ICONS OF ART: THE POETIC TRADITION AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN CHAUCER'S DREAM POETRY

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Huriye Reis.

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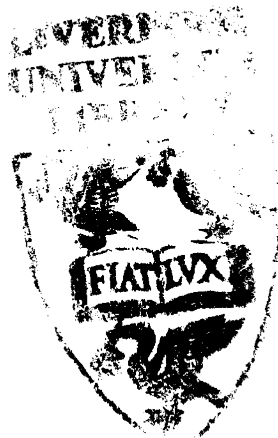

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PREFACE

Chaucer's poetry is a poetry of questions. The narrator in Chaucer's dream poems insists on two things: First, the poems he is making and we are reading are "beginnings". Second, his subject matter comes from books that he reads. Location of the poems of "beginnings" in the "books" suggests a correlative relationship between past and present. It points to a response to the literary tradition, at once uniform and multiphrenic. Taking the literary tradition as the source of poetry, as the "old fields" to which the poet is directed to produce new poetry, the established link with the past indicates a positive approach. But underlying the merge of antithetical components of poetry there is the question of authority, the question of the speaking voice, and the reliability of fictional representation.

Aiming to examine the implications of the question of authority and fictional representation in literary tradition through Chaucer's representations of women in the dream poems, this study addresses two key concerns related to Chaucer's art. Addressing the question of Chaucer's poetics in the dream poems, this study adopts and develops the critical position which recognises Chaucer's achievement in the dream poems as inscribing his theory and practice of poetics, suggesting that Chaucer is conscious of writing in a tradition and reflects this consciousness to his readers in his poetry. The role of the poet is defined as interpreter and transformer of the past and its tradition.

An interrelated concern is Chaucer's female characters. A critical approach which informs this study is the feminist approach to Chaucer's representations of women. The feminist approach examines women as separate from Chaucer's poetics,

focusing instead on recovering Chaucer's idea of women as women. This study will examine women in Chaucer's dream poetry not only as women but also as "matter" in the act of writing itself to suggest that Chaucer's attitude towards poetic tradition and women are not isolated concepts, and can be considered in relation to each other. This is an approach which has not hitherto been considered and which my thesis now proposes to address. The idea of authority pervades both Chaucer's poetic concerns and his representations of women. In an attempt to investigate the implications of the relation between the two, my study incorporates the feminist interests into the theory of Chaucerian poetics.

In an exploration of the tradition for themes, genres and the meaning they convey, Chaucer exhibits an insistence on the authorial position implied by the traditional premises in which he finds women continually subjugated and re-formed. He perceives this authority as indispensable for the poetry to exist and to have a productive relation to the literary past. This study aims to show that the process of questioning the authority can be observed in the representations of women. Represented in a predefined context which assumes the authority, women are the textual domain for the creation of both the traditional deterministic view of poetry and Chaucer's complex purpose to underline its processes.

My approach in this study is grounded in textual analysis of the representations of women in Chaucer's dream poems. Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this study try to identify the implications of the use of the past as a context for literary creation through an examination of the dream form and the narrator in Chaucer's dream poems, the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls* and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. In Chapter Four, the representations of

Alcione and Dido, the women from old books, show that these women are depicted in a complex relation to the authority which determines their existence. Alcione is shown to release herself from the limits of her textual representation in her broken promise to Juno, the main authoritative figure in her story. Alcione's presentation as self-motivated, active woman is contrasted with Dido's passive stance. As opposed to placing the authority on the hands of the woman character, as in the case of Alcione, in Dido's presentation Chaucer foregrounds two conflicting approaches governing her presentation as an example of the instability of fictional representation. The terms of definition are considerably modified to present Dido as a woman beguiled by false appearances. In this sense, the authority over Dido's fictional future is restored to herself, liberating her from the subordinate position she has in each of the traditional treatments to Aeneas.

Chapter Five is concerned with the "idealised" ladies, Blanche and Daisy/Alceste. Both Blanche and Alceste exist in a predetermined fictional context which is constructed by a single-minded ideal perception of women. Deprived of voice, even personal appearance in her fictional representation, Blanche remains emphatically an object of representation. In the case of Daisy/Alceste, Chaucer foregrounds the prior existence of Alceste in a literary context. He further reinforces the continuity of such representation by placing Alceste in old books. Alceste's double role as an idealised woman and a woman from old books serves as a synthesis of the implications raised in the representations of the two groups of women. In this final summation, Chaucer does not defer to the authority of tradition, nor does he attempt to subvert it. Instead, he firmly confirms the authority of the tradition as a shaping force in the creation and proliferation of a concept of woman, be it the textually

encaptivated Dido, Blanche or Alceste.

In Chapter Six, Fame and Nature show a different side of the authority. In the presentation of Fame Chaucer foregrounds the unreliability of fictional representation to an extent which negates almost any credibility of a fictionally constructed idea or concept. Epitomised in the presentation of Fame is Chaucer's idea of misuse of authority. Fame changes her position from the spoken object to speaking subject, and reveals the inevitability of the victimisation accorded to the object of the description. Fame is Chaucer's most profoundly discomforting challenge to the reliability of the traditional representations of women. Fame's arbitrariness along with her constituent element as a mixture of falsehood and truth reflect the principles in traditional depictions of women. Chaucer does not negate the reliability of fictional representation absolutely, but reveals such a great extent of ambiguity within it that it remains suspect. In the presentation of Nature, Chaucer offers an alternative to the acceptance of authority. Nature's rightful exercise of authority shared by the many birds present in the parliament liberates the fictional representation from the constraints of determinism inherent in single-authored presentations. Fame and Nature utilise authority to create two oppositional paradigms.

Chaucer's demonstration of the limitations and impositions governing the representations of women points to the existence of two equally deterministic approaches to women. The misogynistic tradition underlies the presentation of Fame and Nature, while the courtly tradition runs as a counter approach in the depictions of Alceste and Blanche. The women from the books illustrate the alternate silencing of one and favouring of the other according to the standpoint of the writer. Chaucer's own view of poetry conveyed through revisionist representations of women resists this

classification, and instead suggests a problematic co-existence of what has been presented as opposites. The co-existence can take place if the belief in poetry's power to perpetuate the truth is relativised, and if the absolute authority accorded to authors promoting what in reality is the fragments of truth is reconsidered in the light of the results gathered from the possible shifts in the center of authority.

In the representations of women in the dream poems, Chaucer works towards the inception of a tradition. Representations of women provide crucial contact points with the foregoing tradition. Reinforced by direct references to the interaction between the past and present, the women Chaucer reconsiders in the dream poems provide the basis for Chaucer's establishment of a tradition which questions its own validity and reliability.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> Poetic history...is...indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves...Weaker talents idealise; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves. But nothing is got for nothing, and self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realisation that he has failed to create himself?[1]

Stationed within an established tradition of discourse, the individuality of the poetic creation is only possible in the "imaginative space" secured by the poet through a necessitated misreading of his precursors in the search of a meaning, a form of expression, that grows out of a precursor but aims at negating the authority, the presence of the precursor.

The most widely known equivalent of Bloom's position presents itself as a medieval poetic theory of invention. Of the two types of invention, the new subject matter and the use of material which has already been treated, the poets who choose to use previous sources are advised to follow certain precepts. Geoffrey of Vinsauf counsels that writers find the means of validating their poetic effort in the silences, gaps and possibility of restructuring the whole precedent work in ways different from the original: "let us say something at that point where they have said nothing, and where they have said something, we will say nothing; what they said first, let us say later, and conversely".[2] The poet is literally advised to subvert the original so that

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[1] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.5.

[2] *Documentum*, IV, 134, trans. by Roger P. Parr (Milwauke, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1968)

while his work maintains a characteristic affinity with the past, it also is made to move in oppositional directions with the aim of establishing an "imaginative space." In Medieval theory of invention the recommended attitude is evidently a "misinterpretation" as Bloom formulates it, but the theory legitimises misinterpretation as a valid method of poetic creation, and hence provides an external model of appropriation.

Both Bloom's identification of poetic individuality in terms of appropriation, "an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation"[3] and the Medieval theory of invention seem to be behind Chaucer's method of working within a tradition. Chaucer's dream poetry is characteristically the product of an amalgam of the old and the new,[4] marked by a tension generated by an ostensible attempt to reconcile the two. As formulated in Chaucer criticism, this tension seems to be the creative force which, in Bloomian terms, attempts to displace the precursor while actually depending on the precursor for its primary existence. In her discussion of the *Book of the Duchess*, March Pelen maintains: "Chaucer's early voice is much influenced by the poems of Machaut but he is also capable of twisting current poetic fashion to his own original purposes."[5] Wolfgang Clemen views Chaucer's task as a poet to transform "what largely belonged to others until it became all his own."[6]

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[3] *The Anxiety Of Influence*, p. 30.

[4] Derek Brewer, *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 20.

[5] 'Machaut's Court of Love Narratives and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', *ChauR*, 11:2 (1976), 128-55 (p.139).

[6] *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, trans. by C.A.M. Sym (London: Methuen, 1963; first pub. in German, 1938), p.4.

Further, the indicative contention of Bloom and the transforming recipe of the Medieval theory of invention both postulate a variant that Chaucer foregrounds in his work. Implied in the interdependence between the precursor and the new poet is the question of authority manifested through a departure on the part of the new poet that simultaneously acknowledges and subverts the role of the precursor.[7] Criticism has also emphasised that Chaucer's appropriation of the past indicates an intervention in the state of things as he finds them in his sources and produces a correlative challenge to the authority of written tradition. Colleen Donnely writes: "Each time Chaucer borrows an image or scene from a source, he makes it ambiguous, opening his vision to two or more interpretations. By opening his poetry to new interpretations, Chaucer can challenge the elated and unequivocally authoritative position of his sources."[8] Dieter Mehl identifies the dichotomy of authority and experience as more pertinent to Chaucer's individual realisation of himself as a poet when he argues that Chaucer's variations of the dream form "show him struggling again and again with the problem of literary authority and the validity of personal experience."[9]

As much as the problem of authority informs Chaucer's poetry extensively, Chaucer makes it the fundamental principle of his art of poetry that he as a poet is not credited with authority. His narrator starts his poetic expedition with a disclaimer that he is neither a lover nor a successful poet although his dreams are concerned with

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[7] Bloom certainly makes the "anxiety of influence" the manifestation of that struggle.

[8] 'Challenging the Conventions of Dream Vision in the *Book of the Duchess*', *PQ*,, 66 (1987), 421-35 (p. 424).

[9] *Geoffrey Chaucer: An Introduction to His Narrative Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.15. It must be noted that Mehl's observation hinges on a "biographical fallacy", an "experience", validated extratextually.

questions of love and poetry. Recounting a traditional story often results in deferral of authority to its original creators. A continual footnoting accompanies the most authoritative statements in his poetry to confute, contrast and finally invalidate the authority injected in the statement. Widely recognised in Chaucer criticism, these aspects of Chaucer's art initiate a questioning centred around the authorial standpoint as it affects the poetic creation's claim on truth.

Recognising Chaucer's primary method as "recasting, even transforming, the preexisting material that came to him from the 'old wyse'",[10] which predicates a simultaneous existence of the past and present in a confrontational manner in his work, this study aims to look at the implications of the literary appropriation, as Chaucer examines and practices its effects, in a context which privileges an alertness, both by the author and the reader, to the effect of the poetic transformation on the poetic product. Chaucer presents this effect as a powerful negation to be taken into account when the poetic creation is accorded durability and stability of meaning. As maintained by Robert Burlin, "the antinomy of 'experience and auctoritee'" as a characteristic positioning of one's work within an established tradition "addresses itself to the problem of the origins or sources of literary creativity, which leads in turn to an inescapable questioning of the viability of the final product as a source of knowledge."[11] I will examine Chaucer's representations of women in an aesthetic context governed by priorities of authority and possibilities of individual interpretations, which, in its final form relates to an idea of poetry of possibilities

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[10] Edmund Reiss, 'Chaucer's Fiction and Linguistic Self-Consciousness in the Late Middle Ages' in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction,* ed. by Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press, 1986), pp. 97-120 (p.101).

[11] *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1977), p.5.

rather than a poetry of statements and repositions the poetic truth as contingent rather than as absolute.

What is poetry? How does it work? What are the aesthetic principles out of which it develops? And what are the effects of poetic principles on the final product? In his preoccupation with the question of poetry, Chaucer centralises his concern on textual representation. This can be seen in the context of a move from "work" to "text" in its emphasis on the fundamental subjectivity of interpretation in the construction of meaning.[12] Permeating Chaucer's poetry, these questions are polarised into two paradigmatic preoccupations. While "working in his own way, controlling his sources instead of being partly controlled by them",[13] Chaucer manifests an uneasy steadfastness insistently tempered by "Who painted the lion?". Articulated with poignant vigilance at a later stage by the Wife of Bath, this paradigmatic question confronts the authorial standpoint as a determinative power in textual representation throughout the early stage of his career, when he wrote the dream poems, the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls* and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. This paradigm imparts to Chaucer's poetry "an uneasiness with univalent authority"[14] and provides the basis for a poetics of uncertainty. Following from this state of uncertainty, there is in Chaucer's poetry an express dissatisfaction with the permanence and stability of textual representations. When

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[12] See A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 105-106.

[13] William E. Mead, 'The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale', *PMLA*, 16 (1901), 388-404 (p.388).

[14] Robert M. Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.10.

deserted by Aeneas, Dido, in the *House of Fame,* worries about the literary interpretations of her behaviour with the foreknowledge that "Eke, though I might duren ever,/That I have don rekever I never,/That I ne shal be seyd, allas,/ Yshamed be thourgh Eneas" (353-356).[15] Dido's complaint in view of the inversive authority of her perpetuators, together with the implication of the source of this authority as the individual authorities as interpreters of the past, marks for Chaucer a problem domain which he confronts through a revisionist representation of women in literature.

Chaucer not only confronts the problematic issue of authority in literary representations but also proposes authority as the major influential factor in conferring the meaning and significance to textual representation. Chaucer might have been alerted to the idea of authority through the conventional citation of "auctores" in medieval poetry.[16] The "auctoritee" topos theoretically functions as a principle of continuity of the wisdom and knowledge of the past. However, although one of the chief roles of a medieval poet is to "pass on matter", he is not completely restricted in this role. Part of his task is to interpret and gloss the received matter. While discovering meanings implicit in his matter, he also is able to invest it with his own thought and skill.[17] Inherent to such an understanding of poetic intervention is the indication that authority lies not with the text but with the interfering and reshaping agent that mediates the text. Verging on the modern preoccupation with reader's

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[15] Throughout this study the references to Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[16] See Robert Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,*trans. by Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series, XXXVI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953, Orig. pub. in German, 1948), pp. 57-61.

[17] See Kurt Olsson, 'Poetic Invention and Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*', *Modern Philology*, 87:1 (August 1989), 13-35 (p.14).

response, the authorial intervention thus lends poetry an elasticity of meaning, a potential for continuous change, an instability that threatens the reliability of any fictional representation.

A correlative exposition of the conversion of authors into texts in order to exploit their interpretive possibilities can be found in Barthes' theory in his essay "From Work to Text". Barthes defines work as writing shaped by the purposes of its author, while the text is an open space where the author is displaced and where a plurality of meanings are presented to the receiver of the text.[18] The obvious divorce between the author and the meaning of his work, once the work becomes the text, is illustrative of Chaucer's priorities in dealing with traditional formulations of fictional truth.

As it occurs in Chaucer's poetry, the poet's role as the mediator of a text raises questions about poetic truth. An early critic of Chaucer, Robert K. Root, explains the traditionality of Chaucer's poetry in following terms: "The poet" he states, "is not properly an investigator, a discoverer of truth; his function is rather to select and assimilate, and by new combinations of ideas or by new or higher expression, to present the truth with greater cogency and to commend it to the emotions of his audience."[19] Such certainty about poetry's ability to convey truth and the poet's role as the conveyor of truth can be found in Boccaccio's conception of poetry as truth

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[18] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text,* trans. by Stephen Heath (Fontana/Collins, 1977, rep. 1982), pp. 155-164, see also 'The Death of the Author', pp.145-148.

[19] *The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation,* rev. edn (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1957), p. 21.

"veiled in language".[20] However, although Chaucer takes the poet's role as interpreter of his poetic material, he does not seem to view poetry with the same confidence. He rather regards poetry as an invention, with the reminder in mind that for a poet whose "primary concern is with the truth...the first truth to set out is that the poem is not truth but an invention of his own."[21] To draw a parallel between Robert Jordan's analysis of Chaucer's poetics as rhetorical and the text's availability to yield to impositions of authority, the truth is subject to the authority which is one "who exercises judgment and skill in choosing, shaping and composing verbal materials."[22] As Jordan further maintains, since this choice "inevitably introduces a dimension of arbitrariness, the question of correctness- or truth- is always open."[23]

Emerson Brown, Jr. states: "Throughout his literary career, Chaucer borrowed plots, characters, settings, descriptive details, philosophical commentary, and verse forms from 'olde bokes.'"[24] Chaucer's obvious intertextuality provides a context for his representation of women as well. Chaucer's women in the dream poems are of literary sort, not only by the virtue of being the poet's fictional creations, but more significantly because they inhabit "olde bokes" before, and even when, they come into

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[20] See *Genealogia deorum Gentilium*,XIV, ix. in *Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations*, ed. by O. B. Hardison, Jr. and Alex Preminger (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974), p. 202.

[21] Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.81.

[22] *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader*, p.13.

[23] *Chaucer's Poetics*, p. 13.

[24] 'Chaucer and the European Literary Tradition', in *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Collection of Original Articles*, ed. by George D. Economou (New York: McGraw Hill Company, 1975), pp.37-54 (p.37).

the circuit of his poetry. Alcione in the *Book of the Duchess* comes into the domain of poetic contemplation through a story recounted, with reference, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* Dido in the *House of Fame* shares with Alcione a literary background. Presented through a fusion of Ovidian and Virgilian representational priorities, Dido can be seen involved in the problems of poetic representation and the competing demands of authorities. Blanche, in the *Book of the Duchess,* is presented against a tradition of love poetry which the Knight evokes and utilises in his re-creation of Blanche. A similar practice can be observed in Alceste in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* Alceste comes to occupy a representational terrain through direct evocation of tradition, books and dreams. For Nature and Fame, there is provided a long history of writing in which the characters Fame and Nature are stationed. Situated and treated within the dynamics of authority and experience that characterise his poetry, women in Chaucer's dream poems can be seen as part of the machinery of poetry as well as means of contemplation on the formation of literary tradition.

I would argue that stationing his portraits of women within the established discourse of tradition, Chaucer provides an insight into the mechanics of poetry. He highlights the grounds for an oppositional standpoint to some of the attitudes and assumptions prevailing in literary tradition. Chaucer's way of dealing with the question of women's truth and the truth of representations of women underlines the interconnection between the priorities of textual representation and those governing, what I will call, "textualisation" of women. By textualisation of women, I am referring to the processes that Chaucer identifies and exemplifies as textual manipulations of context and authorial intention primarily effective in creation of images of women. An

important linkage that suggests an association between poetic creation sanctified by the "authoritative agents"[25] and women as the poetic place, the text, that facilitates poetic creation can be located in the common nature of traditional material and women as the passive recipient of effects, the existing "matter" for the exercise of changing perspectives and demands.

Chaucer's engagement with the representations of women as means of poetic theorising is centered on two interrelated manifestations of authority, or rather lack of authority. Firstly, women as "matter", as the "object" of poetic representation are traditionally void of voice. That is, as the feminist terminology has it, women do not accommodate the position of speaking subject, the authority that confers meaning and significance.[26] Dante in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia,* Book IV, refuses to accept woman as the first to use language. Such a privileged position, he states authoritatively, cannot be granted to a woman before a man. Evidently, Dante's assertion is an extension of a foregoing tradition. St Paul admonishes "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence" (First Epistle of St Paul to Timothy,11-12). The prohibition of

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[25] Authoritative agents are those that confer meaning. As we will see in the following chapters, the authors, the context, and the priorities pertinent to them form a collective body of "authorial agents".

[26] Though I will use the terminology and some of the conceptual expressions and ideas of the Feminism as a critical theory, I do not approach Chaucer's representations of women from a feminist point of view. My starting point is Chaucer's preoccupation with textual representation and authority which, in my view, Chaucer problematises, in an attempt to clarify, through representations of women. This is rather different from the feminist manifesto which considers art "as the product of a particular cultural milieu, sometimes embodying a society's most deeply held convictions, sometimes questioning these values, ...never disengaged from the claims of time or social order." See *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. ix.

women's expression is expressed by Aristotle in a formula that identifies women with silence: "All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes; as the poet says of women, 'Silence is a woman's glory'".[27] Woman as the silent participant, woman as the one denied the privilege of language, as the one subjected to authority, underlies the fictional representations of women in literature. As we will see in the discussion of Blanche and Alceste as the "idealised" versions of attitudes towards women, the subordination of women to realisation of a poetic venture requires that woman as object remain silent and inactive. While the poet exploits, in this context, the intrinsic silence of women for his poetic purposes and thereby establishes a seemingly stable, durable representation, the possibility of a change, while still based on the silence principle, penetrates the whole presentation. It is the principle that conceives women as matter, the material to be formed. Women in Chaucer's poetry express an awareness that their existence within a text makes that existence textual and subjects them to readings that can be exercised on a text. An instructive example is Criseyde's realisation at the end of Book V of the *Troilus* that, once yielded to an exercise of meaning by Pandarus, the interpretation and re-writing will continue.[28] Woman is associated with matter. Isidore explains, she is called mother, because from her something is effected; for mother is the matter, father the cause.[29] Chaucer explores

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[27] *Politics*, 1260a 28-31 in the *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, trans. by Benjamin Jowet (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:2000.

[28] See the Conclusion to this study for an examination of the potential Criseyde has as a text.

[29] *Etym.* IX, v, 5-6. See Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman As Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p.19.

the principles of silence and matter as they actually are effective in the traditional representations of women, and confronts the authoritative position of the tradition through these principles. In doing so, he suggests an analogy between literary tradition and women, both constituting in the principles of passivity and responsiveness to manipulation, which in essence suggest continuous re-shaping and interpretation.

I would like to clarify this suggestion through an explication of tradition as it informs Chaucer's poetry and his attempt to redefine the fundamental principles of adherence to a tradition. Tradition, in this study, is considered unlimited by the past which is in immediate reach of the poet. It is, as Robert O. Payne rightly suggests more complex and wider in scope. Payne identifies two significances of the term with regard to its relevance to Chaucer's art. According to Payne, tradition is "those particular literary acts, in the past, to which the poet turns in the attempt either to create or to justify his creation: that is tradition as 'model' or specific 'source'". Also, tradition is

> the total continuity of the past, contemplated by the poet as a process, in the attempt to establish its significance in toto and relate himself and his art to it- approximately in the sense in which T.S.Eliot uses the term in his *Tradition and Individual Talent*...Chaucer was much concerned with these two senses of the term [tradition] and some of his finest poetry grew out of his attempts to specify them and relate them to his individual act of composition.[30]

When we consider the implications of Payne's explanation in terms of Chaucer's art, we see that tradition in the first sense characterises an inquiry into what is recognised as Chaucer's characteristic indebtedness to the past. It is John M. Manly that sees in Chaucer's attitude to the past -and the past in his view is the Medieval Rhetorical

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[30] *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977; orig. pub.1963), p. 62.

tradition- the signs of a revolutionary idea of poetry.[31] But before Manly, Root sets the ground for an understanding of the past as sources and models:

> Recognising how great is Chaucer's debt to the work of those who went before him, one is tempted to ask what is left to Chaucer as his own. In one sense, little, in another sense, all.[32]

All that is left for Chaucer is further explained through an idea of a poet, who, though set within the tradition, is equipped with the individual choice as to the "sentence" and nature of his own creation. Root's idea of a poet serves as a good starting point for a differentiation between the critical approaches to Chaucer's poetics of tradition. For one thing, Root's idea of a poet gathers together not only the assimilation and selection which are considered as essential for creation of poetry out of old material but also the use of language for manipulative purposes. Root dismisses the rhetorical connotations of his remarks when he concludes, in relation to Chaucer debt to *Il Flostrato,* that Chaucer does not merely translate, paraphrase or adapt, but he creates the characters anew "from his independent knowledge of human nature."[33]

Tradition as sources or models is behind Barry Windeatt's book of sources and analogues of Chaucer's dream poetry. Windeatt comments on the use of his work as follows:

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[31] I am referring to Manly's understanding of Chaucer's art as close to modern realism in his essay "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians". See *Chaucer and the Rhetoricians,* Warton Lecture on English Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 17-18.

[32] *The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation,* p. 21.

[33] See p. 21.Of course, here, Root is following suit with Manly. As we will see not all the source and model oriented views of tradition seek realism in Chaucer's poetry.

> Chaucer's relation to the sources and background of his dream poems can reveal something of the poet at work, and suggest how a process of re-creative translation and refashioning produces poems that breathe traditions yet speak with originality.[34]

Taking the sources and analogues identifiable in Chaucer's poetry as representative extensions of tradition(s) not only promotes a comparative study of poetry and hence validates the achievement of the present only in relation to specific authors and individual traditions but also fragmentises this achievement. Thus, Charles Muscatine's evaluation of Chaucer's style in his early poetry as a creative poetic response that gains its vigour from a blend of French courtly and bourgeois styles shares a common attitude to tradition with Derek Traversi's study of the development of Chaucer's style in the dream poems in that both studies emphasise tradition as "the French tradition".[35]

Another approach to tradition in Chaucer's poetry can be seen in studies which attempt to determine Chaucer's idea of poetry not in relation to specific sources and analogues, but rather in Medieval poetic theories. Robert Jordan's proposal of Platonic exemplarism as a philosophic base and the gothic cathedral as a paradigm, or Robertson's controversial thesis that Chaucer's poetry promotes Augustinian doctrine of charity by using, as all medieval poetry, the same allegorical structure that can be

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[34] *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues,* ed. and trans. by Barry A. Windeatt (Totowa, N.J.: D.S. Brewer, 1982) p.ix.

[35] Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1964; first pub. 1957);Traversi, *Chaucer: The Earlier Poetry: A Study in Poetic Development* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1987).

found in the Bible, likewise fail to provide a frame for Chaucer's poetics of tradition.[36] While the source and model oriented approach to tradition tends to emphasise Chaucer's innovative use of traditional material, located separately in a French, Italian, English or classical tradition, the search for a poetics to define Chaucer's art presents a more conservative poet.

It can be inferred from Chaucer's poetry that the significance of tradition is important to his idea of poetry. Unlike the indications of critical evaluations, however, tradition as it informs his poetry and as he takes issue with it in terms of authority cannot be limited to certain sources, specific national literatures and poetic theories. When we look at the specific poems which contain speculations about tradition, we see that the literary past is seen as a whole in its relation to the present. The *Book of the Duchess* opens with a statement of recognition of the impact of the old books on the new ones in a coexistential manner. Portrait of Nature in the *Parliament of Fowles* refers the reader to the *Complaint of Nature* as a specific source and contains in itself a selective and proportionate effect of concomitant forces of the old and the new. Yet, this specific reference is used in a suggestive capacity. It is preceded by a more precise statement in terms of definition of tradition which can be observed in the *Parliament of Fowles* where the narrator offers grounds for his preoccupation with reading: "For out of olde feldes.../Cometh al this newe corn" (22-23). Comprised in these lines is continuity, change, and the fundamental dialogue between past and present. The "olde" is incorporated in the "newe" rather than set against each other.

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[36] Jordan, *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); W. D. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Missing in this statement, however, is what exactly those old fields are meant to represent.

I think, as a theoretically more elaborate formulation of old fields-new corn paradigm, T. S. Eliot's definition of tradition can help specify the old fields. Eliot insists on a comprehensiveness that speaks to some of the concerns of Chaucer's poetry in his concept of tradition:

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance...It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[37]

As Eliot's formulation indicates there is one poetry, one literature "comparable in all ages, developing, full of possibilities."[38] Without limiting the poet's heritage to a certain milieu or culture, tradition in this sense is more comprehensive. Goethe urges: "Do not all the achievements of a poet's predecessors and contemporaries rightfully belong to him? Why should he shrink from picking flowers where he finds them?"[39]

The importance of the "historical sense" that Eliot regards as the principal

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[37] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1951; first pub. 1932), pp. 13-22 (p.14).

[38] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p.43.

[39] Quoted in Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.52.

attitude to be adopted by the poet thus has a liberating effect on the premises of poetic creation. It legitimises the use of the past in its totality as a paradigm. As I will be examining in more detail in Chapter Two of this study, conceiving the tradition as a composite unit of diverse literatures provides the context for Chaucer's study of contradictory poetic approaches as they create contradictory images of women. In his study of Chaucer's poetics, Payne suggests a similar selectiveness in Chaucer's compliance with tradition: "...the past was for him primarily an intellectual phenomenon which continued in remembrance just so long as it could be made meaningful to experience."[40]

It is with this view of tradition in mind that it is maintained in this study that as much as Chaucer recognises the need for the poet to resort to and build upon the tradition, what particularly concerns him is the effect of the new work as a destabilising influence on the attitudes and principles of the past. The new effect generated by the new formulation or interpretation legitimises the inquiry into the authority of tradition. It does not seem likely therefore that tradition as a referent point is itself as corrective as it is when perceived as a body of questionable principles.

Given the view that the new work of art restructures tradition, it follows that continuity also predicates discontinuity. The new work of art does not merely fit into and modify the existing order of the tradition, it also makes a prior selection. The dialogue between the past and the present, as it is emphasised in Chaucer's dream poems, is a blend of minuses and pluses, that is, it involves a conscious act of discard and retention, a paradoxical presence in absence. As Claudio Guillén maintains

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[40] *The Key of Remembrance*, pp. 64-65.

> The literary systems evolve in a special manner characterised by the continuity of certain components, disappearance of others, the revival of forgotten possibilities, the quick irruption of new ones, or the delayed impact of still other innovations.[41]

Here, the poet's contribution to tradition for its continuity is obviously not limited to conformity or endorsement and reinforcement of what has been handed down. The sense of tradition as a totality in process is more clearly organic; it involves death and birth or rebirth of components. The poet as the instrument of this cyclic pattern is at the center of tradition. His principles of selection and retention make possible the growth and development and promotion of certain ideas at the expense of disregarding or subsuming certain others. It does not seem to emanate from an authority struggle as much as an autonomous happening. Nevertheless, underlying the indicated evolution of poetry a rather calculated selection is obvious.

As far as the relation of the individual poet to the tradition is concerned, Chaucer views his work as located within the tradition, interacting with tradition in the way Guillén describes the evolution of literary systems. Moreover, for Chaucer, the question is not only the creation and continuation of tradition in his own work. His work engages a great deal of the past through a process of selection and sets a paradigm on which the investigation of the innovative nature of poetry can be based.

The innovation is not necessarily a new discovery, it is not a total change required and it obviously springs "from existing forms and from certain choices or

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[41] 'Literary Change and Multiple Duration', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 14 (1977), 100-118 (pp. 107-108).

decisions, in the face of standards and conventions, on the part of the writer."[42] This study will show that Chaucer's concern is particularly with these choices and decisions and the effect they have in the transmission of traditional, standardised formulations. While Chaucer's concept of poetry appears to be that writing "is never an original activity but is always mediated by the texts that provide access to the system",[43] he is also aware that the individual poet reserves the freedom to interpret and mediate the text that provides access to the system. It is an intervention "in what has already been written; it is to work 'between the lines' of the antecedent texts, there...to build invention upon invention."[44] However, if writing is intervention, an interpretation, there should be a constant revision of the "principles", a destabilisation of the established literary norms. This is not to say that Chaucer positions himself against the established tradition. It is rather that Chaucer's position to tradition is that of an insider. As a poet who is aware of the possibilities facilitated by the tradition, Chaucer's practice with regard to tradition shows that he sets out to reconsider its foundations and to present its principles of continuity in a new light. This attempt eventually brings to the foreground an intrinsic property of tradition, i.e. continuity in change, to be taken into account when traditional formulations are credited with authority and permanence. In a way, Chaucer particularises tradition to display its composing units in order to reconstruct them and redefine the grounds on which the authority of tradition rests. In this process, his own act of writing, his own work is the test case. It acknowledges the

[42] Guillén, 'Literary Change and Multiple Duration', p. 106.

[43] Gerald Bruns, 'The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture', *Comparative Literature*, 32 (1980), 113-129 (p.123).

[44] Bruns, 'The Originality of Texts', p. 123.

importance of the precedents. It states explicitly his debt to his predecessors while inserting in his writing the challenging suggestion that the individual poet may well be "making a significant statement about the ways his attitudes and the art they shape differ from the attitudes and the art of the past; a poem that fits comfortably into the most conventional of genres is often as much a declaration of independence, aesthetic and intellectual, as it is a declaration of indebtedness".[45]

In his engagement with representations of women, Chaucer maintains a correlation between his concept of literary tradition and conception of women. Tradition is the old fields out of which new corn can be produced. It is basically the matter which, as indicated in Vinsauf's formulation above, yields to restructuring and reproducing. It is a vast text that once, as Barthes' theory of text suggests, commended to the responses of its readers, the poets, is able to provide a multiplicity of meanings. Its development controlled and directed mainly by the introduction of individual authority, the authority assumed by the tradition lies in its suggestiveness and productivity rather than in the asserted principles and values. This scheme has a pertinent effect when pursued in the representations of women. In essence, the woman quality is silence. The association with matter has allowed the tradition, represented by poets, to exploit this silence for the purposes of establishing and perpetuating individual interpretations under the guise of universal truths. The idealistic portraits yielded by the Courtly love tradition, for instance, illustrate an image fostered by individual priorities of the poet. The poet's priorities are, in turn, defined by a strong adherence to a recognised mode of speaking of women.[46] I will discuss the

[45] Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), p.13.

[46] Joan Ferrante, *Woman As Image in Medieval Literature,* p. 69.

implications of the use of a "pre-determined context" in Chapter Five.

To consider Chaucer's presentations of women as a means of poetic theorising and practice, this study offers to narrow a gap that Chaucer criticism has built by setting an opposition or at least a distance between Chaucer's idea of poetry and his idea of women. To quote a representative example, questioning Gavin Douglas' attribute to Chaucer "For he was evir (God wait) all wommanis frend," Arlyn Diamond investigates the grounds of this attribute: "Can male and female readers, and characters, share the same moral universe in his works? Are women for him fully human in the same ways men are, or are they something different in nature, driven by different needs, seen always as complementary to some masculine strength or weakness?"[47] Diamond's search for an answer, based on mainly an analysis of the "marriage group" in the *Canterbury Tales*, results in the defeating conclusion that Chaucer "Unwilling to abandon the values and hierarchies he inherits, unable to reconcile them with what he has observed of human emotion and social realities, ...accepts uneasily the medieval view of women as either better or worse than men, but never quite the same."[48] This analysis, of course, takes as its given the actual historical reality and balances it against a stereotypical fictional representation. The author's intention as articulated in the representation of women is considered to be retrievable. Chaucer's representation of women does not take a position against the social reality of his times but is coterminous with the subverted version of this reality. It must be remembered, and as actually Diamond's analysis itself suggests, that women

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[47] 'Chaucer's Women and Women's Chaucer', in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards, pp. 60-83 (p.60).

[48] 'Chaucer's Women', p. 82.

in Chaucer's poetry are not derived from medieval life but they rather emphatically represent attitudes of written traditions. Diamond's contention is that "At the end of the Middle Ages, as in many periods, historical reality and the contemporary versions of that reality as presented in imaginative literature did not necessarily coincide".[49] I do not intend to investigate the real historical grounds for Chaucer's representation of women and Diamond's observations in that context need not be challenged. It is however important to note that Diamond's reading of Chaucer's women not only positions Chaucer as failing in his attempt to represent women "correctly" but also as a conformist as far as the traditional attitude to women in literature is concerned. Implied in this conclusion is the problematic of power versus subjection. It positions the poet in the midst of a struggle for authority -abandoned for conformity to general opinion- and subjects the women to the realisation of that goal. At stake for the poet is not only a mimetic representation of women but also the problems of adherence to an established mode of representation. Diamond identifies the incongruity between life and its distorted version in literature as a failure in which Chaucer partakes. This contention can be challenged in that Chaucer does not engage in the representations of women in order to present an alternative representation of women to those already present in literature. He rather conflates, confuses and destabilises the attitudes towards women by creating multiple perspectives, possibilities of different representations, and evasion of absolute authority. Recognising the different "images" of women as equally valid, or invalid, Chaucer in turn negates the granted validity by exposing the attitude or standpoint that informs it. The representational principles as they inform and control the portraits of women are of more importance than the portraits themselves.

[49] 'Chaucer's Women', p.61.

Jill Mann rightly locates Chaucer's engagement with what she calls the "woman question" in the literary tradition, although the scope of tradition is somewhat limited: "For Chaucer, conventional attitudes to the 'woman question' polarised themselves in the form of two major literary traditions, each of which dated back to a time well before the medieval period."[50] Like Arlyn Diamond's, Mann's critical premises emanate from the reader's urge to test Chaucer's allegiance with and adherence to the traditional view of women. Mann certainly identifies the problem more accurately when she states that "Writing the truth of women's existence... means not turning one's back on stereotypes, but making their existence the centrally important and interesting fact...Chaucer could not write about the unrecorded secrets of women's existence; but he *could* write about the literary stereotypes which governed male-female relationships and set the terms in which they were to be played out."[51] However, although Mann recognises the source of Chaucer's representation of women as literary tradition and locates Chaucer's engagement with women in a marked decision to investigate the force and implications of the authorial intentions, the main emphasis is on the stereotypical depictions of women as they effect the social patterning of gender relationships. Mann thus situates Chaucer's women where they are usually present, not as representations of real women but representations of ideas about women, i.e. in literary tradition where the poet is concerned with creating or re-creating "images" of women. Her thesis examines a sociological manifesto based on textual verification.

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[50] 'Chaucer and the Woman Question' in *This Noble Craft...: Proceedings of the Xth Research Symposium of the Dutch and Belgian University Teachers of Old and Middle English and Historical Linguistics, Utrecht, 19-20 January 1989*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 173-188 (p.173).

[51] 'Chaucer and the Woman Question', pp.186-87.

This study maintains that Chaucer's representation of women considers the male-female relationship as a determining factor in the creation of an image of women. Nevertheless, in the treatment of women, the major concern for Chaucer is the significance of the variations characterising different approaches to women and the source of these variations. Subjugation of women to an image fabricated according to male assumptions signifies for Chaucer a parallel phenomenon in poetic creation. Manipulation of women by forces outside their control for a determinative meaning can be likened to manipulation, even violation, of a text in order to create an imaginative space as Bloom puts it. The authority imposed on women by each subsequent writer, whether conforming to a prior image or not, is the authority of the author/speaker reflected in the new version of an originary text.

As stated above, Chaucer's poetry is concerned with the problems of authority, intertextuality, absolute values and indeterminacy of poetic truth. The stereotypical representations of women present problem areas comparable to those in poetry. Chaucer realises that women as one of the common poetic subjects embody the problems of authority, because they lack authority when they function as a literary text to be written and read. Women travel within the textual world from one context to another, and assume different meanings as they do so. They embody the "imaginative space" pursued by the authors, but they nevertheless are made to represent some absolute values that contradict their openness to interpretation. Thus, Mann's classification of traditions of images of women into Ovidian, a tradition which privileges the female point of view in a context of betrayal and desertion suffered by women, and the antifeminist tradition, which is emphatically male-biased in its point of view and which either silences women into submission or present them as

predicating betrayal has further implications.[52] One thing to recognise is that these traditions are equally and separately represented in Chaucer's work. In their exclusively single perspective they contain their antithesis.[53] Chaucer's engagement with the idea of woman continually suggests a reconsideration of the principles underlying not only the predominantly popular views of women but also the implications of the selection of one principle over the other as a poetic principle. Chaucer's own portrayal of women does not suggest a reconciliation or cooperation between the opposing traditions of representing women. It seems that for Chaucer the identification of opposing attitudes in their own right represents the possibility of change in perspective. This in turn calls for a questioning of the final product's claim to "truth". I will expand these suggestions when I discuss Chaucer's representation of Alcione and Dido, Blanche and Alceste in chapters four and five respectively. Here, I would like to make some preliminary remarks on Dido in the *House of Fame* as a representative case.

In the representation of Dido, two contrasting traditional attitudes to Dido find their way into a problematic co-existence. The premises of such a possible co-existence are more complex and more to do with definition of poetic representation than accepting each tradition as complementary to a true image of woman.[54] Chaucer presents Dido's case as a case in the poetics of power and as such it permeates not only Chaucer's idea of women -even when derived from the literary tradition- but also

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[52] 'Chaucer and the Woman Question', p.173.

[53] Mann discerns a reconciliation in the polarisation of these traditions in Chaucer's representations of women. See 'Chaucer and the Woman Question', p. 175.

[54] Cf Daniel M. Murtaugh, 'Women and Geoffrey Chaucer', *ELH,* 38:4 (December 1971), 473-92 (pp. 473-74).

and more importantly his idea of poetic tradition. Dido's portrayal not only brings together two opposing views of women represented in literary tradition but also, as a telling example of discontinuity predicated by contiquity, two different authorial priorities articulated from two strikingly different perspectives. As opposed to the voice of Virgil, silencing Dido out of narrative space, we have the voice of Ovid reclaiming and mediating the very same space. Dido's fears, hesitations and her fatal resolution do little to effect a change in the perpetuated literary representation of her as a temptress, but nevertheless identify her situation as a situation of powerlessness. Virgil's representation of Dido acknowledges her presence so far as she serves as an obstacle in a narrative of power, conquest and glory. Ovid's representation, on the other hand, brings the sidelined Dido into the foreground not as a convenient yet disposable instrument in the story of Aeneas, but, (as a challenge to Virgil) as the one whose narrative autonomy is violated. The difference between these two traditions of "speaking of women" is in their common point: They both demonstrate Dido's lack of authority, which, for the Virgilian tradition, is to be within the realm of higher power, the power of will. The Ovidian tradition empowers Dido by presenting her as the speaking subject, able to voice the suppressed, unrecognised point of view. It seems that, for Chaucer, the significance of these antithetical representations constitutes in their power to present the same poetic object differently and hence problematise the portrait's fictionality as final and decisive.

Priscilla Martin contends: "Chaucer recognises the power of discourse and the implications of the traditional restriction of written discourse to a male clerical

class."[55] Martin's observation is useful in that the problem posed is a problem of defining women from a restricted perspective. It entails however one of the fundamental concerns of Chaucer in engaging women in an examination of the validity of authority in poetry. To borrow the terminology of feminist criticism, women, in this formulation, are the spoken object. They are made to represent the poet's truth at the expense of silencing theirs. I think, it is Chaucer's realisation of women's lack of power in the textual representation that serves as a starting point for Chaucer's engagement with women as a potential text involving poetics of power, authority and silence.

Chaucer foregrounds the problem very precisely in "Who painted the lion?". The Wife of Bath calls attention to the biased nature of images of women in literature by reminding her audience of the fable of the lion and the man engaged in a heated discussion of a representation of a man beating a lion into submission. The Wife conjures the fable to challenge the idea of women perpetuated by the misogynistic tradition. Through it, Chaucer relocates the authority in the standpoint adapted by the individual rather than in the representation itself.

Feminist criticism resorts to the Wife's critique of tradition formulated in "Who painted the lion?" for "it anticipates their awareness that gender is constructed in male centred language, that the women in literature have mainly been created by male authors, and that female writers inherit a literary tradition largely transmitted by male."[56] This study maintains that "Who painted the lion?" is pertinent to Chaucer's

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[55] *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.xiv.

[56] Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons*, p. xiii.

approach to representations of women and to his poetics of tradition which he presents through women in that it foregrounds the speaking subject and the intentions of the speaking subject as paradigmatic articulations in the fictional representation. Chaucer encourages the reader to see and enquire into the dynamics of power governing the fictional representations of women. The question is pervasive in Chaucer's work not particularly in terms of gender versus gender but more generally -taking the point in feminist criticism that the idea of women is a construct created by a specific point of view- in terms of eligibility of literary representation for re-construction and substantial modification and subversion.

Women populate Chaucer's poetry; they populate his dream poetry. They are fictional women, and Chaucer goes to great pains to emphasise their fictionality. It is the fictional world the women inhabit and the fictionality of women themselves that provide the necessary grounds for Chaucerian analysis of the validity -and reliability- of traditional representations of women. Chaucer's attitude to women, if we insist on a attitude distilled from his poetry, is similar to his attitude to his sources - acknowledged and unacknowledged- and poses similar epistemological and hermeunetic uncertainties, which Chaucer attempts to resolve by acknowledging not only the validity of the question "Who painted the lion?" but also the reader/poet's diverse reactions emanating from that premise. The uncertainties of the response of the successive poets undermine the stability of maximal poetic statements and relegates the authority of the tradition to divergent bodies.

I will examine Chaucer's poetics of literary tradition through representations of women in his dream poems, the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowles*, and the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*. Chaucer

theorises and practices his poetics in the dream poems. It is maintained in this study that, it is not only through his "appropriation" of the traditional material, but particularly through representations of women where Chaucer presents the "traditional" material -embodied in the women portrayed- through a point of view at times mediated by the poet and at times unappropriated to the end that his poetics invite a reconsideration of the principles on which the poetic tradition is built. It will be suggested that Chaucer's idea of tradition is closely linked with his idea of poetry.

Chaucer uses the dream-frame to contain a poet's uncertain quest into the mysteries not of love but of poetic creation. In Chapter Two of this study, I analyse the structural and thematic composition of Chaucer's dream poems as collected selectively from tradition. Chaucer's idea of literary tradition appears to be delivered through a dialogue that is sustained through inclusion of past authors and books in the dream poems. Women come into the circuit of dream poems via books; they come in the stories, in the temples and gardens, and participate in the dialogue between the past and present. Their existence and meaning are suspended between the realm of the seemingly completed past and evidently forming present/future.

Chapter Three is concerned with the place of the dreamer/narrator in the poetics of tradition advocated by Chaucer. The dreamer/narrator constitutes a fundamental part of Chaucer's poetics of tradition in that he not only goes through the transformation required by Chaucer's poetic practice but also demonstrates, in his role as a reader of books as different from the conventional role of lover/poet, the sort of authority needed by the poet/reader to allow for the diffusion of power the literary tradition is vested with.

Alcione and Dido constitute the subject of the fourth chapter as the women

from "old books", a useful expression for the determining effect of the context. In the treatment of Alcione and Dido, Chaucer explores the possibilities of genre subversion and consequences of subversion of authority in writing women.

Blanche and Daisy/Alceste present the problem of predetermined context, wilful manipulation of language and the women as an end product of language. The concern of Chapter Five, therefore, is Chaucer's exercise in the traditional mode of representation which simultaneously invalidates the role of experience and calls for an alternative approach through its deterministic power located in the power of discourse. Moreover, Chaucer's ostensible homage to such a mode of representation underlines its limits through the subjection of female.

The female personifications Fame and Nature are both emblems of power for Chaucer. Fame is closely associated with the "image", the "name" that Chaucer's women are concerned about. Through subversive use of poetics of power, Fame assumes the source of authority as unfair, biased or disinterested. Fame's uncontrollable power as an authority is both destructive and compelling. As such Fame represents the unchallengeable and false grounds from which literary representation derives its authority. The nature of the authority Nature embodies presents a positive alternative approach to the question of fair distribution of authority. As a body of opposites united in autonomous existence, Nature illustrates both the women's ability to possess and exercise power and the possible accord between the authority of tradition and demands of the individual writer. Chapter Six deals with the problematic of authority and its implications through representation of Fame and Nature.

The final chapter will suggest a continuity in Chaucer's concern with women as text along the lines indicated in chapters dealing with representations of Alcione,

Dido, Blanche and Daisy/Alceste. The final chapter will also consider Chaucer's idea of women/tradition as evidence that he founds the English tradition not only by making it possible for English poetry to claim a status as vernacular poetry but also, and more importantly, by making it a poet's task to contest, rival and criticise the past in order to re-interpret and re-order tradition through poetic interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO

DREAMS, BOOKS AND CHAUCER

Chaucer's dream poems stand at the beginning of his career and are characterised by what may be described as extensive use of "old material". The historical verity of the first and the textual presence of the second have had an important consequence for the critical appraisal of these poems and their importance in Chaucer's poetic career. An early attempt to assess Chaucer's place in the history of English literature states, on account of these characteristics, that Chaucer can be considered "first as a translator, next as an imitator and then as an inventor."[1] Dream poems have a history of neglect.[2] Recovery of dream poems from relative oblivion has stimulated lavish interest for biographical

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[1] W.J. Courthope, *A History of English Poetry*, 6 Vols (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895-1910), I, p.253. The imitative period comprises the dream poems.

[2] This neglect can be considered in comparison to Chaucer's other poems, the *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales*. It is only after Skeat's complete edition of Chaucer in 1894 that the dream poems begin to shape the course of Chaucer criticism. Skeat's *Oxford Chaucer* in 1894 and the *Globe Chaucer* in 1898 contributed to distinguishing the authentic dream poems from those attributed to Chaucer in a successful attempt to establish the canon and stimulated an interest in dream poems. Until then the dream poems received little significant attention. Of the canonical poems, there is continual reference only to the *Legend of Good Women* up to 1700, and the *House of Fame* holds interest until 1800. See F. E. Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion (1357-1900)*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1914-1924), Introduction, pp. xix-xxvi.The earliest edition that includes for the first time the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Book of the Duchess* is Thynne's 1532 edition. *House of Fame* and the *Parlement of Foules* appear in an earlier edition, in Pynson's edition of Chaucer in 1526. The poems are occasionally referred to, or quoted. The *Legend of Good Women* is quoted by Gavin Douglas in 1513 and later by Bossewell in 1572. Fletcher refers to it in 1634. For the early evaluations of Chaucer's dream poems see, Albert C. Baugh, 'Fifty Years of Chaucer Scholarship', *Speculum*, 26 (1951), 659-672. See also Francis W.Bonner, 'Genesis of the Chaucer Apocrypha', *SP*, 48 (1951), 461-81.

research or discovery of historical circumstances of their composition.[3] The attempts to shift the critical grounds from historical interpretation to aesthetics, on the other hand, establish a literary ancestry for the poems.[4] Establishment of literary ancestry with the aim of discovering Chaucer's aesthetics, in turn, has led to consequent realisation that the early poems draw largely on French and Italian poetry. In early interpretations dealing with the question of influence is apologetic. The common tendency is to dismiss the early poems

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[3] An early analysis of the *House of Fame* appreciates the poem particularly on account of the learning and opinions of the latter part of the fourteenth century it conveys. The reference is 'A Short Note on the *House of Fame*' in Penny Magazine, (1870). Both the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Foules* are regarded as occasional poems written as a tribute to Chaucer's patrons. See Courthope, A *History of English Poetry*, p.253. Criticism of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is marked by an overwhelming concern with the occasion of the poem. The occasional interpretation initiated by Ten Brink's attribution of the F version of the Prologue to Chaucer's gratitude to Queen Anne, (although challenged by Tatlock on evidence that appointment of Chaucer's deputy had no connection with the queen, therefore Chaucer should have no obligation to compose a commissioned poem) persists until Kittredge and then Lowes question the occasional interpretation. J.S.P Tatlock, 'The Dates of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Legend of Good Women*', *MP*, 1 (1903), 317-29. For Kittredge and Lowes who emphasise the poem's indebtedness, both verbal and conceptual, to the French court poems, and refuse to identify the Daisy/Alceste with Queen Anne, and refuse the interpretation of the poem as a result of royal command, see G.L. Kittredge, 'Chaucer and Some of His Friends', *MP*, 1 (1903), 1-18; Lowes 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French Marguerite Poems and to the *Flostrato*', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 593-683. Also 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Considered in Its Chronological Relations', *PMLA*, 20 (1905), 749-864. The occasional interpretation is less persistent in the *House of Fame*. Immelmann's connection of the poem with the arrival of Anne of Bohemia is rejected by Manly who stresses the fact that a poem dealing with unfaithfulness of Aeneas to Dido would hardly make a wedding present. For a review of discussion of the poem see Frederick K. Riedel, 'The Meaning of Chaucer's *House of Fame*', *JEGP*, 27 (1928), 441-69.

[4] Sypherd, in his *Studies in Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907), pp. 11-20, compares the poem with French love poems. Taking the lead in Sypherd's recontextualisation of the poem, H.Patch, in *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (London: Frank Cass Co, 1927; Reprint.1967), pp. 110-111, places the poem in the Ovidian and conventional medieval traditions of love, and in the tradition of Boethian Philosophy.

as apprentice pieces. Courthope, for instance, acknowledges that Chaucer's art displays a development from the *Book of the Duchess* onwards, but claims that it is only in the *Troilus* that Chaucer becomes an original inventor. Until then "his thoughts are strained, and artificial, wanting in the human sympathy and interest which is an indispensable element in all great poetry."[5] According to this view, Chaucer's career, considered as a succession of elimination of the influences, a progressive attempt at realisation of individuality, moves on to a successful period which has its beginnings only after the dream poems. Root reiterates the same view in considering *Legend of Good Women* as a poem which indicates that "Chaucer has ceased to feel the overmastering influence of Italian models" and that "Excellent as is the quality of Chaucer's work,...it is in the *Canterbury Tales* and in them alone, that we find the full measure of Chaucer's greatness...To attempt any critical appreciation of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole is to discuss the literary art of Chaucer."[6]

The early criticism accorded the dream poems a secondary place because of the difficulty of placing the "imitative" (suggested by the poems' heavy dependence on traditional material) with the innovative. Yet, it also implied the view of dream poems as marking the "beginnings" of Chaucerian aesthetics. Clemen, for instance, concurs with the progressive (and dismissive) view when he states that Chaucer "only gradually discovered

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[5] *A History of English Poetry*, 279. Considering the dream poems as products of infancy of Chaucer's poetic career may be a reflection of Dryden's attribution to Chaucer the place of infancy in the history of English Literature. The idea that nothing is perfect at its beginning both permeates and encourages the progressive approach to Chaucer. See *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden*, ed. by James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), The Preface, p.529.

[6] *The Poetry of Chaucer*, quotations are from pp. 135,151 respectively.

his true and individual manner after having tried out literary forms unsuited to his own temper and to the age he lived in."[7] However, he proceeds to qualify this contention to define the dream poems as the primary locus where indebtedness serves poetic functions. The quest for individuality seems to be encoded in the dream poems so inextricably that the dream poems "can tell us much about the relation between outside influence and a poet's own manner of composition, between tradition and originality, between convention and its application in a new way".[8] By restoring the role of tradition in relation to a poet's utilisation of it for purposes of creative tension, Clemen's observation has served as a poetic manifesto: set in the conventions, yet in a way defying and working against the conventions, the dream poems suggest a purposive confrontation with the influence of the past. Understood in Bloomian terms of antinomy of individuality and authority, accorded to the poet's natural right to use (in order to transform) the past, recent criticism considers the indebtedness of the dream poems to the antecedent texts in terms of intertextuality deployed for new functions and effects. Barry Windeatt has stated with regard to the *Book of the Duchess* that "the joke about the bed in *Book of the Duchess* may seem a piece of distinctively 'Chaucerian' humour, yet to feel a tinge of disappointment in discovering that Chaucer has not written these lines without suggestion from other men's writing is to underestimate how in his dream poems Chaucer can repeatedly make something personal and distinctive by realising the potential of what he found in his reading."[9]

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[7] *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p. 2.

[8] *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p.2.

[9] *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues*, p. x.

In this chapter, my argument will concur with the contention already expressed in criticism that Chaucer's handling of the dream poem suggests a transformation of traditional material and the potential uses of this transformation. I will consider this transformation as it pertains to the form itself rather than to the individual aspects of the themes which are exploited in Chaucer's dream poems and which seem conventional. Chaucer's use of the past in the representations of women in dream poems is in a critical context. This is not to say that Chaucer alters the use of dream poem through structural modification in order to accommodate a critical review of literary representations of women. It is to suggest on the contrary that he alters the function and structural composition of the dream poem for the purposes of critical reevaluation of poetic representation. The dream poem is modified deliberately to serve as the locus, the textual domain, where the tradition is reconstructed. It is a necessary endeavour in that the poetic use of dream suggests the connection between books, antecedent texts, their transformation in the hands of poets/readers. The literary existence of women is affected by these processes. This chapter is concerned with the exposition of the strategy which sets off the dream poem from its conventional context and proposes its use as a book of poetics.

It seems that the early evaluations (although erroneous in dismissing dream poems as imitative) have recognised a fundamental quality of these poems. Chaucer's dream poems are lavishly informed by tradition. A constructive reformulation of this recognition can be observed in Robert Edwards' words, who rightly observes that the choice of dream form "locates the beginning of Chaucer's career as a narrative poet in literary conventions

that, on the one hand, go back to classical and biblical models and, on the other, relate directly to the practice of his medieval contemporaries."[10] Accommodating material from and references to French and Italian writers as well as to Latin Literature, the poems suggest links with diverse developments and draw upon varied sources. Crucial to this diversity is that Chaucer foregrounds these sources and the origins of his borrowings. This literary allusiveness assumes mainly two different forms: The first one is direct citation, as the citation, for instance, together with a summary, of *Somnium Scipionis* in the *Parliament of Fowls*. The second one is more implicit and dependent on the reader's familiarity with the alluded source material.[11] Chaucer uses French and Italian authors as sources of not only several passages, but also of themes, without explicitly acknowledging his indebtedness to them. He does not, for instance, point out that in the description of Fame his starting point is Virgil; whereas in the *Parliament of Fowls* he tells us Nature looks just as she is described in the *Complaint of Nature*. What does this blend of citation, quotation and re-presentation signify? As there have been certain answers suggested, we can perhaps begin to answer this question by qualifying certain precepts. It certainly does not merely indicate, for instance, though it has to be given credit on its own, altering and reshaping these books; acknowledging the precedents to underline his

[10] *The Dream of Chaucer*, p. xi.

[11] See Piero Boitani, 'Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams: the *Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, the Parliament of Fowls*', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; first pub.1986), pp. 39-57 (p.41).

departure from them.[12] If the references to other works and the consequent transformation of the sources credit the poet with a good knowledge of the tradition they represent, they also suggest a knowledge of not only the content but also the nature of the formation of those books.[13] I would argue that Chaucer's approach to the dream conventions is more critically oriented. While recontextualising the conventional properties, he also underlines the presence and necessity of such recontextualisation. In other words, taken as a strategy, Chaucer's use of continental and classical literatures constitutes not only in producing books that reveal "his process of creation" taking its course despite the "limitations diversely imposed by these models, poetic conventions and genres"[14] but, by making the poems reflexive of their constituent parts, it also suggests an attempt to embody this interrelation.

Chaucer employs the dream frame to register a way of thinking about poetry. Registering a way of thinking about poetry in the textual context of writing is an outcome of his critical reading of the literary heritage available to him. As rightly stated by R. O Payne, Chaucer recognised through his reading that books, which constitute the sources and models for the individual poets, "have -whether rightly or wrongly- selected

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[12] My difficulty in agreeing with this view is based on the conviction that the literary allusiveness in Chaucer's dream poems indicates a critical concern which goes beyond realising his individuality as a poet.

[13] See Robert W. Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*', in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction,* ed. by Leigh A. Arrathoon, pp. 121-163 (p.123). In fact, inherent to the antinomy of authority and individuality is the awareness that the authority of the precursor can be challenged by knowing it well.

[14] Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry,* p. 3.

and evaluated the past."[15] As we will see below, located mainly in the pre-dream section, this awareness is continually articulated. Reinforced by structural arrangement, it is this concern to locate the dream experience -and the issues it involves- in a world of writing and reading that suggests a literary context for the representations of women. Epistemological reliability of fictional representation, including his own, is implied to be dependent on the respective poet's selection and evaluation. Such an exercise of selection and evaluation lends a subjectivity to every single work that contributes to tradition -either simply by transmitting or by modifying and redirecting it. That is, tradition handed down by the books is a process which lends itself primarily to renewal via interpretive transmission.

Given its long history, the use of dream framework for poetic considerations is a late development. As a central theme, it does not occur until after Chaucer has introduced the "reading topos" as an integral part of the dream.[16] In the French dream poems after the *Roman de la Rose,* there is a tendency to assert the value and importance of the poet and his work, possibly a transmutation of the first person narration. It is important to note that this emphasis on the poetic interests of the lover/poet indicates poetry as a co-theme. However, it does not pursue the question in a large context. As a representative example, Machaut's inclusion of the subject of poetry within the scope of his love poems, for instance, is in the form of promotion of his position as a poet. Through references to his poems and praises he received on that ground, he never lets the reader, his courtly

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[15] *The Key of Remembrance,* p. 64.

[16] See Marshall W. Stearns, 'Chaucer Mentions a Book', *MLN,* LVII (1942), 28-31.

audience, forget that he is a poet.[17] His *Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre* engages in discussion of poetry. The specific concern is the poet's trespass against ladies in a previous poem. While the poet and his poems are obviously at the center of *Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre*, the resulting penance to write more poems suggests that Machaut is not going beyond a claim to be recognised as a poet. A comparison with the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, which has contextual similarities with Machaut's, is revealing. Like Machaut's Guillaume, Chaucer's narrator is accused of writing against women. Yet, in the Prologue, the problem is not what the poems literally state but rather how Alceste and the God of Love interpret them. The meaning of the poems is more elusive, and related to wider issues of poetic representation. Whereas, within the frame of the theme of love, it is the presence of the poet and the dream as a means of promoting the work of that poet that characterise the poetic interests of Machaut's works.

In Chaucer's dream poems, the poetic concerns are central. A. C. Spearing observes a new poetic consciousness which emerged in England in the fourteenth century: The dream poem "becomes a device for expressing the poet's consciousness of himself as poet and for making his work reflexive."[18] Hence, "Its status [at least for the poet] is that of an imaginative fiction (whether this is conceived as a matter of inspiration, or of mere fantasy, or somewhere between the two); in short ...it is not a work of nature but

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[17] David Alfred, 'Chaucer's Edwardian Poetry', in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honour of Donald R. Howard*, ed. by James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 35-54 (p.38).

[18] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 6.

a work of art."[19] Conceiving the dream as a fictional construct with reflexive qualities is an important progress. As a product of the fictive presence of the poet in his dream as the first person narrator of the dream experience, treating the dream as an imaginative product points to Chaucer's engagement with the form as a context for queries about fictionality, about change of poetic context and the implications of change in fiction for fictional representation.

By the time it reached Chaucer and his contemporaries, dream form was an already established form with fixed formal elements and thematic concerns.[20] It is precisely in this stereotypic quality that it presents a challenging option for the poet to explore the potentialities offered by the form. In many cases, the established mechanics may compel the poet to follow those mechanics; however, for Chaucer, who is aware of the potentials for change inherent in old forms, the very conventionality of the form is enough reason to begin the exploration of the extent of interaction between the established traditions and the current poem. Chaucer is aware of the different ways in which such exploration and practice of conventions can be realised. Such awareness of the scope and extent of the exploration and practice led him to write four dream poems. All of four poems have structural affinities and a common concern for fictional representation with particular reference to the potential for change in fictional representation. As such they constitute a group of works which we may call "poetic visions".

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[19] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 4-5.

[20] A.C. Spearing details the development of dream poetry in *Medieval Dream Poetry*. Barry A. Windeatt's introduction to *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* views the French love poems as representatives of an established tradition from which Chaucer's poems derive.

Chaucer wrote four dream poems. His contemporary English poets, Langland and the Pearl poet, wrote one each, *Piers Plowman* and the *Pearl* respectively.[21] The French poets, on the other hand, are the most prolific dream poets who produced, in the fashion of love poetry, many love-visions which recall each other in theme, style and formal components.[22]

The dream-vision form was inherited from the classics and from Scripture. The *Somnium Scipionis* in Cicero's *De re Publica* and the commentary on the *Somnium* by Macrobius, the visions in the Bible of Ezekiel, Paul, and Paul and John, and Alan de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* are examples of a tradition which was kept alive until the end of the Middle Ages.[23] While the journeys of the classical epic hero[24] might have suggested the theme of journey to some otherworldy place, the biblical visions, like those of Paul

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[21] The case is a bit different with Langland however. His *Piers Plowman* is in three versions and each contains a series of dreams. See Malcolm Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), pp. 1-28.

[22] See James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love* Poets: *The Literary Background of the 'Book of the Duchess'*, University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature, 43 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1968). The popularity of the dream vision form, especially in the fourteenth century, has traditionally been associated with the view that the dream is at least potentially a vehicle of truth, hence the dream-vision frame may be considered to add authenticity. Moreover, the form permits the writer to treat questions which one cannot hope to answer by reason alone but which may require an epiphany or an oracular answer. Both the *Pearl* and the *Piers Plowman* may be considered as dreams of this kind. Use of dream as an authenticating device actually involves a complex evasion of authority on the part of the poet while investing the poem with authority. See Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1972), p.37.

[23] See Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by Joan Krakover Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982), pp. 138-39.

[24] Like Aeneas' journey to the underworld in Book VI of the *Aeneid*.

and John, must have stimulated belief in the authority of dreams.

It is, however, after the *Somnium Scipionis* that the dream form is established with a set of formal and thematic components. After Plato, who, in his *Republic,* has Er have a vision of the other world as the concluding part of his revelation of his ideal state, Cicero uses the dream framework to authorise a philosophical outlook. It is through Macrobius' commentary on this part of Cicero's *De re Publica* that Medieval Ages had the knowledge of Cicero's work. While the biblical dreams undoubtedly have their import on the truth value of the dream, it is Macrobius' commentary on *Somnium Scipionis* that, in order to assert the philosophical and ethical value of Cicero's work, makes the most influential attempt to justify the use of dream as a means to convey serious philosophical teaching. The commentary provides not only a reliable reference for the verification of the truth of the dream but also delves the question of a parallelism between fiction and dream. The popularity of this work has often been associated with the classification of the dreams into two basic categories: those containing truth and worth interpretation as opposed to those which are worthless. The unprophetic group of dreams consists of *insomnium* and *visum* which can be explained in naturalistic terms. The other group contains three types of prophetic dreams, the *somnium*, the *visio* and the *oraculum*. Macrobius uses the prophetic dreams to justify Cicero's utilisation of dream as a means to convey serious philosophical doctrine. To this end, he not only proposes a parallel between fiction and dream as similar vehicles of truth but also classifies fictions according

to their proximity to truth.[25]

Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, on the other hand, establishes the fundamental mechanics of dream-vision form. In a manner which will become a characteristic element of the later dream poems, Scipio falls asleep and meets his grandfather in his dream. His grandfather tells him about his own future and the future of Roman empire, which he presents as the system of virtue and justice. The dreamer, Scipio, awakes with the knowledge that he has the potential to achieve the heavenly bliss accorded to his ancestors. Macrobius accords to Scipio's dream all three types of prophetic dreams. However, in its structure, it is evidently an *oraculum* in which "a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god" appears and gives information or advice. Emphasizing, in his discussion, the status of Scipio's vision not only as a dream but also as a fictional construct, Macrobius furnishes the foundations for the medieval dream poetry, which relied not so much on the dream theories as on the literary examples of dreams for its development.[26] The evidence in the works of later period suggests that Macrobius' dream classification has been taken as an authoritative statement on the truth of dreams which are cast in fictional form. Guillaume de Lorris' citation of Macrobius,

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[25] For an examination of the relation between fiction and dream, see Steven F. Kruger *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1992), pp.130-133.

[26] Alison M.Peden, 'Macrobius and Medieval Dream Literature', *Medium Aevum*, 54 (1985) 59-73 (p.69). The reliance on the literary models rather than actual dreams in composing dream poems suggests that the dream theories do not play a great role in the status accorded to fictional dreams. Macrobius' commentary, it seems, settles this issue once and for all. The self-consciousness felt for the fact that Scipio's highly serious dream might not receive the due attention from its readers on the grounds of being a dream, and therefore might be considered a fable or a lie, seems to diminish in degree later on, mainly because the use of dream form has been conventionalised.

for instance, indicates that dreams, which, in the case of Guillaume de Lorris's dream, are evidently fiction, can be judged on the same grounds as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* has been.[27] The rhetorical acknowledgement, therefore, of one of the major dream theorists in the *Roman* does not indicate an equally weighty concern for its authenticity. By the time Chaucer and his French contemporaries are writing dream poems, considerations on dreams are mere prefatory statements about the possible reasons behind the dream or, as in the *House of Fame*, a subtopic of the opening of the poem which will be used in the subtle ambiguity of truth and false in fiction as well as in dream.[28]

Structurally, the dream poems follow a fairly consistent pattern. The pattern established by the *Somnium Scipionis* is repeated in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, one of the most influential works on the Middle Ages. The visionary of the *Consolation*, Boethius himself, does not fall asleep, but while in despair in the prison cell awaiting his death, Philosophy, as the authoritative figure of the dream-vision, appears to him. After a long Platonic dialogue, Philosophy finally achieves to bring the sorrowing Boethius to an acceptance of his situation. The dialogue evolves around a range of topics from the disparity between God's orderly universe and the humans' chaotic world to Fortune, nature

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[27]The opening lines (1-20) of the *Roman de la Rose* take a very subjective attitude to the issue. The anticipation that a dream may convey a truth symbolically is doubled with the author's assertion that "...think me a fool; ...but, for my part, I am convinced that a dream signifies the good and evil that come to men." For the references to the *Roman de la Rose* throughout this study I use *The Romance of the Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, trans.by Charles Dahlberg (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983)

[28] Lines 1-65 in the *House of Fame* obviously review an ongoing debate. However, the debate does not produce any decisive results for the dreamer, who finally resorts to his own judgement that, if not all dreams, his dream is true.

of happiness, nobility, providence, predestination and freewill. The figure who appears to Boethius is the personification of Philosophy and Boethius is quick to recognise her as such. The personification allegory is used in the subsequent dream poems. The *Complaint of Nature*, which bridges the gap between the *Consolation* and the dream proper, is a work in which a female personification, Nature, appears to the visionary. Her symbolic clothing and the subsequent revelation of her doctrine place her on the same philosophical and allegorical level as the Philosophy. However, the visionary is not able to recognise Nature at first. Unlike Boethius, the visionary of the *Complaint of Nature* falls below the level of his dream and, as Spearing states, in this he becomes the forerunner of many medieval dreamers.[29] The work itself treats sexual love in the context of general philosophy. In its juxtaposition of man's sexual conduct and natural sexual behaviour, this work introduces love as a theme, which is maintained in the French love poems, and informs Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The *Roman de la Rose* has a unique place in the development of dream-vision form. In itself, this work combines the main themes of the dream-vision tradition and represents a unique way of subversion and modification of the tradition for entirely different purposes in strikingly different contexts. It is a work of two authors, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. The difference in scope and theme between the first and second part of the poem has usually been attributed to the different interests of the respective authors and the different periods in which they wrote. Guillaume de Lorris was a court poet who cultivated an idealistic view of the progress of love experience called

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[29] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 20.

fin amor, whereas, Jean de Meun, who took over the poem some forty years later and continued it from line 4028 to the end, was a bourgeois writer whose interests show encyclopedic variance, most of which, including the *fin amor* receive a satirical treatment.[30] Guillaume de Lorris' part introduces to the dream convention the secular version of the paradisal garden inhabited with personifications of several feelings and attitudes. The opening tells briefly and simply the subject matter of the poem: it is the account of a dream the poet, Guillaume de Lorris, claims to have had five years ago, when he was about twenty. In the dream, we are introduced to a setting which will become conventional in the love visions of French poets, informing also Chaucer's poems, especially the *Book of The Duchess*. The paradisal scene with its splendour may be a transmutation of the gardens of earlier religious visions. However, whether Guillaume de Lorris meant to keep on a par with the connotations of the religious visions is not possible to ascertain. The traditional elements like the personifications of abstractions as well as the ideal garden are certainly extensions of a foregoing tradition. However, in its recontextualisation of them, Guillaume de Lorris' text marks a turning point in the tradition. For the French poets at least the influence of the first part of the *Roman* is tremendous. Machaut and Froissart use the ideal garden and the personifications therein freely and abundantly in their exclusively love poems. Lorris' *Roman* represents the tradition for them.[31]

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[30] On this matter see Charles Dahlberg, Introduction, The *Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun*, pp. 2-4.

[31] Cf Constance B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967), p. 9. Associating the popularity of dream form with an interest in dream

The second part of the *Roman*, while continuing the lover's quest for the rose, through its encyclopedic interests, brings into the scope of the poem important philosophical concerns of the *Consolation of Philosophy* and The *Complaint of Nature*. Indeed, Jean de Meun's scheme seems to be an attempt to bring to the fore and thereby to suggest a link between the themes of the previous works and those of his own. He does this in a selective manner, highlighting the main concerns of previous works in new contexts. In this, Jean's presents a precedent to Chaucer's comprehensive treatment of collected material. Jean de Meun does not refer to his precedents in the way Chaucer does, but evidently his personifications such as Reason and Nature, both conveyors of some established doctrines on the subject of love and related issues, are extensions of some previously cultivated ideas. Jean's contribution to the dream of Guillaume de Lorris is then to be sought in the thematic acentricity and comprehensiveness of design of the part written by Jean de Meun. Jean's comprehensive method employed to deliver ideas from strikingly different perspectives does not render his work adequately philosophic, but presents a potential for subversion of old ideas.[32] Jean's attempt to accommodate the past in the enlarged context of the present might have suggested Chaucer's use of the dream vision form as a locus where themes and traditions of dissimilar nature coalesce.

The role *The Roman de la Rose* plays in the tradition of dream vision is manifold.

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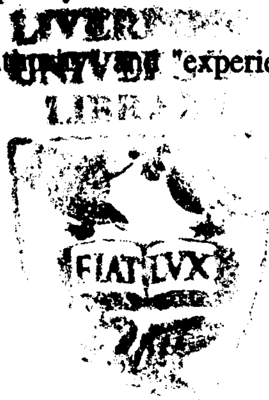
psychology, Hieatt contests the role of the *Roman de la Rose* as a precedent. See also William Calin, *A Poet At the Fountain: Essays on the Narrative Verse of Guillaume De Machaut* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1974), pp. 23-27.

[32] See Sherron Knopp, 'Chaucer and Jean de Meun as Self-Conscious Narrators: *The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* and the *Roman de la Rose* 10307-680, *Comitatus* 4 (1973), 25-39 (p.31).

The first part retains the linear plot of the antecedent texts, yet changes the religious or philosophical context into the context of secular love experience and approximates the conventional narrative elements. The second part remains within the formal boundaries of the dream-vision, but displaces the univalent theme and furthers the intertextuality. Responding to and furthering the intertextuality of Guillaume de Lorris' part, Jean's part becomes a conscious assembly of ideas, texts and authors. The attempt at transformation or reinterpretation of the available past permeates these works, and makes their composition possible. Yet, it does not present itself as a concern of the authors to analyse and question the processes which facilitate the afore-mentioned transformation. Chaucer's use of the dream-vision form as a means of critical evaluation, on the other hand, foregrounds this ongoing intertextuality.

In what follows, the focus will be on the ways in which this intertextuality informs both Chaucer's use of the dream form and its implications for new functions. In Chaucer, critical evaluation of the literary past presents itself as the motive behind the dream. Not only are his dream poems involved in critically reading and re-interpreting the past, but also they are imbued with statements that explicitly state and promote such reading. In the prefatory phase which, in the tradition of dream poetry, initiates the poem's central concern, Chaucer tends to emphasise an interactive form of reading which involves comments on the use of books and their contribution, via transmission, to the understanding of things. Repeated in one form or another in all four dream poems of Chaucer, discussion of poetry in the context of the relationship between the "old" and the "new", between the "au[illegible] "experience" suggests itself as the major concern of



the poem.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, for instance, the conventional insomnia leads to reading a book in which "were written fables/ That clerkes had in olde tyme,/And other poetes, put in rime/To rede and for to be in minde," (52-55). Dictionary definition of fable denotes fictitious or imaginative narrative, story, as opposed to historical truth. Since these fables are usually based on legend or myth, the use of word "fable" itself suggests a collective transmission of fictional statements. Moreover, the clerks, i.e. writers, authors, as the original owners of the fables reinforce the fictional connotation.[33] The lines do not simply establish a fictional context for the books, they indicate also a cooperative collective work. The transmission from clerks to poets, from one agent to another, ensures the preservation, "to be in minde." The indication is that permanence of these stories depends on the participation of their readers or recipients in the act of reading and keeping them in memory. What follows then, the account of the story, is an act of participation in this process.

This statement, while announcing the double burden of a work of art as to be written and to be read, indicates a further significance, for it suggests an awareness on the part, first of the poet and then of the reader, that transmission of knowledge involves both the writer and the reader. While reading leads to writing, it also increases the likelihood of this cyclic activity to be repeated. The poet's participation in this activity produces a

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[33] I am following the definition of the clerk and fable in *Middle English Dictionary*. References to clerks in Chaucer's poetry suggests that the terms poet and clerk are very close in meaning. See, for instance, *CT.C1*.E.32, the reference to Petrarch: "Fraunceys Petrak, the laurate poete,/ Highte this clerk" or The Prologue to the *LGW* 370:"He ne hath nat doon so grevously amys,/ To translaten that olde clerkes writen."

new version of the story that occasioned his comment, and in itself it presents how the works of old times keep alive in the present.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator, having denied any experience in love of which he reads in books, states the reason for him to resort to books:

> Of usage -what for lust and what for lore-
> On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.
> But wherfore that I speke al this? Nat yoore
> Agon it happede me for to beholde
> Upon a bok,was write with lettres olde,
> And therupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
> The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne.
>
> For out of olde feldes , as men seyth,
> Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
> And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
> Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (15-25)

Along with the specific reason, "a certeyn thing to lerne", we are invited to share the more important cause of the reading: The old books in analogy to old fields have the potential for the production of the new "science". These lines more emphatically than those in the *Book of the Duchess* suggest an awareness or even an acknowledgement on the part of Chaucer. It is implied that the metaphorical regenerative fields, the books, can be used by the poets to plough, cultivate and produce "newe corn". The term "new" is particularly significant, for it indicates the existence of the past in the present, significantly in a changed form. The juxtaposition of "old books" and "new science" not only states the purpose of reading as cultivating and bringing to the fore what is contained in the past but it also establishes the context in which the future reading will take place.

As Robert Burlin observes, in this transformative context "authority becomes the experience of a reader, who in turn becomes an author that he may transmit the new knowledge he has harvested."[34]

The harmonious relationship indicated in the *Parliament of Fowls* between the old and the new is not, then, as harmonious as it appears to be. The interaction is suggestive and creative. However, it also implies the interfering agency of the harvester, the poet. A similar recognition presents itself in a qualified form in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* The value of books in preserving the "olde thinges" in mind constitutes part of the introductory speculation about the source of knowledge and the respective roles and reliability of experience and books as sources of knowledge. The prefatory phase of the Prologue presents some challenge to the full "credence" that the narrator calls the reader to accord to the old approved stories. Bordering on skepticism, and yet refraining from an outright rejection, the statement calls for a recognition of what is commonly said or read in books. The absence of means to prove the contrary leaves us one option, regardless of the option of disbelief:

> 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, natheles, 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.

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[34] *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.86.

....
Men shal not wenen every thing a lye
But yf himself yt seeth or elles dooth; (F 1-9; 12-13)

Perhaps, in these lines, Chaucer is invoking the status of truth in books as fictional, which should be regarded as true only within the fictional world in which it occurs: "For by assay ther may no man it preve". Therefore:

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 appreved stories
....
Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve
These bokes, there we han noon other preve. (F17-21;27-28)

The stance established in the *Book of the Duchess* is becoming progressively more problematic. What is meant by the crucial intermediary role of the books is being qualified with emphasis shifted from transmission of the old "lore" to the reliability of authority it holds. The experience, not yet identified as the experience of the poet, is assuming an equally active role, not only in the preservation of "remembraunce the keye", but also in attaining the truth. In this formulation, the previously implied coexistence of old and new, the latter born out of the former, has become complementary in their role in discovering the truth. These two sources of knowledge are, as Lisa Kiser argues,[35]often

[35] *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the 'Legend of Good Women'* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press,1983), p.28. See also Donald W.Rowe, *Through Nature*

in conflict with one another; and only an uneasy synthesis is possible in the acknowledgement that truth must be learned from books as well as from experience. The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is a summation of the ambivalent relationship between the past and the present in Chaucer's dream poems. As we will see, the positivistic approach manifest in the opening statements of the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* is often contradicted in the practical context. In the representations of women, the old "lore" will function in its capacity as authority in defining the fictional context. The use of "lack of evidence" as evidence, emphasised in the Prologue, on the other hand, will serve as a potential challenge in redefining that context.

In relation to these statements R.O. Payne argues that the relatively "passive" relationship between art and the past in Chaucer's poetry "reflects a kind of certainty about the necessity of his relationship to the past which convinced him that if his poetry were to live at all, it had to grow out of the past in such a way as to keep the past alive in it. He was repeatedly troubled and uncertain about precisely how such a growth might take on substance and structure in particular poems but for Chaucer poetry began and ended in remembrance"[36] Considering Payne's location of Chaucer's idea of poetry in the rhetorical tradition which belies a "growth" in poetry, these remarks seem to be somewhat inconsistent with his main thesis.[37] Moreover, viewed outside that context, there is still

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to Eternity: Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p.16.

[36] *The Key of Remembrance*, p.73.

[37] See *The Key of Remembrance*, pp. 1-8.

a limitation in Payne's argument. As Payne maintains, formulations of the purpose of reading indicate Chaucer's recognition of the pivotal role that the literary past plays in his idea of poetry. Chaucer's dream poems are to a large extent manifestations of the "substance and structure" of such "growth". As I have indicated above, the transformation of the dream poem into a literary landscape to facilitate critical re-presentation is the major substantial result of this recognition. However, I tend to think that the explicit statements about the importance of keeping the past alive in present, as T.S. Eliot stated as one of the main tasks of the individual poet,[38] do not designate a poetical theorising exclusively pertaining to Chaucer's own status and role as a poet. The impact of the concern for his own poetry weighs equally, but it seems that the observations in the dream poems on the development and transmission of knowledge conveyed in books relate more to a general observation and experience of the progress of literary tradition. The uncertainty as to the form of coexistence of past and present is resolved, by introducing the past into the poems as blocks of narrative, widely used themes and structural components. I will return to these almost autonomous narrative elements in the discussion of the structural composition of the poems below.

It is important to recognise the prefatory statements as an integral element of Chaucer's knowledge of the process of literary continuity. The poetic principle conveyed in these individual formulations introduce at least three ways in which a constructive relationship between the past and present can be maintained: Reading and keeping what you have read in mind, acknowledging and participating in the birth of novel ideas and

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[38] See the Introduction.

practices which such reading initiates, and finally combining the potentials inherent in both to attain truth. Chaucer's approach to traditions of fictional representation evoked through representations of women within his poems indicates a recognition of the first two as the source of poetic questioning. With the third principle, he invariably takes issue and often leaves the question unresolved. Implications of these principles are dealt with through women which will be the concern of the following chapters. In this chapter, we will see how the dream-vision form is modified to accommodate this idea in its structure.

The poetic interest indicated in the continuous reading topos placed at the beginning of the poems defines the nature of the experience that the poems reveal. The poems are pulled in several directions. The sources come in abundance and great variance, and the generic expectations are continually frustrated. The involvement with books leads to a literary landscape as it exists in the poet's mind. Subjected to continual reshaping and restructuring, this literary landscape does not constitute a cohesive structure. In a manner reminiscent of a visitor in an art gallery who stops and admires or criticises the pictures and the paintings of his choice, the journey takes the reader through the gallery of poets and authors who contributed to the literary heritage and who, through poet/critics like Chaucer, have committed themselves and their works to the interpretation and reception given to them by posterity. The experience derived from tradition is in the form of critical reading. As Jill Mann indicates, in the dream poems the act of reading precedes the act of writing.[39] The role of reading, moreover, is to suggest the existing interrelation between

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[39] 'The Authority of Audience in Chaucer' in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature,The J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, Seventh Series, Perugia, 1990,* ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer,1991), pp.1-12. (p.2).

the antecedent texts and the present one. Reading, as realised in Chaucer's dream poems, illustrates the manner in which the dialogue between these two is maintained.

The structure of the poems, in turn, is influenced by and has a close affinity to the allusive nature the reading assumes. To convey the multiple levels and forms of his engagement with the past, Chaucer allows his poems to develop in thematically discontinuous structures. Via reading, literary past is brought into the poems in the form of fictional gardens, temples and stories to be reshaped into the poetic requirements of the new context(s). Barry Windeatt considers the construction of dream poems as Chaucer's "most 'Gothic' structural technique, where phases and episodes of the dreamer's observing experience are juxtaposed with others in the manner of the 'panels', 'masses' and blocks' juxtaposed in the plastic arts."[40] I would argue that presenting blocks or boxes related to each other in terms of forming a cumulative unity toward explication of a theme is not what appears in Chaucer's dream poems. Rather, the structural composition conjoins and coordinates elements from Chaucer's reading and suggests, as R.O. Payne argues with regard to the originality of these poems, an "attempt to exploit the possibilities of *dispositio* -overall structural arrangement- in ways more complex and meaningful than anything the [rhetorical] manuals suggest in their perfunctory treatments of it."[41] The poems do not work towards completion of a structural pattern to suggest an underlying unity, but rather tend to re-begin with the introduction of a new book or scene. The context of the story of Ceyx and Alcione, for instance, is replaced by the courtly context

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[40] 'Literary Structures in Chaucer', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion, ed. by* Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, pp. 195-212 (p.196).

[41] *The Key of Remembrance,* p. 145.

of the Knight's story in the dream proper in the *Book of the Duchess*. Similarly, while Dido in the *House of Fame* represents a textual imprisonment, Fame re-enacts the problem of authority in an inverted context. In this complex relationship between the poems and their individual self-contained parts, the past is evoked in proportion to its relevance to the conveyance of the theme at hand.

I would suggest that each poem has an interrelated inner and an outer, for the lack of a better term, compositional focus, of which the former serves to illustrate the range of thematic possibilities in a selective way. The outer focus, on the other hand, suggests the complementary quest motif that I have indicated as pertaining to Chaucer's use of dream poem. Although the inner focus, or the thematic range of the poem, is where each poem earns its originality and its independence from the others, these two are not entirely separable. Yet, if we have to make a distinction between the two, the outer focus refers to the interaction between the beginning and ending. With the exception of the *House of Fame* in which reading is contained specifically within the body of the dream,[42] all of Chaucer's dream poems share a concern with reading placed usually at the beginning of the poem, or writing a book at the end. I will refer to the beginning as a structural unit which, "mimicking the process of memory that, when sparked by a present stimulus, leaps the gaps in time to a moment in the past on which the mind focuses", connects the past with the present.[43] In the *Book of the Duchess*, summary of a story from the

[42] I have in mind the story of Dido and Aeneas engraved on the walls of the Temple of Venus in Book I. The narrator's account of the poets holding up their subject matter in Book III may also be considered as a reading activity.

[43] Marcella Ryan, 'The Concept of Textual Unity in Chaucer's Dream-Visions', *AUMLA*, 74 (November 1990), 25-33 (p.28).

Metamorphoses precedes the dream experience; in the *Parlement of Foules*, it is the *Somnium Scipionis* that leads the way to the dream proper. The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* announces that the narrator leaves his books only to pursue the love of a daisy he is privileged to enjoy worshipping in Spring. The recurrent reading topos does not manage to produce a definitive answer to the questions raised by encounters with the authoritative statements it procures. However, by locating the point of reference in the books, it defines the context in which the contents of the dream will be employed. While, for instance, through a reversal of authority, the Black Knight's experience is presented as observed and reported independently by the poet, the stance is that of a reader to a poem written by the Knight. When the Knight re-creates Blanche, he fictionalises her, makes her the heroine of a courtly love poem. As we will see, as they appear in Chaucer's poetry, women are often mediated by such poetic contexts, and, to a great extent, that is why the dream experience falls back on books from which it originates. The opening and ending are approximated in a cyclic pattern.[44]

As for the inner focus, it seems that the dream is employed as a structure to contain other structures whose relation to each other is suggested by the fact that they all stem from the main source: the literary tradition or the past as relevant to the individual poet and the poet's choice of the material for re-examination and re-use. Chaucer uses traditional material as narrative elements or poetic emblems that function as parts of the plot but serve also as embodiments of the poetic art he is practising. As Robert W. Hanning has shown, in the vernacular literature poetic emblems (often visual or iconic

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[44] See Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative*, p. 143.

images) provided a means for the poets to comment on their art.[45] We can observe that, while the overall design of the poems indicates a cyclic composition, the inner formation of the poems is lent to fragmentation. It is mainly governed by the narrator's mental or physical access to the successive structures which the poetic world represented by the poems embody.

Moreover, the inner and outer structures are merged in what R. O.Payne calls "old books-experience-dreams" frame which Chaucer is first to use.[46] This frame not only relates the dream experience, which itself is imbued with literary allusions and references, to writing poetry, but it also locates the act of writing within a literary textual tradition. The book the narrator reads initiates him into an experience which he incorporates into the substance of the book that he eventually produces.[47] The book produced at the end of the dream experience stands apart -though at the same time it encompasses the predream book and the dream itself- as an independent product of reflection on its components. The earliest instance of this can be found in the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer's only poem which can be associated with some topical interest with certainty.[48] It opens with the summary of a book, which the narrator calls a "romance". The generic misprision is

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[45] 'Poetic Emblems in Medieval Narrative Texts', in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lois Ebin, pp. 1-32.

[46] *The Key of Remembrance*, p. 117.

[47] See Barry Windeatt, 'Literary Structures in Chaucer', p.196.

[48] The occasion for the composition of the *Book of the Duchess* has been recognised as a tribute to John of Gaunt for the death of his wife Blanche. Chaucer's other poems have been associated with historical occasions, too. However, although the interest in the aesthetic qualities of these poems has marginalised the historical association, the *Book of the Duchess* is still considered as occasional. See Chapter Five below.

obvious, when we realise that the book actually is Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*[49] However, a comparison of the story related by the narrator, the story of Ceyx and Alcione, and the same story in the *Metamorphoses* shows that the generic classification refers more to the new version of the story than the original. What we hear from the new version is a story of love, with emphasis on the woman character. Alcione's role in the story is transposed to the extent of making her characterisation the focal point of the story, hence an important element to explore the purchase of the antecedent texts on the present representation. As a structural component, on the other hand, the story of Ceyx and Alcione establishes a literary background for the dream experience to follow.

The dream ensues within a fictional world, the narrator asleep over his book. As soon as we are inside the dream the books take over again. On the walls of the glass chamber, in which the narrator awakes to find himself in bed, are engraved the text and the gloss of the *Roman de la Rose* as well as the history of Troy. The physical enclosure, the chamber, proves to be a segment of the literary world the narrator has just slept away from. The cited works mingle with those which are not identified but which by way of implication lie behind the entire experience related by the narrator. This can be seen in the comprehensive structure of the dream that provides access to the traditional love garden of the tradition of dream visions, albeit significantly in the context of a book. Even the dream experience is initiated in the literary atmosphere of the *Roman de la Rose*; it is an atmosphere which is maintained in the experience theoretically juxtaposed with the

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[49] It is possible that Chaucer came to the knowledge of Ceyx and Alcione story through Guillaume de Machaut's *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse* which incorporates a version of it.

literary introduction.

In The *Book of the Duchess,* also the question of what is described as "episodic" structure of Chaucer's dream poems presents itself with ambiguity. As Boitani noted,[50] the plot structure is fairly linear in the *Book of the Duchess*. The introductory book reading with the concluding "mock" moral the narrator draws from it constitutes a parallel with the Knight's situation in the dream. The thematic concern of the introductory book and the Knight's story correspond to suggest a thematic unity between these spatially different structural units: the concept of death and loss discussed against a background of grief caused by the death of a beloved one. However, from another perspective, the link between these two episodes seems to have a different focus. While one of the themes of the story of Ceyx and Alcione is the fatal grief at the death of the beloved, the narrator's interest lies in the power of the prayer uttered by Alcione for a prophetic dream. The narrator uses the prayer to have some sleep which leads to production of a book. In the Knight's story, on the other hand, death proves to be regenerative in its stimulation of the Knight into remembrance of his dead lady, which, in turn leads to production of the Knight's book of his lady. In both cases, remembrance is the active agent through which past is recaptured and animated in the present. In a likewise manner, the mention of the *Roman de la Rose* unfolds a number of literary associations which find full acknowledgement in the Knight's remembrance of the lady. In the story of Ceyx and Alcione, the book, the past is evoked through a method of citation. In the Knight episode, Chaucer introduces a tradition of love poetry which owes its emergence to the *Roman de*

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[50] *Medieval Narrative*, p. 141.

la Rose and develops through the poems of French love poets Machaut and Froissart. I will develop these suggestions in the discussion of Blanche in Chapter V. Here, it must be noted that the literary context is the common ground these two parts of the same poem share. In their representational function, however, they differ, which indicates that Chaucer's presentation or use of traditional motifs encourages an acknowledgement of each as a separate, independent entity.[51] Accordingly, the story of Ceyx and Alcione, for instance, presents itself not only as a structural unit which introduces a traditional story in a new context but also forms *a* context which affects individual themes that it itself contains.

The poem's conclusion relates back to the opening, where it started. The journey through the literary world conjoins the ancients, the more contemporary world of the *Roman de la Rose* and French love poetry with their "ideal" lady, and the present time of the dream book, which indeed has already become a constituent part of that past with the Knight producing his own book of his lady and the dreamer recounting the Knight's book as an integral part of the book that his dreaming produces. The dream journey ends with the production of a book, which is acknowledged in the epilogue: "This was my sweven; now hit ys doon" (1334).

The unfinished state of the *House of Fame* makes the cyclic pattern less material

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[51] See R. Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader*, pp. 56-58. Jordan discerns in the poem several small structures. The poem appears "to dispose itself into clearly defined sections most of which display discernable structural outlines and follow orderly principles of internal organization", p.57.

than that we recognise in the *Book of the Duchess.*[52] However, the complex involvement with books is more recognisably there and takes on even further implications in what can be defined as individual structures, the Temple of Venus, the Palace of Fame and the House of Rumour as well as the literary desert which provides the passage from the initial literary enclave to the following two. The idea of visiting a gallery is predominant in the Temple of Venus, which, with its glass structure and stories, appears to be a replica of the glass chamber in the *Book of the Duchess.* The "curiouse portreytures/ Of olde werk" are what the temple contains. The reading process ensues to relate one particular story which the narrator finds carved on the walls. As I have stated in Chapter I, this story, the story of Dido and Aeneas, removed in retelling from its original epic context, is a remarkable example of the selectivity of the mind at work in breaking the whole into its particulars and yet conveying the sense of wholeness it has. The Temple of Venus is one of the structures which is inherited from the literary past; it will recur in the *Parliament of Fowls* to serve as the structure, the frame for literary associations of different kinds. In the *House of Fame*, it serves as a structural unit that accommodates a book in which the reliability of fictional presentation is questioned through a woman who becomes a subject matter of fictional representation through her failure to differentiate the discrepancy between reality and appearance.

It is in the second important structure in the *House of Fame*, in the Palace of

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[52] On the "unfinished" poems of Chaucer, see John Burrow, "Poems Without Endings", *SAC*, 13 (1991) 17-37. See pp. 33-35 for the ending of the *House of Fame*.

Fame, that we see an image of the poet's mind.[53] Authors, philosophers, historians parade before our eyes. In this memory lane, the literary past comes alive as held by the authors that created and continued it. It is within this frame that Chaucer reveals his most skeptical views about the truth value of fictional representation. Through symbolic imagery and ambiguous meaning of Fame, he renders fictional truth as perpetually suspect. As I will try to illustrate in Chapter Six, within this general frame of rich literary quotation and allusion, Chaucer places an evaluation of the female figure Fame as the representative example of an authoritative tradition. The House of Fame and the House of Rumour, the third structural unit in the poem, share a common ground in their potential as sources of literary creation. While the Temple of Venus, with the *Aeneid* painted on the walls, offers a direct interaction with the past authors and suggests a plurality of interpretation citing Virgil and Ovid as authorities on the matter, the House of Fame is more comprehensive in its scope and successfully brings together a wider range of authors. The House of Rumour, on the other hand, as the storehouse of poetic material, introduces a comical picture of changeability of the source material.

The world of books in the *House of Fame* introduces and develops several themes in the individual structures. The Temple of Venus, for instance, when it reappears in the *Parlement of Foules*, suggests the theme of love and contains stories, including the Dido and Aeneas story told in detail in the *House of Fame*. The use of a structural unit, in this case, serves a similar function as the representation of the poets holding up their subject

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[53] See Lara Ruffolo, 'Literary Authority and the Lists of Chaucer's *House of Fame:* Destruction and Definition Through Proliferation', *ChauR*, 27:4 (1993), 325-341 (pp.326-27).

matter in the house of Fame does. The stories mentioned or the story chosen to be told in detail usually belong to a larger part, of which they are the representative; as in the case of Dido and Aeneas, Jason and Medea etc., and exemplify a poetic attitude. In Fame's hall, Chaucer cites Virgil and Ovid as poets to whom we owe the knowledge of the fame of Aeneas or alternatively continuity of the theme of love. The clear-cut distinction made with regard to these poets, one as the poet of Aeneas, the *Aeneid*, the other as the poet of love, is crucial in Chaucer's examination of tradition which will be the subject of the following chapters. Virgil and Ovid inhabit separate domains defined by the polarity of their subject matter. However, in the Temple of Venus, these two authors are brought together through one of their common subject matters, the story of Dido and Aeneas. Chaucer is here going beyond what he realised Ovid did with the point of Virgil's epic. Bringing these two authors together in the Temple of Venus, which is predominantly a temple of love, Chaucer is acknowledging their separate but related contributions to a tradition and is contextualising this tradition -adding his own contribution in the form of interpretive reading- within the wider tradition. Significantly, the poem breaks off in a scene where various tidings, the potential subject matter of poetry, are combined with each other assuming an uncertain ontological status.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the cyclic pattern is more obvious: reading the *Somnium Scipionis* leads to dreaming and dreaming is followed by more reading. Within this compass, the observations of the dreamer take place in one of the conventional settings of the dream-vision tradition. The conventional paradisal garden, echoing the double inscription on the gate, is subdivided into two parts: the part inhabited by Venus

and the part inhabited by Nature. The narrator's reading, the structural unit which according to the narrator does not prove to be the satisfactory ideal field to generate new things, ("... I hadde thyng which that I nolde,/ And ek ne hadde that thyng that I wolde."), echoes in both parts thematically. Begun in the *Somnium Scipionis*, the theme of love pervades the whole poem. Yet, the predream reading does more than introducing the theme of love: it introduces love as a theme which is exploited and presented in a predominantly literary context. The section in which we have the parliament of birds and which, thematically speaking, brings the other parts of the poem into an interaction, discloses, though apparently only in relation to the appearance of Nature, the name of an author with his book: Alan de Lille and his work the *Complaint of Nature.* In the mention of a book in a highly dramatised scene, we see the literary interests of the opening maintained. The plot of the poem, through its division into structural fragments, offers individual themes to be treated in connection with their relevance to the central concern of the poem. It offers a combinative approach possible only in the wider context of literary tradition which supplies the outlines -the narrative elements and sources for reference in the development of themes. In the Temple of Venus and the parliament of birds, for instance, the concern is more than a reexamination of multiple views on the subject of love.[54] It seems to me that love is more instrumental than central to the purpose

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[54] Mainly stimulated by the narrator's express frustration about love at the beginning of the poem, followed by a garden of love and a debate of love, the *Parlement of Fowls* has usually been read as a poem of love. See Russell A. Peck, 'Love, Politics, and Plot in the *Parlement of Foules*', *ChauR*, 24:4 (1990), 290-305. Peck not only considers love as the major theme in a political context but he also reviews the areas of critical controversy.

of the poem. When, for instance, we look at the scene in which Nature is seen as presiding over the parliament, Nature herself, as a prominent traditional figure, presents, in herself, a separate theme or subject matter as a personified female figure. It is more than simply in relation to the topic of love that Nature's presence can be explained. She is introduced with significant relation to Alan de Lille, a poet/philosopher who devoted a whole book to Nature's doctrine and position in man's life, and who also presented Nature as a woman deeply aware of her femininity and its implications. In this regard, the conventional love garden accommodates Nature as one of the themes contained in the main structural unit; being born out of a book which already exists and whose author the poet includes among the "portraits" he has been commenting on. As we will see in Chapter Six, Nature occupies a special place in the reconsideration of the interaction between past and present.

The book-dream-experience formula applies to the *Parlement of Foules* with a significant variation in that the book that prompts the dream instigates, as in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, an equally bookish experience, one which has its roots and motives in literary tradition. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the poem, as a restatement of the literary interest or journey that has just been experienced, points to the inconclusive nature of that experience. Taking us back to the point where we have started, the dream itself serves as an accommodation of structures.

The dream experience is not initiated with the reading of a book in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. The narrator refers to his habit of reading but also indicates that at a certain time of the year, in May, he abandons his books, and instead,

goes and admires a certain daisy in the meadows. It soon becomes clear, however, that his ardently declared love for this "daisy" has its ties with the literary world. Indeed, the experiential love urges the poet to fall back on his books again, (G 59-70), so that his reverential praise constitutes in art of borrowing, choosing and adapting from the books which, in the first place, apparently suggested even his desire to worship a daisy. While, on the one hand, this movement back and forth between experience and "books" might be, as Payne suggested, equated with pragmatic and traditional approaches to knowledge,[55] as the opening considerations on the value of books and experience also tell, it also, especially in the dream, divorces the experience from the pragmatic world and associates it with the books. Not only does the daisy of the prologue turn out to be a symbol for the ideal lady of the dream, the lady Alceste whom the dreamer knows from his reading, but also the dream experience turns heavily upon the process of writing. The God of Love, a figure familiar to us from the previous dream poems, charges the poet-narrator with the crime of writing books that defame his doctrine. The God of Love's accusation which leads to listing of a number of poems written by the accused poet, includes, among others, the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parlement of Foules*, and the *House of Fame*. Indication of these works in a sense completes the implicit design of the previous works: actual reading (transmission of reading into writing) indicating the interconnection between the works involved through further reading or by merely including them in the overall structure of the particular work. More significantly, in the Prologue, the poems we have been reading so far are integrated in the tradition. I comment on the implications of this inclusion for

[55] *The Key of Remembrance*, p. 96.

Chaucer's idea of tradition in the concluding chapter to this study. Briefly stated, practical and theoretical statements about the tradition as a continued phenomenon through participation of individual authors are documented. The *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parlement of Foules* and the *House of Fame* are, as we know, works of a purpose to state and exemplify the progressive course of tradition. In the final poem dealing with this issue, they are among the works to be cited as forming the tradition. The poet/dreamer's task is not yet complete. As an apt example of ironic acknowledgement of the potential of old books to suggest entirely new configurations, he sets about writing the *Legend* as he has been assigned. With the significance of tradition made clear, the poetic theory that governs the relationship between the poet and the tradition established, though on disputable grounds, the *Legend* proceeds to exemplify the ways of manipulating fictional truth according to the poet's intended goal in repeating the old stories. The *Legend* is written to meet the requirement of Love that poetry presents women as good. This entails violation of the original texts, overt subversion of tradition and manipulation of poetic truth. Testifying to Chaucer's engagement with representations of women as products of poetically manipulated contexts, the *Legend* is almost a parody of the fictional creation.

As for the Prologue, the single structural frame, the flowery meadow of the dreamer's waking life which recurs in the dream with the central figure Daisy present in both, serves as the locus in which the poet's examination of poetry is substantiated in his reading and writing that Daisy/Alceste mediates. The centrality of the daisy figure in both pre-dream and dream experience suggests that the daisy figure is also used as a poetic emblem.

The literary structures represented in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Foules* and The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, along with their function to symbolise the existence of the past in the present, contain themes which lend themselves to individual evaluation. From among these themes, one that Chaucer chooses is the fragmented representation of women in several literary traditions. He examines the conditions and attitudes which shape these representations. He finds these women in the old books, in the gardens and in the temples, the structural frames which he uses to exemplify the interaction between the tradition and the individual poet. He focuses on the representational potentials in these figures to substantiate his poetic search suggested by the design of his poems.

CHAPTER THREE

READING THE TRADITION: THE NARRATOR

In the previous chapter, I have suggested a pragmatic change in the use of dream form as Chaucer employs it. I have further tried to exemplify the functionality of this change as reflected in the overall design of the poems. By containing the past in its relevant fragments, represented by poetic structures, Chaucer's use of dream poem indicates an evaluative restructuring. Contained within the cyclic structure of the poems, beginning with reading and ending with the composition of a poem and further reading, we can see the concern for fictional representation indicated. The dream poems serve to illustrate the outlines of such concern and ground the representations of women in a textual context manipulated by authorial priorities.

In this Chapter, I will look at Chaucer's narrator as a device coexistent and coterminous with the interests of the dream poem as Chaucer employs the form. As we have seen, Chaucer's use of the dream form involves a great deal of modification to accommodate an idea of poetics which he ultimately explores through representations of women. Using the dream frame as the venue of poetic interests is in itself an effective strategy to signal the priorities that will operate in the fictional representations accommodated within the frame. Chaucer uses the narrator as well, not only for reinforcement of the effect but also for establishment of an authorial standpoint. The narrator operates within the fictional world contained in the dream poems. The narrator in Chaucer is essentially a representative of one of the many discourses facilitated by the texts he reads. Since the narrator is presented as a reader/author, and his poetic activities consist of the end result of reading and writing,

he simultaneously reflects and facilitates a primary position of a poet within an established discourse. The narrator's authorial and readerly roles reinforce and manifest the fictional interests of the dream poems.

As an ubiquitous constituent of the dream poem the narrator has a significant place in realisation of the purposes of the poem. Susan Langer states "The most noteworthy formal characteristic of the dream is that the dreamer is always at the center of it."[1] Indeed, the existence of the dream poem, as Spearing notes, depends on the dreamer, for it exists "as an account of the narrator's dream".[2] In this context, in realising the objectives of the poem, perhaps more than the dream poem itself, the dreamer is also a referent. Stating the importance of the part the narrator claims in Chaucer's dream poems, Robert Edwards contends

> Chaucer's narrator stands at the beginning of every poem and thereby sets the conditions by which we learn the poet's stories. He is at once an imaginative source and a practical means of Chaucer's narrative art...The narrative persona is not simply a disguise the poet assumes inside his fiction but a figure he must invent before the fiction can proceed.[3]

The narrator in Chaucer's poems is not simply a fictional construct necessitated by the formalities of the convention, but a functional device whose relation to the matter of his poem is meant to raise an awareness on the part of the reader. A compound figure of the actual poet and imaginary artifact,[4] the narrator assumes priority of position for

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[1] *Feeling and Form* (London, 1953, p.413). Quoted in Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p.5.

[2] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p.5.

[3] *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), p.141.

[4] The recognition of the actual author in the characterisation of the narrator presents itself as a must, especially in view of the references to narrator's extratextual

the poems to develop. But the function of this position within the machinery of the poem is to foreground a reading process and consequently to set the representational domain of the poem. Therefore, as Edwards states, the poet has to define the position of the narrator, the function of the voice speaking to us.

I would argue that Chaucer presents the I of the dream narrative as someone who mediates a literary world of multiple discourses which in turn is mediated to him by the books he reads.[5] Considering that the dream poem begins and ends with the voice of the narrator, the presentation of the narrator as a reader/writer also help define the range and nature of the expectations raised by the dream. The narrator as an indispensable constituent of Chaucer's narrative calls attention to the priorities of his dream through particularisation of his position and priorities as a reader, and that, in turn, underlies the priorities of the dream as a poem.

When we look into the particulars of this presentation, we see that with a

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life. See *House of Fame* 641-660. However, in marginalising the implications for an extratextual personage, I agree with Dieter Mehl's view that "The most interesting aspect of Chaucer's narrator is not what he reveals about the author's personal life and opinions, but the way he directs our responses and controls the narrative situation." See 'Chaucer's Narrator: *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales*', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, pp. 213-26 (p.213).

[5] I take it that it is essentially the same figure that mediates the poems. In other words, although there are obvious fluctuations in the narrator's attitude throughout the four poems, the pose is consistently that of a reader/poet. In this I am following the common ground taken by Dorothy Bethurum, 'Chaucer's Point of View As Narrator in the Love Poems', *PMLA*, 74 (1959), 511-20; and R.O. Payne, 'Chaucer's Realisation of Himself As Rhetor', in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. by James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 270-87. Neither Bethurum nor Payne sees the narrator as a reader, but they recognise a consistent figure throughout all the poems. The consistent figure view has recently been challenged. See J.J. Anderson, 'The Narrators in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*', *ChauR*, 26:3 (1992), 219-235. Anderson draws a distinction between the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* whom she perceives to be a "doer" and the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* who is a "thinker". See p. 220.

lasting consistency, the narrator speaks of his lack of experience in love, his inadequacy to comprehend his dream, and is consequently thrown upon the mercy of his benevolent guides who, furthermore, emphasise his "lack of wit" that renders his attempts at writing poetry successive failures. Critics have noted that Chaucer's presentation of the narrator involves a great deal of self-deprecation and ironic self-mockery.[6] Judged by the standard attitude to him in the poems the narrator has little claim to respectability and sophistication. Africanus' treat to the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* that "...if thow haddest connyng for t'endite,/I shall the shewe mater of to wryte." (167-68) is punctuated with a derogatory remark that recalls the Eagle's contention in the *House of Fame*, "although that thow be dul"; (II, 620-21).[7]

Though a derided poet of poor writing skills, the narrator reveals a profound interest in and an insistence, almost an obstinacy, on reading. Books accompany him when he is at the threshold of the dream. His self-confidence as the protagonist of his poem resides in his image of himself as a reader. At several points throughout the four

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[6] See Thomas A. Garbáty, 'The Degradation of Chaucer's "Geffrey"', *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 97-104. Garbaty remarks that "In the early poems the charge is always leveled against him by others, specifically by these unorthodox beings he has the ill luck to meet" p.100. The allusions to the narrator's "slow-wittedness" have led to a vigorous discussion of the separability of Chaucer from the narrator. The most representative view (and a reconciliatory one) is perhaps Robert Burlin's: "The ironic self-portrait, a mixture of fact and fiction, of self deprecation and self-effacement, adds a new dimension to the narrative, a consciousness of the split between the poet's public and private selves and of the creative process through which they negotiate", *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.27. See George Kane, *Chaucer and Langland: Historical and Textual Approaches* (London: The Athlone Press,1989), pp 1-14, "The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies", for an examination of the difficulties and misperceptions that may result from an attempt of constructing an accurate personality of historical Chaucer from the text.

[7] In the *Canterbury Tales*, the narrator seems to have internalised the charge. Used again with reference to his writing abilities, the narrator owns "My wit is short, ye may wel understonde" (*General Prologue*,746).

poems, he refers to his habit of reading. In the *Book of the Duchess*, he reads to pass the time away for he thinks "it better play/Then playe either at ches or tables" (49-50). In the *Parliament of Fowls*, he spends a whole day reading an old book, named as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, and the ending of the poem signals a continuity of reading as the narrator returns to his books after the dream. It is in association with his reading that the writing activities he engages with come to the compass of the poems. The Eagle in the *House of Fame* reproaches him for spending long hours in his study reading, risking meanwhile his chance of getting news of those who are in his immediate vicinity (654-660). The God of Love in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* exclaims his anger and discontent at the matter chosen by the narrator considering the great number of books available to him in his own library (G 270-275).

Ironically, the dream world complicates the situation for it offers a compulsory exchange of reading with experience.[8] Recognising the narrator's primary interest in reading as a search of material for writing (which it partly is), the dream world authorities offer some experience, observation of unmediated state of things, in order to help him improve his writing. Indeed, Africanus takes him to visit the Garden of Love because "Thow hast the so wel born/In lokynge of myn olde bok totorn/.../That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte...I shal the shewe mater of to wryte" (*PF* 109-112; 168). Dieter Mehl argues "when it comes to actual experience he can only observe the emotions of the actors with distanced admiration and a certain amount of scepticism."[9]

[8] I use the term "experience" as opposed to "reading", in the sense that the dream authorities challenge the narrator's reliance on books for "matter" to write.

[9] *Geoffrey Chaucer: An Introduction to His Narrative Poetry*, p.9.

Still, even in the dream world the narrator remains a reader. Lack of participation in the action of dream seems to be a characteristic display of the narrator's priorities. "For...I knowe nat Love in dede," (PF, 8) turns out to be not only an acceptance of inexperience but also a self defining paradigm the purchase of which can be attested in view of the narrator's response to the dream experience. Once at the gate to the garden of love, for instance, his immediate reaction is to the inscriptions on the gate. Echoing his initial statements about love as he learned it from books (PF,1-12), the narrator responds to what he reads, even before seeing it. In the garden of love as well his appreciation of his dream is marked by a tendency to textualise: Description of Nature is passed over by a reference to *Complaint of Nature*. Nature looks like just as Alan describes her in the aforesaid book.

Perhaps the correlation between the narrator's prioritisation of reading and the consequent relation of his dream can be explained as an ironic subversion of the narrator's position by Chaucer to provide a highly modified conformity with that of the French poems in which the narrator's dream originates from and is about what he knows from experience. Chaucer's narrator knows a great deal about love but "not in dede". As I will explain below, the knowledge comes to him or he gains the knowledge of love as well as of other matters (*House of Fame* gives an exhaustive list of matters to hear, write or sing, III,1957-1976) not through observation and experience of "tydynges" in his waking or dream life but through books. A significant purchase of this shift in priorities can be that conceiving the narrator more as a reader which defines the scope of his position as a poet serves simultaneously to illustrate Chaucer's attitude to the past as a poet (reinterpretation and continuation are generated by reading) and the place he claims for his narrator within the tradition.

First, if we look at the standing of the narrator in the tradition, we see that Chaucer's representation of the narrator suggests the individual dialogue he maintains with the tradition in reconstructing his dream poems. He collaborates with the antecedent presentations of the narrator with a marked departure from them. In his narrator, the conventional role and pose of the dreamer/narrator are recalled but not utilised. The effect of imparting the conventional pose of the narrator through disclaiming can be located in the role or pose through which the poet enters the fictional world of his creation. It can be located in the relationship between the narrating person and the content of his narrative. The dissimilarity of Chaucer's narrator from that of his French predecessors has been located in the narrator's attitude to the experience provided by the dream. In this context, it has been argued that the I of Chaucer's dream poems is markedly different from those of his predecessors in relating an experience which he is at pains to keep at a distance as something observed but not involved with.[10] Unlike the narrator of the *Roman* or the narrators of the Machaut and Froissart, Chaucer's narrator in his dream poems, Bethurum maintains, "trembles at the thought of experience."[11] Evidently, especially in the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *House of Fame*, the narrator is comically frightened by the dream world experience. At the gate of the garden of Love "Ferde I, that nyste whether me was bet/ To entre or leve,..." (152-53), the flight he is treated to in the *House of Fame* "was to gret affray" (II,553). Although these remarks somehow underline the narrator's bookishness, his need, as the eagle puts it, for "som disport

[10] See Dorothy Bethurum, 'Chaucer's Point of View As Narrator in the Love Poems', p.513.

[11] 'Chaucer's Point of View As Narrator', p. 514.

and game" (HF II,664), the point in comparison to the French poetry is that the narrator does not come to the dream with the type of experience that French narrators have. Adherence to the books, as we will see below, provides him with a different "experience" which operates at the level of dream as well as in its evaluation.[12] This takes effect in a highly comical way. Lack of experience provides on the one hand the initiative promoted by the dream guides for the narrator's dream journey. Compelled by his guides, the narrator obliges with the requirement of experience, i.e. experience provided by the dream to complement his theoretical knowledge. Significantly, it also foregrounds the narrator's experience as an unprecedented kind of experience - experience as reading. A comical but unresolved tension is generated from a clash in interests. The narrator's primary interest is in "matter" to read. Reading is experience for him. Whereas for his guides in the dreams, the theoretical knowledge obtained through reading needs to be enriched and tested against the practical world, (the Eagle in the *House of Fame*). When the dream is over, the narrator returns to books either to read more or to turn his dream into a book. In this process, the reading interests of waking are combined with the narrator's overt efforts to comprehend his dream in the light of knowledge he gains from the books in and outside the dream.

A further indication of the position insistently claimed by the narrator is that it exemplifies the way Chaucer locates him within the tradition and yet emphasises his moving in a different direction. Disclaiming first hand knowledge of love can be defined in terms of absence. It determines firmly what the dreamer is not and hence

[12] Absence of prior experience also alienates his dream in that it is almost a sabotage attempt for his poem. In the first place, lack of experience threatens the truth value of his dream; it deprives the poem of the authenticating voice which it needs to claim veracity and credibility. But more than that it undermines, even ridicules, the traditional receptive nature of the dreamer and the teaching function of the dream.

redefines the expectations raised by the love context. It dissociates the dreamer from the conventional pose of a lover. The narrators of Machaut and Froissart in the *Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne* and *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse*, and *Le Paradys d'Amours* respectively define their positions as lovers. The narrator in *Le Jugement* participates in the festive mood of the season of love: "I dressed myself handsomely like one who loved very perfectly, with a constant love." In *Le Dit de la Fonteinne,* the poem is the expression of the narrator's love for the lady, "delightfully written out of the delightful experience of that true heart which is devoted to her." *Le Paradys* opens with the narrator's explanation of the cause of his somnia as the "fair one, for love of whom I entered into this torment and suffer such sleeplessness."[13] Whereas, Chaucer's narrator is not a lover but a teller of lovers.[14] It further undermines the dreamer's position as a poet: the dreamer is not a successful poet.

The dissociation from the conventional pose is accompanied by a definition of the position of the narrator. It is indicated more pervasively than the negative paradigm of lover that the narrator is a reader/poet. His writing is dependent on his

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[13] Quotations are from Barry Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues,* pp. 3, 26 and 41 respectively. Unless otherwise stated, I use Barry Windeatt's translation throughout this study for references to Machaut and Froissart. James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of the Book of the Duchess,* p. 97, emphasises the "well-developed" and "individualised narrator of Machaut's later *dits*" as a precedent for Chaucer's narrators. For a comparison of Chaucer's narrator and the narrators of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun as varying voices see John Finlayson, '*The Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer's Narrators', *ChauR*, 24:3 (1990), 187-210.

[14] The opening lines of the *Book of the Duchess* (1-15) imply love as the narrator's "eight-year sickness", but this allusion is never confirmed in the following poems. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women,* the narrator's love for the Daisy proves to be initiated by books.

reading. More precisely, he reads before writing. He reads and dreams and writes. These defining characteristics are in considerable contrast with each other not only in their import on the identity of the dreamer but also in the dreamer's identification with them. The narrator is at some pains to disclaim association with the priorities of love (PF,158-161). However, that he cannot write well or compose beautiful poetry is the judgement of the authorities he encounters in his dreams in person or as represented by a messenger. And as we will see, such a challenge can take the form of discontent with what he writes, as is the case in the trial scene of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. One particular effect sought in the oft-stressed poetic incompetence may be that it is a parodic response of Chaucer to Machaut's assertions of poetic competence or Jean de Meun's initiation of himself into Guillaume's poem as a poet. As far as Chaucer's narrator is concerned, it is specifically on the occasions of reading-turned writing that "he is also an authority, a narrator with his own voice and opinions."[15] As opposed to Machaut and Jean de Meun, to some extent, the authorial confidence of Chaucer's narrator resides less in how he writes than in re-presenting what he has read. The "variety of narratorial stances and modes...from engagement and commentary to mere reportage and complete detachment"[16] are complex manifestations of the narrator's priority. His perception of the world largely conditioned by his reading, the narrator responds enthusiastically, if sometimes imperceptively, to the matter of reading. In contrast to the engagement in the scenes provided by reading,

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[15] Lara Ruffolo, 'Literary Authority and the Lists of Chaucer's *House of Fame:* Destruction and Definition Through Proliferation', p.328.

[16] John Finlayson, '*The Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer's Narrators', p. 208.

where there is no reading, the narrator, deprived of the contact point, remains passive.[17] In the *House of Fame*, for instance, he declines the Eagle's offer to view the stars, for "I leve as wel, so God me spede,/ Hem that write of this matere,/ As though I knew her places here;" (1012-1014), while he is quite responsive to Dido's story which he is able to read. He manifests a similar attitude while listening to the Knight's story, which provides him with a reading situation that does not belie his position as a no-lover but provides him with "mater" to read.

In his examination of Chaucer's narrator as an "open persona", development of which he ascribes to the *Romance of the Rose,* David Lawton points out that "the narratorial persona developed in dream poetry, with an explicit time-lapse between the writer as poet and writer as dreamer is a powerful instrument to facilitate the tonal range that comes from fluctuating distance and a number of temporal perspectives."[18] The technique can be ascribed to the retrospective nature of the dream poem, though not all dream poets display a conscious treatment of persona as such. Dream always precedes narration of the dream; consequently the sense of passage of time between the dream and the composition of dream experience into a poem allows the poet to utilise the implied time lapse as a means for retrospective and detached standpoint.[19]

Guillaume de Lorris' use of this facility seems to have been an innovation. He

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[17] Cf Burlin's view that the narrator maintains his disengaged attitude to his reading alike.See *Chaucerian Fiction*, p. 29. Burlin moreover sees in the narrator's distance an ironic reflection of Chaucer's attitude as a poet in that "the poet would address his poem and view it in resigned and detached attitude of a creator", p.29.

[18] *Chaucer's Narrators*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer,1985), p. 13.

[19] In Chaucer the use of time-lapse as a device of authorial detachment seems to be replaced by the ackowledged role of books as mediators. The narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* suffers from a persistent insomnia which, as the "present" opening indicates, is not affected by the dream experience.

affects an elaborate time-lapse in having an older poet tell his love-experience in a dream which he had some five years ago. The separation in time of the poet as the writer and the poet as the dreamer brings in at least a double perspective on the experience related in that the dreamer's dream is subjected to the writer's evaluation. Nevertheless, it conjoins the figure of the narrator and the protagonist of the poem in such a way that, though viewed from a variety of perspectives, the action of the poem consists in the first-hand experience of the narrator.[20]

Guillaume's continuator, Jean de Meun, makes the separateness of the narrator and the protagonist of the poem more explicit. In Jean de Meun's part, the experience, stated explicitly as that of Guillaume named as Amant, is no more the experience of the narrator Jean de Meun. Jean de Meun introduces himself as the poet to continue Guillaume's narration. Thus effecting a shift in perspective, Jean de Meun presents himself as a writer writing of someone else's experience in the first person narration mode.[21] In writing of someone else's love experience, the pose of lover is replaced by the undisguised position of a poet, who then allows the characters of his poem to take precedence. The poet, in turn, moves into a domain of total detachment within the frame of the narrative. As the continuator both of the romance and the quest to win the rose, Jean de Meun's position claims to be acknowledged as an authorial position. Although this authorial position goes beyond the lyric subjectivity of Guillaume's narratorial pose, it still remains to be the authorial position from which the action of

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[20] See Kevin Brownlee, *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut* (Madison:The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 12.

[21] Guillaume is explicitly named as Amant when Amors asks his troops to help Guillaume win the rose and Jean de Meun is named as the poet to finish the romance. Lines 10526- 10678.

the poem is related. Jean de Meun's responsibility is doubled in the sense that his task is not only to continue the narration of someone else's experience but also to exercise authorial control in recreating it.

A more clearly illustrated version of the narratorial pose can be found in Machaut. Machaut is certainly aware of the possibilities of narratorial range made available by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Accordingly, in Machaut's poetry we see variations of the lover/protagonist, lover/poet, unambiguously defined at the beginning of the poems. Machaut's narrative stance derives from Guillaume de Lorris' poet/narrator depicted as lover/protagonist and progresses towards a stance closer to that of Jean's. While, for instance, the poet presents himself as a lover in the *Remede de Fortune*, in *Jugement dou roy de Navarre*, sentenced to write poetry to do penance for his transgression in an earlier poem, the narrator emerges as more a poet than a lover. [22]

In Chaucer, the narratorial pose is rendered deliberately ambiguous so much so that the tonal ambiguities further complicate the task of differentiating the speaking voices from one another.[23] However, it seems that while, in the structure of Chaucer's poetry, the narrator's complex position with regard to the management of the tone is of considerable interest to Chaucer, what is more pertinent to Chaucer's use of the narrator is the position of the narrator to the experience related in the poem. As a

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[22] Machaut's location of himself in his poem as a love poet suggests an interest to locate the narrator's poem in a larger corpus of writings. The judgment delivered by his readers enables the poet to "correct", justify and modify his poetic stance while securing a wide recognition of his "individual tradition". Evidently, the condescending allusions to the narrator's writings in Chaucer signal a similar acknowledgement.

[23] See Finlayson, 'Roman de la Rose and Chaucer's Narrators', for an analysis of the effects of tonal variations.

significant departure from the precedents mentioned above, in the presentation of Chaucer's narrator, the dream is offered to the audience not only as the experience of a teller which is largely conditioned and manipulated by the position claimed by its narrator, but also specifically as something that can be tested for its validity and significance. By setting a literary landscape as the ultimate reference point, the narrator offers not only his dream for speculation but also suggests the terms of the response required.

In its express concern with the narratorial activity, The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* seems to present an index to Chaucer's use of the narrator. It will be useful to quote the conversation, or rather the discussion, between The God of Love, Alceste and the narrator in which the question of reading and authority are brought into a problematic relationship:

> And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
> ....
> For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
> Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
> ....
> And of Cresyde thou hast seyd as the lyste,
> That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
>
> (F 322-23;328-29;332-33)

> ...for this man ys nyce,
> He myghte doon yt, gessyng no malice,
> But for he useth thynges for to make;
> Hym rekketh noght of what matere he take. (F 362-65)

> Ne a trewe lover oght me not to blame
> Thogh that I speke a fals lovere som shame.
> They oghte rather with me for to holde
> For that I of Creseyde wroot or tolde,
> Or of the Rose; what so myn auctour mente,

> ... yt was myn entente
> To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce,
> And to ben war fro falsnesse and fro vice
> By swich ensample; this was my menynge. (F 466-74)

The speakers are, in order of appearance, the God of Love, Alceste and the narrator as they are engaged in the "trial scene" in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. The significance of this exchange of views on the meaning of the texts and the author's participation in determining and disseminating that meaning is twofold for the narrator and his role in Chaucer's dream poems.

Firstly, the God of Love is accusing the narrator, as an author, of representing Love's followers in an unfavourable light. His position is that of a reader. He is also a reader who approaches the text with certain expectations. Moreover, he believes that the author can control the text and thus fulfil the expectations required. Accordingly, as a reader of the translation of the *Rose* and the rewritten *Troilus*, which he confidently identifies as authorised by the narrator, the God of Love holds the narrator responsible for the meaning he infers from these texts. In turn, Cupid's charge based on the authorial responsibility demanded from the narrator is reduced to improbability by Alceste's intercession. Coming as a defence on behalf of the narrator, nevertheless not contradicting the former reading of the God of Love's, Alceste's view disregards entirely such a responsibility and shifts the emphasis from "meaning" to "making". To exercise authorial choice, the narrator needs to know his priorities. Whereas, in the narrator's translations,[24] (Alceste includes *Criseyde* as well) no authorial intention can

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[24] Of the two primary meanings of the medieval use of the word translation, one strongly suggests "transformation, alteration". Neither Cupid nor Alceste seems to use the term in this sense. However, the defence produced by the narrator indicates an

be ascribed to the narrator, for the accused lacks such power of judgment. Alceste maintains that the misapplication of authority is a mere result of incompetent reading. Yes, the narrator "useth thynges for to make" but he used them indiscriminately, "He rekketh noght of what matere he take."

The last speaker is the narrator who defends his text as conveying his reading of the past authors. The mention of the past authors as the agent of authority indicates a second parameter to be taken into account in assessing the poetic trespass. In the books under attack, the narrator states, his "menynge" was to transmit the "sentence" of the authors. It is precisely what the God of Love is attacking him for. However, the narrator's line of argument places not only his reading of the meaning of these texts in sharp contrast with that of the God of Love, it also negates Alceste's allegation that he did not comprehend fully what the texts he was translating really meant. In other words, the narrator complies with the God of Love that he participated in continuing a tradition, that, based on his reading of the "auctores", he is also an authority. The narrator's answer, moreover, can be seen as a counter attack, challenging the conclusive interpretations of his accusers: "...yt was myn entente/To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce,/And to ben war for falsnesse and fro vice/By swich ensample; this was my menynge." In the equation of "intente" and "menynge", meaning slides from something subjective to something objective, a fact to be accepted. Yet, in arguing this point, the narrator seems to be commiting himself to a similar fallacy demonstrated by his accusers. He struggles for the recognition of a determinate meaning while coming to the dismaying recognition that it is not possible

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alteration. See R. A. Schoaf, 'Notes Toward Chaucer's Poetics of Translation', *SAC*, 1 (1979), 55-82. "A translation...is literally a missaying...It violates the original...To translate is to violate an authority", p. 58.

to control his reader's response to the text.[25]

This problematic situation seems to foreground a challenge to the narrator's misuse of authority.[26] Further, what we have here is essentially a reading problem.[27] In the accusations of the God of Love, in the defences of Alceste and the narrator, the focal point is the meaning or the absence or misinterpretation of the meaning of a text. The dissenting voices of all three are concerned with the authorial intention and its effect on the anticipated readers. The common denominator in the view of each is the recognition of the process of reading in the production of narrator's books. Although it is no excuse either for the God of Love or for Alceste that the meaning, as they understand it, promoted by the narrator, does not reside in his views but in the books he has read, the ultimate verdict derives from the conviction that intentionally or otherwise the narrator has exercised at least an authority of choice in deciding what to represent from among what he has read.[28] Therefore, his texts being the source of

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[25] Cf Robert R. Edwards, 'Faithful Translations: Love and Question of Poetry in Chaucer', in The *Olde Daunce*: *Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. by Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 138-153 (p.140). Edwards explains Love's reading of the *Roman* and *Troilus* as a consequence of Love's inability to see the divide Chaucer sets between "making" and "enditing" and their respective audiences "wise folk" and "lewed folk".

[26] See Chapter Five.

[27] Lisa Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales*, reads Cupid's judgment as a result of misreading and misinterpreting Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Romance of the Rose*. Alceste's defence and the narrator's protest, Kiser argues, claim Chaucer's works rather than repudiating them. See pp. 71-94. In my opinion, the problem here is not as much misreading as it is a matter of multiple readings.

[28] This contention is clearly stated by the God of Love in G: "why noldest thow as wel [han] seyd goodnesse/Of wemen, as thow hast seyd wikednesse?/ Was there no good matere in thy minde,/ Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thow nat fynde/Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?" (268-72).

delinquency from the God of Love, he must read and write more books to compensate for the wrong he has incurred both upon the god and his followers.

This passage has teasing consequences for the evaluation of Chaucer's narrator in the dream poems. Robert Jordan dismisses the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as the least congenial to Chaucer's purposes as an author in his reading of the trial scene quoted above. He argues that the naming of the books written by Chaucer the poet brings the narrator closer to the actual poet and thereby demolishes the artistic detachment which Chaucer manifests successfully in his previous poems.[29] Jordan's view is suggestive in that the passage in which the narrator is put to trial for his offensive authorial intentions is also where the reader/narrator of Chaucer's dream poems becomes recognisably the reader/author. This does not change the initial strategy, on the contrary it foregrounds and defines the implications of utilisation of books as a background to the poetic activity. It is still a case of books talking to books. Whereas in the other poems the literary heritage of centuries lies at the centre of the drive to write, here the driving force is the literary heritage of the individual. The identification alluded to is therefore as much with the authorial position as it is

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[29] *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader,* p.114. "In this poem, the persona is an artifice insufficiently artificial to achieve the artistic distance Chaucer manages so effectively in other contexts...Chaucer brings artifice closer to autobiographical truth." See also Michael D. Cherniss, 'Chaucer's Last Dream Vision: The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', *ChauR*, 20:3 (1986), 183-199. Cherniss acknowledges that the Prologue seems to be the most autobiographical of Chaucer's poems.Yet, "the visionary is Chaucer in a somewhat limited way" p.185. Donald W. Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity: Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'*, rightly contends that in the Prologue "...the demands of the fiction have been given priority over history" p.5.; R. O. Payne considers the Prologue as autobiographical in a strikingly different context. Payne argues that the Prologue serves as a summation of Chaucer's evaluation of his art as a love poet which he developed in the early poems. See 'Making His Own Myth: The Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *ChauR*, 9:3 (1975), 197-211.

with the actual poet Chaucer. In the dialogue between the God of Love and Alceste, in which the narrator has part only to indicate his liability as a reader, the narrator combines the roles of the reader and the author in their respective deferral of authority (what the book said as a confirmation of what the poet says) and consequent participation in it (therefore I say).

I would suggest that it is not only the historical accuracy of the books cited that suggests an identification with the author and the narrator which is significant here. The trial scene furthers the implication that the reading activity creates the speaker of the poems as an authority, though it does not necessarily make him authoritative. Additionally, the trial scene serves as a reminder that the transformation of reading into writing involves a form of selection. And this selection not only transfers the authority of meaning from the original author to his successors whose initial position is that of a reader but it also hints at the possible use of a certain context for the conveyance of targeted meaning. The narrator states that he means to further Love's cause and has chosen the appropriate texts for his goal. However, the function of the context seems to have failed for the God of Love refuses to recognise a changed context for the canonically antifeminist texts.

Some recent studies have emphasised Chaucer's awareness of the role of the reader in controlling the meaning of the text.[30] The proposals of Peter Travis and Jill

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[30] Peter W. Travis, 'Affective Criticism, the Pilgrimage of Reading and Medieval English Literature', in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. by Laura A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp 201-215; Jill Mann. 'The Authority of Audience in Chaucer', in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. by Piero Boitani and AnnaTorti, pp. 1-12. See also Kay Gilliand Stevenson, 'Readers, Poets, and Poems Within the Poem', *ChauR*, 24:1 (1989), 1-19. Stevenson's specific study of the *Book of the Duchess* detects in the poem an interest in the audience's response and examines this interest through the narrator and Man in Black. See p.2.

Mann take as their starting point the prominent role of the reader or audience in determining the meaning of a work of art as illustrated by the reception theory.[31] In his article on the potential in the medieval literature for the application of affective criticism, Travis emphasises Chaucer's appeals to the reader, especially in the *Troilus*, as a potential author to correct or modify his text. Concerned about the interpretive strategies defining his art and its intent, "Chaucer...foregrounds in his own poetry a heightened sense of the subtle chemistry of the reading process, as text and reader interpenetrate in a mutual act of interpretation and transformation."[32] Chaucer, in Travis' view, brings the reader into the text by way of including and anticipating the response his text may procure from the reader. The awareness of the reader's power is acknowledged through an ongoing dialogue with the anticipated reader. Interpretation of the text will therefore involve a balancing of the fictional experience against the real experiences of the reader and accordingly will yield "as many different readings as there are listeners in his audience."[33]

Mann argues for a similar correspondence between the reader and the text. Contrary to Travis' view, however, the interaction between the reader and the text and the consequent effect of indeterminate meaning lie with Chaucer's pose as a reader rather than in invoking the reader as a correspondent. Mann argues persuasively that the concern with literary authority in Chaucer's *House of Fame* considered in exclusive

[31] Mann does not place her reading within this theory. See 'The Authority of Audience', p.3.

[32] 'Affective Criticism', p. 203.

[33] 'Affective Criticism', p. 204. While Travis' observation is useful, it tends to focus on the future possibilities and the author's resignation to expulsion from his text. Whereas, in my opinion, Chaucer underlies reading in order to foreground its subjectivity.

relation to the author in recent years is overlooking the fact that "when Chaucer gives us a self-portrait, he represents himself...not as a writer but as a *reader*."[34] Mann recognises a preoccupation with Chaucer's relationship to a literary past, well-grounded on the textual references to the dreamer as a book-worm, in the "persisting intrusions of a reading presence", but she emphasizes Chaucer's interest in "his relationship to a literary future -to the readers on whom the continuing life and meaning of his work depends.That is, Chaucer's role as reader of others' works is a covert surrogate for our own role as readers of his own."[35]

The typical reader presented by Chaucer is shown at work in Geffrey's attitude during his flight towards the house of Fame. He immediately begins checking off what he sees around him against the information provided by the books he has read. However, this is a subordinate objective of the passage. More importantly than the display of interaction between life and literature, Mann contends, this scene provides us access to the mind of the reader where books mesh with other books in a manner which denies the individual works their autonomy and renders them, in accordance with the rules imposed by real reading, to "a mish-mash of half-remembered words and images whose arrangement is orchestrated by the reader rather than the writer."[36]

It is useful to my discussion of the narrator that Mann acknowledges the "literary" quality of the narrator's experience and states that literary tradition is used

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[34] 'The Authority of Audience', p. 1. The position is arguable in that Chaucer foregrounds reading as fundamental to narratorial activity with the view of its effect on writing. See R.O.Payne, 'Late Medieval Images and Self-Images of the Poet: Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, Henryson, Dunbar', in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lois Ebin, pp. 249-61 (p.251).

[35] 'The Authority of Audience', p.2.

[36] 'The Authority of Audience', p.5.

as a referent point. However, in Mann's view, the experience, in this context, stimulates literary allusions and associations; it is a contact point with the knowledge stored in the reader's mind prior to his experience. Important to this argument is the fact that Chaucer himself, through the narrator, is implicated in the act of reading. What he does in his poems is to illustrate various representations of reading. While, unlike Travis' extratextual reader, the reading and reader remain within the textual boundaries of the poem, the attitude of the narrator assumes the weight and function of a real reader.[37] As different from the role of the writer who means to reveal the meaning of the story he tells, Chaucer as the reader shows his "disgust and disappointment with the story he has read, and regretting that he has ever started on it."[38] On the other hand, participation of the narrator in the poetic panorama presented in the dream poems as a reader effects a reversal of roles in determining the meaning of the text. The authority of the producer of the text, of the author, passes to the reader ensuring thereby a multiplicity of meanings proportionate with the number of the readers. Such seems to be the case in the problematic dialogue quoted above. When Alceste dismisses the narrator's argument about how he understood and interpreted the questioned texts as a reader, she denies him the authority of intention as an author.

My view of the narrator in this chapter concurs with Mann's main thesis that Chaucer's presentation of the narrator privileges his position as a reader. However, I tend to see the implications of the presentation of the narrator as a reader not in terms

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[37] Or rather "real reading" which defies the text in controlling and organising the reader's response. See p. 5. See also Travis, 'Affective Criticism', p. 212.

[38] 'The Authority of Audience', p. 6.

of reading the poems as manifestations of reading process but rather in terms of the narrator's experience as that of reading. Reading as the experience of the narrator serves the subordinate purpose that, through it, Chaucer establishes the origins of his poetic engagement as the literary tradition. Accordingly, as different from Mann's thesis, moreover, I will not argue that -if reading is to confer a meaning on the text- reading is considerably monitored by the reader's predisposition to the text.[39] Indeterminacy of fictional truth and its openness to (mis)interpretation underlie Chaucer's presentation of women. It is the reader/author's problematic authoritative position that Chaucer is delving. While he indicates that the text is capable of generating multiple meanings, he also shows that these meanings can easily be suppressed or imprisoned or limited to singleness through the ostensibly liberating authority of the reader/author. Evidently, Chaucer's pose as a reader illustrates the power the reader has over the meaning of the text. Yet such awareness is not only with regard to the meaning inferred but also with regard to the meaning conferred. Therefore, it also shows that the attempt at liberating the meaning of the text puts the reader in a position of encapsulating the meaning in his own reading. Therefore, the narrator's role as a reader does not encourage random and often inaccurate appreciation of the text governed by his or her real life experiences or knowledge. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator is confronted with the blunt truth not only that texts are open to (mis)interpretation but also that he, as a

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[39] My disagreement, however, is not so much with Mann's view as it is with the effect of the use of a reading narrator. The narrator's free use of authority to alter the original text, as in the Dido episode, or to point out its restraining qualities, as in the *Troilus*, directs the attention to the primacy of authority in managing a text. A real reader -a reader who comes to the text with certain expectations- may leave it unfinished, but this does not tell us much about his/her interpretive activity.

professional reader, has equal responsibility in generation and dissemination of such interpretations. The question seems to be not so much as where the meanings come from as where the poems come from. Chaucer's narrator does not seem to be oblivious to the fact that his reading of the others' texts results in interpreting them and furthering the "sentence" as reformulated in his readings. In other words, he aims at an authorial recognition -an authorial recognition that derives from his experience of reading the "tradition".

Chaucer's narrator's authorial standpoint is deliberately contingent on the texts from which it derives. By subscribing to the role of a reader/poet, he defines his narratorial activity in terms of recomposing the antecedent texts and authors. In this, his activity opens a platform of disputables. While his position of inexperience puts him on a par with the position of the reader to whom he addresses his poem, Chaucer's narrator attempts also a more direct way of involving the reader in what he is doing. He seeks, above all, to establish a common domain of interaction.[40] His easy, conversational manner of narrating the happenings before, during and after his dream is marked with the tone of a speaker who wishes to abolish the potential barriers between himself and his audience. He is a trusting narrator; he assures the reader/listener of his confidence in their judgment: "well you wot" (BD 16); he is, on the other hand, conscious of the possible disparities between his perceptions and those of his audience when he jokingly threatens ill luck to those who might misinterpret his dream (HF 94-108).

Alexander Weiss associates this casual and familiar tone with the posture of

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[40] See Mehl, *Geoffrey Chaucer: An Introduction to His Narrative Poetry*, pp. 14-15.

Guillaume de Lorris in his addresses to the audience. As Weiss further acknowledges, however, though Guillaume de Lorris' direct addresses to the audience -thus engaging the audience in a conversational manner- may form a precedent for Chaucer, Chaucer's narrator goes far beyond its predecessor in claiming the audience's participation.[41] As opposed to Guillaume's intermittent, and sometimes challenging asides to the audience as to the purpose and significance of his narration, Chaucer's narrator makes the presence of the audience as conspicuous as that of himself. Significantly, in Chaucer, it is often the books, stories that are referred to the audience. An illustrative example can be given from *Troilus and Criseyde*. The narrator, midway through his "translation" of *Troilus*, defers the authorial right to the reader for correction and restructuring of his text (III, 1331-36) with the significant reminder that

> But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al
> As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,
> Yet have I seyd, and God toforn, and shal
> In every thyng, al holly his sentence;
> And if that ich, at Loves reverence,
> Have any in eched for the beste,
> Doth therewithal right as youreselven leste. (III, 1324-1330)

As we will see in the following chapters, in the representations of women, Chaucer utilises this conditional shift in the location of authority to underline the possibility of new perspectives, and thus new texts.

Meanwhile, the narrator becomes a performer whose performance allows the

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[41] *Chaucer's Native Heritage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp.202-203. Weiss' comparison of Chaucer's conversational style with that of Guillaume de Lorris' focuses on the style and syntax which he argues Chaucer simplified to create a more clear and direct effect.

audience's participation on a different level but similar in nature to that of himself. The effect of this mutual involvement is partly to permit the audience to develop an approach to the matter of the poem independent of the narrator. The interaction sought by the narrator as the teller or the performer of an experience feeds on the "discussion topics" provided by the narrator's statements that mark the opening of each poem: the affirmation of the use of books in the *Parliament of Fowls* as "men seyth" (22-25), the discussion of dream theories with regard to their truth value in the *House of Fame* (1-55) with the conclusion that "...I of noon opinion" (55).The statements present thoughts and concepts entertained by the narrator, and they are marked by the narrator's presentational manner. They help to set an agenda and identify the narratorial stance. In their multiplicity and paradoxical coexistence and the narrator's open declaration of noncommitment to any one of the presented arguments, they ask and answer rhetorical questions which are useful to elicit a critical approach from the audience.

Nevertheless, the narrator's manner of presenting his subject to the audience betrays an unsteady, and a slightly unstructured argumentative stance. Particularly in the *House of Fame*, the discussion of dreams invites debate but then evades the whole paradigm by returning to the single point of view which the audience is compelled to share. Evidently, his readiness to share his dream with the audience reveals also a readiness to communicate a blend of received knowledge and critical analysis. The importance of his stance lies in his engagement with citation of authorities to support his argument. This, of course, is a pervasive practice throughout all poems. In other words, his cultivated views of the experience he relates point to the fact that his representations can be deconstructed to their origins. That is, he is constructing, for

the reader, a text out of texts, and the acknowledgement of the process may enable the reader to participate in a similar act.[42]

At significant points in each poem we witness that the dialogue between the narrator and the audience is preserved. Intercepted occasionally by frustrating inadequacies assumed by the narrator, as in his pleas to Apollo in the *House of Fame* (1091-1109), the narration is continued with the ever-presence of "yow lovers" or those who can endite better and more often the undistinguished "you".[43] In this context, the dialogue with the audience is one that stresses the alterity of the narrator and the audience. The invoked "yow" admittedly encompasses a range of knowledge which is not shared by the narrator. The gap is, however, narrowed by providing the books and their pertinent contexts for reference.

The narrator's engagement of the audience in the act of narrating nevertheless involves an expectation of delayed response. At least temporarily, the audience's participation is kept at the level of witnessing and observing the events or the sentiments conveyed in the poem. In other words, although engagement of the audience encourages a divide of authority, the authority of the present narration lies chiefly with the narrator. As the reader of other authors, he admits his experience

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[42] See H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., 'Our Tongues Différance: Textuality and Deconstruction in Chaucer', in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. by Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 15-26.

[43] Susan Schibanoff takes a different view to the audience. She argues that the dreamer acknowledges the audience but shows no sign of anxiety of misinterpretation. The distinction is perceived in that in the early poems Chaucer conceives an "old reader" -the hearer of recitation by the poet- whose response to the text is conveniently secured by the actual presence of the poet. See "The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer", *SAC*, 10 (1988), 71-108 (pp. 98-100).

(what he knows and narrates) to be shaped by his reading. Nevertheless, his representation of this experience in front of a textually invoked audience[44] betrays a willingness to assert his own authority. Yet the claims to authorial position are bound to be temporal and often locally functional. In the *House of Fame*, in the Dido episode, the narrator poses as a reliable authority in his function of retelling the story of Dido and Aeneas as he has read it in the dream. In turn, for a possible different reading, he invites the audience to consult other authors: Virgil and Ovid. The narrator's habit of invoking the audience thus promotes a freedom of interpretation as practised by himself and defines the limits of that freedom as located within the textual reference point i.e. the literary tradition which he makes available to the audience. His mediation of texts hence does not confine the reader to what his "reading" indicates but points also towards the sources of its origin.

I would like to suggest that Chaucer's presentation of his narrator as a reader/poet achieves its presupposed goal in the narrator's appearance as a presenter or a speaker giving a presentation at a conference. This speaker presupposes that the audience will recognise and identify the literary allusions, poetic extrapolations, summaries and interpretations he presents. His mode lends itself in a way to a standard scholarly mode of investigative procedures; it is a method of "progress via authorities". He aims to introduce new ways of perceiving and analysing what is assumed to be known to his audience. He knows that in this sense he is an authority as well; but he also realises that his authority derives from the capacity of the text to bear multiple

[44] I use the term "audience" to cover all the possible readers of the poem. See Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual", *ChauR*, 18:2 (1983), 137-145, for an analysis of the implications of audience in Chaucer's poetry.

meanings and to lend itself to interpretation. His choice among these multiple meanings is purposely not very often clearly defined, for definition and certainty, unlike the narrator of Jean de Meun,[45] are not what he encourages his audience to pursue. In his presentation before this large and learned group, he is prepared to share and even hand over the authority he is bestowed with as a speaker; but the authority his audience is invited to exercise will be of similar nature to that of a reader: i.e. that authority is to be exercised individually, separately and differently. Therefore, the dialogue with the audience will guarantee that the nature of authority that lies with the reader should be understood and exercised in that proper capacity. This strategy not only legitimises his position but also substantiates and explains Chaucer's attitude toward the implications of prefabricated meaning.

Presenting the narrator as a reader who has compiled a great deal of textually verifiable information has profound and overreaching implications for Chaucer's idea of poetry. Always grounded in an epistemologically unfixed domain, poetry, for Chaucer, does not provide stable, firmly established, unchallengeable views or truths. This distrust of fiction as a source of reliable knowledge, on the other hand, derives not from a Platonic idealism or Patristic view of singular truth,[46] but from a recognition of fictional creation as contingent on its creator. Implicated by the narratorial pose as well is the realisation of the power of perspective to render suspect the established notions and conventional contexts in fictional representations. It is a

[45] See lines 15145-50; 15239-36 of the *Romance of the Rose.*

[46] See Sherron E. Knopp, 'Augustinian Poetic Theory and the Chaucerian Imagination' in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Ronald R. Howard,* ed. by James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 91-107.

realisation that informs the priorities of the poet Chaucer when he tries his hand at a fictionally stabilised representation in search of a potential destabilisation. It is the same realisation that urged him to place the origin of his poetry so firmly in the preceding generations so that the shift in perspective should illustrate the shift in meaning and presentation of meaning. This may explain Chaucer's constant strategy noted by Derek Brewer: "within [Chaucer's] imaginative work, he takes no responsibility. He throws it on to the reader. We are treated as equals."[47]

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[47] 'Gothic Chaucer',in *Geoffrey Chaucer,* Writers and Their Background, ed. by D. S .Brewer (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1974), pp. 1-32 (p.32).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WOMEN IN THE BOOKS: ALCIONE AND DIDO

In the previous two chapters, I sought to demonstrate that Chaucer's use of the dream poem and his location of the narrator in the poem as a reader/poet point to a significant insistence on the fictionality of poetic experience. The predominantly literary quality of his dream poems and the narrator's engagement in an act of reading-turned-writing indicate the realisation of a constant interaction between the past and present. Accommodation of a variety of material in the body of the dream poem allows the functional coexistence of the past and present. The narrator's position as a reader suggests a complex pattern of authority, which recognises the subjectivity of the individual authorial stance and redefines the significance of the poetic work.

I have suggested that Chaucer's dialogue with the past as he understands and promotes its role in poetic creation can be observed in this innovative and suggestive use of the dream poem and the narrator. As we have seen in Chapter Two and Chapter Three respectively, the role of the past as a source of inspiration and knowledge has been acknowledged both in restructuring the dream poem and repositioning the narrator in the dream as an important device of the narration.

As stated in the Introduction to this study, moreover, Chaucer's engagement with literary tradition can be seen as an inquiry into the processes of fictional creation. In Chaucer's use, the dream poem serves as the locus where the fictional creation takes place. The narrator's position as a reader who ultimately adopts an authoritative stance which is subjective and governed by the book, or reading, that generates it, on the other hand, suggests individual authority as an essential determinant in poetic creation

even when the poetic creation derives from the antecedent texts. Chaucer's innovative use of dream-form and the narrator indicates a Bloomian negation of authority of the precursor. However, Chaucer's attempt at a re-examination of the implications of tradition and the individual poet's place in the tradition tends more to foreground the opposition between authors or authorities necessitated by their different poetic demands than to subsume one in the other. Chaucer recognises authority as exercised by the author, which in turn is delimited by the context, dictated by the genre or usurped by concerned agents of power as the responsible agent of determinacy in poetic creation. Exposing the contingency of authority through his representations of women, Chaucer advocates a plurality of discourse. These discourses stand in opposition to each other but nevertheless must maintain a necessary co-existence.

This chapter is concerned with the representations of Alcione and Dido as the problem of authority comes into interplay of the stories of these heroines or victims and signals a change in the stability of their positions. It will be seen that as the authority shifts from the subject[1] to the object of the narration, as in Alcione, and from one author to the other, as in Dido, the apparently reliable and stable grounds of

[1] Although I use the term to denote the one who actively creates or writes, one whose subjectivity, as I try to explore in the subsequent chapters as well, is frequently foregrounded by Chaucer, my use of "subject" is resonant of this concept in Lacanian criticism. See Frederic Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject', in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman, 3rd ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University, 1989, Originally published by Yale French Studies, 1977; First print by Johns Hopkins, 1982), pp.338-395. As Chaucer's representations of women indicate, the subject is the one who speaks in the writing to construct a narrative. As women in Chaucer frequently occupy the position of the object, the written, as opposed to the subject, the similarity to the opposition between the Subject and the Other of feminist criticism is worth noting. See Simone de Beauvoir 'Woman and the Other', in *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder (Oxford University Press in association with the Open University, 1992, First pub. 1990), pp.305-310.

fictional representation will also assume a status of questionables as opposed to that of absolutes. Examination of Alcione and Dido, therefore, will focus on their position and function in the narrative.

The first thing to be noted about the narrative context which brings Alcione and Dido into the respective poems is the priority of place in the story. Alcione and Dido feature in "old stories" specifically incorporated into the main composition of the poems, the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame* respectively and are retold by the narrator as a consequence of reading. Alcione is the loving and beloved wife of Ceyx whom she loses through an unfortunate storm. She dies consequently. The narrator, a long-time sufferer of insomnia, -"Myselven cannot telle why.../I holde hit be a sicknesse/ That I have suffred this eight yeer" (34;36-37)- chances upon the story in a book, a "romaunce", brought to him to read and pass the night away. This book is a collection of writings, it "ne spak but of such thinges,/Of quenes lives, and of kinges, and many other thinges smale" (57-59). The narrator picks the story of Ceyx and Alcione, reads it and retells it for the reader, for he thinks it is "a wonder thing": "This was the tale: There was a king/That highte Seys, and had a wif,/The beste that mighte bere lyf,/ And this quene highte Alcione" (61-65). Dido is the Queen of Carthage who loves Aeneas and meets her death through and because of that love. Like Alcione, Dido in the *House of Fame* enters the narrative through a book. In Book I, the narrator finds himself in the Temple of Venus, "ymad of glas," in which "ther were moo ymages/Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages,/And more ryche tabernacles,/And with perre moo pynacles,/And moo curiouse portreytures,/And queynte maner of figures/Of olde werk, then I saw ever" (121-26). Wandering about the temple, he comes upon a story the first few lines of which are provided in direct

quotation: "Thus written on a table of bras;/I wol now singe, yif I kan,/ The armes and also the man/That first cam, thurgh his destinee, Fugityf of Troy contree,/In Itayle, with ful moche pyne/Unto the strondes of Lavyne" (142-148). The narration proceeds swiftly until the hero's, Aeneas, arrival in Carthage and seems to be intent to keep that pace when the narrator intercedes "And, shortly of this thyng to pace, She [Venus] made Eneas so in grace of Dido, quene of that contree,/That, shortly for to tellen, she/ Becam hys love and let hym doo/ Al that weddynge longeth too" (239-244).

Introduced via the books available to the reading narrator, initially, neither Alcione nor Dido occupy the first place in the narrative. The initial emphasis is on the men with whom the women are associated. Alcione is Ceyx's wife, and Dido is Aeneas' lover who let him do "Al that weddynge longeth too." This situation will be changed and the women will claim priority as opposed to their male counterparts. I would suggest that this change in the focus of narrative is where the challenge to the antecedent texts, the tradition, is initiated. The suggested basic outline is that Alcione and Dido both experience love and suffer death as a consequence. Alcione dies after her husband's demise in a storm, Dido commits suicide when she is deserted by Aeneas. However, they live in the stories that, taking the consequences of their love as their basis, provide them with a continuous textual existence. They live in old stories and come to Chaucer's poetry as women in old stories. Chaucer's representations of these women from old books suggest, and to some extent establish the grounds, that the interaction between the text and the women is indicative of women gaining life from the texts and in turn giving life to the texts by facilitating their existence.

The textual history of Alcione and Dido provide a context for women's

continuity in texts. Ceyx and Alcione and Dido and Aeneas stories are well-known and have been frequently employed for poetic purposes. Chaucer and his contemporaries knew the story of Ceyx and Alcione through Ovid. While Ovid is the poet who authorises the story as that of love and reward,[2] Chaucer's contemporaries make a dissective use of it. In the *Paradys d'Amours*, Froissart prays to Juno and Morpheus for a dream in which he can make his complaint to the God of Love.[3] Machaut, likewise, concentrates on the Morpheus episode in his *Fonteinne Amoureuse*. The lover, suffering from unrequited love, recalls Alcione's story and wishes for a mediation of Morpheus so that Morpheus might carry a message to his lady as he delivered a dream to Alcione.[4] In the Dido episode Chaucer cites Ovid and Virgil as "auctorite". Gavin Douglas takes issue with Chaucer's use of the *Aeneid* on the grounds that he misread Virgil,[5] but readings of Virgil's epic, the *Aeneid*, have always taken issue with Dido's representation and raised questions about the truth of his fiction through Dido. The leading figure in centralising Dido is Ovid in *Heroides*. Ovid presents the love affair entirely from Dido's point of view at the expense of deriding Virgil's epic hero.[6] Jean de Meun, Machaut and Cretien de Troyes follow suit

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[2] Ovid recontextualises the myth; he creates a story of mutual love out of the earlier versions which centralise the impiety and the pride of the couple, which leads the gods to exact vengeance on them. See Elaine Fantham, 'Ovid's Ceyx and Alcione: The Metamorphosis of a Myth', *Phoenix*, 33 (1979), 330-45.

[3] See *Le Paradys d'Amours*, 1-117.

[4] *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse*, 555-907.

[5] Reference is from *Eneados* as cited in Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years Of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*, I, p.72.

[6]*Heroides and Amores*, ed. by Grant Showerman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914)

with Ovid in their attack on Aeneas as a seducer. [7]

The textual traditions of the stories indicate a dissimilarity in their use. While the Ceyx and Alcione story is evidently considered as a text that provides a precedent for truth in love,[8] a special function is identified in the dream Juno provides for Alcione.[9] In Dido's case, there is a challenge to the author of the text on the grounds of its representational priorities. I return to this issue below. It is significant that, when Boccaccio takes up Dido, he posits a defence on behalf of Virgil as follows: Virgil "was well aware that Dido had really been a woman of exceptionally high character, who would rather die by her own hand than subdue the vow of chastity fixed deep in her heart to second marriage. But that he might attain the proper effect of his work under the artifice of a poetic disguise, he composed a story in many respects like that of the historical Dido, according to the privilege of poets established by ancient custom."[10] Defending Virgil on poetic grounds in fact endorses the charge made against him by other poets. Yet, it also provides a somewhat clearer criterion for the

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[7] La Vieille comments: "And so he reassured her and promised and swore to her that he was and ever would be hers and that never would he leave her; but she didn't have much joy of it, for the traitor decamped without leave over the sea by ship, through which the fair one lost her life", *The Roman de la Rose,* 13187-94. For line references to Machaut's *Jugement de Navarre* and Cretien de Troy's *Erec*, see Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p.84.

[8] It is important to note that in the dream of Alcione, the *Book of the Duchess*, the main dream narrative embraces another dream narrative. A further similarity can also be seen in the use of both the *Book of the Duchess* and Alcione's dream in that they are both enabling for poetic creation. As we will see below Alcione uses the dream as a functional device to maintain her authorial position.

[9] Gower's lover hears the story as an exemplum which proves that dreams are sometimes prophetic. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* ed. by Russell A. Peck (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1989, first pub. 1980), p. 225.

[10] *De Genealogia Deorum* XIV,13.

presentation of Dido. Chaucer was familiar with the textual and fictional traditions that brought Dido as well as Alcione to his time.[11] I would argue that his awareness of the use of Alcione's story as a text and Dido's story as a problem of fictional representation informs Alcione's and Dido's functions in his poems. As Boccaccio stresses in drawing attention to Virgil's rendering of Dido as a fictional practice, the truth of the "fictional truth" in Dido is that the poet uses the licence of authority and creates a fictional character that would serve his poetic purposes. Dido, in Virgil, is not a character, historical or imaginary, but a fictional construct. By forming an essential part of the epic text, she is primarily the "matere" to be formed and given shape according to the demands of the poem.

In what follows, I will analyse Alcione and Dido separately. As I have suggested, Alcione and Dido share a common representational ground, i.e. they come into Chaucer's narrative through mediated stories; however, they serve different functions in differently viewed stories. The major dissimilarity I can observe lies in their positions in their respective stories. Alcione, in Chaucer's presentation, assumes an active role in that she participates in the creation of her story, the text, and achieves a partial control which ultimately alters her role in the story as well as modifying the tradition in a Chaucerian way of conformity in change. That is, she uses the authorities of her fictional world to write her own text. Assuming the position of the author, she is a creator, a doer. In contrast, Dido's desertion by Aeneas establishes her position as the poetic object, the "matere", subject to diverse interpretations of authors. Ultimately, while Alcione improves her status in the fictional hierarchy of her story, the problem

[11] See Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, pp.79-87, for the circulation of the Dido story and the works available to Chaucer; pp 29-31 give the now commonly recognised history of Ceyx and Alcione story.

of representation in Dido raises significant questions about the reliability of fictional product, between appearance and reality as the narrator puts it in evaluating Dido (HF, I, 263-64).

Consideration of Alcione in Chaucer will have to take into account the defining significance of the episode. It has been generally accepted that Chaucer's use of the Ceyx and Alcione story indicates an engagement with the problem of fictional creation. As Robert Burlin notes, the narrator is "literally 'using' a work of fiction."[12] The work of fiction is the story of Ceyx and Alcione and criticism tends to correlate the theme of the Ceyx and Alcione story with the theme pursued and explored in the dream proper, where the Knight is encouraged to speak of his love and lady.[13] Robert W. Hanning locates the twin concerns of the *Book of the Duchess*, "the nature of poetry and the problem of grief", in the Ceyx and Alcione story "where these two thematic interests first intersect and identify themselves."[14] The function of the story as a structural and thematic "catalyst"[15] is considered to be implied through Alcione. Burlin contends, "it is for Alcione to introduce into the poem the concept of love between husband and wife that is deep and passionate. The quality of her love

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[12] *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.59. As I note below, however, Burlin associates this concern with the creation of a poem that originates from the narrator's reading and resituates its relevance to the dream proper.

[13] The view of resemblance between the Knight's situation and Alcione's needs not be challenged, for, as I will be arguing, they speak to each other across the narrator's story. A direct correlation is suggested by Clemen "Just as Halycone was comforted by the appearance of her husband in a dream, the Knight was comforted by recalling his dead wife to mind as he told his own story", *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p.31.

[14] 'Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*', pp. 133-134.

[15]Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid', p.134.

provides a needed link, dramatically and thematically to the situation of the Black Knight."[16]

I would suggest a different context for the correlation between the Knight's and Alcione's narratives. It is important to note that Chaucer's engagement with the story foregrounds and confirms a tradition of textual and oral transmission. The Ceyx and Alcione's story is a mediated fictional story. It is a "fable", chosen from a book that contains many others written and preserved by poets. Chaucer stresses the oldness and the otherness of the book: "And in this bok were written fables/That clerkes had in olde tyme,/And other poets, put in rime/To rede and for to be in minde,/While men loved the lawe of kinde" (51-56),[17] but he also stresses the textual life of the "fables". The mention of the origins pertains primarily to the "book of fables" and defines the existential conditions of each story therein. Ceyx and Alcione story originally belongs to different times, "olde tyme". Yet the poets have written and mediated the stories for the benefit of posterity. "Ceyx and Alcione" is a story selected from a collection of old material: "Among al this I fond a tale" (59). The narrator reads the tale. It is primarily a text. The narrator reads about a king who dies. He also reads about a queen who also dies but stays in the narrator's memory the next day all day long: "Such sorrow this lady to her tok" and "I who made this book". The lady inhabits the

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[16] *Chaucerian Fiction*, p. 62. For a similar view see John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 72-73.

[17] Fyler, in his discussion of the episode in *Chaucer and Ovid,* discerns a contrast between the age of gold "when man loved the law of kynde" and the age of iron, or the present age. He further suggests that both the narrator and the Knight are historically displaced for yearning for an age that is far past and gone. Obviously, there is an emphatic recognition of the past in the description of the book read by the narrator. However, I tend to think that while entering into present through poems, past serves as a creative stimulant not as a philosophical contrast.

textual world of a book and is evidently significant in the textual world of another book. The mediation obvious in the preservation of the "old book" pertains to the lady, too. There is a text being written, and it is closely associated with the text read. Somewhere in between the text read and the text written is Alcione and her story. Alcione's sorrow pervades the "book made", but nonetheless has autonomy.[18] I would locate the significance of Ceyx and Alcione story in its suggestive creativity. Unlike Machaut's lover, Chaucer's narrator fails to identify with Alcione's sorrow or love. Significantly, reading Alcione's "tale/That me thoughte a wonder thing" (60-61) leads to creation of another tale, another book. The narrator makes use of Alcione's narrative strategy (her prayer to Juno) to set himself free from the intellectual and emotional paralysis that turns him into a "mased thyng"(12); he prays to Juno for sleep, falls asleep, dreams and "makes the book". The new book, like the book of fables that stimulated its formation, contains independent stories: Ceyx and Alcione and the Black Knight and Lady White and the framing story of the narrator's insomnia and its creative consequences. Therefore, Ceyx and Alcione story, as has been argued, is central to the creation of the poem that the narrator owns as his own, but when the narrator wakes up from his poetic vision, he is still holding the Ceyx and Alcione story in his hand. The story has its own life; the narrator's use of it as a reader/author facilitates access to another book, the book of the Black Knight. Like Alcione, the Knight is grieved due to loss of his spouse. And like Alcione's, the Knight's "sorrowful imagination" is activated to produce a story. The narrator's role in the action of the poem that he "makes" is primarily to read. He reads two stories in the

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[18] The structural independence of the story is noted by Robert Jordan who identifies in it a thematic relevance to the dream content. See, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader,* p.74.

Book of the Duchess. Both stories concern love, loss and grief, and both are creations of individual "authors". More importantly, both stories create and maintain an image of woman without which the poetic nature of the enterprise cannot be maintained. The image of woman created in the Ceyx and Alcione story is largely dependent on the reversal of Alcione's situation in the formation and mediation of the text. The Black Knight, drawing on an established tradition of love poetry, offers a portrait of his lady. As we will see in the following chapter, the privilege of authorial standpoint is entertained by the Knight, and his lady is treated as the symbol of ideal femininity which is negotiated and stabilised through the use of allegiance to Love.

Evidently, acknowledging the textual autonomy of the story of the Ceyx and Alcione draws attention to the origins of its formation. Chaucer provides the "old book frame" without mentioning the actual sources as he does in the Dido episode. As I suggest below, that is mainly because, in the Ceyx and Alcione story, the concern is the act of creation and the process in which the use of individual authority closely aligns with utilisation of other authorities for narrative closure. Chaucer demonstrates the process of poetic creation through Alcione. Nevertheless, indicated in the described old book there lies also an invitation for an inquiry into the textual sources of the story. Chaucer's identified sources for the episode are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Machaut's *Founteinne Amoreusse.*[19] The Ceyx and Alcione story is one of the few

[19] James Wimsatt proposes an indebtedness to the *Aeneid* and the *Roman de la Rose* along with the commonly recognised *Metamorphoses* and Machaut's *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoreuse.* See 'The Sources of Chaucer's Seys and Alcione', *Medium Aevum,* 36 (1967), 231-41. See also James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of the Book of the Duchess*; B.A. Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues.*

stories of faithful love in the *Metamorphoses.*[20] It forms the longest single episode in the book. The story begins at XI.266 and continues to XI.748, Alcione assuming centrality from XI.410 onwards. With Alcione's appearance, the focus of the narrative shifts towards the mutual love between Ceyx and Alcione, and love motif takes over entirely once Ceyx leaves for his visit to the oracle. When Ceyx is outside the narrative, away from the country, home and wife, Alcione becomes the object of the story and the means of foregrounding love in preparation for the final metamorphosis as a reward.

Running through Ovid's story of love, death and suffering with partial compensation, it is possible to see also a story of power and subjection. In retelling, Chaucer modifies the story considerably. As we will see below, the major modification is the excision of metamorphosis at the end of the story.[21] The alteration of Ovid's version is based on a recognition of the centrality of the "power" element. Considered as a narrative in which Ceyx and Alcione are the human actors, in Ovid, the protagonists, particularly Alcione, lack power. Alcione occupies the larger sum of the story, but her pertinence to the narrative lies in the fact that she stands at the center of a complex interaction of power and subjection, and is the one who is constantly subjugated by it until and including her metamorphosis at the end.

As Hansen maintains, in Ovid, as in Machaut, Alcione is a figure of fear,

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[20] The stories of Pyramus and Thisbe, Cephalus and Procris and Philemon and Baucis, which revolve around error, jealousy and devotion are among the narratives of mutual love. On the Ceyx and Alcione story in Ovid, see A. H. F. Griffin, 'The Ceyx Legend in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI', *Classical Quarterly*, 31: i (1981), 147-154.

[21] Chaucer also suppresses the storm scene which drowns Ceyx. For the alterations to the story see Finley E. Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), pp. 3-12.

devotion and jealousy.[22] Her limited activity is governed by these emotive reactions. Fittingly, Alcione tries twice to take a partially active part to prevent her fears being fulfilled. Alcione "the faithful" burst into tears when Ceyx tells her about his planned journey, and protests "Where is that care for me, that used to come before everything else?" Alcione's attitude is in ironic contrast with the agents of narrative control. In the *Metamorphoses*, the gods are the active agents of power. They control and direct the lives of the individuals by means of reward or punishment. Alcione's first appearance is when the god-offender Peleus' sheep are attacked by a wolf, which Peleus recognises as an act of divine punishment, and Ceyx offers to go to his help. The sign of danger alarms Alcione, for she is overwhelmed by the concern for her husband's safety. She beseeches him not to go so that by saving his live he could save hers. Anticipation of potential death, then, introduces Alcione into the story as a person who senses the prominence of superior powers. Her "womanly" efforts to stop Ceyx from going show also that Alcione recognises the power relation in her world. In the lower sphere, the world of mortals, she is supplicant to her husband. She does not take an effective active part, but she uses the means available to her as a "faithful" wife. Alcione's intervention from the point of submissive character produces a significant result. Temporarily, Ceyx is safe; however not as a result of Alcione's pleas but because Peleus declines Ceyx's offer for help. The higher sphere, the supernatural domain, enters the narrative as a directly relevant force when Ceyx reveals his plan to go to consult the oracle about the loss of his brother. Alcione particularises the awareness of inevitability into the power of the sea, the potential for storm and death,

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[22] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 64-65.

and presents it as a powerful threat to their autonomy, their oneness in love. It is powerlessness that Alcione focuses on: Even the God of Winds, her father, cannot control the self-motivated winds. The source of information and the control over Ceyx's future lie elsewhere, in the world of supernatural powers. Fortune demands that Ceyx die, the winds oblige and bring about the storm. The gods, authorities in the lives of Ceyx and Alcione, consider their love only after they are separated by death and grant their mutual wish.

As stated above, Chaucer's French contemporaries use the Ceyx and Alcione story as a pre-text for their own poetic concerns. The main incentive in the use of the story as such is the recognition of it as Alcione's story, which, in nuclear form, comprises the revealing dream earned by true love. In Ovid, during her husband's absence, Alcione is not only the faithful wife, inactive and patient, once her correspondence with Ceyx is no more possible, but also is oblivious of the facts of the story. In her total submission to authority lies also a trust. By recognising the power and control lying in the supernatural realm, she credits her subjection with the capacity to earn protection. In this context, Juno's decision to send her a "true" dream serves as a final touch of demonstration of Alcione's subjection to the authority of gods and the designed course of the story. The ending of the story in the transformation of the loving couple into sea birds finalises the power of external forces.

Alcione, in this frame, is a woman of no self-authority. Her bond with her husband, loving and dear though it is, forces her to submit to the decisions first of her husband and then of the gods. The story is not her story, it is about her. It is significant that the poets who mediate her story dwell more on Juno's benevolent act of granting the dream than on Alcione herself. The use of Alcione's story as a poetic

pretext can be seen, as John Fyler suggests, "a refusal to dwell on its controlling and pathetic theme" that Ovid's story develops.[23] It is more likely, however, that, once the story of Ceyx and Alcione is textualised by Ovid, its significance and function are determined by each reader/author.[24] I suggest a similar occurrence for Dido below. Subsequent authors who mediate the story redefine the range of meanings it can bear. Alcione, in these readings, is a constituent of the text. Chaucer's narrator identifies his gain from the story as the long-wished sleep he eventually has. Obviously, if any insensitivity to the emotional import of Ovid's story is demonstrated, the leading figure who does that is Chaucer's narrator. He clearly differentiates between the story he reads and its significance to his narration: "Yf he kan make me slepe sone,/ As did the goddesse quene Alcione" (263-64). Differently from other uses, on the other hand, the narrator does not wish to dream of his lady, and his insomnia is vaguely associated with love (30-40). His earned sleep enables him to write this poem, though there is no indication at this stage in the narrator's account that he is a poet who needs

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[23] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.69. See also Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid', p.130, for a consideration of the status of the Ceyx and Alcione story in Machaut "as an old, exemplary tale, an *auctoritas*."

[24] On Ovid's contextualisation of the legend, see A.H. F. Griffin, 'The Ceyx Legend in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI' , pp.147-154. A brief mention is due of the exegetical commentaries on the story. Exegetical readings centralise Alcione and Ceyx in their oppositional attitudes. Bernard Huppé and D. W. Robertson Jr. interpret Alcione as a spiritual failure driven by worldly solicitudes and grief. Likewise, in *Ovid Moralise*, Alcione stands for the worldly goods that Ceyx is to leave behind through his journey in the ship of the Church. See Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr., *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 36-41. For a negation of the interpretation of Alcione as the worldly weakness see Ellen E. Martin, 'The Interpretation of Chaucer's Alcione', *ChauR*, 18 (1983-84), 18-22. Martin states, Chaucer's Alcione "never faints out of lust or loss, but from longing to know Ceyx's fate, not to change it", p. 21.

inspiration.[25]

Sleeplessness ends in a similar way for Alcione. Juno's gift solves a fundamental problem in her story. In Chaucer, the story is more recognisably Alcione's story, and Alcione's dream is functional not only as a source of reliable information about her husband but also a vital narrative force that sustains Alcione's creative and authoritative position. As I have suggested above, Alcione's story has an independent status. Chaucer revises the story. It is my contention that the revision is achieved through Alcione, through alteration of her standing to the story. The manner of narration is perfunctory at the beginning. It is the story of a king called Ceyx who had a wife called Alcione. The king happens to go on the sea, gets shipwrecked and drowns. Fourteen lines are used to accommodate the large background of Ovid's story where Alcione's relation to her husband and her powerlessness in the face of pending disaster are brought in to prepare for the deserved metamorphosis at the end. Instead of the helplessness and subjection fundamental to the characterisation of Alcione in Ovid, the paradigm in Chaucer shifts from the negative and passive, with regard to Alcione's situation in the narrative, to the positive and active. The excision and suppression of the details of the old story create space for the transformation of Alcione's position in the narrative and facilitate a course of action for her. Alcione moves to the centre of the story as the protagonist who not only activates forces but also reconstructs her text.

With the re-positioning of Alcione, the story becomes a battle of poetic forces

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[25] See Gayle Margherita, 'Originary Fantasies and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed.by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 116-141 (p.125), for an association of the narrator's sleeplessness with "lack of poetic inspiration".

on the poetic subject. Ceyx is out of the scene, "drowned" and Alcione is in a position to exercise her potential power to take control. It is instructive to note that centralisation of the woman character as the active agent subverts the pattern of authority in the source story as well as the retellings. In Machaut, too, Alcione is in the foreground. She is actively involved to find out about her husband's death, which she already knows. Yet, the story serves the larger theme of the poem. The powerlessness of Alcione and the dealings of authorities are considerably subsumed. Juno takes pity on Alcione and Ceyx for their truth and devotion in love and changes them into birds. Power is possessed by Juno and Morpheus to a particular effect. The point seized by Machaut is that Alcione's ignorance of her husband's death raises pity in Juno, who activates Morpheus and ensures that Alcione knows the truth through a dream. Granting the dream induces not only sleep but also a communication with the lover. Machaut's lover needs both. Machaut, therefore, retains the element of power in the figure of Morpheus and transposes it for an effect of authority in the lover's dream. Alcione is a figure of empathy for the lover because of the similarity of their lovelorn situation. The story itself is an effective narrative instrument that ultimately resolves the lover's dilemma. However, essentially, Alcione's status is kept as it is in Ovid. Echoed by Chaucer's description of Alcione as the "best wife that beareth life", Machaut, in using the story as an exemplum, preempts in a way any concern for Alcione's individual role.

In Chaucer, Alcione refuses to become a stereotype, a signified that can be used as a signifier by an author. Instead of serving as an exemplum, either for the love situation or the poem that follows the reading of the story, Alcione authors her own story. Her intervention in the narrative development of her story returns us to the

conditions of its formation. Alcione, in this context, engages with her story as a text and her activity is an activity applied from within the text. This does not challenge the status of the story as a text, on the contrary, it repositions its status as such firmly.

As the shift from King Ceyx to Alcione takes on swiftly, we realise that Chaucer's Alcione is in search of authority, she is in search of control over the action of the story. As the narrator insists in lines 80-100, this wife is deeply concerned about her husband and sorrowful that he has not returned at the arranged time. However, her response to her husband's absence is far from being contained in the home where she was left. In fact, the husband's prolonged absence introduces a paradoxical urgency for action. As soon as Alcione enters the narrative as "This lady, that was left at hom" (77) it abounds in action. There is constant movement: "Anon she sent bothe eest and west/ To seke him,..." (88-89). Robert Edwards likens Alcione in Chaucer to the romance heroine whose anxieties grow with the absence of her husband.[26] Yet, obviously this is a role Alcione refuses to play. The book she inhabits is described as a "romance" and Alcione's obedience to and control by the events confirm this depiction in Ovid. Her assigned role is to wait and submit to the consequences of her husband's absence. Alcione responds to her husband's absence with growing anxiety, yet unlike, for instance, Dorigen of *Franklin's Tale*, she sets about trying to understand what has happened. A crucial dissimilarity can be seen in that Alcione not only worries but also wants to penetrate the unknown realms of her story and discover and substantiate for herself the cause of her sorrow.

The narration begins effectively with Alcione at this point. The first active response to Ceyx's absence, I would argue, transforms Alcione from the state of

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[26] Robert Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer*, p. 75.

subjection to the status of effective initiator and creator. Search for her husband might bear two consequences for the progress of the narrative: We can surmise that Ceyx is found and returns home safely, thus Alcione's narrative ends happily. However, we have a readerly superiority to Alcione as does the narrator who recounts the text. We know that Ceyx is dead, and the remaining option, the feared death of Ceyx, is a certainty for Alcione to be discovered. Uncertainty presents epistemological problems for Alcione. For her story to continue, she needs "knowen even/ Whether my lord be quyk or ded" (120-121), a definitive result. The conducted search fails. The search party "founde nought". This temporarily removes Alcione from the domain of power, or at least brings the activity to a halt.

The active role Alcione assumes can be located in her search for narrative control.[27] Yet, the authoritative position is problematic. Taking the position of active agent for the outcome of the story, Alcione fails. She needs to collaborate with other authorities. For the narrative to proceed, she seeks knowledge but the knowledge sought lies beyond her reach. In a characteristic manner recurrent in Chaucer, her experience, the individual initiative to find Ceyx, needs the "old books out of which comes the new knowledge". So, she resorts to Juno, the highest authority both in the story and in the resolution that follows. In Ovid's story, Juno sends Alcione a dream so that the story can come to an end; so that Ceyx can be identified as dead and Alcione's confusion about the course of events can be corrected. In Chaucer, Alcione exercises a power of necessitated choice to continue and finalise the story. It is a

[27] Cf Ellen Martin, 'The Interpretation of Ceyx and Alcione', p.21."Alcione seeks an understanding of, rather than authority over, events in the world." This does not apply to the narrative position of Alcione. Understanding is the initiative motive which establishes Alcione's authorial position.

choice that subjects her to Juno "Ne she koude no reed but oon/ But doun on knees she sat anoon/...'A, mercy, swete lady dere!'/Quod she to Juno, hir goddesse,/'Helpe me out of thys distresse,'" (105-106;108-110). But in seeking Juno's help, Alcione also sets down her terms of collaboration. She wishes to see Ceyx and know what has become of him in a dream that will signify the truth (117-121). It is the truth she is seeking, truth of her husband's end. As the author of her story, her resort to Juno is in a way a resort to an old book. For the construction of her own version, there is needed a crucial narrative element, a "certeyn thinge", to borrow a term from the *Parliament of Fowls*. The authority she is calling upon, Juno, already knows that certain thing. Juno also has the power to disclose it to Alcione. However, the authority of Juno is placed and made subservient to Alcione's demands in that Alcione's definition of the nature and content of the dream serves her own purposes. In other words, Alcione as the supplicant cannot enter the position of holding that kind of power, but she can demand and consequently utilise the "material" that Juno holds in her possession.

In return, she vows allegiance to Juno. She indicates her part in the action as one of subservience and subjection. If Juno sends her news of Ceyx, Alcione "shal make yow sacrifise,/And hooly youres become I shal/ With good wille, body, herte, and al;" (114-16). It seems that Alcione offers to give up her sovereignty, her independent authority, in exchange of superior knowledge. Although, in Chaucer's version, Ceyx's disappearance provides Alcione with a problem that she has to solve both for the sake of the story and for herself as an autonomous being so that she can rewrite a long-circulating narrative, crucial narrative support situated elsewhere necessitates a suspension of individual independence.

The suspension of narrative authority, though, is highly suggestive. The dream provided by Juno gives crucial information, but the nature of information, "certeyn sweven", and its content, "Whether my lord be quyk or ded", as I have indicated above, are defined by Alcione. Dependence on Juno requires a paradoxical compliance from the goddess. I would like to suggest that the appeal to and use of a higher authority enables Alcione to regain and maintain hers. We can see this in the ending of the story.

The dream granted by Juno is moving, but it is also an essential element for the culmination of Alcione's narrative activities. Morpheus, appearing in the image of Ceyx, tells Alcione the "truth":

> My swete wyf,
> Awake!Let be your sorwful lyf,
> For in your sorwe ther lyth no red;
> For, certes, swete, I am but ded.
> Ye shul me never on lyve yse.
> But, goode swete herte, that ye
> Bury my body, for such a tyde
> Ye mowe hyt fynde the see besyde;
> And farewel, swete, my worldes blysse!
> I praye God youre sorwe lysse.
> To lytel while oure blysse lasteth! (201-211)

As Ceyx's speech indicates, Alcione's place in the story is maintained through her sorrow-induced search for certainty and news of her husband. Ceyx insists "Let be your sorwful lyf...I am but ded". Ceyx in a way asks Alcione to stop her life as the knowledge seeker, because he provides answers to the questions that maintained Alcione's presence as an authority in the story. The search for a beloved husband enables Alcione to conduct a narrative of devotion and control, obliges her to utilise

extrinsic power but ends in an inevitable, it ends in death. There is nothing beyond death. Ceyx advises "Let be your sorwful lyf...I am but ded." The source of activity, the source of power is gone. The story ends in the confirmation of death, an irreversible certainty.

The certainty calls for a closure of narrative for Alcione. Ceyx is dead. The story is over. The contract is over. The superior authority is allowed in only in so far as it facilitates Alcione's progress towards conclusion. Therefore, when the story is over for Alcione, an Ovidian metamorphosis is not possible. It seems to me that omission of final intervention by the gods is consequent to Alcyone's conduct in Chaucer's telling and bears significantly on the problem of authority in the story. Alcione does not call upon the authorities any more and disposes the author in her own way. She dies "within the thridde morwe."

Alcione's use of authority for the definition of her own role within her own story does not change the "sentence" of the old book in that love and death as happenings controlled by authorities are not dispelled. The story is a story of love and death; it is also a story of truthful dreams. However, the shift in authorial position causes a radical alteration in the structure of the story and the position and presentation of its heroine. The ascension to power transforms Alcione from the passive to active, changes her story from one of subjection, suffering and ignorance to one of quest for knowledge, autonomy and creation. Taken as an integral part of the textual becoming or fictional creation, the radical change in Alcione's situation in relation to power destabilises the authority of previous writing. It also defines an innovative yet authoritative attitude to tradition. Alcione interferes with a text and rewrites it from a standpoint that empowers her both as a woman and as an authority.

It is an individual response, but also a highly possible one in that the intervention exercised by Alcione is ultimately performed on a text.

Elaine T. Hansen argues that with the certainty of Ceyx's death, Alcione "takes her seemingly proper and inevitable place as a bereaved wife (a woman without a man)" and goes on to suggest that Alcione dies without verbalising regret or protest, is never allowed the expression of the love she has experienced and lost. Hansen compares Alcione's vocal power to that of the male characters, the narrator and the Black Knight, in the *Book of the Duchess* and protests that "As a fundamental difference between bereaved men and women, the bereaved woman simply dies, alone and in silence, the bereaved man lives on to enter into conversation with another man."[28] This is a reading of the end of Alcione's story that I have difficulty to concur with. There is hardly any evidence in Chaucer's version to substantiate Alcione's situation as stereotypical. She chooses death, and her choice (invalidating metamorphosis) contains her love, her voice, her protest, particularly her exercise of authority on a traditional story.

Notwithstanding the difference of views, my purpose in quoting Hansen is not to take issue with her interpretation. It is rather in relation to Dido, the second woman in the "book", I will discuss below that Hansen's observation of narrative inequality is relevant. The readings of the *House of Fame* frequently engage with the question of an attitude to Dido as a woman. Considering the Medieval approach to Dido's story grounded in a romance context, J.A. Bennett suggests that "Chaucer's sympathies, even

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[28] *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, references are from p. 70 and p.71 respectively.

while he shows her folly, are with Dido."[29] As we have seen above, it is mainly the attitude to Dido that gave rise to a tradition of controversy.[30]

I would agree that Chaucer's employment of the Dido episode addresses the question of tradition. However, his engagement of Dido in the questions of tradition tends to be less centred on Dido as a character. In the *House of Fame,* Dido stands in the narrative as the object of a quarrel between two authors, and as far as Chaucer is concerned neither is closer to a decisive victory.[31] I would argue that in the Dido episode Chaucer brings the problem of authority of poetic representation to the fore by identifying for the reader the oppositional demands of poetic context and interpretation.

A comparison with Alcione is instructive. Alcione's entrance to the narrative as her own is due to an uncertainty. Not knowing the outcome of her husband's journey initiates a new beginning for Alcione. The absence of the man, which Hansen identifies as a symptomatic cause for the death of a female figure, is enabling in that from that point onwards Alcione assumes the role of an author. There is an ironic

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[29] *Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of the 'House of Fame',* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.38. For a consideration of Dido's story as a romance and the preoccupation with her plight, see also pp. 27;39. See also F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,* 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1957), p. 482, for the critics who hold the view of a Chaucer sympathetic to Dido. For an oppositional view, see B.G. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the 'House Of Fame',* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 114. Medieval appreciation of the Dido episode was largely governed by St Augustine's confession that Dido is a character to evoke pity. See Nancy K. Ruff, 'Sely Dido: A Good Woman's Fame', *Classical and Modern Literature,* 12:1 (1991), 59-68 (p.60). n.6, for a challenge to the interpretations of Augustine's confession of sympathy for Dido.

[30] See Nancy Ruff , 'Sely Dido: A Good Woman's Fame', pp. 59-60, for a review of some exegetical interpretations of Dido as the "cause of Aeneas' bad reputation".

[31] See Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons,* p.194.

correlation between Alcione and Dido in this respect. Like Alcione, Dido enters the narrative effectively only after the man she loves, Aeneas, leaves. The absence of the beloved creates a story for Dido, too. However, unlike Alcione, Dido is acting on a given, a certainty that defines her position in the narrative as an object of representation. When the love affair is brought to an end by Aeneas, Dido's reaction is that of a victim not only of love and men[32] but also of mediated (mis)representation:

> "O wel-awey that I was born!
> For thurgh yow is my name lorn,
> And alle myn actes red and songe
> Over al thys lond, on every tonge." (345-348)

Aeneas is not only the man who deserts Dido but also the vital force that directs her representational future. For Dido, Aeneas' leaving is not an act of individual consequence; there is her name at stake. Her representation in the books, what other people will say about her, is certain condemnation:

> "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." (353-360).

When Aeneas leaves, there will remain, always attached to Dido's name, an

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[32] Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.48, sees Dido's "betrayal" as induced by love, and Hansen, *Chaucer's Fictions of Gender*, p.94, considers Dido as victimised "at the hands...of [a] typical, deceptive male stranger."

interpretation that will not speak the truth. Dido will never be considered as "Yshamed be thourgh Eneas" but as someone who gets what she deserves. Verbalised despairingly by Dido, the concern of Chaucer's engagement with the Dido episode is the reliability of fictional representation which is questioned and analysed through a complex interrelation between a story and its authors, man and woman, text and interpretation. Dido speaks. In Chaucer's representation her voice is recognised. Significantly, she speaks to confirm a misrepresented continuity in texts.

Chaucer cites two authors for further insight: "Whoso to knowe hit hath purpos,/Rede Virgile in Eneydos/Or the Epistle of Ovyde," (377-379). Offering the authors as alternatives reflects back on the Dido episode. The narrator's initial reading is a text which tells an epic story, "of armes and also the man", but the text shifts focus and begins to tell how Venus "made Aeneas so in grace/ Of Dido".[33] Both of the named authors, Virgil and Ovid, have written accounts of the love between Dido and Aeneas.[34] But only Ovid considers its consequences for Dido. Virgil's primary

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[33] The shift indicates Chaucer's alertness to the generic contrast between epic and love romance. Epic narrative engulfs the romantic recount as the restoration of the epic concern in the end indicates. The same sort of co-existence of generically opposite narratives can be observed in the *Troilus and Criseyde.* As in Virgil's treatment of Dido, in the *Troilus* as well the epic subsumes the rival narrative, i.e. the love narrative enclosed by it. For a consideration of transformation of epic values to romance as a fundamental structural element, see W. T. H. Jackson, *The Challenge of the Medieval Text: Studies in Genre and Interpretation,* ed. by Joan M. Ferrante and Robert W. Hanning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 105-124. See also Robert M. Jordan, 'The Question of Genre: Five Chaucerian Romances', in *Chaucer at Albany*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Burt Franklin & Co, 1975), pp. 77-103. Robert suggests that since Chaucer's use of romance does not observe the "generic boundaries...our proper study must be narrative structures, not genres.", p. 101.

[34] See Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book: Language, Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), pp. 170-171, Delany, *Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*, pp. 48-57, Bennett, *Chaucer's 'Book of Fame'*, pp. 1-51.

concern lies with the "armes and the man". The epic privileges Aeneas' success in overcoming the obstacles on his way to Italy to found his own state. Indicated by Boccaccio's defence of Virgil on poetic grounds as well, Dido, in this frame, has a part to play only in so far as she, for narrative convenience, first provides help and then becomes an obstacle. By resisting the temptation to forego the service for higher good Aeneas proves his *pietas,* and Dido is removed from Aeneas' story. Functional as an instrument for the poetic achievement of Virgil, and Aeneas' heroic mission, she does not receive any further concern once the function required of her is fulfilled. Employed as a device with which Aeneas "wolde have fame/In magnyfyinge of hys name;" (HF,305-306) Dido is disposed by a shame-induced suicide, while Aeneas, as Robert Burlin notes, "escapes to found Rome and be immortalised by Virgil."[35]

There is a fundamental consequence to the use of Dido as a narrative instrument. She is removed from Aeneas' story, but Aeneas stays in her story. That is to say, as Dido laments above, Dido will never be the same Dido that she was before Aeneas' epic journey called at her country. Before Virgil involved Dido in his poetic ambitions, Dido was the queen of Carthage, the city she founded, loyal to her dead husband, loved and respected by her people, an independent authority figure.[36] In her narration of the story of Dido, Christine Pisan stresses the contrast that before Aeneas' beneficial visit to Carthage, "She was spoken of only in terms of her

[35] *Chaucerian Fiction,* p.48.

[36] Virgil is charged with defaming historical Dido. On this issue see George Kane, *Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 40-41. Also John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid,* pp.33-34.

outstanding strenght, courage, and her bold undertaking,"[37] and views Aeneas' arrival in Carthage as an envious act of Fortune which often targets the prosperous. In Christine, we see Dido enjoying a state of power and glory that Aeneas would have vied. Dido earns herself a new name. She is called Dido which means "the woman who has the strenght and force of a man" on account of her "prudent government".[38] After becoming an instrument in the narrative, being transformed from an individual to the common subject of interpretation and interference, her status is that of a poetic object as the Dido debate verifies.[39]

The narrator returns to and finishes his reading with Aeneas' attainment of his goals. But the epic narrative is considerably delayed once Dido enters the scene. The shift in context effects also a reversal of the object of the story. What begins as the story of Aeneas becomes the story of Dido and how Aeneas "betrayed hir."[40] Chaucer

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[37] The *Book of the City of Ladies*, I. 46.3. References to Christine de Pisan are from Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. by Earl Jeffrey Richards, foreword by Marina Warner (New York: Persea Books, 1982).

[38] Ibid, I.46.3. Christine's account of Dido is dominated by a concern with her "name" which she tries to redefine. Interestingly, she stresses Dido's autonomy through an analogy with man. See Lynne Huffer, 'Christine de Pisan: Speaking Like A Woman/Speaking Like A Man', in *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays Toward a Cultural Antropology*, ed. by Edelgard E. DuBruck, Mediaeval Studies,1 (Lewiston/Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), pp. 61-71, for an examination of the problems presented by Christine's authorial position which, in Huffer's view, alienates the feminine voice to find a place in the male-authored tradition.

[39] The engagement with Dido's representation in Virgil is not only in terms of defying Virgil but also continuing the story by changing the subject and the context. Most of this recognises a position for Dido. Yet, the main issue seems to justify Dido's behaviour as opposed to Virgil's justification of Aeneas'.

[40] See Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p.79. Considering Chaucer's Dido and Aeneas story as a "rendering of the *Aeneid*", Clemen argues that the Dido episode "offers several instances of his art of taking over well-known material and then going on to disappoint expectations and introduce an ironical contrast to what had been

smuggles Ovid into the narrative and makes him steal the story from Virgil and thus from Aeneas. The narrator begins to read about a Dido who is victimised by an Aeneas who betrays her "unkindly". Through injection of a contrasting version of the Dido-Aeneas story, Virgil's text is being controlled and foiled from within itself. We hear an objection, a competitive voice that speaks concerns contradictory to those of Virgil, or the epic treatment of Dido. As I will be arguing below, this dissenting voice that jars with and violates the integrity of Aeneas serves two essentially related functions in Chaucer's representation of Dido. Firstly, the identified force of Ovid lays a claim to the story as Dido's and insists on a redress through reversal of textual and representational priority. The insistence for a fictional compensation facilitates the accommodation of binary representations of fictional truth in the same text. Secondly, it is particularly owing to Ovid's use of the creative space provided by Virgil, by subjugating Dido to Aeneas and his narrative possessiveness, that Chaucer's account of the "old story" engages with Dido as a problematic in poetic representation.

Through the generic contrast, epic versus romance, Virgil versus Ovid, Chaucer is establishing a dialogue between the poetic priorities of two authors on the same poetic subject. That Dido is a woman in love left by her lover, the authors agree on. However, both in Ovid and Virgil her love is placed with the consequence of disparate representations. While Virgil creates and contextualises Dido, Ovid takes Virgil's creation and recontextualises it. Consequently, although this dialogue between the oppositional demands of authors provides two different portraits of Dido, it also

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familiar." Surely, reversing the implications of the well-known story is not exactly what Chaucer is doing. Yet, disappointment of expectations is what the reader gets, as I will be explaining below.

tends to negate their respective representations. They can exist side by side but they cannot be reconciled.[41] In other words, the possibility of textual intervention, and through it, authorial negation produces a negative criterion for the poetic product. The question is not only who is telling the truth about Dido, was she a victim or a temptress but also what difference such a representational priority makes and whose is the priority. The authors meet in the text written by Chaucer and they conclude differently. Dido is deserted and takes her own life as a result. The reason involves truth and challenges it: "How he betrayed hir, allas,/And lefte hir ful unkyndely/...That he wolde hir of trouthe fayle,/ And wende fro hir to Itayle," (294-298) contrasts with a defensive note "But to excusen Eneas/ Fullyche of al his grete trespas,/The book seyth Mercurie, sauns fayle,/Bad hym goo into Itayle,"(427-430).

Chaucer explores the truth in a negative light in Book II of the *House of Fame*. Fame distributes renown or oblivion, good or bad fame in an arbitrary way. The utterances that come to the house of Fame have already assumed an ambivalent, unreliable nature due to their composition of truth and false. The problem is the uncertainty due to the impossibility of distinguishing the truth from untruth.[42] In Dido's story, however, the premises are clear. The contrasting utterances of authorities maintain their stark differences, and bear on the story independently. Dido's story in Chaucer is an epistemological puzzle "about whose truth or meaning there is no

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[41] See Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the 'Legend of Good Women'*, p.123. Kiser makes the same point on the authorities of Dido's story, but suggests that the narrator's presentation of Ovid as an alternative to Virgil's "one-sidedness" is subsumed by Virgil since the story is Virgil's story after all. See p. 124.

[42] See Chapter Six, Section I below.

consensus".[43]

I would argue that, as opposed to Dido's definitive fear, one of Chaucer's main interests in the narrative is to disable the alternative of consensus and foreground Dido's role as a woman in the negotiations of meaning. It is important to note that Ovid challenges the authority of his predecessor through Dido. The disagreement between the two leading traditions notwithstanding, Dido is the written account, the venue where these demands interact and invalidate each other. We observe that Virgil speaks and Dido's truth changes, then Ovid speaks and the truth changes again. Dido facilitates coexistence of oppositional demands. In the *Legend of Good Women*, where the narrator's pre-defined objective is to "make" stories of good women, the opening of the *Legend of Dido* acknowledges the two differing authorities in the narrative's specified purpose of telling the story of Dido and Aeneas:

> Glorye and honour, Virgil Mantoan,
> Be to thy name! and I shal, as I can,
> Folwe thy lanterne, as thow gost byforn,
> How Eneas to Dido was forsworn.
> In Naso and Eneydos wol I take
> The tenor, and the grete effectes make. (924-29)

The narrator, however, ironically promises "grete effectes" as a preface to the following de-authorisation of Virgil by Ovid. Compared to the *House of Fame*, the

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[43] Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women*, p.194. Jacqueline T. Miller, 'The Writing on the Wall: Authority and Authorship in Chaucer's *House of Fame*' ,*ChauR*,17:2 (1982), 95-115 (p. 106), views the purpose of Virgil's and Ovid's appearance in the Dido episode not "simply to deliver contradictory truths" and points to the discrepancy between the attitudes of Virgil and Ovid to truth. Jesse Gelrich considers the conflict between Virgil's story and Ovid's as "appropriate to larger subject of Chaucer's poem" because of the ambiguity it creates. See *The Idea Of the Book in the Middle Ages*, pp. 174-75.

focus is on a different objective in the *Legend of Good Women*. Chaucer appropriates Virgil to realise the narrative priorities evidenced by Ovid and dictated by the God of Love.[44] Instead of the glory and renown read by the narrator in the *House of Fame*, the paintings Aeneas sees on the walls of the Temple of Venus in the *Legend of Dido* eternalise an inverted account. Through an overt suppression of Virgil, the narrator presents Aeneas as a surrogate Dido of the *House of Fame*. The manipulative subversive power of art pronounces for Aeneas an irreversible shame in the representational domain:

> "Allas that I was born!" quod Eneas;
> "Thourghout the world oure shame is kid so wyde,
> Now it is peynted upon every syde.
> We, that weren in prosperite,
> Been now desclandered, and in swich degre,
> No lenger for to leven I ne kepe." (1023-32)[45]

Made to illustrate the "good woman"'s triumph in a love narrative, Aeneas in the *Legend* is not exempted from the subjugating power of representation. Taking Aeneas as a lover, Dido enters in his private world which has already been shaped by art that "decslandered" it. The narrative provides Aeneas' reading of himself on the walls as a context for his subsequent "pretentions". In the Dido episode in the *House of Fame*, Chaucer thematises the discrepancy of author-oriented creations in Dido's failure to differentiate between reality and appearance. In the metapoetic perspective provided in the current telling of the story by the narrator, we can see that, speaking across the

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[44] See Chapter Five for a discussion of the *Legend* as a work produced according to the dictates of the God of Love in the Prologue to it.

[45] In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas witnesses a glorious fame perpetuated in the paintings, I, 453-94. Christine de Pisan indicates Aeneas' past as a reason for Dido's favourable attitude to him, II. 55.1.

debating authors, the narrator recognises a problem with Dido. The narrator defines his part in the story as a mediator: "ther saugh I graven, "then saugh I", but soon confounds this stance with a claim to authorial right: "Non other auctour alegge I" (314). The Dido episode instances the narrator taking a critical, intepretive stance to what he reads. Like the narrator in the *Troilus*, the narrator here assumes an evaluative position and provides an additional dimension to the story. His evasion of allegiance to the "auctor" assumes, as Miller maintains, an insistence "to authorize and stand by his own creation of literary truth."[46] There is a commentary accompanying the reading and, despite its moralising simplistic overtones, it speaks to the central concerns of the Dido story:

> Allas! What harm doth apparence,
> Whan hit is fals in existence! (265-66)

The narrator's voice in this seeming moralisation does not modify the story,[47] it rather endorses the implications of the acknowledgement of a dual tradition. Two poles of poetic truth, appearance and existence, that is, appearance and reality are juxtaposed. These two lines stand somehow independently of the local interest of the story. They pertain not only to Aeneas' false appearance but also to the textual representation of Dido. The narrator responds to the story as a text written of Dido. Dido's narration constitutes in what "the book seyth". Dido is a woman in a book and her representational future is contingent on the future of the book. The narrator's comments provide a further reading of her book.

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[46] 'The Writing on the Wall', p.106.

[47] Cf Miller, p. 107. As I have indicated above, the narrator's engagement with the story as a reader/interpreter is facilitated by inclusion of Dido's narrative, represented by Ovid.

When Dido responds to Aeneas' pledge of love she is doing what "any woman myghte do". The gender difference is enclosed in a suggestive generalisation. Dido is a woman, any woman; Aeneas in turn is a man, any man. The contrast between man and woman is brought into the narrative soon after we hear the beginning of the love affair "...how shee/ Made of hym shortly at oo word/ Hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord," (256-258). This search for the right word to describe the nature of Dido's attachment to Aeneas ends in Dido "dide hym al the reverence/ And leyde on hym al the dispence/ That any woman myghte do," (259-261). Viewed against Criseyde's cautious considerations before falling in love with Troilus (*Troilus* II, 475-83), Dido's love is hasty. Venus makes Aeneas "in grace of Dido" and Dido in turn makes Aeneas "Hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord."

The mention of the role of Venus in initiating the love between Aeneas and Dido suggests that Venus is in the authoritative position of Love. I discuss Love as the authorising agent in the love narratives in the following chapter. The terms of Dido's position indicate a total surrender to the beloved usually observed in love narratives. As the "betrayal" theme suggests Aeneas takes on the role required by such context. "Converting" Dido, however, serves the interests of Aeneas in creating a "false" lover and a "false" text. Venus acts the part of a female authority, but her priorities are defined by Aeneas' interests. Virgilian Venus is partial to Dido as the mother of the hero of the story.[48] The receptiveness, or rather inclination to yield to demand, is a woman attitude. But the lines indicate also that woman as the passive recipient of effects gives man an authority that changes her total meaning and

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[48] For Venus in Chaucer's poetry, see Bennett, *Chaucer's 'Book of Fame'*, Chapter I, 'Venus and Virgil', pp. 1-51.

existence. Venus conspires with Aeneas for the realisation of this transformation. Significantly, the narrative insists that the woman somewhat cooperates with the authors. Dido receives Aeneas because as a woman she "Wenynge hyt al be so/As he her swor; and herby demed/ That he was good, for he such semed" (262-264). Dido, as these lines suggest, goes through a process of transformation through a male authored text. Dido's reaction to Aeneas' departure in the *Legend* is also highly suggestive of this correlation: "...what woman wole ye of me make?/...so ye wole me now to wive take/ As ye han sworn..." (1305; 1319-20). The image Dido acquires through the process is incongruous with what she has expected. According to the narrator's observant remarks, she exemplifies a misinformed commitment to textual reconstruction. Dido is subject to a similar fallacy in the *Legend of Good Women*. Her response to Aeneas is uninformed by the text Aeneas construes out of the paintings.[49] She is moved to love Aeneas partly because of the contrast suggested to her by the story of Troy, but mainly because "he was *lyk* a knyght," (1066) and "*lyk* to been a verray gentil man;/ And wel his *wordes* he besette can," (1068-69)[50]. It is worth noting that Aeneas in the *Legend of Dido* is doubly a traitor. Firstly, as Ovid's version suggests he is not a man of his word, not exactly the hero of Virgil's representation.The emphasis on his position as a knight (1066) and lover (1236) and the conjoining of these in lines 1273-74 suggest that he is also a traitor of Love's

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[49] See Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'*, (Berkeley and Llondon: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 21-24, on the use of Ekphrasis, "the representation of one medium in another", (p.21) in Virgil and Chaucer's adoptation of it in the Dido episode. A specific study of ekprasis in Chaucer's dream poetry is Margaret Bridges', 'The Picture in the Text: Ecphrasis as Self-reflectivity in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowles*, *Book of the Duchess* and *House of Fame*', *Word & Image*, 5:2 (April- June 1989), 151-58.

[50] Italics mine.

doctrine. The ending reiterates and confirms Aeneas' role as a pretension aiming to serve his own interests. Hence the exclaimed "serve" in line 1276: "Now herkneth how he shal his lady serve!". As a story of man versus woman in truth, the *Legend of Dido* argues Dido's case in order to redefine the parameters of that problematic opposition. Dido dies in the hands of Aeneas, her envisaged role of wifehood not realised, her expectations betrayed, but she is also allowed to generate a similar death for Aeneas: "But syn my name is lost thourgh yow.../ I may wel lese on yow a word or letter" (136-162). The narrator truncates at this point, as he does in the *House of Fame*. But the narrative delivers its intended "sentence" in that Dido repays Aeneas through a "word" or "letter", a text written by Dido to redefine the roles associated with them respectively.

In the *House of Fame*, Aeneas' deceiving discourse has significant implications. Aeneas persuades Dido, "as he her swor", by constructing a role for himself, which he abandons for another, and by subjugating Dido in the process. Dido's failure to differentiate between reality and appearance, a distinction clear to the narrator as the reader of the story, is substantiated through Aeneas' disposition as a man: "For this shal every woman fynde,/ That som man, of hys pure kynde, /Wol sheven outward the fayreste,/ Tyl he have caught that what hym leste; (279-282). The simple conclusion that can be drawn from the narrator's belated warnings presents itself as a maxim "woman will be deceived, man will deceive, by their natures."

Yet, it is all to a purpose, a purpose that is set by man, not by woman on the one hand, and by Chaucer on the other. I would argue that this dichotomy of gender determined attitudes, and behaviour, suggests an analogy between the poetic object and the authorities that impose on it diverse meanings. Dido's lament clearly locates the

origins of woman's betrayal in the power of discourse:

> O, have ye men such godlyhede
> In speche, and never a del of trouthe?
> Allas, that ever hadde routhe
> Any woman on any man!
> Now see I wel, and telle kan,
> We wrechched wymmen konne noon art;
> For certeyn, for the more part,
> Thus we be served everychone.
> How sore that ye men konne groone,
> As we have yow receyved,
> Certaynly we ben deceyvyd! (301-302;330-340)[51]

Dido's deceiver, woman's deceiver, has "godlyhede /In speche, and never a del of trouthe". Man versus woman but ultimately it is the manipulative use of speech for persuasive discourse that matters. Man has speech, while woman "konne noon art". The art of speech deceives, while the manageable object receives that deception. Dido's belated realisation of her misuse, her realisation that "hyr life", "hir love", "hir lust" and "hir lord" aims at a violation of her truth, indicates a direct confrontation of fictional representation. Chaucer's realisation of the representational implications of his narrative is through the voice of Dido. Dido voices a significant perception of the power structure inherent to construction of narratives. Yet, unlike Alcione, she never uses the voice actively. Her voice confirms woman's status as the continually exploited regenerative field of fictional (re)construction but the claim to reverse the situation is indicated, not realised. Dido does not see herself as possessing the power to reverse the priorities to her advantage. The narrative that foils Virgil's remains to be Ovid's.

[51] Though voicing Dido in the Ovidian manner, this passage is original in Chaucer. See Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.38. Fyler considers the passage as a confirmation of the narrator's emphaty with Dido.

Dido's powerlessness, her continued lack of voice, is significant in defining the woman's position as the object of the narrative. Utilised by Aeneas, by Virgil and Ovid, Dido's primary role as a woman is defined as one that receives. The "art" subdues in order to transform and misrepresent. And it evidently serves its own interests.

The same idea is inherent to the catalogue of lovers appended to the Dido story to exemplify "such untrouthe,/ As men may ofte in bokes rede," (384-85). Demophon and Phillis, Jason and Medea, Theseus and Adriane are the respective members of the camps of man and woman, deceiver and the deceived. But the witness to the situation is again books. Representation of Dido modifies the context of the "untruth" considerably. Voiced by authorities and made to serve oppositional poetic objectives, Dido provides a paradigm for the creation of such "untruth". Clemen suggests that Dido's complaint of man's untruth forms part of the controversy initiated by the *Roman de la Rose*. Chaucer's audience might have recognised the appended stories as part of that dispute, but Chaucer did not take this controversy seriously.[52] It seems to me, however, that the opposition Chaucer is setting through the sexes is an opposition not only between man and woman but also between seeming and reality. Man is associated with the purposive use of "art", woman in turn is contained and redefined by that art. As in the case of Dido's representations by different authors and her disheartening awareness that Aeneas determines her future existence as a text of speculation and manipulation, the problem seems to be the possibility of authorial and authorised status.

In the context of textual representation, Dido's position as a woman is marked

[52] *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, pp. 86-87.

with a defining artlessness. It is not only a position of innocence, but also a position of powerlessness, "We wrechched wymmen konne noon art;". She does not have authority. Whereas, Aeneas, the "artful" man, can easily steal the narrative control by acting both as creator and perpetuator of women in texts. Dido's story provides a context for Chaucer's continuos engagement with the issue. As the narrator confirms

> But wel-away! the harm, the routhe,
> That hath betyd for such untruthe,
> As men may ofte in bokes rede,
> And al day sen hyt yet in dede, (383-87)

Dido, then, tells the story of women in books. Her story illustrates the ways in which the authority of the text/woman is taken over by its readers and the text itself is made to generate writings punctuated by the priorities of its diverse authors.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPEAKING OF WOMEN "GOOD"

In the previous chapter we have seen that Alcione's position in the text as the author of her story, facilitated by the active stance she assumes towards the happenings in it, marks a radical change both in narrative development and closure and in the position of woman. Dido, on the other hand, as I have sought to demonstrate, is presented by Chaucer more as a problem of textual representation whose changing images through the lenses of disagreeing authors/poets illustrate the unreliability of the final poetic product as a representative of stable truth. Of these two women of "old books", one gains autonomy in the reconstruction of a book, while the other's place and significance are negotiated in a panel of differing traditions. In Alcione, we see Chaucer entrusting an individual response to the textual circulation of a "tale" to its oft-cited heroine. The major representational controversy over Dido stems from the recognition of biased priorities of the authors. The attempt to correct or balance the priorities so that Dido can own a tenable narrative space leads to the destabilisation of poetic product. To this effect, Chaucer holds the portrayal at the level of unresolved disagreement. Without an attempt for reconciliation, two traditions meet and challenge each other in the representation of Dido.

The concern of this chapter is Lady White in the *Book of the Duchess* and Daisy/Alceste in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* In Lady White and Daisy/Alceste, a tradition of speaking of woman is exposed -and considerably challenged- through identification of that tradition as a predetermined context. Lady White in the *Book of the Duchess* and Daisy/Alceste in the Prologue to the *Legend*

of Good Women are situated in a context, which, while delimiting the woman's part in the narrative, privileges its own narrative targets and defines its constraints. It will be seen that the subjective experience of love which initially predicates the presence of these two ladies is contextualised through emphasis and manifestation of a more generally applicable love ideology and discourse which consume both the individuality of the lady and the creative autonomy of the author. Both Lady Blanche and Daisy/Alceste are brought into existence by male lovers who place themselves in the tradition of love before they attempt to conceptualise women through the established discourse they are privileged -and also compelled- to use. Chaucer demonstrates that Lady White and Daisy/Alceste are strategically and effectively kept at the periphery of the narrative complex of the poem while the poetic context and the language utilised to create the portraits are given centrality.

According to Barthes, any reading of a work should submit to the supposition that "the cult of the author" is an obsoletism.[1] The author has no control over the meaning of the text he has produced. Looking at Lady White in the *Book of the Duchess* and the Daisy/Alceste in Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, one can find Barthes' position tenable in a paradoxical way. Both in the *Duchess* and the Prologue, the author(s) feature preeminently. In the former, we have a Knight who tells the story of his love and loss of a lady,[2] while in the latter there features a reader/lover to report a transformative love experience. The "death" of the authors occurs because the meaning is entrusted not to the author(s) but to the controlling

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[1] *Image-Music-Text*, pp. 142-48.

[2] See Kay Gilliand Stevenson, 'Readers, Poets, and Poems Within the Poem', p.1, for a consideration of the Knight's story as a separate narrative contained within the poem.

order which is represented by Love. The Knight of the *Duchess* defines himself as a servant first to Love and then to the lady. As we will see below, positioning himself as the lover governed either by the God of Love or the lady complicates the Knight's primary role in the narrative as an author considerably. He emerges as an author of a text, but his authority is delimited by conditions set by the God of Love on the nature and objectives of his discourse. Similarly, the narrator of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* locates his poetic objective, the realisation of the daisy in a poetic language, within the established discourse sanctioned by the God of Love. Their authorial activities are valid in that they voice the narratives of the God of Love.

The God of Love is the authority acknowledged, both by the Black Knight and the narrator in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, not only to "guide" but also to "dictate" the representations of Lady White and Daisy/Alceste. There is no reference to spokesmen of traditions as with Virgil and Ovid in the representation of Dido, nor is there a recognition of individual authors who manipulate the "truth" according to their poetic goals. Instead, through Lady White and Daisy/Alceste, Chaucer presents a tradition whose undifferentiated contributors, "thrals", do not seem to be threatened by what Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence".[3] The authors we observe in the *Book of the Duchess* and the Prologue to *the Legend of Good Women* lay no claim to "individual talent". The "art" they practise is outlined for them. Their creative capacity is directed at the objective of continuing Love's discourse.

The *Book of the Duchess* is cited by Alceste in the Prologue as one of the

[3] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.30. The reference is to the use of the term "anxiety of influence" defined by Bloom as the driving force behind every poet's struggle to negate the authority of the predecessor.

poems written in the service of Love, to promote Love's ideals. Speaking in defence of the narrator, Alceste states "To serve yow, in preysing of your name./ He made...the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse," (F416-418). If we recall that Love's charge against the narrator/poet in the Prologue is based on the alleged misrepresentation of women in literature by the narrator/poet, citation of the *Book of the Duchess* to refute that claim is significant. In the trial scene in the Prologue, the God of Love presents himself not only as the authority in love but also as the authority in the representations of women in a love context. Love resents the narrator's admiration of the daisy for

> Yt is my relyke, digne and delytable,
> And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
> And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
> And lettest folk from hire devocioun
> To serve me, and holdest it folye
> To serve Love. (F 321-327)

Love claims the possession of two related things: Lady/Daisy, later Alceste, the symbol of woman's truth and the model for the "true" representation of women, and also the lover/poet's discourse. In order to be allowed to admire the flower/lady, to have her audience, as many lovers do in romances and love poems, the lover is required to serve Love in his work. Serving Love entails reversing what the narrator is accused of, i.e. glossing over "how that wemen han don mis" and telling only "goodnesse/ Of wemen". As I have suggested in Chapter Three, the God of Love is pronouncing judgments on the narrator's work as a reader. But his reading capacity is strongly biased since as the "guardian" of a tradition of speaking of women he is inclined to eliminate the textual ambiguities. The narrator is denied the privilege of

service due to his failure, or reluctance, to observe the God of Love's ideological suppression of adverse discourses. In two narratives (the Knight's narrative creation of "Blanche" and the Prologue narrator's fresh attempt to serve Love prior to the threat of "excommunication" suffered by the narrator) we observe a writing process that can be credited with the poetic qualities and targets sought by the God of Love.

At first glance, Lady White and Daisy/Alceste seem to occupy dissimilar narrative domains. The parameters that define the textual existence of these respective women seem to be set apart by the way in which they come to claim a narrative space in the respective poems: Lady White or Blanche, is identifiable with the dead lady of the Black Knight, John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron,[4] while the Daisy, associated with Alceste in the process of the poem, is the sole object of the narrator's unusual love devotion that he practises as a way of substituting his devotion to books. Lady White does not appear in person in the poem, while the Daisy, through her physical existence and preeminence, can actually claim a solid place not only in the spring fields but also as Alceste in books and as the ideal embodiment of woman at the court of Love. Lady White is spoken of in terms of courtly love tradition;[5] in contrast, the description and

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[4] I will return to the historicity of Blanche below. It needs to be noted that recognition of Lady White as created after Blanche predominates the critical tradition of the *Book of the Duchess*. From the narrator's role to the generic import of the poem, (is it an elegy, a consolation for John of Gaunt) a great deal of poetic importance is generated by Blanche. See D. W. Robertson, Jr., '*The Book of the Duchess*', in. *Companion* to *Chaucer Studies*, ed. by Beryl Rowland, revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 403-413, for readings of the *Book of the Duchess* in this vein.

[5] Little space is reserved for Lady White in his study, yet Charles Muscatine in *Chaucer and the French Tradition,* and Wolfgang Clemen's *Chaucer's Early Poetry* place the poem in the tradition of courtly love poetry. See also March Pelen, 'Machaut's Court of Love Narratives and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', pp. 128-155. See pp. 128-131 for the term "courtly love" as "purely a lexical coincidence." Pelen's exposition of the tradition of the term is suggestive in that it refers to "a literary

symbolism of the Daisy explicitly draw on Marguerite poetry.[6]

Yet, when we look at the narrative context in which they are placed, it seems that similarity rather than dissimilarity is the key term for their poetic definition as women. Firstly, they are created by that ideal discourse which I will argue is sanctioned by the God of Love. Secondly, women that the God of Love demands to represent "womanhood" in discourse are categorically dead women. Lady White and Daisy/Alceste have a similar domain in this respect. Lady White is re-constructed in a frame which is punctuated with the idea of death and closes on the irreversible realisation in words of the fact that "She ys ded". Alceste, already a symbol of women in discourse, has been granted her status because "She...for hire housbonde chees to dye" (F 513). Further, the God of Love emphasises the idea of death inherent to the ideal discourse promoted for the figuration of women when he directs the narrator to "books" to select more congenial examples of dead women to employ in the service of his tradition. In the context provided by the God of Love, death re-creates women. Yet, the re-created women have a delimited existence. It is after death that the authority, delegated to the poets by the God of Love, can step in and rearrange the conditions of textual rebirth of women. Death seems to be a prerequisite for women to be spoken of "well". But it is also, especially for the narrative targets realised through it, an opportunity for the ideal re-construction both of the poet and the women

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tradition traceable in its own right to late antique texts and other literary and mythographic materials not strictly dependent on a specific stylistic time, place or social custom", p.128.

[6] As I will suggest below, the marguerite tradition informs Chaucer's daisy worship in style and symbolism, but does not in itself constitute the tradition that Chaucer is invoking in the symbolisation of lady as a daisy. On Marguerite tradition see John L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to French Marguerite Poems and to the *Filostrato*', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 593-683.

concerned. That is, the "actual" death indeed predicates the death of the "individual woman" in order to provide space for the creation of the "idealised" one. In the texts engendered by the death of women, therefore, death allows a transformation congenial to the continuity of tradition as defined by Love.

My analysis below will therefore speak of death, both of Blanche and Daisy/Alceste and also the author(s) obliquely. Transferring in a way, though not exactly in Bartheian manner, the authority of the author, not to the text (though Black Knight and the Prologue narrator want to sustain a certain amount of it in the text, the women, they write) but to the authority of tradition, Chaucer, in Lady White and Daisy/Alceste, challenges the configurations of a tradition that preempts the need for reading by supplying a reader's and writer's manual beforehand.

The *Book of the Duchess* tells of a woman who is good and beautiful, loved and esteemed by a Knight in a way that accords with the law of God of Love. As we will see, the Knight locates his love experience and its object, the lady, in the "religion" of the God of Love. His narrative emanates from and is controlled by some a priori principles that he seeks and achieves as part of his training in the art and service of love. A narrative that activates and promotes the poetic ideals of a tradition enforced by the God of Love is not what the poem has suggested to many of its critics. Although the criticism of the *Book of the Duchess* is dominated by the idea of death, a major theme that the poem engages with, the role of the Knight's narrative is considered to be partly "a conventional idealisation of feminine beauty and grace" and mainly a poetic monument to Gaunt's grief.[7] It has been argued that the "poem's

[7] See James I. Wimsatt, 'The Apotheosis of Blanche in the *Book of the Duchess*', *JEGP*, 66 (1957), 26-44. See Phillippa Hardman, 'The *Book of the Duchess* As a Memorial Monument', *ChauR*, 28:3 (1994), 205-215, for a comparison of the poem

true function: elegy" can be identified in the mention of the Lady White's death.[8] The historical circumstances of the composition of the poem suggest that Lady White's presence in the narrative is overshadowed by an historical presence, Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster, the wife of John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron. The poem is believed to be commissioned by the Duke in commemoration of the death of his wife. Obviously, as has been maintained, the indication of an historical presence (Chaucer entitled the poem the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse) somewhat influences its poetic purchase.[9] As a tribute to Blanche, commemoration of the actual death of an historical woman, the poem allows an interplay of fiction and history. The historical dimension of the poem suggests a reading that will allow major themes of consolation and elegy associated with the grief experienced and expressed by the Knight instead of John of Gaunt. A critical consensus is achieved in the recognition of the historical allegory of the poem. The "Fair Whit" translates the French Blanche, establishing a suggestive relation between Lady White and historical Blanche, and the identity of the Black Knight is revealed when he mounts his horse to head for the castle in Richmond (1314-1319).[10]

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to medieval memorial monuments.

[8]See Ardis Butterfield, 'Lyric and Elegy in the *Book of the Duchess*', *Medium Aevum*, LX:I (1991), 33-60 (p.33).

[9] See Denis Walker, 'Narrative Inconclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic in the *Book of the Duchess*', *ChauR*, 18 (1983-84), 1-17, for a relocation of the poem's suggested function of consolation. Walker agrees that the poem has historical import but focuses his discussion not on "what it means" but on "how it means", p. 1.

[10] Although the date of the composition of the poem is still to be ascertained, the historical implications of the puns remain unchallenged. Edward I. Condred, 'The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A New Hypothesis', *ChauR*, 5 (1970-71), 195-212 (p. 195), argues that the puns "suggest an historical context which seems to explain thoroughly how the poem came into existence, and why it took the form

In her Lacanian analysis of "Blanche", Maud Ellmann declares Blanche textually dead: "...the *Book* is an accomplice to the death of Blanche, her death in discourse, a death on which the life of discourse and the book depends."[11] Ellmann stresses the role of discourse in the process of displacement of "real" Blanche, but the death she speaks about is a death that facilitates the generation of discourse without an essential recourse to a re-creation, as in the tradition of the God of Love. Stephen Manning maintains, "Chaucer must make Blanche worthy of so much sorrow in order to make his [John of Gaunt] grief understandable".[12] Writing an eulogy for Blanche, Chaucer's inevitable method is to idealise her. Quoting Manning, "Chaucer had at his disposal a ready means for idealising Blanche -the traditions of courtly love." Chaucer "idealizes her; he does not individualize her".[13] It is difficult to fail to notice the inherent idea of service in Manning's suggestion of transferred reality. The poet serves

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that it did." Condred's suggestion of 1370 as the date of the completion of the poem contrasts with the usually accepted theory that the poem was composed a few months after the death of Blanche on 12 September 1369. Benson, in the *Riverside Chaucer* (p.329), indicates a period, 1368-1372, rather than a certain date. The 12 September 1369 is challenged by John Palmer in 'The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision', *ChauR*, 8 (1973-74), 253-61, who argues that Blanche died in 12 September 1368.

[11] 'Blanche', in *Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn, Stratford Upon Avon Studies, 2nd Series (London: Arnold, 1984), pp. 99-110 (p.100).

[12] 'Chaucer's Good Fair White: Woman and Symbol', *Comparative Literature*, 10:2 (Spring 1958), 97-105 (p. 98). See also David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, pp 48-57, for an argument against the purpose of the poem as consolation of John of Gaunt. Unlike Manning, Lawton is not convinced that "Chaucer should have tried in this way to console one of the most powerful members of the royal family for the loss of his wife", p.56.

[13] 'Chaucer's Good Fair White', pp. 99, 98-99.

the demands of his patron in the way a lover serves the demands of Love.[14] This, of course, is a valid assertion in so far as we recognise the poem as a truistic application of tradition for consolatory purposes.[15] As Manning's thesis indicates, however, adapting the tradition for the purposes of idealisation is to acknowledge the position that reality is displaced by its idealistic representation. We see Chaucer deliberately "magnifying" the historical Blanche by means of fiction. Fichte furthers this literary connection based on history when he suggests that the aim of the *Book of the Duchess* is to "eternalize the portrait of Blanche in the form of a literary encomium, and its theme is the creation of a lasting literary monument which immortalises the duchess, fixing her virtues forever in the minds of men."[16] In these formulations, the historical predicates the ideal. Blanche seems to make an easy and favourable transition from historical existence to fictional existence. Aided by consideration of genuine grief on the part of Chaucer's patron, the reader is invited to equate, or even replace, the historical Blanche with her fictional counterpart Lady White.

I would suggest that fictional re-creation of Blanche as Lady White is not as uncomplicated as it seems. The Knight's narrative and the controversial issue of consolation rest on the poem's realisation of an "idealised" woman in a predetermined

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[14] See Alfred David, 'Chaucer's Edwardian Poetry', in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. by James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher, pp. 34-35, for Chaucer as a court poet.

[15] For the critical opinions on consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*, see Helen Phillips, 'Structure and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*', *ChauR*, 16 (1981-82), pp. 107-118 (p. 107). For the courtly view of the consolation, see Philip C. Boardman, 'Courtly Language and the Strategy of Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*', *ELH*, 44 (1977), 567-79.

[16] Joerg Fichte, 'The *Book of the Duchess*: A Consolation?', *Studia Neophilologia*, 45 (1973), 53-67 (pp. 60, 65). See also Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, p. 56.

context. The Knight suffers from the loss of his lady and is prompted into a re-creative conversation with the narrator, which produces a narrative that acknowledges the historical context in a problematic way. Idealisation occurs as the major objective dictated by the love context adapted by the Knight. But, when viewed as a fictional creation, it has serious limitations. As I will be examining below, the Knight's dialogue with the narrator and his temporary failure to have the lady confirm his ideals produce challenges rather than conformity to the offered line of idealising narrative. This is to suggest, somewhat in the manner of Ellmann above,[17] inferring my conclusion from useful observations represented here by Manning and Fichte, that Blanche is subsumed by her fictional counterpart. But the fictional creation itself of Lady White is not entirely separated from the implications of the poem's claim to an extratextual reality. The fictional creation is dictated by a tradition of writing that would yield "idealisation" rather than "individualisation" and the narrator's perceptive comment on the potential subjectivity of the Knight's presentation of his lady defers to the historical context to aid the signification of the fictional context. That is, the poem's acknowledgement of the historical Blanche functions as a restatement of the difference created by the fictional context.

The historical basis notwithstanding, in the portrayal of the lady White the priority is the fictional representation rather than a true-to-fact, or for that matter, idealised, reconstruction of historical Blanche. As the title of the poem indicates, together with the Knight's reiteration of the death of his lady at the end, the woman that has sustained the Knight's life is dead, the woman that *will* grant him an existence

[17] A major difference is that Elmann argues for a textual "erasure" of Blanche; as a woman she never takes place. See pp. 100, 103, 106.

as an author is yet to be created in the process of the retrospective narration.The narrator overhears an elegiac expression of the fact of the death of the lady in a lament (475-486). The Knight refers to the death of the lady as a loss. He suffers the loss because of Fortune, by death which took his lady away (599-655). Retrieving the "lost" Blanche in fiction as Lady White takes note of this irreversible fact. It is Lady White that we have as the object, and poetic achievement, of the Knight's narrative.

Significant from the point of view of Alceste's claim for the generic tradition of the poem, i.e. that the *Book of the Duchess* conforms to the demanded "praise of women" topos advocated by the God of Love, the Knight's narrative of ideal discourse is located in a tradition sanctioned by Love. Before the Knight embarks on his narrative enterprise, he establishes and defines the boundaries of the narrative and its obligations, including his own as a lover and author. The Black Knight's narration of his love and his description of his lady are preceded by a narrative enclosure that recalls the observation of the hierarchy demanded by Love in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* The definition of the context precedes the verbal construction of the ideal lady. The Knight sets upon his career as a lover by an admission of surrender of "individual talent" and his submission to the authority of Love:

> "Syr," quod he, sith first I kouthe
> Have any maner wyt fro youthe,
> Or kyndely understondyng
> To comprehende in any thyng
> What love was, in myn owne wyt,
> Dredeles, I have ever yit
> Be tributarye and yive rente
> To Love, hooly with good entente,
> And throgh plesaunce become his thral
> With good wille, body, hert and al.

Al this I putte in his servage,
As to my lord, and dide homage;
And ful devoutly I prayed hym to
He shulde besette myn herte so
That hyt plesance to hym were
And worship to my lady dere. (759-774)

Although the object of wilful surrender to Love predicates an equally wilful surrender to the lady: (He shulde besette myn herte so/That hyt plesance to hym were/And worship to my lady dere), it seems that the Knight's progress towards utterance of devotion to the lady is delayed in order to recognise Love as the representative of a tradition, the authority that imposes and demands. The narrative progress is possible only after the acknowledgement of this constructed authority: "And throgh plesaunce become his thral/ With good wille, body, hert and al./ Al this I putte in his servage./ As to my lord, and dide homage;"

It is useful to view the Knight's narrative in the light of a fundamental textual reference to the *Roman de la Rose.* The chamber in which the narrator's dream ensues is painted with "bothe text and glose/Of al the Romaunce of the Rose" (333-334). The narrator walks out of the chamber to take part in a hart hunting, and the *Roman de la Rose* seems to follow him. This seemingly transitional reference to the "book of love" of Chaucer's time has ramifications for the love narrative that follows thereafter. The implications of this reference have usually been sought in the textual similarities between the *Roman* and the *Book of the Duchess.* As a representative view, Burlin contends that the "imagination of the Black Knight is...unblushingly literary; his heart proves to be a rag-and-bone shop of well-worn motifs from the French tradition of dream visions and romance." The Knight's account of his early youth and his falling

in love, on the other hand, "reads like a summary of de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose,* from the awakening of the lover until his capture by the God of Love, after he has spied his favourite bud among the roses on the bush."[18] We can see that the Knight in this formulation is not only an incompetent author, one who lacks imagination, but also a prototypical lover. Evidently, by his own admission, the Knight subscribes to the tradition of love. He claims Love as his lord and places himself in his service. Yet, there is another level of similarity which is more significant to the Knight's enterprise. The tradition that Chaucer's Knight subscribes to can be observed in the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris in terms of imposition and captivation. As illustrated in the *Roman,* one of Love's abiding interests is the idealisation of the lady as an expression of obedience to the God of Love, who, in the first place, compels the lover to be a lover and has the lover agree to the precepts and requirements of Love. The tradition continues in the works of French love poets, Chaucer's contemporaries Machaut and Froissart in leading. The primary conditions, as amply illustrated in the *Roman de la Rose,* consist in the lover's exaltation of love and the lady. The God of Love, in the *Roman de la Rose,* sets out clearly defined principles that the lover, in order to attain the lady, has to follow. Lines 1681-1776 narrate the progressive indulgence in love as a compulsory vocation. Shot by the God of Love upon singling out the rose of his preference, the lover is imprisoned in the anguish of love. Love proceeds to explain to his "vassal" the terms of his imprisonment. Above all, there is no resistance allowed; instead, the lover is now in care of

Mout liez don tu as si bon maistre

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[18] *Chaucerian Fiction,* quotations are respectively from p.70 and p.71. For a confirmation of Burlin's view that the Knight's love follows the conventional courtly pattern, see Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women,* pp.24-25.

E seignor de si haut renon,
Qu'Amors porte le gonfanon
De Cortoisie e la baniere;
Si est de si bone maniere,
Si douz, si frans e si gentis
Que, quiconques est ententis
A li servir e enorer, (1944-51)[19]

(so good a master and a lord of such high renown. His bearing is so good, so sweet, open, and gentle, that no villainy, no wrong or evil training can dwell in anyone who is bent on serving and honoring him.)

The lover's capture by Love is hence the beginning of a conversion, a transformation that will reconstruct his identity and redefine his priorities. Love, in this context, is paradoxically active. Love is a force that takes over when the lover is most congenial to love. His captivation of the lover, however, is only an initiation. Once in the "prison" of Love, the lover is required to perfect Love's script, to improve in Love as one improves his skills. In a narrative context, the Black Knight expresses his aptitude for the requirements of reconstruction:

Paraunter I was therto most able,
As a whit wal or a table,
For hit ys redy to cacche and take
Al that men wil theryn make,
Whethir so men wil portreye or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte. (779-784)

In depicting the Lady White, we see the Knight in the role of an author. He is a poet who has made and performed many songs (1155-59). He repeats his first composition to the narrator (1175-80). In his seventy-five line long account of declaration of his love to the Lady White, the Knight owns it as a tale five times. He

[19] I am grateful to Professor Glyn Burgess for his help with the quotations in French.

hopes if "my tale I told/With sorwe," (1199-1200), his lady might show mercy. He leaves out "many a word .../ In my tale" for the fear that "my wordes mysset were" (1208-1210). In the lines quoted above, he is presented as impressionable. He provides the space for "Al that men wil theryn make". His authorial powers are subject to what he can bear as a text. But the Knight considers the impressionable stage as an essential positive that will facilitate his authorial becoming. "As a whit wal or a table", he is prepared to take on, retain and continue Love's script. A prominent manifestation of lover's dedication to Love in terms of art can be observed in Machaut. In the ***Remède de Fortune***, Machaut identifies love as a positive yet laborious vocation, an art that will benefit its practiser "Mais qu'il vueille faire et labeure/ Ad ce que j'ay dit ci desseure", (43-44), (given the will to do so, and the desire to achieve and labor at those things). Machaut considers the lover as an artist who should practice that art "La premiere est qu'il doit eslire/ Celui ou ses cuers mieus se tire" (3-4), (to which his preference goes, and towards which he is naturally inclined). Mastery in art requires instruction or doctrine provided by a master who in return will expect love, honour and obedience and service. An essential prerequisite consists of effort and perseverance and an early start in study. Indeed, in the ***Remede***, the *tabula rasa* through which the Black Knight willingly submits to the influence of Love, is employed as a state of innocence.[20] It is an ideal stage in that the lover's or the artist's inclinations can easily be re-moulded according to the empowering influence of his "choice".

Initially, Chaucer's Knight is not endowed with the best of poetic skills. His

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[20] See James Dean, 'Chaucer's ***Book of the Duchess***: A Non-Boethian Interpretation', ***Modern Language Quarterly***, 46 (1985), 235-249 (pp. 242-244), for a consideration of the origins of the *tabula rasa* metaphor.

"lay" is "Withoute noote, withoute song" (472), and his attempts to compose songs in the service of the lady are mediocre: "Althogh I koude not make so wel/Songes, ne knewe the art al" (1160-61). However, he readily takes on the subject matter. He states, from among "other art or letre", "I ches love to my firste craft;" (791). Evidently, the Knight needs practice in his newly chosen "art". Despite his ineptitude in the early stages, he perseveres. As his narrative proceeds, it becomes clear that his lack of knowledge in the "art" is to be replaced by a competence that is sealed by the winning of the lady. The implication is that love as craft, love as art, in a way claims the lady as its product. The Knight's efforts to comprehend Love and to find the best way to serve him finalise in the discovery of a satisfactory means. His means of realisation of his "craft" is the lady. We can see a transformed version of his devotion to love in his devotion to the lady:

> Ryght on thys same, as I have seyd,
> Was hooly al my love leyd;
> For certes she was, that swete wif,
> My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,
> My hap, myn hele, and al my blesse,
> My worldes welfare, and my goddesse,
> And I hooly hires and everydel. (1035-1041)

As these lines indicate, a paradoxical process displaces love and replaces it with the lady. The Knight's abandonment of the self for reconstruction in accordance with the requirements of the tradition which we see in the Knight's description of himself as a white wall recurs when he, in lines 1035-1041 quoted above, proclaims the lady as the sole means to sustain his being. The lady is the "goddesse", the Knight's "worldes welfare" and he pledges to be "hooly hires and everydel." And, "Ryght on thys

same.../Was hooly al my love leyd": Love also determines the lady's poetic figuration. We have a complex relationship between the Knight, Love and the lady. The Knight takes on love as craft in order to project it on, or re-create it in, the lady on whom "Was hooly al my love leyd".

The main interest of the Black Knight's narrative is the expression and explication of his sorrow and love. As Spearing notes, in the *Book of the Duchess* the balance "is tilted in favour of the Black Knight's absolute claims for his idealisation of the lady herself and of his love for her."[21] As much as the sorrow, the story is his story and the lady is his lady. The narrative structure that he builds to reveal the cause of his sorrow to the inquiring narrator rests on what might be called narrative possessiveness. As can be observed in the lines quoted above, the narrative, love and the lady find a focus in the Knight's emphatic use of "my": "My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,"

In contrast, the predominant form of speech in the Knight's narrative is dialogue. Prompted to speak by the inquiring narrator, the Knight has a participating audience in the narrator. The narrator in the role of an audience frequently falls short of comprehending the complexities of the narrative. He misreads the Knight's metaphor of chess game with Fortune and proposes stoicism for the Knight's loss of a "fers". Still, the dialogue is sustained to the end where the Knight utters the irreversible conclusion to his narrative and the narrator is finally able to see beyond the metaphorical construction:

> That was the los that here-before

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[21] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 72.

I told the that I hadde lorn
'Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest;
I have lost more than thow wenest.'
God wot, allas! Ryght that was she!
"Allas, sir, how? What that may be?"
"She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe"
"Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!." (1302-1310)

Yet, the dialogic form does not extent to the Knight's verbal creation of the Lady White. In the *Book of the Duchess,* the Knight has both the voice and the initiative to act. He seeks love (760-774), he chooses the lady, and dedicates himself to serve her:

Among these ladyes thus echon,
Soth to seyen, I sawgh oon
....
That she ful sone in my thoght,
...so was ykaught
That purely tho myn owne thoght
Seyde hit were beter to serve her for noght
Than with another to be wel." (817-818;837-38;843-45).

Spoken in terms of absence, the Lady White is the major test of his training in the craft of love: "I was ryght yong, soth to say,/ And ful gret nede I hadde to lerne;/Whan my herte wolde yerne/To love, hyt was a great empryse./ But as my wyt koude best suffise,/... I besette hyt/ To love hir in my beste wyse," (1090-1094;1096-1097). This initiative is taken further by the Knight's consequent efforts to persuade the lady to take him as her knight (1221-1235). The lady maintains a position of silence while the Knight verbalises his enterprise of love eloquently and forcefully. She is constantly conjured and continuously described and defined in terms of something that the Knight needs both for his discourse and for love. She is very

important to the lover. Yet, the importance she is assigned in the tradition of Love is contained in the Knight's vocalised task and narrative power. As a narrative device, the Knight's portrayal of the Lady White conforms to the strategies advocated in rhetorical manuals.[22] A great many of the adjectives come from medieval manuals of portrayals. The attributes of the lady are analogous to those of the lady in the Harley Lyrics where love is the central theme and the lady's qualities are stereotyped and catalogued.[23] But in seeking to verbalise a mental picture of Lady White, the Knight borrows the terminology of the conventions in order to contextualise his subjective experience.[24]

Through the Knight's location of himself and his love in a recognisable context, our attention is drawn to the forming agent in the portrayal of "Blanche". The Knight's imagination seems to be the active forming agent but it is fundamentally governed by the principles of love narrative. Recognition of love narrative as a context for his "tale" continuously challenges the Knight's authorising hand out of its place. The

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[22] See Valerie Allen, 'Blaunche on Top and Alisoun on Bottom', in *A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck,* ed. by Juliette Dor (Liége: Universite de Liége, Departement d'anglais, 1992), pp 23-29.

[23] For an exposition of the "ideal" in this context, see D. S. Brewer, 'The Idea of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, Especially "Harley Lyrics", Chaucer, and Some Elizabethans', *Modern Language Review*, 50:3 (July 1955), 257-69. See also R. T. Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), Harley Lyrics, 9,12, 13. See George L. Brook, ed., The *Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS Harley 2253* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), pp. 6-7, for a comparison of the secular lyrics and the conventions of the courtly love. No. 7, "The Fair Maid of Riblesdale" illustrates the conventional method of description, moving from general to the specific parts of the girl's body. See also Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric,* 2nd ed (London: Huthchinson, 1978), pp. 120-121.

[24] A recent reading reviving the originality of the Knight's lady is J.J Anderson's. "The Man in Black, Machaut's Knight and Their Ladies", *ES*, 73:5 (October 1992), 417-30. Following Clemen, Anderson argues that in the portrayal of Blanche Chaucer goes beyond conventions by adding to the stylised portrait individual touches.

progressive description suggests that the Knight's imagination is directed at a recollection, and searches through memory for the right terms to deliver the right image. The Knight in this sense can be seen as a poet who envisages and plans the poetic image he means to deliver through words. As the opening lines of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* chart out:

> The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work, and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it. The mode of being is archetypal before it is actual.[25]

There is, however, a difference to be noted and it is that imagining the work is something the Knight derives from the tradition. In writing, or rather speaking of Lady White, "the measuring line of his mind" is controlled and manipulated by the priorities of a higher authority, the creator of his creation, namely Love. The Knight's seemingly dual devotion predicts in the lady a potential to be utilised in the service of love. The idealisation he bestows upon the lady is self-reflexive. As Love needs his "vassal" to figure out women good so does the Knight need the lady to figure out lovers good. That is, the Knight seeks to realise in the lady his own ideal self-definition as a follower of Love. The lady is called "goode faire White". As is known, the epithet white is a commonplace in the description of ladies from love songs to romance.[26] White signifies beauty. It also signifies purity. The Pearl-maiden is clothed in white

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[25] Cited in Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p.32.

[26] See Manning, 'Chaucer's Good Fair White', p.100.

so as to symbolise spiritual purity as well as spiritual superiority.[27] The Knight contends that his lady deserves "White" as her name for her beauty: "And good faire White she het;/ That was my lady name ryght./ She was both fair and bright;/She hadde not hir name wrong" (948-951). The name White then suggests a symbolic formulation of the Knight's perfection projected through the lady.

Moreover, considering White's position in the narrative, i.e. as the major part of the script demanded by Love, it seems that the name White suggests also a parallel to the Knight's initial situation as the white wall. The Knight's whiteness is consumed by Love. His aimlessness removed, the Knight is written to become a devoted follower of love. He is both the author and the text to regenerate new texts, albeit the text he produces will codify Love's idea of a lady. As I have suggested, in order to complete the script, the Knight needs Lady White. Lady White initially is an unrealised ideal. The name White, in this sense, indicates a state of meaninglessness, a positive blankness. The Lady being white can take on the Knight's script, adopt it and project it back to him. The Lady White can be regarded as the unwritten text. Being unwritten, pure and unaffected, she provides the space for the Knight's authorial activity. This analogy can be substantiated by the shift in the focus of the Knight's allegiance from Love to the lady, or rather the progress from being Love's servant to becoming lady's servant. The difference remains, however, that while the Knight is stimulated to action to meet the demands of love, the lady is pursued in order to be given shape according to the lover's desire. Naming the lady as White, therefore,

[27] See Charles Moorman, *The Pearl Poet* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), p. 46.

discloses what Joan Ferrante calls "male fantasy",[28] the Knight's conviction warranted by Love that, as well as the lover, the object of love is manageable. It also defines the position of the lady in the narrative as the silent beneficiary of the Knight's goal.

Therefore, the contrast in the positions of the Knight and the Lady does not consist only in the Knight's being the pursuer and the lady the pursued. The tradition invoked and materialised through the Knight's account of his rise to the status of love's servant and the consequent pursuit of the lady bespeaks also a narrative inequality.[29] Love places man and woman in separate domains. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator's trespass is to "maketh men to wommen lasse triste" (F 333). Women, in Love's contention, are "as trewe as ever was any steel" (F 334). Even when the purpose is "To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce,/ And to ben war fro falsnesse and fro vice/By swich ensample;" (F 472-474) speaking of women in terms other than those designated by Love is "missaying" woman. Alceste warns "For Love ne wol nat countrepleted be/In ryght ne wrong;" (F 476-77).

The God of Love, of course, cherishes some ulterior motives by banishing a lover that will not speak well of love from his kingdom. If writing is motivated by love, and if it follows Love's rules of composition, then Love, and in him, the love tradition, which he describes as "my lawe", will survive intact. Representing woman good is a duty that a lover/poet comes to owe to tradition by positioning himself in it, be it by speaking of ladies or being an ardent lover as the narrator claims to be.

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[28] 'Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature', *Women's Studies*, 11 (1984), 67-97 (p. 67).

[29] See Toril Moi, 'Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love', in *Medieval Literature, Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. by David Aers (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), pp. 11-33, for a discussion of language monopolised by the male lover in Andreas' model of courtship.

The role assignment is based on the marked gender difference prioritised by Love. The lover serves through representation of the lady and the expression of Love's ideals; the lady, in turn, is represented. In other words, the allocation of voice and action privileges the lover. While consigning the lady to the realm of silence, and keeping her as the inert recipient of lavish praise concur with the fundamental principle of "service" in the tradition of Love, in narrative terms this sharp division between the role of the male lover and his lady designates the text, the lady, as one-sided. Instead of the dual tradition we have observed in the presentation of Dido, in Lady White the potentiality of the text to produce multiple voices is suppressed. It is in the overt suppression of "voices" that Chaucer wants his reader to see the inadequacy of the Love's tradition to represent woman.

The Knight's narrative invites challenge due to its attempt to suppress other potential discourses. An ironic realisation of the possible challenges occurs in relation to Lady White's speech. Lady White is spoken of in ideal terms. Like the Daisy of the Prologue, she is a woman of description. Definition rather than narration dominates her textual becoming. The Knight's first sighting of the lady leads to a highly idealised and conventional exposition of her beauty and goodness. He presents her as the paragon of virtue, as the symbol of truth, as the embodiment of beauty and goodness. One of her perfections is her speech: "And which a goodly, softe speche/ Had that swete,/ So frendly...so wel ygrounded...Up al resoun so wel yfounded...so tretable to alle goode" (919-923). The Knight contends that "ther was never yet throgh hir tonge/Man ne woman gretly harmed;/ That purely her symple record/ Was founde as trewe as any bond/Or trouthe of any mannes hond;" (930-931; 934-936). The speech represents her truth. Like her other virtues, her speech, too, is incorporated in the

Knight's descriptive definition of her. Lady White is reported to be in good command of language and "trewe" of her speech. Only once throughout the narrative do we hear her own voice. Summarised by the Knight, her one and only utterance consists of "'Nay' Al outerly" (1243-44). As I argue in the conclusion to this study, the change demanded from, and imposed upon, the woman expresses a paradoxical feature of the love tradition. The poetic ideal is facilitated by the utilisation of the potentiality for change in the lady, "that she would be my lady swete", yet the poetic product tends to be fixed in an environment void of potential for change. This paradox in fact is self-explanatory. If we sustain the idea that the Knight's "image" of the lady is in his mind long before he meets the potential woman to materialise that image, then the Knight's task consists of merely asking the lady to take on an image. Basically, by becoming his "lady dere", Lady White will fulfil the only participation required of her in the entire scheme. She then will validate not only the praise but also the suppression of her voice.

When presented with the "image", Lady White says "Nay". Her "Nay" scores a substantial defeat for the Knight. The "Nay" by the Knight's own logic speaks the truth, "so tretable to alle goode". Surely securing a temporary autonomy for the lady, the "Nay" is dangerously obstructive to what will otherwise develop into an accomplishment recounted in its minute detail. The lady speaks not only to impede the Knight's authorial confidence but also to dismiss it, (as a fantasy perhaps?). The challenge initiated by the "Nay" of the lady is reinforced in the shift of register to the colloquial. The Knight relates retrospectively that "whan I had my tale y-doo," the lady with "a goodly" speech, "acounted nat a stre of al my tale" (1236-1237). In this ironic clash of the imagination and experience, the high aspirations of the meticulously

constructed "tale" are reduced to void. The lady will not consent to the register of the Knight's narrative. As the Knight himself acknowledges, this accomplishment, wooing and winning an ideally presented lady, would not happen if it were not for the lady's acquiesence. Despite the outright rejection, perhaps because of it, since it gives the Knight the chance to improve in the art of love, the Knight completes the construction of the image together with his tale.

The temporarily failed attempt at construction closes off on suggestive literary allusion. His sorrow thereupon exceeds Cassandra's who "Bewayled the destruccioun/ Of Troye and of Ilyoun," (1247-1248). The suggestion is that as the fall of Troy and its citadel closes an era in a civilisation so does the Knight's failure signs the end of his big enterprise. Fiction gains strength from historical "destruction", but for the Knight's fiction it signals an irreversible closure, an unwanted, hence immature, ending. As stated above, the Knight makes productive use of the negation presented to his tale by the lady. Still, the gradual elimination of the resistance takes place within the atmosphere created by that resistance. The rejection places the Knight and his narrative.

Important from the point of reception of the story, the narrator's response to the Knight's idealisation of the lady registers another challenge to the seemingly untroubled continuation of idealising tradition. Lady White is argued by the Knight to be not like any of the courtly love ladies. Unlike the ladies of her position she would "holde no wyght in balaunce/ By half word ne by countenaunce" (1021-1022), "She ne used no such knakkes smale" (1033). This distinction is an extra praise that we have to add to White's other superior qualities. Isolation of White from her fellow women is of course a variation of the "idealised" presentation of her, and a step

towards individualisation. Indeed, the lady's "nay" is an individual response in itself. But since it obstructs the development of the Knight's narrative, the "nay" is neutralised. Here, as Love does for Alceste in the Prologue, the Knight is trying to make a privileged state for the lady. Like Love, he is keen to generalise his conception of the lady as "truth." Lady White's truthful behaviour is a manifestation of her textual truth. The narrator confirms the unique identity of Lady White in terms that point to the contingency of the Knight's verbal picture: "I leve yow wel, that trewely/ Yow thoghte that she was the beste/ And to beholde the alderfayreste,/Whoso had loked hir with your eyen" (1048-1051). It is sharply refuted by the Knight: "With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen/Seyde and sworen hyt was soo" (1052-1053). The challenge for recognition of Lady White's depiction as subjective truth, perceived by the Knight only, is sought to be negated by an appeal to general appraisal. On this issue, Stephen Knight writes "Blanche...is not presented as Gaunt's, or Man in Black's memory of her...All that is said about her is publicly visible and generally acknowledged to be so, like her flawless noble beauty."[30] We can argue that the Knight certainly believes it to be so. He is keen to support his presentation of Lady White with external evidence. His lament earlier states the point that "men may wel se/Of al goodnesse she had no mete!" (485-486). It seems that we have here the introduction of historical context. Historical Blanche is called upon for the verification of her fictionalised portrait. The appeal to public opinion can be an appeal to the listening audience who would, historically speaking, know Blanche. But the narrator's comment registers a fictional level. After all, the Knight's appeal to an extratextual audience is contained within the text. He is the one to present Blanche or Lady White to his audience. In other words,

[30] *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.13.

as the narrator's comment indicates, the Knight is his own witness. It seems to me that the narrator comprehends the context of the Knight's praise and hence places a qualified negation on grounds of subjectivity. His comment is evidently a necessary and valid outcome of the narrative context of the Knight's story. Can it be that, while narrator's conviction about the subjectivity of the portrayal is tenable, the Knight's ostensibly outright rejection of it is not? The narrator in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* claims that nobody ever loved more than he, but for the verification of his love, he freely goes to "lovers" that share a common knowledge not only of love but also of its discourse. Evidently, the Prologue narrator does not experience the anxieties of the Black Knight. The Black Knight has to speak in terms intelligible to the narrator but he also has to observe the decorum of love literature. He assumes the task of serving the lady in the best way by emphasising her uniqueness. He is not willing to admit that the authority of tradition is behind the verbal reconstruction of "Blanche". We see Lady White through his eyes and take notice of the narrative context provided prior to the depiction. The narrator's qualified agreement shows that so does the narrator. The narrator for once is convinced that the tale he has heard is a lover's tale and the lady of the tale is a lover's lady. The book he makes at the end of the dream perpetuates the lady in that frame.

Significantly, the love narrative ends before the Knight utters the fact of death of his lady. It ends on a note that sums up the fundamentally rigid structure of Love's tradition: "Therwyth she was always so trewe/...Al was us oon, withoute were./And thus we lyved ful many a yere/ So wel I kan nat telle how." (1287;1295-1297) The acquisition of the love of the lady brings the narrative enterprise to a closure. The text is completed, the tale is approved, and the Knight has achieved his goal: "Therwyth

she was always so trewe".

Given the narrative priorities of her becoming, I would suggest that the Knight's "trewe" lady can best serve as a problematic paradigm that causes difficulty both for the continuation of the tradition and for the narrator who is found guilty of attempted undermining of tradition in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, composition of which is condemned by the God of Love in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Criseyde's betrayal of her lover is a narrative problem for the "translating" narrator. Burdened by what he has to record but what he does not want to record, the narrator justifies the story of unfaithful Criseyde as follows:

> 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. (V,1772-78)

As has been maintained, this stanza anticipates the composition of the *Legend of Good Women*.[31] It informs also the subject matter of the Prologue by suggesting a problem of textual representation. Its epistemological purchase is a paradigm of opposition, not between true and untrue women, but between Criseyde and Alceste or Penelope as individual women. Chaucer, in these lines, is saying that Criseyde's fault should not be generalised as woman behaviour. In the context of writing, Criseyde has become a subject matter for poets. So the allusion to a tradition "Ye

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[31] Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, considers the *Legend* as a palinode to *Troilus*. See also Michael Cherniss, 'Chaucer's Last Dream Vision: The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', *ChauR*, 20:3 (1986), 183-199.

may hire giltes in other bokes se;" proposes it to be in the poet's power to counterpoint traditional representations of Criseyde through representations of other women who are true and good in love. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, however, the God of Love reacts angrily to this apologetic freedom of poetic choice. In Love's contention, Criseyde and Alceste are "woman", not women of different personalities and persuasions. Criseyde badly fails Love's scheme of defining woman as "true". Her lover/author Troilus, assisted by Pandarus, is also a failure in that the true woman they anticipated at the beginning of the poem proves to be resistant to the textual imprisonment demanded from her.[32] Still, from Love's point of view, even if Criseyde is a transgression, her guilt need not be reiterated. If the poet reiterates the story, then he is the culprit. Hence, the apologetic promise appended to *Troilus* has a reverse effect; it aggravates the narrator's "gilt" in the eyes of the God of Love. In G Prologue, Cupid challenges the narrator "Why noldest thow as wel [han] seyd goodnesse/ Of wemen, as thow hast seyd wikedness" (268-269). Cupid obviously shares with Chaucer the idea that the poet can exercise freedom of choice to further his poetic purposes. Indeed, it is this realisation that partly informs the narrator's "apology". By the same token, it is in this awareness that the God of Love tries to capture the poet: "Was there no good matere in thy mynde,/ Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thow nat fynde/ Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?" (G 270-272). The obvious potential to differ from the tradition is also a potential to accord. In a simplistic formulation, Cupid ponders on the unrealised potential to differ: the poet's subjective response, "matere in thy mynde" and the tradition antagonistic to that of Love, "bokes", could have been put to more

[32] I discuss Criseyde in the conclusion to this study.

favourable use. Evidently, according to Cupid's reductive reading, among the possible traditions of speaking of women the narrator has made a conscious choice of speaking of "untrue" women. Redefining antifeminism, H. Phyllis Weissman states, antifeminism can be defined "to include not simply satirical caricatures of women, but any presentation of woman's nature intended to conform her to male expectations of what she is or ought to be."[33] Chaucer would agree with Weissman's formulation, particularly on the point that any presentation of woman's nature to conform to the prescribed expectations does not produce a dichotomy. However, for the God of Love, conceptualising women as good is not only the prime form of feminism but also a battle to be won in the field of poetic representation.

The Daisy/Alceste of the Prologue foregrounds the "ideal" as an issue of fictional representation on a platform of problems. The representation of Daisy/Alceste is framed by a literary context. The poem is prefaced by an antithetical exposition of belief in books. Initially, the narrator is in his usual pose of a reader. He concludes, in the view of absence of proof to argue otherwise, that the authority of books should be recognised. The rest of the narrative makes an attempt to break away from the occupation with the books and goes in search of an "experience" in the love of the Daisy. The love of the Daisy is new not only to the narrative concerns of the Prologue but also to Chaucer's dream corpus. Nowhere in the other dream poems does the narrator claim a first-hand experience of love. The Daisy of the Prologue then promises a variation, a change in the perspective that we have become accustomed to through the narrator. Yet the Daisy comes into narrative as a

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[33] 'Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterisation of Women', in *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Collection of Original Articles*, ed. by George D. Economou, pp. 93-110 (p. 94).

transformed version of the narrator's devotion to books. As he does with the books, the narrator is prepared to give this flower "alle reverence". The daisy is "of alle floures flour/ Fulfilled of al virtu and honour" (F 53-54). As the books "to rede me delyte", for the daisies "have I so gret affeccioun" (44).

The urge to give up books and the epistemological problems they invite is strong: "...whan that the month of May/Is comen.../Farewel my bok and my devocioun!" (F 36-37;39). The delight of the books is substituted by the daisy, (She is the clernesse and the verray lyght/That in this derke world me wynt and ledeth). Significantly, it is the love of the Daisy that transforms the reader of the opening to an author

> The hert in-with my sorwful brest yow dredeth
> And loveth so sore that ye ben verrayly
> The maistresse of my wit, and nothing I.
> My word, my werk ys knyt so in youre bond
> That, as an harpe obeieth to the hond
> And maketh it soune after his fingerynge,
> Ryght so mowe ye oute of myn herte bringe
> Swich vois, ryght as yow lyst, to laughe or pleyne.
> Be ye my gide and lady sovereyne!
> As to myn erthly god to yow I calle,
> Bothe in this werk and in my sorwes alle. (84-96)

The narrator, as the Black Knight does in his description of Lady White in the ***Book of the Duchess***, presents the effect of love as a forceful desire to be subsumed by the object of devotion. He identifies in the daisy several levels of signification.Through love "loveth so sore that", the daisy invades his mind and conquers his imagination. To this end, the daisy is made to disappear under the images she is conveyed in. The narrator's daisy is the force that controls "my word, my werk". His mental capacity is "knyt so in youre bond" that the narrator surrenders to the invasive power of the daisy

"Bothe in this werk and in my sorwes alle." The narrator assumes the role of an author, but he is an author who willingly submits to the daisy's compelling influence so that he abandons the individual power to imagine and construct. The *Echecs* commentator describes the process of composition as follows:

> In the objects we see made by art we perceive that the craftsman, desirous of making certain objects in a reasonable manner, first applies his intention and conceives beforehand in his mind the form of what he wishes to make. Then follows Imagination, wherein the aforesaid form is impressed and portrayed.

The narrator claims that his desire to compose is entirely governed by the daisy, "the maistresse of my wit, and nothing I". The *Echecs* commentator continues:

> Then the hand and chisel come, or the brush, which complete the object in conformity with the aforementioned steps. For just as the carpenter's chisel or the painter's brush conforms to the hand that directs it, the hand moves in accordance with the Imagination, and the Imagination in conformity with the figure or form which the principal craftsman intends.[34]

The narrator complicates the difference between the respective roles of the hand and imagination in that he is the "harpe" played by the "hand", the Daisy. The admission of the daisy as the mistress of the lover's wit, the ruling agent that will dictate the composition and the thematic balance ("to laughe or pleyne") of the "work" negates the possibility of authorial independence for the narrator. In the dream, Cupid demands the sovereignty of the image of the Daisy in the literary works that speak of women. In this light, the narrator's negation of authorial independence is a delayed compliance with Cupid's doctrine.

[34] Quoted in Kelly, *Medieval Imagination*, p.33.

On the other hand, the negation of authorial independence defines the boundaries of the narrator's authorial activity. The love of the Daisy provides him with a predefined poetic mission. The radical change in the nature of devotion, the shift from books to the daisy, reveals itself to be a submission to uniformity created by the pervasive power of the daisy. The narrator's newly acquired voice will sing "ryght as yow lyst".

Evidently, the Daisy love is substantiated in terms of its capacity to produce poetry, especially poetry that celebrates and speaks of the themes the daisy is made to represent. Significantly, the daisy is silent. She is a flower that can neither receive nor reject the narrator's offers of service, his readiness to make her the author of his work and poems. The daisy has always been silent in her symbolic existence. It has long been realised that the Daisy of the Prologue has a prior existence in the French love poetry of the fourteenth century. In Machaut and Froissart's marguerite *dits* the daisy features as the sole object of the poet's love. Indeed, these poems are poems of devotion and ardent love for a flower called daisy. Fluctuating between implications of the daisy as a real flower and the lady of the poet, the natural attributes of the daisy (she is white and green, she inclines towards sun and closes her petals when it is dark,) are presented as the emblems of the virtues of the daisy/lady and the nature of love she incites and alternatively represents.[35] Guillaume de Machaut's *Le Dit de la Marguerite* introduces its subject with a direct announcement of love of a flower "J'aim une fleur, qui s'uevre et qui s'encline/ Vers le soleil de jours quant il chemine" (1-2), (I love a flower which opens and inclines towards the sun during the day while the sun traverses

[35] Froissart in *Dittié de la Flour de Margherite*, 58-60, explains the reason for the flower's mimicry of the sun. See also Machaut, *Lis et Marguerite*, 235-42.

the heavens). In a manner that characterises other marguerite poems of the period, Machaut places the emphasis on the multiple significances of the flower. The flower, as the opening lines indicate, is the lady the poet loves and intends to praise. Throughout the poem it at once stands for the poet's lady, the power of love, courtesy and loyalty. The daisy of these poems is worshipped with deep respect and love not only for the virtue of being the good, welcoming lady of the lover/poet but also for the virtues that it inspires in the beholder. In *Le Dit de la Marguerite,* the daisy's significance goes beyond the corporeal existence of a lady and purports to be love itself in a complex way:

> Toutes gens sont resjoï dou veoir,
> Et qui la tient, il ne put mal avoir,
> Et qui la sent, Amours le fait mouvoir
> Sans detrier
> A li amer de cuer sans decevoir. (57-61)
>
> (Whoever holds her can have no ill, and whoever smells her, Love moves him without delay to love her from his heart without deception.)

The symbolic value of the daisy, which the French poets use in various ways, is examined by Froissart when he relates the myth that inspired him to plead love by means of the daisy.[36] Froissart relates that the daisy originates from the tears of Hero, whose lover, Cephei died, leaving her inconsolable and distraught for the loss of her beloved. She shed so many tears that Jupiter took pity on her situation and converted the tears into flowers which flourished with the help of sun. Froissart's account of the symbolism of the daisy includes also the relation of the story of Mercury and Ceres whose hearts are joined when Mercury came upon Cephei's tomb and discovered the

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[36] Froissart, *Le Dit de la Marguerite*; Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues,* pp. 149-151.

daisies grown there. Hoping to gain his lady's favour he send them to Ceres, who upon receiving the flowers granted her affections. Emphasising the flower's power to induce someone to love, the poet hopes to benefit from his love of the daisy in a similar way and rejoices in having the opportunity to enjoy the sight of the flowers which remind him of the goodness and the virtues of his lady.

In French poetry, the silent potential of the flower is utilised exclusively symbolically. The Daisy is chosen to represent a poetic ideal. Fittingly, the inherent potential in the Daisy to represent the ideal lady of poetic creation is activated by the poets. The daisy/lady is the paragon of virtue and truth, as is the daisy in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. The lady enjoys an unrivalled elevated status earned by what the daisy represents. In a similar manner to the Black Knight's endeavour to confer on Lady White his selected ideal "image", the daisy is truth and woman is truth via the daisy. The God of Love demands the same equation for Alceste.

The daisy/lady of the marguerite tradition is the nuclear form of ideal womanhood. Yet her honour and name are contingent in the sense that the goodness is assigned to her, is given to her, for she is chosen to represent the poet's love. In a rhetorical questioning of the future of his love and the lady's feelings, the lover in Machaut's *dit* states

> Je ne doubt pas que jamais se varie,
> Eins sui certeins qu'elle m'iert vraie amie
> Jusqu'a la mort,
> (166-68)
>
> (I do not fear that she will ever change, but I am certain that she will be a true lover to me until death, and will remain so if I die.)

Surely the lover is expressing an appreciation of the constancy of the lady as a

positive attribute. The problem is that being a "true lover" is not merely an attribute, it is what constitutes the lady as a whole.

In Chaucer's poem, the daisy devotion tends to explicate rather than disclaim the existence of the daisy as contingent to her significance to the poet. The Daisy as the symbol of a prefabricated image of woman is an issue to be addressed in the dream section. Before being confronted with the significance of the Daisy, the lover/author commends his flower to the tradition. His textualisation of the daisy indicates a self-consciousness: "Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose,/Suffisant this flour to preyse aryght" (F 66-67). Like its counterpart in the marguerite tradition, Chaucer's daisy is the flower of all flowers, she is full of virtue and honour, she inclines towards sun (the symbol of truth) and hates darkness (infidelity, the threat to her virtue) (F 48-54;61-65). The tradition is evoked, fused with lyric expression and allegorical signification. But the Daisy is not only a symbol of love or lady in the narrator's definition of her. She prompts a particular use of discourse, she encourages the lover to compose poetry.

The daisy has to be contextualised, and her powers verbalised. The daisy's muted existence has to be vocalised. The narrator's devotion to the daisy is sustained in a literary environment. And it introduces an enigmatic flower/woman whose significance can be attested only through her impact on the narrator's poetic skills and the acknowledgement of a tradition that can activate those skills for the proper textualisation. The narrator is ready to produce the sort of poetry demanded by the daisy love, but he "ne had Englyssh, rhyme or prose". Lacking the required skill of discourse in such matters, the only referent provided for the expression of his subordination is the lovers that have the voice and the medium of expression. He

embraces the lovers' discourse as the "aryght" form of praise he is seeking.

This conformity comes as a second manifesto, the first being the opening contemplation on the authority of books, and does not ask any questions. Here, a conviction is expressed of the authority of the books to define the terms of the narrator's description of the daisy. It will be useful to quote the whole passage for it expresses a highly self-conscious acknowledgement of the validity and superiority of the established discourse

> But helpeth, ye that han konnyng and myght,
> Ye lovers that kan make of sentement;
> In this cas oghte ye be diligent
> To forthren me somwhat in my labour,
> Whethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour.
> For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn
> Of makyng ropen, and lad awey the corn,
> And I come after, glenynge here and there,
> And am ful glad yf I made fynde an ere
> Of any goodly word that ye han left.
> And thogh it happen me rehercen eft
> That ye han in your fresshe songes sayd,
> Forbereth me, and beth nat evele apayd,
> Syn that ye see I do yt in the honour
> Of love, and eke in service of the flour
> Whom that I serve as I have wit or might. (F 68-83)

Here, Chaucer underlines the convention as a shaping force. The appeal to the lovers undermines the authority of the narrator's own presentation by foregrounding its indebtedness to the tradition. The effect is a necessary but comic literalisation. The personal experience is relinquished for a mode of expression in which the lover has to seek the supervision of others who "kan make of sentement." The purchase of the narrator's emotionally loaded claim over the experience of love is hence diminished by the introduction of the context, or the standpoint, that defines it even before it is

experienced. The daisy/lady conceptualised in terms of the marguerite tradition can be textualised only in the language in which love poetry is written.[37]

It has been argued that the summation of the significance of the daisy is suggestive of meanings not covered by the marguerite tradition.[38] Particularly in the nature of relationship between the lady and the lover, the implications of a quasi-religious devotion are obvious. The narrator states "to myn erthly god to yow I calle" (F 95). Nevertheless, the "god" is an "erthly" god. The narrator's equation of his present "werk" and "my sorwes alle" suggests that the purpose is less to express love and devotion to a certain lady by making her a marguerite lady than to include in the description all possible connotations of such devotion.[39] The narrator's devotion does not designate an active role for the daisy. Compelled by love, it is nevertheless the narrator who decides what position and role the daisy should have in his works. The daisy is essentially the idealised lady, the passive but morally and physically perfect woman. Accordingly, the daisy worship evokes an image, the unique goodness of which determines the limits of its existence. The daisy, therefore, is the individual lady

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[37] For a reverse application of this paradigm, see Lisa Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales*, p.49. Associating the daisy with the "truth" the poet seeks, Kiser argues that the appeal to lovers in these lines is in fact an invitation to share the unifying and truthful significance of the daisy. The narrator presents a model, he does not wish to benefit from the lovers' discourse.

[38] In her idealised state, the daisy is identifiable with the women saints of hagiographical writing. This, of course, is an implication that becomes clear in the association of the Daisy with Alceste. See Delany, *The Naked Text*, p. 67. For a comparison of the daisy's role to that of Virgin Mary, see Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales*, pp. 47-48; Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, p.40.

[39] See Russell A. Peck, 'Chaucerian Poetics and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. by Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 39-56 (p. 46), "Geoffrey's reverence for the daisy is at heart a religious experience. She reveals to him the natural piety of the imagination and of poetry."

of the poet in a limited way. The outburst of love soon epitomises its object, the lady, as a medium of expression for that love. The narrator subverts what he has started out as a personal experience. Evoking the marguerite tradition can be seen as a specific example of contextualisation, for the narrative drops the lady defined by the requirements of the marguerite tradition and turns to the language and tradition that yield such portraits of ladies. The return to the already established form of discourse used by lovers is indicative of the fact that the daisy does not stand as an individual. On the contrary, she is the product of a preconceived idea of women. The appeal to the lovers first declares that the poet does not have the language, the art of praising his lady duly, and is prepared to borrow the mode of expression practised and made available by the so-called servants of love.

In lines 68-83 quoted above is a manifesto which Chaucer indicates as the governing principle underlying the presentation of the lady the narrator invoked in his daisy description. "For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn" is an unambiguous recognition of the existence of that manifesto. The indiscriminate appeal for the help of lovers whether they praise the flower or the leaf makes the point clear that what matters is not what the lady is like but rather how you mean to present her. The poet's lament that he is a late comer in the art of making poetry to serve love and his lady is a further acknowledgement of that manifesto. The self-consciousness in the presence of many works written on the same subject not only renders the narrator's attempt an amateurish exercise, but also warns of the potential reductionism inherent in those works. The presentation of the Daisy is dependent upon the poet/lovers who have practised this art before. At the same time, expressed in the last two lines of the quoted passage, Chaucer explicitly identifies the objective of that representation: it is

the service of love which requires the service of the lady. In this final acknowledgement, the particular case benefits from a generally applied mode of discourse. Clearly, the lady's individuality is compromised by the presence of a stylised depiction in which she is known to be projected by others. In the transition from experiencing the presence of the lady to presenting her in the proper manner required by the service of love, the lady is discarded for the diction by which she is praised. The emphasis is shifted from the lady to the presentation of her. The poet's participation in this acknowledged form of presentation is subject to his conformity to it with which he complies but not without providing explanatory footnotes.

It is as if there is a contract, as the one drawn between the lover and the God of Love in the *Roman de la Rose* and adapted earlier by the Knight in the *Book of the Duchess*, that determines the poet's attitude to the lady. The narrator's reference to the daisy as the mistress of his wit is a telling example (F 88). She is not only the occasion that prompts him to write poetry, she *is* the poetry he writes.

The ideal lady represented by the daisy is therefore a collectively produced construct. She is an image created by the lover/poets. The appeal to lovers is an appeal to tradition. It reveals the role of the literature in defining woman as well as the principles set prior to (and in order to codify) that definition. The narrator's daisy lives in the imaginative creations of lovers. The lovers' imagination thrives upon the lady while the lady, dependent upon that imagination, suffers a textual imprisonment. The address to the lovers, therefore, is crucial to an understanding of the conditions which bestow upon the lady the ideal state that she enjoys. The explicitly stated purpose of praise, which, as in the Black Knight's case, places Love before the lady, "Syn that ye see I do yt in the honour/Of love, and eke in the service of the flour", recognises

an authority in Love and seeks to be admitted to the company of the followers of the tradition of love. The narrator's concern for concensus, and his use of the incapability topos can be seen as further indications of the desire to belong to the tradition. Reliance on tradition, furthermore, closes off the narrator's "experience" as a failed attempt to break away from the books. As if in anticipation of the God of Love's anger, the narrator fully acknowledges the precepts of the tradition. Admittedly, composing love poetry is not one of his skills but he can refer the reader to the main written source in order to give an idea of his meaning. Rehearsing and repeating the established discourse will suffice.

The narrator is preoccupied with the "truth". Although the opening contemplation does not come to a fruitful conclusion in that regard, location of the daisy in literary fields rather than the May fields of his seemingly transformed devotion suggests a localised interest in reading and writing. As far as writing is concerned, the narrator's comical despair at finding himself at a previously cultivated field has implications of poetic sterility. The ever green field of love poetry seems to have been exhausted. As a late comer, the narrator realises that search for new configurations, "freshe songes" will be futile, not that he shows much effort in that regard. Knowing the limited space for the exercise of "individual talent" under the circumstances, the narrator is forced to recognise the authority of the previous authors. The French daisy is the symbol of truth, but not the symbol of truth in books. Conversely, it signifies truth in love. Yet, verbalisation of its truth is contingent on the texts. Again, the truth of the text produced as a celebration of the daisy is comprised by the daisy. Is it then that, the narrator hands over his "wit" to the daisy so that she could imprint the truth not only on his mind but also on the poem he writes? Perhaps

the relocation of the daisy -moving her from the terrain of subjective feelings to the more general and exposed world of literature- signals a challenge for testing her truth, the extent to which she can verify the reliability of textual representation. The Black Knight resists the idea that Lady White can be a unique but subjective reconstruction, something that he perceives as such. He assures his interlocutor that what he says of his lady was endorsed by everyone who saw her. In the daisy, the unquestioned recognition of lovers' discourse suggests an ironic testimony to the pre-existence of the daisy.

To complicate things even further, in the dream the narrator witnesses a celebration of "Thys flour which that I clepe the dayesie" (293). The ladies, led by the queen in green and white and the God of Love, sing: "Heel and honour/To trouthe of womenhede, and to this flour/That bereth our alder pris in figurynge!/Hire white corowne bereth the witnessynge" (F 294-299). The flower stands for woman's truth. Furthermore, it is Alceste's flower. Alceste, the queen of Thrace proves her truth in love through death. Like the daisy of the classical myth on which the ideology of French marguerite poetry rests, Alceste creates her own myth by choosing to die in place of her husband. Since this act of sacrifice of self for the beloved is proof of her truth in love she becomes *the* daisy (F 510-533). The interaction between the "trouthe of womenhed" and "our alder pris in *figurynge*" (my italics) points to Alceste's significance as an "archetype" for the textual representation of women.

We have noted the blatantly literary quality of the lady in the portrait of Blanche. The Black Knight speaks of his lady from a perspective that he first has to adopt and then apply to the picture he has in mind. Chaucer's Daisy/Alceste, too, is a tradition-governed woman. In the Daisy, however, there is no counterpart to the

narrative possessiveness of the Knight induced by tradition for the purposes of poetic enterprise. The expression of love and especially the reconstruction of the lady through language are more readily and openly claimed from the body of literature. Representing the Daisy through the established discourse both calls for a recognition of the Daisy as traditional and identifies it as *a* way of speaking of women. Tradition then is transmitted through realisation of women. The Daisy needs the traditional discourse for perpetuation of her "name", but the poet's need is even greater. As the mastermind behind the project of textualisation, the poet needs the daisy to continue the tradition. In the representation of the "idealised" ladies, love comes to stand for literature. The connection is between literature and women, women and Love. As presented in the Daisy/Alceste, the intermediary role of the lover/poets consists in materialising and continuing the connection in a limiting context.

What is this limiting context? Why is it limiting? In an attempt to provide an explication of these terms and their locale in the presentation of Daisy/Alceste, we need to consider Alceste's epistemological existence in the court of Love. Love introduces Alceste as "kalender ys shee/To any woman that wol lover bee./For she taught al the craft of fyn lovynge,/And namely of wyfhod the lyvnge,/And al the boundes she oghte kepe." (F 542-46) As the Daisy guides and governs the narrator's creative powers, so does Alceste guide the lovers. The lovers in question are women lovers. Alceste earns her representative status by dying for her husband. In Lover's ideology, she is "good" and "true". She represents not only the true women but also women in love.

Michael Cherniss states that Alceste "is an aspect of what Cupid represents...His conceptual identity subsumes hers; there could be a Cupid without

Alceste, but never an Alceste without Cupid."[40] In other words, Alceste is created by Love.[41] Her role and significance consequent to it can only be meaningful in Love. The image of Alceste as goodness, truth and fidelity embodied in wifehood precedes her existence as a woman and determines her actions. As indicated in the last line, this image can be substantiated only within the limits determined by the role embraced by Alceste. When considered in relation to the daisy which Chaucer in the dream identifies not as Alceste herself but as her flower (F 524-25), it becomes clear that Alceste lives in this flower which has become a literary flower and is frequently used to further the image of women as imprinted by Alceste's exemplary behaviour. That is, Alceste disappears in the daisy in the sense that it is her celebrated truth, and the discourse it generates, that the daisy contains, not Alceste. Alceste is selected by the God of Love as the model for poetic representation of woman. The equation suggests that speaking of Alceste is speaking of the daisy. In turn, speaking of the daisy is speaking of all women. Like Lady White, Alceste, too, dies in the poetic figuration of her "truth." The "boundes" that she keeps demand the denial of the individual self, self-destruction and utter determination to be satisfied with an existence within those

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[40] 'Chaucer's Last Dream Vision', p.195.

[41] In an allegorical reading, Lisa Kiser suggests that Alceste is the "symbol of literature's mediating role" in attaining the truth that rests with Cupid, the sun, the symbol of Christian truth. Russell Peck's reading of the Daisy concurs with Kiser's idea that the daisy is the mediator between the poet and the sun, the light of his truth. Yet, Peck identifies the truth contained in Cupid as the poetic message that Chaucer intends to deliver in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Romance of the Rose*. The tendency for a symbolic reading of the daisy suggests also a relationship between the daisy and Chaucer's art. In Peck's terms, the daisy "is an emblem of the poetic imagination", and Chaucer's celebration of the daisy is a celebration of the poetic imagination. See Lisa Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the 'Legend of Good Women'*, pp. 42-46; Russell A. Peck, 'Chaucerian Poetics and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', p. 44.

boundaries. As the God of Love flatly announces in his literal interpretation of the "offensive" *Roman de la Rose* and the *Troilus and Criseyde*, the concerns of the God of Love are dismissive of the complexities of such a narrative which simultaneously bespeaks the need to recognise its limitations.

Alceste speaks in the trial of representations of women but she speaks in terms that reinforce rather than contradict Cupid's formulation. As Lee Patterson observes, Alceste "reveals herself to be a victim who has internalised her own subjection."[42] It is right to suggest that "internalised subjection" is an asset required of all the followers of the God of Love. The Black Knight and the narrator in the Prologue, their ladies, Lady white and Daisy/Alceste, are all re-cast in the course of their contribution to the continuity of the ideological discourse of the God of Love. The restrained authors, the Black Knight and the Prologue narrator, bow to the authority of the tradition of Love. The tradition in question requires that the "authors" are subservient, not creative, that women are representative not individual. Such transforming conceptualisation imposes a "death" upon the authors and the women they create. The God of Love's final directive to the narrator in the Prologue is to return to books and find women who have died for love. Indiscriminate to the complexities of the motives and reasons of their death, he demands a re-formation of dead women in the poetic discourse that he authorises. Dead women serve as a productive field for poetic re-creation. Alceste is the epitome of this potential. But who can blame the God of Love's frustrated attempt at stability and integrity of his tradition, for imposition of meaning and confiscation of autonomy both of the authors and the women, when, given the chance, Lady White can say "Nay" and Criseyde can leave Troilus for another lover, and the narrator/poet

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[42] *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.284.

can refuse to serve his sentence without a call for recognition of his individual "entente"? A "book of dead women" made to order will perhaps level the alarming adversities. This is the deluded state in which Love returns to "paradys, with al this companye-" (F 564) to "serve alwey the fresshe dayesye" (F 565). The narrator/poet resumes writing, with a plan and a designated "meaning" before him. F Prologue reads "And with that word my bokes gan I take,/ And ryght thus on my legende gan I make" (578-79).

"Books" and "making" are two essentials inextricably connected in the *Legend of Good Women.* The narrator is directed to books for soliciting a meaning that will have to be reiterated in unambiguous words. He is to make "...a glorious legende/Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,/ That weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves;" (F483-485). The generic prescription defines the form and the content of the narrative to follow. The God of Love, as the god he is, demands a "holy celebration", a "legendary" of women. Originally, a "legend" was a eulogic biography compiled and read as testimony to the holy deeds, powers and signs of martyrs of religion.[43] As Delany demonstrates, the conversion of this into a genre is not void of self-conscious elaboration.[44] Though grounded in the body of holy faith, "the *ratio* of saints' lives is the presentation of a sublime ideal in the sense that legend, like poetry, discloses a higher degree of truth than history itself."[45] Compilation of "facts" in order to make a legend, the directive of the God of Love, requires victimisation of women who are

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[43] See Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text,* pp. 64-65.

[44] *The Naked Text,* pp. 62-64.

[45] Laurel Braswell, 'Chaucer and the Art of Hagiography', in *Chaucer in the Eighties,* pp. 209-222 (p.210).

the means through which this goal can be achieved. The women presented in the *Legend of Good Women* are invariably dead; their existing reputation largely based on fidelity to love, the "truth", which at the same time is the defining principle in attesting their meaning both poetically and morally.[46] The terms of their goodness as established by Cupid and Alceste are very simple and straightforward. These women love, are betrayed or abandoned, and eventually, to attain the status of a "saint", they seek death voluntarily. The plan designated by Cupid is to generalise Alceste's embracement of death for the love of her husband as the expression of "truth" of women, and it works, at least for the narrator's purposes. In the legends, the narrator does exactly what he has been ordered to do. He subverts the genre, and omits the details of the stories he is commissioned to re-write to create the desired effect. What the narrator does in the legends can be explained in two ways: Firstly, upholding Alceste as the model of good women is a step further, though not necessarily subtle, towards creating an image of women not only in theory but in practice as well. In other words, the scheme is to recast all literary women in a new light so that the particular impact of works like the *Troilus* and the *Roman* can be countered. If we take this position, the plan is obvious; the effect, as the general dissatisfaction with the legends indicates,[47] is surely contrary to what Cupid might have had in mind.

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[46] See Ruth M. Ames, 'The Feminist Connections of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, pp.57-92. Ames suggests that the legends show love as a trap for women. "We deduce from the legends the heresy that if the ladies were wise, they would not have served the God of Love", p. 72.

[47] The critical consensus is that Chaucer is bored with the legends so much so that he has left them unfinished. The "boredom" theory is largely based on the monotonous repetition of the formulaic characterisation of all women included in the legends. See Robert W. Frank, Jr., 'The Legend of the *Legend of Good Women*', *ChauR*, 1 (1966), 110-133, for an evaluation and refutation of the contention that the legends, by the virtue of being imposed upon Chaucer, proved to be uncongenial to his poetic

Secondly, the *Legend* does not attempt further to textualise its heroines. Its starting point is the textual existence of women. It is a rewriting, a re-making. Books have to be forced out of their traditional meaning, women have to be alienated from the contexts in which they have been found. The heroines of the *Legend* are concerned with their future reputation, fears that seem retrospectively confirmed by the books in which Chaucer found them. Utilising the implied potential inherent in the literary presentations of women, in the *Legend* Chaucer makes the practice of taking the part for the whole ironically and comically explicit.[48] The *Legend* is perhaps Chaucer's most poignant attack not on antifeminism or the idealising tradition *per se* but on the contention, pervasive in these two opposite traditions, that it is possible to stabilise and convey a certified image.[49]

Yet, an attempt to imprint a precise "image" at the expense of erasing the already existing ones characterises the legends. All the heroines appear in the same light i.e. dying in order to secure a "good" name. To take an example, Cleopatra's actions consists in running away "for drede" (I,664), to bury Antony in a shrine and to commit suicide. Having fulfilled her "wyfhod" (I, 691) with Antony, she concludes her only speech with the confidence that "and that shal ben wel sene,/Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene" (I,694-95). Similarly, Hypsipyle "trewe to Jason was she al

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interests.

[48] A pertinent contention is Sheila Delany's. Arguing that the *Prologue* and the *Legend* are interconnected, Delany rightly argues that "the image of woman that Eros proposes is simply a massive synecdoche, taking the part for the whole." See *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.159.

[49] I agree with Robert W. Frank, Jr. that the pervasive comicality of the *Legend* derives from the penance of the narrator to present all women good and all men bad. See 'The Legend of the *Legend of Good Women*', p.129.

hire lyf,/And evere kepte hire chast, as for his wif;/Ne nevere hadde she joye at hir herte,/But deyede for his love, of sorwes smerte." (IV, 1576-79).

Working out the excision and omission exposes the motive behind the telling of these stories. It is a categorising and limiting motive. The goodness and virtue of these women are stated so often that the whole plan of representation collapses into an act of assertion. Cupid ordered the narrator to "telle" of women good, and the narrator literally is doing so. While constantly advocating the good woman's cause as helplessness and submission in the hands of a cruel man -Dido's plea to Aeneas is a case in point- or more crudely, dying as a result of love, Chaucer not only realises the reductive maxims of the Prologue but also underlines the extreme extents the authorial power can go without success at effective suppression of dissenting views. As John Fyler contends "The effort to make all women seem to be saints has [a] caricaturing effect. The heroines lose their diversity and individuality in order to suffer martyrdom passively...The preconceived pattern of sanctity defeats its own intent by enervating female heroism."[50]

The *Legend* not only presents a parodic, cryptic view of women made to fit into a predetermined definition, it also shows the eligibility of women to be used as text. The implications of women's textual existence are first implemented in Cupid's accusation of the narrator on the basis of translating antifeminist texts and then is reinforced by his direction of the narrator to the books for the correction of his representations. Women are there, like texts, to be glossed and interpreted and

[50] *Chaucer and Ovid,* p.107. In a reading of the *Legend of Good Women* as a poem in the generic form of *Legenda Aurea,* Janet M. Cowen suggests that the excisions and abbreviations of the details of the stories should be seen in the context of the analogy between Chaucer's poem and the *Legenda Aurea.* See 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: Structure and Tone', *SP,* 82 (1985), 416-36.

represented. The fact that Chaucer's representation of the saints of love is to the detriment of the original presentation is all the more important for this reason. Albeit supplemented by Cupid's short-sighted view of textual representation, the women in the *Legend* are products of one of Chaucer's most direct statements about the instability and unreliability of fictional truth. The fictional truth is equated with woman's truth in its potential eligibility to be manipulated and diverted. Chaucer ridicules the one-sided image of women in having Cupid as the agent responsible for it. Yet Cupid's authorisation of the presentations makes Chaucer's emphasis on the importance of authorial control more obvious. Cupid limits the freedom of the poet with regard to the manner of representation; he even designates the message, prescribing the intended meaning. In following Cupid's instruction, however, Chaucer realises a different maxim: He reinforces the extents of authorial intervention to reshape and transform, even distort, the actual "matter". The stories of "good" women in the *Legend* repeatedly and emphatically tell the story of this transformation and distortion. The women do not merely bow to the tyranny of the God of Love and his doctrine,[51] they also, and more importantly, become emblems of poetic instability and relativity.

[51] Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 284.

CHAPTER SIX

FAME AND NATURE REDEFINED

We have seen that women facilitate the fictional creation; they constitute the text and they bear the poetic purpose sought by the author of the narrative. In the narrative contexts provided, Dido situated between the unreconciliable priorities of epic and romance, Lady White and Daisy/Alceste in the inflexible poetic religion of love, women assume an indispensable importance in the creation and continuation of tradition(s). As we have seen, a strong determinant in these women's textual becoming, and the attempted textual being, is authority: authority as exercised by Virgil and Ovid, authority as exercised by the Black Knight and confiscated by the God of Love, the authority of tradition; the authority that not only defines the narrative space allocated to women but also attempts to stabilise the significance to be inferred from such placement.

In this chapter, I will pursue the question of tradition through representations of Lady Fame in the *House of Fame* and Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls*. The point of departure from the common concern of the two previous chapters will be that Lady Fame and Nature have an authoritative position in the narrative. That is, instead of being created, their major role in the narrative consists in contributing to the act of creation as authority figures. Fame and Nature provide two antithetical paradigms for the use of authority in fictional creation and continuity of norms. In Fame, the concern of Section One of this chapter, authority and its power in (de)stabilising the significance of fictional creation is examined through a focus on the "truth" of fictional representation, while in Nature, discussed in Section Two, the virtues of lack

of reconciliation are given priority in a "parliament" where the individual voices are recognised for their diversity.

SECTION ONE: THE "WICKED" FAME

Chaucer's *House of Fame* is one of his ambivalent poetic undertakings. It opens with an inconclusive contemplation of dream theories, and proceeds to a narrative frame in which, contained within the walls of the temple of Venus, the reader is confronted with the difficult task of distinguishing the "truth telling" authority. With a narrator clasped between the talons of a zealous eagle, the poem finally finds a focus in a compelling reward for the narrator's lifelong engagement with reading and writing. The narrator is escorted, with the supplementary -though unwanted- instruction, to the House of Fame. The narrator's assigned task, search for "tidings of love", brings him to a place where he sights Fame sitting in a throne, placed on a dais: "But al hye, above a dees,/ Sitte in a see imperiall,/ That made was of a rubee all,/ Which that a carbuncle ys ycalled,/ Y saugh, perpetually ystalled,/ A feymynyne creature," (III, 1360-1365). The introductory lines, with their emphasis on the immobility of the character, "above a dees", "perpetaully ystalled", suggest a connection with the "ideal" women of the previous chapter in that Fame, occupying an imperial place, seems to have the same position and ineffective power as the women of Cupid's tradition: Fame is "A femynyne creature,/ That never formed by Nature/ Nas such another thing yseye." (1365-1367). The narrative, however, goes on to negate such a connection. In the description of Fame, the incomparability topos is loaded with ironic implications. Surrounded by the glamour of the riches and jewels, placed on a throne to preside over the crowd which soon will fill the hall, Fame's "sovereignty" is secured, yet her

uniqueness is observed not in terms of admiration but in those of bewilderment. The observation registers the tone of "Nas such another thing yseye" (1367), on an inability to grasp it all. For the creature shifts size, now appearing timid and minute, now gigantic, measuring from earth to sky. Her numerous eyes and ears and tongues (1370-1390) lend her a beastly look. Signifying her speedy movement, she has partridges wings on her feet. This "godesse" is adorned with jewels and riches. She sits in "nobley, honour, and rychesse;" (1416).

The rather cursory description reveals that Fame is able to accommodate strikingly antithetical qualities: her regal appearance versus her bestial appearance; capable of shifting size, she is now small, now big. The textual references to Fame posit a similar ambivalence. The narrator refers to her as either the queen (1535) or the goddess (1394,1406,1415), whereas to the petitioners she is the "lady" (1536,1609,1704) or "Madam" (1553,1842,1847). The petitioners recognise Fame as an authoritative woman, a woman who can grant them the "name/fame" they want and Fame's response is unprecedented: she grants the name but not always the name her petitioners want.

Fame comes into the *House of Fame* at a crucial but late stage. But she predominates the idea of the poem. First introduced by Dido in Book I as the daunting certainty of future condemnation, in Book III, Fame and the palace of Fame are presented in a symbolically oriented discourse. As a due response to the richly suggestive narrative of Book III, Chaucer's presentation of fame has been considered as an awareness of and interest in the formation and fabrication of fame as a concept

or ethical value.[1] Recent criticism suggests that Chaucer's concern in presenting Fame is less moral or ethical than representing fame as a multivalent concept. This represents a radical shift from the proposition that "the theme of the *House of Fame* is the vanity of worldly fame."[2] Jorg Fichte contests the possibility of assigning a moral significance to Chaucer's Fame: "Instead of assigning a determinative meaning to Fame, Chaucer investigates various aspects of it and Fame in Chaucer's portrayal becomes an ambiguous, amoral entity combining both negative and positive aspects."[3] Recent criticism finds in Chaucer's representation of Fame also a concern with truth and authority. In a brilliant study of the *House of Fame,* in search of certainty that she believes Chaucer finally finds in God and the stability of Christian truth, Sheila Delany maintains that Fame is to be understood "as the body of traditional knowledge

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[1] The traditions informing Chaucer's *House of Fame* and Chaucer's specific use of those traditions have been the subject of many studies. I will not analyse fame in relation to ethical and philosophical indications. Such a recent study has been done by Piero Boitani in *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, Barnes and Noble,1984). In Chapter III, "The Fourteenth Century Fame of Fame" Boitani provides a good basis of comparison for Chaucer's concept of fame and his Italian predecessors. See also B.G.Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the 'House of Fame'* ; J.A.W. Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of the 'House of Fame'*; Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's 'House of Fame': The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism.*

[2] B. G. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the 'House of Fame',* p. 5. The certainty of Koonce's contention is challenged, indirectly, in Payne's denial of pertinence of any theme to the *House of Fame*: "The *House of Fame* has no subject, neither fame nor love. All it has is the manner, the attempt to twist around the arrangement of books, dreams, and experience so as to produce some ironies which could illuminate the problem of art, knowledge and illusion", Robert. O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance,* p. 138. For an agreement with Koonce on the moral implications of fame see Paul G. Ruggiers, 'The Unity of Chaucer's *House of Fame*' in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism,* ed. by Edward Wagenknecht (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 295-308 (p.304).

[3] *Chaucer's 'Art Poetical': A Study of Chaucerian Poetics* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1980), p. 67.

that confronted the educated fourteenth-century reader...If wide reading among historical and literary sources provided the medieval poet with a wealth of material, it must also have indicated the equivocal nature of tradition, fame".[4] Fyler locates the idea of contingency delivered through fame in a somewhat edifying interest: "Fame...sums up the blur of truth and falsehood in dreams, books and experience, and she epitomizes the contingency and deceit of the sublunary world."[5] Localising Fame's significance to "language and poetry" and setting it outside the wider scope of the "body of traditional knowledge", Robert Edwards concurs with the idea of uncertainty central to Fame: "Chaucer's portrayal of Fame connects and intensifies two proportions about language and poetry: first, language, including poetry operates under a law of transformation; and second, there is a radical separation of words from things."[6]

As observed in the criticism, Chaucer's Fame engages with the relation between language and literature, fame and literature. Yet, it seems to me that Chaucer's connection of literature and fame can be evaluated more effectively if we recognise the feminine characteristics of Fame and read Chaucer's "exposition" of Fame as part of his larger engagement with the possibility of fictional truth. As we have seen, the question of fictional truth is equally pertinent to women and literature. It seems to me that in the representation of Fame as a female figure exercising arbitrary authority on those who seek it, Chaucer is voicing some fundamental concerns about the collective authority of literary tradition. It is worth noting that as opposed to emphasising the individual author, Chaucer is presenting Fame as the collective product of

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[4] *Chaucer's 'House of Fame': The Poetics of Sceptical Fideism*, pp. 3, 5.

[5] *Chaucer and Ovid*, p.56.

[6] *The Dream of Chaucer*, p.117.

undistinguished voices. No matter how much disagreement or agreement is there among the individual voices, the final product is a combination of their statements, not one or the other. In Fame, deconstructing poetic creation to its individual components and contributors, even at a representative level as we have in the Dido episode, for instance, does not expose the speaker. On the contrary, it calls attention to the permanence and ambivalent status of a generally acknowledged "truth".

In this section, I will first analyse Chaucer's approach to fame as Chaucer considers the constituents of Fame and her consequent position and relevance. Then I will analyse the woman who is born out of, and also is, the Fame Chaucer defines. The Fame Chaucer defines will appear both as the context in which we, the reader, are to evaluate the portrayal of Fame the woman and as the woman herself, the image of whom is shown to be of a similar nature to that of Fame which bears that image.

We have seen that Chaucer's concern with the idea of woman in literature is related to the "fame", the reputation, of women as perpetuated by literature. The indication of the importance of the lady's name is one of the thematic concerns of the text. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Cupid's charge against the poet is based on primarily on the poet's role in 'defaming' women (329-335). In the *Book of the Duchess*, the knight, speaking of the lady White, states "No wyght myghte do hir noo shame/ She loved so wel hir owne name" (1017-1018) and his narrative promotes that name. Alceste and Dido embrace death, through which the former attains the elevated status in Cupid's court. Evidently, the struggle to secure a "good" name, whether conferred, as in Lady White, or denied, as in the Virgilian representation of Dido, is of prime importance for women to achieve a relatively

independent existence.[7] The fame, however, of these women is usually determined by the extrinsic factors, by the poet's perception or narrative objectives, over which women have no control.

Fame in the *House of Fame* distributes fame completelty arbitrarily and regardless of the truth of the matter. As we will see below, in the "judgment scene", Fame bestows good name on those who do not deserve it, and rewards people with ill-deeds with the everlasting fame of virtuous people. Dido's apostrophe to Fame: "O Wikked Fame!- for ther nys/ Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!" anticipates Chaucer's depiction of this goddess in Book III. Although Dido's reference to Fame as wicked is in a somewhat different context from the one in which Fame, the woman, is viewed,[8] the descriptive adjective is ironically relevant. Fame is "wicked" firstly because her conceptual identity is defined by words, words of other people, not her own. Secondly, she misuses the trust put into her power as a representative of image making. I would argue that in Fame Chaucer examines the power of words to construct durable -and reliable- images. And he shows the possibility of image making in this context impossible.

Referring to the repetitive monotony in what misogynists had to say about women, Christine de Pisan writes:

> Just the sight of this book [Lamentations of Matheolus], even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men -

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[7] See Pat T. Overbeck, 'Chaucer's Good Woman', *ChauR,* 2 (1967), 75-94 (pp. 81,85,90).

[8] Dido is certain that her fame will be ill-fame. As I have suggested in Chapter Four, literary representations of Dido, though challenging such certainty, inevitably stems from the relevance of her lament.

> and learned men among them- have been and are so inclined to express, both in speaking and in their treatises and writings, so many wicked insults about women and their behaviour...judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators...it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth.[9]

Despite the obvious dissimilarity in their subjects, Christine's "complaint" registers a common concern with one of Chaucer's assurances to his reader in the *Tale of Melibee:*

> "...ye woot that every Evaungelist,
> That telleth us the peyne of Jhesu Crist,
> Ne seith nat alle thyng as his felawe dooth;
> But nathelees hir sentence is al sooth,
> And alle acorden as in hire sentence,
> Al be ther in hir tellyng difference.
> For somme of hem seyn moore, and somme seyn lesse,
> Whan they his pitous passioun expresse-
> I meene of Mark, Marhew, Luc, and John-
> But doutelees hir sentence is al oon.
> Therfore, lordynges alle, I yow biseche,
> If that yow thynke I varie as in my speche,
> As thus, though that I telle somwhat moore
> Of proverbes than ye han herd bifoore
> Comprehended in this litel tretys heere,
> To enforce with th' effect of my mateere,
> And though I nat the same wordes seye
> As ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye
> Blameth me nat; for, as in my sentence,
> Shul ye nowher fynden difference
> Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
> After the which this murye tale I write." (VII, 943-964)

Chaucer's and Christine's common concern is the "sentence" of what they write and read respectively. In denying authority to Matheleus, Christine is targeting the authorities that speak as if "from one and the same mouth" and wondering at the pervasive misperception of women. In the *Tale of Melibee*, Chaucer concurs with the

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[9] *The Book of the City of Ladies,* I. 1.1.

idea of "same mouth" in a relatively positive linguistic frame. The "telling difference" of the authorities does not effect a "difference" in their message. Changing the expressions or the number of words ultimately account to the delivery of the same sentence. Acknowledgement of the integrity of the main text, "the peyne of Jhesu Crist" secures an authorial freedom for Chaucer, while the same operates as a difficult challenge for Christine de Pisan.

To move backwards, from the reassurances of the *Tale of Melibee* to the *House of Fame*, is to see that in the *House of Fame* Chaucer is presenting us with a similar, albeit reverse frame. Because of "our tellyng difference", Chaucer reassures us in the *House of Fame*, the "sentence" of all poets, all poetry, is the same: it consists of fictional constructions governed by preferences of poets, feeding on the gaps of language, continously transformed and multiplied. Jesus Christ provides a stable context, immune to change. But writing poetry is a different story. Language serves the "sentence" of poets. In so doing, it changes everything *en route*. Reconsideration of the sentence of the poet as the ultimate yet contingent truth one can find in the fictional representation is the primary purpose of Chaucer's engagement with tradition and women. So far, in the representations of Lady White, Dido, Alceste and Alcione, the authority as residing in the individual poet has proved to be only relatively reliable. I would suggest that Fame, in Chaucer's presentation both a woman and an authority figure, demonstrates and intensifies the question of the possibility of stable poetic truth.

Acknowledging the traditional implications the poem may have, I will argue, however, that examined in a fictional world, Fame, in Chaucer's presentation, comes to challenge the conditions giving rise to her fictional existence and also the concepts

and names immortalised by her. The preoccupation with the authority of the books, the tradition, culminates in an attempt to expose the "reality", the "truth", or the lack of them, behind the traditional stories or concepts.[10] As Boitani maintains, the *House of Fame* is a journey through tradition, myth, literature and poetry.[11] Yet, the experiences gained through the journey find their expression in the exposition of the nature of Fame.

Chaucer's presentation of Fame is rich in allusions to the various traditions; yet his depiction of Fame implies nevertheless an insistence on the etymology of the word fame as speaking, hearing and communicating on which the concept of Fame developed and personified by Virgil and Ovid is based. The Greek, Latin, and Hebrew words for fame denote speaking, talking and calling.[12] The word fame has also its roots in the sphere of hearing and listening and singing as well as in the complex of words meaning name. Fame in its earliest presentations is closely linked with language, it becomes almost a personification of speaking, hearing and communicating. For Homer and Hesiod Fame is the goddess of language and poetry. Hesiod calls fame "a kind of divinity" which "never dies out when many people spread it around."[13] The Greeks, moreover, had the image of Fame-Rumour as the agent of news and assigned a special role to the poet who, inspired by a divine voice, sings the glory of man.[14] As

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[10] See Dieter Mehl, *Geoffrey Chaucer: An Introduction to His Narrative Poetry*, p.56.

[11] 'Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams : The *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliamnet of Fowls*', p. 52.

[12] Boitani, *Imaginary World of Fame*, p. 18.

[13] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 760-64.

[14] Homer, *The Iliad*, II, 93-4; Hesiod, *Works*, 764.

a courtly and aristocratic society, the Greeks of Homer's time placed a great deal of value on the quest for honour and fame as the primary duty of a nobleman. As Curtis Watson explains,[15] the conscience of the early Greek man was a public conscience and demanded the expression of public approval or disapproval as a measure of honour or dishonour. Moreover, glory and fame were associated with war, with virtue, with death and above all with poetry. War is apparently the medium through which the hero can demonstrate his prowess and valiance and attain the virtue. Hence, the virtue gained through war becomes the material of poetry whose value is immeasurable in fighting the oblivion which the war leading to death might incur upon the hero. As a result of the association of poetry with fame, an evolution of the connection of speaking and hearing with the nature of fame, poetry as perpetuation dominates the concept of fame in the early Greek society.[16] It is this ideal that Chaucer has Theseus voice in the Knight's Tale:

> And certeinly a man hath moost honour
> To dyen in his excellence and flour,
> Whan he is siker of his goode name...
> Thanne is it best, as for a worthy fame
> To dyen whan that he is best of name (I,3047-56)

With the firm belief in the function of poetry as perpetuation, the individual is confident to achieve a permanency of a good name if he dies when he is at the peak of his excellence.

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[15] *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p.22.

[16] Boitani, *Imaginary World of Fame*, p19 ; Alastair J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer,1982), pp. 128-31.

In the depiction of Fame in the *House of Fame*, the belief in the preservation of truth, in one's name, is undermined deliberately at the expense of instigating a disbelief in the value of poetry as repository of reliable information. Delivered through the negating image of Fame, undermining the role of writing as a reliable means for fame is the motive of Chaucer in writing the *House of Fame*. As has been observed "the subject of the *House of Fame* is the art of poetry itself."[17] However, "The world of Fame is a universe of discourse, in which poets (and all dealers in words) stand exposed victims or henchmen of arbitrary, amoral Fama; it is a world of words processes of which simultaneously define and undercut the concept of poetic tradition."[18] As a creation made out of words, poetry is essentially an unreliable source of arbitrarily transmitted views and notions.

To convince the unbelieving narrator that fame can "here al this", all that is going on in the world, the eagle states

> And so thyn oune bok hyt tellith:
> Hir paleys stant, As I shal seye,
> Ryght even in myddes of the weye
> Betwixen hevene and erthe and see,
> That what so ever in al these three
> Is spoken, either privy or apert,
> The way therto ys so overt,
> And stant eke in so juste a place
> That every soun mot to hyt pace;
> Or what so cometh from any tonge,
> Be hyt rouned, red, or songe,
> Or spoke in suerte or in drede,
> Certeyn, hyt moste thider nede. (712-24)

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[17] Laurence K. Shook, 'The *House of Fame*', in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. by Beryl Rowland, rev. ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 414-427 (p.417).

[18] Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid', p. 141.

Fame's place is located conveniently and the way there is perpetually unblocked so that it is a convenient place to receive the correspondence vital to the formation and preservation of fame. Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses* assigns the same place to Rumour. Chaucer's rendition of this part of the *Metamorphoses* is almost verbatim translation:

> In the centre of the world, situated between earth and sky and sea, at the point where the three realms of the universe meet, is a place from which everything the world over can be seen, however far away, to its listening ears comes every sound.[19]

The Eagle's description of the Fame's residence suggests but does not openly mention the convenience of the place from which "everything the world over can be seen". This is a detail Chaucer is going to combine with Virgil's description of fame as having numerous eyes.[20] Both in Chaucer and in Ovid, the description of the place emphasizes the unanimity and collective nature of "what so cometh from any tonge", the natural inhabitant or visitor of the place.

The place assumes a receptiveness, a readiness to provide access indiscriminately to every sound. In Chaucer's presentation, however, we see the elaboration of the relationship between Rumour and sound in Ovid so that the essence of fame is speech, the words that "cometh from any tonge", either it is read or sung. The rhetorical "repetitio" is employed to extend the comprehensiveness of the place of fame, which nevertheless, by the words "rouned, red or songe" and the final

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[19] *Metamorphoses*, XII. Quotation is from *Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. by Mary Innes (Penguin Books, 1955), p.269.

[20] "Rumour ... is a vast , fearful monster, with a watchful eye miraculously set under every feather which grows on her..." *The Aeneid*, IV, trans. W.F.Jackson Knight (London: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 103.

rounding word "spoke", confines the borders of receptiveness to the spoken words of mouth. Both in Virgil and in Ovid, whose presentation of fame as all-hearing, all-speaking and all-seeing derives from Virgil's, the concept of rumour is personified. In the character description -although Chaucer makes use of both authors in the whole definition of fame- Chaucer's debt or acknowledgement is more to Virgil.[21]

The implications of the initial description seem to be epistomological. The description is three-functional: it tells us the location of the place of Fame, it tells us why it is situated there, and finally how Fame and "everything spoken" are related. In the discussion of the relationship between fame and sound that follows, the eagle attempts a scientific explanation of the reason why "whatever is spoken" must go to Fame's place:

> ...thou wost ryght wel this,
> That every kyndely thyng that is
> Hath a kyndely stede ther he
> May best in hyt conserved be;
> Unto which place every thyng
> Thorgh his kyndely enclynyng
> Moveth for to come to (729-35)

The eagle's lecture on the scientific principles of nature, which he ascribes to Aristotle and Plato "And other clerkes many oon" (759-60) establishes a link of natural inclination between words and where Fame dwells. As "every ryver to the see/ Enclyned ys to goo by kynde" (748-49), in the same manner "everything spoken"

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[21] Chaucer uses Virgilian topos of Fame as herald of news both true and false in his poetry. See *Troilus* IV, 659-65; 'Legend of Dido', 1242-44; 'Legend of Hypsipyle', 1423-24. In the *House of Fame*, the initial description, elaborated by the Eagle's zealous lecture on the transformation of sound, suggests that his interest lies more in the formation of fame.

seeks the palace of fame as its natural place.[22] The theory of natural inclination and the speculative statement on the nature of speech revolve around the possible variations of the word and indicate a range of meanings which seem to be randomly chosen and progressively insubstantial. Everything spoken is "speech or noyse or soun". The mobility implied in the change of terms does not apply to their destination; whatever the form of utterance, it eventually and ultimately seeks Fame's dwelling place as its natural place. So, "every speech, or noyse, or soun" belong by nature with Fame. Fame is "every word" that "lowd or pryvee spoken ys" (809-10).

The spoken words do not arrive in the palace of fame in their original form, but go through a process of transformation by the effect of a naturally expected multiplication. Here, Virgil's Rumour, in whose "freedom of movement lies her power, and she gathers new strength from her going" is subtly transformed. Right in the same manner when you throw a stone into the water it makes a little roundel as a circle which consequently produces another one and then another multiplying forever, so does the every sound, "noght but eyr ybroken" is:

> Moveth first an ayr aboute
> And of thys movynge, out of doute
> Another ayr anoon ys meved;
> As I have of the watir preved,
> That every cercle causeth other,
> Ryhgt so of ayr, my leve brother:
> Everych ayr another stereth
> More and more, and speech up bereth,
> Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun,
> Ay through multiplicacion,
> Til hyt be atte Hous of Fame- (811-21)

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[22] On the Eagle's lecture see Delany, *Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*, pp. 71-72; 'Chaucer's *House of Fame* and *Ovide Moralise*', *Comparative Literatures*, 20 (1968), 254-64; Boitani, *Imaginary World of Fame*, pp. 134-35; Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, pp. 78-80; Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, p.154; Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer*, pp.107-8.

The interaction between the air units, or speech, voice, noise, word or sound, suggests an analogy to the interaction between the literary texts, which provides the continuity of literary tradition achieved through a transformation of the preexistent into a new existence. Speech multiplied or grown in quantity as the essential quality of Fame extends this analogy to Fame.[23] Summed up in the introductory lecture on fame is the indicative view that Fame is a product of thus far unidentified, contradictory speeches. Engaging in a scientific and philosophical discourse no doubt has humorous connotations, which actually imparts the characterisation of the dreamer's feathered lecturer as well. Yet, set against this highly comic character and its zeal and confidence in exemplifying the point it is making, we see a more serious Chaucer stating the regenerating power of words, and words themselves, as the source of the conception of Fame in literature. Fame is the "kyndely" place of sound, but sound is caused by change and has no fixed or stable existence. It consists in a movement or

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[23] The eagle is making use of a different mode of discourse. The eagle's theory of the natural place indicates that the operation of fame is governed by natural laws. The importance of nature to the eagle's argument is suggested by the frequent appearance of the word "kynde" and its variants. The Eagle explains: stones fall, smoke rises and sound comes to Fame's place by "kyndely enclynyng" or the natural tendency of each element to seek its proper place (734-49). As Delany has shown, the eagle's doctrine of the natural place appears in Plato and Aristotle and for centuries it was the basis of medieval natural philosophy.Timaeus states that like moves toward like; following from the theory that the phenomenal world is a copy of whose elements tend to seek the eternal model. Plato invokes the principle of the like to like as the cause of order in chaos (Timaeus, 53a) of vision (45,b-c) and of digestion (81d). The idea was widely circulated in the works of Boethius and the twelfth-century Neo-Platonists of Chartres, the *Romance of the Rose*, the *Ovide Moralise*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The eagle's exposition of natural place therefore is within the orthodox tradition. Since air is a light substance its nature is to rise, since sound is nothing but broken air, its natural tendency is to rise until it arrives at Fame's place. Chaucer, on the other hand, ingeniously reworks these orthodox views into a strikingly novel combination. See Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*, pp. 71, 72; Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, pp.78-80; Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, mentions Philosophy's teaching in the first three books of the *Consolation* as a possible source of the discussion of the natural place.

change. The introductory passage on the natural place is richly suggestive. If the words are the natural inhabitants of the House of Fame, then Fame is constructed by words; Fame is "every speche of every man"(849).

The circularity of this concept, i.e. how Fame is fed and modified by every speech, is reinforced by the description of the formation of news in the House of Rumour. The relative clarity of Fame as speech turns out to be temporary when we arrive at the House of Rumours. The locus is now a labyrinth which muddles our senses, and it does so not only because with its thousands of entrances and exits it offers a bewildering number of choices, but also because the clear-cut categorisation of tidings into groups of love, trust, war and so on in lines 1957-76 is incorporated by the whirling sound let out by a "thousand holes and wel moo". The afterlife of the enumerated tidings is rather uncertain. The house is made of timber "of no strenghte" and its existence, as well as the existence of the tidings dwelling there, depends on chance, Aventure. In this respect, the description of the House of Rumour is corollary, and complementary, to that of House of Fame. There is no goddess of Rumour as there is a goddess of Fame. Because, although the tidings are manifactured in the house of Rumour, they have no substantial significance until their future is determined by Fame. Echoing the eagle's exposition of the physics of sound and how it seeks the palace of Fame, the narrator notes:

> Whan oon had herd a thing, ywis
> He com forth ryght to another wight,
> And gan him tellen anon-ryght
> The same that to him was told,
> Or hyt a forlong way was old,
> But gan somwhat for to eche
> To this tydynge in this speche
> More than hit ever was... (2060-67)

Additional to the movement, the constant interaction between the words in the House of Rumour, the act of relative transformation, indicated earlier in the multiplication process, is dramatised. The journey of the word from mouth to mouth is a journey of growth in size and uncertainty. Like the water ripples of the introduction, the word is multiplied in different configurations. The connection to truth is highly relative in the cyclic pattern the word repeats with the loss of its original intention.[24] The sworn brotherhood of the antithetical tidings (2101) allows the meddling of truth and false so that distinguishing them is rendered impossible. Corollary to the amazing merge of truth and false into one unit to behave as the absolute truth is the proposition that the speech as the major constituent of Fame undermines its reliability. The Fame that the tidings seek after they depart from the House of Rumour acts to destabilise even more the correlation between the words and deeds. The naming process of the tidings is governed by Fame's disposition (2100-2115) and so is their duration. Verbalised previously by the Eagle, when he delivers the narrator to the gate of the House of Fame, "Tak thyn aventure or cas" (1052), the recurrent statement points, on the one hand, to the causality of the survival of the tiding, and on the other hand, to the meagre chance of a true correlation between the signifier and the signified. Definition of Fame in terms of changeable language invalidates and destabilises the very idea of Fame herself and her function in conveying the truth.

When the tidings arrive at the House of Fame, the movement which characterises their formation is put to an end. The final verdict passed by Fame as to their future life indicates a fixing of status so that while the tidings retain their suspect

[24] R.M. Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader*, pp. 33 ,35, 40.

status composed of true and false, once outside the "laboratory" their claim to truth remains unchallenged. In this context, although the palace itself of Fame is imbued with emblems of stability and endurance as well as continuity, we are made aware of the fact that such stability and perpetuation are nevertheless subject to chance rather than design for their survival. The pillars of steel and the shady side of the castle which provide an unobstructed link between the past and the present suggest, as some critics argued,[25] that Chaucer, by placing the ancient poets on metal pillars, is not advocating poetry as a reliable means either to gain fame or to perpetuate Fame. The implication is that stability and endurance are compromised into inconsistency and change. The place of Virgil as a poet bearing the "fame of Pius Eneas" is an apt example to illustrate the ambiguity of fame transmitted by the poets. Virgil is upholding Aeneas' fame at the expense of defaming Dido. The change of perspective, as dramatised in the scene of dissemination of news, effects a new projection so that Virgil's pious Aeneas becomes a traitor when placed in the context of a love affair. Displacing the context does not remove the initial labelling of Dido's behaviour as wayward, but it certainly exemplifies use of the licence of authority.

Engaged in the possibility of representing actuality through words,[26] Chaucer

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[25] The emblems of stability with which the poets are associated in the House of Fame produce some fine problems. While Fame, by common accord, is unstable and unreliable, the poets seem to have found a "shady" site in her world. See Robert Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, p. 57; Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid', p. 155.

[26] D.S. Brewer, 'The Reconstruction of Chaucer', in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings, No: 1: Reconstructing Chaucer*, pp. 3-22 (p.5). Not mentioning the *House of Fame*, Brewer relates the interest in Chaucer's work in the possibility of representing the actuality through words to a potential for realism. Recognising this capacity, Chaucer's search is "progressively more and more for understanding, to find some secret of life." p.6.

shows the possibility to be naught; not because words are insufficient to express reality or because Chaucer has a Platonic view of the Ideal versus imitation so that poetry aims at a goal not achievable, but because he holds the view as indicated in his illustration of the fabrication of Fame that writing "is essentially amplification of discourse; it consists in something to (or with) other texts".[27] The interaction between the texts, the amplification of the discourse evoke an inevitable change in the original point of the source text (in the *House of Fame*, the source is presented as actual speaking persons) the consequence of which is manipulation not only of the fictional truth but also of the power of the words to shape it. This essentially is, what Priscilla Martin calls, authority mediated.[28] Chaucer's presentation of Fame constituting essentially in sound, in language, which is capable of constant change and transformation, and which resists a true correlation between words and deeds, allows a great deal of space for the authority to be mediated. Fame's fictional status is an instance of the awareness that in transmitting the truth poetry offers extremely elusive and unstable grounds. Chaucer's presentation of Fame presupposes a recognition of a "game" of intertextuality, an awareness of the "generative" power of the interconnection between the texts, and the consequent inseparability of the "old" from the "new". Fame indicates a process of transformation which ultimately renders any fictional representation mutable and divergent from its source, be it fiction or reality. Fame is deeply rooted in a fictional, verbal world, which defines and in turn is defined by the transformative principles governing that world. Herself rendered perpetually suspect, Fame, both denominator and receiver of distorted versions of truth, is no

[27] Gerald Bruns, 'The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture', p.123.

[28] *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons*, p. 215.

longer reliable. This is to suggest that in the "exposition" of Fame Chaucer underlines two things: Firstly, Fame herself is an image, a construct contingent on the power of words. Secondly, the idea of tradition and the belief in its authority need to be reconsidered if they are to be associated with Fame.

We have seen that Chaucer examines the art of poetry and its attendant constituents, fictional representation, fictional truth, through women. Fame is multiphrenic in the House of Fame. She is related to poetry, she involves literary tradition. Yet, Fame is also a woman, and I think the ambivalences of Fame can be explained if we consider the feminine quality the symbolic description lends to her. Chaucer presents Fame as sound or words. By emphasising the formative elements that constitute Fame, Chaucer destabilises her existence. Fame has a contingent existence. It is instructive to view Fame as a woman of authority in the light of this negating exposition.

Only a few critics note the "femininity" of Fame in Chaucer's presentation. Clemen's observation that the "'Fame' of Chaucer ceases to be a personified phantom and becomes a strange, slightly grotesque and common creature, envisaged as a quite ordinary human being" is informed by critical interests of realism. Nevertheless, Clemen notes that from the material he inherited, Chaucer draws "a spiteful, fickle woman".[29] Bennett sees no difference between the Wife of Bath, Fortune and Fame; they all have tongues, ears and eyes ready to be employed in the service of deceit and fickleness. Fame is so close to a woman that her reaction to the group of petitioners who wish to be commended to oblivion illustrates how "womanishly incensed by the

[29] Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry,* quotations are from p.105 and p. 104 respectively.

group's despisal of her favour, she bids Aeleus proclaim on his golden trumpet their praises to the ends of the earth".[30] Elizabeth D. Harvey considers the female gender of Fame as a direct equation of her characteristics with that of women and deplores the equation as "a monstrous exaggeration of what was conventionally considered to be a feminine quality: garrulity, the irrepressible compulsion to magnify sound and disseminate gossip."[31] And the few observations are valid in that Fame as a woman is in sharp contrast with the idealistic view of women advocated by the love tradition.

In this part, I will explore the traditional views that correspond to Fame's depiction as a woman. As the discussion in the previous two chapters centralises, depiction of a woman is ultimately verbalisation of an attitude. In connecting women and literature, women and writing, Chaucer's aim is to identify these attititudes for their own sakes and relocate their significance as contingent on the standpoint adopted.

It is not difficult to note a relation between personifications of Fame and literary representations of women. Fame has always been personified as female. The attitudes to fame throughout the ages reveal as strongly contradictory an approach as the one to women. Considered as a deliberate subjection of man's divinely granted authority on his own will to a lesser being, appreciation of fame's value is often discouraged in a forceful rhetoric of its changeableness and deceptiveness.[32] To dissuade people from desiring fame, speculative treatises on fame allowed only a

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[30] See Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, pp. 150, 160.

[31] Elizabeth D.Harvey, 'Speaking of Tongues: The Poetics of the Feminine Voice in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays Towards a Cultural Anthropology*, ed. by Edelgard E. Dubruck (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), pp. 47-60 (p.48).

[32] See Curtis Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, pp. 5-48.

conditional bond of love, often based on virtue and honour, between fame and the individual. The personification of Fame as a monster, consecrated by Virgil, versus the beautiful lady Fame of Boccaccio and Petrarch. The image of Fame reflects the desire of its creator. In their engagement with Fame, the poets often give voice to a contradiction in attitude. Fame's value, mirrored in the personification either as a monster or a beautiful woman, depends on the poet's confidence in her reliability as a vehicle of immortalisation, a means for continuity of his name. I submit that these contemplations recognise Fame as an abstract quality. However, they also imagine Fame. It seems that there is not an insurmountable gap between the changing views of Fame from poet to poet and the changing views of women from tradition to tradition.

The usefulness of woman in continuing the human race is the express reason underlying the misogynistic rhetoric of conflict about woman. There is an attitude voiced in Genius' speech in the *Roman de la Rose*, an influential work in Chaucer's poetic career. After advising men to flee from women in order to protect their bodies and souls, Genius retracts his advice:

> Si ne di je pas touteveie,
> Que le fames chieres n'aiez,
> Ne que si foïr le deiez
> Que bien avec eus ne gisiez;
> Ainz comant que mout les prisiez
> E par raison les essauciez;
> Bien les vestez, bien les chauciez,
> E toujourz a ce labourez
> Que les servez e enourez
> Pour continuer vostre espiece,
> Si que ja mort ne la depiece; (16617; 16619-628)

(However, I do not say... that you should not hold women dear or that you

> should flee from them and not lie with them. Instead I recommend that you value them highly and improve their lot with reason. See that they are well clothed and well shod, and labour always to serve and honour them in order to continue your kind so that death does not destroy it.)

I believe it will not be a far-strecthed analogy to draw attention to the idea of immortality sought through women in Genius' advice. Genius' statement promotes, on the one hand, an ostensibly positive attitude, almost an attitude we find in the courtly lover's love for his lady: "serve and honour them", as well as reassurance of conformity to the male expectation of grace. If we return to Fame's physical description, the elevation indicated can be observed in that Fame can be as tall as to touch the sky, and a queen and a goddess. On the other hand, the desperate warning "Fuiez, fuiez, fuiez, fuiez/ Fuiez, enfant, fuiez del beste" (16582-583), (Fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, my children, fly from such an animal) renders her as small, indeed worthless, as a fly. The relative positiveness implied in the service and honour that the initial description of Fame indicates is particularised, in Genius's speech, into a necessity, the need for women in procreation. Patristic tradition considered woman as an instrument, an agent, which is less than reliable as companion to man, which however needs to be resorted for the continuity of human race.[33] Literary representations, such as the one expressed by Genius is an extension of such a view. St. Augustine testifies to the mere role of women as providing and maintaining the continuity of human race: "Now if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what

[33] For a masterly evaluation of self- contradictory nature of misogynist writing see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991)

was she help to him?"[34] Fame's petitioners do not want children from her, but they certainly want to ensure the continuity of their name.

Initiative description of Fame makes use of a cliche comparison, which also accounts for the shift in size of Fame. The eyes Fame has are as "feele....As fetheres upon foules be,/ Or weren on the *bestes* foure" (1381-83); and she "had also fele upstondyng eres/ And tonges, as on *bestes* heres;" (1389-90)[35] Likening women to beasts because of their alleged loquaciousness, fickleness and inconstancy and their weakness to overcome the desire to pass on what they see or hear is well precedented in literature. The Jealous Husband of Jean De Meun's part of *The Roman*, contends that

> N'est donc bien privee tel beste
> Qui de foïr est toujourz preste.
> Tant est de diverse muance
> Que nus n'i deit aveir fiance. (9913-16)
>
> (There is no animal so well trained [as woman] that is always ready to flee, she has so many different changes that no man should have confidence in her)

Genius concurs with the idea: "Que ja fame n'iert tant estable/Qu'el ne seit diverse e muable./ E si rest trop ireuse beste" (16327-29), (no woman was ever so stable that she might not be varied and changeable.Thus she remains a very irritable animal). Matheolus takes this analogy even further, and provides a matching figure of woman for Chaucer's beastly Fame: "Nature shows and teaches us that every woman is a real monster and that she is quite happy to put up with her own faults. It is said

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[34] *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. by John Hammond Taylor, SJ, Ancient Christian Writers, 42, 2 Vols (New York and Ramsey, NJ: 1982), II, 75, 170-71; XI, 5.

[35] Emphasis mine.

that woman was conceived without nature's consent."[36] We might perhaps need to reconsider the line describing Fame as "...never formed by Nature" (1366).

Bestowed with power, Fame's position invites further consideration of the line's tonal ambiguities and suggestions when read in the light of Matheolus' comment. The intermittent conciliatory remarks that make Fame waver between the poles of high esteem and degradation soon give way to the more weighty remarks of objection and condemnation. Fame's countless tongues and ears are appropriately chosen to symbolise her talkative, gossipy nature as a typical woman. No one's secret is safe with women:

> Nus on qui seit de mere nez,
> ....
> Ne deit a fame reveler
> Nule rien qui face a celer,
> Se d'autrui ne la veaut oïr
> ....
> Ne ja nul fait secré ne face (16349;16351-53;16357)
>
> (No man born of woman...should reveal anything to a woman that should be kept hidden, if he does not want to hear it from someone else...For nothing would she keep silent.)

Chaucer's Fame exemplifies the tendency in woman for irrelevant speech when she decides to proclaim the fame of those who wish to be forgotten and decline the petition for fame whan it is most wanted.

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[36] Jehan Le Févre, *The Lamentations of Matheolus*, II, 4095-4142, trans. by Karen Pratt, 1992, from *Les Lamentations de Matheolus et Le Livre de Leesce de Jehan de Fevre,* ed. A.G. Van Hamel, 2 vols (Paris: Bouillon, 1892 and 1905), in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. by A. Blamires, K. Pratt and C. V. Marx, pp.177-197.

"But Lord, the perry and riches/ I *saugh* sittyng on this godesse!" (1393-94). Indeed, the love of riches and jewels in women are considered, in a rather pejorative way, as a futile attempt to cover the dung-heap. Jean de Meun in the *Roman*, (8889-9013) and Boethius, in the *Consolation*, (II, pr.5) share the view that the radiance of jewels belongs to the stones themselves, not to the wearers, and that whatever is underneath glittering ornaments remains "in its filth". The abundant richness has also connotations of power. Derived from Jerome's verdict in *Adversus Jovinianum*, "To support a poor wife is hard: to put up with a rich one, is torture."[37] the *Roman* advocates the view that if the woman is rich she is uncontrollable (8579-596).

The symbolic representation provides a static portrait, one that "perpetually ystalled". This is in contrast with the opening confirmation by the eagle that Fame consists of movement, unpredictable change. On the other hand, it is in an ironic accord with what Fame demonstrates, when called upon for the performance of her potential to contribute to the continuity of names.

Fame's petitioners are all men, and they all want from Fame to accord them the "fame/name" they want. Fame therefore is sought for both creation, formation of a new name, and preservation. She is, in the second instance, an authority. It certainly is not unprecedented. Love literature rests on the recognition of the lady as the pseudo-goddess, the supreme creator and preserver of lover's life and love. But in love tradition, the exhaltation of the lady as the good name bestower derives from a certainty that the lover can enjoy an equally authoritative status by choosing the lady of his objectives. There is a certainty that the lady will either oblige or decline, but

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[37] St. Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. by W. H. Fremantle, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952). Vol 6, 383.

the essential motive will not be misrepresented. On the other hand, in love tradition, the implied authority of the lady is never actually realised. The woman stays as an image, a poetic objective whose potentials can only be realised by the contesting lover/poet.

Conceptualised as a woman of mysogynistic description, there is something dangerously inappropriate in according Fame the authoritative status. The authority, the power to form, looks amiss when placed in the hands of a woman. Wrought out of the Biblical commentaries and Aristotelian dialectic on the origins of existence of sexes, there is in literature a well established tradition to see woman as secondary to man, a position which stems from woman's passivity by nature. It is stated that the passiveness is not only inherent in woman's nature, it also is authorised as such by God so that woman is not to have authority. Aristotle's formulation of male principle as 'soul" or "form" and the female principle as "body" or " matter" constitutes the rhetorical formula of misogyny. Since form is what shapes, man has the faculty of "movement", the active, formative role, whereas woman's is the "passive", receptive role.[38] The view of womankind advanced by medieval theologians and used by the writers was based in part on the biological argument for women's inferiority. On the other hand, the Biblical evidence about Adam and Eve provided for the medieval commentators a firm ground to allocate women a secondary place and associate them with weakness and infirmity of judgment. The imperative, "And you shall be subject to your husband and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16) gives the power to rule to man. While St. Augustine argues that it is not by her nature but rather by her sin that

[38] See Alcuin Blamires, 'Introduction' in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. by Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt and C.W.Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp 2-12.

woman deserved to have her husband for a master,[39] St. Thomas Aquinas, in an Aristotelian manner, places the authority with man, for "as the active partner" man is a principle in a higher way than the mother, the woman, "who supplies the passive or material element"[40] The commentaries on the issue of women and teaching derive from a similar notion: "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection."[41] "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence" (12). The reasons given for the exclusion of women from authorial position became commonplace arguments of theologians. "For Adam was first formed; then Eve" (13), "And Adam was not seduced but the woman being seduced was in the transgression" (14). St. Paul's statement not only promotes man as the sole part entitled to authority but it also alludes to the mismanagement of authority on the hands of women. Being seduced by Satan, and herself seducing Adam into sin Eve represents a foreboding example of calamity ensued through deceptive speech. Authority is a power women are not fit to handle.[42]

Literary versions of women versus men do not deviate from the traditional formula that "A woman, because of her female sex, is by nature subject to man, or if not by nature, at least by command of the Lord...Women in general have weak and

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39 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI, 37.

40 *Summa Theologiae*, xiii, II,ii 26.10. See also Ia, 92a, Article I.

41 *First Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy*, 2:11.

42 St John Chrysostom, Homily IX on *St Paul's Epistle to Timothy*, 69-72, elaborates on this point: "The woman taught the man once and made him guilty of disobedience, and ruined everything. Therefore, because she made bad use of her power over the man, or rather her equality with him, God made her subject to her husband. 'Your desire shall be for your husband [and he shall rule over you] Genesis 3:16'."

unstable natures and thus they are incomplete in wisdom."[43] While Fame's authority is clearly discordant with her gender, -for, as we have seen, woman as passive and devoid of authority and voice is the norm- the way she handles the authority is not.

The allusions in the symbolic description of Fame notwitstanding, Chaucer obviously does not engage in a war of defining woman as good or bad in Fame. On the contrary, he particularises two outstanding roles for Fame: help in the act of creation, sanctioned by tradition, and exercise of authority, banned by tradition. The static existence, the active nature of Fame put under control and hence temporarily pacified, is maintained until we arrive at the judgment scene in which we witness a radical change not only in Fame's mobility but also in the focus of her dominant feature. In the descriptive part, Fame remains, like the other women we have dealt with above, an essentially inactive figure, the object of the description. Perpetually enthroned, she listens in silence to the prevailing description which clothes her with qualities of movement and change -an unexercised autonomy Fame as a woman is accorded. Implicated in the contrast between the initial description and the consequent realisation of that description in action is the displacement of the control monopolised by the collective creator of the image.

The petitioning scene is actually a judgment scene in that Fame activates all that is ascribed to her in the descriptive portrayal prior to it. Especially the exposition of Fame as sound and words bears upon Fame's distribution of "fame/name". It needs to be noted that in this parodic judgment, Chaucer's representation of Fame does not spare any of her subjects. Chaucer's method is not cumulative, it is emphatic. The

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[43] The Trial of Walter Brut, The Treatise in Refutation of Brut: "On Whether Women are Permitted to Instruct Men Assembled in Public," A3, i . Extract printed in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 251-52.

Fame of the opening turns on her creators with language. As she has been formed out of nonreferential language, she readily acts her nature and fashions names for her petitioners with no reliable or justifiable reason for doing so.

It has been suggested that the representation of the Wife of Bath draws on Fame.[44] It is possible to see a similar inversion of hierarchy of positions in the narrative of the Wife of Bath. As I will be arguing in the next chapter, openly confronting the authority of the mysogynistic texts, the Wife proclaims a right to authorial position. Her challenge to the authority clusters together at once the silence imposed upon and observed by women and the unexpressed equality of men and women in "wikkednesse". Her Prologue combines the traditions of complaint against women and marriage and defence of women and marriage viewed from a female point of view which reveals, subjugates and finally exposes the possible falseness of the incessant accusations.[45] Herself as narrator, as the tale-teller, the Wife of Bath has the control of her verbal world and she participates in the tale-telling itself, although, as W.F.Bolton maintains, she is extremely inconsistent, self-centered and digressive in her attempt to legitimise her mastery over her husbands, over men.[46] Quoted by herself to be refuted, traditional denunciations of women ironically gain ground when set against the "experience" she vindicates over authority. She is everything that antifeminism predicts, the misogynist discourse animated: scheming, sexually

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[44] See Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1983), p.115.

[45] See Zacharias P.Thundy, 'Matheolus, Chaucer and the Wife of Bath', in *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 24-58.

[46] 'The Wife of Bath: Narrator as Victim', in *Gender and Literary Voice*, ed. by Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), pp. 54-65 (p.54).

voracious, illogical, vain, changeable. Yet she possesses a power to comment on the status and existence of women. More importantly, through her power to maintain an existence of considerable independence, or self-imposed dependence, she advocates her own influence by using the means made available by her adversaries. In this sense, to speak and interpret the authoritative texts behave as counter authority to grant the Wife the active and advantageous role of the writer, the painter.[47]

Ironically, Fame is not confrontational. Her representation obviously challenges her status, but when she acts as an authority figure, her position is significant in her confirmation of the accorded staus. She acts the part with disastrous consequences for her petitioners. In the judgment scene, she concurs with her ambivalent status and subjects her petitioners to the same vagrant representation. Fame's reversal of role obviously involves a change from being the script to being the script writer, which eventually turns upon the script, and by dramatising it, verifies what is written therein. Granted the role of a script writer, Fame becomes an authority figure, indeed the absolute authority the administration of which at once defies and justifies the denial of authority to women.

Hence, in the hall of Fame's palace, Fame's appearance is marked with a radical change of position. Endowed with authority and grace of a goddess, she prepares to initiate a process of creation frustratingly unaccountable for her petitioners. The people of all kinds fall on their knees before "this ilke noble quene," (1535), (note the use of "noble" as an ironic indication of a justified servitude offered by men). They all declare their dependence on Fame: "Graunte us, lady shene,/ Each of

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[47] Some critics believe that the Wife's subversive use of authority is analogous to that of Chaucer. See Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women*, p. 217; Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 285.

us of thy grace a bone!" (1536-7). The narrator observes that the manner in which Fame responded to their asking has no logic: "And somme of hem she graunted sone,/ And somme she werned wel and faire,/ And somme she graunted the contraire/Of her axyng outterly" (1538-41). Fame's incomprehensible behaviour is explained away by her indifferent, haughty remark: she is acting according to her nature, an acquired, imposed nature, which, when given the opportunity, can testify to its governing trait, "Al be ther in me no justice,/ Me lyste not to doo hyt now" (1820-21).

Fame's refusal to act justly in distribution of her "bone" echoes the circumstances of her own creation and may as well be an act of retaliation. The authority she is utilising to bestow good or bad name on her subjects functions in a similar manner in which her own name is created, which renders her reaction to the authority and power of her creators considerably different. In Book I, Dido is made victim to the designs of a less fully realised goddess, Venus, who made her instrumental to her son's victory over temptation with the consequence of her tragic death. Dido's failure to realise the existence of an imposed authority leads to entire extermination of her own existence. Indeed, throughout her part in the love affair, Dido is hardly out of Venus's grips. Her individuality is reduced to nothing, and eventually Aeneas's departure places her along with any other physical object no longer useful to Aeneas. Dido's realisation that there are powers beyond her control leads to her surrender, a lament that her reputation will be lost. In the *Troilus*, (V:1061-64), Criseyde gives voice to a similar awareness of the power that others have to shape her presentation in literary texts. Both of the heroines are left hapless with the prospect of their defined name exploited by the successive generations. That their fears are not sufficiently grounded is proven by Chaucer's treatment of their stories

inducing a double perspective. However, neither Criseyde nor Dido are given individual active power to confront the authority which they suspect to be unjust in labelling their behaviour. Fame, on the other hand, invades the world of her presentation, a presentation formed by the words of men and meant to be preserved as originally devised. She reverses the long observed rules of endurance in silence and imprints her own image in the minds, not through the words of her creators but through administration of her own power of words.

The subjugation exercised by Fame on her petitioners brings to mind statements like "...you are a man made in the image and semblance of God, a perfect creature, born to govern and not to be governed"[48] and subverts the imposition expressed by Constance in the *Man of Law's Tale:* "I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!/ Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,/ And to been under mannes governance." (285-87). In Fame, Chaucer examines the possible consequences of the reversal of traditional distribution of power and allows Fame to demonstrate a different version of abuse of authority.

When examined closely, the judgment scene discloses several versions of distorted truth. The first group, who deserve good fame, are denied what they deserve and instead are condemned to oblivion. Fame's reason for doing so, "For me lyst hyt noght" (1564) is a paradigm behaviour. The capricious utilisation of authority amounts to defaming and shaming as well as faming those who have no control, either by deed

[48] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Corbaccio*, 9, 'Perfection of Man', trans. by Anthony K. Cassell (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illionis Press, 1975). See Angela Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*,p.115. Her description of the Wife of Bath as an antifeminist nightmare wife makes a good comparison with Fame "...brash, talkative,...a bullyer and tormentor of her husband(s), wasteful of their money on clothes and personal adornment."

or by word, over the continuity of their name. The second group, accordingly, are granted a "shrewed" fame, though they admittedly deserve good name. Fame's numerous tongues are replaced by Aeolus who acts as Fame's messenger in this game of slander and renown. Personifying Fame's loquaciousness and loudness, Aelous is also the emblem of Fame's power to speak. Unwilling to remain silent, wishing on the contrary to exhaust her alleged fearful powers to disseminate news in accordance with the arbitrary changeableness of her nature, Fame makes sure that her mobility and loudness of speech are well exhibited: "This Eolus.../ ...gan to blasen out a soun/ As lowde as beloweth wynd in helle;/...This soun was so ful of japes,/As ever mowes were in apes/ And that wente al the world aboute," (1800-1807). The cruel exercise of what is feared in woman, the authority, immediately reduces men to the status of subject, mere creatures deprived of their power to sustain the advantageous status quo.

The narrator voices a lament on behalf of the petitioners who will be remembered not as they behaved but as Fame's unpredictable changing mood dictates:

> "Allas," thought I, "What aventures
> Han these sory creatures!
> For they, amonges al the pres,
> Shal thus be shamed gilteles.
> But what, hyt moste nedes be." (1631-1635)

In the narrator's remarks there is also the justification of Fame's attribute as a goddess. Through the authority she exercises, Fame not only has a firm grasp of men's own lives but also subverts the active role of men in procreation. The petitioners are the "sorry creatures", not Fame. The change, hence, is not only in Fame's status, from the spoken object to speaking subject, the change is also from being the created to

becoming the creator. Yet, as if wishing to undermine the certitude inherent in her depiction, instead of providing an absolute source, she makes the return to a source for her manner of creation impossible. The zealous goddess agrees to no opt-out in the creation game. Partly annoyed by the reluctance of the fifth group to have fame, she forcibly ensures that their work comes to be known. The game continues, the fun generated on behalf of the petitioners, enjoyed for the most part by the arbiter, Fame.

In her exercise of authority based on capricious, arbitrary judgment, Fame reopens the question of authoritative discourse. In her exposure of the role that discourse and its capricious control play in the representation of truth, Fame comes to represent not only a negative confirmation of her literary representation, but also the unreliability of literary tradition in general.

SECTION TWO: NATURE: AUTHORITY IMPROVED

Through her constructed power Fame rules over an assembly which is rendered ironically voiceless. It seems that the alternative to make her own voice heard, the alternative to occupy the privileged position of speaking "object", has to have a reverse consequence for her petitioners. Tyrannically subdued and silenced, deprived of the voice they had freely used to construct Fame, the people in their subjugation suffer the inevitable fate of silenced subjects. Despite the ear-piercing loudness of the place, the busy trafficking of the news, the thundery announcement of good or ill fame, Fame's world is eventually governed by a single voice, which is that of Fame alone, so that her voice becomes an instrument for imposition. This form of imposition is relatively void of the anxiety of control in the traditional representations of women sought and gained through suppression of other possibilities. But it has a stronger

capacity of negation in that it confounds the truth and false.

Obviously, Chaucer's presentation of Fame anticipates the epistemological questions the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* pursues in the oft-quoted "books and experience" dichotomy. The "experience" of the House of Fame makes the problem of identifying "truth" no easier. For a poet, deconstruction of traditionally verified fictional creation results in greater uncertainty.

Like Fame, Nature presides over a crowd. Like Fame, she acts as an authority in the processes of generation of "meanings". As an authority figure, however, Nature, in Chaucer's depiction, has a legitimate, undisputed claim to "authority". The narrator introduces Nature as God's deputy. In this allusion, there is the indication that Nature's authority derives from a higher power, the unchallengeable, absolute authority of God. But, in ascribing a position of authority to Nature, the narrative focuses more on Nature's "voice" and the delegation of her voice to the birds whose task designated by Nature is procreation. Fame's voice is double-edged. It adapts the voice of tradition to have the drastically suppressed female voice recognised. The need for the recognition of an alternative discourse is expressed via a negative paradigm. Herself free of the anxiety to control or impose meaning, Nature makes the need for suppression or distortion of the autonomous voice redundant. Further, in the presentation of Fame the intertextuality of the presentation indicates the continuity of tradition, but also underlines the ambivalence pertinent to it. Nature, in contrast, suggests the possibility of a liberating form of authority which renders the need for reconciliation -and decision- redundant.

The narrative in the *Parliament of* Fowls proceeds via authorities. Nature is introduced briefly, with reference to the text of Alan de Lille: "And right as Aleyn,

in the Pleynt of Kynde,/Devyseth Nature of aray and face,/In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde" (316-318). On the one hand, the reference to Alain is precise and definitive: "right as Aleyn/Devysed Nature of aray and face", on the other it is ambivalent. Because, if we follow the textual reference and consult Alain's work, we see that in Alain Nature has a sad face and a thorn tunic. She is deeply troubled. In the *Complaint of Nature*, cited as textual authority for the physical appearance of Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls,* Nature, the vicegerent of God, is presented as a woman who laments the frustration of her designs by Man's wilful disregard for procreation. Whereas, in the *Parliament* the narrator notes the surpassing beauty of Nature and her "easy" voice. As readings of the *Parliament of Fowls* centralise Nature, either as a thematic unifying principle or as the primary purpose of the poem, the comparative basis for these readings is often the philosophical and literary tradition of Nature.[49] Chaucer's Nature has often been examined within the framework of Chartrian philosophy of Alain de Lille. Recognition of the philosophical context of Alain's text as a source for Nature in the *Parliament* has led to evaluation of Nature's authority in a context which is not congenial to the poetic priorities of Chaucer's representation.[50] In this section on Nature as a female authority figure, I will localise

[49] See James J. Wilhelm, "The Narrator and His Narrative in Chaucer's *Parlement*", *ChauR,* 1 (1966), 201-206. Wilhelm re-examines the structural unity of the poem, and considers Nature as the heroine of the poem. I will make references to the relevant works in the process of this section. For a review of the criticism of The *Parliament of Fowls* as a philosophical poem see Donald C. Baker, '*The Parliament of Fowls*', in *Companion to Chaucer Studies,* ed. by Beryl Rowland, pp. 428-445.

[50] See Jack B. Oruch, "Nature's Limitations and the *Demande D'Amour* of Chaucer's *Parlement*", *ChauR* 18 (1983-84), 23-37. Oruch discusses Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls* as a comic heroine frustrated by the demands of a *demande* which is entirely alien to her, outside her province. Along with Alain's *De Planctu,* Oruch suggests two other poets who Chaucer might have read: Jean de Hanville and Brunetto Latini. They confirm the image of Nature as noble and heroic yet distinctly

my argument to the "parliament" scene, where, I believe, Nature's role in managing diversities can be seen as an "ideal" form of authority. I will suggest that Nature offers herself to the birds as a text, of which she is the author as well. The authority she commands and which is utilised by the birds is the authority of the text. In this configuration, the birds represent conflicting interpretations of Nature's text, but they comply with the primary principle that their views of love promote continuity in change.

Like her counterpart in the antecedent texts, Nature in the *Parliament* is God's deputy. And in that capacity, she is the bond between strikingly antithetical properties which she moulds into an accord. The antinomies "hot, cold; heavy, light; moist and dry" are not, in their separateness, irreconcilable. On the contrary, in their reconciliation, "knyt by evene noumbres of accord" is contained the characteristic co-existence of diversities Nature embodies:

> Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
> That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye
> Hath knyt by evene noumbres of acord
> In esy voys began to speke and seye, (379-382).

In the *Complaint*, the primary reason for Nature's sorrow is the violation of the rule of binding with "evene noumbres". In Nature's doctrine, maintaining the principle of even numbers is key to the continuity of creation. In the lines above, the narrator affirms that Nature, as the representative of the creator, the God, can sustain order and procreation. Nature's voice confirms the positive frame of reference. She speaks in "esy voys". A case can be made from this brief reference to Alain, for the comparison

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limited in power and function. See p.30.

of Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls* to Nature in *De Planctu* and the *Roman* as woman/Nature will reveal differences of emphasis, role and power.[51] A notable dissimilarity is that Nature's authority is not threatened by the disobedience of Man which is at the centre of Nature's complaint as a threat to her dignified status, and her art of creation. As the specific reference to the *Complaint* suggests, Nature is a woman in the *Parliament of Fowls*. I will examine the implications of woman Nature in the *Complaint* and the *Roman de la Rose* below. Further, Nature is referred to as a "goddess" and a "queen". As far as textual reference to her gender as a woman is concerned, the narrative does not provide any further specific evidence. There is the indication, however, that Nature's femininity is important to her role in the narrative. Nature is a woman in her creative capacity. Like Fame and other women in Chaucer, Nature, too, is recreated by the agents who activate the potential for creativity inherent to female. In the case of Nature, the "authors" are birds. The birds and Nature are in accord in Chaucer in that Nature regulates the procreation while the birds carry it out. That is, the fecundity inherent to Nature is relocated in the birds that come to her for their annual mating. She is a female figure with a tradition of writing to substantiate her position in a narrative of regeneration. The absence of disobedience negates the possibility of Nature's limitations as a woman and authority. As we will see, the "parliament scene" produces problems of its own. But the problems are the natural result of the principle of "selection" practiced by the birds. The attempt to solve the arising problems suggests a different context and a different approach from the one

[51] George D. Economou affirms the continuity of the philosophical implications of the tradition represented by Alain in Chaucer's Nature. He notes, however, that Nature in Chaucer is placed in a secular love context. See *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp.125-148.

adapted by Nature in the source texts.

Since Chaucer's depiction of Nature is void of the problems of administration of a "law" by a woman/Nature it is also void of the confrontational attitude consequent to it. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that it is the two traditional attributes of Nature that provide a creative context for Nature in Chaucer. These attributes can be defined as the widely recognised attribute of procreation and the contested attribute of authority. We will see that Chaucer's Nature lays claim to both as a text of creative authority. In so doing, she provides a dialogue of acknowledged difference of priorities.[52]

In the allegorical tradition of Nature, Nature's female gender is a determining force in the sense that it weighs upon her authority as a goddess of creation, and the traditional topos of the betrayal of her authority. Nature is endowed with authority through her intermediary role between God and Man. She possesses a delegated authority which in turn is delegated by her to her creatures. Since delegation of authority means, in Nature's case, dependence on the "deputy", the specimen and Man, for the continuity of her creation, Man is capable of challenging or eliminating this authority. Significant from the point of authority of Nature is therefore the fact that Nature's authority is contingent on the continuity of creation. In the *Complaint*, when, impeding the primary role of Nature, man draws away from her law, Nature presents herself as a betrayed mother. She explains the rent in her tunic as a symbolisation of

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[52] See David Aers, 'The *Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, the Knower and the Known', *ChauR*, 16 (1981), 1-17. Aers warns against associating Chaucer's Nature with the Neoplatonic Nature of Alan de Lille, and locates the interest of Chaucer's Nature in an attitude to knowledge and authority. In Aers' formulation Nature is subordinated to the conflicting discourses of the birds, which represent an image of society and natural world.

how "many men have taken arms against their mother in evil and violence"[53] Explained in a moral frame, the reverential honour that Nature expects from Man comprises in Man's obedience to the rules of procreation in order to ensure that the fight against Death succeeds. The moral wrong committed by Man, therefore, is, as Paul Piehler states, "against Nature, against the loving reverence naturally due to one's mother and to all women".[54] Such a reliance on the orthodox view of woman as the means of continuity of human race can account for the discrepancies in the relation of Man to Nature as well as for the limitedness of Nature in possession and exercise of authority. Without Man's participation Nature's power is seriously limited. Winthrop Wetherbee, in his study of the femininity of Nature, observes:

> Repeatedly in the allegories of *Natura* a feminine appeal for recognition, vindication or fulfillment is set in confrontation with a masculine *ratio,* a principle of faculty for realising the implications of this appeal through order. The role of the *Natura* who appeals to God in Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia* and to man in the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alan de Lille is in effect an intensification of the role of woman in a range of poetry of their period.[55]

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[53] The *Complaint of Nature*, Prose IV, 260. The references to Alain's text are from *The Complaint of Nature by Alain de Lille*, trans. by Douglas Moffat (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1908). The quotation is from p. 41.

[54] *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), p.51.

[55] 'Some Implications of Nature's Femininity in Medieval Poetry', in *Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Center For Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies,* ed. by Lawrence D. Roberts (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Center For Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), pp. 47-62 (pp 47-48). In considering the authority of Nature in relation to her femininity in *De Planctu* and *Romande la Rose* I follow Wetherbee's lead. I am also indebted to George D. Economou whose study *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* provides a thorough analysis of the philosophical background of representations of Nature in literature.

Surely, it is possible to perceive in the "complaint" of Nature the significant overtones of the deserted heroine's longing for love, desire, and more importantly fulfillment and acknowledgement.[56] On another level, the feeling of incompleteness indicated in Nature's complaint suggests an Aristotelian allusion to "matter desires form",[57] generalised into "Woman needs Man" to achieve completeness as a being. In the *Cosmographia*, Nature's appeal to Noys, the agent of the divine wisdom, to order the formless existence of primal matter is a strikingly literal metaphor of Woman desiring Man as matter desires form. Indeed, the entire allegory of Nature rests on the idea that without Man Nature can never be her true and complete self.

Dependence of Nature as a woman on Man's procreative sexual activity produces serious complications when in *De Planctu* and the *Roman* Man refuses to participate in fulfilling the designs and plans of Nature. Her position defined by the success of procreation, the deviation from it unbalances not only the relations in the universe but also the relations between man and woman. While, therefore, Nature's complaint or appeal can be read as an untranscribed verification of her subordination to Man, it is also a confirmation of the existence of a power beyond Nature. The implications are present in Alain's depiction of Nature as well as that of Jean, although difference in the focus of depiction results in considerably dissimilar portrayals.[58] In Alain, as Economou notes, Nature's gender is an impediment for possessing powers,

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[56] See Jill Mann, 'Chaucer and the Woman Question', p.173, defining the Ovidian tradition descending from the *Heroides*.

[57] See Section One above.

[58] For a comparison of the two Natures in Alain and Jean, see John V. Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp.194-209.

as for example the power to excommunicate.[59] Yet, she is a goddess, a powerful representative of God, who commands profound respect and reverence from Man as well as from her priest. Alain's representation of Nature balances her nobility and dignity with the righteous sorrow caused to her by Man. This, of course, does not eliminate, but stresses the indication that the frustration of procreative activity limits her position and requires Man to return something that Nature herself cannot redeem.

Jean's depiction of Nature deserves some detailed comment as his narrative in the *Roman* evidently engages in a digressive mode to underline the similarities between woman and Nature. In the *Roman* Nature's position as *vicarie Dei* is evaluated in the context of her position as a woman. Jean's depiction of Nature is subversive in that it concentrates on the "woman" quality of Nature personified as a woman, not only in gender but in character as well. Jean's goddess Nature is decidedly a wronged, deceived woman. She speaks with the voice of a betrayed woman who is seeking sympathy and help from a man who is not willing to offer genuine sympathy - not more than her status calls for. It has been argued that the circumstances in which she appears and the language she uses to refer to the "great misdeed" she has committed make her a far less dignified figure than Alain's.[60] Jean de Meun modifies and at times radically changes the role and status of Alain's Nature. Although the framework of the main narrative remains the same, Jean exploits the limitedness of the power of Nature to restore the inner unity of the world, of which she herself is the

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[59] *The Goddess Natura*, p. 91.

[60] Many critics have noted the dissimilarity. See, for instance, Jack P. Oruch, 'Nature's Limitations and the *Demande D'Amour* of Chaucer's *Parlement*', p. 31. Fleming, in the *'Roman de la Rose'*, notes that in Jean, "Lady Nature is poetically decreased" and "Jean realises a comic potential in Lady nature's prolix femininity", see pp.195, 209 respectively.

image and which has been subverted by man's willful disobedience. The authorial voice in the narrative of the *De Planctu* sustains a carefully measured balance between the limitations of Nature as the goddess of procreation and the limitations of Man as her subject. The ladder of hierarchy establishes a bond between God and Man through mediation of Nature. Nature's subjection to God's law is reflected in Man's subjection to Nature. Man's failure to follow the law of Nature and Nature's inability to restore obedience do not necessarily impair or demolish Nature's power. The violation of the law of Nature is not presented as Nature's fault but as that of Man.[61] The focus of Alain's narrative is the recovery of the procreation rather than Nature's powerlessness to recover it.

In the *Roman*, Nature's confession functions as an ironic means of exposing woman's mind and bringing about a self-knowledge. Nature's revelation of her creation is accompanied by her inedequacy in maintaining the position of a deputy creator. Nature's continually introverted discourse discloses the anxieties of the mind of a woman and exhibits them as eternally accepted. Her complaint about the wrong Man committed by disobeying her law is subordinated to the painfully self-revealing scrutiny of her status as a woman. Her method of analysis is to introduce a series of discontinuous matters but then to develop each so that the focus of attention returns always to herself. Concentration on Nature's woman nature at times tends to move her procreative power to the background. The mode of self-analysis produces ironic conclusions, for Nature's indulgence in the cause of her grief tends to shift the focus of complaint and finds the explanation in her own wrong behaviour:

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[61] See Wetherbee, 'Some Implications of Nature's Femininity in Medieval Poetry', pp. 54-55.

"Lasse! qu'ai je fait!
Ne me repenti mais de fait
Qui m'avenist des lors en ça
Que cist beaus mondes comença,
Fors d'une chose seulement,
Ou j'ai mespris trop malement,
Don je me tieng trop a musarde;
E quant ma musardie esgarde,
Bien est dreiz que je m'en repente.
Lasse fole! lasse dolente!
Lasse, lasse cent mile feiz!
Ou sera mais trouvee feiz?
Ai je bien ma peine empleiee!
Sui je bien dou sen desveiee,
Qui toujourz ai cuidié servir
Mes amis, pour gré deservir,
E trestout mon travail ai mis
En essaucier mes anemis!
Ma debonaireté m'afole.

(16253-271)

(Alas! What have I done? I do not repent of the things that have happened to me since the time when this fair world began, except for one thing alone, in which I behaved most wickedly and for which I consider myself a stupid fool. And when I look at my stupidity, it is very right that I repent of it. Wretched fool! Sorrowful wretch! A hundred thousand times wretched! Where will faith now be found? Have I used my labours well? Am I indeed out of my mind? I always thought to serve my friends, to deserve their gratitude, and I have given all my labor to the advancement of my enemies. My good nature has ruined me.)

Nature here is burdened with the guilt of a crime which is the result of her self-claimed stupidity and wickedness. Her innate nobility is subsumed by foolish behaviour, mismanagement of resources and possibly power, erroneous administration of service, all following from "my good nature". The self-questioning and destructive criticism in Nature's lament are to be doubled and furthered in Genius's comment on Nature's state of mind. On hearing that Nature wishes to make a confession, Genius assumes an authoritative position. The confession is to proceed with the initiation of a formal and distant form of address. Genius immediately establishes a difference of

attitude between himself and Nature, and is inclined to find fault with Nature (16314-318).[62] Nature has to correct her behaviour, "abandon weeping" in order for Genius to help. The betrayal alluded to in Nature's speech is presented entirely as Nature's fault. Like Dido, who has been betrayed and abandoned because of her "nice nature", Nature is allured and deceived. Genius' line of argument is cooperative in its suggestiveness to explore Nature's reaction in the context of common womanly behaviour. His long sermon on women's loquaciousness and love of revealing secrets (16323-16701) intimates a link between Nature and the impulsive nature of women in general. The background prepared by Genius for Nature's confession indicates a tendency to merge Nature's higher rank as a goddess and her innate instability of mind and unpredictable change as woman.[63] Ironically, Genius himself adapts the seductive voice of wives that his discourse targets as untrustworthy, dishonest seekers of others' secrets. As Friedman notes, the intention behind the purpose of revealing secrets is manipulated into a purpose of revealing Nature's character to a larger audience.[64] Accordingly, when Genius' concluding remarks exempt Nature from the oversweeping accusation of women (16701-706), Nature has already been allotted the deficient nature of women. Genius' retraction addresses Nature as a woman, not as the *vicarie Dei*. In his exception of Nature from womanly vices lies a strong confirmation

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[62] Cf the relationship between Alain's Nature and Genius which Wetherbee likens to that of a traubador and his lady. See 'Some Implications of Nature's Femininity', p.54.

[63] Lionel J. Friedman, '"Jean de Meung", Antifeminism and "Bourgeois Realism"', *Modern Philology*, 57 (1959-60), 13-23, sees the speech of Genius as a rhetorical statement of the commonplace and draws attention to Jean's successful humanisation of the allegorical figure of Nature.

[64] '"Jean de Meung",' Antifeminism and "Bourgeois Realism"', p.20.

of Jean's tendency to equate Nature's character with women and thereby reflect the unresolved contradiction that surrounds the concept of woman. The reference, therefore, to Scripture, the supreme authority, renders Genius' conclusion wanting in reassurance. Genius' dualistic view of Nature's character is a preparatory step so that Genius, soon subverting the relationship between Nature and himself, acts more like a judge of Nature's character, at least initially, than a priest. The unresolved contradiction evident in Genius' attitude reveals itself in Nature's self presentation as well.

It is interesting to note that Nature's definition of her own discourse typifies female speech as an indiscretion:

> Fame sui, si ne me puis taire,
> Ainz vueil des ja tout reveler;
> Car fame ne peut riens celer;
> N'onques ne fu meauz laidengiez.
> Mar s'est de mei tant estrangiez:
> Si vice i seront recité,
> E dirai de tout verité. (19218-224)

> (I am a woman and cannot keep silent; from now on I want to reveal everything, for a woman can hide nothing. Man was never better vilified than he will be now. It was an evil hour for him when he wandered so far from me. His vices will be recounted; I shall tell the whole truth.)

Nature thus repeatedly displays an inclination to criminalise her own attitude.[65] The legitimate cause of her complaint is easily subverted into an irrepressible desire for

[65] See Lee Patterson, 'For the Wyves love of Bathe: Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*', ***Speculum***, 58:3 (1983), 656- 695 (pp. 672-73). Examining La Vieille in the ***Roman***, Patterson compares Nature's self-incriminating discourse to that of La Vieille.

talking, making the motive of her speech the desire to talk rather than the need to reveal the erroneous behaviour of Man. The position of Genius in Alain's work as the other self of Nature is also transformed in the role of Genius in the *Roman* to enhance, through his statements and behaviour, Nature's faulty nature.[66]

Nature's confession progressively moves toward a review of her self-esteem as a woman. Intimidated by and consenting to the deservedly inferior position assigned by a tradition of speaking of women, Nature's speech demonstrates the tensions of obligation to reveal more about herself or to revert to silence. She eventually does both. In repentance of creating Man, she resorts to the tactics of the wife enraged by her husband and resolves to reveal all. However, her invective against Man remains in the partly silenced context of complaint: "Bon fait prolixité foïr./ Si sont fames mout enuieuses,/E de paler contrarieuses;" (18298-300), (It is a good thing to flee prolixity. Women are very troublesome and contrary about talking). The antagonistic position she is placed in forces Nature to resort to an apologetic and self-defeating argument, which systematically owns the defective nature of her gender and urges for silence.[67]

Aware of her inability to speak, her lack of voice, Jean's Nature is simply compromising to her position as the silent object of the narrative, cooperative in the determination to suppress and condemn everything she considers feminine. This

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[66] On Genius see Fleming, '*The Roman de la Rose*', who argues that "Genius is not altered, merely put into a radically different context for purposes of comedy", p.195.

[67] Wetherbee argues that the survey Nature gives of the sublunar world is an image of the random and capricious manner in which she presents herself to man and demands his obedience to her law of procreation. 'Some Implications of Nature's Femininity', p. 59.

attitude is obvious when she allows herself to complain, to seek help mainly because it seems to be a more appropriate attitude coming from a woman with which she feels more comfortable, "Je meïsmes, tant con je puis,/M'en plaing e m'en dei plaindre, puis/ Qu'il me reneient le treü/ Que trestuit ome m'ont deü/ E toujourz deivent e devront, (19329-333), (I complain myself, as much as I can, and I should do so because they have denied me the tribute that all men have owed me, and always do). This acknowledgement is doubly ironic. On the one hand, it restates the powerlessness of its female utterer, and on the other, it points to a wider context of breach of the natural bond between men and women.[68] The denied tribute has to be recovered. However, it is not in Nature's power to do so. The powerlessness expressed in the ostensibly justified complaint becomes even more poignant when Nature has to yield her non-existing voice to Genius. It is not a delegation of power, it is rather renunciation -as a result of the betrayal- of her power that Nature requests Genius to deal with the problem causing her anguish. So, "Genius li bien empalez" (19335), (Genius with the gift of speech), will reclaim the procreative power Nature herself is supposedly to preside over and govern to further her plans of continuity of mankind. Enclosed within the general concern of procreation, Nature's search for identity, her quest for self-definition, ends with a total surrender of her own control. She submits to the requirement that as a woman she has to take her identity from a man.[69]

In the light of the exposition above, we can conclude that in the *Roman* the

[68] Cf *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*,128-130.

[69] See Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 347-61. Gardiner explores the question of female identity in women's writings. The comparison of male and female identity formation on p.350 suggests a context for Nature's dependence on male authority for fulfillment.

treatment of Nature's inadequacy as a woman to elicit, maintain and exercise authority is made to serve the confinement of her role to the promotion of the reproductive instinct.[70] Such an attribute would fit in the depiction of Nature as a woman without difficulty, for it does not present a challenge to the male-gendered power. However, Jean's transformation of his source so that the figure of Nature can accommodate and ironically legitimise his view of love, or rather the view of love dramatised in the *Roman*, extends to the degree of removing Nature's censure on unproductive love. As opposed to Nature's conventional invalidation of unproductive sexual practices, Jean's Nature is prepared to comply with any scheme that would lead to sexual act, regardless of the consequent lack of procreation.[71]

The office of Nature as supervision of procreation suggests a link with the view which classifies women as the subordinate help in the act of propagation.[72] Nature's role as *vicaria Dei* permits a considerable freedom of action. However, the freedom confined to her realm as a goddess of procreation does not extend to her realm as a woman. Thus, even in the *De Planctu* where Nature's limitations are considerably suppressed, as a woman she lacks the power to excommunicate. She has to delegate Genius, a man, to ensure the restoration of order through procreation. Jean

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[70] Economou, *The Goddess Natura in the Middle Ages*, pp. 110-111.

[71] See Michael D. Cherniss, 'Irony and Authority: The Ending of the *Roman de la Rose*', *Modern Languages Quarterly*, 36 (1975), 227-38. Considering Jean's Nature as a delimited authority figure, Cherniss comments that Nature is fooled by Venus, Amor and Amant, p. 229. On the subversion of Nature's doctrine in Jean, see also John V. Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography*, p.197.

[72] See Helen Cooper, 'Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 5 (1991), 31-48 (pp.31-32), for the view that the use of grammatical feminine nouns in gender determination of allegorical personifications is suggestive of female attributes.

intensifies this implicit view in Alan's text that Nature's possession of female gender is not incidental but is a means of exemplification and verification of women's lack of voice. In the *Roman* and *De Planctu*, Nature is a flawed figure. Despite her nobility she is distinctly limited in power and function.[73] In both works, her status as a woman allows her to hold the legitimate position of goddess of creation. But exercise of authority is outside her boundaries. As she is not entitled to authority, it is natural that she receives help to reimplement and reinforce her law.

I have suggested above that Chaucer's presentation of Nature has a twin focus. Firstly, Nature is a woman relative to her power to stimulate the birds for procreation. Secondly, it is in her capacity as a woman that she can be considered as a text rewritten or interpreted by the avian "authors" who need her for the realisation of their authorial objectives. If the traditional Nature will have to have a place in Chaucer's representation, I suggest that the woman/Nature of Alain and Jean de Meun find a constructively reversed context in the *Parliament*. Nature in Chaucer is a manifestation of Chaucer's examination of writing processes realised through women. In the previous chapters, we have examined women's textual becoming. And we have seen that while women provide the creative space where the voices are substantiated, the potential diversity and multiplicity of discourse is repeatedly suppressed. While remaining distinctly female in the process, Nature exhibits the positive use of that potential.

The procedure of creation is marked by two functions carried out by Nature

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[73] Jack B. Oruch, 'Nature's Limitations', p.34. "She [Nature] must obtain what cooperation she can without forcing compliance by exceeding the power invested in her." Oruch erroneously argues, moreover, that the limitations apply to Chaucer's Nature as well, who "like a school teacher with an unruly class...represents a higher authority but is not synonymous with it." See also H. M. Leicester, Jr., 'The Harmony of Chaucer's *Parlement*: A Dissonant Voice', *ChauR*, 9:1 (1974), 15-34 (p.27), for a view of Nature in Chaucer as dissolving into chaos and uncontrol.

and the birds respectively. Nature presides over an assembly of birds that "cometh of engendrure/.../To take hire dom and yeve hire audyence" (306;308). The birds bear the task of continuing the creation through Nature's authorisation. As we will see below, Nature acts as a self-reliant, self-confident, apt figure of authority who ensures that in the exercise of the power she possesses the diverse and often contradictory views are taken into account. Nature's authoritative status is simultaneously consequent to the regenerative capacity she is endowed with and the fact that she is capable of enforcing it. Divorced from its philosophical implications, Nature's role in the *Parliament* can be seen in the context of writing provided by Alain's Nature. The noble empress, full of "grace" and the birds that "cometh of engendrure" are carefully positioned according to their respective tasks. The process of "engendrure" is dependent on Nature's "dom" and "hire audyence". In *De Planctu*, the narrator who shares the moral and metaphysical concerns of Nature is a poet. In the edifying dialogue with the female authority of his vision, poetry is subordinated to philosophy and dismissed as the teaching of "child's cradle"[74] Nature reiterates Platonic falsification of poetry as a guide to truth and suspends the poetic tendency to combine historical fact with imaginative creation as mere fancy. Poets' writings do not qualify as verifiable proof for the offending behaviour of gods, but Nature uses the analogy of writing in the explication of her creation. As God's deputy to ensure the continuity of creation, Nature refers to her office as "the pen of my composition." Venus' part as Nature's help is realised through the office of writing. Supervised by Nature so that she obeys the rules of Nature's "orthography" and does not produce "false writing", Venus

[74] *The Complaint of Nature*, Prose IV, 195-240, p. 39.

administers creation by the rules of grammatical art.[75] Nature's writing, Nature's text, is impaired when Venus disregards the grammatical rules of declination and connection of genders on the principle of male plus female. The analogy of creation as writing is sustained in the role of Genius when he prepares the excommunication to be extended to those who refuse to continue creation as required by Nature's rules of writing

> He carried in his right hand a reed of frail papyrus, which never rested from its occupation of writing; and in his left hand he bore an animal's skin from which a knife had cut and bared the shock of hair, and on this, by means of his compliant pen, he gave to images, which passed from the shadow of a sketch to the truth of very being, the life of their kind.[76]

In the *Parliament*, Nature explains her "dom" in terms that suggest birds will produce, will write, analogously speaking, what they gather from Nature's text. Their act of creation is dependent on Nature in that Nature will simultaneously facilitate, authorise and govern its processes. In this capacity, Nature will reveal an antithetical attitude to that of Fame not only in her easy voice, but also in the use of her voice for the acknowledgement of freedom of interpretation and speech in assigning meaning to and crediting the multiple possibilities her text generates. Unlike the confusing and unpredictable strategy of Fame based on instinctual decisions, and personal bias, the content of Nature's speech reveals to the birds the rules they are expected to abide by. Nature obviously demands that the birds follow a regulated procedure. The mysterious conditions of "name" giving in the realm of Fame gives place to carefully and

[75] *The Complaint of Nature*, Prose V, 30-90, pp. 49-50.

[76] The *Complaint*, Prose IX, 105-106, p.91.

precisely accountable conditions of mating. Nature points out mutual consent as necessary in the selection of mates for each bird present (409). She acknowledges the difference between the birds in "kynde" (401), their freedom to choose "as yow lyketh" (402) and the disagreements which might arise (403). In the freedom of choice accorded to each bird that acts under the governance of Nature, the text, the regenerative source that stimulates diverse configurations of meaning and accommodates a multiplicity of voices, we can see a fruitful response to the question of authority in fictional creation. Nature operates within a framework of authority that the poem examines in a number of ways prior to the focused parliament. In Scipio's dream, the reading of which rewards the dreamer with the vision of the garden of love, the simple dichotomy between the "rightful folk" and "likerous folk" presents two clearly defined paths, one leading to salvation, the other to damnation.[77] The antithetical presentation prevails in the garden in the figure of Venus who presides over a world of desire easily submerged by pain. The authorities evoked and simultaneously discarded (the narrator moves on to the garden where Nature resides and finds solace in the freedom pertinent to the garden) seem to be there to contribute, through their irrelevant definitiveness, to the multi-voicedness of Nature's authority, to be consulted with and benefited from in the realisation of a more reliable guide to truth. The mosaic unity less apparent in structure than in theme is finalised by Nature not because in the person of Nature we realise the link between the ostensibly disjoint parts of the poem, but because Nature is the representative of an authority which

[77] See David Aers, 'The *Parliament of Fowls:* Authority, The Knower and The Known', pp.8-9.

transcends dichotomy and promotes individual existence of the plurality of views.[78] The textually present authorities are acknowledged only in so far as their respective doctrines bear a contrast to the authority Nature possesses.[79] Through Scipio's dream we are brought to the galaxy whence one can contemplate the little Earth below and where the music of the spheres is heard. The locus of life after death, the heaven, is a blissful place "there as joye is that last withouten ende" (49). The doctrine promoted is the love of "commune profyt" (46-9; 73-77) which should be exercised on earth but should be detached from worldly pleasure as well. The transcendence suggested in the love of common profit has as its object the Roman sense of salvation and aggrandisement of the *res publica,* which in a wider sense involves the whole of mankind.[80] The absolutist attitude, the prescriptive remedy, presents a doctrinal authority which is partially useful but too strict to contain the diversity of human behaviour. An unstressed virtue in *Scipio*'s doctrine is that although the love of common profit is promoted as a way to eternal bliss, what it comprises, apart from a disdain of worldly pleasure, is left ambiguous. The ambiguity may lead to individual interpretations and in that sense the doctrine may turn out to be much more flexible,

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[78] Charles O. McDonald, 'An Interpretation of Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*', in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism.* ed. by Edward Wagenknecht (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 309-327, argues that Nature is "the greatest single unifying factor... the mediator in the poem spiritually as well as physically", p.326.

[79] As Judith Hutchinson argues, the conventional attitudes and responses which come in answer to a stock situation are betrayed as soon as they are established. See 'The *Parlement of Fowls*: A Literary Entertainment?', *Neophilologus,* 61 (1977), 143-151 (p.143). Hutchinson's view of betrayal of authorities assumes a common literary background between the poet and the aristocratic courtly audience which the poet exploits through unexpected transformations of his source texts so that the expectations raised by the indication of an authority are surprisingly left unfulfilled.

[80] Boitani, 'Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams', p.48.

providing scope for multiple choices. However, the dichotomy between the "lawful people" and "likerous folk", the law-breakers, presented with a prospect of eternal bliss is a highly challenging definitive choice, one that compels a choice between the two offered options. The idea of choice rests on a principle of "right and wrong". As in the world of Fame, there is a sense of judgment present here. Scipio's advice hangs upon the world of the individual as a constant reminder of finality.[81]

The principle of binary oppositions can be observed in the garden, too. As the double inscription over the gate announces, the world behind the gates is at once a happy and deadly place. It offers eternal joy (288), it offers immortality (50-6;207). It is characterised by perennial day, constant spring, the rich variety of vegetables and animals. The rewarded reading for a "certeyn thyng", which one critic identifies as "something constant and authoritative, some really reliable piece of information"[82] takes the narrator also to the world of Venus, where the eternal joy is displaced by destructive pain of love and the immortality gained through natural regeneration is subdued by the death of the followers of Venus.[83] Narrator's opening statement

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[81] See Paul Piehler, 'Myth, Allegory, and Vision in the *Parlement of Foules:* A Study in Chaucerian Problem Solving', in *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Stephen J. Russell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 187-214 (p.197).

[82] Dieter Mehl, *Geoffrey Chaucer: An Introduction to His Narrative Poetry*, p. 39. I believe that the "certeyn thyng" the narrator is seeking can be the generosity of Nature as an authority figure to allow scope for independent development of conflicting views which have a claim to being only locally authoritative.

[83] For the contrast theme see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p.99. As Spearing rightly argues, the world of Nature is characterised by freedom which is dramatically exhibited in the parliament scene. Paul Piehler, ' Myth, allegory, and Vision in the *Parlement of Foules*, sees the "temple which is out of harmony with the happy feelings that emanate from its surrounds" as an extension of the pattern of antithesis established by the *Somnium Scipionis*, p. 201.

describing love as "assay...hard, sharp...conquerynge," and "dredful joye alwey slit so yerne" are manifest in Venus' part of the garden.[84] Despite their common physical world, Nature and Venus are as antithetical as the two inscriptions on the gate of the garden.[85] Nature's world is the uninhibited, unlimited natural world, Venus' world is confined to a temple made of brass. Compared to the immensity and comprehensiveness of Nature's realm, Venus is the goddess of a comparatively small realm. Hidden from the sunlight which so generously characterises Nature's world, Venus represents a barren world of frustration. Accompanied by Bacchus and Ceres, and her porter Richness, she is listening to the beseeching of two young men, who "cryde/To ben here helpe" (278-79). Previously, her son Cupid is presented forging and filing his arrows which he uses to slay or wound and "kerve" (211-17). Contrasted with the regenerative power of love advocated by Nature and practised by the birds, love in Venus' realm is governed by the destructive power of jealousy and proves to be sterile. Those in her service, wounded by the arrows of Cupid, have no choice but cry as the two young men beseeching Venus. The wall of the temple, like the one in the *House of Fame* which pictured the tragic consequences of Dido's failure to see the difference between appearance and reality, is covered with the stories of the people who "here tymes waste/ In hyre servyse;" (283-84). The emphasised sense of waste

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[84] Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in 'Piers Plowman'*, (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1988), p. 66, finds a cooperative relationship between Venus and Nature and reads this relation as indicative of Nature's sponsorship of the instinctual side of man, which consequently draws her away from Reason.

[85] My argument contrasts with Fyler's argument *in Chaucer and Ovid.* p.89, that the antithesis of Nature and Venus is blurred, that Venus is part of Nature's realm and serves her larger purposes of regeneration and the fight for plenum against the ravages of time. I think, the sense of waste and the death of the followers of Venus indicate the reverse.

does not pertain to time only. The protagonists of the stories engraved on the temple wall are dead people, whose love produced "plyt" rather than joy in which they all died. Venus represents the oppressive power which subjugates and consequently condemns those lured by a complex set of motives that rests with it. Force rather than consent is the operational device.[86] The presence of arms, the arrows, makes the world of Venus identical with a battlefield where the might, the dominance of desire, the destructive effect of fire, reigns unchallenged as opposed to the ease and absence of didacticism in the world of Nature. Venus' confined world generates confining imposed meaning elicited by force and in this sense is more identical with that of Fame.

The important difference between Venus and Nature, on the other hand, lies in the consequences of the "desire" they offer. Nature's is, as we will see below, fruitful and immensely productive in its instrumental role to allow growth and variance. In contrast, Venus' ends, in accordance with the enslaving obsessiveness with one's own desires, in a literal death of the lover, and the figurative death of the idea. The dominance of absolute authority of the governing instinct in Venus' doctrine is substituted by the interpenetration of experience and authority central to Nature.

Throughout the introductory speech to the birds Nature makes constant references to the relationship between herself and the birds: "Foules, tak hed of my sentence", "By my statut and thorgh my governance,/ Ye come for to cheese -and fle youre wey- " (383;387-88). Placed side by side, Nature's power to govern and the birds' right to choose indicates a complementary, cooperative relationship. It also

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[86] Hutchinson, 'The *Parliament of Fowls*: A Literary Entertainment?', p.147, "Venus and her retinue seems to be imposed upon the garden rather than a natural part of it."

indicates that the ultimate power resides in the text which is complete and written in the primal form before it is offered to the "choosers". The participation of the birds in Nature's authority through choosing constitutes the crux of the narrative. Indicated in Nature's readiness to grant the right to choose to the birds is a reversal of the application of authority. Unlike Fame, Nature remains the controlling principle which does not control. She promotes decisions, but, unlike Fame, she does not deprive her subjects of the privilege of a decision by acting the decision maker. If the analogy of Nature as the author of a text of love is sustainable, Nature's role in the parliament is to offer this text as a source, a field out of which the new corn comes freely. In this context, Nature's authority gains strength from being delegated to the birds. Unlike Fame's authorial voice which follows in the footsteps of its creator to reciprocate with an equally suppressive and distorted presentation, Nature's voice reveals a reciprocity in recognition of different voices:

> "And after hym by ordre shul ye chese,
> After youre kynde, everich as yow lyketh,
> And, as youre hap is, shul ye wynne or lese.
> But which of yow that love most entriketh,
> God sende hym that sorest for hym syketh!"
> ....
> "But natheles, in this condicioun
> Mot be the choys of everich that is heere
> That she agre to his eleccioun
> Whoso he be that shulde be hire feere.
> This is oure usage alwey, fro yer to yeere, (400-404; 407-411)

The freedom of choice is blatantly contrastive with what is offered by Fame, and it results in a characteristic Chaucerian relativity. In this sense, the principle of mutual consent and the freedom to choose indicate the possible existence of diverse opinions and the recognition of these possibilities as natural and necessary in reaching diverse,

temporarily valid, conclusions.

The yearly practice charted out by Nature is however basically a guideline. It is ensured in theory and practice that the diversity of creation can be maintained if the diversities are recognised on their own. The birds are counselled to choose according to their kind and, in that frame, as they liked. If we extend the analogy, such categorisation recognises the generic differences and authorial priorities in their own right. This apparently working paradigm presents difficulties when the predicament of the three eagles of the parliament does not fit into the plan. The tradition is disrupted when the three eagles all demand the one and only formel, Nature's favourite creature.

The tersel eagle's readiness to comply with the requirement of continuity of Nature -I take Nature as text here- initiates a heated debate, for he is not the only eagle seeking the formel's hand. The tersel eagle's fervent offer of love and service is challenged by another tersel eagle of a lower kind: "That shal nat be!" (450). There is yet another eagle to join the verbal contest to win the formel's heart. Well-loving, long service, truth to the lady in the form of a self-negating devotion constitute the major point of their common engagement with the formel as the object of their desire. But it also demonstrates variations on a "genre" that the text of Nature contains. The eagles' verbal contest has been seen as a display of sterility of courtly love.[87] It has been argued that the inconclusive and fruitless debate presents a satirical reexamination of courtly love poetry in which Chaucer's early poetry finds a starting point. Evidently the eagles provide no easy access to any form of reconciliation for their discourse signals a common array of self-interest distributed into quantitative (the

[87] See Judith Hutchinson, '*The Parliament of Fowls*: A Literary Entertainment?', pp. 148-49.

second tersel claims to have loved the formel longer) and qualitative claims (first eagle loves her best, the third more deeply).

The sterility of the eagles' "tales" notwithstanding, it seems that the debate itself is not as fruitless as it seems. Evidently, the eagles' prolonged pleading interrupts a tradition, a tradition that rests on and guarantees its own continuity. However, while the eagles delay the process of continuity, they also provide a situation that reveals the working mechanisms of the tradition. Their unproductive debate illustrates how, in the process, they write themselves, the formel and ultimately Nature. The isolated conflict between the eagles comes to disrupt a natural process of a more general concern. That Nature allows that interruption by setting a hierarchical order to be followed indicates that the primary purpose is to let the eagles' "idealistic" discourses be "published". Birds of lower kind grow impatient and launch a verbal attack on the eagles:

> "Com of!" they criede, "allas, ye wol us shende!
> Whan shal youre cursede pletynge have an ende?
> How sholde a juge eyther parti leve
> For ye or nay withouten any preve?" (493-97)

Their reaction can be seen as a form of reader-response. Other genres or discourses have a chance to challenge those of eagles. The birds note the absence of proof. They mention judgment. They emphasise the eagles' claim to a decisive answer. But according to their readings, the "tales" they have listened to fail to provide the necessary "preve". These are concerns central to Nature's parliament. Nature has earlier indicated the potential for disagreement. The object of desire may not yield its seeker's objectives. Importantly, the eagles' dispute does not involve the formel directly. That is, although they all desire the formel, their expression of love and

relevant "proof" tends to revolve around a fruitless rhetoric, confined to their motives and interests. The "reading" of the other birds likewise is limited by their adherence to their own modes of discourse. The respective discourses of the eagles and the other birds do not meet. Soon the serious pleading of the eagles is turned into a comically fruitless argument. The zeal to be "myn owene autorite", as cuckoo's self-proclaimed right to judge for all indicates (506), threatens chaos and collapse of the order established by Nature and prevails till the birds have demanded an end to the prolonged argument of the noble birds. The orderly anthology of the beginning, represented by Nature, degenerates into a battle of voices as the incompatible demands of reader/writers attempt to find a space in a mode of discourse entirely alien to their individual standards.

Moved to action by Nature to mate, but unable to integrate this instinct into an orderly expression, the birds resort to their then available means of control and they attempt to subdue the pleading; "kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!" they go and fill the place with the confusing noise of Rumour's place. In the same manner as the voices in the House of Rumours, they begin to fight over who should have the authoritative position to "shape...a remedie,".

The order is called back by Nature's eloquent voice speaking in the same manner as the birds, "lewedly to a lewed man" (HF 866): "Hold youre tonges there!/ And I shal sone, I hope, a conseyl finde/ Yow to delyvere, and fro this noyse unbynde:" (521-23). Nature's promise entails prevention of confusion, a solution that will serve the needs of all the parties involved. It is not difficult to see that the eagles fail to acknowledge the similarity of their respective arguments. They fail to comprehend the relative validity of their demands in the absence of "any preve" (497).

Under the conditions set by Nature, a possible proof can be that they find constructive response to their demands in the formel. But the eagles localise their interest in the competition for the status of creator. The ideal the formel contains, the ideal prized by Nature, is not sought properly. Obsessed with the expression of their love defined by courtly love conventions, the eagles demonstrate the frustration of the insistence on refusing to allow generation of new ideas.[88] Yet, if we take the eagles as individual authors demanding from Nature what already exists in her vast text, the expression of allegiance with the idea of loving for the benefit of individual completeness should not jar the initial design. On the other hand, considering that the eagles do not provide space for the formel to choose once their pleading is delivered suggests that they all seek some form of imposition of their priorities.

It must be noted that the texts constructed by the eagles are essentially male texts. As Nature's position in the narrative is that of a woman as text, the generative grounds are similarly characterised as female. Nature goes a step further, and establishes a principle of mutuality in that while the female remains to be the object of writing she is also allowed a voice to express her consent to the creation facilitated through her. I will return to this issue below. Mutual recognition promoted by Nature between the lover and the beloved is precluded by the eagles' debate.

Nature's intervention for a "solution" calls for an evaluation of the eagles' discourse by each group of birds.[89] The individual case of the eagles urging for a

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[88] McDonald, 'An Interpretation of Chaucer's *Parlement*', refers to the sterility of eagles' concept of love, but sees it in the specific conventions of courtly love which he believes the poet satirises.

[89] It is probably on the basis of this line that Victoria Rotschild concludes: "Nature speaks differently to the 'gentil' birds. The noble birds are under her 'statute', so she gives them the right to speak as individuals. Whereas the other birds which are under

conclusion so that they can fulfill the general purpose of the parliament becomes a case study through which the implications of the assertive claim to truth is analysed. Interestingly, the solutions offered by each group of the birds present to the eagles in particular and to us in general the possibility of truth being otherwise. However, it is not before the end of the parliament that the birds realise the significance of the incompatibility of their discourses. Each group displays an interest in having their responses accepted. Consequently the threat to the order Nature has established appears to generate from the birds' belief that their individual interpretations should be the uncontested truth. Under the circumstances, comedy is inevitable when the other birds enter into the debate with their equally weighty, however impertinent, discourses of love and seek a pertinent place in the individual predicament of the eagles. The problem is the gap between the different discourses which predicates a failure of appropriate response. The parliament proceeds to generate clashing views and more noise. As to the question of choosing a mate for the formel, the attempts to achieve a consensus fail, for none of the birds will see the relevance of a different discourse or will agree to the negation of their own.

Heightening the comic effect and certainly relieving the tension which made the eagles resort to battle, the goose prides in her reading for a practical solution "But she wol love hym, let hym love another!" (567). The inapplicability of suggestion to the question at hand is expressed in the loud laughter of the eagles. The turtle's response is as impractical for she suggests that the lovers should remain in love regardless of the formel's attitude. What a causeless devotion, what waste of time cries

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her 'governance' speak as species rather than individuals", '*The Parlement of Fowls*: Chaucer's Mirror Upto Nature', *RES*, 35 (1984), 164-184 (p.173).

the dove and condemns the suggestion. The cuckoo's verdict that the eagles should remain single all their lives incites equal indignation. In the view of the interpretations expressed on the particular topic of love we realise the possibility of differing discourses. Each bird writes love from their point of view, their needs and expectations, and naturally each shows a tendency to be "my own authority".

Nature's intercession at the point when the battle of discourses seems to be going on forever does not strike us as urging a conclusion . Nature intercedes "'Now pes,....'I comaunde heer!/ For I have herd al youre opynyoun,/ And in effect yit be we nevere the neer./ But fynally, this is my conclusion,/ That she hireself shal han hir eleccioun'" (617-621). The conclusion is again selection. Introducing the time-old principle, Nature returns the issue to its main source. The formel will make her own choice, a well-informed critical assessment. The parliamentary debate allows all, through Nature's supervision, to represent love according to their priorities.[90] While such cross-examination obviously helps different texts to be constructed, it does not, as Nature states, necessarily bring about a solution. In other words, Nature's intervention provides a closure to the narrative, not a conclusion. The attempt for a consensus is failed, because, though it is the ideal method for a critical review of the text presented by Nature, its absence is no less desirable when the conditions of its generation are considered. The openness of the subject matter to interpretation is a principle enforced through Nature's ordering authority. The order is achieved in permitting the contestants to pursue the realisation of their own discourses, without

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[90] See Paul Piehler, 'Myth, Allegory, and Vision in the *Parlement of Foules*', p.204; David Aers, 'The *Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, The Knower and The Known', p.10, for the tolerant attitude of Nature at, what Aers thinks, collapse of the hierarchic order she established compared with the attitude of Nature in *De Planctu*.

suppressing or distorting the expression of contrary views.[91] Nature's authority is instrumental in manipulating the debate towards the fruitful recognition of diversities and the possibility of their uncompromised independent existence.

In the mating of the birds, which significantly takes place only after their respective interpretations of the text are revealed, we can see the form of continuity recommended by Chaucer through Nature. When the temporal authority, the formel, is asked to give her own verdict, it is not surprising that she abstains. As Nature's favourite creature, she is the one who above all represents a version of Nature's authority. The formel's choice would be submitting to the eagles' definitive concepts, and would therefore be the betrayal of autonomy of different views. Expressed in the form of indecisiveness is her reaction to the authoritative viewpoint represented by the eagles and rejected by Nature.[92] The formel's refusal to choose a mate does not necessarily mar the harmony which is brought about out of contradictory though equally recognised standpoints. The formel's decision is in accord with Nature's principle of right to speak. As in Fame's hall, in Nature's parliament, too, the speakers are male. The right to choose seems initially a right to be enjoyed by those who demand. Unlike the male birds, the formel does not authorise a text of her own. But, the formel's use of her "right" to speak reverses that cognition in that she invalidates the absolute authority of her projected creators. Considering that the eagles attempt to

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[91] Jack B. Oruch, '"Nature's Limitations', p.26, reads this as belated realisation of Nature that her confidence in the ability of the birds to arrive at a conclusion has been misplaced.

[92] James Dean, 'Artistic Conclusiveness in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*', *ChauR*, 21 (1986), 16-25 (p.23), reads the formel's deferral of decision as a reflection of the dreamer's state of mind. "She has her being within the poet's dream, and the poet has difficulty with decisiveness himself."

benefit from the text to create their own relative to the formel, her temporary "nay" can be considered as an impediment to the accomplishment of distinctly "courtly" discourses of the three eagles. Significantly, Nature does not contest the formel's right to reject her suitors.

It will be useful to look at the formel's position in view of its implications for the "comune spede". Promotion of common profit is a theme introduced in the dreamer's predream reading, from which he decides to move onto new books, finding the Dream of Scipio, the book he was reading, lacking a certain piece of information he was seeking. In the Dream of Scipio, Africanus explains the way to heavenly bliss as unswerving devotion to common profit. The law breakers and the pleasure seekers, "likerous folk", will find themselves whirling around the world till they have been cleansed of their sin. The blissful place is accessible to everyone provided that they observe the principles of common profit. The parliament scene offers a highly comic version of assessment of it. The philosophical high-principled doctrine of scorn of the earthly does not have a place in Nature's parliament which centralises creation as textual creation. Promoted by Nature, the governing motive behind the birds' debate is "Have don, and lat us wende!" (492). The eagles do not display such anxiety to leave. However, their motive is as self-centered as that of the other birds. Nature, on the other hand, balances the priorities.[93] As her authority as text dictates, her purpose

[93] Judith Hutchinson, 'The *Parliament of Fowls*: A Literary Entertainment?, p.149. Hutchinson's argument is that Nature's compromise of all views reflects back to *Somnium Scipionis*, where, like the eagles, Scipio is advised to be patient to reach the promised blissful place; Hugh White, 'Chaucer Compromising Nature', RES XL: 158 (1989) 157-178 (p.165), sees the procreative characteristic of Nature emphasised in *De Planctu* and in the tradition of Nature at large as common profit ministered through preservation of species which procreation achieves. Hence he establishes a philosophical link between *Somnium Scipionis* and Nature.

is the satisfaction of the desires of all her creatures in the parliament. She ensures that the birds are paired off evenly, so that their act of procreation will yield diverse but in their own right reliable creations. The decision may seem to be slightly forced to achieve temporary harmony. However, reconciliation of opposites, tolerant acceptance of discrepancies have to have their shortcomings.[94] In fact, Nature has alluded to the possible disappointments that might occur (402).[95] In a parliament where the conditions of decision making allow the power to reside in the individual (407-413), the formel's decision should not be viewed as even relatively limited with regard to primary concern of Nature. Continuity is not prevented by the formel's decision, it is postponed. The parliament disperses with the harmonious song of the birds.

Nature and Reason are antithetical in the *Parliament of Fowls.* By her own accord, Nature sets her decision not to interfere with the formel's decision in contrast with Reason. Nature's separation of herself from Reason can be seen in the context of principles, she, as an authority figure and text, accommodates. The line "If I were Resoun" (632)[96] separates her utterly from Reason. The notion of judgment does not enter Nature's realm. Her course of action throughout the parliament points to her ability to check the urge to judge and impose judgments. Therefore, the separation of

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[94] See James Dean, 'Artistic Conclusiveness in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*', pp.23-24, for an approximation of the difficulty experienced in the parliament with the difficulty of art, fiction, has in achieving perfection.

[95] James J. Wilhelm, 'The Narrator and His Narrative in Chaucer's *Parlement*', expresses dissatisfaction that "no questions are answered in the poem, no problems are solved", p.206.

[96] See Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, p.119, for a different manuscript reading of the line. Some manuscripts read "if it were Reason" which might be the correct reading, for it rounds up with the general presentation of Nature as independent of the allegorical figures she is compared or associated with in the source texts.

herself from Reason indicates a distinction of attitudes, a difference regarding the exercise of authority. Reason would want the formel to choose the tersel eagle, but Nature would not. Insistence with the formel to choose would be for Nature to go against the principles of creation she has established. It would be the violation of the principle of mutual recognition of ideas in order to be free to be multiplied.[97] It would be the suppression of the multiplicity of discourses her text contains.

[97] Jack. B. Oruch, 'Nature's Limitations', regards the absence of a conclusion as "dispute and confusion" which is partly the product of Nature's scheme of things. Because of this, as different from Reason, "she finds herself in almost a difficult situation as the eagles", p.28.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
Ne good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shal 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!
....
Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
As clerkes han withinne hir oratories
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.[1]

The concern of this concluding chapter is twofold. Proceeding through suggestions, it will first pursue the question of authority central to the depictions of women discussed in the preceding chapters. For this purpose, I will discuss Criseyde and the Wife of Bath where Chaucer is seen engaged in furthering the implications of textualisation of the concept of women, and also the implications of these considerations for the idea of tradition. In the second part of the conclusion, my concern is to pursue the implications of "Chaucer tradition" in the fifteenth century when the fifteenth-century poets revive the dream-frame form and recognise Chaucer as an authority who re-shaped his literary inheritance to give rise to what now can be called English poetry. The fifteenth-century response to Chaucer is important evidence that Chaucer's interactive progress through the past into present not only establishes him as an "auctor" but also furnishes regenerative grounds for the English poetry to

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[1] *Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1058-1064; *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, 692-696.

develop out of Chaucer's poetry but not necessarily along the lines explored by him. The fifteenth-century poets acknowledge Chaucer as a great poet, but their own theory and practice of poetry are sometimes strikingly different from Chaucer's. I would suggest that the fifteenth-century is the period in which Chaucer's poetry is actively taken into account as tradition. The obvious departure in several ways from Chaucer is positive evidence that for the fifteenth-century poets Chaucer is an author to be interpreted. This indicates that for the fifteenth-century poets Chaucer's significance lies not only in his role as the father of "the English tradition" but also and more significantly -because it helps poetry to develop in different directions- in creating a "sense" of poetic tradition.

Chronologically *Troilus and Criseyde* is a poem written between the time that separates the *Parliament of Fowls* and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. As we have seen, in the latter poem it comes under scrutiny as a poem of manipulative ideological discourse. The evidence brought forward by its judgemental readers Alceste and Cupid charges it with intentional poetic heresy and demands its discontinuity. Chaucer's in-the-text readers in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* urge a return to a line of poetic engagement more congenial to the continuation of the priorities of love narrative. Modern readers demand a similar discontinuity for Chaucer's dream poems. It has been argued that *Troilus and Criseyde* marks a break in Chaucer's career with a courtly tradition that had shaped and determined Chaucer's poetic concerns in the dream poems and that his later poetry is free from the "constraints" operational in the early stage of his career.[2] George Kane

[2] The term "earlier poetry" used in reference to Chaucer's dream poems is not always used in the chronological sense. It refers to a point of departure, a marked difference in the nature of Chaucer's poetic development. My argument is not with the

is a proponent of this division. He argues that Chaucer's career can be divided into two stages defined by a radical change in his idea of a poet.[3] This division corresponds to "sharp differences of tone about certain topics, notably the relation of the sexes and its representation in the convention of *fine amour* between his demonstrably earlier and his later poetry."[4] Conception of Chaucer's poetic career in terms of division into phases derives from the, to my mind erroneous, contention that Chaucer's dream poetry is confined to the fulfilment of the conventions of courtly poetry. As Kane's argument suggests, when viewed through the relations between sexes set by the courtly conventions, the idea of poetry Chaucer explores seems to need to be enlarged and enriched. In this light, Chaucer's solution to the problem he detects in the courtly convention appears to be one of avoidance. "Examining and

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evident development in Chaucer's poetry in the later stages of his poetic career. I believe, however, that the difference and the consequent development are not at the cost of abandoning the poetic concerns he develops in the dream poems. It rather follows from and is built upon the poetic principles established in the dream poems. See, for instance, Derek Traversi, *Chaucer: The Earlier Poetry: A Study in Poetic Development*, for a stylistic evaluation of Chaucer's early poetry as preparing the ground for the poetry of Chaucer's maturity. David Wallace, likewise, maintains that only in the *Troilus* can Chaucer claim a legitimate place in the company of great poets. See 'Chaucer's Continental Inheritance: the Early poems and *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, pp. 19-38.

[3] *Chaucer and Langland: Historical and Textual Approaches*, 'Chaucer and the Idea of a Poet', pp. 15-31 (p.15). Kane considers the early stage of Chaucer's career as controlled by the demands of courtly masters and maintains that only starting with the *Troilus* Chaucer is able to challenge the courtly conventions by representing "the actual sexual relationship with total pscychological realism", p. 21.

[4] *Chaucer and Langland,* p. 15. See also Glending Olson, 'Making and Poetry In the Age of Chaucer', *Comparative Literature,* 31, (1979), 272-290, for a consideration of Chaucer's idea of poetry as "making" or "poetry" which in turn defines Chaucer's activity either as a poet or a maker. Olson suggests a difference of artistry between the two and indicates that although Chaucer's use of the terms are ambiguous, his poetry still sets the grounds for the examination of the late medieval poet's relation to poetry.

displaying its deficiencies", he eventually moves away from this definitive and limiting convention.[5]

But, in the preceding discussion of the women in Chaucer's dream poems, we have seen that the act of pursuing an evaluation -and practice- of the art of poetry is not confinable to, and therefore definable by- the courtly conventions alone. Chaucer's dream poems, as I have suggested in Chapter II, provide a rich literary landscape that resists any form of confinement. Through women, Chaucer brings into the scope of his dream poems not only the idealistic courtly convention but also several other traditions ranging from classical to vernacular. Through a common denominator, an authoritative discourse, these traditions serve for Chaucer as *the* tradition. Examining and displaying the limitations of traditional poetic attitudes, conceptions and practices indicate continuity rather than completion or discard. I have quoted Criseyde and the Wife of Bath above. The words they are allocated by Chaucer are loaded with implications that recall Chaucer's "earlier" concerns. To mention the similarity between Criseyde's and Dido's laments will perhaps be to reiterate the obvious. Perhaps mentioning the fear of everlasting "fame", though suggested strongly in Criseyde's vision of poetic future, will make an oblique connection to the "fixative" name-distribution of Fame earlier in the *House of Fame*. But, the idea of continuity is injected in these quotations in ways stronger than the textual allusions. The prospect of continuity vexes the discourse of Criseyde as it does that of Dido. As we will see below, the transformation Criseyde undergoes in the course of *Troilus and Criseyde* indicates a shift from one context to another but never an end to poetic reconstruction. Conversely, her betrayal of the "ideal" lady of courtly discourse marks a turning point

[5] Kane, 'Chaucer and the Idea of a Poet', p.24.

in her otherwise static and securely defined textual existence. The radical change in her role initiates an ironic continuity in discourse in that by discontinuing the ideal lady she gives rise to a contradictory image of woman unwarranted by the textual conditions of the current narrative. The Wife of Bath, concurring indirectly with Criseyde, opens a new page. Her interrogative discourse signals a necessity for a reverse continuation, for restructuring, of the available written discourse. The gender difference remains marked. Woman as "written" is a vital concern for future representations of false Criseyde, and woman as "written" fuels the Wife's attempt to reverse the processes of image making. The traditional discourse is placed not through supression of potential for continuity but through its suggestiveness as the source of continuity.

The relation between Chaucer's dream poems and the *Troilus* and *The Canterbury Tales* is one of continuation rather than that of a marked difference. The argument of the previous chapters have shown that Chaucer's examination of several aspects of poetry in the dream poems purports to create an "imaginative space" for those who, for the purposes of current narratives, are necessarily unvoiced. The act of writing, we have seen, proceeds through a process of silencing. Since this "silence" is not an inherent position but rather, as Chaucer demonstrates in the representations of women, a position imposed, it functions to foreground an unexploited or suppressed domain of alternative discourses. Richard Helgerson writes, "Meaning in the...system of literary careers, as in any sign system, derives from relations and oppositions between the elements of that system. To write in a certain genre or to speak of one's work in a certain way...was to associate oneself with one group of poets and to

dissociate oneself from another."[6] The authoritative discourse we have observed in creating images of women derives its authority from this conscious association and dissociation. Women, in this context, can be -and are- treated as a literary text. Like a text, their meaning and role are conferred upon them by reader/writers, the creative powers whose initiative is to control their meaning through contextual interpretation. In pursuing a certain meaning to convey, poets use texts to confer meaning upon and alternatively they derive meaning from texts. However, if manipulation of a text for meanings in and outside the control of a poet is possible, the attempt to encapsulate a certain meaning in the text will result in an inevitable defeat. Chaucer's representations of women in the dream poems present some fundamental traditional forms of poetic associations and disassociations. Always foregrounding the creative conditions, the writing positions, these representations embody the gap, the "imaginative space", as a useful corrective to be considered in the evaluation of the literary past.

Chaucer's representations of women suggest that the act of writing is never a completed process. Taking on new implications, it continues in its suggestiveness, in its intended transformations of the "matter" and in its always challengeable conclusions. Hence, the paradigm of "old fields-new corn" stands on a similar epistemological level to "Who painted the lion?". The potential of women to be created according to the priorities of the context of writing is instructive also of the possibility of re-making and re-creating what would otherwise be designated as complete and unquestionable. Chaucer's presentations of women in traditionally

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[6] *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 25-26.

prioritised contexts can be seen as a concerted attempt simultaneously to reflect and to relativise the definitive and prescriptive definitions of the past.

It is not my concern here to evaluate the evidence in Chaucer's later poetry in order to show that the relationship between Chaucer's early and later poetry is one of continuity rather than that of a break; that is too wide a topic to be treated within the scope of a concluding chapter.[7] Nevertheless, a few suggestions are instructive, for, as I have indicated above, Chaucer's engagement with the complex relationship between tradition and the individual poet examined in the representations of women continues in the *Canterbury Tales* as well as in the *Troilus.*

I will consider the narrative space occupied by Criseyde and the Wife of Bath at some length below. We have seen that Alcione, Dido, Blanche and Alceste, Fame and Nature share a common narrative context. They are situated in narrative frames which suggest an interaction between past and present. In the *Troilus* and *The Canterbury Tales,* the dream is no longer employed as a structural frame, but we can observe the continuation of poetic concerns of the dream poems from the point of view of the narrative context. In continuing the idea of women as text -since textuality of women is the key to the illustration and evaluation of the interaction between tradition and the agents of its formation, the poets- Chaucer retains also the past context, the "old fields". Criseyde's story is a pertinent example to illustrate the fluid boundaries between Chaucer's use of the narrative context permeating his early

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[7] Piero Boitani shows the continuity in Chaucer to use and experiment with literary genres and conventions as an essential element of his poetic understanding. The *Canterbury Tales* contain tales which can generically be classified as romance. See *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, pp.135-36. See also Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*, pp. 222-30.

poems and his later work. The *Troilus* follows from and encompasses several key issues of the dream poems in its emphases on the role of the author, the relation to tradition, the necessary instability of textual presentation and women's changeability as an accurate metaphor for continuity in change. In the dream poems, it is the book read (either in or outside the dream) and written that obliquely bring to the fore the relationship between books and women, authority and experience, and tradition and interpretation. Similarly, in the story of Troilus and Criseyde, it is the reading and writing conditions that are most directly confronted. As in the story of Dido, which bears a close affinity to that of Criseyde in its foregrounding of the past as a candidate for reshaping in present, the poetic interests of the *Troilus* are located in fictional history, for which the reader is directed to "Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite/ Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write" (TC, I, 146-7). The context is redefined to focus the narrative on women in the service of love (I,15-21). The author's position, indicated in the dream poems, as the reader of the tradition in several texts is particularised and emphasised in the *Troilus.* The perspective is more focused and the priorities of the author -individual creative processes emanating from and dependent upon interpretative reading of the available matter- are more explicitly realised. Keeping the responsive position of the narrator as reader/author, Chaucer, in the *Troilus*, demonstrates the active consequences of that responsiveness in rewriting a mediated story.[8] This position, reinforced by the potential for change in Criseyde, not only

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[8] Bernard F. Huppé's analysis of the *Troilus* narrator points to a similarity in the position and role of the narrator in the dream poems, although his reading of the "disharmonies" of the *Troilus* does not provide a comparative basis with the dream poems. See 'The Unlikely Narrator: The Narrative Strategy of the *Troilus*', in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. by P. John Herman and John J. Burke, Jr. (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981), pp. 179-194 (pp.186-190).

brings the tradition into focus but also directs the reader towards several possible reading -hence writing- positions.[9] The *Troilus* is one expanded particular component of Chaucer's earlier vision of the past. In view of the dream poems as the critical and evaluative *loci* in which Chaucer formulates a view of poetry negotiating between past and present, Criseyde's agency through past to present (and future) can be considered as a carefully considered expression and elaboration of this view of poetry.

The *Canterbury Tales* involves the frequently invoked past: the stories told characteristically bring with themselves the presence of the past and demonstrate the exertion of influence of the present on it.[10] A significant manifestation of this co-existence can be observed in the contextualising of the stories. In this sense, the *Canterbury Tales* takes us back to the liberated arena of poetic coexistence and interaction implemented in the dream poems, rather than being a sequel to the *Legend*.[11] The legends centralise "the single voice of the poet and... a univocal exemplary meaning."[12] The poetic combat between the "auctores" and the present poet is decidedly one of victory for the poet in the *Legend*. It is also a reverse image of the

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[9] See Murray J. Evans, '"Making Strange", The Narrator (?), the Ending (?), and Chaucer's *Troilus*', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 87 (1986), 218-228, for a consideration of the "endings" of the *Troilus* and the poem's strategies of involving the reader in the act of interpretive writing.

[10] See Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of 'The Canterbury Tales'* (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 1976), pp 78-89, for a discussion of the "linearity" of the time in the *Canterbury Tales*. Howard stresses the "present" and claims that "past" is continuously made present for the effect of immediacy.

[11] I am referring to the contrast between the univocality of the *Legend* and the multivocality of the *Canterbury Tales*. See John M. Hill, *Chaucerian Belief: The Poetics of Reverence and Delight* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 42-43.

[12] Lee Patterson, 'For the Wyves love of Bathe', p. 688.

poet compared to the one we have in the dream poems and the *Troilus*. The past authorities are there not to be disputed or accorded due value but to be silenced or misapplied and misquoted. The intercommunication between the tradition and the poet continues but it is handled with the ironic intention of blatant "suppression" of the voice of the precursors.

Still, *The Canterbury Tales* shares many of the poetic concerns of the *Legend*. One continuous concern in both is the textualisation of women and the subsequent role of women in exemplifying and facilitating the development of tradition. The *Canterbury Tales* is framed within the communicative interaction between the past and present. The scheme of telling stories foretells a mediation of these two realms found in constant exchange of effect in Chaucer's poetry. The tale-telling sets the ground and thereby makes each teller an author or an authority. This earned individual authority is problematically negotiated by the authorial powers of the teller and the tale recounted. That is, while the tellers illustrate a rule of decorum in telling stories pertinent to their social and cultural status and position,[13] the tales call for a recognition of a tradition that has handed them down. Some of the tales are defined in relation to their sources and the tellers acknowledge the authors of their stories.[14] The *Canterbury Tales* proceeds through juxtaposition of authorities and their mediated

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[13] For a negation of dramatic consistency between the tale and the teller see Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 141; John M. Hill, *Chaucerian Belief*, p. 44, argues that the tales and tellers are related through a reading activity that engages not only the tellers but also the telling strategies influenced by the tellers' beliefs and feelings.The correlation between the teller and the tale is frequently emphasised in the discussions of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and her Tale. See, for instance, F.W.Bolton, 'The Wife of Bath: Narrator As Victim'; Patterson, 'For the Wyves Love of Bath'.

[14] The *Manciple's Tale*, 105-129, locates the source as books. See also the *Physician's Tale*, 1-5; The *Franklin's Prologue*, 709-715.

creations. While the Clerk, for instance, tells the story of Griselda, an embodiment of female submission and resignation to extrinsic powers for existence,[15] the Merchant's May is set on a conjugal journey to confirm the Clerk's concluding contention that Griselda's "patience" is unique to characterise woman behaviour. The Clerk and the Merchant represent two different images of women. Yet, they have a common denominator in their one-sidedness of approach to the issue,[16] not to mention the need to recognise the roles of the Clerk and the Merchant as the agents mediating these images. I propose to examine the implications of the right "to authorise" in one of Chaucer's complex textual creations, the Wife of Bath. In the Wife's Prologue this frame is superficially doubled. The Wife's standpoint to her own life story provides a distanced, and hence interpretive and evaluative approach. The Wife's "experience" is crowded with and shaped by books.The Wife examines her "experience" through the Scripture, its interpretive authorities and Jankin's "book". Through the Wife, Chaucer makes a positive statement about the nature of poetic creation. It comes in the form of a radical shift in perspective, as verbalisation of what has been so far approached from several aspects indirectly. But it nevertheless avoids the destructive consequences of usurped power utilised by Fame, for instance. The Wife's prologue, however, does not present itself as a solution, but as a suggestion. The Wife of Bath is presented as a woman speaking for women. But the insistence in her Prologue to alter the balance of authority registers not only a direct questioning of the "textuality"

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[15] For a discussion of Griselda's textual history for its implications of narrative challenges to the role-model of several levels see Lesley Johnson, 'Reincarnations of Griselda: Contexts for the *Clerk's Tale*?', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and all her sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.195-220.

[16] See Daniel M. Murtaugh, 'Women and Geoffrey Chaucer', pp. 479-80.

of women but also an affirmation of the alterability of any given text.

CRISEYDE

The initial context in which Criseyde is introduced to the reader is a book. Chaucer, adhering to his pose in the dream poems, is the competent reader who will tell us a story written a long time ago. The fictitious author Lollius is stated to be "myn auctour" whom the narrator promises to follow closely in telling "the double sorwes .../of Troilus in lovynge of Criseyde/ And how that she forsook hym er she deyde" (I, 54-56). The statement of the intent of the story is in fact the summary of the ending of the story. Before we go, we will learn a great deal about Troilus and especially about Criseyde to judge whether or not Criseyde's role can be contained merely in the story's uncontestable line "forsook hym er she deyde." Chaucer's "translation" of the story presents complications for this simple conclusion. On the other hand, it suggests a reverse paradigm for Cupid's definition of good women in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.*

Criseyde's story is a story of change. To begin with, the power politics indicated in the historical frame of the story are displaced by a transfer to poetics of power.[17] The book tells of the mighty Greeks and Trojans, and localises its interest first on the treachery exercised by Calchas, then on the festive mood of Trojans

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[17] The function of the historical context as the general frame of the course of Criseyde's and Troilus story has been frequently noted in the criticism of ***Troilus***. An early appreciation of this is Kittredge's reading of *Troilus* as a fate tragedy: "Their story begins in the temple of the Palladium; it is Calchas' foreknowledge and the people's infatuation that tear them asunder...The tragedy of character grows out of the tragedy of situation." George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry,* Fifty-Fifth Anniversary edn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970, first pub.1915), p. 121. References will be made to other works through the course of my discussion.

maintaining the routine of their normal life as if there is no war savaging their city. The alternating shift in the narrative focus from the traitor Calchas and the deadly threat his treason poses to his kin to the Palladium festivities is one of the initial indications of the presence of change and instability looming behind the surface reality of the perceived world. Calchas' secret departure is due to his knowledge that Troy will be destroyed by the Greeks. In anticipation of a disastrous change, he decides to be on the powerful side for stability. Meanwhile, the festivities at the temple bring about a change in the proud, love-despising Troilus. Spotted by the God of Love in a manner similar to the Lover in the *Roman de la Rose*, he vows homage to the power of Love and Criseyde.[18] Both the historical frame and Troilus' conversion claim a direct effect on Criseyde. While Calchas' departure endangers Criseyde's well-being in Troy, and makes her subject to the desires of the authorities, Troilus' transformation poses an equally demanding threat to her existence by initiating the transformation of her status, (in)dependence and meaning. The opening then is the opening of the question of power and change which will continually invalidate and eliminate Criseyde's strivings for stability and social and textual security.

The presence or absence of power has significant consequences for Criseyde's state of becoming and being. Modern readings of Criseyde follow from the case argued by Lewis, which is directed at explaining Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus.[19]

[18] For a comparison of the *Troilus* and the *Roman* see James Wimsatt, 'Realism in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *the Roman de la Rose*', in *Essays on 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, ed. by Mary Salu (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, Rowman and Littlefield, 1982, first pub.1979), pp. 43- 56 (pp.43-46).

[19] C. S. Lewis, 'What Chaucer Really Did to "Il Flostrato', in *Chaucer Criticism*, ed. by R.J. Schoek and J. Taylor, 2 Vols (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), II, pp.16-31.

According to this view, Criseyde as governed by fear generated by several forms of threats posed at her signals her eventual betrayal of Troilus from the very beginning of the poem. Fear being her character trait, her instinctive response to the demands of the circumstances is one of survival. While Lewis' thesis successfully explains Criseyde's position in a society where women are subordinate and weak from the social perspective,[20] paradoxically, it presents Criseyde in possession of control. The inadequacy of this argument lies in its isolation, to some extent liberation, of Criseyde as an individual who can be held responsible for her acts of volition. Whereas, as her main character trait illustrates, Criseyde's actions are not consequent to her self-determined interests but are imposed on her by the external forces. David Aers reverses the fatally deterministic (though also apologetic) view of character to suggest that Criseyde's course of action is highly determined by the "contradiction between the aristocratic love conventions in which woman was an exalted and powerful figure, and the social reality in which she was a totally subordinate being to be used, manipulated, and taught obedience."[21] This, though it takes issue with self-determination of Lewis' argument, still adheres to a character-centered explanation. In Aers' view, Criseyde's dilemma is the dilemma of a woman whose total situation shows clearly how profound is the "power of training, habitual subordination, and convention."[22]

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[20] See Maureen Fries, '"Slydynge of Corage": Chaucer's Criseyde as Feminist and Victim', in *The Authority of Experience*, pp. 45-59 (p.58).

[21] 'Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society', *ChauR*, 13 (1978-79), 177-200 (p.184).

[22] 'Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society', p. 193. Cf Maria K. Greenwood, 'Women in Love, or Three Courtly Heroines in Chaucer and Malory: Elaine, Criseyde and Guinevere', in *A Wyf Ther Was*, pp.167-177, (p.169), for a consideration of Criseyde as an opportunistic widow, "the epitome of the young woman whose maturity consists of self-interest".

The question can be reformulated: Why does Criseyde play the role of the conventional courtly love lady? Does she ever escape from, even in imagination, the realities of her world? How much freedom and power does the role of courtly lady accord to Criseyde? As I have stated above, Criseyde's story is involved in poetics of power, but the centrality of power to Criseyde's existence comes not so much from the social circumstances as from Criseyde's eligibility for an exercise of meaning and interpretation. The social aspects of her situation form a frame which is instrumental in completing her presentation(s) as an image, an idea, a concept. In this context, the seemingly conflicting demands of courtly love conventions and the realities of fictional social life emphasised by Aers seem to be in accord rather than discord. Criseyde is a woman. Chaucer's presentation of her in a threatening social atmosphere justifies her fears as a woman. Her betrayal of Troilus, on the other hand, can be explained in the context of her femininity. It is not until after she becomes Troilus' mistress that her "honour" or name begins to attract concern. Then, the details of her social standing -such as being the daughter of a traitor, a detail which eventually gives rise to completion of Criseyde's fame as "untrue"- and the expectations from her as a knight's lady begin to converge. The social difficulties do not explain her betrayal of Troilus, but her status as an interpretable "matere" does. Criseyde is not only the woman in the "book" who has a summary end constituting in desertion and death. She is the book to a complex and unresolved extent. When Criseyde laments the prospect of her bad reputation living forever, she voices, as Elizabeth Harvey observes, "the power that others...will wield over her, possessing, as they do, the capacity to shape

her textual representation."[23] Criseyde's complaint recalls Dido. However, unlike the other women in the books she is not a two-time loser. She survives because she can accommodate the radical change in her reputation. Chaucer's narrative confirms the necessity of Criseyde's change of heart to secure safety and allow for independent existence. However, as I will argue, it is not as much in her capacity as a woman as in her capacity as a text that her survival is pertinent to our understanding of her position.

The collaboration between the demands of social existence and textual existence is an intricate one. Pandarus no doubt exploits Criseyde's fragile social situation when he cunningly reminds her that Troilus is the son of the Trojan king. Nevertheless it is evidently a tricky application of means to serve the end, which is that Criseyde will become the "true" lady of Troilus, she will end his sorrow and make him happy. That is, she will take on the role prescribed by the narrative priorities of the text co-authored by Pandarus and Troilus. It is in fact a double task Criseyde is required to fulfil. Requiting Troilus' love will help Pandarus write his own text of Criseyde.

Criseyde is at the centre of the narrative. But she does not move to the centre by her own accord, she is moved there.[24] Moving Criseyde to the centre requires a convergence of the narratives separately occupied by Troilus and Criseyde. Once captivated by the God of Love, Troilus resolves "loves craft to suwe/...werken

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[23] 'Speaking of Tongues: The Poetics of the Feminine Voice in Chaucer's ***Legend of Good Women***', p.47.

[24] See Adam Brooke Davis, 'The Ends of Fiction: Narrative Boundaries and Chaucer's Attitude Toward Courtly Love', *ChauR*, 28:1 (1993), 54-66 (p.62). Davis contends that the substance of tradition in love poetry dictates that "the woman is ostensibly at the center of the poem", she "is in fact merely its occasion".

pryvely" (I,379-380). As the Black Knight of the Lady White does in the *Book of the Duchess*, he begins his career by composing love songs. But Troilus does not possess the confidence and courage to fulfil the demands of his role as an author and lover. Constrained and motivated by the same force, Troilus cannot activate the power allocated to him by Love.[25] It is with the appearance of his confidante, Pandarus, that things take a rapid turn and Criseyde's position in the story becomes a matter of construction, careful planning and imaging. When Pandarus manages to elicit the cause of Troilus' sorrow, his reassurances of Troilus that he can help to ease his heart find solid ground. Pandarus is pleased that Troilus is in love with Criseyde and immediately "went his wey, thenkynge on this matere,/ How he best myghte hire biseche of grace," (I, 1062-63). Pandarus is confident that he will effect a change in Criseyde as to have her "grace". As he promised to Troilus, Criseyde makes a perfect match for him and "it sate hire wel right nowthe/ A worthi knyght to loven and cherice/ And but she do, I holde it for a vice." (I, 985-87). He assumes the position of author and the right to shape or rather rewrite Criseyde: "And but she do, I holde it for a vice." Criseyde, presented with the love of a "worthi knyght", seems to have both the power and submission accorded to a courtly love lady. The narrative position taken by Troilus and mediated by Pandarus suggests that, like Blanche she will have "governance" on Troilus. Likewise, the conferred power is limited by the necessity of relinquishing authority to those who seek her "governance". By the same token,

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[25] See Chapter Five for the authorial power derived from Love. See also David Aers, *Community, Gender, and the Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.130-131. Aers considers Criseyde's active stance in the love scene as evidence that the poem works to negate man's traditional denial of subjectivity to women. For a comparison of the self-constructions of the Black Knight and Troilus through love and the lady, see p. 122.

Criseyde's necessary granting of grace is a form of receiving, rather than giving. In Pandarus' original narrative Criseyde is not only the beautiful, virtuous, passive courtly lady, whose virtue demands that she has pity for those who suffer for her but also the "matere" that he is going to reinterpret.

I am not arguing that Pandarus, or for that matter Troilus, is aware of Criseyde's potential for re-formation as a text. In fact, Troilus is as much a victim of authorities as Criseyde appears to be. Both are driven into a relationship without their consent. Troilus' love for Criseyde is commanded by the God of Love and in fact is a form of punishment. Similar to the situation in the *Legend of Good Women*, constrained by Love, Troilus has to conform to the tradition of God of Love to recast Crsieyde as "love's servant". Like many converts, once Troilus is actively involved in the art of loving, he will continue to occupy the role of the lover prescribed by tradition till his death. He has so internalised his role as a courtly lover and consented to Criseyde's "maistry" in the relationship that even when Criseyde leaves for the Greek side, which will obviously terminate their relationship, he refuses to interfere for the fear that he offends his lady.[26] The difference between Troilus and Criseyde can be seen as a difference in their respective tasks. Criseyde, potentially a text, changes according to the exerted authority, Troilus, an author, maintains his initial standpoint.[27]

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[26] See E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Troilus and Criseide', in *Critical Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde' and His Major Early Poems*, ed. by David Benson, pp. 44-56 (p.51); Jill Mann, 'Troilus' Swoon', in *Critical Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde' and His Major Early Poems*, ed. by C. David Benson, pp. 149-163 (pp.151-152). Mann, however, relates Troilus' love devotion to "deeply felt emotion" rather than "the conventions of courtship", p. 161.

[27] Troilus' insistence on the preservation of his role as a lover and Criseyde's role as his lady is not disrupted by Criseyde's final desertion of him, either. It is a failure

Troilus' suffering provides a narrative space for Pandarus in which to exert influence as an author. From his point of view, he has a woman and a man. The man is in love with the woman. The woman is oblivious to the man's love. An ideal "matter" to write a story of! His first considerations of the "matter" are given poetic resonances:

> For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
> Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
> With rakel hond, but he wol binde a stounde,
> And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
> Aldirfirst his purpose for to wynne.
> Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,
> And caste his werk ful wisly or he wroughte. (I, 1065-1071)

The introduction of principles of poetic creation from *Poetria Nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf into a matter of domestic significance suggests that Pandarus' strategy is viewed by the poet as a plan for a successful construction of a text. The term "werk" intensifies the textual connotation. Since we already know Pandarus' plan and the "werk" he is set on to accomplish, we may surmise that Criseyde's role in the accomplishment of the work is of utmost importance. Indeed, Pandarus' conception of the love affair as a piece of text, which he extends to Criseyde, is initially indicated in his intertextual discourse which makes Troilus exclaim "What knowe I of the

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on the part of Troilus that he does not recognise Criseyde's potential for change; but he refrains from putting the entire blame of betrayal on Criseyde and in that he is always "true" as he has pledged. See Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on 'Troilus and Criseyde'* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.180, for a comparison of Criseyde and Troilus as characters. Wetherbee considers Criseyde as a flawed character in that she is bound to the world and worldy security to the extent that it is her "modus vivendi". Whereas love idealism is the condition of Troilus. See also Mark Lambert, '*Troilus*, Books I-III: A Criseydan Reading', in *Essays on 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, ed. by Mary Salu, pp. 105-125. Lambert compares Troilus and Criseyde as "heroic" and "unheroic" characters. See pp. 105-120.

queene Niobe?/Let be thyne olde ensaumples, I thee preye" (I, 759-60). Like the narrator of the *Troilus*, Pandarus admits his failure as a lover (I,621-630), but contends that he can make Troilus a competent one: "A wheston is no kervnyg instrument,/ But yet it maketh sharppe kervnyng tolis" (I, 631-32) Pandarus has to resort to the old "ensaumples" to effect in Troilus an awareness of the responsibilities of a lover. Pandarus is trying to prompt Troilus into a productively expressive stance, for Troilus' reticence is "naught, certein, the nexte wyse/ To winnen love -as techen us the wyse-/To walve and wepe as Nyobe the queene," (I, 697-99). As a male lover, Troilus' position is one of action, "tellen of thy sorwes smerte", "speke a resoun moore or lesse" (794-95), otherwise he faces a potential failure, "What womman koude loven swich a wrecche?" (798). The role he prescribes to Criseyde in her absence is conditioned by this "lore", too. As E. Talbot Donaldson observes, for Pandarus "things are whatever one makes them. To accomplish a given action, all one has to do is manipulate the situation so as to produce the proper pressures on the actors."[28] Pandarus, however, not only exerts pressures, he also designs the story.

Pandarus' re-formation of Criseyde follows the principles established by tradition. He acknowledges Troilus as a lover and by "writing" Criseyde he aims to present the lover with the ideal lady of traditional discourse. He freely uses the licence of authority and the voice of authority to transfer Criseyde from the state of "true" widow to the state of "true" lady of Troilus. Pandarus, as the main agent to effect Chaucer's insight into Criseyde as the writable text, feels betrayed and hates Criseyde

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[28] 'Troilus and Criseide', p.49. Donaldson's observation of Pandarus' role as a manipulator is in the context of the clash between reality and illusion. According to Donaldson, despite his radical philosophy Pandarus fails or refuses to regard the natural course of reality.

when she is allured by a different authority. Needless to say, it is his own theory that defeats him. Albeit temporarily, if he managed to form a "true" lady out of Criseyde, it is because Criseyde has been responsive to his authorial power. Yet, his refusal to admit the result of administration of power on someone who is impressionable is a refusal to admit to the manipulative force of authority. His final evaluation of Criseyde's behaviour sets the example for her subsequent literary representation. It is interesting and ironic that the agent who awakens Criseyde to the opportunities presented by a textual re-making can be the agent of her future condemnation.

Pandarus' first act towards changing Criseyde is to urge her to abandon reading books, "do wey youre book" (II,111) and instead "don to May som observaunce." (II,112). It is interesting to note that Pandarus here is laying the foundations of his imaginary fictive house. He is also challenging Criseyde's autonomy. The temporal reference to the necessity of cultivation of Criseyde's taste in spare time activities indicates a search for permanent alterations. Criseyde is urged to abandon reading books so that she can become the "matter" of the books. Criseyde is quick to note the challenge, possibly the danger involved: "Be ye mad?/Is that a widewes lif," (II,113-14). The significance of this jokingly administered exchange of clashing views is expanded in Criseyde's reconsideration of the situation later. At present, she surrenders, unknowingly and ironically, all her possible defences: "As in my gylt I shall yow nevere offende;" (II, 244). Should Criseyde fail to cooperate, she will sign not only the death of the hero of the story, Troilus, but also that of its author: "But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve-/Have here my trouthe, nece, I nyl nat lyen-" (II, 323-24). It is not possible to measure literally the amount of truth in this threat; however, on the figurative level, it is certain that Criseyde's decline of the offer will

prevent the birth of a story; it will frustrate Pandarus' authorial ambitions.

The implications of the consent to re-creation can be considered in the context of Criseyde's current position in the narrative. Like the Wife of Bath, Criseyde is a widow and hence she is free to write her own text, she is free to have her own textual life. She deliberates:

> "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese-
> I thank it God- as after myn estat,
> Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
> Withouten jalousie or swich debat:
> Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!'
> For either they ben ful of jalousie,
> Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie." (II,750-756)

This declaration of independence particularised to Criseyde's freedom from the demands of a husband is indeed Criseyde's stronghold. She is now "free", free of dominance, free of ungrounded false charges that a relationship imposes upon her as a woman. Her pride in this state of freedom concludes nevertheless in her abandonment of it. As Priscilla Martin observes in her consideration of all the characters in the poem as created by forces other than their own will, Criseyde is not her own creator.[29] She has a deep insight into and appreciation of her freedom and sovereignty.[30] But this appreciation is realised in the face of a substantial danger to the very source of it. Criseyde's fears are that once she concedes to the temptation of love it is not only the "mooste stormy lyf" of love that she will have to sail through, but it is also her freedom that she will have to hand over: "Allas! Syn I am free,/ Sholde

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[29] *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons,* pp.164-65.

[30] Maureen Fries, '"Slydynge of Corage": Chaucer's Criseyde as Feminist and Victim', considers this as a feminist outlook expressed by Criseyde. See pp. 45-48.

I now love, and put in jupartie/ My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?." (II,771-73). When read in the context of her hesitations as to her preparedness to act according to the impositions of her new projected status, her fears begin to take shape as fears of textualisation. To love Troilus is to abandon not only the "maistrye", an asset much valued by the Wife of Bath, but also to assume a new identity which calls for submission, silence and serving other people's wishes so that "they seye noon harm of me!", "And who may stoppen every wikked tonge,/Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge?" (II,781; 804-805). If a woman refuses to act out the role expected from her, or as in the most likely case the man stops loving and "Ful sharp begynnyng breketh ofte at ende" (II,791), "Therto we wrecched wommen nothing konne,/Whan us is wo, but wepe and sitte and thinke;/Oure wrecche is this, oure owene wo to drynke." (II,782-84).[31] Criseyde's acute awareness is that by submitting to a role shaped by "tonges", she is required to abandon the role most congenial to fulfil her desires of independence for one which will put her in a fuller interaction with the extrinsic forces. She desperately wants to keep her present role, but as we already know with her she will have to "of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese;" (II,470). In making a choice, she becomes a woman textually and has to surrender her "free" state.

In Criseyde, Chaucer presents us with one of the most complex and ambiguous women of his response to literary tradition. Criseyde defies the particularised fragmented conception of women in her strivings for independence from a predefined role. However, she falls victim, like many of the textualised women, to the predefining authority of the tradition. Criseyde's limited power as a woman is allowed to take

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[31] See Dido above. Criseyde's definition of woman's place in fictional construction is that of an object.

effect in the act of choosing, after long deliberations, to accept the role of Troilus' love. This is not in effect a choice but a voluntary submission. The deliberations warn of generalisation and foresee a continued interpretation. Defiantly, Criseyde exercises her limited "right" to decide as a right to choose on the grounds of her individual existence. This is reminiscent of the Wife of Bath's defence of sex as legitimate on the basis of experience versus authority. Criseyde's resolution seems to follow from similar premises "He which that nothing undertaketh,/Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere." (II,807-808). The esteem of experience overrides the fears of generalised attitude. Criseyde persuades herself to take on the proposed role in defiance of an alternative role: "Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?/ What, pardieux! I am naught religious" (II, 758-759). She, then, is less a passive victim of her literary creation. Prompted for change, she can make a selection, though limited to the demands of her writers. Her subsequent course of action is conducted on the basis of this privilege which she allows herself to enjoy despite the adversities.

Criseyde shares the poetics of power and authority of the poem in her own way.[32] As a woman she accords herself the right to respond to her changing state of being. When she has to leave Troy to reunite with her father, she recognises her power lying not in defiance of the situation but in compliance to it. Her potential to change with the circumstances leads her to move from the position of Troilus' mistress to the position of Diomede's mistress. In that sense, she retains the role of courtly heroine, for her move from Troilus to Diomede is essentially a move from one narrative to

[32] Barbara Nolan interprets Criseyde's participation in the matter of Troy as the changeable, impressionable attitude of a reader. Criseyde responds fully to the texts presented to her and she has the opportunity to collude with or reject the compositional process. See Nolan's *Chaucer and the Tradition of Roman Antique*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1992), p. 234.

another. The thematics of betrayal which both Pandarus and Troilus have difficulties to come to terms with is in fact the thematics of change that in the first place provided the grounds for the temporary success of their enterprise. For Criseyde, however, the activated potential of change has continuity. It is an integral part of her existence. Like a text interpreted from different perspectives Criseyde retains her essential meaning.

The potential for change is finally muted as a paradigm of betrayal. It is replaced by the permanence of the authority of tradition. Criseyde's strivings for independent existence fail badly once she is driven into the realm of proof by experience. In this sense, her story is the story of women in books, in gardens and in the confining world of literature. It demonstrates the complexity of relations in the process of textual creation and the resistance of the text to be defined in simple categorical terms. The ending, then, once more in Chaucer, recognises the inevitability of such categorisation as long as thematics of power serves the formula which designates the woman's position as the object of the narrative.[33] Elizabeth Harvey contends

> it is in the narrator's refusal to condemn Criseyde, in depiction of her as a text that is hard to read, in the numerous and contradictory allusions and citations that cluster around her and that she herself speaks, and most of all, in his acute awareness of the authority a male poet possesses to shape the image of women in texts that separates him

[33] Literary continuation of Criseyde is as an emblem of disloyalty. Henryson's *Testament* reinforces the textual significance of Criseyde's betrayal, as I will argue below. Shakespeare's Pandarus reiterates the categorisation of roles: "Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers between Pandars!" (*Troilus and Cressida*, III, ii, 202-3). For a comparison of Criseydes in Shakespeare and Chaucer, see Talbot E. Donaldson, 'Cressid False, Criseyde Untrue: An Ambiguity Revisited', in *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance*, ed. by Maynard Mack and George deForest (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 67-84.

from Boccaccio.[34]

Criseyde's desertion of Troilus is an independent act of refusal to remain in the allocated role of faithful lover. Unlike the women of the *Legend of Good Women*, she deserts the lover "er she dyde". In declining to accommodate a prescribed role, Criseyde acts as a text. But her capacity as a text also provides space for her textual reconstruction according to what she has done in a love context. To Pandarus, she is a traitress. For Troilus she proves not to be the "certeyn thinge" he was seeking.[35] To the God of Love, creating a woman like Criseyde is undermining the tradition from within. Given her capacity as text, it seems, to Chaucer Criseyde is a reminder of the maxim "Who painted the lion?"

THE WIFE OF BATH

The idea of women as defined by authority and perpetuated by literary tradition forms a major concern of the *Canterbury Tales*. The multi-vocal text of the *Canterbury Tales* continues to deal with women in "books" and particularises the premises of their existence as the text itself. The female comes into focus as one of the points of common interest to the speakers which they try to solve or clarify. Securely located in the domain of written authority, the women portrayed in the tales implicitly challenge each other for the right to model the true image of women. Simultaneous with this tacit rivalry, we have, emphasised in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, the competing powers from which the model image emanates.

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[34] 'Speaking of Tongues', p.48.

[35] On the closure of the *Troilus*, see Murray Evans, '"Making Strange"'; Bernard H. Huppé, 'The Unlikely Narrator'.

The Wife of Bath may be guilty of digression and inconsistency as a story-teller, as Bolton would have it,[36] but her Prologue finds its focus in a carefully contrived and self-confidently revealed meditation on the poetics of power. Her Prologue demonstrates the contingency of the power invested in tradition, and sets about to undermine the unfair distribution of power in the act of textual representation. Her Prologue's contribution to the representations of women derives from its pronouncement of the representations as textual, written or told from a predetermined perspective on women. The attitude we observe in the Wife's Prologue is not a resiliently pronounced attitude, nor is it the unwarned reversal of roles that Lady Fame in the *House of Fame* has to resort to in order to effect a realisation of the distorted state of her representation. In the Wife of Bath, Chaucer foregrounds the perennial appearance of woman read and written as a text and reveals it through the voice of a female character who no longer laments a loss of reputation or worries about its continuation in texts, but instead confronts the authority that has monopolised the power to grant or withhold a good reputation, that , in fact, has monopolised the act of writing.

Chaucer's Wife of Bath is perhaps the only woman in Chaucer's poetry who achieved as diverse and contradictory a literary fame as her own portrayal of herself in her Prologue presents her. As Helen Cooper has shown, the Wife's reputation proved to be as swiftly "rolling on tongues" as Dido and Criseyde expressly foresee their reputation.[37] Quite an opposite in nature to Geffrey the pilgrim, Wife is quick to

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[36] 'The Wife of Bath: Narrator As Victim', p. 54.

[37] See Helen Cooper, 'The Shape-Shiftings of the Wife of Bath, 1395-1670', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 168-84.

build a reputation among the pilgrims as a controversial authority on marriage. The Merchant cites her as authority in his promotion of marriage,[38] and in *Lenvoy de Chaucer to Bukton* she is recommended as necessary reading on the subject of marriage.[39] The readers of the early manuscripts of the *Tales* reacted to her treatment of her husbands and saw in her woman's desire to lie, swear and deceive,[40] in short, the misogynistic view of woman personified.

Continuing the tradition of the Wife of Bath as authority, the friend who advises Hoccleve to write in praise of women mentions the Wife as an authority for the fact that "wommen han no ioie ne deyntee/ [th]at men sholde upon hem put any vice".[41] The friend's advice to Hoccleve is of course a slightly inaccurate reading of the Wife's opposition to the textual treatment of women in her Prologue. Yet, however inaccurate it is, it serves as one of the earliest acknowledgements of the Wife's role in the *Canterbury Tales* as an authority to question effectively the reliability of representations of women in texts. It furthermore underlines the gender polarisation of women as object and men as subject. The Wife, in the friend's warning, is in opposition to male dominance over female identity. The Wife does not insist, as Cupid does in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, that all women are good. She herself has no claim to goodness. She freely and proudly acts as a surrogate for a series of accusations against her own sex, and voices the very accusations as natural woman behaviour (227-28; 515-18). As Peggy Knapp rightly observes, she is engaged

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[38] IV,1685-87.

[39] 9, 29-30.

[40] 'The Shape-shiftings of the Wife of Bath', p. 171.

[41] Thomas Hoccleve, 'The Dialogue With a Friend', 694-6.

in a war against authority centralised on the "dominant discourse of her time."[42] The force behind this is the verbal, if not wholly and successfully established textual, counter-tradition of the Wife of Bath.[43]

To some extent, in the Wife, the carnalised image of women created by the misogynistic tradition stands up to confirm the accuracy of it. Garrulous, aggressive, and scandalously loud, the Wife seems to have internalised, to her own interest, the antifeminist indoctrination. She bullies her husbands (219-20), fabricates false accusations (235-307) and has the "maistrye" through use of violent and deceitful discourse (379-83). The book of "wikked wyves" that Jankin, her fifth husband, tormentingly reads to her becomes a mirror to which Alison is eventually forced to look and see her true image. Her violent reaction to the book ironically proves to be in accord with her internalised image.[44] What we see in her description of her life with Jankin does not appear to be a "distorted" image of herself in the books but an accurate and full account of what we have been given in the first two-thirds of her

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[42] 'Alisoun of Bathe and the Reappropriation of Tradition', *ChauR*, 24:1 (1989), 45-52 (p.45).

[43] See Robert S. Sturges, '*The Canterbury Tales*' Women Narrators: Three Traditions of Female Authority', *Modern Language Studies*, 13:2 (1983), 41-51. Sturges contends that the Wife of Bath invokes a tradition of other women to form an alliance to subvert masculine authority. "Demonstrating the benefits of women's power, herself becomes just such a female poet", p.46. Susan Hagen entertains a similar view without success on the part of the Wife of Bath. The Wife of Bath presents women's experience from a female perspective, however, her revolutionary hermeneutics are subjected to Chaucer's preference of the "androcentric" world view of his time. See 'The Wife of Bath: Chaucer's Inchoate Experiment in Feminist Hermeneutics', in *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive Spirit in the 'Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by Susanna Greer Fein, David Raybin and Peter C. Braeger (Kalamazoo: Medieval Ins. Pubs. Western Michigan University, 1991), pp. 105-24 (pp.110;118).

[44] On Jankin and the Wife's strategies of dealing with his authority, see D. J. Wurtele, 'Chaucer's Wife of Bath and the Problem of the Fifth Husband', *ChauR*, 23:2 (1988), 117-128.

prologue.[45] The "book" is her tormentor, it is the collective authoritative discourse which created her and on which she thrives.

The self-construction of the Wife seems to sabotage her attempt to diminish the power of authorities which designate her being as such as bad.[46] In this light, Alison's quarrel appears to be with the opposite sex for a merciless and relentless superiority, for a radical shift in the balance of powers without a cause to legitimise it. As female confronts the male, the emerging picture seems to put up a case for the relevance of male fear of female dominance in the gender relationships as well as for authoritative discourse. The Wife, then becomes a willing victim of men "who invented her and who made her most vital qualities the servants of a futile drive for power."[47] But does she ?

> He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
> For his desport he wolde rede alway;
> He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,
> At which book he lough alwey ful faste.
> And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,
> A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,
> That made a book agayn Jovinian;
> In which book eek ther was Tertulan,
> Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,

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[45] See Arlyn Diamond, *Chaucer's Women*, p.71. Diamond considers Alison's image in Jankin's book "distorted", yet finds it difficult to sympathise with Alison's "genuine" pain after she has proved "in her own person the 'correctness' of everything in Jankin's book."

[46] See Hope Phylliss Weismann, 'Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterization of Women', p. 110, for the view that although the Wife attempts to free herself from the antifeminist image in her tale, her achievement amounts to nothing but transfering it to another context.

[47] Daniel M. Murtaugh, 'Women and Geoffrey Chaucer', p.483. See also Lee R. Patterson, 'For the Wyves love of Bathe', p. 682; Arlyn Diamond, 'Chaucer's Women and Women's Chaucer', p. 68.

That was abesse nat fer fro Parys,
And eek the Parables of Salomon,
Ovides Art, and bookes many on,
And alle thise were bounden in o volume.
And every nyght and day was his custume,
....
To reden on this book of wikked wyves.
He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves
Than been of goode wyves in the Bible. (669-682; 685-687)

The Wife recalls that she reacted to the book violently. Her physical attack on the book is as much an attack on the image presented there as it is on Jankin's recitation of "my vices" (663). I would argue that Alison's seemingly personal desire for power has further implications for Chaucer. The power Alison desperately seeks is not necessarily confinable to her apparent understanding of "maistrye" in marriage.[48] The measures she takes to secure a limited independence as a woman are temporary measures. The Wife is recounting an "experience". The retrospective outlook she adopts allows her to interpret the experience. That is, the Wife in the Prologue provides two simultaneous narrative levels. Her past experience as a wife is brought

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[48] A useful study of the Wife's insistence on female "maistrye" in marriage is done by Mary Carruthers. Widening the context of the Wife's experience, Carruthers argues that as a tradeswoman Alison realises that sovereignty is the power of the purse, and without the sovereignty over herself which property and money brought to her, she loses her freedom to love. The purchase of this realisation on the Wife's portrayal and attitude to authority is that the Wife challenges the orthodox distribution of roles in marriage with a forceful counter plea based on the reality of experience. See 'The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions', *PMLA*, 94 (1979), 209-22; Carruthers reconsiders her evaluation of the Wife of Bath and the responses it stimulated in "Afterword" appended to the republication of her essay in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and Her Sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson, pp. 39-44. See also David Parker, 'Can We Trust the Wife of Bath?' in *Geoffrey Chaucer: Modern Critical Views*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), pp.49-56. Parker argues that the Wife's two accounts of her fifth marriage contrasts the contention that she has achieved "maistrye" in marriage.

under scrutiny by her present role as a teller and commentator of that experience. We need to remember that, although Alison is portrayed as the corporate representative of the "image" of women projected by the misogynistic texts which she simultaneously uses and denigrates, one primary objective she pursues is to negate the pertinence of the wholesale application of that image.

Of primary importance for a useful evaluation of her prologue is that the Wife of Bath's claim of experience as equally valid as authority operates against a background of mediated texts and feeds on the authority derived from the interpretation. "Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun" (26) but the Wife can well understand the Bible, that "gentil text". The Wife's partial use of authorities has usually been interpreted as her weak point against the authorities which she confronts.[49] But there is a point to her unlicensed use of authority. Her argument against polygamy decidedly ignores the authoritative interpretations and goes straight to the text. In this nonconformity, she also transforms the opening declaration of experience based on her marriage life to the act of reading and interpreting for herself. In her interpretation of the Scripture, she discovers a space for the accommodation of her own authority while displacing others. In her defiance of such stock generalisations, "After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,/I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat" (346-57), we are urged to see the potential for

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[49] As one such example see W.F. Bolton, 'The Wife of Bath: Narrator As Victim', p.61. For a defence of the Wife of Bath's "misuse" of learning as an asset for her inquisitive mind see Peggy A. Knapp, 'Alisoun Weaves a Text', *PQ*,, 65:3 (Summer 1986), 387-401, (p.392). See also James I. Wimsatt, 'The Wife of Bath, the Franklin, and the Rhetoric of St. Jerome', in *A Wyf Ther Was*, pp. 275-281, (pp. 278-80) for a comparison of the Wife's use of rhetorical strategies with that of Jerome; Stewart Justman, 'Literal and Symbolic in the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Geoffrey Chaucer: Modern Critical Views*, ed. by Harold Bloom, pp. 123-135, considers the Wife's literalism with the authorities as a means to parody the analogical thought, a means by which she "nullifies moral controls, or what Chaucer calls "auctoritee", pp. 124-125.

multiple texts. The Wife claims her own text to be authoritative on the same grounds by which "thy text" claims authority. Articulated in these lines, we see not only the Wife's resentful rejection of the established rhetoric of the authorities, but also witness the use of textual premises for the rejection of it. Essentially, the Wife's argued standpoint acknowledges the impossibility of winning what she presents as a battle of discourses informed by the priorities of the authors. Yet, the use of selected authorities for purposes of subverting the established discourse simultaneously relativises and diminishes the authority of the more widely acknowledged discourse.

The problem between the Wife and her most loved husband Jankin centralises the problem of authoritative discourse. The book of wicked wives symbolises Jankin's identification with the written authority as well as pointing to the common perception of women dictated by this authority.[50] The Wife identifies the suppression of pluralities in Jankin's book.The problem is presented as the problem of an unused female discourse, an entirely suppressed female voice. In retrospection, the Wife observes that Jankin's book is invasive of the space to speak. It disregards woman's experience and denies her an existence outside the definitive boundaries of books. The ostensibly private difficulties of the Jankin episode make it emphatically clear that women are perceived textually and predefined by the authority which creates the text. It is a complex formula in that Jankin's tormentingly continuous reading from the books of women's indiscretion to explain to the Wife what she is ultimately makes the Wife the incarnation of that text. The wife and, in her the women, are contained by an

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[50] See Leo Carruthers, '*No womman of no clerk is preysed*: Attitudes to Women in Medieval Religious Literature', in *A Wyf Ther Was*, pp. 48-60. Agreeing with the Wife's challenge to the authority of the clerks, Carruthers investigates the grounds for its "misuse".

authoritative book constructed under the supervision of the maxims of the tradition. However, the Wife is no more content with "thy text", not even with the possibility of subversive use of it for a counter attack on the sources from which it originates. She comes to the realisation that the independence she seeks can only be achieved by total elimination of authoritative discourse. She makes Jankin burn his book. Metaphorically, burning of the book is burning of the vexing authority.

Yet the problem is too complex to be solved by burning "thy text", albeit a text accommodating all the like-minded authors. Jankin is a mediator. Reassured of the authority of the book he reads to the Wife, he functions as a reader who identifies with the "sentence" of the book. Ironically, the Wife is the "book", the text. She can burn the book but she cannot burn the "Wife", the text that she is remains for all to read and write. Unlike Alceste and the God of Love, the "experienced" Wife knows it as a fact that obliterating a book does not discontinue its "sentence". Similarly, silencing others' authority in order to install one's own does not necessarily invalidate others' right to exercise authority nor the validity of their standpoint. Instead, she validates the interpretative authority with a pertinent and suggestive inquiry: "Who painted the lion?"

CHAUCER AND THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY POETS

As we have seen, Chaucer's concern with tradition is expressive of an interest which goes beyond the study of tradition so as to demonstrate its gaps and liabilities. From the beginning, Chaucer is inclined to include himself in that tradition, not as an inconspicuous part of it, but as someone whose work and contribution stands out as the "new corn". I tend to locate Chaucer's work in the productive context suggested

by the "old fields-new corn" paradigm. The representations of women simultaneously acknowledge the past, the tradition, the authoritative discourse and point to the imaginative spaces for the use of the individual poet. The problems of writing and interpretation examined in the Wife of Bath and Criseyde suggest the integration and continuation of tradition in this same context. The Wife of Bath's Prologue not only foregrounds a highly critical and perceptive view of authority derived from interpretation of the text, it also reinforces, in more explicit terms, Chaucer's examination of the authorial power and conferral of meaning through Alcione, Dido, Fame, Nature and Criseyde. The Wife of Bath's deferral of authority to the text and then back to its reader is such an example.

The recurrent emphasis on the priority of interpretive processes operational in the depictions of women serves as a mirror to Chaucer's idea of poetic tradition evolving through interpretation. Reinforced by his readiness to involve his own work in the same process of evaluation and interpretation, the tradition gains a new dimension, a more dynamic and interactive chemistry. Chaucer's contribution to the tradition as an individual poet is in terms of making the tradition more productive. Chaucer's poetry constantly anticipates and encourages a complex form of poetic continuity in its allowance for varied reading and writing positions. We have examined the purchase of this awareness in the presentations of women in the dream poems and traced its continuation in Chaucer's later work through representative cases like Criseyde and the Wife of Bath, through the resurgent motifs as well as through incorporation of individual works into the main corpus of poetry.

In the previous chapters, I have recognised Chaucer's position in the tradition as one of innovative poet. But the discussion of the tradition in the representations of

women indicates an insistent erasure of the poet Chaucer and conversely centres on the writing possibilities which recognise a poet as a represented (and representing) authority. A poet in this sense is an essential part of the fiction-making as the activator of the priorities in text either of tradition or of his own selection. As such he is subject to challenge as much as his fictional creations. In the dream poems the fictional I, the narrator/reader/poet, is continually criticised on account of his writings. The initiation of the poet Chaucer into his work as a poet/author is through the appropriation of this fictional context. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer admits the God of Love's reading of his *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Roman de la Rose* as one approach towards the essence of his art. The evaluation of his art in a fictional context continues in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the Introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale* (II, 45-89), Chaucer comes into the circuit of his poetry as one of those authors he himself has been dealing with. Fictionalising the actual author undoubtedly points to a necessity, expressed by Chaucer in the reading narrator of the dream poems, to incorporate the reading and evaluative processes within the structure of the text.The Man of Law's consideration of his writing skills is in line with the dreamer's incompetence as a writer (II, 90-96). The Man of Law firstly identifies Chaucer as the exhaustive author of love poetry: "For he hath toold of loveris up and doun/.../What sholde I tellen hem, syn they been tolde?" (II, 53; 56). Secondly, he seeks justification of his tale in the rejection of Chaucer's subject matter. Taken as an authority, Chaucer's selection of poetic subject accords with and determines that of the Man of Law: "But certeinly no word ne writeth he/ Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,/.../Nolde nevere write in none of his sermons/Of swiche unkynde abhomynacions,/Ne I wol noon reherce, if that I may." (II, 77-78; 87-89). The Man

of Law in the end excludes Chaucer from further participation in the following story. Without challenging the "sentence" of Chaucer's writing, consideration of Chaucer as the voice of authority is subjected to the conditions which Chaucer himself has been establishing for the authority of the past. The Man of Law's discussion of the "Chaucer tradition" is conclusive. Here, as in the Prologue to *the Legend of Good Women*, his poetry is treated as love poetry in which treatment of women plays a major part. When cited as an authority, Chaucer is often in dispute with the reader --Alceste and the God of Love wish to redirect and canalise his poetic activities, the Man of Law considers the issue well exploited. I think Chaucer's concern to cite not only his name as a literary authority but also as the author of particular dream poems, which in two readings mentioned above are explicitly associated with women, reveals a subtle interrelation between the dream poems and the image of the poet they reflect to the reader. In offering his art to diverse interpretations, Chaucer becomes an inextricable part of the tradition. Each of the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales* is given the potential capacity of a reader/writer to exercise creative interpretation. Placement of Chaucer along with Ovid as the authority on the subject of love and women, as in The Man of Law's reference to Chaucer, is thus important also because, in a Chaucerian manner, the speaker recognises the role of the past in so far as the past provides the space for the exercise of his creative skills.

As an authority deferred to and interpreted via his work, Chaucer eludes the possibility of constructing a solid image of himself as a poet. His authorial presence in his work is mediated by the text that he constantly refers to the reader for completion. A love poet, a misinterpreting reader/author, a censor of immoral tales are the images which his readers construct from his poetry. Contained in the interpretive

possibilities of the text, Chaucer's authority is a delegated authority which he in turn delegates to his readers.

I would suggest that Chaucer's express readiness for the delegation of his authority to the reader provides a context for the evaluation of the fifteenth century poetry which emulates, approximates and continues "Chaucer". Approaching the fifteenth-century poetry as a continuation of Chaucer's poetry does not credit the former with much achievement.[51] A persistent and perhaps unassailable contention is that Chaucer's immediate followers, the first to set out the canon of Chaucer's work, do not have the same creative powers as Chaucer, or that, as Denton Fox's defensive argument suggests, they deliberately fail to recognise Chaucer as an influential poet in the tradition.[52] As readers of Chaucer, the fifteenth-century poets are classified by a distinction between "those writers who understood what Chaucer was doing in his work and those who did not."[53] This distinction can be seen in terms of response: the poets who understood what Chaucer was doing responded to "creative principles of Chaucer's dream poems, imitated those, and sometimes took them further in directions

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[51] Evaluated usually in comparison to Chaucer's poetry, the fifteenth-century is seen as an age in which Chaucer's creative power and poetic enthusiasm are deadened through imitative attempts at Chaucer's poetic achievement. As a variation of this stand point, see Derek Pearsall, 'Chaucer and Lydgate', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, pp.39-53.

[52] 'Chaucer's Influence on Fifteenth-Century Poetry', in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. by Beryl Rowland, pp.385-92. Fox draws attention to the obvious dissimilarity of the fifteenth-century concept of poetry to Chaucer's and argues that the common themes, genres and characteristics come to the fifteenth century from the tradition which Chaucer used but did not mediate for the fifteenth-century. I find it difficult to agree with Fox's contention that fifteenth-century poets regarded Chaucer merely as a legendary, and symbolic figure, and that Chaucer had no substantial influence on their concept or practice of poetry. See especially pp. 387,394.

[53] A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 171.

implied but not completed by Chaucer's work" while the others "imitated only the external form of his poems, without responding to their inner spirit."[54] The comparison with Chaucer is initiated by the fifteenth century poets themselves and, as indicated above, studies of this relationship are continuing to increase.[55] I will make use of the useful discussions on this matter to suggest that Chaucer's sometimes overwhelming presence in this period is an indication that his endeavour to reshape the literary tradition is recognised in the fifteenth century and beyond, and hence provides the continuity of it in the new Chaucerian form.

But the term "Chaucerian" needs redefinition. Viewed in the context of the "imaginative space" provided by Chaucer for any of his readers, it seems that the fifteenth-century responds to tradition, which it envisages as the English poetry created by Chaucer, by considering and utilising what it considered the best creative and innovative way for a poet. In this section, I would like to examine some of the ways in which this response is manifest.

The continuation of Chaucer's poetry as a tradition is manifest in the use of dream form and its Chaucerian formal elements in the fifteenth century.[56] The

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[54] *Medieval Dream Poetry*, 171.

[55] See David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 761-99. Lawton explains the discrepancy between Chaucer's poetry and the fifteenth century in terms of social and political changes which encapsulate poetry and social structure: "There is little room in the fifteenth century for a distinction between literature, society and history. Fifteenth century writing is...a culture", p.771. Seth Lerer, in *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,1993), considers the influence of Chaucer on the fifteenth century "self-fashioning" in the context of a productive reconciliation between changing social demands and the demands of Chaucerian paternity. See pp. 3-8.

[56] Since the discussions of fifteenth-century poetry are governed by the influence of Chaucer as a determinant, the recurrent Chaucerian elements are regarded as

fifteenth-century poets, perhaps because they find Chaucer's art densely and persistently examined and re-formed in the dream poems, seem to respond more actively to his dream poems than to his other work.[57] The abundance of fifteenth-century experiments in dream poetry with Chaucerian resonances suggests a constructive and inclusive pertinence of literary tradition as Chaucer presented it to them. In Lydgate's dream poem, the *Temple of Glass*, for instance, Chaucer's unorthodox use of December night in the *House of Fame* finds an exact parallel. The temple, and the narrator's melancholy and insomnia are among the implicit references to Chaucer's dream poems. Clanvowe's dream poem the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale* incorporates a part of the *Knight's Tale*, and the birds' debate suggests a knowledge of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. *The King's Quair* makes exquisite use of Chaucer's insomniac reading narrator. Use of the book, the *Consolation*, and the dedication at the end of the poem to Chaucer and Gower seem to be an attempt at Chaucerian dialogue with the past through books and authors.

It is possible to enumerate several other occurrences of acknowledgement and

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"influence" rather than as conscious employment of a tradition. See Douglas Gray, 'Some Chaucerian Themes in Scottish Writers', in *Chaucer Traditions*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, pp. 81-90; see also Ruth Morse, 'Gavin Douglas: "Off Eloquence the flowand balmy strand"', in *Chaucer Traditions*, pp. 107-121, for a suggestive examination of these occurrences as partaking in the continuation of a tradition.

[57] However, there are textual references to Chaucer's other works, usually incorporated into the main body of the poem in a quotational manner. One obvious example for the continuity of Chaucer's use of frame tale is Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* which is framed as a Canterbury tale. Denton Fox associates the preference of dream form over the fictional method of *Troilus* and *Canterbury Tales* with the use of the dream form for allegorical purposes. Use of dream form for allegorical purposes further negates the dependence on Chaucer, 'Chaucer's Influence on Fifteenth-Century Poetry', pp.394-95.

use of Chaucerian innovations.[58] Yet, as argued recently,[59] these textual similarities remain superficial. The nature of poetry created via Chaucerian innovations bears witness not to a concurrence with Chaucer but rather to a deliberately formulated dissent. I would like to draw attention to a more productive and, as far as the creative response of the poets writing in Chaucerian tradition concerned, a more sophisticated dialogue with Chaucer's poetry as tradition. This dialogue redefines the fifteenth century poets as readers/authors. It legitimises their transformation of Chaucerian precepts. For instance, the Chaucerian concerns about the nature of poetry and the position and role of the poet have a largely transformed significance in the later treatments. In form and content, the poems involved draw largely upon Chaucerian motifs and concerns, but the poetic resolution differs from that of Chaucer's. Mediated mainly by Lydgate, appreciation of Chaucer in the fifteenth century derives from the position that he has improved and elevated English language to the status of poetic language.[60] *Troy Book*, Lydgate envisages Chaucer as the poet in English comparable to Petrarch. Moreover, "Noble Galfride, poete of Breteyne,/Amonge oure englisch þat

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[58] One particular instance of continuity of tradition as Chaucer conceived it can be found in the use of dream prologues similar to Chaucer's Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. For example, Henryson's Prologue to his *Tale of the Lion and the Mouse*. Another exemplary use of it can be found in Gavin Douglas' prologue to book XIII of his translation of the *Aeneid*. The scene of clashing claims over the laurel tree, the theme of poetic injury through misuse of failure to use the correct authoritative text, the forced compliance of the poet to write according to the demands of the authority figure in the dream are all transfigurations of Chaucer's innovations. For a comprehensive analysis of these Chaucerian echoes, see A.C. Spearing's The *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 171-218.

[59] See A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, for the view of Chaucer as the first poet of English Renaissance whose innovations are thwarted by the deliberate re-medievalisation of poetry by the fifteenth century poets.

[60] See Barry Windeatt, 'Chaucer Traditions', in *Chaucer Traditions*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, pp. 1-20 (pp. 3-5).

made first to reyne/ Þe gold dewe-dropis of rethorik so fyne,/ Our rude langage only tenlwmyne" (*Troy Book*, II, 4697-4700) is shared by Hoccleve when he views Chaucer as the" firste fyndere of oure faire langage". Interpretation of Chaucer's achievement in the sphere of language provides a poetic confidence derived from it, but the confidence generated is utilised in the service of promotion of poetry as the vehicle of truth and perpetuator of virtue.[61] Gavin Douglas in the *Palice of Honour* and Skelton in the *Garlande of Laurel* works on the Chaucerian line of question with regard to poetic tradition and the poet's role in it. Skelton's *The Garlande of Laurel* is a poem concerned with the nature of poetic tradition. As John Scatterwood argues, Skelton here is indebted to Chaucer's *House of Fame* in his subject.[62] Like Chaucer, Skelton identifies himself with a poetic tradition which he conceives as consisting in several languages and interrelated periods. This concern with the relation to literary tradition is finally narrowed down to his relation to English tradition. The gate to the palace of Fame is called "Anglea" and Skelton is escorted to the Queen of Fame by Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, "Theis Englysshe poetis thre" (391). Skelton sees himself in a position not only to make claims about his importance as a poet, but also claims about the status of English poetry. Strengthened by his belief in the role of poetry in perpetuating the "truth", Skelton at once recognises Chaucer as the source of his thematic concern; he nevertheless attempts to restore the status and power of poetry validated in its permanence and stability, characteristically questioned and

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[61] See Lois Ebin, 'Poetics and Style in Late Medieval Literature', in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lois Ebin, pp.263-93 (pp.267,269). Ebin's argument indicates that, introduced by Lydgate, the new concept of poetry confers on writing an inherent truthfulness and considers it as the source of wisdom and virtue.

[62] 'Skelton's *Garlande of Laurel* and the Chaucerian Tradition', in *The Chaucer Traditions*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, pp. 122-138 (p. 123).

undermined in Chaucer. The identification with the English tradition as borne out of a complex interaction with the past and present calls for, in Skelton's view, a more substantial recognition, and he confers it.

The fifteenth-century response to Chaucer is often one of admiration and adulation. But the writings that follow the explicit acknowledgements also show that these poets read and interpreted Chaucer. Their use of Chaucer's poetry is more significant in this sense. The different directions they can take the borrowed themes and ideas indicate that they are followers of Chaucer in their unlikeness to him, in their albeit self-conscious use of poetic freedom. The common appreciation of Chaucer formulated in Hoccleve's acclaim: "O Maister deere, and fadir reuerent!/Mi maister Chaucer, flour of eloquence,/Mirour of fructuous entendement,/O vniuersal fadir in science!"[63] in fact places Chaucer. Chaucer in this formulation is not only the mediator of tradition but also the founder of a tradition. This tradition is frequently particularised to English tradition so much so that even though they recognise, as Skelton and Gavin Douglas do,[64] the intertextuality of Chaucer's poetry, they nevertheless value it more as the new confident English tradition. It is their tradition as they construct and reformulate it from Chaucer. This is to suggest that the fifteenth century poets consider also the formational process of tradition rather than concentrating on and trying to pay homage to English poetry incorporated in Chaucer. Then, we will need to reconsider the insistence on Chaucer's status as the "father"

[63] *The Regement of Princes*, 1961-4.

[64] See Ruth Morse, 'Gavin Douglas...', p.113.

poet.[65] As Barry Windeatt contends, the reverent attitude to Chaucer could be a claim for poetic identity which Chaucer has created for English poetry and which enables English poetry to compete and interact with the classical past as well as with the continental vernaculars.[66] But it is also possible that, as I will try to demonstrate below, the same security of identity is the source of poetic re-direction characteristic of the fifteenth century poetry.

It is in the acknowledgement of Chaucer's poetry as tradition that we find the most Chaucerian responses to it. A particularly instructive example is Henryson's use of Chaucer. Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* is a poem that demonstrates Chaucerian inheritance extensively. It operates on the premises of "Chaucer tradition" to bring that tradition under constructive scrutiny. The poem opens with a Chaucerian "reading narrator" who admits to ineptitude in love. The inefficiency in love is balanced by a poetic activity that foregrounds reading and relating love stories. The context provided for the exercise of poetic activity establishes a standpoint similar to Chaucer's narrator's in the dream poems. The naming of the author and the narrative frame are themselves very Chaucerian. The narrator of the *Testament* states that to spend the winter night, he reaches for a book "writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious/Of fair Creisseid and worthie Troylus" (41-42.)[67] The notable significance of this highly

[65] See A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, pp. 88-110 for a discussion of the "father figure" and the implications of the father figure for Chaucer's relation to the authority of the past and the interpretive responsibilities of the future. Spearing contrasts Chaucerian evasion of the position of fatherhood with the fifteenth-century insistence on assigning Chaucer to one. See p.106.

[66] 'Chaucer Traditions', p.7.

[67] References to Henryson are from *Poems and Fables by Robert Henryson*, ed. by H. Harvey Wood (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1978), pp. 103-126.

Chaucerian context, strengthened by textual citation of Chaucer, lies in its use for an overtly confrontational attitude to its precursor. The narrator of the *Testament* takes the story into entirely different directions, changes the ending and makes Criseyde suffer for her infidelity to Troilus. The story by "fenyeit of the new/Be sum Poeit, throw his Invention," (66-67) triumphs in eliminating Criseyde out of an undeserved existence. Henryson's treatment of Criseyde incorporates Chaucer's version and presents a potential Chaucerian subversion of the "sentence" of tradition by accommodating two authoritative voices in his narrative. Interestingly, Henryson does not allow a Chaucerian co-existence of opposite views. Instead he subscribes to a Bloomian suppression of the precursor in a challenging question: "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?" (64) "Worthie Chaucer glorious" is one of the authorities that populate Henryson's preface to the story he finds written. But it is at the expense of dispensing the dissenting authority for an individual choice that makes his poem possible.[68] His creative interaction with tradition takes place through transformation of a woman's textual presentation. As we have seen, approximating the regenerative fields and women, Chaucer displaces the authority through text, through woman. Authority of a poet is relativised and marginalised. The male authority, the father that "forms" the "matter", loses its power compared to the inexhaustible generative capacity of the text. Fifteenth-century poets acknowledge Chaucer, a poet,

[68] For an examination of Henryson's engagement with authorial position and the function of poetry, see Denton Fox, 'The Coherence of Henryson's Work', in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1984), pp. 275-81 (pp.276-77). Fox maintains that in the *Testament*, the figure of the poet is shown ironically, that we have almost a picture of the poet as a liar. See p. 278. See also Tim William Machan, 'Robert Henryson and Father Aesop: Authority in the *Moral Fables*', *SAC*, 12 (1990), 193-214, for an examination of Henryson's strategies to transfer the authority from his "auctour" to himself in the *Fables*.

as the father of tradition. Chaucer's localisation of creative activity in women resists that status. Authors are subject to suggestiveness of the text for the exercise of their authorial power. Chaucer's examination of women as creations of authoritative discourse, predefined contexts and priorities of authors shows that tradition is a vast text, continually subject to change. The fifteenth century's failure seems to consist in insisting on a father figure. Henryson, otherwise very Chaucerian, fails to consider Criseyde as the potential text that provides him with the Bloomian imaginative space. Chaucer's authority is not allowed to stand on equal questionable grounds as the "new" authority. Rather, it is acknowledged to be silenced.[69] Like Lydgate and Douglas, Henryson prefers a closed representation, and attempts to correct or rather conclude the issue, reading and interpreting on behalf of the reader. Concluding the story of Criseyde, Henryson uses the potential in Chaucer's text for continuation, but makes this potential serve, unlike Chaucer, the "truth" of poetry. The punishment that follows from Criseyde's blasphemy erases Criseyde's attractiveness both as a text and as a woman. The textual erasure of Criseyde is substantiated through repeated confirmation of the focus of the narrative that "Criseyde was false" and Troilus "the true Knight". A similar attitude can be observed in Lydgate's treatment of Criseyde in the *Troy Book*. The tradition is incorporated into the present work through Lydgate' use of Guido's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* as the authoritative text which he is retelling. Lydgate not only reaffirms Criseyde's role as an unfaithful woman but also extends,

[69] See Henrietta Martin-Twycross, 'Moral Pattern in the *Testament of Cresseid*', in *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen, pp. 30-50. (p.31) for the argument that Henryson's reworking of only the fifth book of Chaucer's *Troilus* indicates that he has accepted Chaucer's version upto this point. This further indicates that Henryson's version can be read as a parallel text to Chaucer's.

along the lines of Guido's treatment, Criseyde's example to all women (IV,2148-59). While his responsiveness to the issue of the representation of Criseyde, which he conveys in the narrative frame of Trojan history, and his deliberate choice of a moral and antifeminist "authority" suggest that he carefully examined the poetic possibilities and made an individual conscious choice, it also suggest that, as the maker of the text, he is more willing to exercise authorial power than to provide space for its exercise.

Henryson's attempt at recontextualisation in the *Testament* is suggestive of the fact that Chaucer's poetry has become a precedent for the writers of this period. To place themselves in tradition and to contribute to that tradition they rely on and make use of Chaucer's attitude to tradition. In that, they not only acknowledge and continue Chaucer's poetry as tradition but adopt also the position of the individual poet. The fifteenth-century "Chaucerian" poetry calls for the epithet "Chaucerian" not because it has characteristically Chaucerian themes, genres and recurrent poetic strategies but because it exploits the Chaucerian awareness of writing in a tradition for purposes that Chaucer's poetry tries to invalidate.

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