (Paris: Larousse, 1968), p. 54.

[11] Greimas, p. 54.

[12] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 445-476.

[13] Jehan LeFèvre, Lamentations de Matheolus et le Livre de Leesce (Paris: Bouillon, 1905), II, p. 74.

[14] LeFèvre, II, p. 78.

[15] LeFèvre, II, p. 91.

[16] Pinet, p. 366 (note).

[17] Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, ed. Harry Thurston Peck (New York: American Book Co., 1896; rpt. 1923), pp. 1438-1439.

[18] William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream III, 1, 99.

[19] Guido Guarino, tr., Concerning Famous Women by Giovanni Boccaccio (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 5-7.

[20] Deschamps, XI, p. 226.

[21] Chaucer, p. 143, 1453-1455.

[22] Guarino, pp. 104-106.

[23] Deschamps, XI, p. 226. See also Statius, Thebaid II, pp. 236-237.

[24] Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, I, 1, 16-17.

[25] Guarino, p. 24.

[26] Guarino, p. 40.

[27] Guarino, pp. 23-24.

[28] Guy Cadogan Rothery; The Amazons in Antiquity and Modern Times (London: F. Griffiths, 1910), p. 12.

[29] The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd ed., ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

[30] Rothery, p. 182.

[31] Deschamps, III, pp. 192-194.

[32] Deschamps, I, pp. 199-201.

[33] Johann Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), pp. 72-73. In connection with pageants should be mentioned the Middle English poem "The Nine Ladies Worthy," written around 1500, which may represent the text to accompany such a display. All of Deschamps' nine are included. It was once attributed to Chaucer, which is hard to believe in view of its grossly aureate diction. I quote the first of nine stanzas:

> Profulgent in preciousness, O Sinope queen,
> Of all feminine bearing the scepter and regaly,
> Subduing the large country of Armenia as it was sene,
> Maugre their mights thou brought them to apply,
> Thine honour to encrease, they power to magnify.
> O renomed Hercules with all they pompous boste,
> This princes tooke the prisoner and put to flight
> thine hoste.

(Alexander Chalmers, ed., Works of the English Poets [London: 1810], I, pp. 561-562.)

[34] John Ferne, The Blazon of Gentrie (1586; rpt. Amsterdam, 1973), p. 156.

[35] Ferne, pp. 156-158.

[36] Ferne, p. 158.

[37] Thomas Heywood, The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the Most Worthy Women of the World (1640; micropublished in "History of Women"; New Haven: Research Publications, 1975, reel 45, #287).

[38] Heywood.

[39] Heywood.

[40] Pinet, pp. 237-238.

[41] Pinet, p. 413.

[42] Pinet, p. 414.

[43] Maureen Cheney Curnow, "The Livre de la Cité des Dames of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition," Diss. Vanderbilt 1975. All subsequent references to this edition are included in the text.

[44] Giovanni Boccaccio, De Mulieribus Claris, Vol. X of Tutte le Opere, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1970), p. 64, and p. 493, note.

[45] Susan Groag Bell, "Christine de Pizan (1364-1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman," Feminist Studies 3 (1976), pp. 173-184.

[46] Bell, p. 177.

[47] Bell, p. 177.

[48] See Chapter I.

[49] Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), p. 72.

[50] Warner, p. 73.

[51] Bell, p. 181.

[52] Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," PMLA 94 (1972), p. 214. Also compare January's advice to May, The Merchant's Tale, lines 2168-2175.

[53] Eileen Power, Medieval Women, ed. M. M. Poston (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p. 32.

[54] In a letter to Pierre Col dated October 2, 1402, Christine says this of their "debate":

> You know that it happens with the reading of this book [the Romance of the Rose] as with the books of the alchemists. Some people read them and understand them in one way; others read them and understand them in the opposite way. And each thinks he understands very well indeed. As a result they work to prepare furnaces, alembics, and crucibles, mixing together various metals and materials. With great effort, they blow up the fire, and, because of a minute bit of sublime metal or mere residue . . . they think they have worked wonders. . . . So it is with you and me. You understand the book in one way, and I, quite the opposite. . . . And when we have worked and worked, it is all worth nothing. For the matter is very dishonorable, much like certain alchemists who think they can transmute dung. . . . I would prefer not to be an alchemist in this affair. . . . (Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literature, No. 199, 1978], p. 125.)

CHAPTER IV

"HIRE NAME, ALLAS! IS PUBLISSHED SO WIDE"

Geoffrey Chaucer was clearly intrigued by catalogues of good women and by the stories of individual women from the catalogue tradition, for they appear in almost all of his works. That the foremost English poet of the fourteenth century made such extensive use of the device would be reason enough to devote a chapter to him; but, the significance of Chaucer's catalogues goes far deeper. In his use of Vergil and Jerome, his strong identification with Ovid, and his knowledge of and reaction to such contemporaries as Boccaccio, Machaut, and Deschamps, Chaucer ties together many of the themes and conventions emphasized in the preceding chapters. Of all who wrote catalogues of good women, Chaucer shows the most awareness of the rhetorical nature and possibilities of the technique and of the tendency of such catalogues to reveal more about the composer than about the subject. Too, he shows the greatest awareness of the significances underlying this particular type of catalogue. With Ovid's, his is the clearest-sighted and least sentimental appraisal of the myths surrounding human passion and the female sex. Both consider the whole problem of authority versus experience as represented in the microcosm of

women's virtue: whether a woman can or should develop her own integrity by experience rather than by reliance upon authority's commands simply to remain chaste. As John Fyler puts it in his recent book Chaucer and Ovid, "love becomes," for Chaucer along with Ovid and Vergil, "a metonymy for the irrational impulses in the human mind."[1] Likewise, the classical heroines who are destroyed by the conflicting demands of passion and pudor become a metonymy for the human condition. Authority promises reward to the good and punishment for the evil, but experience reveals the issue to be inexorably confused. "The tension between passion and the generic framework designed to restrain it" in the poetics of Chaucer and Ovid thus amounts to "a structural confirmation of . . . thematic concerns."[2]

Each of Chaucer's early poems--the Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, and the Parliament of Fowls--contains a catalogue of (mostly) women used to illustrate the disastrous effects of love. Catalogues in the Book of the Duchess and the House of Fame are thematically related to short narratives retelling the stories of classical heroines who are themselves exempla. The first tells the story of Alcyone, who died of grief at the news of her husband's drowning; a catalogue placed later in the poem derides the foolishness of those who kill themselves or commit "many another foly"[3] for the loss of love. The narrator of the House of Fame specifically compares Dido, whose story he tells, to

Briseis, Oenone, Hypsipyle, and others who are the victims of "untrouthe." In both poems, these catalogues and short narratives do not seem connected with the central plots of the poems. On closer inspection, however, we can see that these exempla reflect tiny images of the larger stories that enclose them and that, far from being unrelated, they directly affect the directions which the stories take. The transformations which the exempla undergo in the poems are appropriate to the dream-vision form; the mind of the dream-narrator is shown to operate subconsciously upon these images from his reading, in ways to which his waking mind is oblivious.

"The Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse" was written, as Alceste says in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, in sincere praise of the God of Love. Like most elegies, it focuses upon the living, so that its celebration of a love in the past affirms the validity of that love for the survivor in the present. For the Black Knight, the elegy serves as a lesson in the acceptance of loss; for the narrator--perhaps more accurately, for the reader--the elegy teaches the difficult art of consolation. The poem opens outside the dream-vision in which the main action of the story takes place. The narrator describes his sorrow, his resulting sleeplessness, and the book of fables he reads in order to pass the night. One tale strikes him as particularly memorable, "a wonder thing"; he spends almost 200

lines retelling this story, of Ceyx and Alcyone. King Ceyx is drowned in a voyage; Alcyone, in despair at his long absence, calls upon Juno for relief "out of thys distresse." She asks for "som certyn sweven / Wherthourgh that I may knowen even / Whether my lord be quyk or ded" (119-121). Juno sends a messenger to Morpheus, the god of sleep, instructing him to "take up Seys body the king . . . and doo hit goon to Alcione . . . And shew hir shortly . . . How hit was dreynt thys other day" (143-148). Juno's superhuman indifference to mortal suffering shows in the pronoun "hit"; Cyx is already only a corpse. Morpheus, too, is callous, and he take literally Juno's command to "shew hir shortly." His words, spoken through the body and in the voice of Ceyx, are to the point:

> . . . "My swete wyf,
> Awake! let be your sorwful lyf;
> For in your sorwe there lyth no red.
> For, certes, swete, I nam but ded;
> Ye shul me never on lyve yse.
> . . .
> And farewel, swete, my worldes blysse!
> I praye God youre sorwe lysse.
> To lytel while oure blysse lasteth!
> (200-205, 209-211)

His "consolation" consists of saying that it is no good being sorry; the bliss of the world simply ends. The words "I am only dead" are a more chilling <u>memento mori</u> than the familiar "what you are, I once was; what I am, you will be." Morpheus' words are true: Alcyone should not waste the little time allotted to her in grieving, when life and death will

soon be as meaningless to her as they are to Ceyx. The narrator replaces a rather overblown lament given to Alcyone in Ovid's Metamorphoses with one word--"'Allas!' quod she for sorwe." He rather clumsily calls attention to his omission by saying that it would take too long to give the whole text of what she said "in that swow." His haste to get on with his story does not prevent one from feeling that, having said this one word, there is really nothing left for Alcyone to say. The brutal abruptness with which this non-human perspective forces itself into her human world is too much for Alcyone. Ovid's Alcyone grieves loudly, throws herself off a cliff, and, along with her husband, is transformed into a bird; Chaucer's Alcyone receives the divine message and dies shortly thereafter--today, we would say she died of shock.

Although the narrator hurries on to explain that his interest in the story is as a cure for insomnia, he is not without sympathy for her. Almost at the beginning of his retelling, he has expressed it:

> Such sorowe this lady to her tok
> That trewly I, which made this book,
> Had such pittee and such rowthe
> To rede hir sorwe, that, by my trowthe,
> I ferde the worse al the morwe
> Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe.
> (95-100)

Of this reaction, John Fyler says that the narrator's "sympathy with Alcyone arises from the sorrow, not the love, they both feel."[4] This fact helps to account for the kind

of exemplary advice the narrator later gives to the Black Knight. In the dream which follows his reading, the narrator is wandering in a forest when he overhears a knight mourning the death of his lady. The narrator claims to remember the knight's very words; he repeats them and describes the form in which they were delivered. After having lapsed into silence for a time, the Black Knight at last notices the narrator, and they exchange polite greetings. Although the narrator has heard the words well enough to repeat them, he gives no sign of this to the knight. Instead, he makes tactful reference to the knight's obvious sorrow and offers himself as a listener: "'telleth me of youre sorwes smerte; / Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte . . . '" (555-556). The essence of the knight's reply is that Fortune has beaten him at chess by taking his queen. He has nothing left to hope for, he says, but a speedy death.

The narrator, who we know has lost sleep for sorrow eight years running, to the point that he wonders why he is still alive, should be able to sympathize with this longing. Instead, he shows exasperation that a mere game of chess should lead to self-destruction. Pointing out the foolishness of such disproportionate despair, he uses familiar examples of women (and Samson, who in this case would be said by Boccaccio et al. to be acting effeminately) destroyed by their own excessive passion.

"Though ye had lost the ferses twelve
And ye for sorwe mordred yourselve,
Ye sholde be dampned in this cas
By as good ryght as Medea was,
That slough hir children for Jasoun;
And Phyllis also for Demophoon
Heng hirself, so weylaway!
. . . Another rage
Had Dydo, the quene eke of Cartage,
That slough hirself, for Eneas
Was fals; which a fool she was!
And Ecquo died, for Narcisus
Nolde nat love hir; and right thus
Hath many another foly doon;
And for Dalida died Sampson
That slough hymself with a piler.
But there is no man alyve her
Wolde for a fers make this woo!"
(723-741)

Four of the women in this catalogue are mentioned together in the Romance of the Rose; there, their foolishness stems from their failure to love more than one man.[5] The message of the Romance, repeated by the Wife of Bath, is that the mouse with only one hole to run to is in great danger. The basic import of the catalogues in both works is the same: survival is more important than adherence to an ideal which threatens survival. That the knight's loss and his potential range of reaction is to be compared to these examples is undeniable; he, too, should survive. The comparison is softened, however, by the fact that his love, like Alcyone's, ended by death rather than betrayal. His love retains its integrity, while the loves of these suicidal heroines do not. We may hear a faint echo of Machaut's Jugement de le Roy de Behaigne, in which the loss of a loved one by betrayal is judged to be worse than loss by death of a true

lover. There is a psychological reality in this judgment which cannot be translated into telling one's love that you would prefer to have him dead than unfaithful; betrayal seems to deny that any real love ever existed. Chaucer was to return to this problem in Troilus and Criseyde.

Most of the rest of the poem is made up of the knight's reminiscences about his lady and their love. Not until the end is he able to admit, in response to the narrator's reiterated questions, that she is dead. "'Is that youre los? By God, hyt ys routhe!'"--the narrator's simple words end their dialogue. Like Alcyone, the knight has nothing more to say; unlike her, he can go on living, his heart eased at least "for that tyme." He has been allowed, indeed forced, to put Fortune's victory in perspective and to reaffirm the undiminished significance of his love. It is never clear how much the dreamer has understood of his own dream and of the types of consolation presented by the examples of the Ceyx and Alcyone legend on the one hand and the suicidal lovers on the other. Although the catalogue of betrayed lovers, which is the longest speech of the dreamer within the dream, seems irrelevant to the knight,[6] consider the effect if the narrator had chosen the example of Alcyone. It is simply too close to home to have any other effect than to make suicide appear inviting. The contrast between their loss of false lovers and his loss of a true lover helps the knight to reaffirm the worth of his love. The narrator's

obtuse behavior helps the knight come to this realization slowly, in contrast to the businesslike but crushingly swift message-bearing of Morpheus. Authority has helped the knight by its very irrelevance to his own situation. The narrator has responded to the knight's sorrow, as he did to Alceste's, not to the nature of the loves they have lost. We have here the first faint characterization of the bookish narrator as a self-proclaimed authority on "old examples" of classical heroines destroyed by love. This characterization is expanded in the House of Fame and the Legend of Good Women, touched upon in the Parliament of Fowls, and explored from a different angle in Troilus and Criseyde.

Authority, with its simple answers that fail to work and its intricate classifications that fail to fit, comes off fairly well in the Book of the Duchess compared to its treatment in the House of Fame. This fact is obvious from the opening lines in the House of Fame, a catalogue of the various kinds of dreams as expounded by scholarly dream-theory. For almost 60 lines, the narrator lists classifications and possible causes of dreams as if he were reading at random from the index of a compendious work on the subject, while repeatedly asserting his inability to understand any of it. As in the Book of the Duchess, Chaucer is stating his unwillingness to comment in his own person upon the dream he is going to tell, while at the same time characterizing his dream-narrator as an incompetent witness to the

actions of his own imaginary subconscious. The opening remarks on dreams show the narrator to be a reader of the kind whose grasp of facts is accompanied by a total inability to understand, much less generate, ideas as to their significance. His dream opens into a world of words turned "ymages," of which the controlling image is a portrait of Venus, in whose temple the dreamer finds himself. The opening words of the Aeneid, engraved in brass, introduce a painted narration of the events of that epic, "straightened out" in chronological order. Although the pictoral aspect is stressed with the repeated phrases "first sawgh I," "next . . . sawgh I," "and I saugh next," there is some overlapping of the senses, as when the dreamer says that Creusa's message to Aeneas "was pitee for to here" (189). The fictional reality of the story seems momentarily to override the enclosing fiction of the temple, yet this manner of presentation achieves its goal of conveying the extent of the dreamer's vicarious involvement.

His repeated cries of "allas!" in response to the story also make clear his emotional participation. The focus of his strongest reaction, like that of so many medieval authors, is the love affair of Dido and Aeneas. He spends few words--very few words--on the process of falling in love, saying "I kan nat of that faculte" (248). In describing her actions in love and her reactions to Aeneas' betrayal of her, however, the narrator enters fully into

sympathetic involvement with his heroine. As in the Book of the Duchess, it is sorrow at the loss of love, not love, that he understands. Playing down Dido's queenly rank and the special qualities associated with it, he likens her actions to what "any woman myghte do." As in the opening passages on dreams, the narrator pulls out all the relevant terms and examples from his reading; in contrast to the opening passage, however, he here presents himself as an expert--his field, betrayed women. Even more than the dreamer-narrator in the Book of the Duchess, this dreamer holds these martyrs of love to be his area of expertise. As I have mentioned, the dreamer in the Book of the Duchess has as the subject of his longest speech within the dream a catalogue of deceived women; this dreamer, similarly, gives a catalogue such importance that he departs from two levels of fiction--the events of the Aeneid and the dream-temple which frames them--to include it. Although he has admitted (287) that Dido's was a foolish lust, his moralizing on the deceitful wiles of men and his recital of Dido's accusations on behalf of women against all men place the burden of blame squarely on Aeneas. The catalogue illustrates "the harm, the routhe, / That hath betyd for such untrouthe, / As men may ofte in bokes rede, / And al day sen . . . in dede" (383-386):

> Loo, Demophon, Duk of Athenys,
> How he forswor hym ful falsly,
> And traysed Phillis wikkidly,

That kynges doghtre was of Trace,
And falsly gan hys terme pace;
And when she wiste that he was fals,
She heng hirself ryght be the hals,
For he had doon hir such untrouthe.
Loo! was not this a woo and routhe?
   Eke lo! how fals and reccheles
Was to Breseyde Achilles,
And Paris to Oenone,
And Jason to Isiphile,
And eft Jason to Medea;
And Ercules to Dyanira,
For he left hir for Yole,
That made hym cache his deth, parde.
   How fals eke was he Theseus,
That, as the story telleth ys,
How he betrayed Adriane;
The devel be hys soules bane!
. . .
She made hym fro the deth escape,
And he made hir a ful fals jape;
. . .
He lefte hir slepynge in an ile
Desert allone ryght in the se,
And stal away, and let hir be,
And took hir suster Phedra thoo
With him . . .
(387-420)

Like the exempla of the Heroides, on which this catalogue is based, we have only the women's point of view on the subject of "untrouthe." Certain aspects of the stories remain unstated: that Demophoon did not really betray Phyllis, but only arrived too late; that Achilles was forced to give up Briseis; and that Paris, Jason, and Theseus, as well as Hercules, were themselves eventually brought low by women. The dreamer pays lip service to the fact that "the book" excuses Aeneas, but the paltry six lines he expends on this attempt to justify Aeneas' "grete trespas" reveal either skepticism or lack of interest in the hero as hero.

The story of the Aeneid is brought to a swift conclusion in 30 lines, a perfunctory wrapping-up which leads back to Venus and exalts her power. His assertion of Venus' power and mercy, in conjunction with the perverse martyrology illustrating the former but not the latter, shows the narrator to be himself what he calls Ovid--"Venus' clerke." This, as Chaucer later has the Wife of Bath prove by astrology, is a contradiction in terms. If, however, there could be such a thing as a clerk of Venus, we might expect him to behave as this narrator has done--not to know very much about the process of falling in love, but to appreciate (at what he hopes is a safe distance) the difficulty of getting out of love once in.

The dreamer walks from the temple into a desert, "withouten toun, or hous, or tree, / Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond" (484-485). The temple itself seems to have vanished--not an unusual occurrence in a dream; thus, the dreamer has nowhere to hide when an immense eagle swoops down (at the end of Book I) and picks him up (at the beginning of Book II, after a short proem). Reminded of Ganymede and under the influence of the scenes in Venus' temple, the dreamer immediately realizes that the eagle has been sent by Jove. The eagle confirms what the dream-narration has already shown us about "Geffrey"; the narrator is a poet well-acquainted with love and lovers--through books. Jupiter, the eagle reports, holds it to be

" . . . gret humblesse
And vertu eke, that thou wolt make
A-nyght ful ofte thyn hed to ake
In thy studye, so thou writest,
And ever mo of love enditest,
. . . "
(630-634)

His efforts are made the more humble and virtuous by the fact that he himself has had no success as a lover. "Jupiter," the eagle continues,

. . . "considereth this,
And also, beau sir, other thynges;
That is, that thou hast no tydynges
of Loves folk yf they be glade . . . "
(642-645)

The love poet, equipped for his craft chiefly with those familiar stories of abandoned women, lacks knowledge of the "glade" among Love's ancient folk as well as of contemporary lovers. Jove and his agent the eagle have undertaken to correct his view by conveying the poet to the marvelous House of Fame, where he will hear "Mo wonder thynges . . . / And of Loves folk moo tydynges . . . then greynes be of sondes" (674-675, 691). The eagle explains that sound is broken air, and a word "dropped" into air causes ever-widening circles of motion as does a stone dropped into water. The commotion in the air "up bereth" (818) the "speeche, / Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun . . . Til hyt be atte Hous of Fame" (819-821).

This conception of "Fame" as the noise of speech continually in flux is based on Vergil's description of Rumor.[7] This Rumor betrayed Dido by spreading word of her liaison

with Aeneas; we recall that in Book I of the House of Fame Dido blames Aeneas and Fame together:

> " . . . thorgh yow is my name lorn,
> And alle myn actes red and songe
> Over al thys lond, on every tonge.
> O wikke Fame! for ther nys
> Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!
> O, soth ys, every thing ys wyst
> Though hit be kevered with the myst.
> Eke, though I myghte duren ever,
> That I have don, rekever I never,
> That I ne shal be seyd, allas,
> Yshamed be thourgh Eneas,
> And that I shal thus juged be,--
> 'Loo, ryght as she hath don, now she
> Wol doo eft-sones, hardely;'
> Thus seyth the peple prively."
> (346-360)

Plainly, in hoping to learn from Fame some new thing to write poetry about, Geoffrey is siding with the enemy of Dido and her sisters. The choice of the words "red and songe" to describe the dissemination of scandal reminds us of an aspect of Fame potentially disconcerting to poets (especially poets who take it upon themselves to defend betrayed ladies): Fame is in a sense their pander. We may remember in this regard Christine de Pisan's advice to women to resist the advances of men lest the men boast of them afterwards: "remember how they call you frail and false." Chaucer shows his awareness of what would today be called the double standard in regards to sexual fame or infamy by having two groups of men ask Fame for renown as illicit lovers (Book III). The first group prays,

"For Goddes love, that sit above,
Thogh we may not the body have
Of wymmen, yet, so God yow save,
Leet men gliwe on us the name!
Sufficeth that we han the fame."
(1758-1763)

Their prayer is granted; a second group which makes the same prayer receives a scathing condemnation from the fickle goddess: all will know that, though they think themselves irresistible to "bele Isawde," the lowliest peasant is too good for them. The men's eagerness to be known for illicit relationships with women contrasts vividly with Dido's hysterical dread of Fame; in fact, Dido kills herself more to avoid the consequences of her infamy than in sorrow at Aeneas' desertion.

Fame is further undercut as a reliable authority by the details of her castle in Book III. The castle contains visual "catalogues" of Fame's agents and her favorites, mostly personified authorities of literature and history. Fame herself supports Alexander and Hercules, and others of the famous are supported by their chroniclers. Josephus bears "the fame up of the Jewerye" (1436), Statius, that of Thebes, and Homer and others, the especially heavy burden of Troy. Significantly, there is dissent among the holders-up of Troy; Homer himself is suspected of favoritism toward the Greeks. Vergil and Ovid, two of the authorities who exposed Dido to fame but whose treatments differ somewhat, are seen standing close together. This fact may serve to remind

us again of the controversy over Dido's reputation (discussed in Chapter II) among medieval writers, many of whom (including Boccaccio) claimed that she died a chaste widow.[8] Although Ovid and Vergil both find her guilty, they differ in the amount and kind of sympathy shown to the erring queen. Plainly, with this challenge to authority and to Fame in mind, the Poet is wise to refuse fame for himself (lines 1873-1882). Yet, he continues his search for those whose fame he wants to uphold in his role as poet. He follows a friendly stranger to a wicker-work house, "shapen lyk a cage" and "fild ful of tydynges" (1985, 1957). While Fame was capricious in her doling out of justice and injustice, these tidings are even more perverse in their inclination to confuse true with false. Each tiding enters, swells with telling and retelling, then leaves to receive its portion of fame and to return to circulation on earth. Sometimes "a lesyng and a sad soth sawe" (2089) try to leave by the same opening; in order to get through, they swear brotherhood, "that no man . . . shal han on [of us] two, but bothe / At ones" (2103-2104). Moving toward the corner where men are speaking of love-tidings, the poet seems at last to be reaching his goal. What help the "man of gret auctorite" could have given will never be known, for the poet breaks off at this point.

The dilemma which his experiences in the House of Fame have revealed to the poet cannot be answered in the scope

of the poem--not, above all, by a "man of gret auctorite"! The narrator fancies himself an authority on deserted women in the classical mold, yet he has no knowledge (much less experience) of love in his own world. His dream allows him immediate participation in and response to the plight of one who is "famed" among poets and very regretful of the fact. Apparently without realizing that he is siding against her in pursuing this potentially voyeuristic investigation, he continues his search, only to find authorities of all kinds conflicting and unreliable. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the catalogue of betrayed women and especially the retelling of Dido's story function as extreme examples of the destructive powers of authority. Authority, in these women's cases, takes the form of what amounts to a committee of destruction: the rule-makers who decreed chastity-or-death; the men who incited them to break the rule of chastity and then betrayed them; the people who assume that if the rule is broken once it will be broken repeatedly; and the minstrels and poets who spread the women's disgrace. Chaucer returns to the problematic relationship between a poet-authority and his female exemplum in Troilus and Criseyde.

In reading Troilus and Criseyde, we are meant to feel the inevitability of its tragic conclusion from the first lines, and yet to fight against accepting what we know to be true. Chaucer has chosen an example of that very familiar

creature, the "frail and false" woman, for his narrator, reader, and hero to fall in love with. Knowing beforehand that she will be false, as the narrator and the reader do, or accepting a Boethian system of predestination, as Troilus tries to do, fails to comfort. Indeed, if all the contradictory emotions raised by the poem were to cancel each other out, we would be left with only the discomfort. Chaucer has taken much care to ensure this reaction. E. T. Donaldson, in his book Chaucer's Poetry, describes the narrator's

> . . . dual, paradoxical function as a historian whose knowledge of the story is wholly book-derived and as an invisible yet omnipresent participant in the action. It is as a historian that he first presents himself--a rather fussy, nervous scholar who has got hold of some old books, particularly one by Lollius, that tell the story of the Trojan lovers. This he means to translate, although he complains that his sources fail to give as much information as they ought. Nevertheless, they present the essentials: the sorrow Troilus suffered before he won Criseide, and how she forsook him in the end (Bk. I, 55-56). Starting out with such inadequate and unpromising data, the historian proceeds to recreate the story as if he himself were living it without knowing its outcome. His second guise, that of participant, unlike the guise of the historian, is partly implicit, a matter of the emotion intensity and lack of objectivity with which he approaches the characters. As the poem proceeds, the tension between the two attitudes, the historian dealing with incontrovertible fact, the participant speaking from equally incontrovertible emotional experience, increases until it becomes almost unendurable. By the beginning of Book IV (lines 15-21) the narrator's love for Criseide has become such that when he finds himself forced to face the issue of her perfidy he comes close to denying the truth of his old books.[9]

Again, old books are the enemy of a heroine from old books. If we see the narrator in Troilus as representing a more complex version of the narrator in the House of Fame, the question of reliability of sources becomes crucial. As we have seen, there are two versions of Dido's story, one proclaiming her guilt, the other her innocence. Helen, whose fame is even more damning that Dido's, has her defenders as well. Chaucer was probably not aware of the palinode of Stesichorus, recounted in Plato's Phaedrus, which apologizes to Helen for the poet's former libel and explains that the gods had sent a phantom in her shape to Troy.[10] Chaucer would have known, however, the partial defenses of Helen by Ovid and Boccaccio. In the Heroides, Ovid has Helen's daughter Hermione defend her mother by analogy to herself--they are both, as Tantalides, "ever victims ready to the ravisher's hand."[11] To her first love, Orestes, from whom she was forcibly separated and married off to Pyrrhus, Hermione writes, "You are to me what my sire is to my mother, and the part which once the Dardanian stranger played, Pyrrhus now plays."[12] To be sure, this is not the only account given of Helen's activities in the Heroides; Helen herself tells a far different story; but this defense has its effect. Boccaccio mentions almost grudgingly that Paris might have carried off Helen against her will.[13] It is perhaps significant that he refers to the earlier abduction of Helen by Theseus, who, although he only got a few kisses,

falsely ruined her reputation. In the Heroides, Helen's letter to Paris (which mostly shows her "swearing she would ne'er consent") says that Theseus returned her unmolested to her home: "Did Theseus repent but for Paris to follow in his steps, lest my name should sometime cease from the lips of men?"[14] These references to her "name" and destiny reveal ironically that she is destined, both by nature and by poetic fame, to fall. Her beauty has condemned her to the role she must play; she protests, "My beauty is a burden to me; for, the more you men persist in your praise of me, the more justly does [Menelaus] fear [to be cuckolded]. The glory that is my delight, just now is a bane as well, and it were better had I cheated fame."[15]

Here again, we see that one slip (in the case of Helen's rape by Theseus, not even her fault) can betray a woman into the hands of fame and thence to seducers and poets. Dido in the House of Fame is an obvious parallel; another is Criseyde. When she has betrayed Troilus,

> She seyde, "Allas! for now is clene ago
> My name of trouthe in love, for everemo!
> For I have falsed oon the gentileste
> That ever was, and oon the worthieste!
>
> Allas! of me, unto the wordes end,
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> O, rolled shall I ben on many a tonge!
> Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
> And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
> Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!"
> (1054-1064)

Despite the fact that he has Criseyde lament the future infamy that must be hers for betraying the name of trouthe, and despite the fact that--at the end, when he is eager to let her name rest in silence--he directs his readers to other books in which they may see "hire giltes," the narrator seems to doubt the truth of his authorities. His heart bleeds and his pen quakes when, at the beginning of Book IV, he contemplates what he now must write:

> For how Criseyde Troilus forsook,
> Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde,
> Moot hennesforth ben matere of my book,
> As writen folk thorugh which it is in mynde.
> Allas! that they sholde evere cause fynde
> To speke hire harm, and if they on hire lye,
> Iwis, hemself sholde han the vilanye.

The narrator has been caught in an odd, but tremendously effective, form of suspension of disbelief, and has led his reader into the trap along with him. In a sense, his participation in the "emotional experience" of the poem has been an effort to create a counterweight to untrustworthy authority. The experience of the poem has proven equally unreliable. Believing in Criseyde, he disbelieves the authorities from whom he created her. It is only through these "folk" that he has "it . . . in mind" at all. This literary Pygmalion has fashioned a woman whom he feels he can know more intimately than any living woman, although not, perhaps, understand any better. One can imagine him sorely tempted to follow the lead of Boccaccio in dealing with Dido and to find or invent another ending. Instead,

craven, he capitulates to the authorities. He blusters, threatens the writers who may have maligned her, attempts (by echoes of epic themes) to change to subject, promises better women next time, and finally tries to impose resolution in the form of a divine perspective. He would even like, it seems, to follow Pandarus' lead, to hate Criseyde; but his hatred turns elsewhere, back to the men who "with hire grete wit and subtilte / Bytraise [women]--God yeve hem sorwe, amen!" (1782-1783, 1781). If this outburst is anything more than another attempt to divert his own and his readers' attention, it may allude to the "wit and subtilte" of poets. If so, then Chaucer is again showing concern with what Donaldson calls "the philosophical speculation that permeates much of the poem: is it possible in this world to maintain a single firm idea of the reality of any given human situation or character?" Donaldson continues, "history tends to pronounce judgment on the final perfidy of Criseide as effectively nullifying her positive worth as a human being; but the historical point of view does not exhaust the reality of Criseide as the heroine of the poem."[16]

The problem I find implicit in the House of Fame comes to forefront in Troilus. In the first poem, the irreconcilable conflict between the narrator's sympathy for Dido and his reliance upon Fame for subject matter remains somewhat muted because of the separation of Dido's complaint against Fame from the description of his experiences in

Fame's castle. He shows himself plainly aware, however, of the fact that poets, as agents of Fame, betray women. The condemnation and sentencing of Dido for having been unchaste is carried out by authority in the form of poets and lesser rumor-mongers, in league with authority in the form of society's laws. Instead of taking up where this poem leaves off, Troilus and Criseyde approaches the problem in an even more complicated manner. Having recognized the evils done to women by these authorities, the narrator is ready to apply his knowledge to the defense of his heroine. He also throws himself wholeheartedly into the experiential nature of the poem. Unfortunately, Criseyde is not only guilty of unchastity but of unfaithfulness and lack of trouthe, the very virtue that Dido and her companions in the Heroides have in overabundance. Criseyde is not a martyr to love, as his reading would lead the narrator to expect; instead, his hero is. Although the narrator would like to throw out authority altogether and go with his own experience of Criseyde, he cannot. We see the evidence of a struggle, in which, ultimately, authority is the winner. The question remains to torment the narrator, though: do the books lie? If he is, as I have suggested, plagued with real doubts as to the veracity of his sources, he must ask himself at the end--or go to great lengths to avoid asking--if he himself has betrayed Criseyde. Again, authority has been undercut--

especially the authority of the fictional poet himself, whose sense of himself as an expert on and defender of betrayed women has suffered a severe jolt.

Notes

[1] John M. Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 14.

[2] Fyler, p. 14.

[3] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 274, line 737. All subsequent line references to this edition are included in the text.

[4] Fyler, p. 70.

[5] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Harry W. Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), pp. 289-295.

[6] Fyler, p. 76.

[7] Chaucer, Works, p. 786 (note).

[8] Fyler, p. 34.

[9] E. Talbot Donaldson, Chaucer's Poetry (New York: Ronald, 1958, 1975), pp. 1130-1131.

[10] Eleanor Winsor Leach, "The Sources and Rhetoric of Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' and Ovid's 'Heroides.'" Diss. Yale 1963, pp. 1-3.

[11] Ovid, Heroides and Amores, tr. Grant Showerman (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1914, 1977), p. 103.

[12] Ovid, Heroides, p. 101.

[13] Guido Guarino, tr., Concerning Famous Women by Giovanni Boccaccio (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963), p. 152.

[14] Ovid, Heroides, p. 227.

[15] Ovid, Heroides, p. 237.

[16] Donaldson, p. 1132.

CHAPTER V

"LET BE THE CHAF, AND WRIT WEL OF THE CORN"

In the Legend of Good Women and the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer offers three different resolutions to the problem of authority as represented in catalogues of women. In the simplest of these, the catalogues found in the Merchant's, Manciple's, and Monk's tales, he separates himself from the speaker to show on what inept and self-deluded heads "authority" usually falls. In a more comprehensive exploration of the problem, he writes his own free-standing catalogue, the Legend of Good Women, taking the dilemma of Troilus--the narrator's desire to praise his heroine in defiance of his authorities--to its logical conclusions. Most brilliantly of all, he creates the Wife of Bath, a catalogue character who in one stroke makes the doctrine of the catalogues irrelevant and brings to life the human attributes which the catalogues tangentially evoke.

I. The Canterbury Tales: The Merchant, the Manciple, and the Monk

In the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer creates among his pilgrims story-tellers who, like the narrators in his early works, are "experts" in the subject of exemplary women. The lists of good examples provided by these experts

outnumber the lists of bad examples, though not by a ratio of one hundred to one. Having seen many such catalogues in defense of women, however, we are not surprised to find that they often turn out to mean the opposite of what they "say"; nor are we surprised to find the catalogues used primarily to characterize the tellers--the tellers of the tales, the tellers within the tales, or both. Three very different defenses of women are told with antifeminist intent by the Merchant, the Manciple, and the Monk. In each case, the satire is double-edged. These pilgrims feel comfortably superior to the women they mock with pretended praise; yet, Chaucer uses the catalogues to expose flaws in the pilgrims themselves. In so doing, Chaucer seems to be playing upon his knowledge of the catalogues of Boccaccio, Deschamps, and others, which, as we have been, reveal their authors' confused and contradictory ideas about women.

The catalogue of good women in The Merchant's Tale shows the extent to which "good" examples can be subverted by context, as well as the extent to which "goodness" is determined by the point of view of the judge. The Merchant's point of view is revealed from the outset; in the prologue to his tale, he reveals that he has suffered in two months of marriage more sorrow than a wifeless man experiences in being stabbed to the heart. His wife's cruelty, he says, makes her more than a match for the devil himself. When the Host (who also has suffered much from a

wife) asks him to tell the pilgrims "of that art," the Merchant says that he will gladly do so, "but of my owene soore, / For soory herte, I telle may namoore."[1]

Despite this disclaimer of personal involvement in the events of the story, its bitterness is that of a disillusioned man toward his former, deluded self. It is also that of a merchant toward a business transaction in which he has found himself the loser. Only twenty lines into his tale, having set up the plot of old January taking a young wife, the Merchant embarks on a long passage of sustained and bitter irony describing the "glorious thyng" that is marriage. Marriage is a "thyng," a business deal, in which money is exchanged for youth, beauty, and sexual compliance. The voice in this passage is the Merchant's, feigning agreement with January's statement that "'wedlok is so esy and so clene, / That in this world, it is a paradys'" (1265). His own mercenary attitude intrudes occasionally, as when he states that a wife is like land or furniture, except that she lasts longer--"wel lenger than thee list, paraventure."

The Merchant is mocking his character when he proposes a list of wives who gave good counsel:

> Lo, how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,
> By good conseil of his mooder Rebekke,
> Boond the kydes skyn aboute his nekke,
> For which his fadres benyson he wan.
> Lo Judith, as the storie eek telle kan,
> By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte,

> And slow hym Olofernus, whil he slepte.
> Lo Abigayl, by good conseil, how she
> Saved hir housbonde Nabal, whan that he
> Sholde han be slayn; and looke, Ester also
> By good conseil delyvered out of wo
> The people of God, and made hym Mardochee
> Of Assuere enhaunced for to be.
> (1362-1374)

The Merchant has selected women who are indeed examples of good counsel, and in addition Hebrew heroines. The humor of the catalogue lies in its inappropriateness to what January wants, and its relative appropriateness to what he actually gets. Scholars like Tatlock, Bronson, and Turner have pointed out that hidden details of these examples make them ironic in context. In helping her son Jacob, Rebecca was "not only cheating her other son but deceiving her husband Isaac."[2] Judith and Esther became national heroines by acts of violence and deceit against individual men (who merited the treatment, of course, but that is not the question here). Turner finds particularly appropriate, or "inappropriate," the inclusion of Abigail:

> Nabal, like January, was a rich old man. Abigail, his beautiful young wife, perhaps saved him temporarily by conveying herself and a great deal of his goods to David, who was then living a kind of Robin Hood life out in the hills. But she was clearly more interested in saving herself than Nabal, whom she scorned. And when she told him what she had done he died of shock, and she went away with David.[3]

Otten raises a dissenting voice against the interpretation of these good women as ironic, pointing out that, according to the Bible, they are indeed heroines and "acknowledged Deliverance types."[4] While they may represent deliverance

of a kind to May, they represent to January--who is, after all, the imagined auditor of the catalogue--the complete antithesis of what he wants in a wife.

May, the young girl whom January marries, shares the ability of these women to concoct a scheme and to carry it off boldly. Far from being submissive "warm wex" (1430) receiving the imprint of her husband, she uses "warm wex" (2117) to duplicate the key her lover will use to cuckold him. January, who loses his sight after his marriage, cannot see the gestures passing between his wife and his squire. In his blindness he resembles Isaac, whose wife counseled his favorite son to counterfeit the rough skin of his brother and thus receive Isaac's blessing. January's sight is restored in time for him to catch May and her lover in the act, but May is able to find "suffisant answere" to excuse herself. January protests, "'he swyved thee, I saught it with myne yen'" (2378). May counters with the argument that his newly restored sight is not yet settled, that he has seen and judged wrong: "'And with that word she leep doun fro the tree. / This Januarie, who is glad but he?'" (2411-2412).

The Merchant has voiced searing contempt for January both directly and indirectly throughout his tale. Here he makes no comment. No amount of diatribe could express the revulsion he feels more strongly than this simple account of January's joy at being talked out of the truth of what

he has seen with his own eyes. The Merchant despises January with the kind of contempt reserved by those who have come to know the worst for those who still do not. This same superiority is expressed in the Merchant's selection of exemplary women. As common examples of good womanly counsel, they are plausible enough on the surface. In the fictional setting-up of the tale, however, the Merchant knows what January does not, that the details of their stories contradict their superficial usage. The teller of the tale is imagined as addressing his character: "go and marry a woman like Rebecca, or Judith, or Abigail, or Esther. You are too stupid to realize the truth about these women, about all women. I am not." In the process of exposing January's doting self-deceit, however, the Merchant has revealed more than he knows about himself. As E. T. Donaldson puts it, the Merchant, sharing

> . . . January's basic animal attitude toward women . . . feels himself superior to January because he himself is undeceived and can recognize May for what she is--a thoroughly bad bargain. The investment returns only half the expected rate of interest, for while May serves January's lechery she fails to be the faithful consort that he had wanted to comfort his old age. It no more occurs to the Merchant than it does to January that marriage involves something more on the husband's part than a transfer of funds from one commodity to another, and throughout the tale the word <u>love</u> is sadly ironical.[5]

The irony of the Manciple's pretended praise of women differs from the Merchant's in that, instead of playing on the incongruity of what is said and what is not said, it

dramatizes one meaning and loudly proclaims another. The whole of The Manciple's Tale relies on this technique. His tale has a moral--don't talk too much--but the tale itself is many times longer than its Ovidian source (257 lines to 60, omitting Ovid's digressive references to other metamorphoses). Ovid's indirect reporting of Apollo's revenge upon the raven is expanded to an elaborate curse upon the crow and all its descendents, followed by a vivid description of how the god pulls out all its white feathers and throws it out the door "unto the devel" (307). Even the moral itself, which can be summarized "kepe wel thy tonge, and thenk upon the crowe" (362), is expressed in 50 highly redundant lines. The discrepancy between action and words appears also in his catalogue of creatures. The Manciple sets up the catalogue by commenting generally on the difficulty of "keeping" wives--that is, keeping them chaste. He describes Apollo's kind treatment of his wife, but laments the fact that Apollo has a rival in a local youth "of litel reputacioun" (253), worth less than a gnat in comparison with the sun god. The Manciple cautions, "ther may no man embrace / As to destreyne a thyng which that nature / Hath natureely set in a creature" (160-162). He illustrates this lesson with a catalogue of creatures, beginning with the innocuous bird and cat; it is their eating, rather than mating, habits which are shown to follow "kinde."

The catalogue derives directly from the Romance of the Rose, where it functions as a glorification of Nature, applicable to both sexes, and as a vindication of Venus' cuckholding of Vulcan with Mars, applicable particularly to women.[6] When the Manciple moves from the bird and cat to the she-wolf, he switches to feminine pronouns and to the subject of indiscriminate sexual appetite:

> A she-wolf hath also a vileyns kynde.
> The lewedeste wolf that she may fynde,
> Or leest of reputacioun, wol she take,
> In tyme whan hir lust to han a make.
> (183-186)

The application to Apollo's adulterous wife is too clear to be missed. The Manciple then has his joke:

> Alle thise ensaumples speke I by thise men
> That been untrewe, and nothynge by wommen.
> For men han evere a likerous appetit
> On lower thyng to parfurne hire delit
> Than on hire wyves, be they never so faire,
> Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire.
> Flessh is so newefangel, with meschaunce,
> That we ne konne in nothyng han plesaunce
> That sowneth into vertu any while.

Since the story is of an innocent man, and deity to boot, and a guilty woman, this sudden reversal of blame strikes us as incongruous and funny. By this reasoning, Apollo (insofar as he is a man) should feel his desire, rather than his anger, aroused by the news of his infidelity. The Manciple would have it that women are too pure, too virtuous, for their husbands to have any pleasure in them. The way in which he phrases women's good qualities, however, makes them sound suspiciously like negations:

" . . . Never so faire, / Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire. . . . " The device is the same one Chaucer uses at the ending of Troilus and at the beginning of the Legend. In those two works, the attempts to shift blame from women to "false men" stem from what seems the narrator's sincere desire to defend women at any price. With the Manciple, however, this fake attempt to gloss away very deliberate antifeminism makes the satire even more insulting.

The importance of "The Monk's Tale" for a discussion of catalogues of good women stems from the use of Boccaccio's Latin works,[7] particularly De Casibus Virorum Illustrorum and De Claris Mulieribus. Chaucer apparently uses Boccaccio as a model "clerk," whom the Monk follows in order to bolster his own clerical image. In the prologue to his tale, the Monk receives Harry Bailey's extravagent compliments on his manliness and apparent sexual prowess. The Monk does not deign to reply to these insinuations; whether or not he is guilty, he seems to view this kind of joking as an insult to his position.[8] His tale, therefore, which we would expect to partake of his vigorous enjoyment of the world, instead rehearses the typically monkish theme of rejection of the world. Rejection of the world includes rejection of women; although the Monk's antifeminism falls far short of the personal venom of the Merchant, he assumes--with his model, Boccaccio--the inferiority of women, their cunning and deceit.

The Monk's tragedies of the falls of famous men specifically exempt only one character, Lucifer, from the machinations of a female Fortune.[9] Lucifer is above Fortune because he is an angel and "nat a man" (2000). Samson and Hercules are destroyed by wily, charming women, agents and personifications of Fortune. The death of Holofernes at the hands of "Judith, a womman" (2571) is dramatized as an extension of his relations with Fortune, who "ay kiste / So likerously, and ladde hym up and doun, / Til that his heed was of, er that he wiste" (2556-2558). Since Judith used wine and seductive wiles to deprive Holofernes of his head literally and figuratively, the attributes of Fortune, Judith, and "womman" blend into one another in this account.

Boccaccio's and the Monk's antifeminism is most boldly revealed in the story of Zenobia, the one woman included in the Monk's collection. The Monk's version of her story includes details from both De Claris Mulieribus and De Casibus. Because she is manly, having "fled / Office of women" (2256; in DCM, spretis omnino muliebribus offitiis[10]), her fall is judged worthy of inclusion among those of famous men. Zenobia, who is described as a huntress, warrior, queen, and rigorously chaste wife, led her troops against Rome. Fortune's agent against her is Aurelian, emperor of Rome, who because of the titillating combination of her courage and her beauty forces her to march in his triumph. Chaucer departs from De Claris Mulieribus to draw from De Casibus

more details of the reversal of her fortune from masculine to feminine:

> Since she [Zenobia] had put aside the characteristics of a woman for those of a man, he [Aurelian] did not hesitate to lead her ceremoniously in a triumph; . . . Once a queen, then shown as a famous captive, she finally spent the rest of her life in private among Roman women. . . . helmeted, she had inspired soldiers; aproned, she heard the trifles of servant girls. Before, this queen, enthroned, had carried the scepter of the East; now she carried pots and pans at Rome.[11]

Chaucer sums up all these images of reversal from masculine to feminine in the one image of the distaff: "she that bar the ceptre ful of floures / Shal bere a distaf, hire cost for to quyte" (2374-2375). The distaff is traditionally associated with women's pursuits; here, standing for Boccaccio's pots, pans, and apron, it especially represents the demeaning female status and pursuits that Zenobia had sought to escape. Clearly her fall is in part punishment for presuming beyond her sex, and her enforced return to the sex she had rejected the bitterest aspect of her punishment.

With his story of Zenobia's fall, Chaucer shows himself conversant with the ideal of the manly woman as extolled by Boccaccio and others. It was not a technique he often used, but his use of it here rounds out our picture of Chaucer as an expert practitioner of all the uses--particularly the ironic ones--of exemplary women. The misogynistic threesome of Merchant, Manciple, and Monk have shown us good women made bad by context, bad women

ironically offered as good examples, and women praised for all the wrong reasons. We will see all of these techniques at work in the Legend of Good Women. Chaucer's purpose in the Legend is similar to that in these three tales: he mocks the false assumptions about women underlying most of the catalogues. In the tales, his satire focuses mainly on the individual tellers. In the Legend, however,which was written before most of the tales, he relies upon the naive, bookish, well-meaning--if somewhat dense--narrator of the earlier poems. Thus, the ultimate target of the Legend is not the composer of catalogues in praise of women, but the catalogue form itself.

II. The Legend of Good Women

The Legend of Good Women is the most problematic of Chaucer's works. The poem is so dependent on tone for interpretation, and yet so enigmatic in tone, that there really does not seem to be one key to unlock all its secrets. The Legend bristles with contradictions, and they are not the kind of contradictions that easily yield a resolution. The "voice" of the poet is unusually direct and didactic and--even for a Chaucerian narrator--unusually untrustworthy. Until roughly the last 15 years, most critics avoided any direct confrontation with the whole poem, preferring to glean autobiographical tidbits from the prologue.

Since that time, however, new efforts have been made. R. W. Frank's Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women (1972) discusses prologue and tales with great care, but errs in assuming that the violent, amoral tales of pagan women would be unfamiliar and shocking to Chaucer's audience.[12] I have tried to show in the previous chapters that to anyone who knew contemporary French and Italian writers--LeFèvre, Machaut, Boccaccio, Dante, and others--or who knew Chaucer's own early works, the stories of these women would have been quite familiar. Frank's belief in the audience's ignorance leads him to see Chaucer's use of abbreviation as merely reflecting a desire to write short narratives, "as many of them as possible."[13] As we will see, however, there is much more to abbreviation in the Legend than a desire for brevity.

Two works stand out as offering both a cogent approach to the Legend as a whole and a detailed appraisal of the individual legends: Eleanor Winsor Leach's unpublished Yale dissertation (1962), "The Sources and Rhetoric of Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' and Ovid's 'Heroides,'" and Pat Trefzger Overbeck's article "Chaucer's Good Woman" (1967). Each takes a richly revealing approach to the poem; Professor Leach examines Chaucer's deliberately obvious manipulation of his sources, finding humor in the undeniable moral culpability of the "good" women and in the rhetorical maneuverings necessary to present them as good. Professor Overbeck shows the composite "good woman" functioning as a link

between characterizations of women in the earlier and later works in her rebellious relationship to authority. While drawing heavily on both these critics, my reading of the Legend focuses on the poem as the supreme example of its genre and as a devastating parody of that genre: the catalogue of good women to end all catalogues of good women.

Any investigation of the prologue to the Legend naturally begins with a glance back to the ending of Troilus and Criseyde. In the course of trying to end that poem, the narrator turns abruptly from a belated description of his hero's warlike deeds to address the women in his audience:

> Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe,
> And every gentil womman, what she be,
> That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
> That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.
> Ye may hire giltes in other bokes se;
> And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
> Penelopees trouthe and good Alceste.
>
> N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
> But moost for wommen that bitraised be
> Thorugh false folk; God yeve hem sorwe, amen!
> That with hire grete wit and subtilte
> Bytraise yow! And this commeveth me
> To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye,
> Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!--
>
> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> (1772-1788)

The names Penelope and Alceste, as Alfred David points out, indicate Chaucer's use of a particularly important document in the field of good women:

> The joining of Alceste's name with Penelope's means that Chaucer had been looking over the catalogue of virtuous pagan women in St. Jerome's Epistle Against Jovinian, the same passage that was to become the source of Dorigen's lament in the Franklin's Tale (V. 1367-1456). Jerome had written, "Alcestin fabulae ferunt pro Admeto sponte defunctam; et Penelopes pudicitia, Homeri carmen est" (stories tell that Alceste died in place of her husband Admetus, and Homer sings of Penelope's virtue). The echo of Jerome in Troilus is evidence that the tract, which was to become so important an influence on the Canterbury Tales, also helped to inspire the Legend of Good Women and that Chaucer had been doing research on "good women" while he was still working on Troilus.[14]

David further suggests that "if Chaucer had a specific comedy in mind" at the ending of Troilus, "the evidence points to the Legend of Good Women."

In the conjunction of these two wishes--to write of good women and to write a comedy--I see the determination of the narrator never again to be caught in the trap of being let down by his heroine--and his authorities--and left open to charges of antifeminism. The basic argument of the Legend appears in his words to women here at the ending of Troilus. Do not be angry with me, he says, for writing about a false woman; I did it mostly to warn you women against false men. Feeling himself uncomfortably akin, in his treatment of Criseyde, to those men "that with hir grete wit and subtilte" betray women, he resolves to go to any lengths in the future to avoid this role. Remembering The Manciple's Tale, we notice that the narrator's method of deflecting blame from women (who have it by

association with Criseyde) to men resembles that of the Manciple. The Manciple, completely cynical in his attitude toward women, either assumes that the female portion of his audience will not see that the joke is on them, or does not care whether or not he incurs their anger. In contrast, the narrator of Troilus apologizes to women with the genuine fear that they will "be . . . wroth" with him. Nervous lest they not be appeased by his promise to do better next time, he makes the obviously flimsy assertion that he did it to warn them against men. In his eagerness henceforth to write good things about women, he seems willing to forfeit any other goal, including adherence to those authorities which got him into this mess. He carries out this resolve to praise women at any price in the Legend.

We can, of course, only guess at Chaucer's own motives in writing the Legend. It is possible that he was indeed criticized by women of the court for writing "antifeminist" works such as Troilus and Criseyde. We have no reason to assume that critics in Chaucer's day were more penetrating than those in our own, some of whom claim that Troilus is "antifeminist propaganda." Given the popularity in the late fourteenth century of works in praise of women, someone may very well have suggested to Chaucer that he compose such a work. Or, he may have thought of it himself for the same reason. Either way, the elaborate accusations levelled at him in the prologue by Cupid and Alceste serve an important

purpose, that is, the creation of the fictional narrator's fictionally heightened dilemma. The narrator must be portrayed as a man forced to praise women beyond the dictates of reason and contrary (in some cases) to the evidence of his sources. With such a speaker, Chaucer is able to expose the lack of reasoning displayed by almost all the catalogues in praise of good women. These catalogues tend to glorify qualities in excess: not just courage, but the ability to lead an army into battle; not just faithfulness in love, but martyrdom for a totally unworthy man; not just strong-mindedness, but monomania. By his narrator's attempt to separate the chaff from the corn in the lives of the women he praises, and to suppress the chaff, Chaucer shows the falseness of the catalogues.[15]

The exaltation of the heroines by a concomitant blackening of their lovers and of men in general also reveals a fact of the catalogues which one does well to remember: they are often false by the same token that the catalogues exemplifying the evilness of women are false. They may seem to apply to human beings, but in reality they do not. Neither women nor men should be exalted one above the other, because both sexes are equally human. Although it sometimes takes excess to correct excess, the true liberation of women comes not from excessive praise but from a recognition of their humanity. Chaucer deflates the rhetoric of the catalogues in the Legend in order to make this point, or so I

believe. He then goes on, as we have seen, to subordinate the catalogue device to a wider concern with characterization in some of the Canterbury Tales. The catalogues in the tales operate with controlled irony; the irony of the Legend is so pervasive as to be at times out of control. Yet, like the tales, the Legend seeks to direct its irony by means of a narrative voice. The narrator himself is therefore of crucial importance as the voice telling the legends, which in turn tell about him.

In both its versions (I quote from the "F" version unless indicated), the prologue to the Legend of Good Women casts the decision proclaimed at the ending of Troilus in a different fictional mode. It is the story of a poet who, betrayed by his sources into telling the story of a false woman, incurs the wrath of the God of Love. He begins by speaking of his reverence for and belief in "olde bokes," and ends by undertaking the retelling of stories in which the authorities must continually be pushed aside by the force of his obligation to praise women. The central aim of the prologue, then, is to make clear what he is doing--writing a humorous "defense" of women in which any kind of objective fairness, historical veracity, or mythological consistency is sacrificed to the all-important purpose of praising women. He must undercut his authorities when necessary, while at the same time relying on them completely for his information. This comic dilemma forces

him to use methods similar to (though more complex than) those of Jehan LeFèvre in Le Livre de Leesce. LeFèvre defends his mythological women wherever any slight grounds can be found for doing so--e.g., Medea, Circe, and Dido as examples of largesse. When no case, however strained, can be made for defending the women, LeFèvre simply denies the authorities altogether; thus, the stories of Pasiphae et al. are "fables" (see Chapter III). John Fyler sees Chaucer's method as the imposition of a Christian frame upon pagan, Ovidian content: "Cupid orders Chaucer to impose a prefabricated system, the literary form of the saint's life, on the flux and ambiguity of human experience." Thus, "problems arise when Chaucer tries to flesh out this catalogue with the hyperbole of saints' lives. . . ."[16]

The relationship between experience and authority is explored in the first 28 lines of the prologue; but, this exploration is so obscure that critics have not been able to decide whether it is a serious exploration of the problem (with religious overtones) or an elaborate joke. I see it as primarily the latter, because of the attitude toward authority not voiced, but actually demonstrated, throughout the poem.

> A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
> That ther ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
> And I acorde wel that it ys so;
> But, natheless, yet wot I wel also

> That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree,
> That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
> Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
> But as he hath herd seyd, or founde it writen;
> For by assay ther may no man it preve.
> But God forbede but men shulde leve
> Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
> Men shal not wenen every thing a lye
> But yf himself yt seeth, or elles dooth;
> For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,
> Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee.
> Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all, pardee!
>
> Than mote we to bokes that we fynde,
> Thurgh whiche that olde thinges ben in mynde,
> And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,
> Yeve credence, in every skylful wise
> That tellen of these olde appreved stories
> Of holynesse, of regnes, of victories,
> Of love, of hate, of other sondry thynges,
> Of whiche I may not maken rehersynges.
> And yf that olde bokes were aweye,
> Yloren were of remembraunce the keye.
> Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve
> These bokes, there we han noon other preve.
> (1-28)

The question is, to what does the injunction to believe books where we have no other proof apply? The answer, in terms of the poem, must be--to the existence of good women. E. T. Donaldson, in his essay on the prologue in Chaucer's Poetry, says:

> It is not until we have finished the prologue that we understand the relevance of Chaucer's opening remarks on the credibility of old books. Old books describe faithful women and he is perfectly willing to believe old books, but personally he has never met a faithful women . . .[17]

Perversely enough--and this is the problem in Troilus--old books also describe unfaithful women and women who, if technically faithful to their lovers, are not "good" in any other sense of the word. It is these authorities against

whom the narrator must fight, holding up the standard of praise for women against an onslaught of unwelcome details from old books. Like any good propagandist, he holds the "proof" of his information to be in the extent to which it supports his views. "Experience" is only a consideration at all insofar as he generalizes from his examples of faithful women and trecherous men to warn contemporary women. The ultimate function of the opening lines may be to cast a shade of doubt both over what one reads and what one sees, and over the judgments (heaven or hell) that one infers from such evidence. The martyrs of love are in Cupid's "paradys," but they are, like the inhabitants of Vergil's lugentes campi, women quas duras amor crudeli tabe peredit.

The narrator's lack of experience with real women and his unsuitability as a lover, familiar from earlier poems, are emphasized here by the side-tracking of his romantic affections onto books and daisies. Another emotion is also turned toward these objects--religious veneration:

> On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
> And to hem yive I feyth and ful credence,
> And in myn herte have him in reverence
> So hertely, that ther is game noon
> That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
> But yt be seldom on the holyday,
> Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May
> Is comen, and that I here the foules synge,
> And that the floures gynnen for to sprynge,
> Farewel my bok, and my devocioun!
> (30-39)

His praise of the daisy goes on for about 50 more lines; it (she) is "of alle foures flour," and he loves it (her) so much that "ther loved no wight hotter in his lyve." The self-parody of these lines conjures up a fictional poet who loves and celebrates old stories and daisies the way most men love women and celebrate holy days. Clearly, the focus of these emotions is not where it should be, or at least not where it usually is. The narrator shows his awareness of the fact when he asks "lovers that kan make of sentement" to help him with his rhyming, as if making love and making verse had some connection. As it turns out, love is never a safe emotion, even when applied to old books and spring flowers. The poet will be as browbeaten by tyrannical sources threatening to get out of hand, and by a daisy turned imperious women, as any lover was ever bullied by the loved one.

The beautiful May morning in which the narrator gives free rein to his worship of the daisy also serves as a backdrop for the "smale foules" to express their joy at life preserved and renewed:

> The smale foules, of the sesoun fayn,
> That from the panter and the net ben scaped,
> Upon the foweler, that him made awhaped
> In wynter, and distroyed hadde hire brood,
> In his dispit hem thoghte yt did hem good
> To synge of hym, and in hir song despise
> The foule cherl that, for his coveytise,
> Had hem betrayed with his sophistrye.
> This was hire song, "The foweler we deffye,
> And al his craft." And somme songen clere

Layes of love, that joye it was to here,
In worship and in preysinge of hir make;
(130-141)

. . .
And therwithalle hire bekes gonnen meete,
Yeldyng honour and humble obeysaunces
To love, and diden hire other observaunces
That longeth onto love and to nature;
Construeth that as yow lyst, I do no cure,
And thoo that hadde doone unkyndenesse--
As dooth the tydif, for newfangelnesse--
Besoghte mercy of hir trespassynge,
And humbly songen hire repentynge,
And sworen on the blosmes to be trewe,
So that hire makes wolde upon hem rewe,
And at the laste maden hire acord.
Al founde they Daunger for a tyme a lord,
Yet Pitee, thurgh his stronge gentil myght,
Forgaf, and made Mercy passen Ryght,
Thurgh innocence and ruled Curtesye.
But I ne clepe nat innocence folye,
Ne fals pitee, for vertu is the mene,
As Etik seith; in swich maner I mene.
(153-166)

As in the Parliament of Fowls, nature governs love according to its precepts. A slightly jarring note is sounded, however, with the "unkynde" birds; unnatural behavior has entered the natural world. Paradoxically, however, this "unnatural" behavior is in reality most natural. Not all birds are faithful in love, and some--here the "tydif"--are notorious for their fickleness. In avian terms, their "unkyndeness" is a matter of course, but here it is treated as something to be repented. When repentent birds swear "on the blosmes to be trewe," we feel uneasy; the birds' renewed fidelity will follow its natural course, the ephemeral course of blossoms.

The courtship ritual of birds echoes the Romance of the Rose, and this echo emphasizes the stereotyped quality of their "natural" behavior. Robert W. Frank describes the problem presented by these lines in a footnote:

> . . . it is just possible that . . . the birds . . . are in some danger of shedding their conventional character and becoming real birds again. In which case, the conventions of love are set against the realities of nature, and their artificiality is threatened with comic exposure.[18]

He calls the references to the fowler and to the birds' "observances" instances of "insistence . . . on their bird nature," but it seems to me also to be insistence on their human nature. The most unsettling aspect of the passage results from its echoing of the paradigmatic situation we have so often met with in the dream-visions and will meet with again in the legends. The fowler who uses "sophistrye" (usually thought of as verbal cunning) to trap small birds, as well as the "unkynde" birds who swear on summer blossoms to be true, calls to mind those false and flattering men--Aeneas, Jason, and company, together with those warned against at the ending of Troilus. Their victims, whose initial "Daunger" is tempered by "Pitee" until "Mercy" overcomes "Right," can be seen as analogous to Cupid's martyrs, the women true in (and destroyed by) love. The narrator's awkward insistence upon avian innocence, which he wants to be distinguished from folly and false pity, indicates the transition from his treatment of women "dampned"

for foolish love in the Book of the Duchess to his exaltation of the same women to Paradise in the Legend. This passage describing birds in spring prefigures the Legend as a whole as well as the individual legends. The laws of nature war with laws of human society; neither is healthier, holier, or more admirable than the other, neither is wholly destructive by itself, but the combination is explosive. Nature is as divinely indifferent to the virtues and sufferings of her creatures as to their vices.

Like the birds, the heroines of the Legend must be made to seem virtuous in their yielding to nature and to the persuasive powers of their lovers. The white-washing becomes necessary when the God of Love and Alceste, best of all the good women, rather unjustly accuse Chaucer of defaming women in certain of his works. Their accusations dramatize the uneasiness expressed by the narrator at the end of Troilus. Cupid, who chills with his glance the narrator kneeling in adoration of the daisy, approaches together with his entourage and asks, "'Who kneleth there?'" This rhetorical question has its desired effect of bringing the cowed narrator to stand before his questioner. Cupid says that the poet has no right to be near the daisy: "'Yt were better worthy, trewely, / A worm to neghen ner my flour than thow'" (317-318). He goes on to charge the poet with heresy, with libelling and "hindering" love's servants and with holding it "folye" to serve love. He claims irrefutable proof of

his accusations:

> For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
> Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
> That is an heresye ayeins my lawe,
> And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
> And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste,
> That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
> That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.
> (328-334)

Eleanor Winsor Leach points out that although "these two works do constitute an unfortunate choice" and show incomplete understanding on Cupid's part, "one point can be made in Cupid's favor":

> Granting that the god is a fervent conventionalist, and by no means a Chaucerian, his view is tenable. Both poems yield, in some part, evidence enough to make Cupid's accusations, and Chaucer's sins, both valid.[19]

She continues:

> In many discussions of Cupid's literary judgement, . . . no one seems to have remarked upon the fact that Cupid has selected the earliest and the latest of Chaucer's long poems and made them absolutely equivalent. . . . Cupid ignores the whole of Chaucer's literary progress between the traditional and the non-traditional. . . .

The fact that Cupid's feeling for poetry is strong but ill-informed helps to account for the mistake he makes in assigning Chaucer's penance. He cannot see how far Chaucer has come from the conventional view of women and the conventional adherence to authority operative in his translation of the Romance of the Rose. Indeed, critics have asked how Chaucer could take such a step backward. As Alfred David phrases the question, "Why after the profound exploration

of human character and the heart-rending lessons of Troilus did Chaucer go back to the love-vision and renew, or pretend to renew, his allegiance to the God of Love?"[20] Professor David and others, including Pat Trefzger Overbeck, answer this question by regarding the Legend as representing a transition from Troilus to the Canterbury Tales. To my mind, the Legend is indeed closely allied with both these poems; it is as realistic in its view of love and lovers as either but uses a different poetic mode to convey its message. To understand that mode, we must consider in detail Cupid's charges against and commands to the poet.

Contained in the God of Love's admonition to Chaucer (the G-version) is a passage crucial to a reading of the poem in context of other catalogues of women:

> . . . answere me now to this,
> Why noldest thow as wel han seyd goodnesse
> Of wemen, as thow has seyd wikednesse?
> Was there no good matere in thy mynde,
> Ne in alle thy bokes me coudest thow nat fynde
> Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?
> Yis, God wot, sixty bokes olde and newe
> Hast thow thyself, alle ful of storyes grete,
> That bothe Romayns and ek Grekes trete
> Of sundry wemen, which lyf that they ladde,
> And evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde.
> This knoweth God, and alle clerkes eke,
> That usen swiche materes for to seke.
> What seith Valerye, Titus, or Claudyan?
> What seith Jerome agayns Jovynyan?
> How clene maydenes, and how trewe wyves,
> How stedefaste widewes durynge alle here lyves,
> Telleth Jerome, and that nat of a fewe,
> But, I dar seyn, an hundred on a rewe;
> That it is pite for to rede, and routhe,
> The wo that they endure for here trouthe.
> (267-287 - G Version)

Of course, as any sophisticated audience would know, the truth is quite the opposite; "clerks," especially the ones named, are the mortal enemies of women, praising a few only to damn the rest by comparison. As well as amplifying the comic characterization of the God of Love as literary critic, this passage makes more explicit a central joke of the poem: that defenders of women repeatedly ignore the whole for a part in dealing with their "authorities." Making Jerome a defender of women alerts the reader to expect other instances throughout the poem in which facts are bent to suit the argument. The God of Love goes on to describe what all these clerks say about women, and we find we are back with the idea of chastity as the only criterion for virtue in women. The passage seems to echo Jerome on this point:

> For to hyre love were they so trewe
> That, rathere than they wolde take a newe,
> They chose to be ded in sondry wyse,
> And deiden, as the story wol devyse;
> And some were brend, and some were cut the hals,
> And som dreynt, for they wolden not be fals.
> For alle keped they here maydenhede,
> Or elles wedlock, or here widewehede.
> And this thing was nat kept for holynesse,
> But all for verray vertu and clennesse,
> And for men schulde sette on him no lak;
> And yit they were hethene, al the pak,
> That were so sore adrad of alle shame.
> These olde wemen kepte so here name
> That in this world I trowe men shal nat fynde
> A man that coude be so trewe and kynde
> As was the leste woman in that tyde.
> What seyth also the epistel of Ovyde
> Of trewe wyves and of here labour?
> What Vincent in his Estoryal Myrour?
> (282-307)

The problem is that, while Jerome's women are true to their virginity or chastity, those of the Legend are mostly true to their lovers outside of wedlock. The shift is necessary to what will be the argument of the poem: not chastity but faithfulness in love is woman's sole virtue. Ovid (whose "trewe wyves" are mostly illicit lovers) is being turned into St. Jerome. What we do notice in this passage and in the legends is that this transformation is not so radical as it first appears. Jerome's martyrs died, or took other measures, lest they violate their chaste or virginal states. Chaucer's martyrs, most of whom are from Ovid's Heroides, exchange their chaste or virginal state for promises of marriage; and, they risk their lives and/or sacrifice their "names" to obtain these promises. When they are deserted, as brides or brides-to-be, they are in the same state as Jerome's martyrs but without the honor. Jerome's chaste martyrs died or took steps to avoid the ignominious fate of Chaucer's unchaste martyrs, but both groups, finally, are sacrificed to the same ideal: chastity or death--sooner or later. Neither group could obtain its martyrdom without the help of men, yet how central the men really are is debatable. Each of Chaucer's heroines dies or suffers for her name, as Cupid suggests in this passage. Even Alceste and Hypermnestra, the most unselfish and efficacious of the martyrs, die for their "wifhood" as much as for their husbands.

When Alceste steps in to help the poet defend himself against Cupid's accusations, she proposes this penance to the God of Love:

> . . . he shal maken, as ye wol devyse,
> Of women trewe in lovynge al here lyve,
> Whereso ye wol, of mayden or of wyve,
> And fortheren yow . . .
> (437-440)

Cupid acquiesces; the poet then receives her further explanation of his sentence:

> Thow shalt, while that thow lyvest, yer by yere,
> The moste partye of thy tyme spende
> In makyng of a glorious legende
> Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,
> That weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves;
> And telle of false men that hem betraien,
> That al hir lyf ne do nat but assayen
> How many women they may doon a shame;
> For in youre world that is now holde a game.
> And thogh the lyke nat a lovere bee,
> Speke wel of love; this penance yive I thee.
> (481-491)

At the end of the prologue, Cupid adds his dictum: "Let be the chaf, and writ wel of the corn" (529, "G" Version). He suggests that the poet begin with the ladies of the balade; supposing that he did not mean to include Absalom and Jonathan, they are Esther, Penelope, Marcia wife of Cato, Iseult, Helen, Lavinia, Lucrece, Polyxena, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Hero, Dido, Laodamia, Phyllis, Canace, Hypsipyle, Hypermnestra, and Ariadne. Chaucer is to tell "of al hir lyf the grete" (575). Obviously, even the list proposed by Cupid does not conform to the requirement to write of chaste maidens, wives, and widows. They will require a good deal of moral retouching.

The eclecticism of the balade and its resulting moral ambiguity are much to the point of the Legend. Absalom appears first, praised for his golden hair. Since Absalom possessed the most famous and most fatal hair in all of literature, his inclusion is appropriate--but only as an example of hair. In context of the Legend's purpose, to praise women and to dispraise men, he is a very odd choice. Jonathan is even odder; his representation of "frendly manere" reminds us that women are rarely friends to men or to each other in the legends. There is nothing unusual about Penelope and Marcia, the wife of Cato, appearing as examples of wifehood, or about Isolde, Helene, and Lavinia as examples of beauty. Of Lucrece and Polixena, we are told that they "boghten love so dere." The love they paid so dearly for was not their own, as the phrase suggests; rather, each paid with her life for being the unwilling object of a man's desire. Cleopatra's passion and Thisbe's pain for love are extolled; they are unexceptionable choices. Under "trouthe" appear Hero, Dido, Laodamia, Phyllis, Canace, Hypsipyle, Hypermnestra, and Ariadne. Incest, infidelity, deceit, death, and suicide are some of the results of their trouthe. This group anticipates most closely the actions and qualities which will be praised in the legends.

A revealing comment on both the balade and the legends appears in the prologue to The Man of Law's Tale. Mentioning the many women of whom Geoffrey Chaucer had written in

"the Seintes Legende of Cupide" (and a few whom Chaucer had in fact missed), the Man of Law describes their suffering and their cruelty:

> Ther may he seen the large woundes wyde
> Of Lucresse, and of Babilan Tesbee;
> The swerd of Dido for the false Enee;
> The tree of Phillis for hire Demophon;
> . . .
> The crueltee of the, queene Medea,
> Thy litel children hangynge by the hals,
> For thy Jason, that was of love so fals!
> (62-74)

The Man of Law accepts the bloody acts and fates of "thise noble wyves and thise loveris," but recoils in horror at "thilke wikke ensample of Canacee, / That loved hir owene brother synfully" (78-79), saying that Chaucer would not write about her. Of course, if one takes the balade as a projected cast of characters for the legends, it appears that Chaucer may have planned to include Canace. The fact that the Man of Law willingly accepts so much suffering and cruelty but balks at the example of Canace reminds us of how shocking the other legends really are. He appears so inured to degradation, unless it violates the most sacred of taboos, that the other legends evoke from him a sentimental response. His own tale sentimentalizes the sufferings of Constance; and, his aversion to Canace's unnatural love occasions further irony. He is unaware that the story of Constance was in its original form (still current in England at Chaucer's time) based on a motif of father-daughter incest.[21] In terms of the balade and the Legend, his comments

on the heroines remind us that there is a great deal more to Hero, Dido, Laodamia, and the rest than trouthe.

The white-washing given by the narrator to the heroines of the legends has proven amazingly successful. Robinson speaks for many when, introducing the Legend in his edition of Chaucer's works, he says that "there can be no doubt that in the mind of Chaucer and his contemporaries the heroines he celebrates were good in the only sense that counted for the purpose in hand--they were faithful followers of the god of Love."[22] However, as I have indicated in previous chapters, not only Chaucer but Christine de Pisan, Jehan LeFèvre, Guillaume de Machaut, and others were fully aware of the inherent contradictions, whether they exploited them comically or sought to untangle them.

As Eleanor Leach describes it,

> Chaucer's penitential service to the God of Love is divided into four major offices:
> 1. Use old books
> 2. Praise faithful women
> 3. Condemn treacherous men
> 4. Omit irrelevant facts
>
> The one inclusive precept which governs these specific ones is voiced by Alceste: "speke wel of love." Chaucer's four rules are both a means to and an explanation of this end. . . . [33]

Professor Leach sees in these rules the undertaking of "a new artistic responsibility." Before, as Alceste points out, he had essentially been a translator; "now, he must select his material and arrange it for a purpose. He must embrace a system, and prove a hypothesis. The task requires

rhetoric."[24] Professor Leach goes on to examine the kinds of rhetoric employed in the legends. She finds that in order to perform his four main tasks, Chaucer must "amplify and . . . abbreviate his material." He must "amplify" the goodness of women and the evil nature of men, and he must abbreviate--insofar as possible, conceal altogether--any details which would undermine this carefully constructed thesis. Yet, she points out, the thesis is undermined, time and again, at the very points where the troublesome details are omitted. The ironic discrepancies between what the sources say--the full details of the stories--and what appears in Chaucer's rhetorically-enhanced versions are thoroughly explored in her dissertation. Upon this practice of abbreviation, she comments,

> . . . we may observe that in the legends dealing with incontrovertibly "good" women, Thisbe and Lucretia, Chaucer does not call our attention to any expurgations, a fact which bears witness to the consciousness of his practice elsewhere. The opening legend, that of Cleopatra . . . contains three striking abridgements. The opening lines themselves are economical: (580-83)
>
> "After the deth of Tholome the kyng
> That al Egipt hadde in his governyng,
> Regned his queene Cleopataras."
>
> Behind this vague opening lie such events as Cleopatra's murder of her brother and the affair with Julius Caesar which establishes the queen on her throne.[25]

The two other abridgements are his omission of details of the wedding feast (which may not have happened[26]) and of her grief at her and Antony's defeat (which she used as an occasion to attempt the seduction of Octavian[27]).

More familiar ironic omissions are those from classical myths. Dido's much-repented violation of her widowed chastity is reduced to a mention of her as "whilom wif of Sytheo" (1005). Hypsipyle is "whilom Thoas doughter" (1468), the only clue to the fact that the women of Lemnos had killed all their men prior to the Argonauts' arrival. Hypsipyle herself was unique in that she spared her father's life, but to have praised her for this would have been to condemn all the other women on the island. Similarly, the 50 sons and 50 daughters of Danaus and Aegyptus disappear after the first mention; to reveal that 49 of fifty daughters had obeyed their father and killed their husbands would go against the proportions of a hundred good against one bad woman established by Cupid. Medea killed her two children by Jason as revenge for his betrayal of her, but this fact, like the text of her letter to Jason, is for Chaucer "to long for me to wryt" (1679). Procne killed her son by Tereus and served his flesh to his father in revenge for the rape and mutilation of Philomela; this is passed over by Chaucer, who blandly states:

> The remenaunt is no charge for to telle,
> For this is al and som: thus was she served,
> That nevere harm agilte ne deserved
> Unto this crewel man, that she of wiste.
> (2383-2386)

The mysterious betrothal arranged by Ariadne between Phaedra and the son of Theseus (who himself was only 23 at the time) may hint at the outcome of the story: long after Theseus

deserted Ariadne for Phaedra, the latter became enamoured of his son Hippolytus. When he refused her advances, she killed herself and left a letter accusing him of dishonoring her. Of Phyllis, who made such woe for Demophoon, Eleanor Leach points out that since Demophoon did return to her (albeit late), "the tale of Phyllis is really a story about a woman's lack of faith."[28]

The two legends that do not have to be expurgated, those of Thisbe and Lucrece, achieve their ironic effect through different means. Chief of these is what could be called the balloon effect, found throughout the legends: emotional scenes are over-inflated to the point of bursting, then collapse upon themselves. The poet sometimes supplies a pin to facilitate the process. In the case of Lucrece, undeniably a chaste woman and faithful wife, Chaucer calls in Augustine, ostensibly as a witness in her favor. However, as Pat Trefzger Overbeck points out,

> St. Augustine . . . passes judgment on Lucrece in his City of God: if you extenuate her homicide, you confirm the adultery; if you acquit her of adultery, you make the charge of homicide heavier; either way she is culpable.[29]

So much is made of her fainting during the rape--"she feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr"--that it seems an attempt to answer an unspoken allegation that, had she been awake, she would have enjoyed it. The suspicion may never have occurred to us if it had not been so elaborately prepared against. Even more shocking are the final verses of her

story, which praise Lucrece for not taking a new lover:

> I telle hyt, for she was of love so trewe,
> Ne in hir wille she chaunged for no newe;
> And for the stable herte, sadde and kynde,
> That in these wymmen men may alday fynde,
> Ther as they kaste hir herete, there it dwelleth.

The basis for praise in this passage seems to be that Lucrece did not fall in love with Tarquin, her rapist, and did not change her old love, her husband, for a new "in hir wille." There are two rather nasty implications here: that Lucrece could have been tempted to love the man who treated her so brutally; and that, although she did not exchange old lover for new in her will, she did so in her body.

Perhaps it is unfair to judge Pyramus and Thisbe on the basis of what Shakespeare does to them in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Those who have studied the Pyramus and Thisbe legend, however, detect a hint of the ridiculous even in the earliest versions. Chaucer's retelling of the story borrows from Ovid the lovers' address to the wall, which even the sympathizing poet must admit are "ydele wordes" (767). It is the double suicide, however, which is most tellingly overdone. No matter that, in life, death frequently comes in undignified form; in art, certain conventions must be adhered to if solemnity is to be preserved. The observation (from Ovid) that blood flows from Pyramus' wound like water from a broken sewer pipe (851-2) could easily have been rephrased to grant him a bit more dignity. Thisbe finds him "betynge with his heles on the grounde"

(863), a detail which brings to mind parody Westerns. And "who coude wryte," the poet asks rhetorically,

> . . . which a dedly cheere
> Hath Thisbe now, and how hire heer she rente,
> And how she gan hireselve to turmente,
> And how she lyth and swouneth on the grounde,
> And how she wep of teres ful his wounde;
> How medeleth she his blod with hire compleynte;
> How with his blod hireselve gan she peynte;
> How clyppeth she the deede cors, allas!
> How doth this woful Tisbe in this cas!
> How kysseth she his frosty mouth so cold!
> (869-878)

The action is on fast-forward, and the images are slightly off: she can weep tears into the wound, but how can she mingle blood with lamentation? The kissing of his frosty mouth seems also to be taken from a mixed bag of stock phrases, since Pyramus is not even "fully ded" (883) yet. He does die, at the sound of her name, and she prepares to follow him. Her rather unexceptional leave-taking ends incongruously with an echo of the poet's earlier warning to women not to trust men they do not know well: she cautions, "lat no gentil woman hyre assure / To putten hire in swich an aventure" (908-909). The moral of this story, according to Thisbe, is that women should not follow their lovers into the woods at night.

Another aspect of the legends' ironic technique lies in the poet's stated relationship to his sources. His task includes using old books, and the prologue states his reverence for them. So, we feel a bit surprised when, only 30 lines into the first legend, he qualifies his description

of Antony:

> . . . certeynly, but if that bokes lye,
> He was, of persone and of gentillesse,
> And of discrecioun and hardynesse,
> Worthi to any wyght that lyven may . . .
> (609-612)

The most marked questioning of authority accounts for much of the humor in the legend of Dido. He begins by saying,

> Glorye and honour, Virgil Mantoan,
> Be to thy name! and I shal, as I can,
> Folwe they lanterne, as thow gost byforn,
> How Eneas to Dido was forsworn.
> (924-927)

This bombastic proclamation of intent to follow Vergil is amusing when one considers that, because he has to create a heroine rather than a hero, Chaucer must suppress or give a different slant to many details of his original.[30] The effect becomes even more humorous when one realizes that, after its opening tribute to Vergil, this legend does more overt challenging of its sources than any other. After giving a condensed report of Aeneas' meeting with his mother, Venus, the poet parenthetically comments, "I coude folwe, word for word, Virgile, / But it wolde lasten al to longe the while" (1102-1103). He hedges when confronted with Vergil's description of Aeneas entering Carthage, but quickly reverts to doctrine:

> Whan he was in the large temple come,
> I can nat seyn if that it be possible,
> But Venus hadde hym maked invysible--
> Thus seyth the bok, withouten any les.
> (1019-1022)

He falters again when describing another of Venus' miracles, and this time fails to recover his stance as an unquestioning believer:

> . . . oure autour telleth us
> That Cupido, that is the god of love,
> At preyere of his moder hye above,
> Hadde the liknesse of the child [Ascanius] ytake,
> This noble queen enamored to make
> On Eneas; but, as of that scripture,
> Be as be may, I take of it no cure.
> (1139-1145)

Eleanor Leach comments that "at the very point where he might have scored points in Dido's favor by telling how her love, inspired by the gods, was no fault of her own, Chaucer lets his opportunity slip."[31] Overall, the effect of Chaucer's overt references to, as well as his departures from, his sources suggests disaffection from "old bookes." The authority of the God of Love, who imposed the task of writing the legends, clashes with the authority in books.

We can begin a closer investigation of Chaucer's good women by rephrasing Freud's question: what do good women want? The answer for most of them is that they want men, but what kind of men and in what way? The poet gives us an advantage over the women in that we are told repeatedly how devious and fickle men are in love. Because of this stress on the men's falseness, all their other qualities come across as mere window-dressing. From the women's point of view, however, these men are endowed with irresistible attractions. Cleopatra loves Antony "Thourgh his

desert, and for his chyvalrye"; and, "but if that bokes lye," he is the equal of any man "of persone and of gentillesse, / And of discrecioun and hardynesse" (608-611). Pyramus is "oon of the lustyeste" young men in Babylon and conveniently placed to win the love of his sequestered neighbor, Thisbe. Aeneas we perceive through Dido's senses:

> The queen saugh that they dide hym swych honour,
> And hadde herd ofte of Eneas er tho,
> And in hire herte she hadde routhe and wo
> That evere swich a noble man as he
> Shal ben disherited in swich degre;
> And saw the man, that he was lyk a knyght,
> And suffisaunt of persone and of myght,
> And lyk to been a verray gentil man;
> And wel his wordes he besette can,
> And hadde a noble visage for the nones,
> And formed wel of braunes and of bones.
> . . .
> And wel a lord he semede for tó be.
> And, for he was a straunger, somwhat she
> Likede hym the bet, as, God do bote,
> To some folk ofte newe thyng is sote.
> (1061-1077)

She describes him herself in similar words:

> . . . "he is so wel ywrought,
> And ek so likly for to ben a man,
> And therwithal so moche good he can
> That al my love and lyf lyth in his cure."
> (1172-1176)

Sight and seeming dominate these passages. Aeneas has a good reputation, he speaks well, he looks like a knight--and a lover. The fact that he is a stranger has great influence with her. Most powerful over her emotions, however, is the fact that Aeneas is in trouble.

> Anon hire herte hath pite of his wo,
> And with that pite love com in also;
> And thus, for pite and for gentillesse,
> Refreshed moste he been of his distresse.
> (1078-1081)

A highly unusual chain of events has given Dido (she thinks) power to help Aeneas--power, that is, over a situation in which, were he an ordinary man and she an ordinary woman, she would have none. Having the ability to help him, having every reason to expect him to be grateful, she feels she can dispense with the usual devices women use to protect themselves ("Daunger"). Aeneas' "distresse" in a sense reverses their roles, so that she can court him, make him lavish presents, give him the security usually offered by knights to ladies "in distress." The fairy spokeswoman of the Wife of Bath may be right in saying that women want sovereignty; that is what Dido thinks she has. Aeneas has the gift of making promises, which seems by convention to come far more easily to false lovers than to true ones: "as a fals lovere so wel can [he] pleyne / That sely Dido rewede on his peyne. . . . " (1236-1237). He falls into the role of subservient courtly lover with ease; this "grete gentil-man," knight and hero, becomes a sort of fop who waits upon his lady "at festes and at daunces"; his deeds "of armes" at jousts are sandwiched between his song-writing and trinket-sending (1265-1276). When he tires of these "obeysaunces," he makes plans to leave by night and carries them out despite her desperate pleas for him to stay.

Jason, like Aeneas a stranger and guest in need of help, exerts power over women by his looks, charm, and pitiable condition:

> Thow madest thy recleymyng and thy lures
> To ladyes of thy statly aparaunce,
> And of thy wordes, farced with plesaunce,
> And of thy feyned trouthe and thy manere,
> With thyn obeysaunce and humble cheere,
> And with thy contrefeted peyne and wo.
> (1371-1376)

A long and very telling list of the qualifications for a lover is presented by Hercules to Hypsipyle as qualities belonging to Jason:

> This Ercules hath so this Jason preysed
> That to the sonne he hath hym up areysed,
> That half so trewe a man there nas of love
> Under the cope of heven that is above;
> Of these thre poyntes there nas non hym liche:
> Of fredom passede he, and lustyhede,
> Alle tho that lyven or been dede;
> Therto so gret a gentilman was he,
> And of Thessalye likly king to be.
> There was no lak, but that he was agast
> To love, and for to speke shamefast.
> He hadde lever hymself to morder, and dye,
> Than that men shulde a lovere hym espye.
> (1524-1537)

There are quite a few discrepancies in this endorsement. No man exists who is half so true in love, Hercules says, as Jason; but either Jason has not loved and so not been tried, or he has loved and so not been true. Hercules' emphasis on Jason's hardiness, his "lustyhede," his generosity, and particularly his ability to conceal a love affair seem to recommend him for an illicit relationship rather than marriage, yet Hercules drops a mighty hint at

the end of this discourse that marriage is what Jason "needs." Again, with Medea, Jason's gift for making women love him is described as lying in his looks, renown, speech, ability to act like a lover, and--most of all--his need for her help. He promises marriage at exactly the right moment, after she has proved to him that only she can save him, and before they have gone to bed together.

Theseus, worst of all deceitful men, has one pre-eminent virtue which attracts Ariadne (and presumably Phaedra) to him: he is "a kynges son" (lines 1953, 1975, 1979, 2055, 2080, 2130). There are fewer descriptions of his appearance than of Jason's, but his persuasive tongue is shown in action. When he has the ear of Ariadne, he swears to be her page and to live in her service, while dropping many hints of his princely stature. Ariadne, who thinks that it would be a waste to let a lord's son die, actually makes the suggestion of marriage. She finds it a "shame" for "A kynges sone, and ek a knyght . . . To ben my servaunt in so low degre" (2080-81); "Yit were it betere that I were youre wyf" (2089). Theseus plays upon her romantic notions by "admitting" that he has loved her, sight unseen, "ful many a day . . . And aldermost desired yow to se / Of any erthly livynge creature" (2115-2118). But his gift for seduction shows most clearly in the brilliant stroke with which, in four lines, he exalts her desirability, his own "stedefastnesse," her dominance over him, and,

perhaps most important, the rank she will attain by marriage with him:

> "Upon my trouthe, I swere, and yow assure
> This sevene yer I have youre servaunt be.
> Now have I yow, and also have ye me,
> My dere herte, of Athenes duchesse!"
> (2119-2122)

The narrator, in an apostrophe to Theseus, voices the "reasoning" behind the passion of several of the good women. Theseus, in prison and soon to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, should be eternally grateful to anyone who would help him:

> Me thynketh this, that thow were depe yholde
> To whom that savede thee from cares colde!
> And if now any woman helpe the,
> Wel oughtestow hire servaunt for to be,
> And ben hire trewe lovere yer by yere!
> (1952-1958)

We see again the force of expected gratitude, which gives the benefactor a sort of "maistrye," in "The Legend of Phyllis." Chaucer expands upon Ovid's suggestions in the Heroides "that Demophoon came to her in need of material assistance, which she readily supplied." In Chaucer's version, "Demophoon . . . arrives in graphic desperation nearly crushed by his encounter with a heavy storm."[32] Phyllis has an apparently strong position from which to bargain for marriage. Chaucer abbreviates all description of their wooing to the business transaction at the heart of it:

> . . . unto Phillis hath he sworen thus,
> To wedden hire, and hire his trouthe plyghte,
> And piked of hire al the good he myghte. . . .
> (2465-2467)

Apparently, these women--Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Ariadne, and Phyllis, half of Chaucer's list--place a mistaken reliance upon what seems to be their advantageous position in relationship to their men. They expect gratitude, but gratitude among the men of the legends is as short-lived as the keeping of bargains.

Among the good women, on the other hand, the keeping of bargains--trouthe--is the pre-eminent virtue. That women are expected to suffer more in love is practically proverbial. And, since the God of Love charges Chaucer to praise faithful women, this virtue is even more to be expected here. In order to fulfill this command, Chaucer employs all the rhetorical devices in his power. Good women, the God of Love tells us in the prologue, are so true to their loves that they prefer death to being unfaithful. More accurately, perhaps, they prefer death to losing their "name." We have seen how closely this resembles the martyrdom of virgins and chaste women praised by Jerome to the extent that, in Chaucer as in Jerome, no other virtue is thought worthy of consideration. This assumption is shared by the women themselves, of course. It is their willingness to give up everything for love that leads them to expect gratitude and recompense in the form of marriage from the lovers who come to them in need.

Eleanor Leach and John Fyler, critics who have emphasized the rhetorical hyperbole of the Legend, see the

elevation of "fallen" women to the stature of martyrs as humorously revealing the inadequacy and falseness both of the rhetorical devices and of the heroines themselves. Fyler sums up his appraisal of the poem by saying, "To attempt to find trouthe where there is none does not, as the Legend of Good Women neatly proves, accomplish very much."[33] That the women are not really admirable heroines makes the rhetoric of the Legend funny and reveals their vaunted trouthe to be very spurious indeed. The women have pledged their trouthe to lovers thinking that they will receive it in return; they invest their virtue in one losing proposition after another. As E. T. Donaldson remarks of the characters in "The Franklin's Tale," it is a "mistake . . . to assume that the world owes it to us to make us practical returns for our idealism."[34] This fact is what distinguishes Griselde from, say, Medea; the latter has no conception of fidelity for its own sake. But despite the fact that, as Leach and Fyler point out, these women's trouthe does not live up to the claims made for it, their "virtue" should be given careful examination for what it is. As I have suggested, the women's search for a self-definition at odds with authority--and what happens to them in the process--can be seen as both female rebellion against the "law" of chastity and human rebellion against all external, arbitrary, and also necessary and civilizing, authority.

In her article "Chaucer's Good Woman," Pat Trefzger Overbeck describes the "composite Good Woman" as one "who cannot or will not relate to authority, the consummate woman of experience."[35] The Good Woman rejects divine authority: "In striking contrast to her prototype in the saint's legend and to her sister heroine in the medieval romance, Cupid's saint is deprived of, or spared, impelling supernatural motivations or influences, whether God, gods, Fate, or Fortune"[36] (although Hypermnestra comes to grief through astrological causes). The women reject human authority, including--with Cleopatra, Dido, Hypsipyle, and Phyllis, who are reigning queens--their own. For these women, "The only meaningful sovereignty is in the love relationship."[37] In this fact lies the center of the problem.

Let us look back for a moment at Alceste, that most exemplary of faithful women. The God of Love says of her that:

> . . . she taughte of fyn lovynge,
> And namely of wifhood the lyvinge,
> And alle the boundes that she oughte kepe.
> (544-546)

Thus, the other martyrs can be said to be following her example, spiritually if not chronologically. Alceste chose to die and go to hell in place of her husband. Her husband allowed her to do so. Faithful unto death, she is now in paradise--without her husband. How could any of these women martyred for love be "happy"--and there is supposed

to be joy in heaven--without their men? Even Dido in the lugentes campi was granted the company of her first husband. It would seem that the men who put these women in "paradise" are analogous to the Roman emperors who by killing faithful Christians enabled them to receive their heavenly reward. The love of these faithful lovers is focused upon itself, not really on the object of passion. They are in reality true to their "names," not to the men they supposedly love. Their emptying of self is, paradoxically, as selfish an action as the men's betrayal of them. As Professor Overbeck says,

> The prototypical Good Woman, free from the restraints of authority and the dictates of reason, pursues an ignis fatuus, a hallowed earthly union or a sublunary perfection impossible of attainment, destroying herself in the process.[38]

Her goal is mastery over her lover, leading to wedlock. Overbeck points out the contradiction in seeking "freedom from masculine dominance and, at the same time, sanctioned union with the male which implies such dominance."[39] It seems, however, that the women do not look beyond the act of marriage to envision the details of married life. Their wish to dominate centers on forcing--through bribe and threat--their chosen men to make the proper vows.

This theme--the primacy of the marriage vow or the promise to marry--recurs throughout the legends. Cleopatra "wax [Antony's] wif, and hadde hym as hire leste" (615). When he dies, she recalls her oath to feel as he feels,

"wel or wo," "lyf or deth." She kills herself in adherence to this vow, determined to feel just as dead as he does. She takes care that her death not be easier than his by jumping naked into a pit full of adders. The "covenaunt" (790) and "trouthe" (778) between Pyramus and Thisbe to meet and elope is taken more seriously by Thisbe, who arrives first at their meeting place. When Pyramus, thinking her dead, kills himself, she follows suit. Like Cleopatra, she wants to prove herself the equal of her lover, saying, "'God forbede but a woman can / Ben as trewe in lovynge as a man!'" (910-911). With the story of Dido, the women begin to gain a substantial lead in the contest of keeping trouthe. Aeneas sweárs the glib oath of a false lover, while

> . . . sely Dido rewede on his peyne,
> And tok hym for husbonde, and becom his wyf.
> For evermo, whil that hem laste lyf.
> (1237-1239)

The importance of her belief that she will be his wife goes deep, for she refers to it repeatedly when he speaks of leaving:

> Have ye nat sworn to wyve me to take? (1304)
>
> Ye wole nat from youre wif thus foule fleen? (1307)
>
> And, so ye wole me now to wive take,
> As ye han sworn, thanne wol I yeve yow leve
> To slen me with youre swerd now sone at eve!
> For thanne yit shal I deyen as youre wif.
> (1319-1322)

The name of wife has more value for Dido than Aeneas' love, more even than life itself. She gives a reason: "These

lordes, which that wonen me besyde, / Wole me distroyen only for youre sake" (1317-18). Here we see why marriage is so important to these women. Unwilling to maintain the virtue of chastity imposed upon them by society and enforced by men who have no intention of adhering to it themselves, they are driven to seek marriage with the men for whom they forsook society's laws. No such demands weigh upon their lovers, however. As Chaucer reiterates through the voices of narrator and characters, shaming women "is . . . holden game" (478-479) among the majority of men in ancient and contemporary times. The problem of all the good women may be summarized by saying that they yield to nature rather than to society by taking lovers; and they adhere to social respectability rather than to nature by choosing death over life with shame. If they could follow only society's laws, or only nature's demands, they would be able to survive. Here, as in the description of birds in the prologue, "the conventions are set against the realities of nature."

Jason, the "rote of false lovers," goes through some form of marriage with Hypsipyle (1559-60) and with Medea (1636), leaves them both, and marries "yit the thridde wif anon" (1660). These rather suspect marriages do little to ease the despair of the abandoned wives, however. Lucrece kills herself out of what seems an excessive reverence for the state of wifely chastity. Ariadne, as we have seen, bargains for marriage with Theseus and performs her part

of the "covenaunt" by saving his life (2139). Although no wedding has been performed, she is referred to as his wife (2152, 2171). Procne, though not the titular martyr of "The Legend of Philomela," avenges her husband's rape and disfigurement of her sister and his falseness to herself (Chaucer tactfully omits this part of the story). Chaucer works Tereus into his list of false lovers, saying that he is "in love so fals and so forswore" (2235) that to hear or read his name spreads corruption. The emphasis here falls on Tereus' breaking of his marriage vow, unlike the emphasis of the story of the whole upon Philomela. Hypermnestra, like Lucrece, may be seen as carrying her wifehood too far. She has gone through a marriage ceremony, arranged by their fathers, to a man she seems not to have known previously. Told by her father to kill him, she debates with herself the course she should take:

> "Or he or I mot nedes lese oure lyf.
> Now certes," quod she, "syn I am his wyf,
> And hath my feyth, yit is it bet for me
> For to be ded in wifly honeste
> Than ben a traytour lyvynge in my shame."
> (2698-2702)

The magnanimity of her decision to sacrifice herself is undercut by the astrological details which introduce her. We know that she could not stab anyone "thogh she shulde lese hire lyf" (2595) and that she is fated to die in prison. The outcome is so determined that we question whether Hypermnestra has any virtue worthy of the name.

The Legend of Good Women is in many ways a shocking poem, perhaps most in the relationship built up between the narrator, the world of the poem, and the world of the audience. This relationship is what finally determines the tone of the poem. The prologue suggestively portrays the poem's audience as the enclosed, ordered, and gracious world of the court--a court modelled on the "courts of love," and equally fictionalized. The narrator mentioned the contest between the flower and the leaf, an "elegant, and unresolvable, courtly quarrel"[40] which provided a fictive backdrop for love-debates. Alceste, in the F-version of the prologue, requests presentation of the finished poem to the queen. The narrator addresses his audience of young lovers, asking them to help him with his rhyming. These details encourage us to envision the audience as made up of the "yonge, fresshe folkes" addressed at the ending of Troilus. However, certain warning notes are sounded. Cupid tells the narrator that to shame as many women as possible "in youre world . . . is now holden game" (479). The legends pick up on this note of warning. The legend of Cleopatra ends by the narrator saying, "Now, or I fynde a man thus trewe and stable, / And wol for love his deth so frely take, / I preye God let oure hedes nevere ake!" (703-705). The story of Pyramus and Thisbe contains one of the few good men the narrator has found in all his books. Nevertheless, both the narrator and Thisbe warn women against

trusting their reputations and safety to men. Chaucer's third telling of the story of Dido repeats this warning; the narrator speaks out to address women in the audience, saying that not only old examples, but their own observations, should serve to warn them against men.

Addresses to true and trusting women and to false men proliferate from here on out in the legends. In describing Jason, the narrator says he does not have time to describe all his wooing, "but in this hous if any fals lovere be, / Ryght as hymself now doth, ryght so dide he" (1554-1555). Men are not to be trusted (1883-1885). Men will not be faithful to one woman "but it so be that he may have non other" (2393). Men are the "subtyl fo," so that women, the narrator says, should trust "as in love, no man but me" (2559, 2561). The "morals" here have become as extreme as their opposites, the warnings of misogynists like those mentioned in the prologue. In fact, substitute "women" for "men" and they say exactly the same things. Chaucer has redressed the balance twice: he has praised women, and he has dispraised men so excessively as to make any such generalization seem ludicrous. The fact that he addresses so many of his warnings against men to his imagined audience of young lovers--who, if they were to take him seriously, would feel very uncomfortable--helps to defuse those warnings. Yet, by preaching against a whole sex, he recreates an experience which must have been not unfamiliar to the

female half of the audience. In so doing, he reveals the folly of such practices. The seriousness of the Legend of Good Women thus lodges in its humor. Rationality has been dispensed with so many times--in love and in rhetoric--and with such disastrous results, that we are finally forced to embrace it and reject its opposite. No easy choices are made between faith in love and the instinct for survival; between "natural" behavior and social rules and rituals; between woman (or man) as devil and woman (or man) as saint. In showing some romantic myths and rhetorical devices for what they are, we moderns may be tempted to say that Chaucer has struck a blow for the right of women (and men) to choose for themselves what sort of trouthte they will embrace.

Notes

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 115, 1243. All subsequent line references to this edition are included in the text.

[2] W. Arthur Turner, "Biblical Women in The Merchant's Tale and The Tale of Melibee," English Language Notes 3 (1965), p. 93.

[3] Turner, p. 93.

[4] Charlotte F. Otten, "Proserpine: Liberatrix Suae Gentis," Chaucer Review 5 (1971), p. 280.

[5] E. T. Donaldson, Chaucer's Poetry (New York: Ronald, 1958, rpt. 1975), p. 1085.

[6] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Harry W. Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), pp. 289-295.

[7] Sources differ on whether Boccaccio's works are a major source for The Monk's Tale. John H. Fisher, in his edition, The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977), p. 283, note, says that "there is evidently little direct relation between Chaucer's content and Boccaccio's." He further states (p. 287, note) that the story of Zenobia "is evidently directly related to Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus, which is odd in view of the fact that none of the accounts is drawn from the more appropriate De Casibus. . . . " My discussion of the tale argues for Chaucer's use of both DCM and De Casibus, and I find Fisher's statements unconvincing to say the least. I do not know whether Chaucer intended to model his Monk on an antifeminist clerk named Boccaccio or upon a nameless writer of short biographies having antifeminist overtones, but the result would have been the same in either case.

[8] Donaldson, p. 1103.

[9] Edward M. Socola, "Chaucer's Development of Fortune in the 'Monk's Tale,'" JEGP 49 (1950), p. 164.

[10] Giovanni Boccaccio, De Mulieribus Claris, in Tutte le Opere, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1970), p. 406.

[11] Giovanni Boccaccio, The Fates of Illustrious Men, tr. Louis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), p. 209.

[12] Robert Worth Frank, Jr., Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 26, 34-35.

[13] Frank, p. 10.

[14] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 38-39.

[15] The ironic humor of the Legend of Good Women was long in being rediscovered and even longer in gaining acceptance. Harold C. Goddard put forth the theory that the Legend is meant to be funny in 1909; he was so firmly rebutted by John Livingston Lowes in the same year that for decades Goddard received only slighting references in thorough bibliographies. See Goddard, "Chaucer's Legend of Good Women," JEGP 7 (1908) and 8 (1909), pp. 47-111.

[16] John M. Fyler, Chaucer and Ovid (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 98-99.

[17] Donaldson, p. 1089.

[18] Frank, pp. 24-25.

[19] Eleanor Winsor Leach, "The Sources and Rhetoric of Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' and Ovid's 'Heroides,'" Diss. Yale 1963, pp. 27-28.

[20] David, p. 38.

[21] Carl Lindahl, "The Girl Without Hands and the Lady Who Cannot Be Touched," delivered at the Thirteenth Conference on Medieval Studies of the Medieval Institute, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 6, 1978. Six versions of the tale were probably known in Chaucer's time, either in manuscript or oral form. In only one of these does the father's incestuous desire for his daughter not appear.

[22] Chaucer, p. 482 (editor's note).

[23] Leach, p. 42.

[24] Leach, p. 42.

[25] Leach, p. 65.

[26] Leach, p. 107.

[27] Leach, pp. 66 and 109.

[28] Leach, p. 195.

[29] Pat Trefzger Overbeck, "Chaucer's Good Woman," Chaucer Review 2 (1967), p. 84. Cf. Leach, p. 127.

[30] Of course, Chaucer is following Ovid more closely than Vergil, which makes his assertions of homage to the latter even more humorous. See Fyler, p. 111 ff.

[31] Leach, p. 153.

[32] Leach, p. 196.

[33] Fyler, p. 123.

[34] Donaldson, p. 1089.

[35] Overbeck, p. 76.

[36] Overbeck, p. 77.

[37] Overbeck, p. 78.

[38] Overbeck, p. 85.

[39] Overbeck, p. 86.

[40] Fyler, p. 120.

EPILOGUE

"WHO PEYNTEDE THE LEON?"

The Wife of Bath, as I have suggested, brings together all the paradoxes implicit in medieval writings about women. She is as fierce and combative as the virago, as fleshly and appealing as the seductress; and, although she did not remain a virgin past the earliest days of puberty, she shows great concern with the praise of woman as virgin promulgated by "clerks." She herself is a contradiction in terms, a temperamental amalgam of Mars and Venus; this fact makes Chaucer uniquely able to comment through her on the contradictions from which she takes her being. The Wife gets to the heart of the catalogue technique with her comments on lion-painting:

> . . . it is an impossible
> That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
> But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
> Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
> Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
> By God! if wommen hadde writen stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.[1]

The antifeminist catalogues of women written by "clerks"--which here may include Jerome, Ovid, Matheolus, Boccaccio, the Merchant, the Manciple, the Monk, and scores of others--are all exercises in painting woman as the enemy. The aim

(which some took more seriously than others) is to give men the power to resist sexual temptation by making women so abhorrent as to present no temptation, while making her provocative enough for the danger to seem real.

But what of the catalogues in praise of women, which the Wife mentions in an aside--the "holy seintes lyves"? As Alison is aware, such praise, which damns the many by excepting the few, does little to help ordinary women escape the general defamation. This is true whatever the definition of "saint": Ovid's praise of women, who valued faith to their lovers over any other good; Jerome's praise of women who preferred chastity to life itself; or Boccaccio's praise of women who were men in all but physiology. Not having any genuinely feminist body of doctrine--nor any written by a woman, before Christine de Pisan--women had to evaluate themselves by rules and models for behavior set up by men. Men did all the writing and all the official talking. (What women said among themselves is, of course, another matter.) What intelligent women could do, and must have done, was to evaluate those rules and models, to determine for themselves to what extent the rules should be followed. Chaucer gives us two fictional examples of women doing just that.

Dorigen and Arveragus, the heroine and hero of The Franklin's Tale, are equally committed to the ideal of trouthe in marriage. Arveragus, however, is more able to

"suffre" the realities of life than is Dorigen. One feels, although there is no textual evidence for it, that Dorigen is quite a bit younger than her husband; certainly she is less inured to the harsh demands which life makes upon one's ideals. This difference in their natures can be seen in their exchange of promises:

> . . . this wise, worthy knight
> To lyve in ese, suffrance hire bihight,
> And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere
> That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here.
> (787-790)

He promises to be patient; she promises to be perfect. Dorigen conceives of her marriage and her role as wife in the most idealistic terms. The Franklin's ironic treatment of her flaw ("ful wisly") is gentle, though a bit condescending. When Arveragus leaves her to perform his duties as a knight, Dorigen behaves in the manner of heroines in romances:

> For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
> As doon thise nobles wyves whan hem liketh.
> She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth;
> Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth
> That al this wyde world she sette at noght.
> (817-821)

Dorigen seems also to be acting a part, that of the "lady" in a romance, when she agrees to love Aurelius if he can make the rocks disappear. Her essential fidelty to Arveragus is not swayed, but it is obscured by this indulgence in romantic, melancholic fantasy. That she depends so clearly upon the impossibility of the task she imposes reveals her fundamental good sense. She does not really

believe that she is the heroine of a romance, though from time to time she acts like one. Much to her surprise, she finds out later--after she had forgotten all about her promise to Aurelius--that she is indeed living in a world of romance. The rocks disappear.

Forced to confront the ideals of behavior with which she has up to now been entertaining herself, Dorigen turns first to examples of "noble wyves" from literature (specifically, from Jerome's Adversus Jovinianum). Reciting a long list of martyrs to chastity, seemingly in order to work herself up to following their example, she begins with women who died rather than lose their virtue. It is a strong beginning:

> Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,
> And many a mayde, yslayn hirself, allas!
> Rather than with hir body doon trespas?
> Yis, certes, lo, thise stories beren witnesse:
> Whan thritty tiraunts, ful of cursednesse,
> Hadde slayn Phidon in Atthenes atte feste,
> They comanded his doghtres for t'areste,
> And bryngen hem biforn hem in despit,
> Al naked, to fulfille hir foul delit,
> And in hir fadres blood they made hem daunce
> Upon the pavement, God yeve hem meschaunce!
> For which thise woful maydens, ful of drede,
> Rather than they wolde lese hir maydenhede,
> They prively been stirt into a welle,
> And dreynte hemselven, as the bookes telle.
> (1364-1378)

She employs apostrophes, rhetorical questions, interjections, and quotations in telling several similar stories. The energy of her delivery dwindles in proportion to the efficacy of her examples, however. She arrives at the bottom of the heap with rather oblique references to Bilyea, whose

virtue consisted in not telling her old husband he had bad breath; Rodogune, who killed her nurse for suggesting she remarry; and Teuta, Artemesia, and Valeria, who, though often mentioned as examples of good women, do not really fit the announced contents of the catalogue.[2] The announced contents--that many wives and maidens have killed themselves rather than lose their honor--presents a deceptively simple choice between death and dishonor. As the examples are from Jerome, so this choice is based on the ideal of chastity as propounded by Jerome and his confreres. Wholeness of body is a woman's virtue; no other sense of "holiness" matters. The emblem of integrity has replaced its reality. The self-destructive acts of these women have much the same flavor as those of the martyrs of love, such as Dido, Phyllis, and Thisbe. Their "wholeness" is not integrity at all, but the substitution of an unnaturally exalted part for the neglected whole. Is the virginity or chastity of these maidens and wives itself a form of trouthe? I would argue that in most cases it is not. When they sacrifice their lives, it is for an ideal to which they were committed by the accident of their sex. While trouthe is an act of volition, enabling one to choose the ideal or person to whom one makes a promise, virginity is a physical fact. Women are born with it and are automatically put into the position of having to defend it against outside forces. In most of the cases cited by Dorigen, the women's intentions are

completely irrelevant. Lucrece intends to remain chaste; she becomes "unchaste" through no fault of her own, but her spiritual chastity (so to speak) is totally invalidated by the violation of her body. In addition, as I have mentioned, the law of chastity-or-death applies far more to women than to men. Trouthe, on the other hand, is a contract making the same demands on both sexes. The pledge of trouthe is intimately connected with the kind of equality in marriage advocated by the Franklin.

Certain phrases used by the Franklin emphasize the fact that Dorigen behaves during crises as do fictional ladies when confronted with separation from lovers, suits from would-be lovers, and challenges to their virtue. Rather than reinforcing the fictionality of Dorigen, the comparison reinforces the reality of her situation. Accustomed to modelling her reactions and her behavior on the examples of noble wives and ladies from mythology, history and romance, Dorigen finds her predicament complicated when their examples lead her astray and finally urge her to suicide. Dorigen does not follow their example--fortunately; instead she busies herself thinking up more and more examples until Arveragus comes home, then takes his advice. The Franklin, whose comments show awareness of the inappropirate nature of the models she is trying to follow, has given us a glimpse of a woman trying to follow rules which are inhumane in the extreme. I am disappointed, however, by the fact that his

ending deflects attention from Dorigen and her efforts to maintain trouthe onto the three male characters and their fredom. Insofar as the Franklin does this, I find his tale unsatisfactory as an answer to the problems of women's integrity and of "maistrye" in marriage.

In order to obtain the sexual equality needed for partnership in marriage, and to construct a sense of integrity based on values other than virginity, the Wife of Bath must first overturn centuries of antifeminist assumptions. Chaucer's creation of her departs radically from the usual methods employed by defenders of women. She does not try to prove the goodness of women by example; one feels it unlikely that she would respect exemplary women like the ones in Dorigen's list. She does not deny all of the charges of antifeminists; in fact, she makes some of them against herself. She would say that, yes, she is lustful and shrewish, but that lust and shrewishness are fairly efficacious means of getting what one wants. Rather than countering one absurd oversimplification (all women are evil) with another (all women are good--or even one woman is perfect!), Alison holds them in tension. Her counter-argument does not take the form of a coolly intellectual approach to her opponents, however. She is a pragmatist, but she is also an artist. Her artistry consists of her sensitivity to the verbal constructions of the "authorities" she refutes and, beyond this, of her ability to use their means to her own ends. Mary

Carruthers, in her article "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," points to that central metaphor used by the Wife to describe both the techniques of the antifeminists and her own modus operandi in her prologue and tale:

> The fable of painting the lion teaches that the "truth" of any picture often has more to do with the prejudices and predilections of the painter than with the "reality" of the subject and that truthful art (and morality) must take account of this complexly mutual relationship. In her prologue, the Wife describes her own progress toward building a "trewe" marriage out of her experience as an ironic corrective . . . for the pronouncements of those clerics and other authorities at whom she pokes fun in her prologue . . .[3]

Her remark about the painting of lions shows the Wife's awareness of the exaggeration on both sides, including her own. She uses her knowledge of men's accusations against women to pre-empt the real complaints of her husbands:

> Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde
> That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
> And al was fals . . .
> . . .
> I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,
> Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.
> Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;
> I pleyned first, so was oure werre ystynt.
> (380-390)

The Wife knows how to "paint" herself as a wronged innocent, using the very colors provided by her enemies. Throughout her prologue she also paints "sheep" with the faces of husbands and clerks. In dealing with clerks, she quotes their most ludicrous attempts to "devyne and glosen" reality into ethereality. "And certes," she mocks Jerome with an air of innocence, "if ther were no seed ysowe, / Virginitee, thanne

wherof sholde it grow?" (71-72). In some cases she does more than justice to their asininities, as when she wrestles with Jerome's "diffinicioun" of the permissible number of husbands, drawn from the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman. She distinguishes between the Bible's actual commandments and its "conseillyng" (67), maintaining her reverence for the first while dispensing with the second. She finds her experience a guide to determining God's purpose for the flesh:

> Telle me also, to what conclusion
> Were membres maad of generacion,
> And of so parfit wys a wright ywrought?[15]
> Trusteth right wel, they were not maad for noght.
> Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun
> That they were maked for purgacioun
> Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale
> Were eek to knowe a female from a male,
> And for noon oother cause,--say ye no?
> The experience woot wel it is noght so.
>
> (115-124)

The reverence Alison feels for marriage and her role as a wife is partly a recognition of the independence which, paradoxically, it gives her. Mary Carruthers describes the process by which Alison acquired this independence through the realities of marriage among the medieval bourgeoisie:

> As Alisoun knows from experience, the true fruits of marriage are described neither in Jerome nor in the deportment books but are set in the marriage bed. Its important spoils for her are neither children nor sensual gratification but independence. Marriage is the key to survival, and that is what Alisoun seeks and finds. . . . The lesson that Alisoun has learned is obvious: marriage is contracted for money, and the acquisition of money is equivalent to the attainment of honor, respect, and independence.[4]

To achieve the demands of her sense of self-worth, she uses the realities of marriage. The "equality" involved is that of a play for power--take as much, and give as little, as possible. The ideal of marriage remains her aim, however, and she sacrifices all she has gained in her matrimonial bargains to obtain that ideal. Carruthers points out that "the full flower of Alisoun's awakened heart is her gift to Jankyn of the 'maistrye' of her property." Unfortunately, "her gesture does not inspire a corresponding generosity in him."[5] Carruthers sees the trouble of their marriage as arising from Jankyn's belief in "auctoritee"--specifically, antifeminist authority, which would give him mastery over his wife contrary to her advantage in years, wealth, and "experience" of all sorts. Jankyn gets her body and spirit, as well as her property, and proceeds to devalue them all by presuming to set up rules and preach to a woman his superior in all but sex. Being stubborn, she fights back, but she is more deeply hurt than her pride will allow her to show him. "Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose / The wo that in myn herte wa, and pyne?" (786-787). Jankyn's book "of wikked wyves" contains the supreme examples of antifeminist lion-painting: Eve, Delilah, Deianira, Xanthippe, Pasiphae, Clytemnestra, Eripyle, and so forth. When, on one occasion, she saw that "he wolde nevere fyne / To reden on this cursed book al nyght," her endurance finally breaks; she tears three leaves from the book and knocks him to the

floor. In the ensuing scuffle she manages to frighten him, to make him beg forgiveness, and to deal him another blow, so that

> . . . atte laste, with muche care and wo,
> We fille acorded by us selven two.
> He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
> To han the governance of hous and lond,
> And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
> And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
> And whan that I hadde geten unto me,
> By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,
> And that he seyde, "Myn owene trewe wyf,
> Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;
> Deep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat'--
> After that day we hadden never debaat.
> God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
> As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
> And also trewe, and so was he to me.
>
> (811-825)

One may harbor dark suspicions about the stability of a marriage between such strong and diametrically opposed wills as those of Alison and Jankyn, but the point is that her language exalts the marriage to a vision of happiness in an admittedly imperfect world. At least in the act of telling, her fifth marriage attains the sort of equality praised by the Franklin: husband and wife are sure enough of each other and of themselves to enter into a bond of trouthe. Again in her tale, the Wife transforms into the world of Faerie what she has learned in her own world, especially with Jankyn. A woman is cheapened and demeaned when her husband (in league with clerks) tries to keep her honor for her, to act as her spiritual jailor. While an endless stream of exempla try to teach women that they are inherently evil, any equality is hard to come by. The Wife sees the

words "keep thyn honour" as the surest admission of her worth as a human being, and with this assurance she imagines herself the kind of wife she wants to be, a true and loving one.

With his creation of the Wife of Bath, Chaucer's development of the catalogue from a formal, rhetorical device to a technique of characterization reaches its culmination. She is a catalogue come to life, using all the contradictions with which "authority" has endowed her to undermine that very authority. In her, Chaucer goes beyond the impersonal irony of the Legend, which is directed against the falseness of the catalogues and of the authority they claim to represent. He also transcends the personal irony of the Manciple's, Merchant's, and Monk's tales, which mocks the pretensions of these characters to authority in their supposed knowledge of women. This many-times-married woman seems an ideal target for Jerome and Boccaccio, as well as for the antifeminist pilgrims. In fact, however, she is more aware than any of them of the true nature of the authority they claim and of its propensity to reveal "clerks" for what they are.

Alison--unlike Dido, Criseyde, and the women of the Legend--does not hide from authority. What men may say about her holds little fear for her. She does not try to hide behind authority, either, as do the "clerks" and the Chaucerian personae in their clerkish moments. She is

willing to come to grips with authority, accepting what she sees as essential and rejecting what is trivial. Although not moral in the conventional sense, perhaps, she shows a high moral sense in her desire to have experience and authority meet and make sense for her. It may be this attribute that leads some readers to identify the Wife of Bath closely with Chaucer himself. She is one of very few characters with the strength and honesty to keep from dissociating experience and authority, act and belief. Chaucer gives her the integrity to pull together the disparate qualities of the catalogues.

Chaucer's triumph in the Wife of Bath lies in his ability to give lusty, argumentative, and, finally, reflective life to the impossibility painted by clerks. She exerts the inexorable charm over men of Boccaccio's Iole, the inescapable tongue of "Theophrastus'" archetypal shrew, the concern (albeit purely theoretical) with chastity of one of Jerome's true wives. The compounding of three absurd oversimplifications into one body produces--and herein lies the magic--a human being more real than any one of her components. Perhaps most importantly, Chaucer threw out the fabliau (The Shipman's Tale) he had planned to assign to the Wife[6]; it is the story of a woman who sells her body to get what she wants. Instead, he gave her a dream.

Notes

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 82, ll. 688-696. All subsequent line references to this edition are included in the test.

[2] Numerous critics have commented on this complaint. Most perceptively, James Sledd ("Dorigen's Complaint," Modern Philology 45, 1947) says, "what might have been the depth of her suffering is the climax of her irrelevance, and a potentially tragic story has been turned aside . . . to the pleasant" (p. 43). Donald C. Baker ("A Crux in Chaucer's Franklin's Tale: Dorigen's Complaint," JEGP 60 (1961) adds the further refinement that Dorigen's last examples are of wives obedient to their husbands: " . . . Chaucer subtly chooses the illustrations . . . to work Dorigen's lament in its emotionally confused course toward Chaucer's goal: her exhausted indecision which is, in effect, a decision to leave the final word to her husband" (p. 60).

[3] Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," PMLA 94 (1972), p. 209.

[4] Carruthers, p. 214.

[5] Carruthers, p. 215.

[6] The Shipman's Tale is commonly believed to have originally been intended for the Wife of Bath. See Robinson's edition, p. 732.

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