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TRADITION AND CHAUCER'S UNFAITHFUL WOMAN

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degree of

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BY

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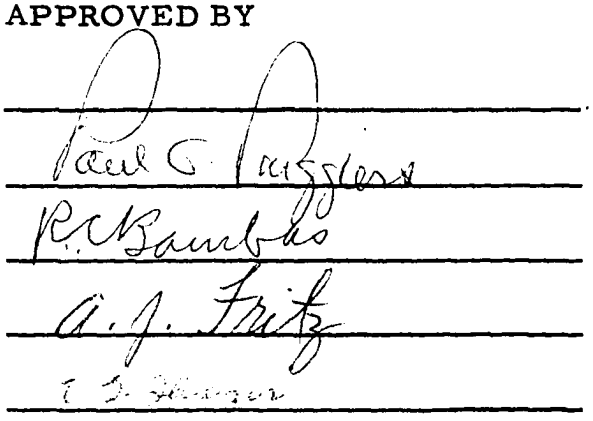
TRADITION AND CHAUCER'S UNFAITHFUL WOMAN

APPROVED BY



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PREFACE

That the medieval period was a time of violent contrasts is now accepted as a truism. Everyone knows in general about the simultaneous flourishing of pulpit antifeminism and of the worship of the Virgin Mary; everyone is likewise familiar with the growth in the twelfth century of a literary antifeminist tradition alongside the emerging tradition of courtly love with its extreme adoration of the lady. That these religious and literary traditions had an effect on each other is also known in general terms. But what specifically was that effect? Did the increasing veneration of the Virgin modify this pulpit antifeminism? Did it have any effect on literary antifeminism? That literary forms and images were exchanged by courtly literature and the clerical writings addressed to the Virgin has been noted before, if inadequately studied. But whether or not there was a reciprocal influence in the substance of these writings has not been clear. To answer these questions is beyond the power of any single study and surely beyond the scope of this one. This study will attempt to present enough of the relevant evidence at least to suggest the answers as a preliminary to the discussion of Chaucer's relation

to these traditions simply because so little of the ground has been cleared. So much of this material has in the past been taken for granted that surprisingly little has been done to collect the materials in some kind of coherent manner so as to facilitate evaluation.

A notable exception is F. L. Utley's excellent book The Crooked Rib. Although one might have wished that study to have been more extensive, the value of the book both intrinsically and as a pioneering study would be difficult to exaggerate. That book and books like T. A. Kirby's Chaucer's Troilus and Courtly Love provide backgrounds respectively for the medieval literary tradition of antifeminist satires and replies, and for the tradition of courtly love. While this study may at time seem to be going over ground which those and other studies have covered, it is to be hoped that there will be some value in placing these traditions beside each other as they existed side by side in the medieval period. In any case they are in this study for a second and more important reason, for the light which they may shed on the mind and art of Geoffrey Chaucer.

Although Utley has quite rightly warned against the artificial limits placed on the time and location of antifeminist utterances, he has also pointed out that these satires had a fixed form in the Middle Ages which they lacked before and after. Furthermore, although the fact can be oversimplified and overemphasized, one of the characteristics of late medieval man was his ability to hold extreme and apparently

opposing points of view. This is strikingly indicated in his two attitudes toward women, however theoretical and divorced from the actual conditions of life these attitudes may have been. Mary and Eve furnished convenient points of reference for the two stances of extreme idolatry of women (if in the abstract) and extreme antifeminism (if again divorced from ordinary relations with the opposite sex).

Of the first attitude, a modern writer has asserted,

> This elevation of woman centres in Mary the Mother of Jesus, the purest virginity and motherhood, both tender and strong, united in wonderful sublimity . . . . The respect for woman rises and falls with the veneration of the Virgin Mother of God. Consequently for art also the Virgin has become the highest representation of the most noble womanhood. [1]

Although there is something in this, it too easily passes over the fact that at the height of the veneration of the Virgin in the Middle Ages, when sublime poetry was being written in her praise, some of the most virulent satire was being written (or quoted with illustrations, as in the Jerome epistle 'Against Jovinian') against the rest of her sex, often by the very same men who wrote in praise of Mary. Mary was even used against other women in this vilification as the ideal which they failed so miserably to attain.

No matter how much care is taken, there is a real danger of oversimplification, both of the various traditions and of their effects on later treatment of and theories about women. As Utley has warned,

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[1] Francis L. Utley, The Crooked Rib, (Ohio State University Contributions in Languages and Literature, 1944), p. 3.

"The forces which combined to produce satire and defence of women are part of a complex process."[1] It might be added that the effects of these satires and defenses are also complex and perhaps even more difficult to assess.

In his book Utley has asserted the need for a reassessment of the background of medieval satires of women, and has revealed the direction which he believes such a study should take:

> Excessive emphasis has been placed on five of the sources of medieval antifeminist writings : an arbitrary division in time, the Middle Ages; a place and culture, the Orient; an ideal, asceticism (and its visible expression, the medieval Church); a class, the bourgeoisie; and an individual experience, that of the poet. Each of these is significant, but none should be treated as though it existed in a vacuum. Moreover, we should not ignore four others too seldom considered: another culture, that of Greece and Rome; a psychological factor, sex antagonism; a common human characteristic, the desire for entertainment; and another ideal, courtly love, which is the product of another class, the aristocracy.[2]

This seems a remarkably fair evaluation of the situation. In the first three parts of the present study, seven of the nine factors which Professor Utley lists are studied -- the first five plus two of the last four, Hellenic and Hellenistic culture and courtly love. Of the other two, sex antagonism, while impossible to measure, is implicit in the discussion of tales from the debate in the Marriage Group, the Wife of Bath's Tale, the Merchant's Tale and the Clerk's Tale. The treatment

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[1] Francis L. Utley, The Crooked Rib, (Ohio State University Contributions in Languages and Literature, 1944), p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

of Chaucer's habitual ironic stance attempts to deal with the other factor at least implicitly in his use of the antifeminist tradition, the desire for entertainment.

Although Professor Utley's evaluation of what is needed to delve into this tradition is an accurate one, his book is not an attempt to reconstruct the background in detail. He prefaces his book by saying,

> This book is no short history of women. Its primary task is to record the crucial documents and to contribute toward their understanding by some attention to their genesis, their kinds, and the details of their literary history. [1]

More particularly, The Crooked Rib is primarily an annotated listing and analysis of satires and defenses of women as they are found in the literature of England and Scotland from the thirteenth century until 1568. Within the limits he has set for himself, Professor Utley has provided a valuable study. Even within this limited period and area, however, is to be found the striking omission of pulpit satires on women. The Crooked Rib, then, is a specialized study of a particular type of literature in a particular period of time. A detailed study of the traditions which Professor Utley has touched upon is still to be published.

This study will of necessity suffer from the non-existence of such a basic text. Because a survey of these religious and literary traditions has been deemed necessary as an introduction to the study of Chaucer's use of them, and because this survey is of necessity limited

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[1] Utley, p. vii.

in scope by being an introduction, a compromise has been reached. Whenever the field has been thoroughly covered by specifically literary studies, as in the case of courtly love, the material will be of a more summary nature. Because the first part is concerned with the part which has received least attention in literary studies, the philosophical background, that part will be given extended treatment. In the interest of readability and because the materials are readily available, I have made use of translations wherever these were available; otherwise, the study could at times have given the appearance of macaronic verse. I have not, however, ventured to provide a translation of my own when a good one was not available.

The danger of a general approach to such a complex problem is evident, but, in the present case, unavoidable. Philippe Delhaye's statement of the case presents a bitter truth:

> L'expression de cet anti-feminisme constitue evidemment toute une province du royaume des lettres et je serais bien presompteux de m'en proposer une exploration complete.[1]

In a field which is so complex and in which so much needs to be done, the presumption of the present study is even more evident. If there were many more studies like those of Utley and Delhaye, the present study could be presented with more confidence. As it is, however, the dangers of misinterpretation of the material at hand seem to be outweighed

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[1] Philippe Delhaye, "Le Dossier Anti-Matrimonial de l'Adversus Jovinianum et Son Influence sur Quelques Écrits Latins du XIIe Siècle," Med. Stud., vol. 13 (1951), p. 65.

by the opportunity to present side by side the factors involved in the 'woman question' and in turn to study Chaucer in his connection with them.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the following members of my doctoral committee for giving their time and effort to the task of reading and criticizing this study: Dr. Rudolph Bambas, Dr. Alphonse J. Fritz, and Dr. Calvin G. Thayer of the English Department; and Dr. Donnell Owings of the History Department. Above all, I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Paul G. Ruggiers, who gave me the benefit of his learning and perceptive criticism from the inception of this study. Although to none of the above goes any share of the blame for the work's inadequacies, it must inevitably have been worse without their advice.

TRADITION AND CHAUCER'S UNFAITHFUL WOMAN

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> . . . the ascetic principle early made way for itself in the development of the Christian Church. Nay, in the course of this development, asceticism soared to heights and produced phenomena in the life of the Church which for greatness and far-reaching influence on the whole cultured life of humanity falls in no way behind what the history of non-Christian religions has to show of an analogous kind. . . . The beginnings of asceticism in the Christian Church constitute another chapter in the history of that process which is usually spoken of as the 'Hellenizing of Christianity.'[1]

In The Great Chain of Being, Arthur O. Lovejoy distinguishes two strains of Platonism -- 'otherworldliness' and 'this-worldliness' -- and says he means by the former

> the belief that both the genuinely 'real' and the truly good are radically antithetic in their essential characteristics to anything to be found in man's natural life, in the ordinary course of human experience, however normal, however intelligent, and however fortunate.[2]

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[1] O. Zöckler, "Asceticism (Christian)," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, Vol. I (1910), p. 74.

[2] Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1936), p. 25.

Sense, he says, to the otherworldly mind is delusory.

> And -- the theme is of the tritest -- the joys of the natural life are evanescent and delusive, as age if not youth discovers. But the human will, as conceived by the otherworldly philosophers, not only seeks but is capable of finding some final, fixed, immutable, intrinsic, perfectly satisfying good, as the human reason seeks, and can find, some stable, definitive, coherent, self-contained, and self-explanatory object or objects of contemplation. Not, however, in this world is either to be found, but only in a 'higher' realm of being differing in its essential nature, and not merely in degree and detail from the lower. [1]

Partly as a result of its contact with Hellenism and partly as a result of its own nature, Christianity has also had these two strains from the earliest times. In keeping with its attention to this world, Christianity has of necessity been a body of ethical doctrine. In keeping with its attention to the imperfection of this world and its longing for a better one, however, it has also had the opposing tendency to renounce this world and its concerns as hopelessly corrupt and to turn its thoughts to the future one.

As Lovejoy has pointed out, the principle of gradation has also been a force in Platonic and Christian thought from the earliest times, and it too has played its part in the history of asceticism. Plato's distinguishing of various connected levels of love and their consequent varying values bears an affinity, for example, to the Pauline doctrine, much elaborated in later times, that marriage is good, but virginity is better -- that love of the human (if chaste) is good, but love of the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

divine is on a higher plane and therefore better. Asceticism was the higher life chosen so as to follow this higher love.

This principle of gradation as enunciated in various of Plato's works was a great force in the thought of early Christianity and the Middle Ages. So were the strains of this-worldliness and otherworldliness. The first set up goals for constant striving 'upward,' and the second is embodied in Plato's analogy of the chariot, with its conflict between the 'higher' and 'lower' emotions. The consequent dilemma for all but the monastic orders of being caught between the need to live in this world and the duty to renounce it in favor of the next manifested itself in various ways -- in none more strongly than the question of love and the relation of the sexes.

In this specific connection also, Platonism and Neoplatonism had definite effect. The ladder of love which Plato posits in the Symposium with its scale of value from the lowest animal love to the highest spiritual kind had its effect, if indirectly, from Origen and Augustine right up to the present. The total renunciation of the physical for the spiritual which is so much a part of Neoplatonism and various Eastern mystery cults of the time also had its influence, however much the Church tried to resist it.

The history of Christianity right up until the Reformation is in part a history of conflicts about the ascetic ideal and, as Lovejoy has shown, of elaborations of the concept of the cosmos as a great ladder

or chain. Chaucer was the inheritor of both the worldly-otherworldly conflict and of the concept of the levels of love. That he was affected by the first we know poignantly from his Retraction. That he was conscious of and affected by the theory of the gradations of love we know, for example, from the Troilus epilogue and the Wife of Bath's prologue.

A complete history of Western theories concerning love and women is yet to be written, and perhaps is impossible to write. Certainly it is beyond the scope of the present study to go farther than to suggest the more direct influences on the debate up to Chaucer's day. Because the philosophic background is the least understood part of the story, it will be given extended treatment. In the second part of the story -- the clerical tradition based on the earlier philosophic justifications of asceticism -- enough of the relevant documents will be reproduced to indicate the themes of the great mass of materials which they represent. This section will be much smaller because the sameness of the authorities on which they are based, and essential agreement of writers on the subject, would make any extended discussion necessarily repetitious. The third part, also, will be shorter because much of it has been covered in various places before. For a summation of the religious and literary mergence which took place in the high Middle Ages, the Roman de la Rose will serve quite well. As this work exerted a direct and demonstrable influence on Chaucer, it will also serve conveniently to lead into a consideration of Chaucer's use and modification of the tradition.

"Christian asceticism is one of the phenomena produced by the union of pre-Christian factors of civilization with the spirit of Christianity . . . ," says Zockler.

> . . . the stage upon which the phenomena of a fully developed and socially organized Christian asceticism first make their appearance is found in those lands which constituted the world of Graeco-Roman civilization; and the religious and philosophical traditions of this same cultured world form the point to which the asceticism of the Church, with its ideals and efforts, primarily and mainly attaches itself. [1]

Asceticism, then, is part of the heritage of Christianity from Graeco-Roman civilization, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the philosophical justification of asceticism was taken from Hellenistic thought to support a tendency which was already present in Christianity.

At the beginning of the Christian era, the Hellenistic world had four dominant philosophies -- Stoicism, Cynicism, Neopythagoreanism, and Neoplatonism. All four were unanimous in at least one respect, the high value which they placed on asceticism. In fact the image of the ideal philosopher for these philosophies was of an ascetic.

> Abundant evidence of the essential identity of the connotation of the terms 'ascetic' and 'philosopher' is furnished especially by the writings of Philo Judaeus, as well as by those of numerous Christian Fathers from the time of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria onwards. When Philo hails the Jewish religion, and the Fathers hail Christianity, as the true philosophy, both have in view a certain ascetic element in their respective religions. The moral strictness and earnest demand for virtue found in both, when looked at from the view-point of asceticism, formed the connecting link which rendered possible such a combination of the Jewish or Christian ideal of life with the 'wisdom' of the Graeco-Roman philosophers. [2]

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[1] Zockler, pp. 74-75.

[2] Ibid., p. 73.

As a syncretic philosophy, Neoplatonism adopted elements from Plato, Aristotle, the Stoa, and the Neopythagoreans. It was, then, the most convenient medium of transmission of the ascetic tendencies in the other philosophies, and as such had the most direct effect.

Whenever a philosophical justification for asceticism is given in early Christianity, that justification is closely associated with Neoplatonism. Although Porphyry might have been included in this study as a third, the two great names in the merging of Christian and Neoplatonic thought are Origen and Plotinus. Their emotional commitments and powers of mind made them ideal for this task. Prior to these two men, however, another great synthesizer had brought together in one body of thought the elements of 'this-worldliness' and 'otherworldliness' which were to war in the thought and inclination of later times. Although the lengths to which some of his doctrines were taken would have astonished him, as with so much else in Western tradition, the philosophical background of the story begins with Plato.

SECTION I

OTHERWORLDLINESS: THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER II

PLATO

> The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists in a series of footnotes to Plato.[1]

Although there might seem to be a wide gap between the antifeminist literature at the basis of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Plato, there is a demonstrable, if indirect, connection between them, both through the general ascetic tradition of Christian thought and more specifically through the traditional antifeminist writings of early Christian writers, and the later writers and clerics who used their writings as authority. The influence of Platonism on the earliest Christians, continuing to the time of Thomas Aquinas, is well established and needs only a little sketching. Its influence on the debate about women has not been so well covered and will require more discussion.

Through asceticism, Platonism, by means of its strange step-child Neoplatonism, has had a great effect on the theories about the status of women. We may define asceticism as that way of life which strives to

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[1] Alfred N. Whitehead, quoted in Lovejoy, p. 24.

suppress the senses, to turn the soul from all sensuous desires, and to develop its virtue by as total as possible an attention to the divine. One element which is almost universally present in asceticism is the notion that matter, or at least the material side of human nature, is evil. Rejection of the material and sensual portion of existence is the best path to virtue. The import of this for theories concerning woman is plain: woman as the child-bearer represents the sensual and animal side of human nature; if concupiscence is a hindrance to virtue, woman as the symbol and object of it is a temptress, a lure away from the spiritual life. As will be seen later, Biblical examples -- especially Eve in her role in the Fall -- helped to support this ascetic condemnation.

As more than one historian has pointed out, Platonism and Christianity were well-suited to each other. Platonism supplied Christianity with a philosophical system in no essential way at odds with it, and supplied also a set of terms which were both flexible and familiar. Various church historians have remarked on the relative ease with which the Greeks were converted to Christianity as compared with some of the other peoples. Clement of Alexandria and Paul are striking examples of the basis of truth in Clement's statement that "Philosophy led the Greeks to Christ, as the law did the Jews."[1]

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[1] Quoted in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff (1st. series, New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1917), I, p. 107n. Cited hereafter as Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

St. Paul, the great systematizer of Christianity, found the basis of his theorizing in Platonism. On this point Dean Inge has asserted,

> We are on surer ground when we look for a Platonic element in St. Paul's theology than when we discuss possible borrowings from the mystery-cults. The whole doctrine of the Spirit in his epistles corresponds closely to the Platonic Nous.[1]

Inge goes on to point out some of the instances of the influence of Platonism on Paul's writings, among them that

> The words, 'The things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal,' are Platonism. . . . In Rom. i. 20 'the invisible things are understood through the things that are made,' and I Cor. xxii. 12 reminds us of Plato's parable of the cave. The immateriality of Spirit was perhaps not quite clearly asserted by any writer before Plotinus; but St. Paul's 'spiritual body' does not involve him in such materialism as that of Tertullian.[2]

As H. O. Taylor has pointed out, many of the Fathers acknowledge their debt to Platonism, among them Justin,

> . . . who often speaks of Christianity as a philosophy and realises that through Platonism he reached Christian truth. But more explicitly the Alexandrians, Clement and Origen, intrenched their Christianity in philosophy, and apprehended it in modes of Platonic thought. With them Christianity is the culmination of philosophy and includes all truth; philosophy is the preparatory study.[3]

On the whole, it was not Platonism as a body of ethics, but as a metaphysical system, which had the greatest impact on the early Christian

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[1] W. R. Inge, The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926), p. 12.

[2] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[3] Henry Osborn Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University, 1903), p. 125.

writers. Judaic law, modified by certain doctrines of Stoicism and added to by some new doctrines from the Gospels, served as the basis of the ethical system. But for a description of the cosmic plan, and of the Creator and His relation to man and to the rest of creation, Platonism (if with it we may include its strange offspring, Neoplatonism) in its 'otherworldly' strain was available and used extensively. Of necessity this metaphysic influenced the ethical system as derived, for example, by St. Paul -- and this influence has a bearing on feminist tradition -- but the connection between Christian and Platonic ethics is not nearly so close. It is in the support of asceticism by a metaphysical system that Platonism had its greatest influence.

It will be well to keep in mind that the discussion of Plato's thought is only preliminary to the discussion of Neoplatonism, the vehicle by which those of Plato's ideas which survived the interpreting, systematizing and dogmatizing of Philo, Plotinus, and later Neoplatonists were known and had their influence. The seeds of Neoplatonism might be there in the Dialogues, but Plato would have been amazed at the lengths to which some of his apparent followers took what were for him only tentative hypotheses. Whatever Platonism may mean, it must mean something different, for example, from Plotinus' total rejection of the physical. The lower kind of love for Plato is not simply a rung of the ladder to be avoided; rather it is a means to the higher rungs. For good or ill, however, Platonism for the men of the early Church

and for the Middle Ages meant, in the main, Neoplatonism. The discussion of Plato, then, will only touch on the above-mentioned seeds of Neoplatonism as a preliminary to the discussion of that elusive and difficult philosophy.

Plato's references to women are few and short. In the Republic, it is true, he gives some attention to their role in his projected society and gives them more credit than many a fellow Athenian would have; but even there the discussion consumes little time other than to defend his rather liberal (for his time) conception of their role. On a few occasions he lapses into a few antifeminist utterances, and these, as Paul Shorey says, "represent a slight 'disharmony' between Plato's philosophic opinions [that women have all the virtues of men, but in lesser degree] and his instincts of an Athenian old bachelor."[1]

In the Laws he speaks of the "feminine habit of casting aspersions on one another."[2] Again he speaks of keeping one's temper, "not getting into a passion, like a woman, and nursing ill-feeling."[3] In the same work he also discusses "that part of the human race which is by nature prone to secrecy and stealth on account of their weakness -- I mean the female sex. . . ."[4] In the Republic Socrates has an imaginary picture

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[1] Paul Shorey, What Plato Said (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1933), p. 632n.

[2] The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (3rd. ed. rev.; London: Oxford University, 1892), Vol. V, p. 324. Cited hereafter as Dialogues.

[3] Ibid., p. 113.

[4] Ibid., pp. 162-63.

of a mother complaining of his father to her son and rehearsing "all the . . . complaints about her own ill-treatment which women are so fond of rehearsing."[1]

As already noted, in common with most men of his day, Plato takes it as evident that women are inferior to men. In the Laws the Athenian Stranger, a spokesman for Plato, says that

> . . . the neglect of regulations about women may not only be regarded as a neglect of half of the entire matter, but in proportion as woman's nature is inferior to that of men in capacity for virtue, in that degree the consequence of such neglect is more than twice as important.[2]

Perhaps it will be best not to press this ratio too far. In the Republic, after a long discourse, Socrates says that ". . . all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man."[3] At that, this seems slightly liberal in view of the official status of woman in Athens. Still, in the Timaeus, Plato perpetuated for later times a view of woman's lower place on the scale of being. At the creation of the world,

> . . . as human nature was of two kinds, the superior race would hereafter be called man . . . . He who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star, and there he would have a blessed and congenial existence. But if he failed in attaining this, at the second birth he would pass into a woman. . . .[4]

And so on down the scale through the higher, then the lower animals, etc.

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[1] Ibid., Vol. III, P. 254.

[2] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 163.

[3] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 148.

[4] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 461.

In such a large body of work by an "Athenian old bachelor" of his particular time, the derogatory references are few indeed. It was not Plato directly quoted who was to affect the debate about women in later times. As we shall see, it was asceticism drawn from a part of his philosophy by Neoplatonists, plus perhaps his placing woman on a lower level of being, which was to make him an influence on the history of the subject.

In the Phaedrus Plato makes an analogy of his version of a tripartite soul to a chariot with one of the two horses striving upward toward the goal of the whole and the other pulling downward, the whole being controlled as well as may be by a charioteer who represents the rational faculty. The 'good' horse which tends upward toward the divine is the 'higher' emotional element of the spirit and has its seat in the heart (as the rational has its place in the head); the 'bad' horse which impedes the upward movement of the spirit and alters its course (if allowed to) represents the 'lower' emotions, which have their place correspondingly in the lower part of man.

Love is, as Lane Cooper points out in the preface to his translation of the Phaedrus, the chief emotion of the spirit. The question which is crucial for the spirit's fate is whether the tendency toward the higher or lower object of love will prevail. If the strength of that element of the spirit which tends upward is great enough, and if it is rightly guided by the rational faculty, then the spirit leaves the earth and unites with the divine. If the lower emotion prevails, the spirit falters and is pulled earthward:

> . . . the horse of evil mixture sags downward; unless he has been chastened by his driver, he drags him down and sinks him to earth. It is the hour of agony and sternest conflict for the soul. But the souls that are called immortal, these when they attain the summit pass outside, to stand upon the roof of heaven; here stationed, they are carried round in the celestial revolution, and behold what lies beyond.[1]

This parable of the chariot is important in its own right and also exemplifies the 'otherworldly' strain in Platonism of which Lovejoy speaks. The opposite tendency -- 'this-worldliness' -- is also present, even in the same dialogue, but as Lovejoy says, its historical effect has been much less than that of 'otherworldliness':

> . . . that this is a persistent type, and that it has in one form or another, been the dominant official philosophy of the larger part of civilized mankind through most of its history, I need not remind you. The greater number of the subtler speculative minds and of the great religious teachers have, in their several fashions and with differing degrees of rigor and thoroughness, been engaged in weaning man's thought or his affections, or both, from his mother Nature. . .[2]

Although it is easy to oversimplify the phenomenon, the tendency of Platonism in its influence -- however divided and undogmatic it may be within itself -- has been to enforce the rejection of the material, present world for a spiritual, 'other' one. It is through Plato, as Inge has said, that the

> . . . conception of an unseen eternal world, of which the visible world is only a pale copy, gains a permanent foothold in the West.[3]

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[1] Plato, Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias, and Symposium with Passages from the Republic and Laws, trans. Lane Cooper (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1938), p. 30.

[2] Lovejoy, p. 26.

[3] Inge, p. 10.

And, he adds, "the call, . . . once heard, has never long been forgotten in Europe."[1]

The connection of the chariot analogy and its import for Church doctrine seems clear. If the ideal tendency of the spirit is upward, away from the things of the material world, and if the tendency of the lower emotions is to pull man away from his goal through attraction to the earth, then the more man controls his lower emotions and the more he turns his attention from the material world, the better able his soul will be to reach up toward its goal. The more complete the denial of the lower emotions, the less chance of distraction of the higher emotions and the reason away from the spiritual goal. As will be noted later, the correspondence of this to patterns of thought in Paul and Augustine is close.

Much in Plato's thought must be ignored in order for a thorough rejection of the material world to be deduced from it; and ignore it the Neoplatonists and other early interpreters of it did. Plato was known until the Renaissance primarily for the Timaeus and certain selected passages from other works which were reproduced or alluded to by other writers. Because the Timaeus is uncharacteristic in some ways of Plato's work, and because the thought of Plato undergoes a radical change in the commentaries of Neoplatonists like Plotinus, the influence of Platonism in the first centuries of the Christian era is not as one might have expected.

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[1] Ibid.

For a long time Plato meant the Timaeus and certain commentaries written by his avowed followers. Jowett puts the case succinctly:

> Of all the writings of Plato the Timaeus is the most obscure and repulsive to the modern reader, and has nevertheless had the greatest influence over the ancient and medieval world. [1]

To this may be added the testimony of Lovejoy:

> It was translated into the Latin by Cicero, but was known to the Middle Ages chiefly through the fourth-century Latin version of Chalcidius. Over forty ancient or medieval commentaries on it are known. It is the Timaeus that Plato holds in his hand in Raphael's "School of Athens." [2]

In a way it is easier to deal with the Timaeus as it was understood and elaborated by the Neoplatonists than as it is in itself. In itself the Timaeus is very complex and obscure at times. It is named for a Pythagorean and some at least of the doctrines expressed are taken over bodily from Pythagoreanism. Perhaps Pythagoreanism is an element which has not been given sufficient attention in the examination of the Neoplatonist writings. Certainly the Timaeus is the favorite dialogue of the Neoplatonists.

Characteristically Lovejoy has clarified the outlines of the Timaeus, and we can do no better in a general discussion of it than to reproduce his words. Although much of the Timaeus, he says, is obscure and controversial in meaning, its greatest influence on Neoplatonic thought is from

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[1] Dialogues, Vol. III, p. 341.

[2] Lovejoy, p. 337n.

> . . . two closely related conceptions which the dialogue first introduces, so far as we know, into the general stock of Occidental philosophical ideas. The first is an answer to the question: Why is there any World of Becoming, in addition to the eternal world of Ideas, or, indeed, to the one supreme Idea? The second is an answer to the question: What principle determines the number of kinds of being that make up the sensible and temporal world?[1]

Lovejoy adds,

> . . . Plato transmitted to later Greek and medieval and early modern philosophy the vast assumption. . . that these questions may and should be asked; and he provided, for those after him who asked them, the long accepted answer.[2]

The speaker of the dialogue has a very simple and confident answer to the question of why the "World of Becoming" was created. The Creator, he says,

> . . . was good, and that good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of the world, as we shall do well in believing the testimony of wise men. . . .[3]

Plato here makes the crucial philosophical assumption that the existence of many types of beings, even very imperfect ones, is desirable. The Idea of the Good so overflows with goodness that it has created beings to which it can transmit this goodness according to their varying abilities to possess it. As Lovejoy says so admirably,

> The concept of Self-Sufficient Perfection, by a bold inversion, was -- without losing any of its original implications -- converted into the concept of a Self-Transcending Fecundity.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 46.

[2] Ibid., p. 47.

[3] Dialogues, Vol. III, p. 450.

[4] Lovejoy, p. 49.

Perfection and Fecundity -- these two concepts were to play a great part in the debate on women and asceticism. Various were the manifestations and mutations of the two. The Neoplatonic soul struggling upward to unite with the unmoving, perfect One (or at least the sphere of its noumenal emanations, as we shall see later) is matched by the emanations downward from that One, paradoxically unmoving yet the cause of the filling of the universe with all possible kinds of beings. The same kind of duality manifests itself in various ways in the Middle Ages. As Arthur W. Hoffman has shown, the General Prologue of the Canterbury Tales contains dual forces: "nature impels and supernature draws."[1] Not the least important manifestation of the dual ideals of Perfection and Fecundity is found in the debate on women and procreation. On the one hand, theory demands virginity and denial; on the other, nature presses for marriage and renewal. Paul's counsel to perfection and virginity is countered by many writers before Chaucer with the biblical text to go forth and multiply.

In this opposition of Perfection and Fecundity is the connection between the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the Timaeus, a connection much closer than might have been supposed. There is on the one hand in the Timaeus the concept of the Idea of the Good as being the source of all creation. Since by definition whatever it does is good, creation must

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[1] Arthur W. Hoffman, "Chaucer's Prologue to Pilgrimage: the Two Voices," ELH, Vol. XXI (1954), p. 2.

be inherently good. If there is, that is, the ideal of imitating the perfection of the divine and of striving to control the lower emotions in order to unite the soul with the divine, there is also the ideal of Fecundity, of imitating the creativity of the same divine Creator.

> The proposition that -- as it was phrased in the Middle Ages -- omne bonum est diffusivum sui here makes its appearance as an axiom of metaphysics. With this reversal there was introduced into European philosophy and theology the combination of ideas that for centuries was to give rise to many of the most characteristic internal conflicts, the logically and emotionally opposing strains, which mark its history -- the conception of (at least) Two-Gods-in-One, of a divine completion which was yet not complete in itself, since it could not be itself without the existence of beings other than itself and inherently incomplete; of an Immutability which required, and expressed itself in, Change; of an Absolute which was nevertheless not truly absolute because it was related, at least by way of implication and causation, to entities whose nature was not its nature and whose existence and perpetual passage was antithetic to its immutable subsistence. [1]

That there is a duality in Plato's thought is nowhere better exemplified than in his parable of the cave in Book VII of the Republic, with its ideal of an ascetic, contemplative retirement from the concerns of men set against another ideal of an active, social involvement. The first part of the parable is too famous to need more than a reminder: the prisoners chained in a cave and unable to turn toward the fire's light which is behind them, their mistaking the shadows cast by the light on the well before them for real objects, etc. The second part, however, is not so often alluded to and brings forth two conclusions:

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[1] Lovejoy, pp. 49-50.

first, the need for asceticism, and second, the duty of social involvement.

Socrates explains the parable to Glaucon:

> . . . the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world . . . . my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of the light and of the lord of the light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed. [1]

As we shall discuss in a later section, this metaphor of the light and the source of the light is the favorite of Plotinus in his description of a world beyond this one.

This ascent was not easy to make; those who made it had to change completely the direction of their souls (like the parable of the chariot in which the bad horse must be turned from his object), and they had to learn little by little to adjust from the world of becoming to the world of being, "and of the best of being, or in other words, of the good." [2] The change involves not just a process of education in virtue, but a change in the whole attitude of the soul away from the one world to the other. Socrates uses the example of a rogue who uses his soul's innate wisdom for the wrong purpose.

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[1] Dialogues, Vol. III, p. 217. [2] Ibid., p. 218.

> But what if there had been a circumcision of such natures in the days of their youth; and they had been severed from those sensual pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which, like leaden weights, were attached to them at their birth, and which drag them down and turn the vision of their souls upon the things that are below -- if, I say, they had been released from these impediments and turned in the opposite direction, the very same faculty in them would have seen the truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.[1]

In no essential way is this at odds with Plotinus and other advocates of asceticism. It is in the next step that Plato loses his influence on later ascetic thought.

Once these souls have emerged into the upper world of the true light, says Socrates, not surprisingly they wish to remain there. To descend again would be like returning to the darkness of the cave. But they must be made to return. Glaucon protests against this:

> But is not this unjust? . . . ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?[2]

And in Socrates' reply is the element of social involvement which Plotinus rejects (at least philosophically):

> You have again forgotten, my friend, . . . the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.[3]

This lack of social involvement on the part of the Neoplatonists, their failure to provide in their philosophy for the great mass of people who

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[1] Ibid., p. 219.

[2] Ibid., p. 220.

[3] Ibid., p. 220.

do not have speculative minds, is one of the reasons given by historians for the failure of Neoplatonism in its contest with Christianity. Even in the Republic social involvement on the part of ascetics seems rather a contradiction. When Plato goes on to spell out the degree of involvement needed -- they must breed, etc. -- the opposition seems clearer.

At any rate, in the parable of the cave, there are certain elements which are in perfect agreement with, and an influence on, later ascetic thought: this world is one of becoming, and the appearances in it are but shadows of the other world, that of being; the duty of the soul is to turn from 'this' world and to contemplate the 'other' one; perfect knowledge of the other world and a perfect turning from this one can only come after the renunciation of the demands of the senses that this world be accepted as very real and its demands pressing. There is, in other words, an opposition of the ethical and the metaphysical in Plato's thought.

As a matter of fact, Plato's own religions inheritance was dual. James K. Feibleman, in a provocative book called Religious Platonism, distinguishes in Plato's work "two sets of religious ideas," which are connected with the two strains which Lovejoy calls 'this-worldliness' and 'otherworldliness,' and which Feibleman calls 'realism' and 'idealism.' The former strain is connected with the older religion concerned with Olympian and earth gods, the latter with two relatively late religions in Greece, Orphism and Dionysianism:

> The Orphic and Dionysiac cults are more consistent with idealism, the native Greek religion more consistent with realism.[1]

Feibleman adds that

> . . . it was one of these religious philosophies -- the idealistic version -- which Philo and Plotinus exaggerated and which has come to be called Neoplatonism.[2]

Feibleman describes Orphism as a cult which "featured monotheistic sun-worship, gentleness, vegetarianism, pacifism, spiritualism, and the immortality of the soul."[3] With reservations this could do as a description of the man who did so much to rework Plato's thought -- Plotinus, arch-spiritualist and worshipper of "the Light."

It was through the Timaeus, an uncharacteristic dialogue, and a few passages taken from other works -- the parable of the cave from the Republic, for example -- that Plato was known after the time of Plotinus and the Alexandrians; and it is for this reason that the historical Plato had to wait for hundreds of years to be retrieved. It is easy to sympathize with Jowett when he complains,

> The influence which the Timaeus has exercised upon posterity is due partly to a misunderstanding. In the supposed depth of this dialogue the Neoplatonists found hidden meanings with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and out of them they elicited doctrines quite at variance with the spirit of Plato.[4]

This goes too far, however. If, as Feibleman insists, "it only adds to the confusion to play down the distinction" between the two philosophies,[5]

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[1] James K. Feibleman, Religious Platonism (London: Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 16.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

[4] Dialogues, Vol. III, p. 342.

[5] Feibleman, p. 147.

it also may add to the confusion to insist too rigidly on the distinction. The Orphic element in Plato's thought is pervasive, as Feibleman himself insists, and Orphism has definite points of correspondence with Neoplatonism. As indicated earlier in this section and shown more fully in works like The Great Chain of Being and From Platonism to Neoplatonism,[1] there were very definitely in Plato's work the seeds of Neoplatonism. Only lacking to bring them to fruition were the emphasis on them to the exclusion of other elements of Plato's thought, a doctrinaire attitude toward the portions taken over, the tendency toward extreme systematization, and a complete disavowal of half of man's nature. In other words Plato's work had to be adapted by men who were more rigid and more mystical than he, and less humble in the face of the complexities of basic philosophical problems. Such men appeared, and the greatest of them was a Copt named Plotinus.

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[1] Philip Merlan, From Platonism to Neoplatonism (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1953).

CHAPTER III

PLOTINUS

> In Neoplatonism the psychological fact of the longing of man for something higher, is exalted to the all-predominating principle which explains the world . . . . Neoplatonism is consequently a stage in the history of religion; nay, its significance in the history of the world lies in the fact that it is so.[1]

Neoplatonism took over and elaborated that half of Plato's philosophy which Lovejoy has called 'otherworldly,' then passed on this elaboration to the early Christian writers. The consequences of this for the debate on women were far-reaching. In Neoplatonism the early Christian writers found a thorough-going system and defense of asceticism as an ideal, complete with a convenient set of terms. Harnack comments that in asceticism ". . . Neoplatonism in the end celebrated its greatest triumph."[2] As noted before, asceticism as an ideal is necessarily a part of the debate on women because it affects the official and unofficial attitudes toward women. Henceforth, when asceticism was given

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[1] Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan (7 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1902), Vol. I, p. 342.

[2] Ibid., p. 360.

philosophical and theological support, Neoplatonism was at the basis of the justification.

In his history of the Church, Schaff defines asceticism as "a rigid outward self-discipline, by which the spirit strives after full domain over the flesh, and a superior grade of virtue."[1] He follows Zöckler in dividing it into eight branches, namely,

> 1) the asceticism of penal discipline and self-castigation; 2) of domestic life; 3) of diet (fasting and abstinence); 4) of sexual life (celibacy); 5) of devotion; 6) of contemplation; 7) of practical life; 8) of social life (solitude, poverty, obedience).[2]

These are not, of course, mutually exclusive, but affect each other. The ideal of celibacy, for example, cannot help but affect social life, etc. Celibacy, then, is only the most obvious element of asceticism which affects the theoretical status of women. The change in attitude toward domestic and social life brought about by the emergence of asceticism as an ideal affects quite directly the status of women.

The greatest thinkers of the Ante-Nicene period, both pagan and Christian, have their places in the history of asceticism. Their interrelation is a much discussed question; only their importance is indisputable. The first two figures to catch our attention are Paul and Philo, both roughly contemporary, both influenced by Platonism, and both important thinkers in their own right. Then there is Clement,

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[1] Philip Schaff, A History of the Christian Church (8 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), Vol. II, p. 388.

[2] Ibid., p. 388n.

like Philo a man who did his major work in Alexandria, and directly influenced by Philo's work. Then there is Clement's pupil Origen, who is quite influenced by Neoplatonism and probably by Philo, and there is Plotinus, who like Origen studied under a great but shadowy figure, Ammonius Saccas.

Here are the figures, all in some way influenced by Platonism, all but one partaking of the philosophic traditions and movements of Alexandria while resident there. It is their relation to each other which is in doubt. How much did the later Alexandrians owe to Philo? What is Philo's relation to the Middle Platonists? What is the relation of Ammonius Saccas to Philonian philosophy, and what exactly did he teach Origen and Plotinus? These are questions which have stimulated much discussion; they are fortunately outside the bounds of this study, however, which will be confined to the effects of the Neoplatonic tradition on the debate about women, specifically through the ideal of asceticism.

Because a study of this kind must necessarily limit the attention given to the philosophical background of clerical antifeminist writing, it seems best to study this background by giving attention to certain key figures. Fortunately, there are certain men who, because they encompassed so much in their work and because they had such great and indisputable influence, can serve admirably for this. The first such man dealt with was Plato, the fountainhead of Western thought;

the second was Plotinus, eclectic synthesizer and bestower of a framework of asceticism. For the first great reconciler of Christianity and Hellenism, we have Clement. The man who followed Clement made of that reconciliation a full-fledged system.

Schaff finds the Egyptian origins of these men significant (Origen and Plotinus were Copts, although Clement was a Greek who had come to Alexandria):

> There is something in the very climate of the land of the Pharaohs, in its striking contrast between the solitude of the desert and the fertility of the banks of the Nile, so closely bordering on each other, and in the sepulchral sadness of the people, which induces men to withdraw from the busy turmoil and the active duties of life.[1]

Whatever the cause, asceticism is the very keystone of the systems of both Plotinus and Origen.

The Neoplatonists apparently got the term asceticism from the Stoics.[2] The Stoics had taken over from earlier times the term for gymnastic exercise -- askesis:

> Just as the training of the muscles which is necessary to perfect bodily development is effected by giving them one by one an artificial and for the time an exaggerated exercise, so the training of the moral powers was effected, not by reading rules and committing them to memory, but by giving them a similarly artificial and exaggerated exercise. A kind of moral gymnastic was necessary. The aim of it was to bring the passions under the

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[1] Ibid., p. 390.

[2] See Edwin Hatch, The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church, ed. A. M. Fairbairn (Hibbert Lectures, 1888; London: Williams & Norgate, 1907), pp. 165 et seq.

> control of reason, and to bring the will into harmony with the will of God. [1]

With the Stoics, then, asceticism was practiced as a means of making the reason predominant over the emotions. It was but a step to the ideal of as complete as possible a denial of the demands of the body in Neoplatonism. In the Neoplatonic dualism, all that promoted attachment to matter militated against mind. Asceticism promoted the ascension of the Ladder of Being by the spirit; surrender in any way to the bodily appetites pulled the spirit earthward and prevented ascension. The doctrine was always a possible consequence of an overelaboration of Plato's chariot analogy.

Also, as noted before, Plato had put woman a rung lower than man on the Ladder of Being: to have to do with her was to attach the spirit more closely to matter which was at the very bottom, to descend rather than to ascend. Although later Christian thought may have changed the emphasis and stopped short of this conclusion, the consequence is nevertheless possible both in tendencies already present and in tendencies taken over from Neoplatonism:

> The idea of moral reformation had from the first seized different men with a varying tenacity of grasp. There were some men who had a higher moral ideal than others: . . . there were some to whom moral life was not the perfection of human citizenship, but the struggle of the spirit to disentangle itself from its material environment, and to rise by contemplation to fellowship with God. There are proofs of the existence in the very earliest Christian

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[1] Ibid., p. 147.

> communities of those who endeavoured to live on a higher plane than their fellows. Abstinence from marriage and from animal food were urged and practised as 'counsels of perfection.'[1]

Neoplatonism, then, could be used to reinforce a point of view which was already present. St. Paul's 'counsels of perfection' were implicit in later Jewish theological tradition and in the Gospels perhaps, but Neoplatonism furnished the system and the terms for later commentators. As a matter of fact, H. A. Wolfson contends that Philo was the most important link between Plato and the Neoplatonists.[2] At any rate, the advocate of asceticism, whatever the source of the impulse, could find all the philosophical support he wanted in Neoplatonism. That these advocates availed themselves of the opportunity we shall soon see.

In describing Neoplatonism, we can conveniently follow Feibleman's listing of six basic ways in which it differs from Platonism:[3] 1) the shift in emphasis from philosophy to religion;[4] 2) the use of allegory by the Neoplatonists for textual interpretation; 3) the change from the tentativeness of Plato to the certainty of the Neoplatonists; 4) the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 164-65.

[2] H. A. Wolfson, Philo (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1947.)

[3] Feibleman, pp. 97-99.

[4] "The Neoplatonists either failed to distinguish between philosophy and religion while according the emphasis to religion, as Plotinus, or they made a clear distinction between philosophy and religion and, with equal clarity, subordinated philosophy to religion." [Ibid., p. 97.]

shift from the finite to the infinite; 5) the loss of any interest in nature;[1] 6) the change in the role of the individual from social to God-centered. In short the tentative, philosophic dialogue of Plato became the dogmatic, religious monologue of the Neoplatonist.

The historical connection between Plato and Neoplatonism is a much more vexed question today than it was in the nineteenth century. At that time it seemed that the phenomenon could be explained simply by pointing to Oriental influences, Ammonius Saccas, and the personality of Plotinus. Modern research has indicated, however, that there was a continuously developing tradition from Plato's death until Plotinus. Many of the changes in Platonism which Plotinus embodied in his Enneads were not original with him but originated as early as the first generation of Plato's successors in the Academy. Certainly Aristotle's description of Plato's beliefs does not always agree with the philosophy embedded in the Dialogues.

The movement currently afoot to deny an essential difference between Platonism and Neoplatonism seems to be at best questionable. Merlan's explanation of what he sees as the basic similarity of Platonism and Neoplatonism seems to stem from his assumption that the immediate successors of Plato would represent his philosophy quite accurately. The only Platonic doctrine which we can indisputably connect

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[1] "For the Greeks, nature lay between God and man; for Neoplatonism, God and man were directly connected, without the intermediation of nature." Feibleman, p. 99.

with Plato, however, is that found in the Dialogues. And that Platonism differs even from the first generation of his successors. Merlan explains this by attributing the philosophy of the Dialogues to the speakers and not to Plato. This would seem to make Plato primarily a historian of ideas, at least in the Dialogues.

Although we may note with Feibleman that it does not seem to accord with psychology that a man of Plato's indisputable gifts for speculation would spend the greater part of his life in writing down doctrines with which he had scant sympathy, still the 'real' Plato is not the question here -- fortunately. What writers of the first few centuries of the Christian era thought Platonic philosophy was and the use they made of it are the points at issue. And for them Plotinus, and following him Proclus and Porphyry, represented Plato's thought. The how of the shift from Plato as represented in the Dialogues to Plato as represented by Plotinus is difficult to trace. Philo is part of the answer, but only part. In any event, after the shift had taken place Plotinus was accepted as the medium of Plato's doctrines.

Sister Mary Patricia Garvey quotes Augustine's remark in the Contra Academicos that "the countenance of Plato . . . shone forth especially in the person of Plotinus, a Platonic philosopher," and she goes on to report,

> According to the Benedictines of St. Maur, five manuscripts of the De beata vita substitute the name of Plotinus for that of Plato

> in the statement by Augustine to the effect that he had read a few books of Plato.[1]

Because it was Plotinus who directly affected some of the early Christian writers, it is from Plotinus that we can take our outline of Neoplatonism.

Porphyry began his brief sketch of the life of Plotinus and the arrangement of his work in this way:

> Plotinus, the philosopher our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body. So deep rooted was this feeling that he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage, or his birthplace.[2]

This, the first we hear of Plotinus from a disciple, taken with the last sentence he is said to have uttered, serves admirably as an introduction to the man and his philosophy. According to Eustochius, another disciple, the last words of Plotinus on his deathbed were: "I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine in the All."[3] Hatred of the flesh and the desire of the spirit to reunite with the divine -- these stand as the most obvious elements in Plotinus' thought.

That thought, which Feibleman calls 'early' Neoplatonism to differentiate from that emergence in the high Middle Ages of a Neoplatonized

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[1] Sister Mary Patricia Garvey, Saint Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist? (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ., 1939), p. 50.

[2] Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work," in Plotinus, The Enneads, trans. Stephen MacKenna (2nd ed. rev.; London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 1. This work is cited hereafter as Enneads.

[3] Ibid., p. 2.

Aristotelianism which he calls 'late' Neoplatonism, may be characterized as extremely spiritual and eclectic, based avowedly on Plato, and less openly on Aristotle and the Stoa. Although he has the same kind of view of the residence of evil in matter as certain mystery religions of the time, Plotinus escapes the ditheism of those sects by attributing to every level of being a certain amount of good and by claiming a connection, by levels, with the divine One. This is how his doctrines could save Augustine from Manichaeism. Only that divine One is the origin of that which exists. By making matter co-existent with the One and by making it antithetical to that which flows from the One, however, Plotinus does not escape ditheism entirely.

Plotinus' three-level divinity is a trinity only if we admit, as the Christian tradition does not, an inequality between the members. Perhaps, to avoid confusion, it is better to give it its more usual name, a graded Triad.

At the height of the Triad is the One, which is perfect Unity, free of all things yet the ultimate source of all things:

> Now, if all aspiration and Act whatsoever are directed toward the Good, it follows that the Essential-Good neither need nor can look outside itself or aspire to anything other than itself: it can but remain unmoved, as being, in the constitution of things, the well-spring and first-cause of all Act: whatsoever in other entities is of the nature of Good cannot be due to any Act of the Essential-Good upon them; it is for them on the contrary to act towards their course and cause. The Good must, then, be the Good not by any Act, not even by virtue of its Intellection, but by its very rest within Itself. [1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 65.

Yet the One, we learn after further consideration, has one inescapable necessity: it must transmit good to other beings. This is the answer to the why of the world, an answer to be rejected by Christian theology which denies any necessity to the Creation. Also rejected, as will be seen later, is the notion of only the movement of the lower upward with no movement of the Good downward after apparently the first emanation, though this last point is uncertain.

In accordance with its nature, which is so good that it must beget others to partake of that goodness, the One has begotten the Nous or Intellectual-Principle. Nous is a reflection of the One. Sometimes Plotinus uses the analogy with the light: the One is like the pure Light, and Nous is like the sun which transmits the light but, because of the lower nature of the body which transmits it, no longer pure. The third member of the Triad is the Universal Soul, which is in turn the reflection of the Nous, the member just above it. The Universal Soul, in Plotinus' analogy of the light, corresponds to the moon which reflects the light of the sun, yet even less like the original Light.

Plotinus thought that he solved the problem of how multiplicity came into being, the old problem of the One and the Many, by means of this Triad and the nature of the One. It was not the nature of the One to be alone: because of an inner necessity to share its goodness, it begot Nous, the Intellectual-Principle, to partake of its goodness. It was from Nous directly that multiplicity came: it contains within itself

all forms of things. The Universal Soul, being more imperfect yet, contains a greater multiplicity and gives rise to the many which actually are in the world. Souls come from it and combine with matter to make up the actual material world of men. As Nous, or the Intellectual-Principle, is the highest (below the One) in Plotinus' dualistic Ladder of Being, so matter is the lowest.

Man is the result of an uneasy union of body and soul -- of matter, which is evil, and spirit, which is good:

> As necessarily as there is Something after the First, so necessarily there is a Last: this Last is Matter, the thing which has no residue of good in it: here is the necessity of Evil.[1]
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> . . . . . .
>
> Matter becomes mistress of what is manifested through it: it corrupts and destroys the incomer, it substitutes its own opposite character and kind, not in the sense of opposing, for example, concrete cold to concrete warmth, but by setting its own formlessness against the Form of heat . . . . Thus, in sum, what enters into Matter ceases to belong to itself, comes to belong to Matter . . . .[2]

Sister Garvey comments,

> The union of the spiritual soul with this principle of dispersion is the result of a fall. The soul receives nothing but harm from its union with the body. It lives, as it were, a dream life, while united with the body, from which it awakens only when it extricates itself from its gross, material vesture at the moment of death. There is an ethical warfare constantly taking place between soul and body, in which the soul must do everything possible to eliminate sense life. By the practice of asceticism, it must remove everything acquired by its fall . . . . By union with the body, it has, so to speak, lost itself and it can recover itself only through a continual process of purification until eventually it leaves its prison, the body, and is united to the One.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 72.

[2] Ibid., p. 73.

[3] Garvey, pp. 49-50.

There are two movements: the movement downward from the One (emanation) and the movement upward toward the One (striving). The fall of man according to Plotinus is a fall into matter; salvation is the escape from matter. The One is perfect and its actions are perfect (insofar, says Plotinus, as It may be said to act at all); imperfection comes in with the activity of the lower levels -- the lower the level, the more diluted the goodness. Nous is less perfect than the One from which it emanates; the Universal Soul is correspondingly less perfect as emanating not from the One but from Nous. The souls which emanate from the Universal Soul are more imperfect still, and become even more imperfect in their contact with matter -- the body. It is a possibility and a duty for every soul to ascend once again, to move upward through the stages of its former descent, first by attaching itself to the Universal Soul, then upward:

> If . . . it is the presence of soul that brings worth, how can a man slight himself and run after other things? You honour the Soul elsewhere; honour then yourself.
>
> The Soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God: in the strength of this power make upwards toward Him: at no great distance you must attain: there is not much between.[1]

Such, then, is a rough sketch of the Triad of Plotinus and of man's relation to it. We may note that Plotinus had not actually solved the problem of imperfection in a world whose ultimate source is

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[1] Enneads, p. 371.

Perfection, but had only separated the one from the other by two intermediate steps. As Lovejoy points out, the Neoplatonist is stuck with

> . . . the two contradictory theses that 'this' world is an essentially evil thing to be escaped from, and that its existence, with precisely the attributes it has, is a good so great that in the production of it the divinest of all attributes of deity was manifested. [1]

Earlier in his book he asserts:

> There was no way in which the flight from the Many to the One, the quest of a perfection defined wholly in terms of contrast with the created world, could be effectually harmonized with the imitation of a Goodness that delights in diversity and manifests itself in the emanation of the Many out of the One. The one program demanded a withdrawal from all 'attachment to creatures' and culminated in the ecstatic contemplation of the indivisible Divine essence; the other, if it had been formulated, would have summoned men to participate, in some finite measure, in the creative passion of God, to collaborate consciously in the processes by which the diversity of things, the fullness of the universe, is achieved. [2]

Neoplatonism, then, did not resolve the problem, as Augustine learned, but through Plotinus it did provide the philosophical system in which the problem could be expressed; and it stated the ideal of contemplative 'otherworldliness' which long was to influence Christian thinkers.

With the 'otherworldly' strain of Plato's thought now embodied in a system, we can turn to the effects of it on later thought -- that is, to asceticism. Asceticism is the call to forsake the good things of this world for the promised, infinitely better things of the other. Reason

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[1] Lovejoy, p. 96.

[2] Ibid., pp. 83-84.

may tell a man that this is wise, but emotion impels him to take this world and get what good he can from it. This, again, is the conflict between 'this-worldliness' and 'otherworldliness' of which Lovejoy has spoken. Asceticism may be the 'official' ideal, but the practice is usually otherwise. Lovejoy's comment may be noted at this point for later development:

> I have said 'official philosophy' because nothing, I suppose, is more evident than that most men, however they may have professed to accept it, and have even found in the reasonings of the rhetoric of its exposition a congenial and moving sort of metaphysical pathos -- which is partly the pathos of the ineffable -- have never quite believed it, since they have never quite been able to deny to the things disclosed by the senses a genuine and imposing and highly important kind of realness, and have never truly desired for themselves the end which otherworldliness held out to them.[1]

This does not mean, however, that the society in which the ascetic ideal is the official one is little affected by it.

> Where some form of otherworldliness is generally professed, the socially prevelant scale of values is largely shaped by it and the principal themes and objectives of intellectual effort receive their character from it.[2]

This is an important hint. If asceticism is not the sole cause of anti-feminist writing -- and of course it is not -- it still has a large place among the causes. There is, as Utley says, a psychological basis for it in 'sex antagonism';[3] but the ascetic ideal gives the antifeminist a warrant, as it were. This point will receive fuller treatment later,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

[3] Francis L. Utley, The Crooked Rib ("Contributions in Languages and Literature"; Ohio State Univ., 1944), p. 3.

but it might be well to mention in passing three major consequences of this ideal.

The first consequence of the ascetic ideal in Christian writing was that virginity was declared to be better than marriage. The Scriptural authority for this was drawn primarily from four passages: Matt. 19:22; I Cor. 7:7sqq.; Matt. 22:30; and Rev. 14:4.

The second consequence of the ascetic ideal was that the Fall was widely regarded as sexual. This was opposed sometimes by the assertion that sex was the first result of the Fall; Jerome even went so far as to consider the possibility that the sexual organs were the gift of Satan after the Fall. If the Fall was connected with sex, then it seemed reasonable that those who indulged in sex repeated in some way the Fall.

The third consequence -- though not always carried so far -- was that woman, following the first Eve, was considered a favorite instrument of Satan. It was through Eve that Satan was able to cause the fall of Adam; and it was through Eve's daughters that the man striving for perfection might fall. We may recall in this connection Jerome's story of how, when he was residing in the desert, a devil in the shape of a woman came into his bed.

As in Neoplatonism, then, the ascetic ideal in Christianity fed antifeminism by associating woman with the lower nature of man. Whether woman was regarded with the Hellenists as occupying a lower rung on

the Ladder of Being or, following Genesis, as made in the image of man, she was lower in the scheme of things. To have to do with her was to turn from the ideal of rising. The system, Scriptural authority, and the story of the Fall were all there, ready to be brought together. The men to make the synthesis for Christianity were not lacking -- one of them was an acquaintance and fellow student of Plotinus.

CHAPTER IV

ORIGEN

> His outward life was that of a Christian and opposed to the law, but in regard to his views of things and of the Deity, he thought like the Greeks, inasmuch as he introduced their ideas into the myths of other peoples. [1]

In his study of Origen, René Cadiou makes the case for that great thinker in this way:

> Because of the fact that on a number of occasions certain opinions of his have been formally condemned, Origen has never been given the title of a doctor of the Church. Yet his influence on Christian thought is comparable only with that of St. Augustine or of St. Thomas Aquinas. [2]

Harnack makes a comparable assertion:

> Among the theologians of antiquity Origen was the most important and influential alongside of Augustine. [3]

Like Plato and Plotinus, Origen brought together doctrines from various sources and made his own system of them. Like them, he can

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[1] Porphyry, quoted in Harnack, Vol. II, p. 341.

[2] René Cadiou, Origen: His Life at Alexandria, trans. John A. Southwell (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1944), v.

[3] Harnack, Vol. II, p. 332.

be thought of as a synthesizer and systematizer. But, also like them, he transformed what he brought together and made it his own. Perhaps this is why all three men are so difficult to deal with: their claim to originality seems vitiated by the fact that many of their doctrines can be traced to earlier men; each in fact has been accused of being merely a historian of ideas. Plato takes over doctrines primarily from Socrates and the Sophists, and from the Pythagoreans; Plotinus has Plato, Aristotle, Philo and the Stoa in his intellectual background; Origen also takes from various sources. However, the very fact of bringing together what would have seemed before to be irreconcilable elements and making of them a system argues the greatness and originality of each man. No one had reconciled them before.

Many factors -- the place, the time, his family background, his teachers -- favored Origen. It has been said that in every intellectual revolution there is the concurrence of the right conditions and the right man; whatever the value of this as a generalization, third-century Alexandria and Origen were a perfect combination. Harnack is correct when he says,

> Like all epoch-making personalities, he was . . . favoured by the conditions in which he lived, though he had to endure violent attacks. Born of a Christian family which was faithfully attached to the Church, he lived at a time when the Christian communities enjoyed almost uninterrupted peace and were being naturalised in the world; he was a member of a Christian Church where the right of scientific study was already recognised and where this had attained a fixed position in an organized school. [1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 333.

We may add to this the fact that he lived in Alexandria and had two of the greatest teachers of his day.

The influence of place is not to be taken lightly. It was, first of all, the meeting-place of all of the great intellectual movements. Here was the great Philonian school of Jewish scholarship where the attempt was first made to syncretize Hellenist and Hebraic traditions. Alexandria also was the battleground on which Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, and Christianity struggled for converts. It was a place of intellectual ferment in which each movement lost members to the others. It was just the place for a Christian to see that if Christianity was to win converts among the educated, it must meet them on their own intellectual level. It was also just the place to provide the philosophic background for that transformation of evangelical Christianity.

Although a mind like Origen's cannot be explained fully by means of outside influences, certainly his two teachers, Clement and Ammonius Saccas, must have had a strong effect upon him. As a matter of fact, this influence is evident in his work even when he is rejecting rather than accepting what they have taught. Ammonius left no writings, but certain correspondences in the thought of his students, especially the two great ones, Origen and Plotinus, make it clear that his system had many of the basic features of Neoplatonism. In fact, at one time these correspondences caused historians to assign to him the role of founder of Neoplatonism.

H. A. Wolfson, noting the similarities between Neoplatonism and the work of Philo Judaeus, calls Philo the founder of that philosophy. At the beginning of his monumental study of Philo, Wolfson states that with the exception of Philonian philosophy,

> . . . none of the peoples who after the conquests of Alexander began to participate in Greek philosophy contributed anything radically new to it.[1]

Near the end of his study he makes the assertion even more clearly and sweepingly:

> This is the new period in the history of philosophy ushered in by Philo and ushered out by Spinoza. If we still choose to describe this period as mediaeval, for after all it comes between a philosophy which knew not of Scripture and a philosophy which tries to free itself from Scripture, then it is the mediaeval philosophy of Philo. For well-nigh seventeen centuries this Philonic philosophy dominated European thought. Nothing really new happened in the history of European philosophy during that period.[2]

Certainly Philo is a very important figure, but the consensus of modern researchers seems to be that it is quite questionable to choose any man, or even any place or time, as the fons et origo of mediaeval philosophy. We should expect a syncretistic philosophy to have a complex history, and such seems to be the case. Hatch is probably nearer the truth in calling Philo a valuable bridge between Plato and Plotinus. As we have seen, Plato was changed as early as the first generation of his followers. Philo is an important influence on Origen and Plotinus, but only in conjunction with others.

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[1] Wolfson, Vol. I, p. 3. [2] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 459.

The most obvious influence on Origen was his great teacher, Clement of Alexandria. In his behalf, Quasten says:

> Clement knew very well that the Church could not avoid competition with pagan philosophy and literature if she was to fulfill her duty towards mankind and live up to her task as a teacher of nations. His Hellenistic education enabled him to make of the Christian faith a system of thought with a scientific foundation. We owe it above all to him if scholarly thinking and research are recognized in the Church. He proved that the faith and philosophy, Gospel and secular learning, are not enemies but belong together.[1]

Although he is an important figure in his own right, Clement is most important in the history of the early Church as one who laid the groundwork for Origen. In regard to the difficulty of reconciling the Old and New Testaments, for example, Bigg comments that

> Clement, whose intellect is penetrating but not systematic, did not grasp the whole range of the problem before him. He leaves for Origen the task of dealing with those passages, in which, as the Gnostics affirmed, the Scriptures attribute direct immorality to Jehovah, and confines himself to the proposition that goodness is not inconsistent with severity, that He who teaches must also threaten, and He who saves correct.[2]

Christianity was at a critical point when Clement began to teach in Alexandria. Although the overt persecution had subsided for the time, it was in direct competition with the mystery cults and with the Hellenists for converts. Clement himself was a convert from Hellenism and was aware that this was appealing to the educated people. Many Christians on the other hand were reacting to the threat posed by

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[1] Johannes Quasten, Patrology (2 vols.; Utrecht & Antwerp: Spectrum, 1953), Vol. II, pp. 6-7.

[2] Charles Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1913), p. 84.

Hellenism by condemning the learning of the Greeks. Tertullian had just spoken out against the unceasing philosophic quest for truth.[1] Clement saw, and Origen more clearly, that if Christianity was to have converts among the educated, it must take the earlier learning for its own use. Reason he said, was given to man to use in seeking perfection, to all men:

> And should one say that it was through human understanding that philosophy was discovered by the Greeks, still I find the Scriptures saying that understanding is sent by God.[2]

Clement's work made legitimate the use of Hellenistic philosophy service of Christianity; he spoke of truth as a river into which many streams run; he also used the famous analogy of truth as a body whose members are possessed by various different people, each of whom assumes that the member which he possesses is the whole body. Building on this work of justification, Origen used Greek philosophy in making the first great Christian theological system.

As Daniélou has pointed out, there was a driving urgency in Origen which made this so.

> Unlike Justin or Clement, he was not a philosopher who had been converted to Christianity and kept his philosophical outlook. He was an apostle, a missionary, who saw that if he was to expound Christianity to the leading minds of his day, he must know the philosophy by which they lived, for only so would he be in a position

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[1] See Cadiou, p. 24f.

[2] Clement of Alexandria, "Stromateis," Ante-Nicene Christian Library, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (24 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), Vol. XII, p. 324. This collection is cited hereafter as Ante-Nicene Library.

> to answer their difficulties and stress the factors in Christianity likely to appeal to them most.[1]

His father died a martyr in the persecution of Septimius Severus (A. D. 202), and, at eighteen, Origen was put in charge of the school for catechumens of which Clement had been the master before his flight from Alexandria at the height of the persecution. It was at about this time also that Origen emasculated himself, taking, as Quasten says, "in too literal sense,"[2] the passage from Matthew 19, 12:

> For there are eunuchs, who were born so from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, who were made so by men: and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it.

This act alone could make him serve as a symbolic figure in the history of asceticism; his system insures him a much greater place.

Quasten calls Origen "one of the great mystics of the Church,"[3] and certainly he has much in common with that other Alexandrian mystic Plotinus. Both construct a thorough-going, hierarchical system featuring strong ascetic tendencies. The Nous of one has much in common with the Logos of the other: Both Nous (the Intellectual-Principle) and the Logos (Christ) are capable of apprehension as the One and God are not; both are supreme objects of union; both men posit the necessity of

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[1] Jean Daniélou, Origen, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), p. 73.

[2] Quasten, Vol. II, p. 38.

[3] Ibid., p. 94.

asceticism and rising by levels in order to effect this union. A brief outline of Origen's system will serve to indicate the similarities between the two great systems and also Origen's debt to the Platonic tradition. In fact Quasten asserts that the "main defect" of Origen's thought is "the predominant influence of Platonic philosophy."[1]

Origen, like Plotinus identified God as Perfection, and, also like Plotinus, he pictures the rising of the soul as a partaking of that perfection as nearly as possible: the goal, he says is 'to become as like to God as possible.'[2] Quasten,[3] on the basis of the De Principiis, outlines Origen's system as a five-stage process by which the soul effects a union with the Logos. First, a man must acquire self-knowledge:

> For unless the soul acquires self-knowledge in the way we have detailed above, and carefully practises itself in the word of God and the divine law, its fate will be to gather on these points the views of the various teachers, and to follow after men whose words have no excellence, no prompting of the Holy Spirit . . . It is as if He [God] speaks to the soul already within, already in its place among the mysteries. Yet because it is careless about self-knowledge, about inquiring what it is, what it should do and how, and what to leave undone, to this soul it is said, Go thy way forth, like one sent forth by the master for this fault of sloth. So great a danger is it for the soul to neglect the knowledge and understanding of itself.[4]

The second stage, the result of this self-knowledge and soul-searching "will be to recognize that we have to take up arms against sin; which prevents us from reaching perfection. This presupposes the

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[1] Quasten, Vol. II, p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 94.

[3] Ibid., pp. 94-99.

[4] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

battle against the passions . . . and the world as the causes of sin."[1] As with Plotinus, the goal of the struggle with the passions is complete freedom from them. "This leads to a renunciation of marriage, not that Origen rejected it, but only that he recommends the celibate life and the vow of chastity for the true imitator of Christ: 'And if we offer to Him chastity, that is our body's chastity, we receive from Him chastity of the spirit.' . . . Origen praises Christ as the one who brought virginity into the world; he sees in it the model of perfection, which consists in castitas et pudicitia et virginitas . . . ."[2]

The third stage hearkens back to the Stoics; it is the exercise and practice of asceticism. "Such complete detachment from the world can be acquired only by the lifelong practice of asceticism."[3] The body has a strong hold which is to be broken by frequent vigils, fasting, long and continual study, and the exercise of humility. Quasten comments that "Origen appears here as a forerunner of monasticism."[4]

These three stages are preliminary to the mystical ascent. The realization must come that man's life on earth is only temporary; the man must fight against sin and temptation, and exercise himself in virtue and contempt for the world. These are "inward sufferings of the soul, which accompany each step higher. Origen for this reason

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[1] Ibid., p. 96

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 97.

[4] Ibid.

refers on many occasions to the necessity of such temptations."[1] There are many conflicts connected with this ascent. "However, the more the conflicts and battles multiply, the more consolations are granted to the soul."[2]

The final step is what Quasten terms "the mystical union of the soul with the Logos."[3] This is not an annihilation of the self as with some mystery religions and as even Plotinus seems to imply. The relation between the soul and the Logos, he says, is like a mystical marriage, as he explains in his commentary on the Song of Songs.

It is possible to overemphasize the similarities of the systems of Origen and Plotinus, and of the influence of Neoplatonism on the former. There is the fundamental difference of the indifference of Plotinus' One to all matters below it, in contrast to the grace of Origen's God. Human effort alone was taken into account by Plotinus in discussing the striving of the soul toward perfection; Origen, on the other hand, acknowledged the need of the soul for God's grace as well as its own efforts. This is the import of Augustine's remark in the Confessions that he had not found in the Neoplatonists that the Word was made flesh. Such a concept would have been incomprehensible to the Neoplatonist for many reasons. First of all, there is the indifference alluded to;

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

[3] Ibid.

second, there is no doctrine of sin in Plotinus: the material world is all evil and the spirit must help itself to escape from it: that divinity should have anything to do with matter was unthinkable. Neoplatonism was in short a religion without a founder, and, as Augustine saw, one which could speak only to speculative minds.

There were enough elements of Neoplatonism in Origen's thought, however, to make it a strong influence and to help make his thought suspected and, in part, condemned by future Church writers and officials. As noted earlier, though, his influence was nevertheless great on later Church thought. His system of asceticism had its influence, and, in conjunction with that system, so did his allegorical reading of the Bible.

As authority for his own doctrines, Plotinus was handicapped in having only a few writings of Plato. By means of reading the text on three levels, historical, moral, and mystical, Origen had the full weight of the Bible at his disposal. Quasten's comments are again pertinent:

> The Bible to Origen is not only a dogmatic or moral treatise but something far more living, far more elevated, the reflection of the invisible world. His first principle is that the Bible is the Word of God, not a dead word imprisoned in the past, but a living word addressed immediately to the man of today. His second principle is that the Old Testament is illuminated by the New, just as the New only discloses its profundity once it is illuminated by the Old. The bond between the two is determined by allegory. [1]

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[1] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 92.

As with so much in the intellectual activity of the time (or since), this allegorical exegesis had an ultimately Greek origin. Almost two hundred years earlier in Alexandria, Philo had used this method on the Pentateuch. It still played a prominent part in the Philonian school in Origen's time, and he must have been influenced by this; but there was also warrant for it in Greek history. As Hatch has shown,[1] the Greeks had what served as a scripture on which they practised exegesis:

> The combination of . . . three feelings, the mystery of writing, the reverence for antiquity, the belief in inspiration, tended to give the writings of the ancient poets a unique value . . . . The verses of Homer were not simply the utterances of a particular person with a particular meaning for a particular time. They had a universal validity. They were the voice of undying wisdom. They were the Bible of the Greek races.[2]

Hatch notes:

> The method had for many centuries an enormous hold upon the Greek mind; it lay beneath the whole theology of the Stoic schools; it was largely current among the scholars and critics of the early empire.[3]

Specifically in regard to Philo's exegesis, Hatch points out:

> In all this, Philo was following not a Hebrew but a Greek method. He expressly speaks of it as the method of the Greek mysteries.[4]

The method had then a wider currency than just in the Alexandrian school of Jewish philosophers, and this is perhaps why it was so readily accepted by so many when Origen used it as a method of expounding Christian doctrine. Cadiou says truly of Origen,

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[1] Hatch, p. 50 et seq.

[2] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[3] Ibid., p. 61.

[4] Ibid., p. 69.

> He based his entire doctrine on his commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures. His theology was, above everything else, a system of exegesis.[1]

"In the eyes of the true mystic," Cadiou observes later, "everything that exists bears the mark of the divine, and Origen saw God's signature in every element of Holy Scripture."[2] This remark helps to indicate the manner in which asceticism and symbolic interpretation are linked. The earthly fact represents a higher, spiritual truth. The world for Origen is a place of purification of the soul.[3] In the objects of the world is the revelation of the Creator of them; in the Old Testament is the prefiguring of the Logos and the truths which He has brought to earth. Rather the truths are already there, imparted by the Logos:

> . . . by the words of Christ we do not mean those only which He spake when he became man and tabernacled in the flesh; for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets. For without the Word of God, how could they have been able to prophesy of Christ?[4]

The Logos has been the key by which these truths of the Old Testament may be unlocked.

Following Clement, Origen recognizes two kinds of faith and knowledge held by Christians: Pistis, or ordinary belief, and Gnosis, or 'higher' knowledge of the divine. The one state will suffice for most

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[1] Cadiou, p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] See Harnack, Vol. II, p. 361ff.

[4] Origen, De principiis, trans. Frederick Crombie, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (10 vols.; New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1926), Vol. IV, p. 239. This collection is cited hereafter as Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Christians, but for the one who is striving for a higher state, the second is necessary. The theme of contemptu mundi in Christian thought, if not making its appearance here, is at least receiving its first embodiment in a theological system. The literal fact of the world is subordinate to the higher spiritual fact. Applied to life, spiritual interpretation would call for a life primarily of the spirit rather than the flesh. Origen's most famous piece of Scriptural exegesis, that of the Song of Songs, may serve admirably to show this spiritualization at work. As will be noted later, this also played its own very definite role in the debate on women.

In the Prologue to his Latin translation of Origen's two homilies on the Song of Songs, Jerome says, "While Origen surpassed all writers in his other books, in his Song of Songs he surpassed himself."[1] Lawson conjectures convincingly that Jerome is referring also to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, which he also intends to translate.[2] Certainly Origen's three writings taken together constitute his greatest direct influence on later times. In these can be seen his use of allegorical exegesis, his Platonic, ascetic tendencies, and his distinction of two types of believers.

The Song of Songs, he says, is not for everyone:

> But it behoves us primarily to understand that, just as in childhood we are not affected by the passion of love, so also to those

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[1] Origen, The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies, trans. with an intro. by R. P. Lawson ("Ancient Christian Writers," Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), p. 265. Cited hereafter as Origen.

[2] Ibid., p. 16ff.

> who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life . . . it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings.[1]

Origen is addressing himself then to those who are capable of more perfect knowledge, of Gnosis.

The ascetic tendency is built on a Platonic conception of two kinds of love:

> . . . just as there is one love, known as carnal and also known as Cupid by the poets, according to which the lover sows in the flesh; so also is there another, a spiritual love, by which the inner man who loves sows in the spirit. And, to speak more plainly, if anyone still bears the image of the heavenly according to the inner man are heavenly.[2]

Later, Origen is even more explicit as to the action of the more perfect Christian in regard to these two loves:

> . . . when this passion of love is directed on to diverse skills, whether manual crafts or occupations needful only for this present life . . . or even when it is expended on the study of geometry or music or arithmetic or similar branches of learning, neither in that case does it seem to me to be used laudably. For if that which is good is also laudable -- and by that which is good we understand not anything corporeal, but only that which is found first in God and in the powers of the soul -- it follows that the only laudable love is that which is directed to God and to the powers of the soul.[3]

Foreshadowing later depictions of what D'Arcy has called eros and agape, that is the love directed upward toward God and the love flowing downward from God, Origen distinguishes between a well-directed and a misdirected inner love, the former of which originates in God Who is Charity.

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

[3] Ibid., p. 36.

> And this spiritual love of the soul does flame out . . . sometimes towards certain spirits of evil, and sometimes towards the Holy Spirit and the word of God . . . .[1]

Charity is from God and is directed back to God:

> We must understand . . . that this Charity, which God is, in whomsoever it exists loves nothing earthly, nothing material, nothing corruptible; for it is against its nature to love anything corruptible, seeing that it is itself the fount of incorruption. For because God . . . is Charity, it is charity alone that posseses immortality.[2]
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> . . . . . .
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> Thus, then, the name of charity belongs first to God; and for that reason we are bidden to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength -- Him, that is, from whom we have the very power of loving.[3]

There are then first the love of the outer man, which is directed to the material; then there is the love of the inner man which may or may not be directed toward God:

> And this spiritual love of the soul does flame out . . . sometimes toward certain spirits of evil, and sometimes towards the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.[4]

If Charity is both from God and, through the spirit, directed back to Him, Origen does not explain the nature of this misdirected love. In fact, it would seem that he is speaking of the same love if this were not a contradiction of his definition that it is from God and directed back to Him. At any rate, here is first of all the dual Platonistic kind of higher and lower love -- now called inner and outer -- and here also is a rather inexplicit representation of the love directed

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[1] Ibid., p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] Ibid., p. 35.

[4] Ibid., p. 30.

upward and that emanating downward, eros and agape. As noted earlier, Origen has already made a more explicit distinction in the De Principiis.

The distinction between the outer and inner man, the misdirected and well-directed loves, reinforces the ascetic tendencies in the Commentary. Lawson points out that

> In the Commentary Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Canticles everywhere conjoined with the psychic interpretation -- in fact, this latter becomes increasingly prominent as the discussion moves on.[1]

Christ is both the Bridegroom of the Church and of the soul, and in his increasing emphasis on the latter relationship, Origen bolsters the tendency of the interpretation toward asceticism. Lawson calls the Commentary "the first great work of Christian mysticism,"[2] and mysticism by definition is individual and otherworldly.

The allegorical identifications of Origen in the Commentary had the greatest direct effect on later writers of any of his later writings. Lawson points to this influence:

> . . . he was followed by Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, Maximus Confessor. But, though almost all borrowed from him, none equalled him in richness of thought and depth of mystical conception. His Commentary is indeed the first great work of Christian mysticism.[3]

The import of the work is so familiar that perhaps only a brief discussion of it will suffice.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[2] Ibid., p. 6.

[3] Ibid.

Origen discusses each line of the Song of Songs on three different levels. On the literal level he says, the song is a marriage-song written in a dramatic form.

> Reading it as a simple story . . . we see a bride appearing on the stage, having received for her betrothal and by way of dowry most fitting gifts from a most noble bridegroom; but, because the bridegroom delays his coming for so long, she, grieved with longing for his love, is pining at home and doing all she can to bring herself at last to see her spouse, and to enjoy his kisses. We understand further that the bride, seeing that she can neither be quit of her love, nor yet achieve what she desires, betakes herself to prayer and makes supplication to God, whom she knows to be her bridegroom's Father.[1]

That this level, however, can be dangerous, Origen has already said in his prologue. Those who are "at the stage of infancy and childhood in their spiritual life" might understand only this. The man who is advanced in spiritual life is able to see past this level to a higher truth which it veils.

> But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust![2]

The man who is advanced, however, will be able to go beyond to an inner meaning. The first inner meaning to manifest itself is that Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride. Those who

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[1] Ibid., p. 58.

[2] Ibid., p. 22.

minister to the Bride in this reading are the prophets and the angels. The latter are the deliverers of the bridal gift, which is the Law. In order to kindle the love of the Bridegroom in the Bride, the prophets as ministrants foretell His coming and "His countless Acts of power and His mighty works."[1] They give many of His attributes, His beauty, charm, and gentleness.

> But, since the age is almost ended and His own presence is not granted me, and I see only His ministers ascending and descending upon me, because of this I pour out my petition to Thee, the Father of my Spouse, beseeching Thee to have compassion at last upon my love, and to send Him, that He may now no longer speak to me only by His servants the angels and the prophets, but may come Himself, directly and kiss me with the kisses of His mouth -- that is to say, may pour the words of His mouth into mine, that I may hear Him speak Himself, and see Him teaching.[2]

The Church of the Old Law, then, awaits and foretells the coming of Christ with the New, awaits the coming of the Bridegroom and the marriage which will ensue.

The third level is that of the individual soul, which longs for the spiritual marriage with her Beloved, after having received her dowry.

> For, just as the Church's dowry was the volumes of the Law and the Prophets, so let us regard natural law and reason and free will as the soul's betrothal gifts. And let the teaching, which comes down to her from her masters and teachers, following on these gifts of her natural endowment, be to her for her earliest instruction. But, since she does not find in these the full and perfect satisfaction of her desire and love, let her pray that her pure and virginal mind may be enlightened by the illumination and the visitation of the Word of God Himself.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 59.

[2] Ibid., p. 60.

[3] Ibid., p. 61.

The goal of the soul, in keeping with Origen's doctrine in the De Principiis, is a spiritual marriage with Christ, sealed with a kiss.

> And let us understand that by the 'mouth' of the Bridegroom is meant the power by which He enlightens the mind and, as by some word of love addressed to her . . . makes plain whatever is unknown and dark to her. And this is the truer, closer, holier kiss, which is said to be granted by the Bridegroom-Word of God to the Bride -- that is to say, to the pure and perfect soul; it is of this happening that the kiss, which we give one to another at the holy mysteries, is a figure.[1]

Origen has called the Church "the whole assembly of saints" and "a corporate personality."[2] As the emphasis on the experience of the Soul increases in his work and the attention to the symbolism of the Church diminishes, there is a corresponding emphasis of the individual experience. Although the orthodox theologian will argue that the Church is a necessary vehicle to higher experience, the mystical experience is necessarily individual and apart from the "corporate personality." As we have seen before, there is a part of any philosophy or religion which must live in the world and be concerned with it -- and a part of the Church is so concerned; there is also the tendency of the mystic to strive to transcend the world in an individual experience of the soul. The tendency of Origen's thought is toward the latter.

Harnack points out that Origen worked out his system "in opposition to the systems of the Greek philosophies and of the Christian Gnostics."[3] But, he adds,

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[1] Ibid., p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] History of Dogma, Vol. II, p. 334.

> the science of the faith, as developed by Origen . . . bears unmistakable marks of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. Origen speculated not only in the manner of Justin, but also in that of Valentinus and therefore likewise after the fashion of Plotinus; in fact he is characterised by the adoption of the methods and, in a certain sense, of the axioms current in the schools of Valentinus and traceable in Neoplatonism. [1]

In this influence are the elements which strengthened his system, but also features later declared heretical.

In opposition to the Gnostics, Origen recognized not a dual but a single origin of all that is in the world. Following the Greeks and foreshadowing later theologians, he recognized evil as a state of non-being, a turning-away from God. The spirit, he recognized, is not self-moved but also is raised by God through the Logos. He recognized that the Logos, Christ, had united with the flesh, and that the flesh would be raised with the spirit. He was, in short, more orthodox than formerly was understood.

There is, however, ample evidence of the heretical elements of his thought. Werner Jaeger asserts that the cause of "the strong emphasis on gnosis in Clement and Origen" is that

> they had to pay attention to this new power that threatened to become a dangerous rival of Christianity, to be reckoned with like Manichaeism and Mithraism. What the Alexandrians have to offer under the name of gnosis is of course very different from the systems of a Basilides or Valentinus . . . . To the Oriental gnosis and its crude symbolism they oppose their own gnosis, which is largely derived from Greek philosophy. [2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 334-35.

[2] Werner Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (Harvard University, 1961), p. 54.

This necessary historical accommodation had its bad effects. It is one of the main reasons that Clement's writings were soon to come under suspicion and why the later "Origenic controversies" ended in an official declaration of the heresy of some of his doctrines. From the Manichaeans to the Albigensians and beyond, the major heresies have usually exhibited this tendency of making a rigid division between this world and the next, an extreme otherworldliness. The history of later ascetic writings might be described roughly by a measurement of the extremity of this rejection of the physical world, and by the rigidity of the barrier placed between the physical and the spiritual.

Once orthodoxy in theological matters was relatively well settled, the greatest theologians were careful to avoid this great elevation of the spiritual to the point of rejecting the material, which was also from God. The recent, more sympathetic treatment of Origen, however, stems from recognition, first, of his role as the virtual founder of Christian theology and his influence as such on later thought, and second, of the consequent difficulties he faced in bringing together Christian principles and pagan thought.

Origen adheres to tradition insofar as it stems obviously from the Bible. His difficulties arise in trying to embed tradition in a pagan philosophical tradition:

> As an orthodox traditionalist and decided opponent of all heresy Origen acknowledged that Christianity embraces a salvation which is offered to all men and attained by faith, that it is the doctrine of historical facts to which we must adhere, that the content of

> Christianity has been appropriately summarised by the Church in her rule of faith, and that belief is of itself sufficient for the renewal and salvation of man. But, as an idealistic philosopher, Origen transformed the whole content of ecclesiastical faith into ideas . . . . [In this system] it was taught that the wise man who no longer requires anything is nearest the Deity, because he is a partaker of the highest good through possession of his rich Ego and through his calm contemplation of the world; here moreover it was proclaimed that the mind that has freed itself from the sensuous and lives in constant contemplation of the eternal is also in the end vouchsafed a view of the invisible and is itself deified. [1]

As Harnack points out, a subtle form of dualism creeps into Origen's thought:

> In the final utterances of religious metaphysics ecclesiastical Christianity, with the exception of a few compromises, is thrown off as a husk. The objects of religious knowledge have no history of rather, and this is a genuinely Gnostic and Neoplatonic idea, they have only a supramundane one.
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> The system itself is to be, in principle and in every respect, monistic, but, as the material world, though created by God out of nothing, merely appears as a place of punishment and purification for souls, a strong element of dualism is inherent in the system, as far as its practical application is concerned. [2]

Such is the system of Origen. His use of allegorical exegesis, especially on the Old Testament, had both an indirect and a direct influence. His philosophical justification of asceticism broadly influenced the beginnings of monasticism. His theological system paved the way for later theology, both as a justification of it and as an influence on it. It is in the working out of his system that he falls into a dualism which we have already seen in Plato and Plotinus. His dis-

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[1] Harnack, Vol. II, pp. 336-37. [2] Ibid., p. 343.

tinction of Pistis and Gnosis, belief and knowledge, separated them too radically to be allowed to go unchallenged; but it is a foreshadowing of later such tendencies, for example the 'Believers' and the 'Perfect' of the Catharist heresy. It is a forerunner of the dichotomy of 'this-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness' which runs as a thread through the Middle Ages and which had as a by-product the clerical attacks on women. Augustine was needed, along with a tradition of conservative theology, to effect a full-scale accommodation.

CHAPTER V

ST. AUGUSTINE

> When Neoplatonism became a decisive element in Augustine's religious and philosophical mode of thought, it did so also for the whole of the West.[1]

> He loathed the life of sensual indulgence he had led; and from that time forth 'concupiscence' was for him the prime and typical sin. . . . the Platonists no less than Paul taught him that to begin its ascent to God the soul must emancipate itself from the desires of the flesh.[2]

> What maketh the heart of the Christian heavy? The fact that he is a pilgrim, and longs for his country.[3]

Everyone knows Augustine's famous story of how reading the Neoplatonists helped to save him from Manichaeism and to lead him to Christianity. What is not so clear, however, is the extent to which the still employed Neoplatonic doctrines and trains of thought after he

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[1] Harnack, Vol. V, p. 33.

[2] George Foote Moore, History of Religions, (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1913 & 1919; repr. 1949), Vol. II, p. 194.

[3] St. Augustine, "Commentary on Psalm CXXIII," Quoted in Will Durant, The Age of Faith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), p. 74. Durant comments that this could serve as Augustine's epitaph.

became a Christian writer. The tendency lately has been to admit that Neoplatonism is embedded in Augustine's thought, although it is transmuted there somewhat. Feibleman, for example, asserts:

> Augustine . . . was heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, and he may have been chiefly responsible for incorporating it in Church doctrine.[1]

Professor Latourette is more cautious in taking essentially the same stand:

> The Neoplatonic elements in the Bishop of Hippo can easily be exaggerated, for it was not they but his experience in his final faith which brought him into prominence, but he could not, even if he had so desired, quite have erased the impression made on him by his former associations. His developed theology was largely a combination of Neoplatonism with traditionally Christian views.[2]

Of course there are essential differences between the doctrine of Augustine and that of Plotinus, or even of Origen. Religious historians have quite rightly called Augustine's thought a composite of Eastern influences, chiefly Neoplatonic, and Western influences, chiefly from Tertullian and Cyprian. Part of the complexity of Augustine's doctrine lies in the fact that it is an amalgam of the speculative, largely on Neoplatonic lines, and the traditional, Western Church doctrine. The speculative will be of most interest to us, for it was here that Augustine had his greatest influence on the history of Christian asceticism, and

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[1]James K. Feibleman, Religious Platonism, (London: Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 171.

[2]Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Vol. I, The First Five Centuries (New York: Harper, 1937), p. 312.

hence on the debate about women. Some have argued that this asceticism is as much Pauline as Neoplatonic, and there may be something to this, but Paul and Neoplatonism are inextricably linked in Augustine's thought:

> . . . unless all signs deceive, Augustine received from Victorinus the impulse which led him to assimilate Paul's type of religious thought; for it appears from the works of the aged rhetorician that he had appropriated Paul's characteristic ideas, and Augustine demonstrably devoted a patient study to the Pauline epistles from the moment when he became more thoroughly acquainted with Neoplatonism. [1]

It may be instructive to remember that the first two appearances of Pauline doctrines as matters of extended exposition were in the writings of the time of the Alexandrians and in that of St. Augustine. Before the days of Clement and Origen, commentaries had been mainly on the four Gospels. The Alexandrians concentrated on the Gospel According to St. John and on the Pauline works in the New Testament. From that time until the high Middle Ages, Pauline doctrine and Neoplatonically oriented Christianity were closely linked.

The discussion of the philosophical background of antifeminism will close with St. Augustine, because with him asceticism as an official ideal thoroughly and permanently entered the mainstream of Christianity. His advocacy of asceticism is more restrained than most of the great thinkers who preceded him, but he, followed by Boethius and then by the pseudo-Areopagite, is the main source of the philosophical justification

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[1] Harnack, Vol. V, p. 33.

of asceticism,[1] although certain writings of Ambrose and Jerome were used for added authority.

The rise of monasticism coincided with the growth of theological justifications of asceticism. Ascetic tendencies had been present in Christianity from the first, but they had usually been individual and practiced within the communities. These communities were beset from without, so that asceticism functioned in an environment by no means at odds with it. Taylor comments,

> If the Christian churches had been kept continually in the purifying fires of persecution, ascetic devotion might have continued to find within them scope for its energy and safeguards for its life. The persecuted and the martyred did not need to crucify the flesh in the desert. Whenever persecution ceased, laxity of manners and morals invaded Christian communities. From the time of Constantine, it became convenient for the world, evil and good, to cloak itself with Christianity. The tremendous increase of monasticism, and of the celibate life even outside of monasteries, was the answering protest of the fervent Christian life . . . . Not in times of persecution, but after the Church had this world's peace, their tens became thousands.[2]

Biblical justifications of this flight from ordinary society were scant at best. A saying of Christ that His kingdom was not of this world could be countered by others enjoining positive good works within the society of men. The impulse to flee from the corrupt world of men was present, nevertheless, and it found support in Neoplatonic writings, both pagan and Christian. The impulse of St. Anthony to flee into the desert could strike an answering cord in the heart of Augustine when he

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Taylor, p. 150.

read of it, and the same kind of impulse could serve as a motivating force in his conversion and in his lifelong advocacy of asceticism.

The two other great Church Fathers of the same period, Ambrose and Jerome, also gave force to this tendency, both in their influence on Augustine and in the influence of their own writings; therefore, a brief discussion of them will help to keep from overemphasizing this element of Augustine's thought or treating him as if he were a pioneer of ascetic writing in the West. Nothing could be more untrue. Many of the earlier writers had defended asceticism. But none of them had both the philosophical system and the impact on later thought to have the influence of Augustine. We have already seen the influence of Victorinus, for example, on Augustine. Harnack asserts that

> when we study the works of Victorinus . . . we are astonished to find in him a perfect Neoplatonist, and an Augustine before Augustine.[1]

But other than his influence on Augustine, Victorinus had little lasting effect on the history of asceticism.

If Victorinus was one direct route by which Neoplatonism influenced Augustine, Ambrose was another; Ambrose it was who had helped to convert Augustine and had baptized him after his conversion. Ambrose had himself been converted by Simplicianus, the man who in Book VIII of the Confessions tells Augustine of the miraculous conversion of Victorinus. Like St. Jerome, Ambrose was a reader of Origen and even,

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[1]Harnack, Vol. V, p. 33.

according to Jerome, a translator of some of his works.[1] Harnack says of this influence,

> Ambrose was sovereign among Western Bishops, and at the same time the Greek trained exegete and theologian. In both qualities he acted on Augustine, who looked up to him as Luther did to Staupitz.[2]
> . . . . . .
> It is true Ambrose had his own reservations in dealing with Plato and Origen; he did not adopt the consequences of Origen's theology; he was much too hasty and superficial in the sphere of speculative reflection to appropriate from the Greeks more than fragments. But he, as well as the heavier but more thorough Hilary, raised the West above the 'meagreness' of a pedantically literal, and, in its practical application, wholly planless exegesis; and they transmitted to their countrymen a profusion of ideas attached to the text of Holy Scripture. Rufinus and, in his first period, Jerome also completed the work. Manichaeism would hardly have been overcome in the West unless it had been confronted by the theosophic exegesis, the 'Biblical alchemy' of the Greeks, and the great theme of virginity was praised with new tongues after Western Christians heard of the union of the soul with its bridegroom, Christ, as taught by Origen in his commentary on the Song of Songs.[3]

Ambrose is, then, an intermediary between Origen and Augustine. The laudatory terms which Augustine uses in referring to him are indication enough of the influence he had on Augustine. More than one historian, however, has pointed out that Ambrose himself was by no means original, but much indebted to the Greeks. James F. Loughlin, for example, in an article in the Catholic Encyclopedia, says,

> With a genius truly Roman, he contended himself with thoroughly digesting and casting into a Latin mould the best fruits of Greek thought.[4]

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[1] St. Jerome, "Letter LXXXIV," Trans. W. H. Freemantle ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, Vol. VI), p. 179.

[2] Harnack, Vol. V, p. 30. [3] Ibid., p. 32.

[4] James F. Loughlin, "Ambrose," Catholic Ency., Vol. I, p. 384.

Later, Loughlin elaborates on this:

> He delights in the allegorico-mystical interpretation of Scripture, i.e. while admitting the natural or literal sense he seeks everywhere a deeper mystic meaning that he converts into practical instruction for Christian life. In this, says Jerome (Ep. xli), 'he was a disciple of Origen, but after the modifications in that master's manner due to St. Hippolytus of Rome and St. Basil the Great.' He was also influenced in this direction by the Jewish writer Philo to such an extent that the much corrupted text of the latter can often be successfully corrected from the echoes and reminiscences as met with in the works of Ambrose. [1]

Philo and Origen are names we have met before, of course, and the names of Basil and Hippolytus are important to this study only in that they helped to pass on and reinforce the doctrines of Neoplatonized Christianity. For our purposes, the greatest importance of the writings of Ambrose is that they reinforced certain tendencies which were already present, especially Neoplatonic tendencies and the glorification of virginity. The latter will be touched upon in a later section; the former element flows into the work of St. Augustine:

> Not only Victorinus, but ultimately also Ambrose himself, Optatus, Cyprian, and Tertullian were lost to view in Augustine; but they made him the proud stream in whose waters the banks are mirrored and on whose bosom the ships, and which fertilises and passes through a whole region of the world. [2]

The influence of Jerome on Augustine is more problematical. As we have seen before, Jerome translated from Origen's works. Because by his own admission, Augustine's knowledge of Greek was very weak and of Hebrew nonexistent, the influence of Jerome's translation

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[1] Ibid., p. 387.

[2] Harnack, Vol. V, pp. 35-36.

of the Vulgate must have been great. Without the Vulgate, Augustine's writings would surely have been somewhat different. But whether, in addition to his translations, Jerome's philosophic writings had any effect is more difficult to say. Harnack denies any:

> We may disregard Jerome; he had no importance for Augustine, or if he had any, it was only in confirming the latter in his conservative attitude. This, indeed, did not refer to Jerome's learning, which to Augustine was always something uncanny and even suspicious.[1]

Harnack asserts that Jerome's greatest effect was that "his writings implanted monachism."[2] Whatever the value of this as an evaluation of Jerome's role in the history of theology, his value for our purposes lies not in his philosophic influence on Augustine or in his contribution to supporting the philosophical bases of asceticism. He figures in the active implementing of asceticism, and therefore will be discussed in the next section.

It is not possible to summarize in a chapter the thought of St. Augustine; fortunately, it is not necessary to do so. As with Plato, only a part of the thought of Augustine is relevant in the history of the philosophical justification of asceticism. As the compiler of A Monument to St. Augustine defines the purpose of that work, so this summary is addressed to

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[1] Ibid., p. 30n.

[2] Ibid.

> the more general aspects of St. Augustine's thought: to St. Augustine the Philosopher, the Sociologist and the Man of Letters, not to St. Augustine the Doctor of Grace and the Ecclesiologist.[1]

In the latter roles, of course, St. Augustine had a tremendous influence on Church history and doctrine. In these roles he also was an unconscious force in the rise of monasticism, and so had a role in that way also. But his most important service in the history of Christian asceticism is in the report of his own experiences and in his Neoplatonically oriented, philosophical support of asceticism.

When in the Confessions Augustine rejected his sensual former life, and when he defended this rejection by means of Neoplatonic modes of thought, he decisively introduced Neoplatonic thought into the religious philosophy of the West up to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas -- and beyond. The extent of the later influence of the pseudo-Dionysius, Macrobius, and Boethius is more easily explained if we remember that the enormous prestige of Augustine had prepared the way for the acceptance of Neoplatonic habits of thought. In fact, Rufus M. Jones calls Augustine "the real father of Catholic mysticism,"[2] and goes on to say,

> The general type of his mysticism is Platonic. The mind itself, or at least that which is 'at the top of the mind,' may directly apprehend God.[3]

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[1] T. F. B., A Monument to St. Augustine (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), p. 7.

[2] Rufus M. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 87.

[3] Ibid., p. 91.

The system of Aquinas gave much less support to this sort of mystical leap than did the system of Augustine. Perhaps it is significant that asceticism does not hold such a dominant place in the thought of the Middle Ages after Aquinas: Aquinas had rejected that part of Augustine's thought which was connected with the Platonic Ideas in favor of a more pedestrian, more specifically rational mode of thought. There is less support for the mystical 'leaps' to knowledge and contact with the divine in the system of Aquinas with its emphasis on rational processes than in that of Augustine with his acceptance of the Ideas which are apprehended not so much rationally as emotionally. But until the time of Aquinas, the ascetic life could be coupled with a promise of mystical apprehensions of divine truths.

Not only his philosophy but also his own experience in the garden in Milan gave support to this kind of mystical revelation. Neoplatonism had started the conversion of Augustine by saving him from Manichaeism; the mystical experience of hearing a child's voice saying "Take and read" and his opening the Bible immediately to the right passage for his salvation -- this experience completed his conversion. It is not surprising, then, that Neoplatonism and mysticism loom large in Augustine's philosophy. The text which changed Augustine's life, he says, is Rom. 13.13, 14. It is instructive to compare the text with his ascetic bias:

> Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,

> and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Neoplatonism's saving of Augustine from the errors of Manichaeism was not its first victory over a mystery-religion. From the beginning it had been in conflict with them. Porphyry tells of several Christian Gnostics in Italy during the time of Plotinus who had exhibited ". . . Revelations bearing the names of Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Mesus, and others of that order,"[1] and who claimed that Plato had failed to understand the nature of the other world. Plotinus attacked these people in a treatise entitled "Against the Gnostics," which is reproduced in the second Ennead.

At about the same time that Plotinus was writing against the Italian Gnostics, Clement and Origen were opposing the Gnostics, Christian and otherwise, in Alexandria. Clement and, as we have seen, later Origen opposed the misled Gnostics with the 'true' Gnostic, who apprehended the real nature of the Creation and of Christ the Logos.

Neoplatonism did yeoman work against the ditheistic mystery-religions because it was a system based on the supreme originating and sustaining power of the One. It was through their ditheism that the Gnostics were most vulnerable to Neoplatonism with its thorough system based on the unity of the One, from which all else emanated. The One is good, says Plotinus, and it is the final cause of all that is.

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[1] Enneads, p. 11.

> We have seen elsewhere that the Good, the Principle, is simplex, and correspondingly, primal -- for the secondary can never be simplex: that it contains nothing: that it is integral Unity.[1]

Thus Plotinus begins his treatise against the Gnostics. The First Principle, he says, cannot be dual; it must be one. The identity of the Good and the One is sufficient answer to those who perceive both a good and an evil principle in the origin of all that is:

> When we speak of The One and when we speak of the Good, we must recognize an identical nature . . . .[2]

This use of the philosophical to aid the religious in his own experience was only the first instance of Augustine's merging of the two; indeed, it is difficult to separate the two in his thought. He brought together Neoplatonic asceticism and Christian tradition, and wedded them to the framework of Church doctrine. Complex himself, Augustine could be greatly influenced by two such different figures as Plotinus and Tertullian.

It will not do to think of Augustine, as some have done, as a Neoplatonist who holds his philosophy in an uneasy balance with his religion. Inconsistencies there certainly are in Augustine's thought -- he saw this well enough to write his Retractions -- but they are more often than not weaknesses which he was led into in the heat of controversy. As we can see in the Confessions, Augustine understood pretty well his debt to Neoplatonism, and his enumeration of the ways in which

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[1] Ibid., p. 132. [2] Ibid.

the Neoplatonists differed essentially from the Christians is still a good beginning on the subject. But Augustine added to that philosophy elements totally foreign to it before -- first, a Redeemer who had become flesh. Origen had done this before, of course, but he had failed to add two other elements -- a sense of the pervasiveness of sin in human nature and the assertion of the total inability of man to aid in his own salvation.

Before Augustine, Origen had employed Neoplatonism in constructing a religious philosophy; but Origen had thought of evil in more strictly Neoplatonic terms. Origen foresaw a succession of worlds in which souls were attracted down to matter, only to escape from it back up to the spiritual world. Evil for Origen, then, was only a temporary condition of the soul in its contact with matter. Because he did not have a sense of the sinfulness of human nature, he did not provide for any punishment after death. Existence for him was a succession of purifying experiences for all souls. As mentioned earlier, the idea of sin for Plotinus would have been meaningless. Insofar as it was able, the soul tried to escape from matter and return to the spiritual world; existence in the flesh was damnation enough. Augustine was the first great thinker to add to the Neoplatonic scale of being the sense of the sinfulness and complete unworthiness of all that existed below the level of the angels.

In his career Augustine was engaged against three great heresies: the Manichaean, the Donatist, and the Pelagian. We have already seen how against the ditheism of the first could be employed the Neoplatonist arguments for the single origin of all things. Against the Donatists, he asserted the primacy of the Church and its eternal existence. Against the Pelagians, he clarified the doctrine of grace and man's total helplessness without it. Also against the Pelagians, he elaborated the doctrine of original sin and the Fall brought about by Adam's corrupted will.

Not in seclusion but actively engaged in seeking his own way out of intellectual and spiritual difficulties did Augustine develop his thought. In his answers to the rival doctrines of the three heresies, Augustine created the bases of his own thought. Against the Manichaeans, he developed his ideas concerning the freedom of the will and the nature of God. Against the Donatists, he developed his ecclesiastical thought. And against the Pelagians, he further developed his thoughts on hereditary sin, the corrupted will which yet is free, the necessity of grace for salvation, and the doctrine of vitiated nature which led him to declare that after the Fall, sex had turned to evil lust.

Perhaps with no other philosopher -- certainly with none of those studied so far -- were actual experience and the progress of thought so allied as in the case of Augustine. He was an adherent of or chief adversary of every major system of his day. Before his conversion to the fourth, Christianity, was completed, he went successively

through the three major systems of his time -- Manichaeism, Scepticism, and Neoplatonism. After his conversion, he wrote against the first two, though he was never quite able to repudiate, even intellectually, the third. He also wrote against the two other (besides Manichaeism) heresies of the time -- the Donatist and the Pelagian.

Because Augustine was involved in virtually everything which challenged traditional Christian thought, his thought was molded on the anvil of experience. Because this is true, an examination of his biography seems a good way of being a study of his thought -- or at any rate that portion of it which bears on asceticism. This seems especially fruitful because his Confessions is at once his most biographical work -- being a record of his intellectual and spiritual development -- and also his most mystical.

As Dom Cuthbert Butler says,

> St. Augustine's Confessions is a Christian classic so widely read that his personality is among the best known in history.[1]

A brief sketch of his life up to his contact with Neoplatonism, therefore, should suffice to bring his early life to mind.[2] He was born at Tagaste, not far from Carthage, in 354, the son of a Christian mother and a middle-class, pagan father -- Monnica and Patricius. The very different

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[1] Dom Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism (London: Constable, 1922; repr. Dublin: Arrow Books, 1960), p. 79.

[2] For a discussion of Augustine's early period, see W. J. Sparrow Simpson, St. Augustine's Conversion (New York: Macmillan, 1930).

characters of the two gave to Augustine a complex nature -- at once passionate and intellectual like his father's, and patient and open like his mother's. Augustine's mother bore with saintly forbearance the infidelities and violent temper of his father; and Patricius was at last converted and baptized just before his death in 370.

Both Monnica and Patricius recognized the talents of their son, and thought he was not baptized early, he was enrolled as a catechumen while yet a child. Patricius supplemented his education with instruction in the classics. At eleven Augustine was ready for advanced studies and was sent to Madaura, twenty miles south of Tagaste. He remained there until he was sixteen, becoming well-grounded in the classical authors and increasingly skillful in Latin grammar and rhetoric -- though he failed to gain more than a slight knowledge of Greek. For a year he was forced to be idle in Tagaste through a lack of funds, but at seventeen he went off to school in Carthage aided by a wealthy fellow-townsman named Romanianus. He was soon the best student in the rhetoric school in Carthage.[1]

In Carthage it was, he says, that he became the servant of his physical desires, not to be freed for many years:

> To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I succeeded in enjoying the person I loved. I befouled the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I dimmed its

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[1] Vernon J. Bourke, Augustine's Quest of Wisdom (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1945), p. 16.

> lustre with the hell of lustfulness; and yet, foul and dishonorable as I was, I craved, through an excess of vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. I fell precipitately, then, into the love in which I longed to be ensnared.[1]

At the age of sixteen Augustine had by his mistress a son whom they called Adeodatus, 'the gift of God.'

At nineteen -- just when Augustine had begun to feel a restless need for something more than he had found in his rhetoric classes and in his life with his mistress and child -- he read the Hortensius of Cicero, which praised the things of the mind over those of the body. Bourke comments on this work,

> The fragmentary quotations from this work, now available, are not at all striking, but Augustine was probably just at a point in his intellectual development at which he was ready to begin to think of the more serious problems of life. Hitherto, he had been interested chiefly in questions of form, of elegance in speech. With the reading of the Hortensius, his mind was turned to the quest of truth, of the wisdom of philosophers.[2]

In Book III of the Confessions, Augustine himself graphically describes the effect of the work on him:

> How ardent was I then, my God, how ardent to fly from earthly things to Thee![3]

Inflamed as he was, Augustine turned from the Hortensius to Scripture, only to be disappointed:

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[1] St. Augustine, Confessions, trans. J. J. Pilkington ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Vol. I), p. 60. Cited hereafter as Confessions.

[2] Bourke, pp. 16-17.

[3] Confessions, p. 62.

> . . . not as when now I speak did I feel when I turned towards those Scriptures, but they appeared to me to be unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully; for my inflated pride shunned their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit pierce their inner meaning.[1]

Disappointed, he turned to Manichaeism, which he professed for almost ten years.

Neoplatonism, as we have seen, has a tendency to be dualistic; but the description pales before the extremity of the Manichaeist dualism. As Albert H. Newman says, "Mani taught dualism in its most unqualified sense."[2] In this regard Newman quotes a passage from the Kitab al Fihrist -- with Augustine, one of the few reliable sources of information about Manichaeism:

> Mani teaches: Two subsistences form the beginning of the world, the one light the other darkness; the two are separated from each other. The light is the first most glorious being, limited by no number, God himself, most glorious being, limited by no number, God himself, the King of the Paradise of Light, with these his attributes, is without beginning, but with him two equally eternal things likewise exist, the one the atmosphere, the other the earth . . . . The other being is the darkness . . . . Mani teaches: that the light subsistence borders immediately on the dark subsistence, without a dividing wall between them; the light touches with its (lowest) side the darkness, while upwards to the right and left it is unbounded. Even so the darkness is endless downwards and to the right and left.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Albert H. Newman, "The Manichaean Heresy," (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Vol. IV), p. 11.

[3] Ibid.

Newman comments that "this represents Mani's view of the eternally existent status quo, before the conflict began, and the endless state after the conflict ceases."[1]

Mani had an answer to the question of why the two kingdoms did not remain separated:

> The Princes of Darkness became enamored of the light and launched an attack upon the realm of Spirit. To meet this attack God sent forth an emanation of Himself, called Primary Man (Primus Homo), to do battle with the demons. But Primary Man was at first overwhelmed by Eblis, the leader of the demons, and a part of his panoply (the five pure elements) was taken from him. Then the God of Light Himself, with the assistance of some new aeons, rescued Primary Man. But Primordial Man had already lost to Eblis his five 'finer elements' (the Gentle Breeze, the Wind, the Light, the Water, the Fire). Five elements of darkness (Smoke, Burning, Darkness, Hot Wind, and Cloud) had become mixed with these, and so the finer elements were trapped. To liberate these finer elements, the God of Light then created the visible world from these mingled elements, and this created act was the beginning of the liberation of the imprisoned elements . . . . Now the sun was the abode of Primordial Man. When the sun had received all the light that could possibly be liberated by being caught in buckets and poured into it , a fire would be kindled on the earth to burn for 1468 years, when no light would be left; then the King of Darkness and his demons would withdraw into the pit prepared for them beneath their kingdom of darkness.[2]

To this greatly altered Zoroastrian scheme, Mani added elements from Scripture (though not nearly so many as later Manichaeans). The Primordial Man was not Adam, but preceded Adam. As a part of the

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Stanley R. Hopper, "The AntiManichaean Writings," A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford Univ., 1955), pp. 151-52.

Kingdom, the former was an aeon and therefore purely spiritual. The Kingdom of Darkness was material; and all that between the two kingdoms was a mixture of the two brought about by demons trying to capture light after the defeat of Primordial Man.

> Hereupon, one of these Arch-fiends and [one] of the Stars, and Overmastering Violence, Avarice, Lust, and Sin, copulated, and from their copulation sprang the first man, who is Adam, two Arch-fiends, a male and a female, directing the process. A second copulation followed and from this sprang the beautiful woman who is Eve.[1]

When the Angels saw what had happened, they prayed for someone to free man; in response, Jesus was sent, accompanied by a god. These two seized the Arch-fiends and imprisoned them, freeing Adam and Eve.

> Jesus warned Adam of Eve's violent importunity, and Adam obeyed his injunction not to go near her. One of the Arch-fiends, however, begat with her a son named Cain, who in turn begat Abel of his mother, and afterwards two maidens, Worldly-wise and Daughter-of-Avarice. Cain took the first to wife and gave the other to Abel. An angel having begotten of Worldly-wise two beautiful daughters, Raufarjad and Barfarjad, Abel accused Cain of the act. Cain enraged by the accusation slew Abel and took Worldly-wise to wife. So far Adam had kept himself pure, but Eve was instructed by a demon in the art of enchanting, and she was enabled to excite his lust and entrap him. By Adam she bore a beautiful son, whom the demon urged Eve to destroy. Adam stole the child away and brought it up . . . . This son was named Seth . . . . Adam once more yielded to Eve's fascinations, but through Seth's exhortations was induced to flee 'eastward to the light and the wisdom of God.' Adam, Seth, Raufarjad, Barfarjad, and Worldly-wise died and went to Paradise; while Eve, Cain, and Daugher-of-Avarice went to Hell.[2]

It should be remarked that, unlike Adam, Eve was born with only a tiny spark of light.

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[1] Newman, p. 14.

[2] Ibid., p. 15.

In the practical application of Mani's teaching in the cult, two kinds of believers are described, the Elect or Perfect and the Hearers, a division to crop up in later heresies such as the Catharist. The Elect are those who devote themselves to a rigid asceticism. Mani says,

> It is incumbent upon him who will enter into the religion that he prove himself, and that if he sees that he is able to subdue lust and avarice, to leave off eating of all kinds of flesh, the drinking of wine, and connubial intercourse, and to withold himself from what is injurious in water, fire, magic and hypocrisy, he may enter into the religion; but if not let him abstain from entering. But if he loves religion, yet is not able to repress sensuality and avarice, yet he may make himself serviceable for the maintenance of religion and of the Truthful [i.e. the Elect], and may meet (offset) his corrupt deeds through the use of opportunities where he wholly gives himself up to activity, righteousness, zealous watchfulness, prayer and pious humiliation; for this suffices him in this transitory world and in the future eternal world, and his form in the last day will be the second form. . . .[1]

This is the system to which Augustine paid allegiance for almost ten years of his life. This account of it has been somewhat extended because it is the most important of all the heresies in its influence, and also because it represents the most extreme form of the dualism and hatred of the material which is always a tendency in asceticism. It not only influenced the rise of later heresies such as the Albigensian and Catharist, but it also was still a major problem in its own right in the time of Aquinas, who, according to a famous anecdote, was lost in thought at a banquet for some time, then suddenly brought his fist

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[1] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

crashing down on a table and exclaimed, "And that should settle the Manichees." Perhaps the secret of its long life lies in its use of Scripture for its own purposes, and in its exaggeration of what was already present in various ascetic systems.

For almost ten years, then, Augustine gave at least intellectual assent, if not emotional commitment, to an extremely dualistic, extremely (at least in theory) ascetic system. Book V of the Confessions tells how he began to doubt Manichaeism. It was the cosmology, he says, which he first began to doubt. The philosophers, says Augustine, worked out a very different system of astronomy, foretelling eclipses, equinoxes, solstices, and other phenomena not taken into account in the Manichaean system. "Nor did their calculations fail them; and it came to pass even as they foretold."[1]

These and other doubts Augustine says he allayed in anticipation of the coming of the great Manichaean bishop, Faustus, who was to answer his questions. Augustine soon found, however, that Faustus was simply an elegant orator, totally unable to resolve his doubts. He began to turn from the Manichaean, and said of the experience later,

> Thus that Faustus, who had entrapped so many to their death, -- neither willing nor witting it, -- now began to loosen the snare into which I had been taken.[2]

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[1] Confessions, p. 80. [2] Ibid., p. 83.

Of this time in Augustine's life, Newman comments,

> From this time Augustin's faith was shaken, and he was soon able to throw off completely the yoke that had become too grievous to be borne. But to reject Manichaeism was not necessarily to become an orthodox Christian. Augustin finds himself still greatly perplexed about the nature of God and the origin of evil, problems the somewhat plausible Manichaean solutions of which had ensnared him. [1]

After he began to doubt the possibility of finding any truth, Augustine was attracted for a little while to Scepticism, but then he began to read 'some writings of the Platonists' -- almost certainly translations of Plotinus. As he himself understood, it was Neoplatonism which enabled him finally to reject the lingering influences of Manichaeism. He still believed, he says, first in "two masses, the one opposed to the other, both infinite, but the evil more contracted, the good more expansive." [2] The nature of Christ he also still misunderstood; the Manichaeans called the sun 'Christ' and worshipped it. Even after he had rejected the faith, he says, he still believed Christ

> to have been reached for, as it were, for our salvation out of the lump of Thy most effulgent mass . . . . I was afraid . . . to believe Him born in the flesh, lest I should be compelled to believe Him contaminated by the flesh. [3]

As we have seen, the first belief -- in an extreme dualism -- could be successfully opposed by Neoplatonism. As for the second of these -- the belief in the corruption of the spirit by the flesh -- it

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[1] Newman, p. 27.

[2] Confessions, p. 86.

[3] Ibid., p. 87.

is not so clear that Augustine ever completely divested himself of that. Neoplatonism did not solve all of his problems -- it had its own inherent tendency to a kind of Cartesian body-spirit dichotomy -- but it did enable him completely to rid himself of the specifically Manichaean doctrines.

In the first place Neoplatonism answered Augustine's most basic questions about the nature of God. As Newman says, for almost all the statements about God which can be found in the strictly anti-Manichaean writings, ". . . an almost exact parallel can be pointed out in the writings of Plotinus, the Neo-Platonic writer with whom Augustin was most conversant."[1] Newman summarizes these statements as follows:

> With Augustin God is absolutely simple and immutable, incomprehensible by men in their present state of existence, exalted above all human powers of thought or expression. All things may be said of God, and yet nothing worthily . . . . He is better known by not being known; it is easier to say what He is not, than what He is. God is wanting in qualities; has no variety and multitude of properties and attributes; is absolutely simple . . . . There is no discrimination in God or substance and accidents, of potency and act, of matter and form, of universal and singular, of superior and inferior. To know, to will, to do, to be, are in God equivalent and identical . . . . God makes new things, without being Himself new, unchangeable He makes changeable things, He always works and always rests. The changes that take place in the world do not fall in the will of God, but solely in the things moved by God.[2]

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[1] Newman, p. 28.

[2] Ibid.

Even the style of defining by paradoxes is straight out of Plotinus. In these descriptions, as Newman says, Augustine "narrowly escapes fatalism on the one hand, and denial of the true personality of God on the other." Some of the doctrines would be modified later, but they were effective in the polemics against the Manichaeans.

Augustine's first argument against the Manichaeans came from a question he had learned in Carthage from his friend Nebridius, a question, he says, which disturbed "all we who heard it":

> What could that reputed nation of darkness . . . have done unto Thee hadst Thou objected to fight with it? For had it been answered, 'It would have done Thee some injury, then shouldst Thou be subject to violence and corruption; but if the reply were: 'It could do Thee no injury, then was no cause assigned for Thy fighting with it . . . . So that should they affirm Thee . . . to be incorruptible, then were all these assertions false and execrable; but if corruptible, then that were false, and at the first utterance to be abhorred.[1]

Hopper comments that this was a favorite argument of Augustine's; "the same argument occurs, with variations, in his book On the Morals of the Manichaeans, and in his Nature of the Good, against the Manichaeans."[2]

Augustine perceived that the central point of Manichaean doctrine was the theory of evil, and it was here that he attacked them the most vigorously. Hopper comments that Augustine's "conversion to 'Neoplatonism and good habits' at just this point in his development is to

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[1] Confessions, p. 103. [2] Hopper, p. 159.

some extent crucial for the history of Christian thought."[1] After Augustine orthodox Christian philosophers and theologians followed essentially his view of evil as having no existence of its own but as being simply the deprivation of good. Augustine derives from the Neoplatonists (taken both by him and by Plotinus from Aristotle's metaphysics) the identification of God as both the Essential Being and the Good. If -- as proved in the single origin of all things -- all that is has its being from God (Who is absolute Being), and if all that is has its goodness from God (Who is also absolute Good), then that which is not good in a thing can not come from God; and if it is not from God, it is not. Evil, therefore, is nothing in itself, but is simply the absence of goodness. Thus from his definition of the nature of God and his attribution of all creation to God, which he derived primarily from the Neoplatonists, Augustine was able to derive the idea of evil as nonbeing.

This definition of evil, which was repeated by others up to and including Aquinas, enabled Augustine to solve his own persona dilemma and at the same time to oppose a system which posited a finite, less-than-omnipotent, corruptible deity. Hopper points out the difficulty, however, into which his opposition of Neoplatonic to Manichaean doctrine led Augustine. It comes from Augustine's failure

> to distinguish between 'defect' as the nonbeing of something and the defectio as an act (or, as Irenaeus says, an apostasy). As a

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[1] Ibid., p. 168.

> result nature (ontology) is ranked higher than personality, and Kierkegaard's insight that 'sin is not a negation but a position' is lost.[1]

This is the difficulty, then, in Augustine's position on evil: by insisting on the identity of a scale of being and a scale of goodness, he is led into the extreme asceticism of the Neoplatonist who strives to take flight from this world of mere becoming and lesser being for contact with the world of higher being and goodness. Hopper admits that "this naturalizing, or ontologizing, of the contents of moral action results in an ethic of denial of the world and asceticism,"[2] but he denies the assertion of Harnack that this is due to the "retention of Manichaean influence."[3] "The real point," says Hopper, "is that the Neoplatonic world view also produces a dualistic ethic."[4] That this is true we have already seen; that it is the answer to the source of Augustine's lingering dualism seems probable. Augustine was enabled to discard an extremely dualistic system, Manichaeism, by one, Neoplatonism, which also by an internal logic was dualistic. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he paid for discarding ditheism by accepting the dualistic tendencies of Neoplatonism.

In line with the certain influence of Ambrose and the very probable influence of Origen on Augustine's discarding of Manichaeism may

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See Harnack, Vol. V, pp. 102, 211n.

[4] Hopper, p. 169.

be mentioned his use of allegorical interpretation of Scripture to refute that sect. The Manichaeans thought they saw in the Old Testament the presence of the evil diety, who had brought about creation, in contrast to the good diety of the New Testament. Clement and Origen had encountered the same kind of objection to the Old Testament (that it was counter to the spirit of the New Testament) and had opposed it by means of allegory; Ambrose and Augustine did the same. In the heat of controversy, both went far beyond the implications of the text. Newman complains,

> It would be hard to find examples of more perverse allegorizing than Augustin's Anti-Manichaean treatises furnish. [1]

The extreme allegorical exegesis which we have seen allied with Neoplatonism in the writings of the Alexandrians appears now again in the writings of Ambrose and especially of Augustine. Paul and Neoplatonism and the great emphasis on exegesis which was supported by the text which said that the letter kills but the spirit gives life -- these all were brought together for good through the enormous influence of Augustine's writings. His conversion from the materialism of Manichaeism to the spiritualism of Neoplatonism was operative here also.

The next great heresy which Augustine opposed was the Donatist.

> Augustine was still occupied with the controversy with the Manichaeans, in which he so sharply emphasised the authority of the

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[1] Newman, p. 30.

> Catholic Church, when his ecclesiastical position -- Presbyter, A. D. 392, Bishop, A. D. 396, in Hippo -- compelled him to take up the fight with the Donatists.[1]

This controversy, while crucial in Church history, is important here primarily in that it insured that the influence of Augustine's writings would extend through the whole of the West and have the authority of the Church behind them.

The Donatists first of all denied the priesthood of any man who was a traditor; they also denied the validity of the ordination of any bishop who had been ordained by a traditor. To preserve itself from chaos, the Church had to oppose to this the conception of the sanctity of the office and of the institution, whatever the state of the individual in it. It asserted the objective, as opposed to the subjective, value of the sacraments: they had value no matter what the moral state of him who administered them. Augustine had already seen the need and value of an appeal to authority and opposed the Donatists in several writings.

Before him Optatus had stated the existence of the Church as an objective fact in itself. Augustine was in no sense original, but rather elaborating on views taken from Optatus and Cyprian. Harnack has a good summary of Augustine's use of the doctrine:

> Augustine's counter-argument, based on Cyprian, Ambrosiaster, and Optatus, but partly disavowing . . . the first-named, went far

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[1] Harnack, Vol. V, pp. 140-41.

> beyond a bare refutation of the separatists. He created the beginnings of a doctrine of the Church, and means of grace, of the Church institute of salvation, the organism of the good, i.e., of divine powers in the world. Nor did the Donatist controversy furnish him with his only motive for developing this doctrine. The dispute with the Manichaeans had already roused his interest in the authority of the Church, and led him to look more closely into it than his predecessors . . . . The Pelagian controversy, the state of the world, and the defence of Christianity against heathen attacks, had an extremely important influence on conceptions of the Church. Thus Augustine created the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church on earth . . . .[1]

For some time the Donatists were a potent force, especially in Africa (in Hippo, they were in the majority). Finally civil authority used force to suppress them at the behest of the Catholics and, after 407 A. D., with the support of Augustine on the use of force. For our purpose the important point is that the authority of the Church had been permanently established and, because of the prominence given to his writings by the Church, the influence of Augustine's ascetic writings was insured.

In opposing the Pelagian heresy, Augustine shifted his ground somewhat. He did not make any drastic changes in his basic thought, but he did change his emphasis at certain points. It was only after Augustine's soul-searching after his conversion that he was clear in his mind about the human application of some of his views, shifting to an emphasis of the role of the person in sin (as opposed to the 'naturalization' of evil to which Hopper alludes). Harnack points out,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 142-43.

> At the time of his fight with Manichaeism . . . he had rather emphasised, following the tradition of the Church teachers, the independence of human freedom, and had spoken of original sin merely as an inherited evil. It was his clerical office, a renewed study of Romans, and the criticism of his spiritual development, as instituted in the Confessions, that first led him to the Neoplatonic Christian conviction that all good, and therefore faith, came from God, and that man was only good and free in dependence on God.[1]

Contrary to what was once thought, Pelagianism was not a reaction to Augustine's doctrine of sin and grace, but had an independent growth.

> The two great types of thought, involving the question whether virtue or grace, morality or religion, the original and inalienable constitution of man, or the power of Jesus Christ was supreme, did not evolve themselves in the controversy. They gained in clearness and precision during its course, but both arose independently of each other, from the internal conditions of the Church.[2]

In his essay on the controversy between Augustine and the Pelagians, Professor Warfield stresses its inevitability; it was inevitable, he says,

> that sooner or later some one should arise who would so one-sidedly emphasize one element or the other of the Church's teaching as to salvation, as to throw himself into heresy, and drive the Church, through controversy with him, into a precise definition of the doctrines of free will and grace in their mutual relations.[3]

Paul Lehman distinguishes two underlying issues:

> In the order of their importance for Augustine, they are the fact and the nature of the grace of God in Christ, and the fact and the role of the will in the attainment by man of moral excellence.[4]

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[1] Harnack, Vol. V, p. 168. [2] Ibid., p. 169.

[3] B. B. Warfield, "On Augustin and the Pelagian Controversy," ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Vol. V), xiii.

[4] Paul Lehman, "The Anti-Pelagian Writings," A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse, (New York: Oxford Univ., 1955), p. 213.

Warfield states the question vividly:

> The real question at issue was whether there was any need for Christianity at all; whether by his own power man might not attain eternal felicity; whether the function of Christianity was to save, or only to render an eternity of happiness more easily attainable by man. [1]

The heresy began simply as an emphasis on the freedom of man's will, but because he did not reccgnize the distinction which Augustine saw between the freedom to will and the freedom to do what is willed, Pelagius was led into a very direct challenge of orthodox thought. We can see in this that his view of the striving of the soul for its salvation was like that of pagan philosophers who had no sense of the disabling effect of inherited sin. Jerome had this in mind when he spoke of Pelagianism as the "heresy of Pythagoras and Zeno." [2]

As we have seen, Augustine already held the orthodox views about inherited sin, enabling grace, and the atonement of Christ. He also, however, held to Neoplatonism which differed in certain essentials from orthodoxy in this respect. It was Pelagianism which led him clearly to formulate these ideas about grace and the will. The doctrine of grace, of course, had a tremendous effect on the later Church. But it is when he is writing on the corrupted will, the origin of evil, and inherited sin that Augustine plays his greatest role in the history of Christian ascetic thought.

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[1] Warfield, xiv.

[2] Quoted in Warfield, xiv.

Because they saw that in order to prove themselves orthodox they must show that their views were not at variance with traditional practice, the Pelagians began with a consideration of the baptism of infants. This was done, they said, not because the infants had inherited sin but rather that they might be consecrated to a Christian way of life.

> To the Pelagians, it seemed contrary both to nature and to Scripture to argue that infants must be baptized for the remission of sins and for deliverance from eternal death because Adam had sinned and been punished with death. [1]

The Pelagians asserted that the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge referred to the death of Adam in the soul and not in the body. Adam's body, they said, would have been subject to death even had he not fallen. Augustine first answered them in a treatise called On the Merit and Remissions of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants, in which he formulated the outlines of his refutation of the Pelagians. Because this long treatise does contain the essential features, developed against the Pelagians, of Augustine's thought as it bears on our subject, Augustine's fifteen-odd anti-Pelagian treatises will have to be represented by it. Certain of his other writings, however -- particularly On Marriage and Concupiscence, another anti-Pelagian writing -- will be considered in the next chapter.

Augustine opens the treatise by denying that physical death would have come to Adam if he had not sinned. Physical death, he asserts was one of the consequences of the Fall:

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[1] Lehman, p. 213.

> . . . he would, if he had not sinned, have been changed into a spiritual body, and would have passed into the incorruptible state, which is promised to the faithful and the saints, without peril of death.[1]

Augustine's aversion for the physical leads him, even here when he is opposing a view of the destructible nature of the body in the Adamic state, to follow Paul (I Cor. 15. 52, 53) in seeing the need for the body, even in its original state, to be changed into something more 'spiritual.'

In this and in what follows, Augustine uses Pauline passages to back up his interpretation of the Fall and to draw ascetic conclusions. Living according to the body, he says, is living according to death; and he quotes Rom. 8. 10: "But if Christ be in you, the body indeed is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." This is another proof, Augustine says, that Adam's sin brought death to the body. He quotes another passage from Paul -- Rom. 8. 12-13 -- and draws his conclusion:

> 'Therefore, brethren,' says he, 'we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live.' What else does this mean but this: If ye live according to death, ye shall wholly die; but if by living according to life ye mortify death, ye shall wholly live?[2]

Next, Augustine passes to the Pelagian contention that Adam's sin was passed on as a bad example but had no power of itself to injure

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[1] St. Augustine, On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Vol. V), p. 16. Cited hereafter as Forgiveness of Sins.

[2] Ibid.

those who followed. This is part of the crux of the whole matter and is the reason that the opponents started with the question of infant baptism. Both saw clearly that on this matter hinged all else. The Pelagians, says Augustine,

> refuse to believe that in infants original sin is remitted through baptism, for they contend that no such original sin exists at all in people by their birth. [1]

The very nature of man and his relation to God and to the Church was in question -- whether he was able of himself to effect his own salvation, the nature of Christ's sacrifice, the Church's role in the salvation of souls. Warfield describes the three corollaries of the Pelagian doctrine of the free will and power of man:

> It would be inexplicable on such an assumption, if no man had ever used his ability in keeping God's law; and Pelagius consistently asserted not only that all might be sinless if they chose, but also that many saints, even before Christ, had actually lived free from sin. Again it follows from man's inalienable ability to be free from sin, that each man comes into the world without entailment of sin or moral weakness from the past acts of men . . . . And still again, it follows from the same assumption of ability that man has no need of supernatural assistance grace in his striving to obey righteousness . . . . [2]

In countering the Pelagian contention that Adam did not pass on his sin directly but is only important as men imitate him, Augustine makes a distinction between actual sin and original sin:

> No doubt all they imitate Adam who by disobedience transgress the commandment of God; but he is one thing as an example to those who

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Warfield, xv.

> sin because they choose; and another thing as the progenitor of all who are born with sin. [1]

> The apostle . . . has declared concerning the first man, that 'in him all have sinned'; and yet there is still a contest about the propagation of sin, and men oppose to it I know not what nebulous theory of 'imitation.' [2]

Augustine opposes to this Pelagian doctrine of imitation his own orthodox one of propagation. The sin of the person is propagated at the same time that he is; only grace can remit it:

> . . . whilst by the generation of the flesh only that sin is contracted which is original; yet by the regeneration of the Spirit there is effected the remission not of original sin only, but also of the sins of man's own voluntary and actual commission. [3]

This idea of the sin which is inherited at the moment of propagation is one to which Augustine would return again -- particularly in writing on 'concupiscence' -- and the part which it played in the story of antifeminism was great, as will be seen more clearly in the next chapter. Augustine uses the rest of the first book of the treatise in proving that the reason for the universal custom of baptising infants is their inheritance of original sin.

This first book of the treatise is the one with greatest bearing on our topic in that it deals specifically with original sin and the Fall. The next books are simply elaborations of the first in dealing with the doctrine of the corrupted will of man and the primary need for grace. These

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[1] St. Augustine, Forgiveness of Sins, p. 18.

[2] Ibid., p. 19.

[3] Ibid., p. 22.

topics have much less bearing on Augustine's ascetic thought. After Book I he deals primarily with four questions: (1) whether a man could be sinless in this life, to which he answers that he could; (2) whether anyone ever has failed to sin in this life, to which he answers that no man ever has; (3) why no man has ever failed to sin in this life, to which he answers at length that men's wills are corrupted; and (4) whether any man ever could be without sin, to which he answers in the negative by expounding on the doctrine of original, inherited sin.

We may note one passage at the beginning of the second book of this treatise which sums up much of the preceding book and points toward similar passages to be treated in the next chapter of the present work:

> Concupiscence, therefore, as the law of sin which remains in the members of this body of death, is born with infants . . . . Unbaptized infants it implicates as guilty and as children of wrath, even if they die in infancy, draws into condemnation. In baptized adults, however, endowed with reason, whatever consent their mind gives to this concupiscence for the commission of sin is an act of their own will. After all sins have been blotted out, and that guilt has been cancelled which by nature bound men in a conquered condition, it still remains . . . .[1]

He perceived nature vitiated in no way so strongly as that after the Fall sex had turned to evil lust. He felt this so strongly as to suggest, in the treatise just discussed, the possibility of children's being given to Eve, had she not fallen, fully grown and brought forth without sex -- perhaps plucked from trees like fruit, suggested Pelagius in amusement.

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[1] Ibid., p. 45.

This chapter has of necessity been too short to really suggest the great debt which Church history owes to Augustine -- a debt which, as M. Gilson has pointed out, tended to be forgotten after Aquinas took over the thought of Augustine and embodied it in an Aristotelian system. Perhaps a brief summary of the more important elements will tend to indicate the extent of his debt to others and of the much greater debt of all who followed him.

In the first place, Augustine came into a church with an organization which owed much to Tertullian. Tertullian it was who, with his legalistic turn of mind, gave the basic justification of a universal Church and who delved into the problem of grace and merit. But, as was mentioned in connection with his controversy with the Alexandrians, Tertullian was highly suspicious of free philosophical inquiry (he was the father of the old chestnut about believing in his religion because it was impossible.) From Tertullian and Cyprian, Augustine took much -- especially in regard to the definition and authority of the Church -- but he also brought decisively into Western Christianity the habit of philosophical inquiry, which was not so much a part of its tradition as it was in the Eastern Church.

Augustine decisively wedded Neoplatonism and Pauline doctrines and helped to insure the great authority of Paul in matters of faith. Neoplatonism's saving of Augustine from Manichaeism also had far-reaching results. It was highly successful against ditheism, but had its own tendency to dualism, as Lovejoy says.

Ambrose, Jerome, and Rufinus had translated Origen's exegesis and made their own use of his methods. Augustine followed them in this and helped to insure the continued use of a Neoplatonically influenced exegesis of Scripture. We have already seen Harnack's testimony that

> Manichaeism would hardly have been overcome in the West unless it had been confronted by the theosophic exegesis, the 'Biblical alchemy' of the Greeks . . . .[1]

That this exegesis was not an unmixed blessing may be seen in some of the extremities to which it could lead, as will be described in the next chapter.

The Donatist heresy made Augustine develop his ideas, following Cyprian, about the authority and role of the Church. The Pelagian controversy, as we have seen, had perhaps the greatest influence on his ascetic bent through forcing him to clarify his ideas about sin and the Fall. That there was great stability in Church doctrine after Augustine is due in great part to his having to wrestle with the basic questions raised by these heresies.

In an article on St. Augustine, Eugene Portalié distinguishes three phases in the 'history of philosophical Augustinism."[2] The first lasted up to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas:

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[1]Harnack, Vol. V, p. 32.

[2]Eugene Portalié, "Augustine of Hippo," Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 99.

> During the long ages which were darkened by the invasion of the barbarians, but which were nevertheless burdened with the responsibility of safeguarding the sciences of the future, we may say that Augustine was the Great Master of the West. He was absolutely without a rival, or if there was one, it was one of his disciples, Gregory the Great, who, after being formed in his school, popularised his theories . . . . Hence a current of Platonic ideas was started which will never cease to act upon Western thought. [1]

The significance of this powerful influence on the history of Christian ascetic thought is difficult to overestimate. We have seen in this chapter how his own experience combined with his Neoplatonic leanings to make asceticism pervasive in his philosophy. There is in him, as in Plato, an element of this-worldliness -- necessarily so, in view of the role thrust upon him by the Church and by the attacks upon it. There is also the otherworldly element in him -- as shown in his attempt to refuse the offices voted to him in Hippo. This otherworldliness is pervasive in his philosophy, strengthened as it is by his debts to Neoplatonism.

At first glance, it might seem presumptuous to attempt to end a discussion of the philosophical background with a man who died some twenty years after the first sack of Rome. Various historians, however, have testified to the pervasiveness of Augustinian influence during the Middle Ages. Portalié, for example, asserts.

> In the pre-Thomistic period of Scholasticism, then in process of formation, namely from Anselm to Albert the Great, Augustine is the great inspirer of all the masters, such as Anselm, Abelard,

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[1] Ibid.

> Hugo of St. Victor, who is called by his contemporaries, another Augustine, or even the soul of Augustine. And it is proper to remark . . . that from the time of Anselm the cult of Augustinian ideas exercised an enormous influence on English thought in the Middle Ages. As regards Peter Lombard, his Sentences are little else than an effort to synthesize the Augustinian theories.[1]

There are indeed other Neoplatonic defenders of otherworldliness after Augustine, even some who show little evidence of his influence. If this were simply a study of Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages, we could hardly ignore Boethius, or Macrobius, or pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. These, however, in no essential way contradicted the Augustianian ascetic philosophy; on the contrary, they supported and reinforced it. Up to the time of the entrance of Aristotelianism on the scene, Neoplatonism and Augustinism held sway. As we know from the case of a man like Chaucer, Boethius and other Neoplatonic writers were still influential after the advent of Aristotelianism.

As we might have expected, Portalié defines the second phase of philosophical Augustinism as beginning in the thirteenth century at the time of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. At first the introduction of Aristotelian methods brought a horrified reaction from the more conservative men, educated in a tradition of Neoplatonic Augustinism.

> The doctrinal revolution brought about by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in favor of Aristotle startled the old School of Augustinism among the Dominicans as well as among the Franciscans, but especially among the latter, who were the disciples of the eminent

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[1] Ibid.

> Augustinian doctor, St. Bonaventure. This will explain the condemnations, hitherto little understood, of many propositions of St. Thomas Aquinas three years after his death, on the 7th of March, 1277, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardly, a Dominican. The Augustinian school represented tradition; Thomism progress.[1]

This condemnation of 1277, however, was the last triumph over Thomism. After this, the prevailing philosophy gradually came to an accommodation with Thomism, which after all was not antithetic to most of the received, Augustinian tradition; on the contrary, it was a kind of Augustinism adapted to Aristotelian methods. It was not long before the canonization of St. Thomas (February 14, 1325) erased the stigma of the condemnations. The moderation of the early Thomists and the general recognition of the similarities of the old and new systems undoubtedly hastened the progress. Portalié comments,

> Albert the Great and St. Thomas, far from being adversaries of St. Augustine, as they were reported to be, placed themselves in his school, and while modifying certain theories, took over into their system the doctrine of the African bishop. How many articles in the 'Summa' of St. Thomas have no other object than to incorporate the theology this or the other theory which was cherished by St. Augustine . . . . Hence there was no longer any school strictly Augustinian, because every school was such. They all eliminated certain special points and retained the same veneration for the master.[2]

On the whole, St. Augustine's laudation of virginity and the ascetic life is accepted without demur by the clerics of the Middle Ages, as we shall note in the next chapter. The two great figures of Paul and Augustine gave great authority to the preference for asceticism and

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[1] Ibid., p. 100

[2] Ibid.

virginity over a life of the senses and procreation; the testimony of men like Jerome and Ambrose gave added weight. The philosophical justification of asceticism as enunciated by Augustine prepared the way. The acceptance of it by later clerics and the embodiment of it in their writings and especially in their sermons established it as the official ideal, as Lovejoy noted, in preference to a merely natural this-worldliness. Because of his regard for his mother, the saintly Monnica, Augustine might have been quite surprised at the outcome; but he had helped to pave the way for and to justify antifeminism.

PART II

THE CLERICAL TRADITION

CHAPTER VI

VIRGINITY AND MARRIAGE

The Augustinian theory of original sin necessarily implied a low view of the marriage state. Augustine forged this theory in the heat of controversy; and medieval orthodoxy followed him into his least flattering conclusions. [1]

Christianity came to look upon sex as the worst form of evil, and the greatest temptation to which man is heir. This belief, as it finally crystallized, was a product of orthodox Judaism, pre-Christian asceticism, the purification trends in the mystery cults, the general supernatural orientation of Christianity, and the abnormal personal experiences of Paul and Augustine. [2]

The causes which brought about monasticism prevented the recognition of the absolute holiness of marriage within the Christian communities . . . . So marriage fell below the demands of Christian idealism; it was not raised to their level, but was definitely numbered with those things which might be tolerated but could not be admired. Absolute holiness lay only in virginity. This was the monastic outcome. [3]

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[1] G. G. Coulton, Five Centuries of Religion (Cambridge Univ., 1929), Vol. I, p. 443.

[2] Harry E. Barnes, An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World (Rahway, N. J.: Cordon, 1937), p. 293.

[3] Henry O. Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (Columbia Univ., 1903), p. 193.

A large part of the story of antifeminism among the clerics is connected with the rise of monasticism. The monks were such a source of antifeminism that the Wife of Bath could say that not a one could speak well of a woman. Because thoughts of women were a source of great trial, as we see in the accounts of such as St. Jerome and St. Antony, this antifeminism was only natural; it was inevitable that some would make women somehow guilty for their having to undergo such a trial. Reinforcing these feelings was the general view of Eve, the first woman, as having given in easily to the serpent, then helped bring the downfall of Adam, the first man.

The influence of the philosophical justifications of asceticism on the rise of monasticism was probably not great; as noted before, the impulse to leave the communities grew with the popularity of Christianity. The monks used these philosophical supports, however, to justify the impulse which had led them away from the ordinary communities. They also used these earlier writings to justify their own impulse to antifeminism. Because of the prestige of these monks and because for a long time they were the greatest source of writings of any kind, the rise of monasticism is another important element in the rise of antifeminism. It may serve, then, as a preliminary to the account of the praise of virginity and the scorn of marriage which also figured in antifeminism.

In the past hundred years church historians have come to recognize just how strong and pervasive was the expectation among early Christians of the end of the world. Evangelists of the first centuries of the Christian era made full use of otherworldly and apocalyptic material from the Scriptures in order to encourage zeal and gain converts. Owen Chadwick notes,

> St. Paul was not the only writer to use the imminent approach of the end as a ground for advising freedom from the cares of marriage. The earnest waited for the end in continence, prayer, faith. [1]

We have already noted that at first these Christian ascetics remained within the Christian communities, small as they were and surrounded by hostility and persecution, in an atmosphere which was quite in keeping with their zeal. This persecution and the general expectation of the end of the world promoted an otherworldliness among Christians who were every day expecting either martyrdom or the Apocalypse. This otherworldliness was coupled with an idealization of virginity:

> In the New Testament the demand for ascesis, self-discipline, possessed many other aspects besides the advice about continence. The cardinal demand, from the Sermon on the Mount downwards, was the demand for detachment: and towards detachment it was believed that continence could be a useful aid. But already in the second century virginity was beginning to appear to be the act of asceticism par excellence, the necessary foundation to the earnest and disciplined life. [2]

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[1] Owen Chadwick, Introduction to Western Asceticism (Library of Christian Classics; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 13. The following account of the rise of monasticism is much indebted to this work and to Schaff's History of the Christian Church.

[2] Ibid., p. 14.

This emphasis on virginity and continence at times went far beyond the bounds of orthodoxy. Some Christian groups, influenced by the mystery-religions, made continence a condition of membership; for example, "Marcion refused to baptize any married person who would not agree to dissolve his marriage."[1] Men like Irenaeus and Justin Martyr fought these excesses, but even they shared the contemporary preference for virginity.

By the time of Tertullian, the number of ascetics within the Christian communities had grown considerably. At the end of the century, Methodius wrote his Symposium, a work rarely equalled in its fulsome praise of virginity and one to be alluded to again. In this same third century, however, the size of the Christian congregations was growing so that there came about an inevitable separation of the ascetics and the non-ascetics within the communities as the former spent their days in prayer and specifically religious work, while the latter went about the business of earning a living and acting as if the end of the world were not at hand. Chadwick comments,

> To transform these primitive ascetics into monks, two developments were necessary: (1) withdrawal from the congregation, (2) common discipline and rule. Already in the third century the need for these developments was becoming urgent.[2]

The earliest Christians had the values of the martyrs: a strong sense of being pilgrims 'in transit' on the earth, a sense of the great

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 15.

need to be only concerned with spiritual matters, a sense of the worthlessness of the ordinary concerns of life in general -- marriage, parenthood, the work of the world. As Christianity became the official and universal religion, the pervasiveness of this otherworldly feeling lessened; consequently, religious and moral standards fell. The ascetics, who were the heirs of the old values of the martyrs, began to remove themselves from the communities.

One of the first and the most famous such removal was that of another Egyptian, St. Antony. Antony was influenced as a young man to give his wealth to the poor and to begin the life of an ascetic within the community in which he lived. Soon he was travelling to other places to learn from other ascetics.

> So far, there was nothing new or original. Antony had become an ascetic in the same way as other men and women for more than a century. But after a time he felt the need to withdraw altogether from the neighborhood of human beings. He retreated to some tombs where he was locked in and remained inaccessible.[1]

This event took place at some time around 275 A. D.

In his Life of St. Antony, Athanasius says that Antony stayed locked in the empty vault until the age of thirty-five (about 285 A. D.), tempted and tormented by demons. Finally, after Antony had struggled long and hard against the demons, a voice said to him,

> Antony, I was right here, but I waited to see you in action. And now, because you held out and did not surrender, I

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[1] Ibid., p. 18.

> will ever be your helper and I will make you renowned everywhere.[1]

On the day after this, Antony departed for Pispir, where he lived in an abandoned fort. To him came men wanting to imitate his way of life, and he became their leader and teacher.

Antony was generally regarded in the fourth century as the founder of monasticism, although a few gave the title to the hermit Paul of Thebes (228-341).[2] At any rate his example, through Latin translations of Athanasius's Life, had great influence.[3] He is said to have visited Paul in the Egyptian desert, shortly before Paul's death, and this meeting, if it took place, is symbolic in two ways: first of all, in the connection which Paul was always to have with later asceticism through the ascetics' use of his writings for justification, and second, in the difference between the two men -- the one a solitary ascetic to the end, the other a solitary ascetic who was to become the leader of a community of ascetics which was the forerunner of the monasteries which were soon to be built.

Probably St. Pachomius was as important as St. Antony in the founding of monasticism in that he first founded a rule and discipline

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[1] St. Athanasius, The Life of St. Antony, trans. Robert T. Meyer (Ancient Christian Writers Series, No. 10; Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1950), p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 101.

[3] See, for example, Augustine's anecdote in his Confessions, p. 122.

for the group of ascetics which had gathered about him. Pachomius, like Antony, began his life of asceticism in a village and gradually separated himself from the ordinary community of men, emblematic of the movement of ascetics generally at the time. After he retired to the deserted village of Tabennissi, he was joined by others. At first the group worked for local farmers, but as the consequent separation caused a lack of discipline, Pachomius finally removed them from all but minimal contact with those outside their group. In establishing a rule, Pachomius was, more obviously than Antony, pointing toward monasticism, whereas the latter seems more of a forerunner of the later hermits who attracted followers but resisted organization.

One of the most direct influences in founding a specfically Western Monasticism was St. Basil, a man whose writings owed so much to Origen and made such an impression on Augustine. He had once visited Egypt and was perhaps influenced by Pachomius's theory of an ascetic community.

> But the ruling notion of most Egyptians -- the superiority of the hermit life to community life -- he rejected. His work is best understood not as an offshoot of Egyptian monasticism but as a continuation and extension of the idea of the primitive ascetic society . . . . though his groups were withdrawn from the normal congregation, their quest for holiness issued in pastoral work for the congregation . . . . There is an easy step from the ascetic groups of Tertullian's day to the brothers of St. Basil. They were groups existing essentially for the same purpose, but in the later period brought together in a common life so that their pursuit of perfection should be unhindered by worldly distraction, and placed under a stern rule of obedience to ensure the

> discipline and training in holiness which a rightly administered rule provided. [1]

The two factors necessary to turn primitive asceticism into monasticism -- withdrawal from the community and a common rule and discipline -- were now present. Something more ambitious and thorough than St. Basil's "Rule" was needed, but the essential foundations of monasticism were laid. Monasticism only awaited St. Benedict to give it a rule on which to base all future changes.

Athanasius first brought the news of monasticism to the West, along with two monks who accompanied his exile in 340 A. D.

> The phenomenon excited at first disgust and contempt, but soon admiration and imitation, especially among women, and among the decimated ranks of the ancient Roman nobility . . . . Many went to Egypt and Palestine, to devote themselves to the new mode of life; and for the sake of such, Jerome afterward translated the rule of Pachomius into Latin. [2]

Many of the clergy began to espouse the ascetic way of life. Ambrose spent much of his time preaching asceticism and celibacy, and he established a monastery in Milan, as Augustine tells in Book VII of the Confessions. Augustine himself supported monasticism. Schaff thinks that Augustine's

> evangelical principles of the free grace of God as the only ground of salvation and peace were essentially inconsistent with the more Pelagian theory of the monastical life.

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[1] Chadwick, p. 17.

[2] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1950), Vol. III, p. 201.

Yet, says Schaff, Augustine

> went with the then reigning spirit of the church in this respect, and led, with his clergy, a monk-like life in voluntary poverty and celibacy, after the pattern, as he thought, of the primitive church in Jerusalem . . . .[1]

It was Jerome who was the most zealous of all the Church fathers in promoting monasticism, and in himself living the life of an anchorite.

> He was the first learned divine who not only recommended but actually embraced the monastic mode of life, and his example exerted a great influence in making monasticism available for a promotion of learning.[2]

This last point is important. The earlier monks had generally scorned learning; Augustine repeats the story of Antony's having to have the Bible read to him. The Western monks after Jerome, however, did vital work during the darkness of the triumph of the barbarians and the disintegration of the Empire in preserving and promoting the wisdom of the past. That they were often particularly drawn to preserve, and expand on, antifeminist writings also gave them an important role in the history of antifeminism.

The monks were the direct heirs of the martyrs, both in their zeal and in their essential values:

> In what does sanctity, perfection, holiness consist? What fruits are expected of the holy man? In the fourth century the Christian reply to these questions was governed by the memory of the martyrs.[3]
> . . . . . .

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[1] Ibid., p. 202.

[2] Ibid., pp. 205-206.

[3] Chadwick, pp. 20-21.

> Long before the age of persecution was past, the word martyr is applied to any one who lives a truly self-sacrificing life. Tertullian could write of a martyrdom of will 'perfect without suffering,' Cyprian of 'the martyrdom of virginity': and it was natural for the ascetical writers of the later fourth century to use the word 'martyrdom' in these loose and general senses.[1]

As the heirs of the martyrs, the monks also were otherworldly in their thought. This otherworldliness, as might have been expected, became deeply tinged with Neoplatonism:

> In the third century, the school of Alexandria, led by Clement and then Origen, had couched their moral and ascetical thought in terms partially borrowed from the vocabulary of Greek philosophy. The end of life was the vision of God. The training of the body, the conquest of sin, the fight with the demons, the practice of virtue, were all destined to the one great end -- contemplation of God by pure mind. This language, utilized as it was by two profound thinkers both of whom were deeply Christian, suited the needs of those monks who theorized upon the purpose of the solitary life: and with certain adaptations educated monks in Egypt used this vocabulary and these ideas to explain their own practice. They supplied the most sensitive, discerning and sober instruction to be found in the Egyptian movement: and their influence is to be seen every where, even among those ascetics who came in time to resent it.[2]

We have seen how, with Augustine, this conjunction of asceticism and Neoplatonism was securely established in Western Christian thought.

The first epistle to the Corinthians is the single most favored text for the Fathers in discussing marriage and virginity. This is important because Paul is writing in it in the same kind of expectation of the end of the world which we have seen among many of the early Christians. The Corinthians, in fact, seem to have shared this feeling and

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

[2] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

to have asked him if they should not leave their spouses and live apart in celibacy. Other questions were asked of him, including, we may infer, some about the lawfulness of any kind of sexual activity. In his answer Paul gives what Bigham and Mollegen call his "interim-ethic."[1] That later Christian writers changed the ground for this ethic we shall see later. The passages on marriage and celibacy had such influence later that a discussion of the early ideas on virginity and marriage must start with them.

Paul begins the epistle by rebuking the Corinthians for their dissension about the choice of their preachers. He then goes on to allude to stories which have reached him about the licentiousness among the Corinthians and admonishes them against fornication and the company of fornicators. Then, in Chapter VII, he turns to the questions they have asked him:

> It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in a like manner to the husband . . . . Defraud not one another, except, perhaps, by consent, for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and return together again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency. But I speak this by indulgence, not by commandment . . . . But to them that are married, not I but the Lord commandeth, that the wife depart not. And if she depart, that she may remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife.[2]

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[1] Thomas J. Bigham & Albert T. Mollegen, "The Christian Ethic," A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1955), p. 382.

[2] I Cor. 7:1-12. All quotations from the New Testament are from the Rheims translation of the Vulgate.

Marriage, then, in Paul's "interim-ethic" is a haven from the dangers of incontinence, but only a haven. For those strong ones who are able: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

To this, Paul adds the admonition to those already married that they are obligated to their spouses and must stay with them. Even for these, however, celibacy is best if they are both strong enough for it -- for time is running out:

> This therefore I say, brethren; the time is short; it remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none . . . .[1]

Marriage is an essentially earthly concern and can hinder concern for spiritual matters, which are vital with the end of the world imminent. In these times it is better to stay single if one is able:

> He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife: and he is divided.[2]

These are the basic elements on which later writers expanded: marriage can be a refuge from the mortal sins of fornication; but the unmarried state is preferable for those who can maintain it without succumbing to its dangers. These 'counsels of perfection' were soon taken as divine commandments with the married state only allowed to the weak who were unable to win the prize of virginity.

The veneration of virginity grew with the monastic movement. It also followed that same movement from the East to the West. Although

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[1] I Cor. 7:29.

[2] I Cor. 7:32-33.

Tertullian and others in the West had early repeated Paul's preference of virginity to marriage, it was in the time of Jerome and Ambrose that this veneration of virginity changed to an obsession. The most famous and influential of the writings in the East was the Symposium of Methodius, written some time in the latter half of the third century.

Methodius violently opposed those doctrines of Origen which were at variance with conservative Church tradition, but at the same time adopted so many of Origen's most basic premises that he must be called Origenistic. He accepted, for example, the doctrine of the Logos in its entirety. He also accepted much of Origen's allegorical method of interpretation of the Scriptures. In regard to this, according to Herbert Musurillo, it is the

> application of the Canticle (and related texts) to virginity that marks Methodius' advance on Origen . . . .[1]

Methodius varies the symbolism of the marriage of Adam and Eve as prefiguring the marriage of Christ and the Church by also

> holding that the individual soul rather must become the bride of Christ, and that for each the descent of the Logos from heaven and his death must be repeated -- mysteriously and in the heart of the believer.[2]

Harnack asserts the importance of this variation by Methodius in this way:

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[1]Methodius, The Symposium, trans. Herbert Musurillo ("Ancient Christian Writers Series," No. 27.) Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1958), p. 41. Text and introduction cited hereafter as Symposium.

[2]Harnack, Vol. III, p. 109.

> We would not have had in the third century all the premises from which Catholic Christianity was developed in the following centuries, unless this speculation had been brought forward, or, had been given a central place, by a Christian theologian of the earlier period. It marks nothing less than the tapering of the realistic doctrinal system of the Church into the subjectivity of monkish mysticism. [1]

In his merging of the kind of mysticism of Origen, which however seemed to give a rather subordinate place to the Church, with the traditional regard for the Church as an object of veneration, Methodius influenced and prefigured this same kind of attitude in Western monasticism. The Church, he said, was the mother of the soul, as the individual soul must strive to become the bride of Christ. As Musurillo says, in its emphasis on celibacy as the focal point of asceticism and the use of nuptial imagery in illustrating the relationship between Christ and the virgin,

> Methodius' Symposium has had a profound influence on the stream of ascetical thought in both the East and the West. [2]

Because of its influence and because it prefigures later writings on the subject, this work will be considered at some length.

Methodius' Symposium is based on the Symposium of Plato; whereas that work sets itself to examine love, this one goes about finding ways of praising chastity and virginity. Methodius' Symposium is also called the Feast of the Ten Virgins, and in it each of the ten makes a speech on the subject of chastity and virginity, followed by the speech and awarding of the prize by the hostess Arete.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Symposium, p. 3.

The first speech is by Marcella, and she begins with an exordium in praise of virginity:

> Virginity is something extraordinarily great, wonderful and glorious. To speak frankly in the manner of the Scriptures, this most beautiful, noble way of life alone is the Church's sustaining bosom, her flower, her first fruits. This is the reason, too, why our Lord, in that passage in the Gospels in which he instructs us in the various ways in which men become eunuchs, promises that all who make themselves virgins will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.[1]

The speech goes on to use Plato's chariot image in regard to virginity:

> . . . it demands strong and generous natures, that can completely divert the stream of sensuality and guide aloft the chariot of their soul, straight and up and up, never losing sight of their goal -- until, leaping easily over the world with the lightning speed of thought, they stand upon the very vault of heaven and gaze directly upon Immortality itself as it wells up from the pure bosom of the Almighty.[2]

Although Methodius was a leading opponent of Porphyry, the Neoplatonism of such a passage is evident.

Marcella goes on to describe "the plant of virginity" which was "sent down to mankind from heaven," and which had to be slowly nourished from incest, to polygamy, to monogamy and marriage chastity, to the virginity which came to the world with Christ:

> The first question to be answered is this: how is it that the many prophets and righteous men who spoke and taught so many noble things, not one of them praised or embraced the state of virginity? The answer is that it was reserved for the Lord alone to be the first to exalt this doctrine, just as He alone, coming into the world, taught men how to draw near to God.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 41.

[2] Ibid., p. 42.

[3] Ibid., p. 46.

Thalia replies to Theophila's allusion to the first Epistle to the Corinthians with the text from the Epistle to the Ephesians in which Paul makes the analogy of human marriage to that of Christ's marriage to the Church. As we shall see later, these are the two favorite Scriptural texts (with the passage from Genesis) in the discussion of marriage. Those who participate in human marriage are less perfect than those who participate in the spiritual marriage only:

> Those who are more perfect and have embraced the truth with more perception, and thus, by their perfect faith and purification, have detached themselves from the absurdities of the flesh -- these become the Church and the helpmate of Christ; they are the virgin, as the Apostle tells us II Cor. 11:2, espoused and wedded to Him that by receiving from Him the pure and fertile seed of doctrine they might collaborate with him in the preaching of the Gospel for the salvation of the rest. [1]

In the seventh speech, Procilla makes an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs in which she says that it will be the virgins who are the true brides of Christ, second only to one. Christ, she says, has said that there will be variations in the rewards of the faithful.

> So too in this case He reveals that the order and holy choir of holy virgins will be the first to follow in His train as it were into a bridal chamber, into the repose of the new ages. For they were martyrs, not by enduring brief corporal pains for a space of time, but because they had the courage all their lives not to shrink from the truly Olympic contest of chastity. [2]

The bride of Christ, she says, is His body and Queen, and the virgins are handmaids of it:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 66-67.

[2] Ibid., p. 99.

> For so lovely, indeed, and thrice desirable is the glory of virginity that the choir and order of virgins is conducted directly following the Queen herself, whom the Lord has brought to sinless perfection and has presented to the Father, because they have won as their lot a place next to the bride. [1]

This identification of virginity as an integral part of the New Dispensation is a favorite argument of its defenders and, as we shall see in the chapter on that subject, plays a role in the history of Mary-worship.

To this speech of Marcella's, Theophila replies, defending marriage. Her defense is the traditional one of alluding to the Genesis command to go forth and multiply:

> God's declaration and ordinance with regard to the begetting of children is still being carried out accordingly up to the present day: the Creator is still fashioning men. For it is clear to every one that God, like an artist, is still working on His universe, as indeed the Lord also taught when He said, My Father worketh until now. [2]

Here in classical form is the confrontation of the ideal of an unmoving Perfection with an overflowing Fecundity. The Neoplatonic dilemma of two ideals has been transferred to Scripture. Marcella quotes I Cor. 7:38 in which Paul sets up a hierarchy of value in regard to marriage and virginity, and gives the traditional argument of the defenders of marriage that virginity's being better does not make marriage bad.

The next speech -- that of Thalia -- represents the culmination of the discussion of marriage. In this Methodius gives what has been

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[1] Ibid., p. 104.

[2] Ibid., p. 49.

called his "Christian doctrine of Platonic participation."[1] Man, he says, is caught between two extremes:

> Two elements which are utterly contradictory to each other, life and death, corruption and incorruptibility. Life is evenness; corruption is unevenness . . . . Man himself, being between these two extremes, is neither absolute justice nor injustice; but placed midway between corruption and incorruptibility, to whichever he bends and inclines, he is said to turn to the nature of that which has gotten the upper hand of him . . . . Placed midway between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was changed into the form of that whose fruit he had tasted . . . .[2]

Thecla wins the prize with the next speech and indeed could hardly go farther in his praise of virginity:

> . . . virginity alone makes divine those who possess her and have been initiated into her divine mysteries. Greater good than this is impossible to find, dwelling apart from either pleasure or pain: and the wings of the soul, impregnated with it, truly become firmer and lighter, accustomed daily to fly from the interests of men.[3]

This speech is the most Neoplatonic and otherworldly of all in its account of the ascent of the soul to contemplation of the Divine, and the most rigorous in its assertion of the need for virginity. The virgins are the ones, she says, who do not succumb at all to the passions. They are completely otherworldly; and they,

> soaring up into the supramundane regions above this life, see from afar things that no mortal has gazed upon, the very meadows of immortality bearing a profusion of flowers of incredible loveliness. And there they are ever and always contemplating the sights of that place. And hence they care nothing for the things which the

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[1] Ibid., p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 64.

[3] Ibid., p. 105.

> world thinks good -- riches and fame and family trees and marriage ties -- and there is nothing they esteem higher than the things they see above.[1]

Although Methodius remained within his community as a bishop apparently, this is the same sort of feeling which was leading men like Antony and Pachomius into the desert and which was soon greatly to influence Ambrose, Jerome, and later Western writers.

When Athanasius brought word of Eastern monasticism and two monks with him to Rome in 339 A. D., monasticism and the veneration of virginity had been growing in the East for about a hundred years. His being in Rome was the result of his flight from the Arian persecutions. Favorite targets in these persecutions were the monks and nuns, and the final triumph over the Arians was also a triumph for virginity and monasticism. The expounding by Athanasius of these ideals and his Life of St. Antony almost immediately aroused sympathy and emulation in the West.

The writings of Athanasius were so largely taken up with opposing Arianism and recounting the ravages of the Arian persecutions that there is not so much as we might have expected in his actual writings in defense of virginity. There is the testimony of Jerome, however, that his visit to Rome had a great impact. Perhaps the explanation is that in the East he did not have to convince orthodox Christians of what

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[1] Ibid., p. 106.

was already traditional, while in Rome he was in direct contact with the leading men of the Church. The few passages that are specifically taken up with the praise of virginity are much like those of other Eastern theologians of his day, and not far from some already quoted from the Symposium.

In his treatise called Incarnation of the Word, for example, he says that Christ is the origin of the teaching of virginity:

> Which of mankind . . . taught concerning virginity, and that this virtue was not impossible among men? But Christ . . . had such power in His teaching concerning it, that even children not yet arrived at the lawful age vow that virginity which lies beyond the law.[1]

He also gives a traditional rendering of the comparative value of marriage and virginity. Marriage brings forth fruit thirtyfold, but

> if a man embrace the holy and unearthly way, even though, as compared with the former, it be rugged and hard to accomplish, yet it has the more wondrous gifts: for it grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundredfold.[2]

One point of the traditional doctrine of virginity which Methodius does not specifically mention (thought it is perhaps implied) is found in Athanasius -- the comparison of the life of a virgin to that of an angel:

> The Son of God . . . , having become man for our sakes, and having destroyed death, and delivered our race from the bondage of corruption, in addition to all His other benefits bestowed this also upon us, that we should possess upon earth, in the state of virginity, a picture of the holiness of Angels.[3]

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[1] St. Athanasius, Incarnation of the Word, trans. Archibald Robertson, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," IV), p. 64.

[2] Ibid., p. 557.

[3] Ibid., p. 252.

After the coming of Athanasius, Ambrose and later Augustine eulogized virginity in the West, but it was Jerome who was the most persistent and extravagant in his praise of the virgin state. His most famous work on the subject is Epistle Number Twenty-Two, addressed to Eustochium, the virgin daughter of his great friend Paula.

Jerome begins by showing the motives which should move one to be devoted to a life of virginity. He refers to the passage in the Song of Songs in which the bride says that she is black:

> Born, in the first instance, of such parentage, we are naturally black, and even when we have repented, so long as we have not scaled the heights of virtue, we may still say: 'I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.'[1]

What is the reward for scaling these heights of virtue?

> The context shows -- 'The king shall desire thy beauty.' This, then, is the great mystery.[2]

This is reminiscent of Origen's exegesis of the Song of Songs and perhaps also of Methodius' Symposium. The reward of virginity is to be a bride of Christ.[3]

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[1] St. Jerome, "Letter XXII," trans. W. H. Freemantle, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, VI), p. 22.

[2] Ibid.

[3] We may note that nunneries of a kind had preceded the rise of monasticism. After he gave way his wealth, St. Antony put his younger sister into one of these houses. The nuns in these establishments were called "brides of Christ" in Alexandria, and Athanasius refers often to the torments they endured in the persecutions by the Arians.

It is in this letter that Jerome gives such a graphic description of the torments of the flesh against which the virgin and celibate must struggle. He was, he says, "living in the desert, in the vast solitude which gives to hermits a savage dwelling-place"; yet

> although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts, I often found myself among bevies of girls . . . . I remember how I often cried aloud all night till the break of day and ceased not from beating my breast till tranquillity returned at the chiding of the Lord. I used to dread my very cell as though it knew my thoughts; and stern and angry with myself, I used to make my way alone in the desert. [1]

Reading such an account makes the violence of the monks against Eve and her sin and her daughters much more understandable.

Even in this letter to a dedicated girl, Jerome follows the pattern of many monks of going from praise of celibacy, to consideration of the struggle against the passions, to citing Biblical passages against the inciters of those passions. Although it properly belongs in the next chapter, a passage following the one in which Jerome relates his own struggles with lust will show how naturally the one account could lead into antifeminism. He has just given his own example to Eustochium to show the difficulty of resisting lust; now he turns to Biblical examples:

> Do you wish proof of my assertions? Take examples. Sampson was braver than a lion and tougher than a rock . . . ; and yet, in Delilah's embrace, his resolution melted away. David was a man after God's own heart . . . ; and yet as he walked upon his housetop he was fascinated by Bathsheba's nudity and added murder to adultery. [2]

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[1] St. Jerome, "Letter XXII," p. 25.

[2] Ibid., p. 26.

In the next chapter, examples will be given of the lengths to which such Biblical examples could be taken.

In regard to the last part of the present chapter -- the discussion of marriage theory -- we may note Jerome's notorious expression in this epistle to praise marriage primarily as the source of virgins:

> I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns, the gold from the earth, the pearl from the shell. [1]

Mothers are commanded not to obstruct their daughters from remaining virgins:

> Are you angry with her because she chooses to be a king's wife and not a soldiers? She has conferred on you a high privilege; you are now the mother-in-law of God. [2]

There is no need to list more examples from the Patristic age (though virtually every prominent Christian writer of the time could provide some); the praise of virginity could hardly go beyond this.

The praises of virginity were sung from this time throughout the Middle Ages. Virginity, however, was soon to be joined to its very type, Mary. In the earliest writings in praise of virginity, Christ was always brought forth as the example of perfect virginity. As the sense grew, however, of the awesomeness of Christ in His role as Judge, Mary was increasingly thought of as a mediatress and example of virginity. The praise of virginity did not change; it simply became a part of Mary-worship,

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[1] Ibid., p. 30.

[2] Ibid.

and consequently the medieval praise of virginity will be taken up in the chapter on the worship of the Virgin.

It may be noted, however, by way of closing, that even St. Thomas, who is usually conservative in these matters, quotes with approval in the Summa (Q. 152, A. 4.) Jerome's passage on the subject in his treatise Against Jovinian. In Article Three of the same question, St. Thomas says,

> Now to keep oneself free from the experience of venereal pleasure has an excellence of its own deserving of greater praise than keeping oneself free from inordinate venereal pleasure. Wherefore virginity is a special virtue being related to chastity as magnificence to liberality. [1]

Although Vermeersch says that the Catholic Church does not now hold that there is a special virtue in virginity, [2] it was a view widely held from the Patristic age onwards, and it was a view which had a great effect on attitudes toward marriage.

Tertullian was still using Paul's apocalyptic argument in his day. William P. Le Saint comments,

> The proximity of the parousia was a fundamental tenet of Montanism, and Tertullian seems to have been excessively sympathetic to the belief before his actual defection from the Church. The

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[1] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1932), Vol. 13, p. 113.

[2] A. Vermeersch, "Virginity," Catholic Ency., Vol. XV, p. 48f.

> connection between this conviction and his exaggerated asceticism is obvious.[1]

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the connection between the conviction of the imminent end of the world and an exaggerated asceticism was indeed close in the early days of Christianity; but modern research has shown that one did not need to be a Montanist or a candidate for Montanism in Tertullian's day in order to have this feeling.

Nevertheless, of the three extant treatises of Tertullian on marriage and chastity, the first -- Ad uxorem -- was written at a time when authorities agree that he was orthodox and writing treatises of important influence on Church history. The discussion of Tertullian's theories, then, will be limited to this first treatise, although it should be remembered that the other two were also remembered and quoted. In fact, De monogamia, the third treatise, was written when Tertullian was a thorough Montanist, and it states emphatically a view which the Wife of Bath has emphatically denied over a thousand years later -- that no marriage can be valid but the first one.

Ad uxorem was written by Tertullian to his wife about 200 A. D., exhorting her not to remarry after his death. Even in this first treatise,

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[1] William P. Le Saint, Introduction to: Tertullian, Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage (Ancient Christian Writers Series; Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1951), p. 115n. The introduction and notes are cited hereafter as Le Saint; the treatises are cited under their respective titles.

Tertullian points out the example of Genesis in the question of remarriage to prove that it is not good; marriage, he says,

> is an institution blessed by God for the reproduction of the human race. It was planned by Him for the purpose of populating the earth and to make provision for the propagation of mankind. Hence, it was permitted; but only once may it be contracted. For Adam was the only husband that Eve had and Eve was his only wife: one rib, one woman.[1]

Tertullian was so pleased with this conceit that he repeated and expanded it in the other two treatises, De exhortatione castitatis and De monogamia. St. Jerome liked it and used it in his epistle Adversus Jovinianum and his epistle Ad Geruchian de monogamia. "Innocent III uses it in his letter Gaudemus in Domino, forbidding the practice of polygamy to converts from paganism."[2]

Late in the treatise, after saying that it is better not to marry at all, Tertullian turns to consider those who have a desire to live on in their posterity. His answer shows that he, like Paul, thinks the end is near:

> To us this is sheer nonsense. For why should we be so anxious to propagate children since, when we do, it is our hope -- in view, that is, of the straitened times which are at hand -- that they will go to God before us. We ourselves desire, as did the Apostle, to be delivered from the wicked world and received into the arms of our Lord.[3]

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[1] Ad uxorem, p. 11.

[2] Le Saint, p. 115n.

[3] Ad uxorem, p. 16.

To the problem posed by Old Testament examples, used as late as the Wife of Bath in her allusion to the marital habits of Solomon, Tertullian replies with a distinction, from Paul, between the dispensations before and after Christ.

> . . . we may explain this difficult matter simply by saying that it was necessary in former times that there be practices which afterwards had to be abrogated or modified. For the Law had first to intervene; too, at a later date, the Word of God was to replace the Law and introduce spiritual circumcision. [1]

One source of this theory of the two dispensations, which we find Augustine using in discussing marriage, is Rom. 5:19-21.

On Paul's statement that "it is better to marry than to burn," Tertullian asks rhetorically,

> . . . but what sort of good, I ask you, can that be which is such only when it is compared to what is bad? [2]

As we shall see, Augustine and Jerome both followed him in this argument. They are forced by Paul's own words and by orthodox tradition to admit that marriage is good, but they hasten to add that it is good only by comparison with the sins of fornication and adultery from which it may protect. "How much better it is," exclaims Tertullian, "neither to marry nor to burn!" [3]

> Nothing is to be sought after for the sole reason that it is not forbidden. When we come to think of it, even such things are, in

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[1] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[2] Ibid., p. 12.

[3] Ibid.

> a sense, forbidden because other things are preferred to them. To prefer the lofty is to exclude the low. [1]

Although he opposed Clement's sort of free philosophical inquiry, Tertullian set up the same sort of Neoplatonic dichotomy between the flesh and the spirit as, for example, Plotinus:

> The flesh is of the earth, the spirit is of Heaven. Now, why is it that, habitually seeking excuses for ourselves, we plead the weaknesses of our nature and disregard its strength? Should not the things of earth yield to the things of Heaven? If the spirit, being nobler in origin, is stronger than the flesh, then we have no one to blame but ourselves when we yield to the weaker force. [2]

As a matter of fact, this gives the same sort of credit to the power of the human spirit as the Neoplatonist, and much more than Augustine would have allowed it.

Marriage is only a concession to certain human weaknesses which it is the duty of a Christian to resist:

> There are two weaknesses in human nature which appear to make it necessary that those who have lost a spouse should marry again. First, there is the concupiscence of the flesh, and this has the strongest pull; second, there is the concupiscence of the world. We servants of God ought to scorn both weaknesses, since we renounce both lust and ambition. [3]

In its role as a concession to the Christian's inability to live up to his duty, marriage is something far below an ideal. This passage throws much light on what Tertullian means when he follows Paul in calling marriage "a good."

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[1] Ibid., p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 14.

[3] Ibid.

It was inevitable that opposition should grow to monasticism, the low estimation of marriage, and the exaggerated praises of celibacy and virginity. This opposition came at the same time the monastic ideal was gaining favor in the West. The chief of the opposition was a celibate named Jovinian, and his teaching evoked perhaps the most famous antimarriage, antifeminist treatise of all -- Jerome's epistle Adversus Iovinianum.

Sometime before the year 390, Jovinian wrote a work attacking the ethics involved in monasticism. According to Jerome, Jovinian maintained four points: (1) that 'virgins, widows, and married women, who have been once passed through the laver of Christ, if they are on a par in other respects, are of equal merit'; (2) that 'they who with full assurance of faith have been born again in baptism, cannot be overthrown by the devil'; (3) that 'there is no difference between abstinence from good, and its reception with thanksgiving'; (4) that 'there is one reward in the kingdom of heaven for all who have kept their baptismal vow.'[1]

The first point was the one on which Jovinian insisted most strongly.

> In favor of the moral equality of married and single life, he appealed to Gen. ii. 24, where God himself institutes marriage before the fall; to Matt. xix. 5, where Christ sanctions it; to the patriarchs before and after the flood; to Moses and the prophets, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and the apostles, particularly Peter, who lived in

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[1] Jerome, Against Jovinianus, trans. W. H. Freemantle, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, VI), p. 348. Cited hereafter as Against Jovinianus.

> wedlock; also to Paul . . . . He declared the prohibition of marriage and of divinely provided food a Manichaean error.[1]

Jerome replied to this with such lack of restraint that even his friends took offence, and Augustine was moved to write a treatise on the advantages of marriage -- De bono coniugai. Even Jerome came to feel that he had gone too far,[2] but the treatise was quoted and used long after his own later attitude toward it and Augustine's tempering of it were virtually forgotten.

Tradition has it that Jovinian wrote his treatise after being bothered particularly by Jerome's resounding praises of virginity which he regarded as baseless. In his reply to Jovinian, Jerome was anxious to refute the charge brought against the advocates of celibacy and virginity that they were advocating doctrines from the Gnostic heretics and the mystery-religions.

> For ourselves, we do not follow the views of Marcion and Manichaeus, and disparage marriage; nor, deceived by the error of Tatian, the leader of the Encratites, do we think all intercourse impure . . . . We are not ignorant of the words, 'Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled.' We have read God's first command, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth'; but while we honor marriage we prefer virginity which is the offspring of marriage.[3]

If it had maintained this temperate beginning, Jerome's treatise would not have become the type and model of clerical anti-feminist writings. However, in what immediately follows this, there is a clear indication

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[1] Schaff, Vol. III, p. 229.

[2] Ibid., p. 229n.

[3] Against Jovianus, p. 347.

of just how much he honors marriage and just how great a preference he gives to virginity.

> Virginity is to marriage what fruit is to the tree, or grain to straw. Although the hundred-fold, the sixty-fold, and the thirty-fold spring from one earth and from one sowing, yet there is a great difference in respect of numbers. The thirty-fold has reference to marriage . . . . The sixty-fold applies to widows, because they are placed in a position of difficulty and distress. [1]

It is not long before Jerome is showing his antifeminist, anti-marriage bias to the fullest. The lengths to which he takes some of Paul's statements indicates how little convinced he is in agreeing with the designation of marriage as a good. On I Cor. 7:1, he expounds,

> If it is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one: for there is no opposite to goodness but badness. But if it be bad and the evil is pardoned, the reason for the concession is to prevent worse evil. But surely a thing which is only allowed because there may be something worse has only a slight degree of goodness. [2]

The inference that marriage is only the lesser of two evils seems inescapable.

Jerome says that Paul only 'acquiesces' to marriage "lest [he] should seem to condemn nature." [3] He carries even further Tertullian's view that marriage is good only by comparison with a life of fornication. Paul, he says,

> gives a reason for saying 'If they have not continency, let them marry,' viz. 'It is better to marry than to burn.' The reason why it is better to marry is that it is worse to burn. Let burning

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 350.

[3] Ibid., p. 352.

> lust be absent, and he will not say it is better to marry. The word better always implies a comparison with something worse, not a thing absolutely good and incapable of comparison.[1]

"It is," says Le Saint, "as though the Apostle were to illustrate the point by saying that 'it is better to have one eye than none.'"[2]

Jerome replies to Jovinian's allusion to God's command in Genesis -- "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" -- with an epigram: "Marriage replenishes the earth, virginity fills Paradise."[3] He even indulges a number-symbolism to prove the worthlessness of marriage (except as it produces virgins): the second day in the Creation, he says, is the only one which is not called good,

> leaving us to understand that two is not a good number because it destroys unity, and prefigures the marriage contract. Hence it was that all the animals which Noah took into the ark by pairs were unclean. Odd numbers denote cleanness.[4]

Jerome ends his discussion of Jovinian's first point with an extended account of "a book On Marriage, worth its weight in gold," which "passes under the name of Theophrastus."[5] This work is not extant, but Jerome's account of it furnishes a handy list of complaints against women for future writers. "A wise man . . . must not take a wife," says the author.[6] A wife hinders one's studies by demanding too much attention. A wife demands costly expenditure and will nag until she gets

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Le Saint, p. 116n.

[3] Against Jovinianus, p. 360.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 383.

[6] Ibid.

it. A wife "is the only thing that is not shown before she is married," and the husband only learns the worst after it is too late. A wife will be jealous over nothing, yet rare is the woman who is to be trusted herself. "If a woman be fair, she soon finds lovers; if she be ugly, it is easy to be wanton."[1] "When a husband is sick, a wife makes him worse with her tears and boasts . . . of anxiety . . . . But if she herself is poorly, we must fall sick with her and never leave her bedside."[2]

Because Jerome was widely conceded to have defended the superiority of virginity at the expense of condemning marriage, Augustine decided to write a treatise On the Good of Marriage before he, too, went on to defend the superiority of virginity against Jovinian (De virginitate). Even this treatise with its cautious, corrective purpose finds Augustine going further than Paul in regard to marriage and virginity. Paul had called marriage a haven from the dangers of fornication. But Augustine says that even within this haven one may sin:

> For intercourse of marriage for the sake of begetting hath not fault; but for the satisfying of lust, but yet with husband or wife, by reason of the faith of the bed, it hath venial fault, and, through this, continence from all intercourse is indeed better even than intercourse of marriage itself, which takes place for the sake of begetting.[3]

Augustine is quite ready to follow the path of this preference for virginity to its logical conclusion:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] St. Augustine, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," V), p. 402.

> But I am aware of some that murmur: What, say they, if all men should abstain from all sexual intercourse, whence will the human race exist? Would that all would do this, 'only in 'charity out of a pure heart, and good conscience, and faith unfeigned'; much more speedily would the City of God be filled, and the end of the world hastened.[1]

This manages to embody both Paul's longing for the end of the world and Jerome's epigram about marriage's peopling the earth while virginity fills heaven.

In his writings against Pelagius, Augustine is less circumspect in discussing marriage. In his treatise On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin, Augustine states, as elsewhere, the three good things of marriage. Marriage, he says,

> is a good in all the things which are proper to the married state. And these are three: it is the ordained means of procreation, it is the guarantee of chastity, it is the bond of union.[2]

In going on to discuss the Fall and original sin, however, Augustine becomes more extreme.

When God commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply," those words

> are not prophetic of sins to be condemned, but a benediction upon the fertility of marriage. For by these ineffable words of His, . . . God forbid that we should think that marriages in Paradise must have been such, that in them the procreative members would be excited by the mere ardour of lust, and not by the command

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[1] Ibid., p. 404.

[2] St. Augustine, On Original Sin, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," V), p. 251.

> of the will for producing offspring, -- as the foot is for walking, the hand for labour, and the tongue for speech. Nor, as now happens, would the chastity of virginity be corrupted to the conception of offspring by the force of a turbid heat, but it would rather be submissive to the power of the gentlest love . . . .[1]

Augustine uses his doctrine of 'vitiated nature,' then, to answer those who use Gen. 1:28 in their defense of marriage. Marriage was unencumbered by lust before the Fall. After the Fall, however, even lawful procreation has this element of lust.

> Thus it comes to pass that marriage is permitted to effect all that is lawful in its state, only it must not forget to conceal all that is improper. Hence it follows that infants, although incapable of sinning, are yet not born without the contagion of sin, -- not indeed, because of what is lawful, but on account of what is unseemly: for from what is lawful nature is born; from what is unseemly sin.[2]

Although this passage is not perfectly clear, it seems to suggest that procreation is naturally lawful within marriage, but that the unseemly act of procreation passes on the original sin to the infant, partly by its vitiated, unseemly nature.

Two later passages seem to support this interpretation:

> This concupiscence of the flesh would be prejudicial, just in so far as it is present in us, if the remission of sins were not so beneficial that while it is present in men, both as born and as born again, it may in the former be prejudicial as well as present, but in the latter present simply but never prejudicial.
> . . . . . .
> A regenerate man does not regenerate, but generates, sons according to the flesh; and thus he transmits to his posterity, not the condition of the regenerated, but only the generated.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 252.

[3] Ibid., p. 253.

If this interpretation of these passages reads too much into them, certainly that there is a tendency in them in that direction is undeniable. Just this interpretation is made in another treatise which the Middle Ages attributed to Augustine, but which is now thought to be by Fulgentius. On Ps. 1:7 ("Behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me."), Fulgentius argues,

> Since, when man and woman are commingled for the generation of children, there is no such commerce of parents without taint of lust, therefore the children born of their flesh cannot be conceived without sin, which sin is transmitted to the child not by propagation, but by lust. [1]

This is important both because it bore the seeming authority of Augustine and because later clerics saw nothing at variance in it with his other teachings.

In the tenth century, we find St. Odo, abbot of Cluny, still arguing in a similar manner:

> Why does God condemn to all eternity an infant born of lawful wedlock and conceived at a permitted season, even though it die before it can have committed sin? Since it is certainly not punished for its own sin, plainly this must be for the sin which is committed at the moment of its conception. If therefore there is so much guilt in conjugal commerce that the infant earns just punishment for the fault alone, how much is there in adultery, or in the pollutions committed for the sole satisfaction of lust? [2]

If Augustine had stopped short of this conclusion, he had clearly provided the material for it. Bigham and Mollegen observe,

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[1] Coulton, Vol. I, p. 444.

[2] Ibid., p. 445.

> Because of the Christian doctrine of Creation, he believes in procreation, but because of his belief in Redemption he considers it unnecessary. Because of God's creation and command, marriage is for him a good; but because of the Fall, the results of which to his mind are transmitted through procreation, the act of procreation is always close to sin. Indeed original sin is the mother of the excess of physical passion over and above the necessity of procreation and is also the daughter of that excess in the next generation.[1]

A passage from Augustine's treatise On Marriage and Concupiscence may show just how close he can come to the positions of Fulgentius and Odo. Even when man and wife come together for lawful propagation, he says, "the very embrace which is lawful and honourable cannot be effected without the ardour of lust . . . .":

> This is the carnal concupiscence, which, while it is no longer accounted sin in the regenerate, yet in no case happens to nature except from sin . . . . Now from this concupiscence whatever comes into being by natural birth is bound by original sin, unless, indeed, it be born again in Him whom the Virgin conceived without this concupiscence. Wherefore, when He vouchsafed to be born in the flesh, He alone was born without sin.[2]

There has been ample testimony of the way clerics followed the Church Fathers in their marital views. Examples could be piled up, if there were any point in it, to show the low esteem for marriage among the clerics from Tertullian to Thomas Aquinas. Augustine's great influence was operative here, and, as Bigham and Mollegen observe,

> With a doctrine of the Fall different from that of the Neoplatonists, Augustine is still able to think Neoplatonically of the body as a

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[1] Bigham and Mollegen, p. 385.

[2] St. Augustine, On Marriage and Concupiscence, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," V), p. 275.

> shackle and a shame, to be rescued by rational control for purposes of parenthood or, better, to be escaped by continence and meditation. This doctrine of the sinfulness of sex held sway until St. Thomas wrote his Summa. [1]

With the coming of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, the official clerical attitude changed somewhat. In line with Aquinas's usual handling of Christian tradition, however, this was more a matter of degree than of kind. Bigham and Mollegen assert,

> The high Scholastic, in whose sacramental doctrine marriage was raised from the natural order, went beyond the Patristic view to make full place for Christian family life, and at the same time they gave pre-eminence to monastic dedication as a social function within the Christian community and as an individual call to mystical devotion. [2]

In connection with this, it should be pointed out that even the Patristic view offered the belief in the supernatural origin of marriage, but in their writings on marriage they did tend to take a naturalistic view of its present state.

The earlier writers had emphasized I Cor. 7:1 sqq., which did support a naturalistic view of marriage by emphasizing its earthly values and duties. The high Scholastics, on the other hand, used Eph. 5:22 sqq., which supported the sacramental, supernatural character of marriage:

> Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of his body. Therefore as the church

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[1] Bigham and Mollegen, p. 385.

[2] Ibid., p. 386.

> is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church . . . . So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church: Because we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular love his wife as himself: and let the wife fear her husband.

In emphasizing the supernatural bond of marriage, St. Thomas and the high Scholastics helped to raise it finally in the estimation of the rank and file of the clergy. In the following passage from the Summa, for example, St. Thomas opposes the imputation of evil to the marriage with a reference to the passage from Ephesians:

> Now a human act is said to be good in two ways. In one way by goodness of virtue, and thus an act derives its goodness from those things which place it in the mean. This is what faith and offspring do in the marriage act . . . . In another way, by goodness of the sacrament, in which way an act is said to be not only good, but also holy, and the marriage act derives this goodness from the indissolubility of the union, in respect of which it signifies the union of Christ with the Church. Thus it is clear that the aforesaid goods sufficiently excuse the marriage act. [1]

As the clerical attitude toward women fell with the esteem of marriage in the Patristic age and after, so it rose with the shift of feeling in regard to the character of marriage. But it was not a swift and dramatic rise; working against it were a thousand years of anti-feminism nourished by Biblical examples. If feminist theory was a

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[1] St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. XIX, p. 513.

mixed heritage in Chaucer's day, the traditional examples of Eve, Delilah, and others still tipped the scales toward antifeminism.

CHAPTER VII

ANTIFEMINISM BY BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

> 'Forget also thy father's house,' as David . . . admonishes: 'Thy father' he calleth the impure deed that begat thee of thy mother, that same indecent burning of the flesh, that same flaming itch of carnal lust, before that loathsome act, that beastly copulation, that shameless coition, that fullness of stinking ordure and uncomely deed.
>
> . . . If thou askest why God created such a thing to be, I answer thee: God created it never such; but Adam and Eve turned it to be such by their sin, and marred our nature . . . .[1]

> The celibate clergy still had a score to settle with Eve for her indiscretion in the Garden, and they tried to balance the account by abusing her daughters.[2]

Virginity, as we have seen, early became an ideal, and marriage suffered accordingly. First of all, this was a product of the same climate of thought and emotion which produced first the martyrs and then the monks. The monks and other celibates found the trials and temptations

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[1] Hali Meidenhad, trans. & ed. Oswald Cockayne; rev. F. J. Furnivall. (Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 18.) London: 1922, pp. 12-13.

[2] William E. Mead, "The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale," PMLA, Vol. 16 (1901), p. 396.

of the flesh almost more than they could bear. If it was natural for them to think that these trials and temptations were by devils, it was also natural to think that devils had taken the guises of women. From this, it was only a step to thinking of women as being tools of the devils. Antifeminism and asceticism, then, could be and often were linked closely.

These men quite naturally looked to the Bible for justification of both feelings -- the goodness of celibacy and virginity, and the evils of women and intercourse with them. The first example they found remained their favorite -- the Genesis account of the Fall. They had only to look there to see the terrible result of the first marriage and the events which led to the first loss of virginity.

Because Eve's succumbing to the temptation of the serpent had brought evil into the world, it was inevitable that clerics should single her out for special condemnation. As all men were said to have been present in Adam in the Garden, so, it seemed, were all women present in Eve. As she had brought the downfall of the first man, so later women could be the confusion and downfall of later men.

The aim of Western monasticism was to eliminate those desires which hinder the contemplative life -- the life of perfect love of God through contemplation and the communion of the other monastic worshipers.

> Chief among the emotions and desires -- to wit, the lusts -- to be eliminated was passionate love between the sexes . . . . All sexual

> desire was condemned, every mode of life involving it was excluded, and whatever might occasion it was forbidden. Mainly to this end was the monk's diet regulated, his fasts prescribed, and his intercourse with the world restricted.[1]

Although the monk strove to renounce all that was perishable and that led away from God, the focal point of resistance to earthly vanity and weakness was to the passion for sexual intercourse.

Besides its connection with sex, married life was also less perfect than the monastic way of life because it hindered contemplation and, as Paul said, turned the mind away from God to the pleasing of the spouse. Every man who married, then, every man who fell into what the clerical mind often saw as the devilish snares of women -- that man fell away from the best kind of life. Woman represented the greatest danger to the maintenance of life according to the monastic ideal. Augustine, for example, would never allow a woman -- not even his sister -- in his presence unless there were others with him.

We saw in the last chapter how easily Jerome could be led from telling his own trials and erotic visions in the desert to giving Biblical examples of men of God who had fallen because of women. It was perfectly easy to make this transition, and later emphasis on the Fall helped to strengthen the tendency.

Although Eve was by far the favorite, there were other Biblical examples of women who had brought disaster to men. We have already

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[1] H. O. Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (Columbia Univ., 1903), p. 179.

seen, in the passage from St. Jerome's epistle to Eustochius, the two favorites (after Eve, of course) of early writers -- Delilah and Bathsheba. Other examples were not difficult to find: there was, for example, Job's wife who counseled him to despair. There was Judith, who married Holofernes only to kill him in his sleep and cut off his head; this did indeed help the Chosen People, but it also went to show the deceitfulness of women. In time the shrewishness of Noah's wife gained currency, and she came to be the type of the female nag, of which company the Wife of Bath boasts herself a member and on which comic writers have always drawn for material. As will be seen in the next chapter, there was a witness for the defense -- Mary -- but the effect of her worship on these diatribes was not as we might have expected. This, however, is a topic which will concern us later.

It was not until the time of Augustine that the impairment of human nature consequent to the Fall received the emphasis in Christianity which it had throughout the Middle Ages. There was a later Jewish tradition somewhat like the ascetic Christian tradition of the third and fourth centuries, but even that tradition, because of its different kind of Platonic tendency, tended to give more credit to human power than the Christian one would allow.

The Alexandrian Neoplatonists spoke of evil as <u>simply</u> a turning-away from the good, which could be cured by the power of the will. We have seen how Origen regarded evil as only a temporary condition

of the soul. J. H. Bernard points out the change which was wrought in Neoplatonized Christianity by the emphasis on the Fall and the consequent vitiation of Nature:

> Speaking broadly, the Greek view was simply that the 'original righteousness' of the race was lost; the effect of Adam's sin was a privatio, an impoverishment of human nature which yet left the power of the will unimpaired. But the Latin writers who followed Augustine took a darker view of the consequences of the Fall. It is, for them, a depravatio naturae; the human will is disabled; there is left a bias towards evil which can be conquered only by grace.[1]

Partly because of the contact with Greek philosophy and partly because of the general sentiment of the time just before the dawn of the Christian era, later Jewish theology was greatly influenced by asceticism. This asceticism was embodied in the later pseudepigraphic writings. R. H. Charles says that it was in

> the centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian era, when the currency of this apocalyptic writings was very widespread, because they almost alone represented the advance of the high theology in Judaism, which culminated in Christianity.[2]

The pseudepigraphic books in which discussions of the Fall were most famous were the books of Adam and the books of Enoch. In the Apocalypsis Mosis is Eve's account which connects the forbidden fruit with lust. She is telling her children of the Fall while they sit beside

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[1] J. H. Bernard, "Fall," Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, p. 841.

[2] R. H. Charles, Introduction to the Book of Enoch in Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia of the Old Testament in English, ed. R. H. Charles and others (2 vols.; Oxford, 1913), Vol. II, p. 163. Cited hereafter as Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia.

Adam's deathbed. The first part of her account is much like that in Genesis. Finally, she says, she succumbed:

> And I opened to him and he walked a little way, then turned and said to me: 'I have changed my mind and I will not give thee to eat until thou swear to me to give also to thy husband.' (And) I said, 'What sort of oath shall I swear to thee? Yet what I know, I say to thee: By the throne of the Master, and by the Cherubim and the Tree of Life, I will give also to my husband to eat.' And when he had received the oath from me, he went and poured upon the fruit the poison of his wickedness, which is lust, the root and beginning of every sin, and he bent the branch on the earth and I took of the fruit and I ate. [1]

The Adam books (Apocalypsis Mosis and Vitae Adae et Evae) seem to have been influential among very early Christians and Gnostics, who changed them somewhat. L. S. A. Wells points out,

> The most marked characteristic of these Christian and Gnostic books is the new part played by the ascetic life as such. Ascetic touches . . . are not wanting in our Adam books; but they are far removed from the way of thinking presented by these products of the pious imagination of monks, where it is on account of their fasting and celibacy that the children of Seth are styled 'Sons of God,' and live apart on a holy mountain; where the temptation of Adam is an incitement to marry Eve, where long years of separation are only brought to an end by the special command of God (even as Noah is only induced to take a wife against his will by the same command), where fasting is a constant practice, and celibacy a necessary mark of saintliness. [2]

Because of the loss of so much of the literature of the first two centuries of the Christian era, it is difficult to say how much of an effect these pseudepigraphic writings had on early Christian thought.

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[1] Apocalypsis Mosis, trans. L. S. A. Wells, Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia, Vol. II, p. 131.

[2] L. S. A. Wells, Introduction to "The Books of Adam and Eve," Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia, Vol. II, p. 131.

The most famous of these -- the two Enoch books (the Book of Enoch and the Book of the Secrets of Enoch) -- were accepted as inspired by Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.[1] In the Book of the Secrets of Enoch, the Platonic influence on the account of Adam and Eve seems evident. God says that Adam does not understand good and evil and must be tested; He explains,

> For I have seen his nature, but he has not seen his own nature, therefore through not seeing he will sin worse, and I said: 'After sin what is there but death?'
>
> And I put sleep into him and he fell asleep. And I took from him a rib and created him a wife, that death should come to him by his wife, and I took his last word and called her name mother, that is to say, Eva.[2]

This account of the danger of Adam falling into evil through ignorance evidently owes much to the Platonic doctrine that all men seek the good, but choose the bad through ignorance.

Hilary, Augustine, Jerome, and others condemned the Enoch books, and after the third century they faded from sight. How much influence or lasting effect they and the other pseudepigraphia had on ascetic thought is difficult to say. Certainly there is one passage on Eve in the Parson's Tale which, as Otto F. Babler says, "seems to be based on Old Hebraic legends."[3]

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[1] R. H. Charles, Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia, p. 165.

[2] Ibid., p. 450.

[3] Otto F. Babler, "The Head, the Foot, and the Rib of Adam," NQ, Vol. 171 (1936), p. 229.

The passage in the Parson's Tale explains why Eve was made from Adam's rib. Christ, says the Parson,

> ne made hire nat of the heved of Adam, for she sholde nat clayme to greet lordshippe. For ther as the womman hath the maistrie, she maketh to muche desray . . . . Also, certes, God ne made nat womman of the foot of Adam, for she ne sholde nat been holden to lowe; for she kan nat paciently suffre. But God made womman of the ryb of Adam, for womman sholde be felawe unto man. (I. 925ff.)

Babler had found this version of the legend in the Sefer Haagadah of Chaim Nachman Bialik:

> God made Eve of a rib. He overthought it, from what matter he should make her. He said: 'I will not make her from the head, that she may not be too haughty; nor from the eye, that she may not wish to see all things; nor from the mouth, that she may not be too talkative; nor from the heart, that she may not be too envious; nor from the hand that she may not try to touch all things; nor from the feet, that she may not run about.' So He made her of a modest part of the man's body. Nevertheless she overthrew all precautionary measures, because she got all these bad qualities. [1]

All that went before, however, seems pretty pallid beside the tirades which resulted, in the third century and after, from the brooding over the Fall and its consequences.

When Augustine added to the tradition of Neoplatonic Christian asceticism an emphasis on original sin and the vitiation of nature because of the Fall, he prepared the way for the later laments of what had been lost in the Garden and the consequent railing against Eve for her part in bringing evil into the world. The equal guilt of Adam was often forgotten in all this, partly because he was the second to succumb

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[1] Ibid.

and also because every man was felt to be weak when tempted by a woman. Care must be taken, however, not to attribute too much to Augustine in this regard. Even in a passage praising his mother, Gregory Nazianzen, an early contemporary of Augustine, could casually compare her good example to Eve's bad one, with a note of wonder that such goodness could be in one of her sex:

> She indeed who was given to Adam as a help meet for him, because it was not good for man to be alone, instead of an assistant became an enemy, and instead of a yoke-fellow, an opponent, and beguiling the man by means of pleasure, estranged him from the tree of life. But she who was given by God to my father became not only, as is less wonderful, his assistant, but even his leader, drawing him on by her influence in deed and word to the highest excellence . . . .[1]

The connection which we saw between the growth of the ideal of asceticism and virginity, and the lowering of the status of marriage and procreation, seems also to include the increasing prominence of the first wife and mother. As the ranks of Christian writers came to be filled increasingly by monks and other celibates, and as these men tended increasingly to identify celibacy with the best life and anything else with a worse one, the role of the first woman in bringing lust and temptation into the world came increasingly into prominence.

The central role which the Fall and the consequent vitiation of nature play in the thought of Augustine, however, must inevitably have heightened an already growing tendency. The ascetics and antifeminists

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[1]Gregory Nazianzen, "On the Death of His Father," trans. C. G. Browne & J. E. Swallow, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, VII), pp. 256-57.

would probably have given ever-increasing attention to Eve and the Fall, but Augustine's doctrines of original sin and vitiated nature insured that the Fall would get almost as much attention as the Redemption in the religious thought of the centuries following his own.

Although Origen used a combination of Christianity and Neoplatonism to come to an optimistic conclusion as to the temporariness of evil and the redemption of all souls, Augustine merged the two to reach quite different conclusions. Whereas Origen had thought of the soul as leaving the body (or at least all of the gross, material part of it -- with only a 'pneumatic' body left) and thereby escaping the evil which inheres in matter, Augustine used the Neoplatonic dichotomy of body and soul to reach pessimistic conclusions about the ability of any but a very few (perhaps one in 100,000) to escape sin and destruction. His account of the Fall and his identification of the man with the soul and the woman with the flesh is a curious blend of traditional Christian exegesis and Neoplatonism, as shown in this passage on Psalm XLIX:

> What was said by God to the Serpent? 'She shall mark thy head, and thou shalt mark her hell.' . . . But wherefore said He this to Eve? Because through the flesh man doth slip. Our flesh is an Eve within us. 'He that loveth his wife,' he saith, 'loveth himself.' What meaneth 'himself'? He continueth, and saith, 'For no man ever yet hath hated his own flesh.' Eph. 5:28, 29 . Because then the devil would make us slip through the flesh, just as he made that man to slip, through Eve; Eve is bidden to mark the head of the devil, because the devil marketh her heel. [1]

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[1] St. Augustine, "Psalm XLIX," trans. J. E. Tweed ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," VIII), p. 170.

This mastery which the flesh, in the absence of grace, exercises over the spirit after the Fall is a theme to which Augustine returns over and over. This is what he means when he says that "this sin is of such a character that it is the punishment of sin."[1] The punishment is that man no longer has power of himself to do what he wills or to refrain from what his will opposes. His elaborations of the consequences of the error to which Eve urged Adam are harbingers of the myriads to come:

> For God, the author of natures, not of vices, created man upright; but man, being of his own will corrupted, and justly condemned, begot corrupted and condemned children. . . . And thus, from the bad use of free will, there originated the whole train of evil, which, with its concatenation of miseries, convoys the human race from its depraved origin, as from a corrupt root, onto the destruction of the second death, which has no end, those only being excepted who are freed by the grace of God.[2]

Later writers who discussed the Fall often treated Eve as the tool or even the ally of the devil. The author of the thirteenth-century poem Cursor Mundi, for example, describes Adam's plight in this way:

> Now mon is sett betwene two
> On ei er side he ha a fo
> Bitwene sathan and his wif
> Adam is sett in mychel strif
> Bo þe þei be on o party
> To ouercom man wi þ tricchery . . . .[3]

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[1] St. Augustine, On the Merits and Remission of Sins, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," V), p. 59.

[2] St. Augustine, City of God, trans. Marcus Dods ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," II), p. 251.

[3] Cursor Mundi, ed. Richard Morris (Early English Text Society, Original Series, LVII; London, 1874-78), p. 51.

Eve was used as an example of all kinds of sins. Tertullian, for example, uses her as the type of impatience, which she got from the devil:

> The woman, immediately on being met by him . . . was, through his very speech with her, breathed on by a spirit infected with impatience: so certain is it that she would never have sinned at all, if she had honoured the divine edict by maintaining her patience to the end. What (of the fact) that she endured not to have been met alone; but in the presence of Adam, not yet her husband, not yet bound to lend her his ears, she is impatient of keeping silence, and makes him the transmitter of that which she had imbibed from the Evil One?[1]

Incidentally, it will be noted that in this passage we have a reference to the notion held by some early writers that Adam and Eve were only married after the Fall.

In the Ancren Riwle (or, more accurately, the Ancrene Wisse) Eve is held up to the young nuns as an example of the evils of constantly looking about:

> When thou lookest upon a man thou art in Eve's case; thou lookest upon the apple . . . . Eve, thy mother, leaped after her eyes to the apple; from the apple in Paradise down to the earth; from the earth to hell, where she lay in prison four thousand years and more, she and her lord both, and taught all her offspring to leap after her to death without end. The beginning and the root of this woful calamity was a light look.[2]

Eve was held up especially as a warning to women against pride:

> Eve was a nyce mayde and a proude; for sche byleved to the wordes of the serpent and wende to haven be evene to godes knowynge, . . .

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[1] Tertullian, "On Patience," trans. S. Thelwall ("Ante-Nicene Fathers," XVIII), p. 710.

[2] Ancren Riwle, ed. & trans. James Morton (Camden Society, Vol. 57; London, 1853), pp. 53-55.

> and was unbuxom to godes hestes; . . . and thurgh that trespas were yschut aȝenst ous the ȝates of paradyse.[1]

Clerical writers and preachers were also fond of using Eve as a point of comparison with other Biblical examples of bad women. One of their favorites in this regard was Job's wife. Here, for example, is Augustine on Job's wife:

> There stood the wife, and instead of giving her husband any help was suggesting blasphemy against God. For we are not to think that the devil, in leaving her when he took away the sons, went to work as one unskilled in mischief: rather, how necessary she was to the tempter, he had already learned in Eve. But now he had not found a second Adam whom he might take by means of a woman. More cautious was Job in his hours of sadness, than Adam in his bowers of gladness, the one was overcome in the midst of pleasant things, the other overcame in the midst of pains; the one consented to that which seemed delightsome, this other quailed not in torments affrightsome.[2]

Elsewhere he speaks in the same vein:

> Who can have so much to suffer in his estate, his house, his sons, his flesh, yea in his very wife who was left to be his temper! But even her who was left, the devil would have taken away long ago, but that he kept her to be his helper: because by Eve he had mastered the first man, therefore he kept an Eve.[3]

Sometimes Job's wife is compared to the serpent, as in this passage from a homily of St. Chrysostom:

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[1] MS. Harl. 2398, fol. 39b. Quoted in G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (2nd. ed. rev.; New York; Barnes and Noble, 1961), pp. 119-120.

[2] St. Augustine, "On Patience," trans. H. Browne ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," III), p. 530.

[3] St. Augustine, "On the Creed," trans. H. Browne ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," III), p. 372.

> There he who deceived and conquered was a serpent; here the tempter was a woman, and she did not prevail: and yet she at least was far more persuasive than he. For to Job after the destruction of his wealth, after the loss of his children, after being stripped bare of all his goods, her wiles were added. But in the other case there was nothing of this kind. [1]

The two examples which we saw in the last chapter from Jerome remained among the favorite of homilies throughout the Middle Ages:

> Who was strenger than Sampson, wyser than Salamon, holyer than David? and ȝit thei were al overcomen by the queyntise and the whiles of women. [2]

The author of the Ancren Riwle also used the story of David and Bathsheba to show the evils of looking about too freely:

> . . . this king and prophet, chosen out of all the people, concerning whom God himself spoke these precious words, was thus, through casting his eye upon a woman as she was bathing, led into sin, let his heart wander, and forgot himself so far that he committed three heinous and deadly sins: adultery with Bathsheba, the lady upon whom he looked, treachery and manslaughter upon his faithful servant Uriah, her lord. [3]

As Owst says, "Rebuke for the vices of women was ever a solemn duty of the medieval pulpit." He goes on to quote a medieval cleric on the subject of Judith, one who in other contexts was held up as an example of how a widow should conduct herself. He tells of the deception practiced by Judith on Holofernes, then concludes in this way:

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[1] St. Chrysostom, "Homily III," trans. T. P. Brandram ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," IX), p. 195.

[2] MS. Harl. 45, fol. 101b. Quoted in Owst.

[3] Ancren Riwle, p. 57.

> She broȝth this hed with hure thorow-owte the ost to the cite, and sett itt uppon the walles; and whan the ost on the morow se that prince was ded, anon their flewȝ, and ther enmyes sewed hem and put many of hem to dethe. Loo sirs, here mayȝe see how that a prince, that wanne a grett parte of the world, myȝth not overcome, but was distrowed by the nyce aray and atyre of a woman. And atrowthe it is to drede that in thise dayes many men ben overcom spiritually and slayen in ther own soules . . . .[1]

This example of how Judith could be made to fit the purpose of the cleric is instructive. Jephthah's daughter Dinah is an example of another who was at times unjustly used to make a point, this time the danger of a girl's putting herself too much in the sight of men:

> She lost her maiden honour, and was made a harlot. Afterwards, for the same cause, were truces broken by high patriarchs, and a great city burned, and the king and his son, and the men of the city slain, and the women of the city led away; her father and her brethren, such noble princes as they were, made outlaws. To this length went her sight: and the Holy Spirit has caused the whole to be written in a book, in order to warn women concerning their foolish eyes. And take notice that this evil which came of Dinah, came not from her seeing Sichem, the son of Hamor, with whom she sinned, but it came from her letting him set his eyes upon her; for that also which he did to her was in the beginning sorely against her will.[2]

How Noah's wife came to be the type of the shrew is difficult to say. There is no warrant for it in Genesis nor in the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, which is the other extended account of the Flood. The Biblical passage for describing the type of whom Noah's wife was to become the representative was Proverbs 7:10-12:

> And behold a woman meeteth him in harlot's attire prepared to deceive souls; talkative and wandering, /Not bearing to be quiet,

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[1] Owst, p. 118.

[2] Ancren Riwle, p. 55.

> not able to abide still at home, / Now abroad, now in the streets, now lying in wait near the corners.

Noah's wife will appear again in the discussion of the popular literary tradition, but, as Owst points out, "her immediate foster-parent is very clearly the native pulpit."[1]

The book of antifeminist utterances which the Wife of Bath's fifth husband possessed was representative of a long tradition of such collections in the Middle Ages. To the specific examples of weak and deceitful and ruinous women named in the Bible could be added certain other, more general condemnations of women. Proverbs contained some and Ecclesiasticus had many. A long passage from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene illustrates what these collections must have been like. Because this is so, it seems worth quoting at some length from the translation of Coulton:

> Note that it is said of St. Nicholas, 'he avoided the company of women': and herein he was wise; for it was women who deceived the children of Israel (Num. xxxi.). Wherefore it is written in Ecclesiasticus, 'Behold not every body's beauty; and tarry not among women. For from garments cometh a moth, and from a woman the iniquity of a man.' Again, in Ecclesiastes, 'I have found a woman more bitter than death, who is a hunter's snare, and her heart is a net, and her hands are bands. He that pleaseth God shall escape from her: but he that is a sinner, shall be caught by her.' In Proverbs again, 'Why art thou seduced, my son, by a strange woman and art cherished in the bosom of another?' Again in the sixth chapter, 'Let not thy heart covet her beauty, be not caught with her winks: For the price of a harlot is scarce one loaf: but the woman catcheth the precious soul of a man.' And again in the twenty-third, 'For a harlot is a deep

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[1] Owst, p. 492.

> ditch: and a strange woman is a narrow pit. She lieth in wait in the way as a robber, and him whom she shall see unwary, she shall kill.'[1]

After pages of this kind of thing, it is no wonder that the Wife was moved to violence.

From quoting and commenting on Biblical examples of ruinous women and the occasional antifeminist utterances from Biblical and Patristic sources, the medieval preachers often turned to cataloguing the failings of women. Owst notes that "'foolish' is perhaps the commonest of all epithets to be hurled at the sex, when the pulpit turns to denounce it."[2] Other vices against which they preached were garrulity, quarrelsomeness, the tendency to be always gadding about, love of finery, and disobedience. Because these and other charges against women played such a large part in medieval literature, they can more conveniently be discussed in the chapter on the popular tradition.

The clerical tradition came to attribute to Eve all of the womanly vices -- her donning of the fig leaves was said to be the origin of the female love of finery! In the same way, the Virgin came to represent all of the womanly virtues. Quite early, then, writers tended to set the one off against the other, the second Eve against the first. Justin

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[1] G. G. Coulton, From St. Francis to Dante (2nd ed. rev.; London: David Nutt, 1907), p. 96. Cited hereafter as Coulton, From St. Francis to Dante.

[2] Owst, p. 386. A valuable account of these antifeminist catalogues will be found on pp. 385-404 of that work, to which this chapter is indebted.

Martyr, for example, gave the accepted view that God had used the one woman to help undo the evil brought into the world by the other. Christ, he says,

> was made man of the Virgin, that by the same way that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent took its rise, it might also receive its destruction. For Eve when a virgin and undefiled conceived the word of the serpent, and brought forth disobedience and death. But Mary the Virgin receiving faith and joy, when the Angel Gabriel told her the good news that the Spirit of the Lord should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should overshadow her, and therefore that Holy Thing which should be born of her is the Son of God, answered, Be it unto me according to Thy Word.[1]

In an article on Eve in the Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Mangenot gives this resume of the history of the comparison:

> Dans l'ordre du salut et de la reparation du péché, Ève a été comparée à Marie, la mère du Sauveur, par contraste plus que par ressemblance. Adam ayant été consideré par saint Paul et par les Pères comme la figure de Jésus, le second Adam, . . . il etait tout naturel qu'Ève devint, elle aussi, la figure de la mère du Sauveur, bien que saint Paul n'ait pas marqué ce caractere figuratif de la premiere femme. Si les Pères apostoliques ne l'ont pas signalé non plus, saint Justin, le premier au IIe siècle, a comparé Ève avec Marie. Il exposait à Tryphon, Dial. cum Tryphone . . . que le Sauveur Jésus devait être le fils d'une vierge pour que la désobéissance prit fin par la même voie qu'elle avait eu commencement sous l'excitation du serpent. Ève etait vierge inviolée, quand elle enfanta la désobèissance et la mort; la vierge Marie les a détruites par sa réponse confiante à la parole de l'ange qui lui annoncait la naissance du Fils de Dieu . . . . La premiere a été seduite par un ange, la seconde a reçu d'un ange l'annonciation de sa maternité divine . . . . La prudence, l'obéissance et la foi de la seconde ont remplacé l'imprudence, la désobéissance et l'incrédulité de la première. Le mal qu'Ève avait laissé introduire dans le monde en prêtant l'oreille aux discours astucieux du serpent

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[1] The Works Extant of S. Justin the Martyr, trans. G. J. Davies, ("A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West"; Oxford, 1861), pp. 196-97.

> a été reparé par l'audition que Marie a donnée à la parole de l'ange Gabriel. Dieu qui a condamné Ève a couronné Marie de gloire. Comme la mort est venue par la première Ève, la vie est revenue par la seconde. Ève a été reintégrée en Marie comme Adam l'a été dans le Christ.[1]

Although this is an accurate description of the comparisons made of the two Eves, the modern notion that the growth of the worship of the virgin correspondingly raised the clerical opinions of women will bear examination in the next chapter.

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[1] E. Mangenot, "Ève," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Vol. V (pt. 2), pp. 1651-52.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORSHIP OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Thow Mayde and Mooder, doghter of thy Sone,
Thow welle of mercy, synful soules cure,
In whom that God for bountee chees to wone,
Thow humble, and heigh over every creature,
Thow nobledest so ferforth oure nature,
That no desdeyn the Makere hadde of kynde
His Sone in blood and flessh to clothe and wynde. [1]

Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncrost
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast . . . . [2]

The beginning of the worship of Mary is hazy and uncertain. The few mentions of her name by the earliest writers are relatively casual and unenlightening. That there was more interest in her than in the other saints, at least beginning in the second century, we know

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Second Nun's Prologue," The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (2nd, ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 207. This text is cited hereafter as Robinson.

[2] William Wordsworth, "The Virgin," Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt & Helen Darbishire (Oxford: 1946), Vol. III, p. 373.

from the apocryphal writings designed to fill our the scanty picture given of her in the New Testament.

The problem of weighing this early evidence is also hindered by the emotional manner in which the most sedate Church historians approach the subject, either pro or con. Catholic historians are at pains to prove the antiquity of the worship on very sparse evidence; Protestant historians, on the contrary, try to use this sparseness of information as evidence that the worship is a post-Nicene innovation. This is hardly the place to attempt to resolve the question of the origin of Mary-worship; therefore, this chapter will begin with the subject as it comes most clearly into view -- in the first ecumenical councils.

Mary's name is not too much in evidence in the surviving literature until the third century near the end of the first great Christological debates. Her appearance in these was only natural: if Christ was indeed merely a divinely inspired man, or God giving only the illusion of having a body, or a divided nature which had only united after birth, the status of His mother must be correspondingly affected.

Perhaps the earliest heresy in regard to Christ was the Docetic heresy that teaches that Christ did not have a real material body and human nature, but only took the appearance of one. As Adrian Fortescue notes, it seems at first strange that this should be

> the earliest of all heresies. One would have thought that the first and second Christian generations would at any rate have had no doubt about our Lord's real manhood. The explanation is that

> Docetism did not develop by a perverse process from the gospel and the Christian system, but came to Christianity from without.[1]

The source of Docetism is that dualistic frame of mind which was so pervasive from the time just preceding the Christian era through the early centuries of it. We have noted Augustine's recognition that one of the fatal flaws of Neoplatonism is the failure to recognize the union of the Logos with the flesh. This same mystery of the union of flesh and divinity was to cause certain Christians to fall into heresy. A person who subscribed to the dualistic tendency to see matter as inherently evil and spirit as inherently good was going to stumble when confronted with the union of God with matter. The Docetist answer was that this union only seemed to have taken place.

Because the Christians of the second century were mostly converts from other religions, inevitably they brought with them some ideas which did not fit in the Christian framework. Irenaeus lists some of the heresies which were in evidence in his day:

> Some of them introduce another Father besides the Creator; some, again, say that the world and its substance was made by certain angels; certain others [maintain] that it was widely separated by Horos from him whom they represent as being the Father -- that it sprang forth . . . of itself, and from itself was born. Then, again, others [of them assert] that it obtained substance in those things which are contained by the Father, from defect and ignorance; others, still, despise the advent of the Lord manifest [to the senses], for they do not admit His incarnation; while

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[1] Adrian Fortescue, "Docetism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. Hastings, Vol. IV, p. 832.

> others, ignoring the arrangement [that He should be born] of a virgin, maintain that He was begotten by Joseph.[1]

Because the Incarnation was so difficult to comprehend, perhaps the most prevelant heresies were Christological. By the third century one of these heresies -- the Arian -- was so powerful that orthodox Christians in the East, like Athanasius, were often forced into exile. Although the controversy continued after the Council of Nicea, the outcome was predetermined with the creed which was enunciated there. The Nicene Creed became the basis for examining later Christological heresies, particularly the Nestorian.

Although Origen and others had earlier used the term Theotokos ("Mother of God") in regard to Mary, it was in the Nestorian controversy that the term became the basis of a doctrinal dispute. Here again, Christological doctrine was the basic issue (as it had been in the Arian controversy). Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, divided Christ into two Persons: Christ the man who was born in the flesh, and the Godhead which united with the human after birth -- hence his term for Mary of Christotokos ("Mother of Christ") in opposition to what was implied in the term Theotokos.

Pope Celestine, after receiving letters on both sides of the subject from Nestorius and Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, decreed the Nestorius should be deprived of his bishopric and communion unless he

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[1] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," trans. Alexander Roberts & W. H. Rambaut ("The Ante-Nicene Fathers," Vol. I), p. 547.

rejected his innovation. Because of the influence of Nestorius, however, the Emperor wrote to Cyril calling for a synod to decide the matter. This synod -- the Third Ecumenical Council -- met at Ephesus and decided that the letter of Nestorius did not agree with the Nicene Creed. The connection of this controversy with the status of Mary can be seen in the first anathema pronounced against Nestorianism:

> If anyone will not confess that Emmanuel is very God, and that therefore the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (Theotokos), inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of God made flesh . . . : let him be anathema.[1]

The next two ecumenical councils -- the Fourth, held at Chalcedon, and the Fifth, held at Constantinople -- reaffirmed the nature of Christ and became ever stronger in asserting the dignity of Mary. Here, for example, is an anathema pronounced by the Fifth Ecumenical Council:

> If anyone shall not call in a true acceptation, but only in a false acceptation, the holy, glorious, and ever-virgin Mary, the Mother of God, or shall call her so only in a relative sense, believing that she bore a simple man and that God the Word was not incarnate of her, but that the incarnation of God the Word resulted only from the fact that he united himself to that man who was born [of her]; if he shall calumniate the Holy Synod of Chalcedon as though it had asserted the Virgin to be Mother of God according to the impious sense of Theodore; or if anyone shall call her the mother of a man . . . or the Mother of Christ (Christotokos), as if Christ were not God, and shall not confess that she is exactly and truly the Mother of God, because that God the Word who before all ages was begotten of the Father was in these last days made flesh and born of her, and if anyone shall not confess that in this sense the

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[1] "The XII. Anathematicisms of St. Cyril Against Nestorius," trans. Henry R. Percival ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, Vol. XIV), p. 206.

> holy Synod acknowledged her to be the Mother of God: let him be anathema.[1]

Important as these official pronouncements were, they represented only one part of the very complex process by which the worship of Mary reached such heights in the Middle Ages. With the insistence of the Church that He was not merely a demi-god but God in the flesh, the awful majesty of Christ came to be felt poignantly by ordinary believers. Perhaps the apocalyptic preachings about the day of judgment, with Christ as the Judge, also contributed to this growing awareness of the terrible divinity of Christ.

With the growth of this feeling, it was only natural that some awestruck and fearful believers should wish for some human advocate before the bar of justice. As Christ had earlier been thought of as the mediator between man and God the Judge, gradually Mary came to be addressed as the mediatress between man and Christ the Judge. As early as the fourth century (367), we find Epiphanius, in his seventy-ninth Heresy, condemning a sect of Arabian women, whom he calls Collyridians, for worshipping Mary as a goddess and offering to her bread-cakes, perhaps in imitation of the rites of Ceres.[2]

The rise of the ideal of virginity also multiplied the references to Mary in the Patristic writings. Indeed, Harnack asserts that

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[1] "The Fifth Ecumenical Council," trans. Henry R. Percival, ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, XIV), p. 313.

[2] Schaff, Vol. III, p. 418.

> Ambrose and Jerome, above all, in their controversy with Jovinian, initiated the church in the worship of Mary. Ambrose who exerted so strong an influence upon Augustine is especially to be mentioned as patron of this worship. He taught that Mary took an active share in the work of redemption, and already applied Gen. III. 3 to the holy virgin. [1]

The earliest writers on the ideal of virginity had spoken of the virgin life as an imitation of the life of Christ. As his divine majesty was felt, however, partly as a result of the Christological controversies, gradually the life of a human -- Mary -- came to be the type of holy virginity.

The parallel drawn between Eve, the first virgin, and Mary, the perfect virgin, also had its effect. Schaff recognizes the beginning of Mary-worship

> as early as the second century in an allegorical interpretation of the history of the fall, and in the assumption of an antithetic relation of Eve and Mary, according to which the mother of Christ occupies the same position in the history of redemption as the wife of Adam in the history of sin and death. [2]

Harnack lends his considerable authority to the same point of view: ". . . it is undeniable that the later Mariolatry has one of its roots in the parallel between Eve and Mary." [3]

This comparison of Eve and Mary has already been mentioned in the last chapter. As far as we know from the existing records, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian were the first to make this

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[1] Harnack, Vol. IV, p. 315. [2] Schaff, Vol. III, p. 414.

[3] Harnack, Vol. II, p. 277.

comparison. Justin has already been quoted on the subject; here is Irenaeus in the same vein. In accordance with the divine plan of the Incarnation, he says,

> Mary the Virgin is found obedient . . . . But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless a virgin . . . , having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary having a man betrothed to her, and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race . . . . For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith. [1]

As may be seen in this passage, even in the second century considerable merit and power was being attributed to Mary.

In Book XX of his City of God, Augustine states a position most definitely which we have seen him take before -- the sin of everyone who ever lived:

> . . . it is good for all men to hear His voice and live, by passing to the life of godliness from the death of ungodliness. Of this death the Apostle Paul says, 'Therefore all are dead, and He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.' Thus all, without one exception, were dead in sins, whether original or voluntary sins, sins of ignorance, or sins committed against knowledge . . . . [2]

The status of Mary in this regard is a question he does not want to deal with. In reply to the assertion of Pelagius that many of the people in

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[1] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," p. 455.

[2] St. Augustine, City of God, trans. Marcus Dods ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," II), p. 425.

the Old Testament lived sinless lives, Augustine denies that any of them lived without sin. Mary is on the list, however, and we may see from his qualification her status in relation to other Biblical figures even in his own day.

> We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honour to the Lord; for from Him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred upon her who had the merit to conceive and bear Him who undoubtedly had no sin.[1]

Schaff claims that Augustine's reasoning on this point is an innovation:

> The reasoning of Augustine backward from the holiness of Christ to the holiness of His mother was an important turn, which was afterward pursued to further results.[2]

This does not seem quite so new and unusual as Schaff makes it sound. Rather than being something brought in by Augustine, it would seem to be a rather natural sort of reasoning. Here, for example is Ignatius in the first century:

> Now the virginity of Mary was hidden from the prince of this world, as was also her offspring, and the death of the Lord; three mysteries of renown, which were wrought in the silence of God.[3]

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[1] St. Augustine, On Nature and Grace, trans. Peter Holmes & R. E. Wallis ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," V), p. 135.

[2] Schaff, Vol. III, p. 419.

[3] Ignatius, "Epistle to the Ephesians," trans. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, & F. Crombie ("Ante-Nicene Fathers," I), p. 57.

As the nature of the Incarnation became clearer in the next three centuries, the holiness of the mother of Christ became more evident. It was only natural for people to feel that since the Son of God had taken flesh from Mary, Mary must be inexpressibly more holy than any other who had ever lived.

In an article on Mary, E. Dublanchy asserts that in all the time since the fifth century,

> il n'y eut aucun développement du dogme de la maternité divine qui avait atteint, à l'époque des conciles d'Ephèse et de Chalcédoine, tout le perfectionnement dont il était susceptible.

But, he goes on to say,

> il y eut un progrès dans le développement des conclusions déduites du dogme de la maternité divine. [1]

It will be convenient to follow Dublanchy as he traces the development of these conclusions deduced from the divine maternity.

In the first place, he says, the eminent dignity of Mary was deduced from her maternity:

> Du ve à la fin du xie siècle, l'éminent dignité de la maternité divine est contenue dans des affirmations generales qui, selon la pensée de leurs auteurs, visent non seulement les perfections de Marie, mais sa dignité elle-même. Parmi ces affirmations, nous citerons principalement les suivantes: Marie surpasse toutes les créatures, même les anges; Marie n'est inferieure qu'à Dieu; rien dans les créatures ne peut être comparé à Marie; le Créateur seul la surpasse. [2]

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[1] E. Dublanchy, "Marie," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Vol. IX (pt. 2), col. 2355.

[2] Ibid.

By the high Middle Ages, the dignity of Mary was indisputable:

> A la fin du XIe et au commencement du XIIe siècle, saint Anselme (1109), fit mieux resortir la trancendante supériorité de la Mère de Dieu en montrant son intime union: avec Dieu le Pere, puisque le même Fils est commun à Dieu le Père et à la vierge Marie: avec Dieu le Fils, puisqu'elle est sa mère; avec Dieu le Saint-Esprit, par l'opération duquel elle a conçu et enfante le Sauveur . . . . Dans la suite les théologiens reproduisirent et commentèrent fréquemment l'affirmation de saint Anselm sur l'union intime de Marie avec les trois personnes de la sainte Trinité. La relation intime de Marie avec Dieu le Père fut rendue plus manifeste par cette assertion de saint Thomas qu'il y a en Jésus-Christ une seule filiation appartenant à la personne eternelle du Verbe, mais avec deux relations, une relation réelle entre Dieu le Pere et le Verbe, et une relation de raison entre Marie et le Verbe, Sum. theol., III^a, q. xxxv, a.5; opinion dès lors communément suivie par les théologiens.[1]

This expression of the intimate relation of Mary and the Word Incarnate gave her a dignity, as Dublanchy says, "en quelque sort, infinie, surpassant de beaucoup toutes les dignités créés."[2]

This dignity of Mary came to make her seem the best of all the saints to mediate between the Christian and God. The traditional position on this matter is stated by Dublanchy. This mediation, he says, is implicit in the antithesis between Mary and Eve.

> La foi de la Vierge, par laquelle la régéneration nous a été procurée, est bien la foi par laquelle Marie a été pour tout le genre humain, la cause du salut; tandis que, par son incredulité et sa désobéissance, Ève avait causé notre perte . . . .[3]

With usually cautious theologians vying in their praise of Mary's dignity and her role as mediatress for men, it would be expected that

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[1] Ibid., col. 2356.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Dublanchy, col. 2386.

the populace would go even further; and such is the case. The decision in favor of Mary's role as Theotokos (adapted by Latin writers as Deipara) by the council at Ephesus was greeted joyfully, "amidst bonfires, processions, and illuminations."[1] Although there were some setbacks to her worship after that, the councils which immediately followed the one at Ephesus, as we have seen, strengthened that worship. Although there is less evidence for determining the early popular attitudes toward Mary than the official doctrines, here as elsewhere popular opinion must have gone further than the official attitude from the very first. Certainly this is true of the body of popular traditions which have survived -- the Mary-legends.

The first of these are certain apocryphal books of the New Testament, chiefly the Book of James, or Protevangelium, the Gospel of the Birth of Mary, the History of Joseph the Carpenter, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Liber de Infantia, or Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Schaff points out,

> The Catholic church, it is true, condemned this apochryphal literature so early as the Decrees of Gelasius; yet many of the fabulous elements of it -- such as the names of the parents of Mary, Joachim (instead of Eli, as in Luke iii. 23) and Anna, the birth of Mary in a cave, her education in the temple, and her mock marriage with the aged Joseph -- passed into the Catholic tradition.[2]

Throughout the Middle Ages, reverence for Mary and popular legends about her grew apace. The Ave Maria (though not the complete

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[1] Schaff, Vol. III, p. 421.

[2] Schaff, Vol. III, pp. 413-14.

prayer of today) was apparently added to the Pater Noster in the tenth century; and

> an office of the Virgin came into use especially through the influence of St. Peter Damiam (1007-72), whose extravagant language regarding her chimed with the popular voice. Saturday was specially dedicated to her, Masses being said in her honour. In 1905 Urban II ordered that the Hours of the Virgin should be said every day and the office every Saturday. [1]

Popular theories about Mary were often strengthened by men of the Church. St. Bernard, for example, affirmed her power of mediation in this way:

> If you fear the Father, there is Christ the Mediator. If you fear Him, Who, though Man, is also God, there is His Mother, pure humanity. She will listen to thee. The Son will listen to her, the Father to Him. [2]

The reverence which any good son shows his mother was always a basis for the legends about Mary's power. This may have been strengthened in the unlearned by the images of her, which commonly showed her holding the Christ-child in her arms. We even find Guibert de Nogent voicing what was a common notion among the less learned:

> The Virgin has with Jesus the power which a mother in this world has over her son. A mother does not pray: she orders. How, then, would not Christ listen to His Mother? [3]

This power of Mary with her son gave rise to many stories, one of the most common being her staying of his hand in preventing the end

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[1] J. A. MacCulloch, Medieval Faith and Fable (London: George G. Harrap, 1932), p. 106.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] Ibid.

of the world. One story is about a statue of the Virgin which began to sweat greatly; all of the people were amazed until a man possessed informed them,

> Why do ye stand wondering? The Son of Mary had stretched out his hand to strike, and, if she had not held it back, the world would certainly not now exist. Behold this is the cause of the sweating.[1]

Another vision was of Christ's vexation with the wickedness and corruption of the world and his ordering the trumpets to sound twice. The Virgin threw herself at the feet of her Son, begging Him not to sound the trumpets a third time, which would have ended the world:

> 'Beloved Son, if not for those wicked men's sake yet at least for my loved ones.' And thus Christ was appeased.[2]

The great love of Mary for her Son also gave rise to a type of legends about women who ransomed their own lost children by taking the image of the Christ-child. The fifteenth miracle listed by Johannes Herolt, for example, tells of a woman who, informed that her daughter had been devoured by a wolf, rushed to the chapel and

> plucked the image of the Saviour from the bosom of His Mother, and standing before her with many tears broke out into these words: 'Never, Lady, shall you have your Son back again, unless you restore to me my daughter.
>
> . . . She gave the order, and released her. And so, having followed up the wolf's track, they found the girl walking about among some bushes, and saw the marks of the wolf's teeth in her

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[1] Johannes Herolt, Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, trans. C. C. Swinton Bland (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1928), p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

> throat but only on the surface of the skin, where they remain to this day as a testimony to that great miracle.[1]

As many historians have pointed out, the worship of the Virgin filled a great need. Her maternal sympathy, power, and readiness to avert disaster helped to soothe the fear of that Judgment Day which every Christian could see depicted most starkly in the murals on the walls of the churches. Coulton puts the matter succinctly:

> Official theology, taken literally, was very ruthless; upon its fundamental doctrine of original sin an inexorably logical system was built which no serious mind could contemplate without horror, even though it was a holy horror. Not only was there that wholesale perdition of the unbaptized; not only the almost certainty of purgatory at the very best; but, even so, it was the merest fraction of baptized Christians that could hope to see final salvation, however the preachers might encourage each man to hope that he might be among those few. The cult of the saints, and of Mary in especial, offered relief from this intolerable nexus of fate . . . .[2]

Or, as Henry Adams puts it,

> There was no crack and no cranny in the system, through which human frailty could hope for escape. One was forced from corner to corner by a remorseless logic until one fell helpless at Mary's feet.[3]

Men were only too conscious of their lack of merit. Some of them lost hope of pleasing the members of the Trinity, and it was natural

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[1] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[2] G. G. Coulton, Five Centuries of Religion ("Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought"; Cambridge, 1929), Vol. I, pp. 145-46. Cited hereafter as Coulton.

[3] Henry Adams, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), p. 250.

to turn to the Divine Mother, who was always sympathetic. Mary was completely the female in popular legend -- sympathetic, capricious, even jealous at times. The beneficiaries of her sympathy were those who made a habit of praying to her. MacCulloch quotes the author of a fabliau:

> He who had the good custom of saying the Hours of Our Lady . . . will never be damned on the day he says them.[1]

Gautier de Coincy, who told so many of these legends, describes the devil's indignation at losing the soul of an undeserving sinner through the intervention of the Virgin:

> She is more truly Lady in earth and heaven, by one degree, than God Himself. He loveth her so, and hath such faith in her that she can neither do nor say aught that He will disavow or gainsay. She maketh Him to believe whatsoever she will; if she were to say that the magpie is black, or that muddy water is as clear as crystal, then would He make answer: 'My mother saith sooth!'[2]

Many of these stories tell of Mary's chastizing the devil or taking the soul of a great sinner from him, often for trivial reasons. One legend, for example, tells of

> a certain great robber who had never done any good, except that he had fasted one Saturday in honour of the Blessed Virgin and kept one mass to her, that she might convert him before his death.

The Virgin appeared to him and said that on his saying five words he would be delivered from his sins.

> Now some time afterwards the robber was caught, kept in prison, and three days later led out to the gallows.

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[1] MacCulloch, p. 106

[2] Quoted in Coulton, Vol. I, p. 148.

> On the way God granted him sincere repentance, and in that true repentance he uttered five words with much earnestness: 'God forgive me a sinner', and immediately he was reconciled to God and was saved. [1]

These are only representatives of the many legends of learned and unlearned alike about the power and kindness of the Virgin. Her worship had a hold on the popular imagination which is difficult to appreciate fully in our own day. Eileen Power sums this up quite well:

> By the eleventh century (to which the first written collections of her Miracles belong) she was supreme and supreme she remained thereafter. All the great doctors of the twelfth century, from the orthodox St. Bernard to the Heretic Abelard, combined to honour her; Adam of St. Victor wrote hymns for her and Albertus Magnus solemnly debated the scholastic question 'whether the Blessed Virgin posessed perfectly the seven liberal arts' and resolved it her favour. . . . Soldiers shouted her name in battle, craftsmen dedicated their guilds to her, monks recorded her miracles in prose and verse . . . . Magnificent cathedrals were reared and decorated in her honour, and her lady chapel stood in every church. She could command all the best artists and the poets from Dante downwards surpassed themselves in her praise. [2]

All of this brings us to a question which was brought up in the preceding chapter: Did the honor given to Mary have any appreciable effect on the status of her sex? In part this was implicitly answered in that chapter before it was raised. As we have seen, the clerical traditions of glorification of virginity and antifeminism grew up side by side; with this glorification of virginity grew the glorification of

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[1] Herolt, pp. 71-72.

[2] Eileen Power, Introduction to: Johannes Herolt, Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, trans. C. C. Swinton Bland (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1928), x. Cited as Power, Miracles.

Mary, the type of holy virginity. The very clerics who could so laud Mary were often the very ones who recited long lists of complaints against women in general. Jerome, who could praise virginity and Mary to the skies, could reproduce the long antifeminist diatribe of Theophrastus and say that it was worth its weight in gold. Other clerics followed him and made his epistle Against Jovinian a model and source-book. Coulton says,

> The cult of the Virgin probably did a little indirectly to raise the status of women; but the claims usually made in this direction are not, so far as I know, borne out by any documentary evidence; and, on their very face, they are grossly exaggerated. [1]

One piece of negative evidence is furnished by the Germanic lands, which early manifested a real equality between the sexes which changed after the advent of Christianity. It might well be argued that in this case the growth of feudalism was the operative element in this lowering of women from their former position; nevertheless, it is difficult to see that the growth of Mary-worship had any appreciable effect in this particular case.

Although there are clerics who could find good words to say for women, the weight of clerical tradition was in favor of giving Mary unstinted praise on the one hand, while listing complaints against the other members of her sex. The feeling seemed to be that the ability to make a woman the instrument of salvation just added to the glory

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[1] Coulton, Vol. I, p. 174.

of God -- and the glory of Mary herself. But other women were not to be compared to Mary: the second Eve was spotless, matchless -- whereas the first Eve was felt to have many counterparts.

The position of women in canon and civil law reflected in some measure clerical attitudes toward the sex. A husband was allowed by canon law to chastise his wife, and apparently men in all ranks took advantage of the opportunity. We find St. Bernard saying in a public sermon,

> And I say to you men, never beat your wives while they are great with child, for therein would lie great peril. I say not that you should never beat them, but choose your time . . . . I know men who have more regard for a hen that lays a fresh egg daily, than for their own wives . . . .[1]

Coulton reports this story about Frederick II:

> Weary of his wife, the Emperor had seduced her cousin: and Jean de Brienne, exasperated by this double wrong to his daughter and his niece, talked loudly of washing it out in blood. Therefore the Emperor 'so threatened and beat the Empress as almost to slay the babe in her womb.'[2]

Like the rest of the history of human relations, however, the position of women in the Middle Ages -- even officially -- is complex and unclear. It was a mixed tradition, as Miss Power points out:

> The subjection of women was . . . one side of medieval theory, accepted by both the Church and by the Aristocracy. On the other hand, it was they who developed with no apparent sense of incongruity the counter-doctrine of the superiority of women, that adoration (Frauendienst) which gathered round the persons of the Virgin

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[1] Coulton, From St. Francis to Dante, p. 14.

[2] Ibid., p. 15.

> in heaven and the lady upon earth, and which handed down the modern world the ideal of chivalry. [1]

As we shall see in Part III, both the literary and clerical traditions to which Chaucer was heir were mixed and both have points of correspondence: both had an established, formal tradition of satires on women, and they supplied each other with material, as Owst has shown; both, on the other hand, also had a tradition of elevating a particular woman -- the lady of courtly love and the Virgin -- and here again each supplied the other. As a matter of fact, as will be discussed in Part III, the two apparently antithetical attitudes of worship and condemnation of women could be held at the same time by a secular writer as well as a cleric.

Although Mary-worship probably did contribute something to courtly love, there is, as C. S. Lewis points out, [2] a decided time-lag between the growth of Christianity -- and with it Mary-worship -- and the rise of courtly love. There is also the problem that the rise of courtly love was by no means the result of a universal tendency in lands where Mary was worshipped, but can be located within a relatively small area. At any rate, as Miss Power says,

> . . . as a factor in raising the position of women too much importance must not be attributed to the ideal of chivalry. Just as

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[1] Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," The Legacy of the Middle Ages, eds. C. G. Crump and E. F. Jacob (Oxford, 1932), p. 404. Cited hereafter as Power, "Position of Women."

[2] C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, (Oxford, 1936), p. 9.

> asceticism was the limited ideal of a small clerical caste, so chivalry was the limited ideal of a small aristocratic caste, and those who were outside that caste had little part in any refining influence which it possessed. [1]

Although it is a problem which does not admit of a clear solution, the effect of Mary-worship on the status, both practical and theoretical, of women was probably not great. By her power and dignity, she was too far removed from ordinary women. People might appeal to her because of the motherly qualities ascribed to her, but her example of unstained holiness could not be ascribed to her sex any more than that of Christ could be ascribed to the male sex. Even the effect of Mary-worship on literature, where the material is there to be examined, is difficult to assess, as will be seen in the next chapter. Although there were many poems to the Virgin, these are mostly from the time of the rise of courtly love and after, and might be as well ascribed to the influence of the latter. While the worship of the Virgin must have had a softening effect on religion and life in general, this effect is difficult to document and apparently had only an indirect effect on the status of women in general.

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[1] Power, "Position of Women," p. 406.

PART III

THE LITERARY TRADITION

CHAPTER IX

THE COURTLY TRADITION

> It is impossible to reconcile the tenets of Courtly Love with the commandments of God, with the Divine Will as interpreted by St. Paul, with the teachings of Christ and His Church. From the point of view of the troubadours, however, love, illicit and adulterous at least in aspiration though it may be, is the source of all good and of all virtue, even of chastity. [1]

> With regard to the social background, all that can be stated with confidence is that we know of nothing in the objective relationships of men and women in the Middle Ages which might conceivably motivate the strain of love-poetry which the troubadours developed in the Midi of France. [2]

> For I, that god of loves servauntes serve,
> Ne dar to love, for myn unliklynesse,
> Preyen for speed, al sholde I therfor sterve
> So far am I from his help in derknesse . . . . [3]

The code of courtly love has for centuries received attention as an important factor both in literature and in its influence on later conduct.

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[1] A. J. Denomy, The Heresy of Courtly Love ("Boston College Candlemas Lectures on Christian Literature"; New York: 1947), p. 27.

[2] Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love: An Introduction to the Love-Poetry of the Renaissance (N. Y.: Macmillan, 1958), p. 45.

[3] Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, 11. 15-18.

Historians have begun to suspect that allegiance to the code was more theoretical than real in actual conduct during the first centuries of its development; however, its influence on literature has been great from the first, and its influence on conduct and manners since the Renaissance has been scarcely less.

With the interest in courtly love has come a natural interest in its origin or origins. It seems at first glance totally unlike anything preceding it in Western culture or literature. Critics have looked for sources in many directions: toward Rome, toward Moorish Spain, toward the Albigensians, toward Mary-worship, toward the Bernardine tradition, and toward the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism of the Averroists. Many theories have arisen, only to be replaced by other theories, and it is likely that other theories will be advanced in the future. As Theodore Silverstein aptly remarks,

> The trouble with Courtly Love is that it gives its lovers no rest, and the modern critical devotee is hardly less jealous for his favorite theory of its nature and source than was the troubadour. [1]

This may remind us of another influential body of thought which we have encountered, about which there has been a great deal of recent discussion concerning sources -- Neoplatonism. The comparison seems apt enough. Platonism seemed to be changed into Neoplatonism to fill a need. The identity of the person who first began to make the significant

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[1] Theodore Silverstein, "Andreas, Plato, and the Arabs: Remarks on Some Recent Accounts of Courtly Love," MP, XLVII (1949-50), p. 117.

changes does not seem nearly as important as the receptivity of others to the change. There must have been many versions of Platonism around. Why, we may ask, should the doctrine as expounded by Plotinus (whether it was he who made the significant changes or not) have been so popular? It is not the sort of system which would have appealed widely, say, to the Athenians of Plato's day. At just that time, however, there was something in the air which made people receptive to otherworldliness.

The same point may be made about courtly love. Even if someone in the future turns up a lost tenth-century Arabian love handbook annotated in Provençal, or an Averroist treatise on the subject, or something else, this could never be as enlightening as might an explanation of the popularity of the courtly code in Provençe and in the rest of Europe to which it spread. Why, for example, did the ideal change from the ideal comitatus relationship of chief to warrior to that very strange ideal of lady to love-vassal? As there had been during the centuries of the emergence of Neoplatonism and Christianity, something was in the air which made people receptive to this change. Before going on to discuss this receptivity to courtly love and the possible reasons for it, however, perhaps it will be well to briefly describe the system as it originated in Provençe.

Father Denomy distinguishes three essential characteristics of courtly love:

> The novelty of Courtly Love lies in three basic elements: first, in the ennobling force of human love; second, in the elevation of

> the beloved to a place of superiority above the lover; third, in the conception of love as ever unsatiated, ever increasing desire.[1]

These three elements, he says,

> provide, as it were, the skeleton framework, the mechanics or thought pattern of Courtly Love: the surge of the lover to rise in worth and in virtue towards the beloved through the force and energy of desire.[2]

C. L. Lewis says that this love has four characteristics: "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love."[3] This does not conflict with Denomy's first two characteristics if we think of Courtesy in connection with "the ennobling force of human love" and of Humility in connection with "the elevation of the beloved to a place of superiority above the lover." Lewis's third characteristic, Adultery, will require a little discussion, however.

We have seen that Denomy gives as the third characteristic of courtly love "the conception of love as ever unsatiated, ever increasing desire." How this can be connected with adultery is explained by the troubadours' conception of "pure" love. This pure kind of love is explained in the Eighth Dialogue of The Art of Courtly Love, by Andreas Capellanus:

> This kind consists in the contemplation of the mind and the affection of the heart; it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted to those who wish to love purely. This

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[1] Denomy, Courtly Love, p. 20. [2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, (Oxford, 1936), p. 2.

> is the kind that anyone who is intent upon love ought to embrace with all his might, for this love goes on increasing without end, and we know that no one ever regretted practicing it, and the more of it one has the more one wants. This love is distinguished by being of such character, and no injury comes from it, and God sees very little offense in it. [1]

Perhaps this is adultery in the strict sense, but a very strange kind of adultery it is. It will be noticed that the main reason the "final solace" is omitted seems to be to keep the desire not only never satiated, but, as Denomy points out, "ever increasing."

That this love did not always remain "pure" the courtly system admitted, and the resultant kind of love was called "mixed":

> But this is called mixed love which gets its effect from every delight of the flesh and culminates in the final act of Venus. What sort of love this is you may clearly see from what I have already said, for this kind quickly fails, and lasts but a short time, and one often regrets having practiced it; by it one's neighbor is injured, the Heavenly King is offended, and from it come very grave dangers. But I do not say this as though I meant to condemn mixed love, I merely wish to show which of the two is preferable. But mixed love, too, is real love, and it is praiseworthy, and we say it is the source of all good things, although from it grave dangers threaten, too. [2]

Andreas was writing a treatise describing the doctrine as it existed in the north of France in the time and court of Marie de Champagne, but this doctrine of amor purus corresponds closely to the fin' amors

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[1] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John J. Parry, ("The Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies," no. 33; New York: Columbia Univ., 1941), p. 122. Cited hereafter as Andreas. Parry points out that St. Jerome attacks a similar practice in the early Church in his epistle to Eustochius already cited. This introduction is cited hereafter as Parry; the text is cited as Andreas.

[2] Ibid.

of the troubadours.[1] This point is more important than it might at first appear, because over half a century intervened between the first troubadour love poems and the treatise of Andreas. The earlier poets were much less ready even than the noble in Andreas' Eighth Dialogue to accept the amor mixtus which he describes there. Marcabru, for example, says that is adultery and evil which seeks the consummation instead of stopping short as fin' amor does.

Several false leads have been followed by critics who failed to recognize the differences between the code as it originated and as it developed later in the north and in Italy. The basic elements are pretty much the same in the earlier and later periods; however, factors which were added later have sometimes sent the critics off on false scents. As we shall see presently, one of the most persistent of these false leads has been Ovid.

The first troubadour we know of was Guillaume IX (1071-1127), Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine. Jeanroy classes four of the extant lyrics of Guillaume as courtly and points out the existence in them of the principal traits of the troubadour lyric:

> L'espèce d'exaltation mystique qui a pour cause et pour objet à la fois la femme aimee et l'amour lui-même était déjà désignée sous le nom de joi; l'hymne enthousiaste que le poète entonne en son honneur . . . et qui est une de ses productions les plus réussies

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[1] See A. J. Denomy, "Fin' Amors: the Pure Love of the Troubadours, Its Amorality, and Possible Source," Medieval Studies, Vol. VII (1945), pp. 139-207. Cited hereafter as Denomy, "Fin' Amors."

> suppose naturellement l'existence de la chose et du mot. Dès cette époque existait aussi l'assimilation du 'service' amoreux au service féodal. Dès cette époque, enfin, étaient fixées les attitudes respectives de la femme aimée et de l'amant: l'une, dédaigneuse, inexorable . . . ; l'amant repoussé . . . , timide au point de n'oser se déclarer . . . , comptant sur la patience comme le meilleur moyen d'arriver à ses fins . . . : déjà la femme est louée pour ses qualités mondaines . . . et l'amour est considéré, pour l'homme, comme la source de ces mêmes qualités . . . .[1]

Since Guillaume died in 1127 at the age of fifty-six, this would make the start of the doctrine some time before the turn of the century.

That Guillaume was working in an already established tradition seems certain, first because of the workmanship displayed in his poetry, and second because he invites comparison of it with others:

> Je veux qu'on sache s'il est de bonne couleur, ce petit 'vers' sorti de mon atelier: c'est que, en ce metier, j'emporte la fleur, en vérité, et j'en prendrai à temoin ce 'vers' lui-même, quand il sera lacé.[2]

This fact and others have led critics recently to turn to the poetry of the Spanish Arabs. Although there is continuing opposition to the view that there was such influence, as Parry says,

> Opposition to the theory of Arabic influence seems to be due largely

> to the reluctance of the modern school of French scholars to admit French literature is indebted to any source outside its own country and ancient Rome.[3]

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[1] Alfred Jeanroy, Les Chansons de Guillaume IX, duc d'Aquitaine (Paris: Librairie Ancienne, 1913), xvi-xvii. Cited hereafter as Jeanroy, Guillaume IX.

[2] Ibid., p. 13. Jeanroy's translation. [3] Parry, p. 7n.

A. R. Nykl especially has pointed out the many similarities between Hispano-Arabic love poetry and that of Provençe.[1] For now it should suffice to quote a passage from Parry on the subject:

> Communication between these Moslem states, with their Mozarabic subjects, and the adjoining Christian states was both easy and frequent. Often poets themselves were the mediums of communication. Because they had been trained in the art of saying things well, they were often employed on missions both to Mohammedan and to Christian sovereigns. Secretaries and ambassadors were often chosen from among their ranks. But such employment was precarious, and many of them changed masters either through necessity or in the hope of bettering their condition. A set of wandering poets came into existence, who passed from one court to another or sometimes found shelter with some bourgeois lover of verse. The situation is much like that which developed a century later in France.[2]

The next troubadour of whom we have any knowledge was Guillaume's friend and vassal Ebles II, Viscount of Ventadour.

> On l'avait surnommé 'le Chanteur', et la façon dont ses contemporains parlent de lui nous autorise à le considerer comme une sorte de chef d'école.[3]

Although no poetry of Eble has survived, there are references to him in the poetry of the other troubadours which have led scholars like Jeanroy

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[1] See A. R. Nykl, A Book Containing the Risala Known as The Dove's Neck-Ring about Love and Lovers composed by Abu Muhammad 'Ali ibn Hazm al-Andalusi (Paris: Geuthner, 1931), pp. lxxviii-ciii; Nykl, Troubadour Studies (Cambridge, 1944), p. 4; and Nykl, Hispano-Arabic Poetry and Its Relations with the Old Provencal Troubadours (Baltimore, 1946), pp. 371-411.

[2] Parry, p. 172.

[3] Alfred Jeanroy, La Poesie Lyrique des Troubadours. (2 vols.; Paris, 1934), I, p. 156. Cited hereafter as Jeanroy, Poesie Lyrique.

to see his court at Ventadour as the place where the actual fusion of all the elements of the courtly lyric took place.[1]

This theory of a "school of Eblè" gave rise to a distinction of two schools of courtly poetry, one idealistic and under the leadership of Eble II, the other realistic and a reaction against the first school. This school, so goes the theory, has its greatest representative in Marcabru. There is no room here for a discussion of the matter, but, as Denomy says, the theory is at best highly questionable.[2] For our purposes these early troubadours all seem to write in the same modes, about the same subjects, and with the same basic doctrines. The characteristics which Jeanroy finds in the poetry of Guillaume IX are the basic ones which were taken to the north and which Denomy distinguishes under three main headings: the ennobling force of love, the elevation of the beloved to a place of superiority, and the conception of the lover as ever unsatiated -- in fact, as deliberately remaining unsatiated.

Such is the system which was taken north by Guillaume's granddaughter, Eleanor of Aquitaine, when she married Prince Louis of France. Bernard de Ventadour, her long admirer and one of the greatest of the troubadours, followed her and must have aided in the introduction of courtly love in the north. This introduction, however, awaited her daugher, Marie de Champagne, to be made a real factor in the literature and culture of the north of France.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[2] Denomy, "Fin' Amors," pp. 139-43.

Eleanor succeeded her father, Guillaume X, in 1137, at the age of fifteen. She was soon married by Louis Capet, who succeeded a month later to the throne of France as Louis VII. It was a dull and monkish court for Eleanor until she followed Louis on a crusade. In Byzantium she was introduced to the sumptuous world of the East, with its luxury of furnishings and entertainments. This was a revelation for her as it was for all the crusaders in that summer of 1147. Amy Kelly comments,

> It was in the course of this liberalizing experience that the queen resolved to escape altogether from the monastic austerities and restraints of the French court. Upon her return to France, and at her own initiative . . . her marriage to Louis VII was annulled on the conventional ground of consanguinity . . . .[1]

Six weeks after her annullment, Eleanor married Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy -- a boy eleven years her junior and within two years destined to become Henry II of England. During her stay at the court in London, the secular arts flourished;[2] even so, Eleanor must have kept comparing the still-primitive English court with the one in Byzantium. At any rate, when Henry confirmed their second son, Richard, as Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou in 1169, she accompanied Richard to Poitiers and proceeded lavishly to rebuild and refurnish the household there. The household had already become a sort of nursery for the

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[1] Amy Kelly, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Courts of Love," Speculum, XII (1937), pp. 6-7.

[2] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

offspring of both the Capets and the Plantagenets, and under her influence tournaments and other entertainments drew gallants and ladies from all over.

The household was soon in bad odor, and Louis began to be concerned.

> The pious king of the Franks, who had valuable hostages in that court in the persons of his two younger daughters, must have felt the urgency of some provision for orthodoxy in Poitiers quite as much as the harried queen. It was therefore an inspiration to hit upon the Countess of Champagne as the maîtress d'école for the royal academy in Poitiers.[1]

Marie had grown up in the staid and religious atmosphere of the French court and had been married at the relatively late age of nineteen to Henry the Liberal, Count of Champagne. With her mother's approval, Marie set about getting the interest, and thereby the control, of her charges by setting up a court of love in imitation of the earlier Provençal ones. Using Ovid's Art of Love as a model, but much modified by the Provençal tradition, Marie

> drew up, and her chaplain Andreas recorded for her, then or subsequently, the constitution of a society to be impelled not by force nor by casual impulse, but by an inner disciplined sense of propriety. What progress could be made in dialectic by untutored squires who rode hacks into mess halls, and by hoydens who diverted eyes from psalters in the very midst of mass? And upon what could one ground a code of chivalry save on the classic and universal theme of love? . . . And finally, to support the rather threadbare dicta of Ovid, who was after all in that court the passion of the elder generation, Marie's code professed to derive from the authentic practice of chivalry in the court of King

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[1] Ibid., p. 12.

> Arthur in Caerleon on Usk, than which nothing could afford a more unexceptionable pattern of chivalry.[1]

Here seems to be the point at which Ovid entered the history of courtly love. As with some of the other theories, further research has shown that critics were mistaking incidental features added later for signs of the origin. As Theodore Silverstein has remarked,

> Ovid is out of the game by now, whatever that genial professor added to the science in the twelfth century; for, where man is ennobled by the soaring fire of Courtly fin' amors, the De amore teaches a view of sex which -- as William of St. Thiery, following the hint of Augustine, once indicated -- weighs down the body to the earth from which it sprang.[2]

Because Ovid did play his part in the history of courtly love, however, perhaps it may be useful at this point to list some of the correspondences which have been pointed out between passages from his works and elements which are part of the tradition in the north of France. Here, following T. A. Kirby, is a list: the notion of the God of Love as an irresistible power; love as the great tormentor; the lover as the prey of love; the lover as a soldier in the service of the lady as the captain; love as the source of great physical strength; love as a sickness or disease; the lover as pale and wont to tremble; love as both pleasant and painful; the lover as fearful, with no appetite or ability to sleep; the notion of the lover as wont to weep, yell, groan, faint, and/or lose his wits.[3] Ovid was a handy reference point from which

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

[2] Silverstein, p. 117.

[3] Thomas A. Kirby, Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love (L.S.U. Studies, No. 39; Louisiana State Univ., 1940), pp. 6-14.

to construct a code, but the characteristics which he gives to courtly love are hardly unique with him. Some of the same characteristics were favorite material for humor among the Greeks and Romans long before Ovid and would have shown up in courtly love in some form if Ovid had never written a line.

Things went along swimmingly for some time at Poitiers. Andreas provides descriptions of what the sessions of the court of love must have been, with Marie sitting as judge, surrounded by other notable ladies who help her to render verdicts. These courts and the rest of the gaiety was soon to come to an end, however. While Henry was campaigning in Ireland in 1171, he received word that Poitiers was filled with plotters against his throne, and he heard further that Eleanor was in the very midst of the plotting, along with three of his sons, Henry, Richard, and Geoffrey.

The king came to Poitiers and removed the younger Henry, the heir-apparent, to Chinon; however, in the night the son was helped to escape to the court of France. The king further learned that Eleanor had given Richard and Geoffrey into the keeping of the king of France. Enraged, Henry destroyed rebel castles all over Poitou, captured Eleanor and others, and brought them all to England to be imprisoned. Marie de Champagne returned to her court at Troyes, already a place of some literary note, and with her went the tradition of courtly love in France.

One point which should be made in connection with the episode at Poitiers is one which is too often ignored. This point is that, whatever the origins of courtly love -- religious, philosophical, or literary -- and whatever its effect on later times (and it has been considerable), the whole point of the courts of love was as a diversion. The point seems not worth making until it is remembered how many critics have professed themselves mystified at the rapidity with which courtly love spread and was accepted.

The popularity of courtly love with these idle young people (most of them were under twenty) is not difficult to imagine. The ladies could now be treated with an unaccustomed deference and placed on a flattering pedestal. The young men, on the other hand, could now have some point to their activities: striving to win a joust has more point if it is done for a lady -- as any modern young body walking a fence could testify. To be sure, there were other very important factors involved; however, the rapid spread of courtly love is more easily explained if we remember that for some at least -- and these perhaps in the majority -- courtly love was from the beginning a highly diverting game.

It was to Troyes that Marie went with her memories of the courtly code and the courts of love; and it was at Troyes that the courtly code entered the romance most momentously -- an entrance so important for future literature. The influence of Ovid can be seen in the writings of two members of the court at Troyes -- Andreas and Chrétien de Troyes.

Andreas' treatise, based avowedly on Ovid, is now thought to date some time between 1174 and 1182, although he compiled some of the material at Poitiers. The romances of Chrétien probably date from the same time.

Of Chrétien, Cross and Nitze observe, "No study of Chrétien de Troyes' love-concepts can overlook the fact that he himself had translated Ovid."[1] They point out that the opening lines of the Cligès mention him as

> Cil qui fist d'Erec et d'Enide
> Et les Comandemanz d'Ovide
> Et l'Art d'Amors an romanz mist . . . .[2]

Although the romance of Erec is relatively free from touches of Ovid and courtly love, "the romances of Cligès and Charrete abound in Ovidian reminiscences."[3]

Erec et Enide dates from some time before Marie became Countess of Champagne, and critics generally agree with Guyer's estimate of the omission of the code of courtly love:

> The omission of courtly love from the first romance is evident from the first meeting of Erec and Enide, who is the daughter of a poor nobleman. It is no less evident throughout the story.[4]

Although we know that the Ovidian translations were written after Erec et Enide, the possible influence of Marie on the undertaking of

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[1] Tom Peete Cross & W. A. Nitze, Lancelot and Guenevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love (University of Chicago, 1930), p. 88.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 89.

[4] F. E. Guyer, Chrétien de Troyes: Inventor of the Modern Novel (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), p. 22.

the work is impossible to determine. Here is Parry's summation of the problem:

> It is possible that the Ovidian translations were written after Countess Marie came to Troyes; Cligès almost certainly was, for scholars have detected in it references to the Heraclius of Gautier of Arras, and that, as we know from a reference to Countess Marie, was written after her marriage. There is nothing in the love casuistry of Cligès that Chretien could not have developed for himself out of Ovid, but it seems most natural to attribute the difference in tone between this poem and the Erec and Enide to the growing influence of the countess.[1]

Perhaps Chretien's most influential romance and by far his most thorough representation of the code of courtly love was undoubtedly written under the influence of Marie -- Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart. He says himself that the countess commanded him to write it and provided him with both subject (matiere) and the method of treating it (san):

> Del Chevalier de la Charrete
> Comance Chrestiiens son livre;
> Matiere et san l'an done et livre
> La contesse, et il s'antremet
> De panser si que rien n'i met
> Fors san painne et s'antancion;
> Des or comance sa raison.[2]

Parry notes that

> his statement is phrased as a compliment, but it is not difficult to see beneath the surface a note of apology for writing on a theme with which he is not wholly in sympathy. The poem is an elaborate illustration of the doctrine of courtly love as it was introduced into northern France by Eleanor and Marie. Here for the first time in

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[1] Parry, p. 14.

[2] Der Karrenritter (Lancelot) und Das Wilhelmsleben (Guillaume d' Angleterre) von Christian von Troyes, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1899), pp. 1-2.

> Chrétien's extant works we find the glorification of the love of one man for another man's wife, a situation which Fenice, in Cligès, had declared to be intolerable. Chrétien clearly found the theme distasteful and left the poem unfinished; the conclusion is by Godefroy de Laigny.[1]

Cross and Nitze point out that the Lancelot is by no means the best work of Chrétien, but, they add,

> uninspired as the romance often is, the plan and execution go far to explain why Lancelot succeeded Tristan in the amatory literature of the Middle Ages.[2]

The Knight of the Cart begins with the capture of Guinevere through the weakness of Sir Kay. Gawain and Lancelot go off in search of the queen, but Lancelot soon loses his horse. A dwarf appears driving a cart and tells Lancelot that he will find Guinevere if he will ride in the cart. Lancelot hesitates to ride so disgracefully, but love impels him to get in. The three, with Gawain riding and the other two mounted in the cart, pass through a town where they are jeered and abused, especially Lancelot, but all is endured for love of Guinevere. They soon learn that Guinevere has been captured by Meleaganz, son of the king of Gorre, to which land there are two entrances -- the Water-Bridge, which Gawain chooses, and the Sword bridge, which Lancelot chooses. On the road, Lancelot accepts lodging from a damsel who makes a condition that he sleep with her. Once in bed, however, he shows her no favor; the damsel is so impressed with his constancy that she promises to help him win back Guinevere. After many trials, Lancelot finally crosses the

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[1] Parry, p. 14.

[2] Cross & Nitze, p. 2.

Bridge of Sword and fights Meleaganz. Though he is badly wounded, the mere sight of the queen causes him to begin to win the fight, but the mere wish of Guinevere causes him to stop the fight and leave the field to Meleaganz. When Lancelot is brought into her presence, Guinevere pretends to be quite angry with him, and he goes away in despair. Word comes back that Lancelot is dead and Guinevere attempts to kill herself; upon a false report of her death, Lancelot attempts suicide also. After another separation in which Guinevere goes back to Camelot and Lancelot is imprisoned, Lancelot appears at a tournament disguised and begins to win. Suspecting who it is, Guinevere sends him word to act a coward. He immediately begins to fight badly, to the taunts of the spectators. The second day, she sends him word to do his best and he is victorious. Lancelot is again imprisoned in Gorre and here the version of Chrétien stops.

This poem has been summarized at some length to indicate the nature of Chrétien's mergence of the romance and the courtly love code. The code had always had the elevation of the lady, but in this romance she is so elevated that the mere sight of a few strands of her hair makes the hero almost faint. The lover is not only ennobled by his love, as with the troubadors, but he is enabled to fight much better by the mere sight of his lady. The chosen lady is another man's wife, but there seems at least some doubt whether the pair stops short of final consummation, as the code demanded of the best lovers. The lover's complete subjugation

to love is so great that he is willing to endure taunts of cowardice at the lady's mere whim. The code of love had, in short, been wedded to a martial theme. The progress in virtue which love of the lady affords has become partly a progress in martial prowess, gentility and humility -- the knightly virtues.

Chrétien's last work, Perceval, or The Story of the Grail, departs from the earlier ideas and ideals of courtly love; however, this very departure is illustrative of two elements in the courtly tradition which remained constant through out the first two centuries of courtly love, at least among the great practitioners. The first of these is the tendency toward extreme idealization of the object of the lover's desire. As early as Jaufré Rudel, with his amour lointain, the lady tends to be little more than a misty abstraction. Although the terms in which the early troubadours describe their desire can be extremely sensuous, the descriptions of the lady early become conventions and stereotyped idealizations. The northern French romantic tradition, with Chrétien's Grail, and the other great offspring of the Provençal tradition, the Dolce Stil Nuovo, with its culmination in the Divine Comedy, are illustrative of the easy manner in which this shadowy lady could be changed into a religious ideal.

The second element is connected very closely with the first; it is the attention mainly given, not to the lady, but to the trials of the lover and his growth in virtue as a result of his love. Works as different as The Knight of the Cart and the Divine Comedy illustrate the relative

slightness of attention to the objective representation of the lady herself as compared with the very full description of the hero's trials and triumphs by virtue of his love.

This leads us to a consideration of the current popular theory of the origin of courtly love in the influence of the Christian mysticism of the time. This theory is currently in the lists with the Arabic hypothesis. It is offered at times in connection with the theory of the origin of courtly love in the cult of Mary, which critics began to fluorish at the time of the beginning of courtly love.

Although the theory of the great influence of the veneration of Mary on courtly love is not so widely held now as it once was, perhaps a few of the objections to it may be raised to help to put the theory of the religious origin of courtly love into perspective. In the first place, as we have seen in the last chapter, the worship of Mary goes back at least to the fifth century. It has only been that the great bulk of the literature concerned with Mary starts with the twelfth century that her worship has seemed so late in starting. Also, it is difficult to see that Mary-worship -- or even courtly love -- had raised the general status of women much by the end of the twelfth century. Third, the very attitude of the Virgin toward those who pray to her is totally opposed to that of the lady. The one was often addressed as "Blessed Mother" and was always ready to listen to and aid her faithful worshipper; the other was haughty and disdainful and the traditional attitude of the lover

toward her was fear and hesitancy to even approach her. There is also the problem of the localization of the beginning of the code: there seem to have been no such tendencies in other literatures up to this time. Fifth, the style of courtly poetry was related to Christian liturgy and ritual not early but later in the period. And finally, if courtly love had had a religious origin, we should expect it to be extremely spiritual at first and then perhaps to lapse into sensuality later. On the contrary, in its first century or so, the sensual poems are more numerous in the early period, with the spirituality increasing later in the school of Troyes and in the Dolce Stil Nuovo. Although any one of these objections might be subject to discussion, they seem in the aggregate to point to some origin of courtly love other than traditional religion.

Denomy and Gilson have also strongly and, it seems, tellingly opposed the origin of courtly love in the doctrine of charity in general and the influence of the great twelfth-century mystics in particular. Denomy notes that there was

> a great wave of mysticism whose power, perceptible about 1125, burst with full force during the twelfth century. It is with this burst of mysticism which flowered with William of Saint-Thierry, Hugh of Saint Victor and with Saint Bernard, that Wechssler would attach the origins of Courtly Love and would explain the formation of the ideas in the Christian mysticism of that age. At the outset, it is well to note that the appearance and flowering of both movements were roughly contemporaneous. Those mystics whose writings Wechssler uses to develop his theory were born at the end of the eleventh century and died at the middle of the twelfth. Their writings appeared from the first quarter to the middle of the twelfth century . . . . From the point of view of chronology, direct influence on the part of the Western mystics on the formation

> of the ideas of Courtly Love is hardly likely, especially when the three greatest and most influential of these were of Belgium and the North of France: William from Liege, Hugh from Paris and Bernard at Clairvaux.[1]

To this may be added the powerful voice of Gilson testifying the essential opposition of courtly love to the Bernardine type of religious love.[2]

To venture into a field in which it is difficult to find two experts agreeing exactly as to origins or even emphases is to court disaster. Silverstein says that "a field so thoroughly controverted as Courtly Love" is one "through which a highway paved with general influences can lead to no good end."[3] From the extremeness of the opposition of experts in the field, however, it would seem that the general influence active at the time and their relations to each other are points which must be worked out before anything more specific can be adduced with confidence. The most promising lead seems to be in the Arabic tradition, as far as the conventions go. Denomy also brings forward Neoplatonism and the Arabic mystic and philosophical traditions.

Underlying all of the currently most popular theories lies a similarity which critics have tended to overlook. This is a certain dualism

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[1] A. G. Denomy, "An Inquiry into the Origins of Courtly Love," Medieval Studies, Vol. VI (1944), p. 91.

[2] Etienne Gilson, "Saint Bernard et l'amour courtois," Appendice IV, La theologie de saint Bernard (Paris, 1934), pp. 193-215.

[3] Silverstein, p. 120.

which underlies all of these supposed influences. Silverstein objects to Denomy's theory of Neoplatonic influence by saying,

> Even if we are disposed to accept its relevance as the frame work of Courtly Love, it is difficult in some respects to distinguish from the Augustinian tradition; and it provides itself no bridge from the high metaphysical reach of that philosophy to the lower ground of carnal human love. It would be hard indeed to discern in Plotinus himself, in the extreme realism of the de divisione naturae, in Albigensian or Sufist asceticism, or in the metaphysics and psychology alone of Avicenna anything resumbling such a bridge.[1]

Although we may note that such a bridge is indeed to be found in the fountainhead of Albigensianism -- Manichaeism -- the question of just how this dualism influenced courtly love (whether a form of Manichaeism or not) is still to be determined.

The point which is clear in all of this, however, is that here again is that dualism which, as Lovejoy has shown in the Great Chain of Being, is a continuous strain throughout the Middle Ages. It has taken a very special form, but here it is in courtly love: the lover idealizing his lady, yet wishing to possess her; the lover wishing to lie beside his lady and caress her, yet to refrain from consummating his love; the idealization of a code in direct opposition to the morality of a religion which most practitioners professed. Andreas shows this duality in his treatise on courtly love when he spends two books describing and recommending it, only to reject it completely in the third. Part of the problem perhaps lies in the fact that courtly love could be a different

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[1] Ibid., p. 118.

thing to each different person. For one it could be the channel for what was in essence a religious feeling; for another it could be the idealization of an unresisted natural instinct; for a third it could be a pleasant diversion.

The most definite conclusion which may be reached in regard to the courtly tradition is that it is lyric in essence as in origin. The complaint is of the very essence of courtly style. For practical purposes, as the earliest troubadours saw, the lover must remain ever unsatisfied, the lady never quite attainable. The lady is conventionalized and misty because the code is essentially personal and inward-turning. The subject is not the lady but the trials and growth in virtue and gentility of the lover. It is no accident that it is in the pool of Narcissus that Guillaume de Lorris's Dreamer first sees the Rose of his desire.

Dante in the Divine Comedy shows how the courtly love convention of the progress of the lover in knowledge and virtue can be used to represent the religious progress of the soul. Because on its highest level courtly love had always been a kind of secularized religion, it served admirably for this. The three elements which we have distinguished in it could all serve the purpose: the ennobling force of the emotion, the elevation of the loved object, and the ceaseless yearning of the soul upward. Guillaume de Lorris also made an allegory of the progress of the soul, in the Romance of the Rose; but this time the progress of the soul is toward the mundane ideal of courtly knowledge and earthly union

with the Rose. In both cases the movement is away from exterior action for its own sake toward the use of the exterior action as a guide to the interior progress of the soul. In these two poems, the personal, inward tendency which we have discerned in the courtly convention reaches its culmination in two very different ways.

Robinson notes in his introduction to Chaucer's translation of the first 1700-odd lines of the Romance that

> the original Roman . . . of which about one third is represented in the English translation, probably exerted on Chaucer a more lasting and more important influence than any other work in the vernacular literature of either France or England. [1]

As he goes on to say, this influence is not surprising in view of the fact that the work had held a place of great importance in French literature for two hundred years.

Guillaume probably began the work about 1237, and, though critics once believed that it was relatively obscure until Jean de Meun continued it about 1277, it apparently was popular from the beginning. As Robinson notes, the de Lorris section of the Romance of the Rose "set the fashion for numberless allegorical love-visions." [2]

When Jean took up the work, he continued in a very different spirit. In his long continuation, Jean used the work as the vehicle, as Robinson says, "of an elaborate treatise on the life and thought of

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[1] Robinson, p. 564.

[2] Ibid.

the age."[1] It is instructive of the changing point of view of the times that Jean should have used Guillaume's fragile allegory in such a way, and much more instructive that the later reputation of the work was due chiefly to Jean's continuation. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, a new, more skeptical and more realistic tradition was intruding even into courtly literature, just as Jean, 'the Voltaire of the thirteenth century,' had entered the fairyland Garden of the Rose. The appeal of the old tradition did not die out: of the three extant fragmentary translations of the Romance of the Rose, for example, the one by Chaucer is a translation of the first half of the original work. But by the fourteenth century, the idealized courtly tradition existed beside, and sometimes clashed with, an assertive realism.

CHAPTER X

THE POPULAR TRADITION

> Women journey by widely differing ways, but whatever windings they may wander, and through however many trackless regions they may travel, there is only one outlet, one goal of all their trails, one crown and common ground of all their differences -- wickedness.[1]

> O Wicket wemen, wilfull, and variable,
> richt fals, fickle, fell, and frivolus,
> Dowgit, dispytfull, dour, and dissavable,
> Vnkynd, crewall, curst, and covettus,
> Ouirlicht of laitis, unleill, and licherus,
> Turnit fra trewth, and taiclit with treichery,
> Vnferme of faith, fulfillit of fellony! . . .[2]

> They are all crazy and full of fleas, the women.[3]

There is an inevitable difficulty in attempting to classify literature, in making what must be in the final analysis arbitrary divisions in terms of matter, form, chronology, and so on. Writers tend to use

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[1] Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium (Courtier's Trifles), trans. Frederick Tupper & M. B. Ogle (N. Y.: Macmillan, 1924), p. 193.

[2] Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. Rossell H. Robbins (Oxford, 1952), p. 225.

[3] L. B. Alberti, Opere volgari, Vol. I, p. 43: 'Tutte sono pazze e piene di pulci, le femmine.' Quoted in Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love (N. Y.: Macmillan, 1958), p. 3.

the form which suits their present purpose and to adapt it to fit their purpose.

The division between courtly and popular literature now seems more artificial than it once did. In the first place, a writer in the courtly tradition making lyrics exalting his lady to the skies may turn around and blast the rest of her sex like a secular Jerome. Petrarch, for example, saw apparently no contradiction in attributing all of his glory and virtue to Laura on the one hand, while elsewhere presenting himself as the traditional antifeminist:

> Foemina . . . verus est diabolux, hostis pacis, fons impatientiae, materia jurgorum, quâ caruisse tranquillitas certa est.[1]

Besides the writer himself, the courtly audience also did not restrict itself to the literature within what has come to be called the 'courtly' tradition. Bedier, for example, found and was puzzled by the fact that courtly audiences heard and vastly enjoyed the most vulgar fabliaux. The suggestion has even been put forward recently that many of the fabliaux which have survived were written by court poets specifically for a courtly audience.[2]

Tenuous and unrewarding though it may seem, perhaps the best way we can distinguish between the two traditions is to point out that the one has its origin and first audiences in the courts, whereas the

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[1] Petrarch, Epist. sen., Vol. XIV, p. 3. Quoted in Valency, p. 3.

[2] See Per Nykrog, Les Fabliaux: Etude d'histoire literaire et de stylistique medievale (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1957).

other originated elsewhere -- in sermon exempla, popular tales, and so on. Difficult as it is to attempt to sort out the strands of literary anti-feminism, especially as they are entwined with the clerical tradition, the task is made easier by the fact that in this tradition, as in the courtly one, the visible formal beginnings are in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Historians have long pointed to the disorder and desolation of the tenth century and have called it something like the nadir of the human intellect. Throughout this period the men from the North raided throughout Europe. Constant civil strife within the countries of Western Europe coupled with attacks from without brought general knowledge and education to perhaps its lowest point in the Christian era. Although there quite probably remained an oral tradition, the writings which survive from this period are primarily religious. From what survives from Old English literature, for example, it seems that the death of Alfred in 901 can be taken as the end of the flourishing of the Old English poetic tradition.[1] Very often what has survived from this period is a retelling of an earlier work. We may find saints' lives in this century in France, but according to Nitze and others, the epic, like the chanson de geste,

> was the immediate product of the warlike conditions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in France . . . .[2]

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[1]John S. Westlake, "From Alfred to the Conquest," Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. I, p. 119ff.

[2]William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (3rd ed.; New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1938), p. 20.

We might feel that the emergence of the various types of literature in the eleventh century was due rather to the increased stability of the period, but whatever the reason for the phenomenon, it is true that not only the provençal lyric but virtually all of the most characteristic literary types of the later Middle Ages received their basic forms in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The objection may be made that there is, even in the tenth century, evidence of a continuing tradition of heroic literature which the epic and the chanson de geste drew upon in the following century, and this is probably true. There are rarely these very rigid distinctions evident at a particular time; something is always brought from the time before. However, the written forms as we know them emerged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Certainly secular antifeminist satire in a formal sense seems to have emerged at this time; and it is to this portion of the popular tradition that this chapter will direct itself. It is interesting to speculate on the influence of Jerome's epistle Against Jovinian in this multiplication and formalization of antifeminist satire. The period which saw the rise of literary (as opposed to clerical) antifeminism also saw the increasing use of Jerome's epistle among theologians. Philip Delhaye notes that, from the fifth century until the period of the Schoolmen,

> d'une façon générale les oeuvres de saint Jérôme sont souvent mentionées à cette époque . . . . En général cependant ces écrits ne prêtent pas au dossier anti-matrimonial de saint Jérôme

> l'attention que lui donneront nombre de théologiens et de litterateurs tout au cours du XIIe siècle. [1]

Perhaps this growth in the popularity of the epistle coupled with the growth of formal antifeminism is less a matter of the influence of the one on the other than it is just another instance of writers in the grasp of a pervasive feeling making use of the material already at hand. At any rate at least three of the greatest of all theologians made use of the essay.

These three were Abelard in his Historia calamitatum, Peter Lombard in his Sententiae, and St. Thomas Aquinas in his Summa Theologiae. Here, for example, is St. Thomas on the question of whether adultery is only a species of lust. In his second objection he notes that

> . . . Jerome says: 'It matters not for what reason a man behaves as one demented. Hence Sixtus the Pythagorean says in his Maxims: He that is insatiable of his wife is an adulterer,' and in like manner one who is over enamoured of any woman. Now every kind of lust includes a too ardent love. Therefore adultery is in every kind of lust: and consequently it should not be reckoned a species of lust. [2]

His reply to the objection sums up the traditional thought on the matter:

> Matrimony is specially ordained for the good of human offspring . . . . But adultery is specially opposed to matrimony, in the point

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[1] Philip Delhaye, "Le Dossier Anti-Matrimonial de l'Adversus Jovinianum et Son Influence sur Quelques Écrits du XIIe Siècle," Medieval Studies, XIII (1951), p. 71.

[2] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2nd ed. rev.; London: Barnes, Oates & Washbourne, 1937), Vol. XIII, pp. 150-51.

> of breaking the marriage faith which is due between husband and wife. And since the man who is too ardent a lover of his wife acts counter to the good of marriage if he uses her indecently, though he be not unfaithful, he may in a sense be called an adulterer; and even more so than he that is too ardent a lover of another woman.[1]

This point of view seems illuminating when applied to the casualness with which writers, both courtly and popular, refer to adultery. In the rigoristic view of the Augustinian tradition, the marriage act fails to be a sin only when it is indulged in without undue passion and for the specific purpose of procreation. Giving free rein to one's passions is a sin within the marriage as well as without. Indulging in the act for the sensual pleasure of it is adultery even if the partner is one's wife. In fact, says St. Thomas, the husband who uses his wife so is even more of an adulterer "than he that is too ardent a lover of another woman."

A doctrine so rigorous was obviously to be followed only by the strongest of believers. All others must inevitably fall away to some extent because of the power of the emotions. (Augustine saw this weakness clearly when he conjectured that the number to be saved might be as small as one in 100,000). The consequence seems to have been that the doctrines of human love, both in courtly and popular literature, evolved with curiously little reference to Church doctrine. When that doctrine was referred to, the challenge of this literary one could be

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[1] Ibid., p. 152.

quite apparent, as in the scene in which the Viscount remonstrates with Aucassin, saying,

> . . . what profit would you have, had you become her lover, and taken her to your bed? Little enough would be your gain therefrom, for your soul would lie tormented in Hell all the days of all time, so that to Paradise never should you win.

Aucassin's answer represents the challenge posed, usually only implicitly, in the doctrines of passionate love:

> In Paradise what have I to do? I care not to enter, but only to have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, whom I love so dearly well. For into Paradise go none but such people as I will tell you of. There go those aged priests, and those old cripples, and the maimed, who all day long and all night cough before the altars, and in the crypts beneath the churches; those who go in worn old mantles and old tattered habits; who are naked, and barefoot, and full of scores; who are dying of hunger and of thirst, of cold and of wretchedness. Such as these enter in Paradise, and with them have I nought to do. But in Hell will I go. For to Hell go the fair clerks and the fair knights who are slain in the tourney and the great wars, and the stout archer and the loyal man. With them will I go. And there go the fair and courteous ladies, who have friends, two or three, together with their wedded lords. And there pass the gold and the silver, the ermine and all rich furs, harpers and minstrels, and the happy of the world. With these will I go, so only I have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, by my side.[1]

As might be expected of literature stemming directly from Church tradition, strictly antifeminist literature made no such direct challenge to orthodoxy. The epistle called The Advice of Valerius to Ruffinus the Philosopher not to Marry is an example of a pamphlet which had great popularity and which was based on Jerome's epistle Against Jovinian. In fact it was often circulated under Jerome's name. In his collection

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[1] Aucassin and Nicolette, trans. Eugene Mason (N. Y.: E. P. Dutton, 1958), pp. 6-7.

called Courtier's Trifles, Walter Map reprinted the epistle and claimed it for his own. There seems little reason to doubt the claim.

Like Jerome, Map begins with the example of Eve; he then turns first to the traditional example of Bathsheba, and second to Jerome's example of Solomon. Into his example of Solomon, however, begin to creep more classical analogies than Jerome would have allowed himself.

> At last, having bowed his knee to Baal, he was degraded from a priest of the Lord to a limb of the devil, so that he seemed to be thrust over a yet greater precipice than Phoebus, who, after Phaeton's fall, was changed from the Apollo of Jove into the shepherd of Admetus.[1]

It is not that classical allusions do not appear in Jerome's work, but he was too close to the pagan time to be able so casually to make such an analogy. We remember his renunciation of Cicero and the other classical writers.

Whereas Jerome passed from Solomon's example to citing Biblical texts in support of his thesis, Map passes on to citing pagan examples:

> Lucretia and Penelope, as well as the Sabine women, have borne aloft the banners of modesty and they have brought back trophies with but few in their following. Friend, there is now no Lucretia, no Penelope, no Sabine woman. Fear all the sex.[2]

The author refers to the stories of Jupiter and Europa, of Phoebus and Leucothoe, and of Mars and Venus. A more secular spirit has crept into traditional antifeminism. Whereas it was natural for the monks and the preachers to refer to Samson and Delilah when illustrating how

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[1] Walter Map, p. 186. [2] Ibid.

even the strong can be brought to ruin by a woman, Map refers to the story of Hercules and Deianira. It is true that the work may have been a school exercise, and this would account for the numerous classical references; but it would not account for its popularity. Whereas the whole of the Courtier's Trifles does not seem to have been widely known until after the Middle Ages,[1] Map proudly refers to the popularity of this epistle in reproducing it.

Even the popular antifeminist satires generally stayed closer to the clerical tradition than this epistle, however, and Map feels impelled at the end of the work to defend his use of pagan examples:

> I know the superstition of the heathen; but every one of God's creatures furnisheth some honourable illustration, whence He himself is called lion, or serpent, or ram. The unbelieving perform very many things perversely; nevertheless they do some things which, although barren in their case, would be ours bring forth fruit abundantly.[2]

The close of the epistle refers the reader back to Jerome's essay:

> But, to support belief in my words by the testimony of the ancients, read the Aureolux . . . of Theophrastus and the story of Jason's Medea, and thou wilt find almost nothing impossible to a woman.[3]

This Aureolus must refer to the long quotation from Theophrastus in Jerome's epistle; in introducing the passage, Jerome had said that the book from which it was taken, On Marriage, was "worth its weight in gold."

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[1] M. R. James, ed., Preface to: Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium ("Anecdota Oxoniensia," Series IV, Part XIV; Oxford, 1914), xiv et seq.

[2] Walter Map, p. 194.

[3] Ibid., p. 196.

The passage from Theophrastus, quoted in Chapter VI above, supplied a list of women's faults which was considerably augmented in the later Middle Ages. If the passage was, as Map seems to imply, excerpted from the rest of the epistle Against Jovinian (and this is the only place we know where it could be found), this is only more proof of the growing popularity of that epistle and its contents.

Owst notes that with this outgrowth of antifeminism, "we are concerned with another literary conceit that springs direct from the preachers." The reason which he gives for its popularity is illuminating:

> To the vast mass of the middle and lower orders, for whom no romantic minstrelsy had provided a chivalrous ideal, the pulpit, their one oracle of learning and refinement, presented a picture of womanhood, ill-balanced, indeed, but sufficiently realistic and lively to appeal to the lay mind. Thus early there grew up in popular verse a traditional satire, half-comic, half-tragic, from which neither the greatest of medieval English poets nor the greatest of all our dramatists could escape in their day, and one that stubbornly persists through the literature of following centuries to that of modern times.[1]

Antifeminist writers, following the preachers, attributed to women all of the sins possible, as well as some unavoidable natural defects. The problem with this literature is not to find enough material; rather it is that there is an embarrassment of riches. Perhaps the various themes may be discussed best by referring them to the pulpit diatribes. Owst lists five of the most common categories of pulpit charges against women, the first being their foolishness.

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[1] G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (2nd ed. rev.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), p. 377.

"'Foolish,'" notes Owst, "is perhaps the commonest of all epithets to be hurled at the sex, when the pulpit turns to denounce it."[1] In the same vein -- this time in regard to French poetic satires of the later Middle Ages -- Theodore Neff comments,

> Le degré de stupidité attribué aux femmes est quelque chose de remarquable. On les représente comme voltigeant ca et la et tombant insouciamment, étourdiment, dans les dangers plus redoutables, à la manière des papillons qui se font brûler les ailes dans la flamme d'une bougie . . . .[2]

While Owst takes many of his pulpit examples from the Summa Predicantium, a fourteenth-century collection of exempla by the Dominican priest John Bromyard, parallel tales may be found in the secular collections of tales, the most famous of which are the Decameron and the Canterbury Tales. Another popular collection is the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, a collection which is composed of tales which, although they were collected in the fifteenth century, may be shown to have analogues throughout the Middle Ages.

One of the tales in the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles has many analogues among tales illustrating the foolishness and gullibility of women. It is a popular variant of those tales, like the Shipman's Tale, in which a clever priest or other religious man deceives a foolish woman. In this

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[1] Ibid., p. 386.

[2] Theodore Neff, La Satire des Femmes dans la Poésie Lyrique Fançaise du Moyen Age (U. of Chicago diss.; Paris: V. Giard & E. Briere, 1900), p. 4. The following discussion is indebted to this work and to that of Owst.

tale the hero is a hermit who has become enamored of the daughter of a simple-minded widow. One night the priest made a hole in the wall near the widow's bed and spoke to her through a hollow rod:

> "Listen to me, woman of God!" he intoned three times in a very low voice, without waking her. "I am an angel of the Lord, Who hath sent me to thee to announce to thee the great blessings He hath seen fit to confer on thee. He desireth an heir from thy flesh and blood, to wit, thy daughter, to reunite, reform, and restore to its proper estate the Church, His bride. And it shall be in this wise: Thou shalt go from here up the mountain to the holy hermit, and lead thy daughter to him, and tell him fully what God hath just commanded thee through me. The hermit will know thy daughter, and from their union shall spring a son chosen by God and destined for the Holy See of Rome, who will do such good deeds that he will be compared to Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Now I am going. Obey the Lord.[1]

Things go as planned, and of course the mother cannot forebear boasting to the neighbors of the honor done to her daughter. However, to the surprise of all, the resultant baby is a girl; the hermit hears and flees,

> either to another country -- I don't know which -- to deceive another woman or young girl, or to the desert of Egypt to do penance for his sin with a contrite heart.[2]

The extremity of the foolishness which the writers attribute to women is matched at times by the powe r of females to deceive. Not quite logically, alongside their attacks on the foolishness of women the preachers and writers also often represent the poor husband as powerless to resist feminine deceptiveness. The following tale, from the

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[1] The Hundred Tales (Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles), Trans. Rossell H. Robbins (New York: Bonanza, 1960), pp. 52-53.

[2] Ibid., p. 53.

Gesta Romanorum, indicates also the way women were represented as aiding each other in these deceptions:

> A soldier, going into a far country, intrusted his wife to the care of her mother. But some time after her husband's departure the wife fell in love with a young man, and communicated her wishes to the mother. She approved of the connection, and without delay sent for the object of her daughter's criminal attachment. But while they feasted, the soldier unexpectedly returned and beat at his gate. The wife, in great tremor, concealed the lover in her bed, and then opened the door for her husband. Being weary with travel, he commanded his bed to be got ready; and the wife, more and more disturbed, knew not what she should do. The mother observing her daughter's perplexity, said, "Before you go, my child, let us show your husband the fair sheet which we have made." Then standing up, she gave one corner of the sheet to her daughter and held the other herself, extending it before him so as to favour the departure of the lover, who took the hint and escaped.[1]

These deceptions played by women rival the number played on them. The women in this popular literature tend to be incredibly foolish or so clever that no mere man could hope to remain undeceived by them.

The second characteristic pulpit charge against women listed by Owst is their garrulity and love of gossip. Under this heading of loquaciousness, we may note the charges against women of nagging, complaining, and gossiping. All of these faults came to be embodied in the medieval representation of Noah's wife. In the Wakefield Noah, the wife's first speech to Noah demonstrates the shrewishness of which she is the type:

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[1] Gesta Romanorum, trans. Charles Swan, rev. Wynnard Hooper (London: George Bell & Sons, 1899), p. 223.

Now, as euer myght I thryfe, /the wars I thee see!
Do tell me belife, /where has thou thus long be?
To dede may we dryfe, /or lif, for the,
For want.
When we swete or swynk,
Thou dos what thou thynk;
Yit of mete and of drynk
Haue we veray skant.[1]

This woman early shows herself a kind of compendium of feminine vices. After her long tirade to her husband, she turns to the audience and tells them confidentially that women have to be careful of their husbands and when her own husband is vexed she must act contrite and wring her hands;

Bot yit other while,
What with gam and gyle,
I shall smyte and smyle,
And qwite hym his mede.[2]

This is an opportunity for the playwright to have Noah and his wife to engage in a slapstick fight in which the husband does indeed win -- at least for the moment.

The wife's love of gossip is more vividly portrayed in the Chester Noah's Flood. Her stubbornness about entering the ark in the first play is a willful desire to do more spinning. In this play it is for love of her gossips:

But I have my gossips everichon,
One foote further I will not gone;

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[1] Chief Pre-Shakespearian Dramas, ed. Joseph Q. Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), p. 104.

[2] Ibid.

They shall not drowne, by St. John,
And I may save their lyfe![1]

Finally she is forced to enter; but her first act is to box her husband's ear.

This love of gossip is not confined to the women of the lower classes:

Dites vox patenostres aussi por ces duchesses,
Pour comtesse aussint, et puis por ces princesses,
Qu'au moustier el ne soient mie caqueteresses.[2]

In the Ayenbite of Inwit Dan Michel says that the evil tongue is a tree cursed by God and on which are ten boughs: idleness, boasting, flattery, seduction, lying, perjury, strife, grudging, opposition, and blasphemy. This is a good list of the charges brought against women in regard to their loquaciousness.

The third major category of woman's faults is what Owst calls "instabilitas loci":

> an equally fatal attraction to the outside world, its freedom, its publicity and its scope for yet more pleasant gossip. Having been permitted, for her frailty, to escape the strait and narrow way of Virginity, she now finds herself no better satisfied with the enforced seclusion of married life.[3]

We have already seen how the rape of Jephthah's daughter, Dinah, and the troubles which ensued from it, was used to illustrate the dangers of women's constant wandering about. The Knight of La Tour-Landry

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[1] A Literary Middle English Reader, ed. A. S. Cook (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1915), p. 491.

[2] Neff, p. 12.

[3] Owst, p. 388.

tells of a woman who have received a bad name by her habit of constantly going to feasts. On her deathbed she swore that she had never done amiss, and all about her were abashed because they had all thought her guilty.

> And therfor it is gret perile a woman to acustume her or to desire to goo to suche festis ther she might abide atte home with her worshippe saued, vndefamed of her good name; for atte suche places mani women takithe moche blame withoute cause.[1]

The disobedience of women was in painful contrast to the official view of the husband as the rightful ruler of the household. The demand of the Wife of Bath for sovereignty for women was only in keeping with pulpit and literary satires and complaints on the actual state of things. Noah's wife in the Chester play displays what Owst calls "a certain unnatural condition of contrariety, or wilfulness, which is one of the risks which every intending husband must be prepared to face."[2] To Noah's demand that she do as he tells her, she answers,

> By Christ, not or I see nore neede,
> Though thou stand all day and stare![3]

Finally Noah's sons have to force their mother into the ark; Noah greets her, only to receive a blow for his pains:

> Noah. Welcome, wife, into this boate!
> Noah's Wife. And have thou that for thy note!
> (Gives him a box on the ear.)[4]

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[1] The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, ed. Thomas Wright (Early English Text Society, Original Series, vol. 33; London, 1868), p. 36.

[2] Owst, p. 89

[3] Cook, p. 490.

[4] Ibid., p. 492.

The Knight of La Tour-Landry advises his daughters to "take hede how alle good women owe to be humble, curteis, and serueisable vnto her husbondes."[1] He knows, however, some stories which can serve as a warning of what can happen to wives who do not render their proper obedience. One husband was chided before others by his wife and ordered her to hold her peace;

> but the more faire he spake, the worse she dede. And he, that was angri of her gouernaunce, smote her with his fiste downe to the erthe; and thanne with hys fote he stroke her in the uisage and brake her nose, and alle her lyff after she had her nose croked, the whiche shent and dysfigured her uisage after, that she might not for shame shew her uisage, it was so foule blemmished. And this she had for her euelle and gret langage, that she was wont to saie to her husbonde. And therfore the wiff aught to suffre and lete the husbonde haue the wordes, and to be maister, for that is her worshippe . . . .[2]

A French tale begins in this way:

> Vous qui avez des femmes et qui les laissez devenir maîtresses et prendre trop d'empire, écoutez l'histoire que je vais vous raconter. Elle vous apprendra à réprimer de bonne heure leurs caprices, et à les corriger quand elles sortiront du respect et de la soumission qu'elles vous doivent.[3]

The author goes on to tell the story of a lord who, because he had married for love, had early allowed himself to be ordered around by his wife. When his daughter came to the day of her marriage to a count,

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[1] Knight of La Tour-Landry, p. 98.

[2] Ibid., p. 25.

[3] Fabliaux ou Contes: Fables et Romans du XIIe et XIIIe Siècle, trans. Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Legrand d'Aussy (3rd ed. rev.; Paris: Jules Renouard, 1829), Vol. III, p. 187.

he asked her to always be sweet and complaisant with her new husband. The mother, however, true to her habit of always contradicting him, spoke to the daughter in words which sound much like those of the Wife of Bath:

> Ma fille, lui dit-elle, je n'ai plus qu'une leçon à te donner. Tu as un mari amoureux, pour une femme c'est une fortune. Veux-tu être heureuse? tâche de le dominer dans ces premiers moments, en voilà pour la vie. Essaie ensuite de le contredire en quelque chose, accoutume-le à t'obéir, prends le ton qui ordonne: en un mot, tu vois ce que je suis, fais comme moi.[1]

The count, however, had seen how things stood between the mother and the father and determined to cure his bride of any such pretensions. On the way back to his castle, a hare crossed their path; he told his two hounds, "Fetch!" When the two hounds came back without the hare, he cut the throat of each. Later, his horse displeased him and he cut its throat. The bride was shaken, but remarkably undeterred. At the castle she ordered the chief cook to change all of the meal which the count had ordered, saying that she would answer for it to the count. The cook obeyed, and the count struck him, putting out his eye, and ordered him out of his domains. He spanked his wife and kept her in her bed for some days. From then on his wife was submissive, and he was later able to cure her mother's willfulness. Had Chaucer known the story, it might have served as a reply to the Wife of Bath in the course of the Marriage Group.

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[1] Ibid., p. 192.

The last general failing of the five which Owst lists is one of the favorite subjects of the satire and complaint addressed to women, both in literature and the pulpit -- their vanity. Pride was supposed to have led the first woman into sin, and pride of dress was often derided as one of the besetting sins of women. The author of Jacob's Well gives this example of the danger of pride of dress:

> A countas, chast of body, gret in doing almes-dedys, devowt in prayerys, deyid, and was drawyn wyth feendys to helle-ward, and cryed, 'allas!' and aperyd to a lady of fraunce, fowl as a feend, and seyde to here: 'beþou ware be me and alle oþere! for I was a good lyuere in alle oþere thynges, saaf I haadde delyȝte in pride and veynglorye, in prowde aray of myn heuyd and of my body, in longe traynes, and in brode hornys, and I desyred werdly worschyppe. and only forþis pryde I am dampnyd wyth-outyn ende!'[1]

The horned headdress mentioned was the subject of many literary and pulpit satires. Preachers and poets alike compared the horns to those of beasts and demons. Lydgate, for example, wrote a poem on the subject, the last stanza of which goes like this:

> Clerkys recorde, by gret auctoryte,
> Hornes wer yove to bestys for dyffence;
> A thyng contrarye to femynyté,
> To be maad sturdy of resystence.
> But arche wives, egre in ther vyolence,
> Fers as tygres for to make affray,
> They have despit, and ageyn concyence,
> Lyst nat of pryde, then hornes cast away.[2]

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[1] Jacob's Well, ed. Arthur Brandeis (Early English Text Society, Original Series, vol. 115; London, 1900), p. 80.

[2] Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume, ed. F. W. Fairholt (Percy Society, vol. 27; London, 1849), pp. 53-54.

Not mentioned in Owst's list, but implicit in many of the complaints and popular tales about women is their lecherousness and promiscuity. Though some women in these tales manage to protect their honor, most tales take for granted what Theophrastus said of the sex: "If a woman be fair, she soon finds lovers; if she be ugly, it is easy to be wanton."[1] Just as the husbands in the fabliaux are represented as taking elaborate precautions to prevent their wives from making them cuckolds, the wives are represented as easily avoiding the cleverest of traps. There are dozens of these stories of the strategems by which women are enabled to deceive their husbands. Representative of them is the following one from the Decameron.

A rich merchant was exceedingly jealous of his wife, and when she wished to go to church on Christmas morning and be confessed, his suspicions were aroused, for he never let her out of the house and wondered what sins she could have to confess. The husband ordered her to confess at their chapel instead, then disguised himself as a priest. The lady recognized him, however, and told him that she was enamored of a priest who came to her at night. The husband determined to wait by the door in order to surprise the priest, and while he sat below, the woman summoned her lover to come in by the roof. Later she revealed to her husband that she had recognized him; this shamed him out of his jealousy.

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[1] Jerome, Against Jovinianus, trans. W. H. Freemantle (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. VI), p. 383.

> And so the adroit lady had, as it were, a charter of indulgence, and needed no more to contrive for her lover to come to her over the roof like a cat, but admitted him by the door, and using due discretion, had many a good time with him, and sped her life gaily. [1]

There was, to be sure, something of a pulpit tradition counter to the antifeminist one. Some preachers spoke of the Virgin Mary's being made the means of men's salvation not as a sign of God's power in utilizing even something so debased as her sex, but rather as a means of honoring the sex. Owst quotes a homilist who pointed out that "women in time of cristes deth . . . were nou3t so flyttynge in the beleve as were the aposteles." [2] Also in the literature of the earlier Middle Ages woman found a few bright spots. The women in the sagas come off pretty well. In the later Middle Ages, however, it is difficult to find literature which does not either make a demi-goddess of the heroine, or else a shrew, a cheat, or a fool. If the earlier Germanic literature tended to treat women simply as people, literature after the eleventh century tended to treat them as something more or something less.

From the Latin lyrics of the "vagantes," alternately praising love and satirizing women, to the fabliaux, by turns exposing the abysmal stupidity of the sex and relating its clever ruses, the visible origin of this antifeminism seems to be in the religious and philosophical tradition.

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[1] The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. J. M. Rigg (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1928), p. 140.

[2] Owst, p. 120.

The sermon exempla and pulpit diatribes against the sex furnish the visible immediate origin, but behind them is the whole intellectual revolution which we have traced. It might have seemed a long way from the asceticism of Plotinus and Origen to the libels on women in the popular lyrics and tales, but the ascetic ideal is a thread which runs through the period. The dualism of body and spirit in this tradition prepared for this antifeminism. As Helen Waddell says, "When asceticism is the positive good, love and licence are but degrees of negative comparison."[1] It is probably true that the actual conditions were quite different and that here we are dealing with a convention. Eileen Power points out,

> Certainly medieval records as a whole show a cameraderie between husband and wife which contrasts remarkably both with the picture of woman in subjection which the Church delighted to draw and with that of the worshipped lady of chivalry.[2]

Antifeminism, then, like the mother-in-law joke, is a convention. It is, however, a remarkably enduring convention. Whatever the explanation of its origin and growth, it is still a fertile source of material in Chaucer's day; in fact it still is today.

Strange as it may seem, an important source of antifeminism for later writers was the same as the source for much of the courtly

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[1]Helen Waddell, The Wandering Scholars (6th ed. rev.; N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1955), p. 227.

[2]Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," The Legacy of the Middle Ages, ed. C. G. Crump and E. F. Jacob (Oxford, 1932), p. 416.

poetry idolizing women -- the Roman de la Rose. Guillaume de Lorris had begun the poem in the service of the courtly ideal; another writer, Jean de Meun, continued the poem in a different spirit and with a different aim.

In an important recent study of the Roman de la Rose, A. M. F. Gunn concludes that earlier critics have erred in saying that Jean continued the poem with a different intention and with no interest in or power of archetectonics.

> His intention -- like that of Guillaume de Lorris -- was to create a 'Mirror of Love,' and of his adherence to this intention there is a plenitude of proof. With a few relatively insignificant exceptions, the meaning of love in the experience of the individual and in the workings of the universe is the theme of the poet in every section of his work. [1]

Certainly older critics seem to have gone astray in making a too absolute division between the two parts; however, the danger of going to the other extreme is evident. The general subject, as Gunn says, is approximately the same; Jean's performance in maintaining a comprehensive structure Gunn has amply demonstrated; but to go much further than this in trying to demonstrate the unity of the poem as a whole is to lose an important point about the course of literature in the later Middle Ages. The theme of the two men is love only in approximately the same way that the theme both of the sonnets of Petrarch and of the Divine Comedy is love.

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[1] A. M. F. Gunn, The Mirror of Love (Texas Technological College Press, 1952), pp. 483-84.

To some extent, Gunn makes allowance for this:

> Jean de Meun made Guillaume's story -- an account of youth's awakening to the beauty and powe r of love -- the first part of his own full-length representation of the gradual and uncertain progress of youth toward emotional maturity. [1]

To say this, however, is to show just how profound the gulf is between the two parts of the poem. Courtly love in its origin and in Guillaume's portion is a self-enclosed system, the property of a small class. The Dreamer is admitted to the Garden by Idleness. In his treatise on love, Andreas states that "when poverty comes in, the things that nourished love begin to leave, because 'poverty has nothing with which to feed its love.'"[2] Courtly love, then, is for the rich and idle. Restricted to a small class, courtly love also grew up beside Church doctrine with little reference to that doctrine except at times to parody it. It was one of the many places where, as Eileen Power has pointed out, "the Church and the Aristocracy were . . . often at loggerheads with each other . . . . "[3] This opposition is not immediately evident in early courtly love poems just because there was so little reference to anything outside the code.

The second part of the poem is the work of a man with interests far beyond those of the sort represented in the first part. The larger significance of his work is that it is indicative of, and an influence on,

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[1] Gunn, p. 491.

[2] Andreas, p. 30.

[3] Power, p. 401.

the changes which were taking place in literature. Both the popular tale and the courtly poem were becoming vehicles for much heavier freight than ever before. The change of the first culminates in some of the Canterbury Tales; the change in the second reaches its high point in the Divine Comedy, Jean's portion of the Roman de la Rose, and Troilus and Criseyde and some others of the Canterbury Tales. This latter change -- in the courtly poem -- was, as we may see, extremely fruitful. It marks, in the Knight's Tale and especially in Troilus and Criseyde, one of the high points of Chaucer's art.

PART IV

CHAUCER AND THE TRADITION

CHAPTER XI

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

> Boccaccio's Criseyde is an attractive, sensual Neapolitan aristocrat, capable of any trivial impulsiveness, little more than a lay-figure to carry her part, therefore without any great conflicts, personality, or interest. Criseyde on the other hand is the earliest full-figure Portrait of a Lady in English literature . . . . There is no better phrase for her personality than that she has every trait which makes woman attractive to man.[1]

> Chaucer has not really, as the critics tell us, ennobled the character of Boccaccio's heroine. She is the same lightly-loving lady, careful of her reputation, but careless of her honor. She is merely a little more clever at deceiving her friends.[2]

> As Cressida is at the beginning, such is she to the end; amorous, gentle, affectionate, and charming altogether, but fatally impressionable and yielding. Her strength of will is no match for her inconstant heart . . . . The Filostrato is the tragedy of Troilus; Chaucer has made it the tragedy of Cressida also . . . .[3]

Until now, we have been considering the growth and perpetuation

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[1] J. S. P. Tatlock, "The People in Chaucer's Troilus," PMLA, LVI (1941), pp. 96, 98.

[2] Robert K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 113.

[3] George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915), p. 135.

of certain conventions and conventional ideals. First, we considered the genesis in ancient philosophy of the ascetic ideal and its elaboration in religion. Allied to this ideal and to an extent growing out of it was the convention of antifeminism, which found expression in both religious and secular literature. Beside the antifeminist tradition, but for a long time not brought into significant opposition to it, were the religious veneration of the Virgin and the courtly veneration of the Lady. By virtue of their roles as ideals and conventions, they probably bore little resemblance to actual practice; but they remained in the Middle Ages sources for religious and secular works and as potential sources of debate.

The duality between the real and the ideal is in evidence throughout the course of recorded history, of course, but the lines are seldom as clearly drawn as in the Middle Ages. A theologian like Albertus Magnus could go so far as to call Mary a goddess, while accepting Aristotle's definition of woman as a mismade male. A courtly poet could write an idolatrous poem to his lady and follow it with a virulent satire on women. Andreas Capellanus could write two books setting forth and extolling the courtly code, only to add a third rejecting it as unworthy of Christians. That these conventions could for so long exist side by side says something about their role simply as conventions. They did, however, represent accepted ways of thinking -- if divorced from practical reality -- and it was inevitable that a more thoughtful poet would either transmute them into something else, as did Dante, or would bring to

light their inherent inconsistencies, both with each other and with the facts of human life, as did Chaucer.

Chaucer did this in one place, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, by juxtaposing the ideals of virginity and fecundity, the clerical tradition of antifeminism and the fabliau tradition of the cleverness of women in always getting their way, the courtly ideal of youth and beauty and the courtly ideal of gentilesse. The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales also makes use of this technique of opposition. In the Prologue is characterization of the pilgrims which makes them representative types, yet highly individual. There are the two forces acting on the pilgrims, nature and supernature. This habit of opposing what are at times irreconcilable tendencies and points of view is a favorite of Chaucer and a function of his ironic stance. The real and the ideal, nature and supernature, the demands of the flesh and the demands of the spirit -- all are set in a dynamic equilibrium in his works, nowhere more poignantly than in Troilus and Criseyde.

Although a larger study would inevitably do more to illuminate the subject, this chapter will have to be limited to the character of Criseyde, a character concerning whom there has been much controversy. Some have called her a victim of circumstances, while others have objected that she seems merely an opportunist. Some have called her cynical, while others have called her helpless. This is evidently a topic which can stand more light, however little the present discussion may be able to shed.

Coupled with the complexity of Criseyde's character is the complexity of the author's treatment of the material. Chaucer writes a tragedy of Troilus, only to have his hero laugh from above the earth after it is all over. He writes feelingly of the delights of love, only to reject the whole story in his epilogue. The opposition of the real and the ideal, in short, is central to the poem and the key to its complexity. A discussion of just about anything concerning the poem must at least touch on the problem which the author poses in the epilogue. First, however, the character of Criseyde herself requires careful consideration.

Limiting this chapter primarily to a study of Criseyde does not do too much to simplify consideration of the poem, for her character is one of the greatest sources of disagreement among critics and also vital to the understanding of the work. Root says that she is "the artistic centre of the story, and on the strange complexity of her double nature Chaucer has expended his best energies . . . ."[1] When we remember Root's position, quoted in the headnote, that Criseyde is the same woman she was in the Filostrato, it seems best to study Boccaccio's heroine as a preliminary to the study of her transformation into Chaucer's heroine.

When Criseida first appears in Il Filostrato, she appears as the standard romantic heroine. Calchas, says the author,

> had left a daughter of his, a widow, who was so fair and so angelic to behold that she seemed not a mortal, Criseida by

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[1] Root, p. 102.

> name, as amiable I am advised, as wise, as modest, and as well-mannered as any other lady in Troy.[1]

Because of the author's need, however, to prepare for her betrayal, she displays in the course of the poem two traits not so common to the romantic heroine -- sensuousness and a tendency to calculate coldly the advantages and disadvantages of any situation in terms of her own welfare. Ker has said that all three characters "might have come out of the Garden of the Decameron . . . ,"[2] and certainly Criseida is conventional enough, with the added flavor of the last two traits, which are common to the clever women of the tales themselves. This last change from the conventional heroine is reinforced by her relatively low social status.

When Troilo first sees her at the festival, he sees what appears to be the conventional romantic heroine -- tall, beautiful and haughty.

> She was tall and all her limbs were well proportioned to her height; her face was adorned with beauty celestial, and in her whole appearance she showed a womanly dignity. With her arm she removed her mantle from before her face, making room for herself and pushing the crowd a little aside.[3]

Her haughtiness, a trait of most courtly ladies, is part of her appeal to Troilo:

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[1] The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. Nathaniel E. Green and Arthur B. Myrick (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania, 1929), p. 139. Although the translators changed the names of the characters to their English equivalents, I have changed them back for clarity. This edition cited hereafter as Filostrato.

[2] W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance (London: Macmillan, 1897), p. 423.

[3] Ibid., p. 147.

> As she recovered her composure, that act of hers -- somewhat disdainful, as if she were to say 'one may not stand here' -- proved pleasing to Troilo. [1]

The action also serves to show her from the first quite able to take care of herself.

In the Second Part when Pandaro learns of Troilo's passion for his widowed cousin, he tells Troilo that he could not find a better object for his love:

> 'No lady was ever more deserving, none was ever livelier and more entertaining, none more pleasing nor more gracious, none of larger soul among all that ever have been. Nor is there task so lofty that she would not undertake as willingly as any king or would lack courage to carry to completion, provided only she had the power.' [2]

This description of her serves to reinforce the earlier impression of her as a woman who, though a widow, is quite able to hold her own and manage for herself.

Pandaro tells Troilo that there is only one problem: Criseida is more virtuous than other women and holds love in contempt.

> 'But if naught else annoy us, believe me, I will with my soft words find a way to cope with this, to the relief of thy necessity. Possess thy soul in patience, curbing well thy warm desire.' [3]

The fault he speaks of is a common one among romantic ladies and no fault at all, of course, but simply a way of heightening the interest of the story and the desirability of the heroine. This contempt for love

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[1] Filostrato, p. 147.

[2] Ibid., p. 173.

[3] Ibid., p. 175.

can, in other romances, create plot interest in the strategems by which the hero and his friend change the lady's indifference to love and circumvent the other obstacles which fear and censure may put in the way. This is the way of the Roman de la Rose, for example.

In Il Filostrato, however, all doubts are resolved in the course of the conversation in which Pandaro first opens the subject. Criseida begins by feigning horror of the idea of such an affair:

> 'O God help me! What will others do now that thou strivest to make me follow the precepts of Love?'[1]

She protests that her heart is still heavy because of the death of her husband. On the heels of this, however, she shows what is her more immediate concern:

> 'And if anyone should have my love, certainly to him would I give it, provided only that I thought that it would please him. But as thou shouldst clearly know, the fancies which he hath now, often occur, and last four or five days, and then pass lightly away, love changing as thought changeth.'[2]

She tells Pandaro to find someone else for Troilo, and he angrily starts to leave, then turns back to warn her that she will not be young forever. It is a simple reminder, but in her reply she shows that her citadel has fallen:

> 'Alas,' said Criseida, 'thou speakest the truth . . . . The greater number die before the path granted by the celestial fire is completed. But let us now stop thinking of this, and tell me whether I may still

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[1] Filostrato, p. 187.

[2] Ibid.

> have solace and joy of love, and in what way thou didst first take note of Troilo.'[1]

Pandaro tells the story, and she is won, asking only that things be handled discreetly.

The accomplished way in which she sets about bringing the affair to a conclusion indicates that her reputed aversion to love has probably been a cover for her reputation. The debate with herself in which she engages after Pandaro's departure is the standard one; however, coming as it does on the heels of her swift approval of Pandaro's suit for Troilo, it rings hollow. Any suspense it might have generated is dispelled by her next action. On hearing the news from Pandaro, Troilo rushes to Criseida's house to catch a glimpse of her.

> She was standing at one of her windows and was perchance expecting what happened. Not harsh nor forbidding did she show herself toward Troilo as he looked at her, but at all times cast toward him modest glances over her right shoulder.[2]

After an exchange of letters in which she artfully increases the ardor and hope of Troilo, Creseida gives Pandaro her official acquiescence. When Pandaro presses her for a proper time, she arranges the meeting with suspicious efficiency:

> 'Thou knowest,' said Criseida, 'that there are some ladies and other people with me in this house. Some of them are to go to the coming festival. Then I shall remain with him. I hope that this delay cause him no anxiety. Of the same manner of his

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[1] Ibid., p. 191.

[2] Ibid., p. 203.

> coming I shall then talk with thee. See only that he be prudent and know well how to conceal his desires. [1]

Thus speaks the voice of experience.

The action of the Third Part of the poem corresponds roughly to that of Book III of Troilus and Criseyde. In this part of the story -- the consummation of the love of the pair -- an element is brought forward in Criseida's character which was only hinted at before, her sensuality. Boccaccio presents this through highly specific description. When Criseida keeps on her shift, saying that she is "bashful," Troilo replies, "Soul of me, I pray thee remove it, so that I may have thee naked in my arms, as my heart desireth." She replies, "Behold, I rid myself of it."[2]

In the Fourth Part, the impending separation is announced. Women come to comfort Criseida on hearing the news of her coming departure from the city. Boccaccio's comment on their departure shows once again how little the courtly code softened attitudes toward the sex in general:

> But after a deal of foolish cackling, such as most women make, they took their leave and went their ways. [3]

Troilo comes also to lament her departure, and her answer, sounding for all the world like a passage from Andreas, is revealing of her cool practicality:

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[1] Ibid., p. 235.

[2] Ibid., p. 253.

[3] Ibid., p. 329.

> 'Our love which pleaseth thee so much, pleaseth thee because thou must act secretly and seldom come to this place. But if thou wilt have me freely, soon will be extinguished the glowing torch which now enkindleth thee -- and me likewise. For if, as now, we wish our love to last, it must ever lie concealed.'[1]

After the separation, Criseida sits grieving for Troilo and vowing to return to him whatever the consequences. Although it is only the third day, Diomede, who has divined her secret, comes to her and predicts that Troy is doomed and all its inhabitants with it. After speaking of this and of the superiority of Greeks over Trojans, he vows his love and worthiness. True to form, Criseida encourages him in the very act of rejecting him. She cannot accept him -- even though he is of royal blood.

> And this causeth me much wonder that thou canst place thy mind upon an insignificant woman, as I am, of low rank. For thee the fair Helen would be more fitting. I am in distress and not disposed to listen to such a declaration. I do not mean, however, that I am sorry to be loved faithfully by thee.[2]

The speech is not such as utterly to crush anyone, and Diomede goes away much more hopeful than he came.

> Tall he was and well-favored in person, young, fresh, and very pleasing, and strong and haughty, as men say, graceful of speech as ever any other Greek, and he had a nature prone to love. Which things Criseida in the midst of her woes kept pondering to herself when he had departed, hesitating whether to approach or avoid him.[3]

As before, all Criseida needed was a suggestion. The conversation has taken place on the third day after her separation; yet she has already

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[1] Ibid., p. 361.

[2] Ibid., p. 423.

[3] Ibid., p. 425.

more than half decided to make the change to Diomede. Long after this, she writes to Troilo telling him that she loves him more than ever and giving many excuses for the delay of her return. This is the last we see of Criseida. The rest of the poem -- some forty-three stanzas -- is taken up with the grief and final death of Troilo, plus an epilogue warning of false women.

This is Boccaccio's heroine then. She has features of the courtly ladies: beauty, haughtiness, discretion, high spirit. On the other hand, like the unfaithful women in the fabliaux, she is cool, clever, practical, and ever ready to seize the main chance. Even her apparent virtues of modesty and reluctance to be wooed turn out to have the aim of enhancing her value and preserving her reputation. That Chaucer has changed the character materially in his poem we can see by comparing his Criseyde with Boccaccio's heroine.

From the first sight of Criseyde, there are hints that she is in some degree different from her prototype in the Filostrato. Unlike that woman, she is somewhat more retiring:

> . . . she stood ful lowe and stille allone,
> Byhynden other folk, in litel brede,
> And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede,
> Simple of atir and debonaire of chere,
> With ful assured lokyng and manere. [1]

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 11. 178-82 from The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). All references to Chaucer's text are from this work and the lines are cited following the text.

In his first full description of Criseyde, Chaucer follows Boccaccio that the woman is tall: "She nas nat with the leste of hire stature. . . ." (I, 281) In Book Five, however, he changes his mind: "Criseyde mene was of hire stature . . . ." (V, 806) Robinson notes that the later description is in agreement with the versions of Joseph of Exeter, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, and Guido delle Colonne.[1] This is in keeping with Chaucer's observable tendency away from Boccaccio's version after the first book. In the course of Book Two, Chaucer begins to make his own the story itself, and not simply the narrative frame. Criseyde's character begins to undergo changes with the first visit of Pandarus.

In the meantime, however, there are little hints. There is the Criseida of Il Filostrato "making room for herself and pushing the crowd a little aside," beside the description of Criseyde:

> . . . creature
> Was nevere lasse mannyssh in semynge.
> And ek the pure wise of hire mevynge
> Shewed wel that men myght in hire gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse.
> (I, 283-87)

Like Criseida, she is a little haughty, but her look does not quite mean the latter's "One may not stand here":

> To Troilus right wonder wel with alle
> Gan for to like hire mevynge and hire chere,
> Which somdel deignous was, for she let fall

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[1] Robinson, p. 834n.

Hire look a lite aside in swich manere,
Ascaunces, 'What! may I nat stonden hire?'
(I, 288-92)

Pandarus's description of his niece seems almost the same as Pandaro's of his cousin:

'. . . I nevere saugh a more bountevous
Of hire estat, n'a gladder, ne of speche
A frendlyer, n'a mor gracious
For to do wel, ne lasse hadde nede to seche
What for to don; and al this bet to eche,
In honour, to as fer as she may strecche,
A kynges herte semeth by hyrs a wrecche.'
(I, 883-89)

This is the same kind of conventionally high-pitched, romantic praise of the Filostrato; however, one element of the earlier description is significantly missing. Pandarus does not say what was said of Criseida -- that she despises love. In that poem, as already noted, this is a ruse which Criseida manages for her own ends. Taken with changes to be noted later, the omission is significant.

"Book II," says Professor Root, "may be called the book of Criseyde. An overwhelming proportion of the lines is dedicated to the unfolding of her character."[1] And certainly, though other elements of her character are revealed later, much of the complexity of her personality is revealed in the course of this book. What many have not recognized is the fact that this book is also where Chaucer has added the new events to the story as told in the Filostrato. Surely it is not without significance

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[1]Root, p. 107

that the very book which seeks to present the character of Criseyde is just the one where new plot elements have been added.

It is in the Second Part of Il Filostrato that Criseida also reveals a different person below her outward guise, but hers is a conscious deception for conscious, simple ends. If some critics are correct in saying that Criseyde is also a deceiver and an opportunist, she is much more complexly so. And probably self-deceived as well. Because of the complications which he has introduced, it seems that if there is anywhere a pattern to Chaucer's adaptation of Il Filostrato it is to be seen in Book Two. For this reason, the comparison of it with its source will be close and extended.

The Book begins with the visit of Pandarus to Criseyde's palace. This man, however, is no longer the young Renaissance rake of Il Filostrato. As Robinson points out, "Chaucer, by making him a generation older -- Criseyde's uncle -- at once complicates his character."[1] The earlier Pandaro had reassured his friend that all women are ready for love, and so his cousin, at least, proved, managing the affair once it had begun. The change in Pandarus's character and role point to a change in that of Criseyde. Until the end, it is he who manages things, arranging the meeting as Criseida had done in Il Filostrato. As we shall see, Diomed is given a different character to conform to the somewhat different part which he is to play. As these characters become more

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[1] Robinson, p. 387.

active in the story, the heroine becomes correspondingly more passive, more like the usual romantic heroine -- like Emelye in the Knight's Tale, though with much more character and complexity.

Boccaccio contented himself with saying that there was joking and laughter when Pandaro and Criseida got together. Chaucer adds a bit of complication almost at once. Pandarus invites Criseyde to dance and do other May-observances.

> 'I? God forbede!' quod she, 'be ye mad?
> Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
> By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!
> Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
> It sate me wel bet ay in a cave
> To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
> Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.'
> (II, 113-19)

This is not such a reaction as the earlier heroine would have given. It may well be that Criseyde is more interested in preserving her reputation than in any more religious life, but the passage serves to show that fearfulness which is such a dominant trait of hers -- and not at all in evidence in the character of Criseida. The difference is seen again in the parallel passages in which cousin and uncle try to whet the curiosity of the heroine. Criseida keeps pressing her cousin to come to the point. Criseyde, on the other hand, tells him,

> 'Now, uncle myn, I nyl yow nought displese,
> Nor axen more that may do yow disese.'
> (II, 146-47)

This may be simply an artful way of making him come to the point, but other passages serve to indicate that she has partly guessed what he is

about to say and is both burning to hear it and fearful of being faced with the necessity to act on whatever he has to say.

> 'Now, my good em, for Goddes love, I preye,
> Quod she, 'come of, and telle me what it is!
> For both I am agast what ye wol seye,
> And ek me longeth it to wite, ywys;
> For whethir it be wel or be amys,
> Say on, lat me nat in this feere dwelle.'
> (II, 309-14)

In both poems the women protest, on hearing the news that they are loved, that their relative should be protecting their virtue rather than aiding in the loss of it. The fact that this is said to the lady's uncle in the second poem gives it an added force. Also Criseida, as we have seen, expends only one stanza in lamenting the perfidy of the world before revealing the real source of her fear concerning Troilo:

> '. . . as thou shouldst clearly know, the fancies which he hath now, often occur, and last four or five days, and then pass lightly away, love changing as thought changeth.'[1]

In the First Part of Il Filostrato, Troilo, when disparaging lovers, also says that he has tried that game.

In Chaucer's poem, of course, Troilus is wholly inexperienced in love. Critics who say that the heroes of the two poems are just alike might do well to assess what it means for Chaucer to have made a less experienced, less practiced hero. Certainly the heroine's first reaction to the affair is changed:

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[1] Filostrato, p. 187.

> 'What! is this al the joye and al the feste?
> Is this youre reed? Is this my blisful cas?
> Is this the verray mede of youre byheste?
> Is al this paynted proces seyd, allas!
> Right for this fyn? O lady myn, Pallas!
> Thow in this dredful cas for me purveye
> For so astoned am I that I deye.'
> (II, 421-27)

Her calling on Athena may remind us of Emelye's prayer to Athena in the Knight's Tale. That the goddess protected neither is not the only parallel between the two heroines, as we shall presently see.

C. S. Lewis has called Chaucer's changes of Il Filostrato "a process of medievalization."[1] He explains this in part by saying,

> The Book of Troilus shows . . . the very peculiar literary phenomenon of Chaucer groping back, unknowingly, through the very slightly medieval work of Boccaccio, to the genuinely medieval formula of Chrestien.[2]

He goes on to define this 'medievalization' as a return to older literary interests: to interest in the poem as history from the Trojan period, in flowers of rhetoric for their own sake, in "doctryne and sentence," and finally in the code of courtly love. Lewis points out in this last regard that Chaucer

> not only modified his story so as to make it a more accurate representation in action of the orthodox erotic code, but he also went out of his way to emphasize its didactic element.[3]

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[1] C. S. Lewis, "What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato," Essays and Studies, vol. XVII (1932), p. 56.

[2] Ibid., pp. 58-9.

[3] Ibid., p. 66.

Lewis does not explain this "didactic element"; however, it seems likely from the import of the rest of the essay that he means the kind of courtly-love didacticism of Chrestien in The Knight of the Cart. Much of Lewis's argument is that Chaucer was engaged in the Troilus in correcting the errors against the code made by Boccaccio. Chaucer's change of the epilogue alone, however, would seem to refute this. Boccaccio's epilogue draws the correct courtly moral from the story: shun fickle and unworthy women in favor of the perfect one.

> The perfect lady hath a stronger desire to be loved and taketh delight in loving; she discerneth and seeth what is to be eschewed; she avoideth and chooseth; foresight she hath and looketh to the fulfilment of her engagements. All such ladies are to be followed, but choice should not be made in haste, for they are not all wise, because they may be older and age lesseneth worth. [1]

This, it seems, is the proper moral to be drawn from the story by an exponent of courtly love, as Lewis says Chaucer is. That it is not the moral drawn by Chaucer, the parallel passage in Troilus and Criseyde shows clearly.

"O giovanetti," says Boccaccio, don't trust women too lightly. Search carefully for the "perfetta donna." [2] What our author says, on the other hand, all readers of Chaucer remember:

> O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
> In which that love up groweth with youre age,
> Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
> And of youre herte up casteth the visage
> To thilke God that after his ymage

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[1] Filostrato, p. 499.

[2] Ibid., pp. 498-99.

> Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
> This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.
> (V, 1835-41)

Rather than 'medievalization,' this is turning from one kind of medieval moral to another. Attractive as it is as a convenient explanation of what Chaucer really did to Il Filostrato, Lewis's description tends to overlook part of the author's revisions.

Lewis's referring the revisions back in the direction of Chrestien de Troyes, however, can be helpful. If, as seems true, all four of the characters have been changed, perhaps there is a discernable tendency to the changes. Because this is a study only of Criseyde's character, a quick glance at the changes in the other characters will have to suffice. Troilus, as we have seen, is not experienced in love as was Troilo; Pandarus is older than Pandaro, more experienced, more comic, uncle not cousin of the heroine, and more conscious of his obligations to her and her dependence on him; Diomede in Il Filostrato is more the conventional lover -- awed by the lady, despairing but determined to tell his love -- whereas the Diomed of Troilus and Criseyde is practiced and aggressive, knowing what he wants and how to get it. In the first part of the poem, unlike Il Filostrato, Pandarus initiates and directs almost all of the action. In the last part, Diomed takes over with the same sort of practiced skill. Troilus is a more passive character in Chaucer's poem, depending on Pandarus for guidance in the affair, even unclothed and tossed into bed by him after fainting at a crucial moment. By enlarging

the parts of Pandarus and Diomed, and by making them so much in control of things, Chaucer has made a more passive character of Troilus in the first part of the poem -- and of Criseyde in both parts.

When Criseida decides, in the Filostrato, to give her love to Troilo, she immediately takes steps to manage the affair. She warns Pandaro of the need for discretion; she shows herself at her window at just the right time to be seen by Troilo; she writes to Troilo in such a way as to increase his ardor and hope; she plans the time and place of the first meeting. In comparing all this with the Troilus, it is apparent that the active role has passed almost entirely to Pandarus. This is the import of the changes in Book Two. The poem is closer to the older romantic tradition -- to the Roman de la Rose. In the Roman de la Rose, the Rose remains waiting while the lover, instructed by voices of experience, seeks to reach her. Like Pandarus, whose duty is to protect his niece, La Vieille has a duty to protect the Rose. Also like Pandarus, she gives the young lover the advice of age and experience to aid him in attaining his goal. In the romances, women who manage affairs as efficiently as Boccaccio's heroine are usually the damsels rejected by the hero. Romantic heroines usually are content to suffer and wait -- for the lover to woo them, rescue them, win them again, and so forth -- more in the manner of Chaucer's heroine.

It is easy, however, to overstate the case. After all, Criseyde is not the passive, ideal Rose. As in the course of Il Filostrato Criseida's

mask of a romantic heroine is removed to show the fabliau woman beneath, just so in Troilus and Criseyde the heroine is revealed as all too human. She is not, however, the one-sided heroine of the romance or the equally one-sided woman of the popular tale.

After telling his news in Il Filostrato, and being rejected, Pandaro starts to leave, only to turn back and remind his cousin that time is fleeting. As we have seen, the effect is immediate. Pandarus, at this juncture, uses a different tactic, knowing his niece's great fearfulness.

> . . . Sith I se my lord mot nedes dye,
> and I with hym, here I me shryve, and seye
> That wikkedly ye don us bothe deye.
> (II, 439-41)

It is indicative of the changes made in the heroine that in the earlier poem the appeal is made to her self-interest -- she is growing older. This time the heroine is of different stuff, and the approach to her is made differently.

She stays her uncle. The stanzas which follow this are among the most important in the whole poem for an understanding of Criseyde and have only distant parallels in Il Filostrato.

> Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere,
> So as she was the ferfulleste wight
> That myght be, and herde ek with hire ere
> And saugh the sorwful ernest of the knyght,
> And in his preier ek saugh noon unryght,
> And for the harm that myghte ek fallen moore,
> She gan to rewe, and drede hire wonder soore . . . .
> (II, 449-55)

Pandarus's threat is not such as would have moved the earlier heroine, and in this and other lines Chaucer seems to be setting the stage for an explanation of her actions by emphasizing her fearfulness. She probably is not completely convinced by the threat, but because she is the "ferfulleste wight that myght be," and because she still retains something of the earlier heroine's careful calculation, she determines to both take pity on him and protect herself: Criseyde

> thoughte thus: 'Unhappes fallen thikke
> Alday for love, and in swych manere cas
> As men ben cruel in hemself and wikke;
> And if this man sle here hymself, allas!
> In my presence, it wol be no solas.
> What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye:
> It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie.'
> (II, 456-62)

It does not seem that we need to read anything sinister into the last line. Criseyde seems to have decided to try to do a little of what her uncle has requested, while protecting her honor, and not provoking a populace which is already enraged by her father's defection. Widows, as we know from various stories of forced marriages and abductions, had indeed to play "sleighly" in the Middle Ages; how much need then, had Criseyde -- in a hostile town and no longer having even an uncle to turn to.

Criseyde agrees to relent a little, so long as her uncle does not require anything more of her.

> 'And here I make a protestacioun,
> That in this proces if ye depper go,

That certeynly, for no salvacioun
Of yow, though that ye sterven bothe two,
Though al the world on o day be my fo,
Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe.'
(II, 484-89)

There seems no need to doubt that she, at least, believes this. In this and in what follows, the reader can see her fear at war with her curiosity.

'O good em,' quod she tho,
For his love, which that us bothe made,
Tel me how first ye wisten of his wo.
Woot noon of it but ye?' -- He seyde, 'No.'
'Kan he wel speke of love?' quod she; 'I preye
Tel me, for I the bet shal purveye.'
(II, 499-504)

Pandarus tells the story and ends by declaring,

'Ther were nevere two so wel ymet,
Whan ye ben his al hool, as he is youre:
Ther myghty God yet graunte us see that houre!'

'Nay, therof spak I nought, ha, ha!' quod she;
'As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!'
(II, 586-90)

Has Criseyde, as some claim, already decided to yield? It is impossible to say, but it seems more likely that she sees herself still as playing "ful sleighly."

Just as the earlier heroine did, Criseyde has a debate with herself after the departure of Pandarus. But first comes one of the two incidents which Chaucer has added to the book. Criseyde hears a cry from the street that Troilus has put the Greeks to flight and is coming through the city gate. Troilus passes, looking every inch the modest, valiant, perfect knight.

> Criseyda gan al his chere aspien,
> And leet it so softe in hire herte synke,
> That to hireself she seyde, 'Who yaf me drynke?'
> (II, 649-51)

It is a sight to soften any young feminine heart, especially with the added thought that this one who is admired by all is wholly in love with her:

> For of hire owen thought she wex al reed,
> Remembryng hire right thus, 'Lo, this is he
> Which that myn uncle swerith he moot be deed,
> But I on hym have mercy and pitee.'
> (II, 652-55)

It is not Pandarus's speech but the sight of Troilus which overcomes Criseyde's defenses, at this time and again later. The earlier heroine could make up her mind without any such sight; by providing this incident and two more in which Criseyde sees Troilus in circumstances certain to soften any girl's heart, Chaucer has removed some of the lightness with which the earlier heroine entered the affair. Criseyde turns from this spectacle to engage in the same kind of stylized debate as the earlier heroine. But this time there is in the back of her mind the sight which she has just had of Troilus. In contrast Criseida of Il Filostrato sees Troilo for the first time only after she has resolved the debate in his favor.

Criseyde's debate is not so much between the advantages and disadvantages to herself of the love affair; rather it is a contest between her fearfulness and her desire. True to the changes made in her character by Chaucer, she has made no decision at the end of the debate, but remains caught between desire and fear.

> . . . hire thought gan for to clere,
> And seide, 'He which that nothing undertaketh,
> Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere.'
> And with an other thought hire herte quaketh;
> Than slepeth hope, and after drede awaketh;
> Now hoot, now cold; but thus bitwixen tweye,
> She rist hire up, and wente here for to pleye.
> (II, 806-12)

In the garden, Criseyde listens to Antigone's song, another addition of Chaucer's. After the song, she questions Antigone about love, and the discussion, like the interview with Pandarus and the very martial sight of Troilus, is part of a gradual process by which she is won.

> Criseyde unto that purpos naught answerde,
> But seyde, 'Ywys, it wol be nyght as faste.'
> But every word which that she of hire herde,
> She gan to prenten in hire herte faste,
> And ay gan love hire lasse for t'agaste
> Than it dide erst, and synken in hire herte,
> That she wex somwhat able to converte.
> (II, 897-903)

Meanwhile, in his role as manager of the affair, Pandarus tells Troilus to write a letter to Criseyde, tells him how to write it, and carries it to his niece. He takes Criseyde into the garden, gives her the letter, and begs her to read it and reply to it.

> Ful dredfully tho gan she stonden stylle,
> And took it naught, but al hire humble chere
> Gan for to chaunge, and seyde, 'Scrit ne bille,
> For love of God, that toucheth swich matere,
> Ne brynge me noon; and also, uncle deere,
> To myn estat have more reward, I preye,
> Than to his lust! What sholde I more seye?'
> (II, 1128-34)

Here as elsewhere Criseyde's reaction is wholly different from that of the heroine of Il Filostrato. Again her initial reaction is of great fear,

followed by curiosity and desire. Her fearfulness will not allow her to commit herself, but her curiosity and desire make her relieved and acquiescent when her uncle makes the decisions for her. Pandarus thrusts the letter into the bosom of her dress and tells her triumphantly,

> 'Now cast it awey anon,
> That folk may seen and gaure on us tweye.'
> Quod she, 'I kan abyde til they be gon';
> And gan to smyle and seyde hym, 'Em, I preye,
> Swych answere as yow list youreself purveye,
> For trewely I nyl no letter write.'
> 'No? then wol I,' quod he, 'so ye endite.'
> Therwith she lough, and seyde, 'Go we dyne.'
> (II, 1156-63)

Her relief is evident; once the thing is decided, she becomes gay and playful, qualities not to be seen in her predecessor. Pandarus has made her do what she wanted to do but her fearfulness kept her from doing -- take the letter. She makes an excuse to go into private and read the letter. When she reappears, Pandarus perceives that she has read the letter, and he urges her to reply. She does so, declaring that it is the first she has ever written.

The letter is not quoted by the author, but his resumé of it shows that it is different from that of the earlier heroine:

> She thanked hym of al that he wel mente
> Towardes hire, but holden hym in honde
> She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde
> In love; but as his suster, hym to plese,
> She wolde ay fayn, to doon his herte an ese.
> (II, 1221-25)

Soon, however, Troilus rides by to the battle, and the sight of him completes the process of infatuating her.

Criseyde, which that alle thise thynges say,
To telle in short, hire liked al in fere,
His person, his aray, his look, his chere,

His goodly manere, and his gentilesse,
So wel that nevere, sith that she was born,
Ne hadde she swych routh of his destresse;
And how so she hath hard ben here-byforn,
To God hope I, she hath now kaught a thorn,
She shal nat pulle it out this nexte wyke.
(II, 1265-73)

There is no question about Criseyde's feeling now. Whatever the extent of her feelings before, the process is now complete. Pandarus, sensing her reaction, urges her to give Troilus an interview.

But theron was to heven and to doone
Considered al thing it may nat be;
And whi, for shame; and it were ek to soone
To graunten hym so gret a libertee.
For pleynly hire entente, as seyde she,
Was for to love hym unwist, if she myghte,
And guerdon hym with nothing but with sight.

But Pandarus thought, 'It shal nought be so,
Yif that I may; this nyce opynyoun
Shal nought be holden fully yeres two.'
(II, 1289-98)

Always there is Criseyde's caution, and always there is Pandarus's determination to see the affair through to the conclusion. He sees through her caution to her increasing desire.

The other major episode which Chaucer has added serves not only to infatuate her more, but to present after their first meeting, a meeting which strengthens her love. It is also instructive about the addition of this episode to compare it with the first meeting of the hero and heroine in Il Filostrato -- in which they quickly go to bed.

In Il Filostrato Pandaro, after inducing Criseida to reply to the letter of Troilo, keeps coming back to straight-forwardly press his friend's cause, until Criseida coolly tells him, "Since it is to thy pleasure, I am disposed to do thy will."[1] After her decision, she efficiently arranges time and place. Chaucer, on the other hand, has given Criseyde the determination to "guerdon hym with nothing but with sight." To Pandarus has passed the responsibility to arrange events so that his friend may succeed. This is the key to the added episode of Troilus's sickbed in this book. He arranges to get Criseyde into the house, by playing on her fearful nature.

Some have found it difficult to believe that Criseyde is what the author says she is -- "al innocent of this." And indeed she must have had some thought that she would meet Troilus there. But, says the author, only "God and Pandare wist al what this mente." (II, 1561) It might be fruitful sometime to study this poem in terms of the additions made dealing with the role of Fortune and of Pandarus. Surely most of these additions would have either depictions of Pandarus acting as the motive force in the first or the author's philosophizing on Fortune and the ultimate end of human life. At any rate in the first part of the story, these changes show both Troilus and Criseyde more acted upon than acting. The increased prominence of Pandarus in the story inevitably change the role played by each of the lovers.

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[1] Filostrato, 1. 133.

As Pandarus is the active agent of Book Two, setting things in motion and keeping them moving to their conclusion, so he is the same in Book Three. The book begins with the first meeting of Troilus and Criseyde, which Pandarus has engineered, and ends with their parting after the second, which he has also brought about. He is far more in evidence in this book than in the comparable portion of Il Filostrato. Troilo and Criseida, practiced lovers, have no need of Pandaro at their tryst. In the second poem, the presence of Pandarus adds comedy to the scene and to the depiction of the characters.

Although the depiction of the first time the pair makes love is in one way heightened by being less explicit than the same episode in Il Filostrato, in another way it is greatly lowered by the presence of a third party. This lowering is added to, of course, by Pandarus's action of disrobing the unconscious Troilus and dumping him into bed. The whole scene hovers perilously close to bathos.

The scene does not add too much to our knowledge of Criseyde, but it does clarify some points about her. She has not been taken in when Pandarus invites her to his house and tells her that Troilus will not be there. That the contrary is implicitly acknowledged by both is shown by what Pandarus says and by Criseyde's answer. Pandarus tells her,

> 'Nece, I pose that he were;
> Yow thurste nevere han the more fere;
> For rather than men myghte hym ther aspie,
> Me were levere a thousand fold to dye.'
> (III, 571-74)

Criseyde answers,

> 'Em, syn I most on yow triste,
> Loke al be wel, and do now as yow liste.'
> (III, 587-88)

So long as she need not fear for herself, Criseyde desires the meeting. It is not such a meeting as she would have arranged on her own, but she is quite happy to be 'tricked' into it by her uncle. This is the import of her answer to Troilus when he tells her she is caught and must yield:

> 'Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
> Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought heere!'
> (III, 1210-11)

This confession is not evidence, as some have alleged, that Criseyde has been in control of the game from the beginning. It is a more artless and open statement than Boccaccio's heroine would ever have allowed herself. There may elsewhere be evidence of a devious quality in her nature, but here she is quite the opposite.

The end of Book Three is the end of Pandarus as an active force in the story. Having done the greatest part of the work in bringing the two together, he has only the task of helping them to meet regularly:

> . . . pleynly to th' effect right for to go,
> In joie and suerte Pandarus hem two
> Abedde brought, whan that hem bothe leste,
> And thus they ben in quyete and in reste.
> (III, 1677-80)

As a matter of fact, after this time both Criseyde and Pandarus tend to fade out of the story as personalities, although Troilus, little more than

a stereotype of the lovesick knight in the first three books, gains definition in the last two.

There is a break discernible between the first three books and the last two, and this break is a function of the changes in the characters and their field of activity. In the first book Chaucer follows Il Filostrato closely. Criseyde appears as the conventional stylized romantic heroine, hardly a three-dimensional character. Troilus is the same -- a conventional hero of romance, conventionally wounded by the god of love. Pandarus alone is a recognizable individual in this book, and even he is to become clearer in the next two books.

In the second and third books, Criseyde is increasingly a definable personality, however, various, -- sensuous yet practical, gay yet fearful, quick of understanding but weakwilled and wishing to be led. Pandarus becomes a more commanding figure -- if not dominating at least in control of events. He entered the affair, as he tells Troilus, 'bitwixen game and ernest,' but he is always present and active to insure that the pair is finally united. In the presence of two such vivid characters, Troilus's personality is more shadowy, but even he is recognizably different from his predecessor -- more passive and less experienced.

After Book Three the characterization of Criseyde becomes more generalized; she becomes less a personality and more a historical figure, like Henryson's heroine. This is not an absolute change; yet it is a clear tendency in the author's treatment of her. In fact, the whole

poem shifts from predominantly dramatic in the second and third books to predominantly narrative in the fourth and fifth. The author shows the change graphically in the fifth book when he takes three stanzas to describe Criseyde as if she had never been introduced to the reader before.

> She sobre was, ek symple, and wys withal,
> The best ynorisshed ek that myghte be,
> And goodly of hire speche in general,
> Charitable, estatlich, lusty, and fre;
> Ne nevere mo ne lakked hire pite;
> Tendre-herted, slydyng of corage;
> But trewely, I kan nat telle hire age.
> (V, 820-26)

These lines have correctly been called an attempt to soften the effect of her betrayal of Troilus, but they also represent the change from an intimate, dramatic portrayal of Criseyde to a more objective, narrative one.

The other characters have changed their relation to the action. Unlike his earlier role, Pandarus is ineffectual now either to control events or to console his friend. Troilus himself, though he is more appealing and less a character wavering on the edge of the comic, is scarcely forceful or active, even compared to his former self.

The key to the changes in the roles played by the characters and the more objective handling of them lies in the shift of the field of action. In the first three books the field of action is limited to a small area in which the human agents act and act decisively. The one exception to this is the initial act of falling in love. It is a field of action where Pandarus can act effectively and control events, where Criseyde can choose to

let herself drift into the affair or not. Only the first sight which each of the pair has of the other is a function of chance; of the rest of the events, they are, in their varying degrees, in control.

In the last two books, the field of the action broadens. Now it is Fortune which is the active force; and in the face of it, the efforts of the human agents are futile. Boccaccio had recognized the activity of Fortune in the story, but he passed over it more quickly than Chaucer because it is not so relevant to the story in the original version. Boccaccio's epilogue shows the import of his version -- beware of women who look like romantic heroines but are not. Chaucer's is far different from this, however.

Chaucer's epilogue carries the ascetic, Christian message: love not the world, but turn your face to God;

> . . . and thynketh al nys but a faire
> This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.
> (V, 1840-41)

It is the old argument for otherworldliness: this world is a bed of pain.

> Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde:
> In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
> (V, 1748-49)

Happiness is brittle and soon broken, because people are weak. Only in Christ is there stability,

> For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
> That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
> (V, 1845-46)

It is an epilogue which many have not found palatable. It is definitely

at odds with the tone of the first three books -- but so are the last two books. In this poem again is the conflict between this-worldliness and otherworldliness. On the strictly natural level, the first three books have real appeal in the idealized love of the young pair. But even the third book, when it becomes an almost sublime hymn to love, there is the comedy of Troilus's being undressed by Pandarus and tossed into bed. Chaucer's ironic stance is evident even in this book, the most romantic one of the poem. There is, even here, an undercutting of the affair.

When in the fourth book the field of action broadens, more objectivity is introduced. The differences between the ideals and intentions of the actors and their capabilities become poignantly clear. Ideally the romantic knight triumphs over all obstacles for the sake of his love. Ideally, love makes its principals as constant as the North Star. Ideally, such things as self-preservation do not matter to the courtly lover who has given up all other concerns and is willing to sacrifice himself for love.

But the human fact does not measure up to the literary ideal. In the face of an ideal which demands an inhuman perfection, Criseyde is all too human and 'slydyng of corage.' A comment which Chaucer makes about Emelye in the Knights's Tale is one that he might have made about Criseyde:

> . . . wommen, as to speken in comune,
> They folwen alle the favour of Fortune.
> (2681-82)

It is an observation with no hint of condemnation as he is almost the only teller of the story never to condemn Criseyde. He softens the fact of her betrayal as much as he can, making it first of all on the tenth day rather than the fourth that Diomede speaks to Criseyde. Although the implication in Boccaccio is that Diomede's success is almost immediate, Chaucer says,

> But trewely, how longe it was bytwene
> That she forsok hym for this Diomed,
> Ther is non auctour telleth, I wene.
> (V, 1086-88)

When he finally must admit her guilt, he hastens to soften it again:

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
> Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,
> That for her gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hier untrouthe,
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire for routhe.
> (V, 1093-99)

He does more yet to try to excuse her: he makes the tragedy not a tragedy at the end (although calling it one) by having Troilus look back to the earth and laugh.

That laugh diminishes the characters, the events, and Criseyde's guilt. It is connected with the comic elements in the story. Troilus has done what the narrative has done -- become much more objective. In the limited vision of the human involved in the story, it is very serious, even tragic. From the philosophic viewpoint of the eighth sphere, it is the pitiful, comic spectacle of the futile human slipping and sliding as

he strives to climb a glass mountain atop which stands an unattainable ideal of earthly perfection. Tears over such a spectacle are irrelevant from this objective viewpoint. It is in the nature of the imperfection of this world. Criseyde need not be condemned too much for not acting as the ideal heroine would, because it is a world where the saints are far outnumbered by the weak and sinful. On the human level, one may grieve that she failed so miserably to attain the ideal, but on the level of the other world, from which Troilus looks back, all human imperfections look pretty much alike. The chasm between the ideal and the human is no more poignantly revealed than in Criseyde's line after she has failed Troilus: "To Diomede algate I wol be trewe." (V, 1071)

This is the dilemma of man which is represented in the concept of the Great Chain -- to live life suspended between the devils and the angels, to be the battleground of the flesh and the spirit. This is the tragedy of Criseyde -- to be both heroine and traitress, a figure belonging at once to romance and to the comic tale. She is not for Chaucer what she was for writers before and after him -- simply a type of the deceiver. If she were, she would touch us no more than Boccaccio's heroine. There is little that is simple black or simple white in Chaucer, and Criseyde, certainly, is complex. She is neither just romantic nor just comic; she is human.

Despite the attraction of this love affair, the author is well aware that it represents something neither permanent nor sublime. Only the

divine love affair is that. If a modern reader finds it distasteful to be reminded of this fact at this particular time, this is only because he is not so insistently aware of it. Chaucer's comic utterances and his epilogue may be taken as breaches of decorum only if we feel that his greatest obligation in a romance is to be consistently romantic. As in his Retraction, so here Chaucer shows himself aware of another obligation -- not to his art, this time, but to his religious and philosophical sense of ultimate values. The Troilus is his 'tragedie' only on one level; on another level it is the comedy which all imperfect human actions have been since the Fall.

CHAPTER XII

COURTLY LOVE AND TALES OF THE FIRST DAY

> The parallelism set up in the Knight's Tale is carried forward on two levels -- in the Miller's Tale, where Nicholas and Absolon vie for Alisoun's favors, and in the world of the pilgrimage where the Miller and Reeve fling stories rather than challenges at each other.[1]
>
> The contrast between the Knight's and Miller's ways of treating stories about two men in love with the same woman gives the first fragment its essential structure. The General Prologue prepares the way for this clash of attitudes and introduces all the participants in it as it does for the other tales and groups of tales. The Reeve's and Cook's tales and their prologues grow out of the clash . . . .[2]

Chaucer gives the Knight the first tale in the Canterbury Tales in keeping with his social status and gives him a stately, elevated tale consonant with the nobility ascribed to him in the General Prologue. In keeping with the richness of the design of the Tales, however, this tale in this position can be seen to function in other ways. For one thing this tale establishes, with the Miller's Tale which follows, the poles of idealism

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[1] Charles A. Owen, "Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: Aesthetic Design in Stories of the First Day," English Studies, v. 35 (1954), p. 51.

[2] William C. Stokoe, Jr. "Structure and Intention in the First Fragment of The Canterbury Tales," UTQ, v. 21 (1951-52), p. 127.

and realism, romance and comedy, between which are ranged the other tales. The Knight's Tale goes further than the other tales in its exploration of Boethian, natural philosophy (in contrast to the religious philosophy of the Parson's Tale).

Also, in its treatment of love and gentillesse, the Knight's Tale deals with themes to appear subsequently in tales as different as the Wife of Bath's Tale, the Merchant's Tale, and the Franklin's Tale. Knights are treated in quite different ways by the Wife, the Merchant, and the Franklin. Love, or at any rate the relation of the sexes, is of course a constant topic in the tales.

Finally, the Knight's Tale serves as the immediate occasion of a tale by the Miller, who announces he will "requite" the Knight's tale, and who is in his turn followed by the Reeve, determined to requite the second tale. In this interchange of Knight, Miller and Reeve are to be found the two broad literary traditions -- popular and courtly -- already established in this study, but raised by Chaucer to new literary levels. Only the Troilus had previously carried the romance to this philosophical height; In the Miller's Tale the fabliau attained a literary level never before attained -- and perhaps never again.

Because the Knight's Tale serves as either the immediate or the indirect occasion for much of the discussion of women, love, and gentillesse in the Canterbury Tales, a short discussion of it should be helpful in the discussion of the various tales which is to follow. Perhaps the case for

its inclusion at the beginning of the discussion of the various tales may be strengthened by noting a point to be developed in the last chapter: the Merchant's Tale -- a tale far away in space and much farther away in spirit from the Knight's Tale -- also contains a love triangle, a love-sick knight, supernatural intervention, and a famous line from the Knight's Tale concerning gentillesse (but this time profoundly ironic):

> Lo, pitee renneth soone in gentil herte!
> (E. 1986)

A. The Knight's Tale

In a comparison of comedy and tragedy, F. M. Cornford said of the latter,

> That action is primary, character secondary, seems to be true of any drama, ancient or modern, that can be called tragic.
>
> Tragedy must represent the way of the world, the movement of life, the workings of destiny, the end that grows inevitably out of a given beginning, as a plant or animal grows out of its germ. The sense of internal structural necessity seems indispensable to the tragic effect. It is not really absent even where the fatal moment is a clash between the unaccountable spontaneity of will and the stroke of blind chance. There is still the feeling that such things must be; and chance itself no sooner ceased to be a power of malignant purpose than it was resolved into inexorable law. There is no room for accidents that are insignificant, in other words, particular accidents, without what Aristotle calls a 'universal' meaning.[1]

This passage is suggestive of much to be found in the Knight's Tale. The careful parallelism of everything about the two young knights has for one of its effects the generalization of their characters. Emily, also, is little

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[1] Francis Macdonald Cornford, The Origin of Attic Comedy, (rep. Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co.: Garden City, N. Y., 1961), p. 171.

more than a dim convention. Chaucer's making all of the figures little more than two-dimensional counters has the effect of focussing on "the way of the world, the movement of life, the workings of destiny." As Cornford says of tragedy in general, there is no room for the merely incidental. The young men are equal in prowess and deserts, so that the end is to be seen not in their characters but in forces outside of them. To the extent that individual prowess is not a factor in the story, it is not a romance but a tragedy.

Like Troilus and Criseyde, however, the Knight's Tale is neither purely a tragedy nor purely a romance. The poem involves two broad themes: the first, from romance, is the chivalric ideal of life -- love, combat, and nobility; the second, more closely identified with tragedy, is the philosophical question of the proper stance of man in the face of the inconstancy of Fortune and the unfathomableness of destiny.

Theseus most closely approximates an identifiable person in the poem, and he is vital to it, serving to bind together the two themes. He is the perfect embodiment of the noble life, and he is the agent of and spokeman for destiny and the Boethian response to life. Cornford notes,

> Tragedy does not seek to ape the manner or portray the characters of everyday society; its function is to represent the destiny of man, the turning wheel of Time and Fate. To accomplish this, it must roll away the parti-coloured screen, the motley surface of social custom, the fashions and accidents of the place and the hour, and open to our sight a vision of man's life and death, which the bravest can hardly endure to contemplate until it is redeemed by art. [1]

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[1] Cornford, p. 180.

As the agent of destiny, Theseus serves to initiate the action at times and to direct it at others. As the spokesman for the destinal order and the philosophical response to life, his speeches serve to "roll away the parti-coloured screen . . . and open to our sight a vision of man's life and death . . . ."

Destiny and Fortune are the subjects of much discussion in this tale. The speech which initiates the chain of events which is the plot of the tale -- that of the Theban suppliant to Theseus -- begins with a reference to Fortune:

> She seyde: 'lord, to whom Fortune hath yiven
> Victorie, and as a conqueror to lyven,
> Nat greveth us youre glorie and youre honour,
> But we biseken mercy and socour.
> . . . . . .
> . . . certes, lord, ther is noon of us alle,
> That she ne hath been a duchesse or a queene.
> Now we be caytyves, as it is wel seene,
> Thanked be Fortune and hire false wheel,
> That noon estaat assureth to be weel.
> (A. 915-18, 922-26)

Fortune and Destiny are interchangeable at times and by the end of the tale have become almost identical. For example, Arcite tells Palamon,

> 'Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee,'
> (A. 1086)

only to follow with an assertion that their plight is not merely chance but something destined from their births:

> Som wikke aspect or disposicioun
> Of Saturn, by som constellacioun,
> Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
> So stood the heven whan that we were born.
> (A. 1087-90)

And it is a fixed destiny rather than inconstant fortune which Palamon blames when he addresses the gods:

> 'O crueel goddes that governe
> This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,
> And writen in the table of atthamaunt
> Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt . . . .
> (A. 1303-06)

Fortune and her wheel give way here to the writing of the gods on tables of adamant and Saturn's speech later on reinforces the idea that this that seems like mindless chance to mere mortals is rather the functioning of a wise and always-functioning destiny:

> 'My cours, that hath so wyde for to turne,
> Hath moore power than woot any man.
> Myn is the drenchyng in the see so wan;
> Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
> Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
> The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
> The groynyng and the pryvee empoysonyng;
> . . . . . .
> Myn is the ruyne of the hye halles . . . .
> (A. 2454-60, 2463)

The "prison in the derke cote," the "ruyne of the hye halles" of Thebes, and the "groynyng" of the young knights have all seemed like merest chance, but are all the products of fixed destiny.

Although Theseus serves as the main spokesman for Destiny in the tale, it is worthy of note that Arcite, the eventual victim, foreshadows Theseus' long speech on the inscrutability of destiny and faith in its ultimate workings in his complaint:

> 'Allas, why pleynen folk so in commune
> On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune,
> That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse

Wel better than they kan hemself devyse?
(A. 1251-54)

The insistence on the operation of Destiny in this tale is never clearer than in Theseus's sudden appearance at the site of the battle in the forest between the two young men:

The destinee, ministre general,
That executeth in the world over al
The purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn,
So strong it is that, though the world had sworn
The contrarie of a thyng by ye or nay,
Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft withinne a thousand yeer.
For certeinly, oure appetites heer,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
Al is this reuled by the sighte above.
This mene I now by myghty Theseus,
That for to hunten is so desirus . . . .
(A. 1663-74)

Though Emily prays to Diana to remain a maid, she acknowledges the overruling power of destiny:

Or if my destynee be shapen so
That I shal nedes have oon of hem two,
As wende me hym that moost desireth me.
(A. 2323-25)

In the poem Saturn is most closely identified with Destiny in heaven and he also resolves quarrels and disorder there as does his counterpart Theseus, overruling even the gods:

'My deere doghter Venus,' quod Saturne,
'My course, that hath so wyde for to turne,
Hath moore power than woot any man.
. . . . . .
Now weep namoore, I shal doon diligence
That Palamon, that is thyn owene knyght,
Shal have his lady, as thou hast him hight.
Though Mars shal helpe his knyght, yet nathelees

Bitwine yow there moot be somtyme pees,
Al be ye noght of o compleccioun
That causeth al day swich divisioun.
(A. 2453-55, 2470-76)

At the battle Theseus attempts to prevent bloodshed by limiting the types of weapon to be used; here again, however, the best intentions are overruled by Destiny, which has ordained that Arcite shall die. Just at the time when Arcite's fortunes seem at their summit,

Out of the ground a furie of infernal sterte
From Pluto sent at request of Saturne,
(A. 2684-85)

and causes Arcite to be killed. The reaction of the women is the emotional, natural one to the death of one at the height of felicity:

'Why woldestow be deed,' thise wommen crye,
And haddest gold ynough, and Emelye?'
(A. 2835-36)

Even Theseus abandons his customary philosophical stance momentarily, until his father repeats the Christian theme of contempt of the world which we have seen previously in the Troilus epilogue:

This world nys but a thurfare ful of wo,
And we been pilgryms, passynge to and fro.
Deeth is an end of every worldly soore.'
(A. 2847-49)

As well as being the interpreter of destiny in the tale, Theseus is the embodiment of the chivalric virtues. When he appears at the beginning of the tale, he is returning from the conquest of the Amazons and the marriage of Hippolyta. Love and battle -- these are the main interests of the romance from Chrétien onward, and, with Destiny, they

are the main forces in this tale. The theme of the noble life -- of a life involving the martial virtues tempered by the courtly, feminine ones -- finds expression in all the activities of Theseus, and in those of the two younger knights.

The opening scene is of the Theban women appealing to Theseus 'thurgh thy gentillesse' to defend their cause against Creon, and indeed Theseus is the image of gentillesse at the end of their appeal:

> This gentil duc doun from his courser sterte
> With herte pitous, whan he herde hem speke.
> . . . . . .
> And in his armes he hem alle so hente,
> And hem conforteth in ful good entente,
> And swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knyght,
> He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght
> Upon the tiraunt Creon hem to wreke . . . .
> (A. 952-53, 957-61)

Theseus is a conqueror returning in martial array, but like the teller of the tale he is a 'verray parfit gentil knyght.' He reacts with the gentillesse described in a later line:

> . . . pitee renneth soone in gentil herte.
> (A. 1761)

Theseus's gentillesse in this case also serves him in his role as an agent of destiny. One of the young men complains later of the ruin which is destined for the descendants of Cadmus; and it is by his despatch of Arcite and Palamon to prison in Athens and his later part in arranging the battle that Theseus serves as the active agent of the destinal order. He is the restorer of proper order in Thebes by his arrangement for the funerals for the Thebans whom Creon had refused burial, and he does

the same later in the scene in the forest. From a disorderly brawl between the two young men, Theseus changes their contention into a stirring pageant with the flower of chivalry ranged on each side.

As noted before, the narrator entertains the possibility that the appearance of Theseus in the forest at that particular time was an act of destiny. But if Theseus' appearance is a result of destiny, his reactions to the scene demonstrate his own embodiment of the chivalric virtues. It is in this scene in the forest that he again exhibits the warlikeness tempered with pity which is the courtly ideal. The immediate reaction of Theseus on learning the identities of the two men is angry and warlike:

> 'Ye shal be deed, by myghty Mars the rede!'
> (A. 1747)

Again the women appeal for pity, and again Theseus responds to the appeal. They kneel and beg his mercy,

> Til at the laste aslaked was his mood,
> For pitee renneth soone in gentil he rte.
> . . . . . .
> And in his gentil herte he thoughte anon,
> An softe unto hymself he seyde, 'Fy
> Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
> But been a leon, both in word and ded,
> To hem that been in repentaunce and drede . . . .'
> (A. 1760-61, 1772-76)

Once his anger has died, the sight of the two men causes Theseus to muse upon the power of love:

> 'The god of love, a, benedicte!
> How myghty and how greet a lord is he!
> Ayeyns his myght ther gayneth none obstacles.
> . . . . . .

Who may been a fool, but if he love?
(A. 1785-87, 1799)

The ambivalent attitude toward love in the Troilus is here again in evidence. Love is the force which impels men to act. It can be the instigator of brave deeds and of foolish ones. It may even be the cause of strife and ruin; yet even the strife can be glorious, observes the narrator.

To fighte for a lady, benedictee!
It were a lusty sighte for to see.
(A. 2115-16)

Paradoxically, as Theseus says in a later speech, love is also the force which, though causing occasional strife, imposes order on chaos:

'The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
Greet was th' effect, and heigh was entente.
Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.
(A. 2987-93)

The 'great chain of being' is here a chain of love, because love is the force which binds. In the medieval scheme love is, in a very real sense, being. Of all that is, God exists most perfectly; and God is love.

The same Mover, says Theseus, who made this chain of love also established destiny in the world --

'Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
Certeyne dayes and duracioun
To al that is ingendred in this place,

Over the whiche day they may nat pace,
Al mowe they yet tho dayes wel abregge.
(A. 2995-99)

The Neoplatonic element, by way of Boethius, pervades the entire passage. From the stable, perfect Mover nature proceeds down the chain, becoming more and more corruptible.

Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
That every part dirryveth from his hool;
For nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng
Of no partie or cantel of a thyng,
But of a thyng that parfit is and stable
Descendynge so til it be corrumpable.
(A. 3005-10)

The import of Theseus's speech sums up the philosophical elements of the tale, and they are broadly two. The first, as we have seen, is that all proceeds from the one Prime Mover Who has a design, however unfathomable its manifestations may be to living men. The second philosophical element is the Boethian answer to living in a world where men are subject to changes they cannot understand. This answer is a blend; the first part is a Boethian stoicism:

Thanne is it wisdom, as it thynketh me,
To maken vertu of necessitee,
And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
And namely that to us alle is due.
And whoso gruccheth, he dooth folye,
And rebel is to hym that al may gye.
(A. 3041-46)

The second part of the answer is the warrior's traditional love of glory:

And certeinly a man hath moost honour
To dyen in his excellence and flour,
Whan he is siker of his goode name;

Thanne hath he doon his freend, ne hym, ne shame.
(A. 3047-50)

In the Knight's Tale, two tendencies of the courtly tradition identified in the earlier chapter are manifest: the tendency of the heroine to be little more than a dim and conventionalized idealization, and the focussing, not on the heroine, but on the trials and growth in virtue of the lover -- in this case, two lovers. Emily is always seen from afar, whether through the bars of a prison cell, or in the company of Theseus and his court. There are two moments when she might have been given definition -- in her prayer to Diana and her reaction to the death of Arcite; at neither time does the poet take the opportunity to give her new dimension. Here, for example, is the passage on the second occasion:

Shrighte Emelye, and howleth Palamon,
And Theseus his suster took anon
Swownynge, and baar hire fro the corps away.
What helpeth it to tarien forth the day
To tellen how she weep bothe eve and morwe?
For in swich cas wommen have swich sorwe,
Whan that hir housbondes ben from hem ago,
That for the moore part they sorwen so,
Or ellis fallen in swich maladye,
That at the laste certeinly they dye.
(A. 2817-26)

An opportunity to bring Emily to life is forgone in favor of a generalized statement about women 'in swich cas.'

In Chapter IX it was noted that there are good reasons for these tendencies in the courtly tradition. In the first place, the lady functions in the work as an almost unattainable goal, and by definition is perfect

and unchanging. There are few possibilities for her to be unlike heroines in other works of the same kind. It is because the hero can and does change that the focus is on his actions. The story is that of the simultaneous progress toward the goal and progress in virtue. The Divine Comedy is the ultimate example of both of these points.

The reason that the two heroes of the Knight's Tale are not presented as clearly as others of Chaucer's heroes -- hende Nicholas, for example, or daun John, or even Troilus -- will require some discussion. If it be admitted, that is, that there is good reason for the lady to remain conventional and indistinct, this still leaves the question of why the focus should not be more firmly fixed on Palamon and Arcite. Why do they remain little more than counters in the tale? The terms of the definition of the essential focus, however, should be re-examined: the focus is on the trials and growth in virtue of the lover, and this is not synonymous with focussing on the lover. Piers Plowman and the Dreamer in the Roman de la Rose remain in the memory, not as characters with a life of their own, but as figures who are created to go through a series of actions. If it be objected that these are the heroes of allegories, it should be noted that in varying degrees knights from Lancelot to Troilus have given the same impression. For all of his generalized name, January, in the antiromantic Merchant's Tale, is clearer in the memory than Troilus, or Arcite, or perhaps even the Knight himself.

Arcite and Palamon are not brought on the stage to excite sympathy for them and apprehension concerning their ultimate fates. Even more

clearly than in other romances, their function is to be acted upon in order to explore the nature of the noble life and the proper response to the facts of life and inevitable death. "Acted upon" -- this is the key. Whereas the comic character from hende Nicholas to Don Quixote can initiate action, the hero of the true romance or tragedy only reacts after being acted upon. Oedipus's story is of events thrusting themselves upon him and his struggling with them. Palamon and Arcite are sent to prison in Athens, then delivered from prison; not they, but Theseus initiates the tournament. Even the death of one of them is not the work of the other but the result of the working of destiny through a supernatural event. Emily especially -- wanting to remain a maid yet given to a man, losing that man at the precise moment he begins to appeal to her, finally marrying the other man at her kinsman's command -- shows how little control the principals have of their fate.

It is Theseus in this tale who can act most independently; it is his function to guide the reaction of the principals in accordance with gentility and wisdom. In this function, he comes on the stage at the end to explain the import of the events and to bring about the inevitable marriage of Palamon and Emily. Even here, the hero and heroine cannot be expected to initiate the action, but must be acted upon. Chaucer's comic characters display more independence.

B. The Miller's Tale

Although it is the Knight's Tale which the Miller says that he will

'quite,' his tale strikes in several directions. The portrait of hende Nicholas, for example, forcibly reminds us of the other Clerk of Oxford. The portrait of the old cuckolded carpenter wounds the self-esteem of the Reeve, who calls attention to its relevance to himself. The portrait of Absolon not only ridicules young courtly lovers -- like the Squire, for example -- but also makes the same kind of insinuation as the Host does later about those in church business who have their minds on other subjects. Those in the company in religious orders might have taken the same offense as did the Monk at the Host's suggestion that the former knows more of the way of a man and a woman than he is telling:

> This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye
> Religious folk, for ye mowe bettre paye
> Of Venus paiementz than mowe we;
> God woot, no lussheburghes payen ye!
> (B2. 3149-52)

It is an insinuation made by other pilgrims, notably the Shipman.

Despite the Reeve's overly sensitive outburst, however, the main target of the Miller's Tale is the preceding tale and what the Miller understands the import of that tale to be. He has taken a traditional fabliau story -- a clever clerk beguiling an old husband and sleeping with his wife, only to get his own comeuppance -- and he has added elements to it to make it what I shall call an "anti-romance." This term leaves much to be desired, but I know of no other for a purpose which is undeniably present in many popular tales, including the Miller's Tale.

As pointed out in Chapter X, the terms 'courtly' and 'popular' may mislead us into thinking of too absolute a division between the forms. There were by the fourteenth century, that is, popular romances and courtly fabliaux. The popular tales, especially, began early to ape and invert the values of the courtly tradition. Was the high-born lady supposed to be haughty and unapproachable? The popular story-teller could tell the one about the lady and the tinker. Was the lover supposed to succeed by hesitancy and the writing of poems? There were dozens of instances where the direct approach worked better.

E. T. Donaldson, in an illuminating essay on Chaucer's use of the idiom of popular poetry, has demonstrated that one of Chaucer's devices is that of

> sprinkling these characterizations and conversations with clichés borrowed from the vernacular versions of the code of courtly love -- phrases of the sort we are accustomed to meet, on the one hand, in Middle English minstrel romances and, on the other hand, in secular lyrics such as those preserved in Harley MS 2253 -- but phrases that are not encountered elsewhere in the serious works of Geoffrey Chaucer.[1]

Donaldson demonstrates that the effect of "this imported courtly diction is telling comedy." And, following Donaldson's lead, Gardiner Stillwell demonstrates that

> the use of would-be-elegant love-diction in ironic contexts was well established in fabliau-literature long before Chaucer's

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[1] E. T. Donaldson, "Idiom of Popular Poetry in the Miller's Tale," English Institute Essays, 1950, ed. Alan S. Downer, (Columbia U. Press: N. Y., 1951), p. 122.

> time (the extant fabliaux dating mostly from the thirteenth century) . . . .[1]

This ironic use of courtly diction is only part of the rough treatment given the courtly tradition in comic literature. The idealized lady of the courtly tradition was too far removed from the image of woman in the popular literature and pulpit alike to remain unchallenged. Andreas Capellanus's reference to the inability of a woman of the peasant class to appreciate the niceties of the courtly method of wooing (and his consequent recommendation of a more direct approach) seems well grounded. It is Idleness who admits the Dreamer to the garden of the Rose; those without such leisure were likely to be immune to the charms of languishing and hesitating.

This is the case with the Miller. His first response is to the courtly love question in the background of the Knight's Tale -- which of two equally worthy lovers is to win the lady. In his portraits of Nicholas and Absolon, he presents what he sees as the real question -- whether a courtly lover has any chance at all against a clever young man who knows the "old dance." The Miller responds to the question of the more deserving lover with the scorn of the practical man for abstract theorizing. Men and opportunities are rarely equal. The secret lies in keeping one's wits about him and in being 'handy' in the oldest meaning of the

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[1]Gardiner Stillwell, "The Language of Love in Chaucer's Miller's and Reeve's Tales and in the Old French Fabliaux," JEGP, v. 54 (1955), p. 693.

term. The philosophical element is either lost on the Miller or else he ignores it. The courtly tradition embodied in the Knight's Tale is his chief target.

This is not at first apparent. After brushing the old carpenter aside as

> A riche gnof that gestes had to bord,
> (A. 3188)

the Miller gives an extended portrait of Nicholas. The relevance of this portrait to the Miller's aim of answering the Knight's Tale is not clear in the beginning. If any target is intended, it seems at first to be the Clerk, who is also from Oxford and outwardly studious. No particular character need be singled out, however; the cleric who is outwardly studious and religious, but is secretly a schemer, is a stock one in the popular tradition. An example of this, mentioned in Chapter X, is the tale of the hermit who pretended to be an angel in order to deceive the mother of a young girl.

The Host's heavy-handed insinuations later about the Monk come from the stock representation of the clever, lusty cleric. It is a character to reappear as "daun John" in the Shipman's Tale. If the portrait of Nicholas takes a casual swipe at the Clerk, then, this is the result of the skepticism inherent in the popular tradition about the chastity of anyone, excluding saints, man or woman.

Like the Clerk, Nicholas is poor and learned. The observation about his knowledge of women is made in such an off-hand manner --

juxtaposed with an observation about his appearance -- as to emphasize how much it is a stock characteristic of clerics in popular tales:

> Of deerne love he koude and of solas;
> And therto he was sleigh and ful privee,
> And lyk a mayden meke for to see.
> (A. 3200-02)

There is a clue that the Knight's Tale has not been forgotten in the detail about Nicholas's knowledge of astrology, a knowledge to be used to dupe the carpenter. This use of astrology in the tale is the closest we come to a reference by the Miller to the philosophical theme of destiny in the Knight's Tale: for the practical Miller, all such theorizing serves only to beguile ignorant men -- like the carpenter.

Earle Birney sums up the character of Nicholas in this way:

> He is the devil-may-care, pleasure-loving, uninhibited young male, the lusty and unstudious student; he walks alert for amorous adventure, with the tang of strong wild herbs about him. [1]

This is a suggestive resumé. Nicholas has "lerned art"; he can sing so that listeners bless his "myrie throte"; but when he woos the young wife, he uses not 'art' or 'song' but the directest of methods. As such he is the opposite of Absolon.

The description of Absolon comes last of the three principals, but it is through him that the Miller replies most directly to the Knight's Tale -- and to the courtly love tradition behind it. Father Beichner points out that in most of the analogues to the tale,

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[1] Earle Birney, "The Inhibited and the Uninhibited: Ironic Structure in the 'Miller's Tale.'" Neophil., v. 44 (1960), p. 334.

> Absolon's part is taken by a smith, since the plot requires easy access to a hot colter or something similar for the branding.

In connection with this, he observes that

> If the smith appeared in this role in the story as it came to Chaucer in a lost fabliau or in an oral version, or even if the story contained another character who had to go to the smith for the colter, the poet must have considered the use of a smith as the rejected and duped lover. The plot would be a shade more plausible and economical. But at the same time Chaucer would have felt it necessary to give him the physique of a smith and rather crude sensibilities. . . . A smith would be dangerously like the Miller himself who tells the story, and it would not have been appropriate for the Miller to allow the duped lover in any way to resemble himself. In any event Chaucer gave us Absolon.[1]

This is consonant with Father Beichner's purpose in his article of showing that Chaucer was

> consciously creating people with whose character the action of a borrowed plot would not be inconsistent -- in other words, through character he was motivating as much as possible a fabliau whose action originally had little or nothing to do with character.[2]

The effect of the ending is indeed heightened by the extremely fastidious, squeamish character given to Absolon; however, he also serves as a straw man for the Miller's iconoclastic treatment of courtly love.

A point about Absolon's portrait which must be made immediately is its length. The portrait of Alison is long (39 lines) and deservedly famous, but that of Absolon is a line longer. And it has an anti-romantic function. Father Beichner points out,

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[1] Paul E. Beichner, "Characterization in the Miller's Tale," Chaucer Criticism: the Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1960), p. 118.

[2] Ibid.

> Absolon indeed is more ladylike than Alisoun. He is too ladylike, and therein lies much of the humor when his downfall occurs.[1]

However, Absolon's effeminacy is only a caricature of other courtly lovers. The Squire, for example, also has

> lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse,
> (A. 81)

though they may not be gold, as Absolon's are. Absolon dresses fashionably, as does the Squire, and like that ideal youth, loves to sing and dance. It is in his other attributes -- and in others deliberately left out of the list -- that he slips. Unlike the Squire's portrait, no mention is made of Absolon's physique or strength. The ability to joust might not have been appropriate for him as it was for the Squire, but other saving virtues are denied his description. His ability as a barber is not really the same as the Squire's horsemanship. The great particularity with which the narrator describes his clothing communicates a sense of the overelaborate care he takes of his dress.

The narrator's exclamation about Absolon is at least two-edged:

> A myrie child he was, so God me save.
> (A. 3325)

By Chaucer's day, the meaning of the word child had become ambiguous. It could either mean a "fighting man," as in Sir Thopas (B. 2000), or it could have its modern meaning, as in the phrase "be with childe" (Knight's Tale, A. 2310). Applied in its first meaning to Absolon, the term is

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[1] Beichner, p. 119.

highly ironic; he is no one's ideal of a warrior. The second meaning is also fitting; for all his attempted sophistication, he is a child in his wooing. Unlike Nicholas, Absolon is the eternal adolescent, drawn to women yet timid of them. He could never have seized Alison as Nicholas did; he is content to press his humble lover's suit at a respectful distance.

Nicholas, on the other hand, appears as clever and managing as any of his counterparts in popular literature. His scheme is as devious and elaborate as any fabliau audience could wish; and his approach to the wife could not be more direct:

> . . . on a day this hende Nicholas
> Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,
> Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye,
> As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte;
> And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,
> And seyde, 'Ywis, but if ich have my wille,
> For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille.'
> And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones . . . .
> (A. 3272-79)

Nicholas takes this direct approach in the first place because of his own character; but also he takes it because he has understood Alison as Absolon has not.

Lowes observed that the masterly description of Alison

> signally displays Chaucer's power of pouring new life into hackneyed moulds. The portrait runs faultlessly true in its method to the stock conventions for depicting feminine beauty -- those conventions which, with devastating uniformity, list the lady's charms in scores upon scores of fourteenth-century and earlier French poems. Forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, throat, and on without let or hindrance -- the lady is anatomized in good set similes as inescapable as death. Chaucer has kept the mould, and thrown to the winds the stock details

> that fill it. And he has gone for his similes, not to the books, but straight to the English countryside.[1]

The first sure sign that the tale is to be an anti-romance is this catalogue description of Alison, and there is strong irony implicit in Chaucer's having kept the form of the catalogue while taking his similes from "the English countryside."

Alison is not only connected with the countryside; care is also taken to connect her with what is fresh and young. She can "skippe and make game," just

> As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
> (A. 3260)

She is better to look at than "the new pere-jonette tree" (A. 3248). She is compared to "a joly colt," a comparison to be picked up again in the first scene with Nicholas. The reader even gets the comparison of Alison to a caged, young, wild animal in the passage just before the beginning of her catalogue:

> This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf,
> Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
> Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
> Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
> For she was wylde and yong, and he was old . . . .
> (A. 3221-25)

The end of the description sums her up as ambiguous and unformed:

> She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,
> For any lord to leggen in his bedde,

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[1] Lowes, pp. 218-19.

Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.
(A. 3268-70)

She is a country girl, then, who, because she did not wed her "good yeman," is ready for the direct, country approach of Nicholas, as Birney has pointed out:

> True, she is the wife of a prospering village carpenter, and he is a traditionally subtle clerk of Oxford, but they both emerge as essential country types -- at least as these would be conceived by the gentils, from whose viewpoint such sophisticated fabliaux as this must be observed.[1]

Their first encounter is completely natural: he reaches out for what he wants, and she springs "as a colt dooth in the trave" (A. 3282). But she is not to escape, for, as Father Beichner has said,

> Not only is Nicholas always at hand but he is also 'hende' in the sense of 'ready or skilful with the hand, dexterous.'[2]

Nicholas is both nigh and sly, proving, says the narrator, the truth of the proverb that

'Alwey the nye slye
Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth.'
(A. 3392-93)

The secret, he implies is in both the nighness and the slyness. Nicholas is close at hand, and he also does not make the mistake of being a mooning, timid, courtly lover.

Absolon's singing serves only to arouse the husband, an unforgivable blunder in the popular tradition:

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[1] Birney, p. 334.

[2] Beichner, p. 125.

'What! Alison! herestow nat Absolon,
That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?"
(A. 3366-67)

Nicholas has already succeeded with Alison, and her reply is comic in its brevity and in what it leaves unsaid:

'Yis, God woot, John, I heere it every deel.
(A. 3369)

Absolon's performance here, together with the knowledge by the reader of what has already transpired between Nicholas and Alison, serves the Miller's intention of ridiculing courtly love. Later, the misplaced kiss does the same. If his adherence to the courtly code had not made him content to beg for a kiss before being sent away, Absolon would never have needed to rub his lips

With dust, with sond, with straw, with clooth,
with chippes . . . .
(A. 3748)

The essence of the Miller's scorn of him and all courtly lovers is put into the bleat which comes from his own mouth:

'I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete.'
(A. 3704)

That Nicholas, he of the direct method, is lying in Alison's bed at that moment makes the picture of Absolon, the would-be courtly lover, even more bathetic.

All that remains of action is for the two other men in the story to get their comeuppance. If in his approach to Alison Nicholas showed his debt to the country, in his managing of the affair afterward he showed

himself a "ful subtile" clerk. His downfall is that he is too clever. In many of the other analogues, it is the woman who is branded, but this would not have suited the Miller's purpose to shoot barbs in several directions. A clerk can be too clever for his own good, and though Nicholas's cleverness serves the purpose of the plot, it will never do for him to get off completely, so it is he and not Alison who is "scalded in the towte."

The old carpenter is not to go free, either. The Reeve has already helped to identify the carpenter with himself, and whether the rest of the case fits or not, the Miller has already pointed out that the carpenter has violated nature's law against the marriage of youth and age:

> But sith he was fallen in the snare,
> He moste endure, as oother folk, his snare.
> (A. 3231-32)

Indeed, the old carpenter endures perhaps the worst of all. He has broken his arm, his lodger has slept with his wife, and the two young people have made a fool of him before the neighbors.

And last there is Alison. Concerning her, Birney, following others, points out,

> Only she remains unscathed and entirely successful, Nature's female, neither inhibited nor lacking in primitive caution.[1]

Good and bad, Chaucer's women all end up relatively successful and

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[1] Birney, p. 337.

unchanged. Troilus and Arcite may die, but Criseyde and Emily survive to mate again. The clerkish cleverness of Nicholas in the Miller's Tale and of Aleyn and John in the Reeve's Tale may lead them into unpleasantness, but the natural cleverness of May and of the wife in the Shipman's Tale serves to protect them from trouble. Their heroes may be educated, or changed, or ruined, but the women are relatively changeless, from Alison and May to Constance and Griselda.

Chaucer's art encompasses women ranged between the lightly wanton and the steadfastly virtuous. One characteristic which all have in common, however, is that they are all steadily themselves from beginning to ending. Mary McCarthy has said of comic characters,

> What we recognize as reality in these figures is their implacable resistance to change; they are what perdures or remains -- the monoliths or plinths of the world . . . .
>
> The comic element is the incorrigible element in every human being; the capacity to learn, from experience or instruction, is what is forbidden to all comic creations and to what is comic in you and me. [1]

This first point is more illuminating about Chaucer's men than his women. The heroines of the serious tales -- Constance, Griselda, Prudence, Cecilia -- are as resistant to change as those in the comic tales. This fact will require more discussion later, but for now it may be observed that in both the first serious tale and the first comic one, the woman serves both as the focal point of the action and, of the three principals, as perhaps the one least affected by it.

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[1] Mary McCarthy, "Characters in Fiction," On the Contrary, (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy: N. Y., 1961), pp. 288-89.

C. The Reeve's Tale.

It might seem at first glance that when the third tale of the first day is reached, the courtly code has been forgotten. The violent reaction of the Reeve and his obvious intention of getting vengeance on the Miller serve to make the Knight's Tale and courtly love seem far away. That neither has been completely forgotten, however, is part of the point of the Reeve's Tale.

The main intention, nevertheless, is the obvious one -- vengeance -- and it is to that that most of the tale is addressed. The Reeve has already called attention to the relevance of the Miller's Tale to himself before it was begun. As soon as the Miller announced the import of his tale, the Reeve objected. That he was formerly a carpenter is a fact which might well have been forgotten had he not spoken up. By the end of the tale, his anger is contained. With typical understatement, the poet says of him,

> By cause he was of carpenteris craft,
> A litel ire is in his herte ylaft;
> He gan to grucche, and blamed it a lite.
> (A. 3861-63)

His anger is not enough to overbear his discretion, however. Whether it is because he is old,[1] or a congenital coward,[2] his sword is

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[1] See Forehand Brooks, "Old Age and Chaucer's Reeve," PMLA, v. 69 (1954), pp. 984-89.

[2] See Walter Clyde Curry, "Chaucer's Reeve and Miller," PMLA, v. 35 (1920), pp. 189-209.

now rusty in its sheath. He grouches that he could get vengeance with a story of a duped miller if he cared to "speke of ribaudye." Then his tone changes to one of self-pity:

> But ik am oold, me list not pley for age;
> Gras tyme is doon, my fodder is now forage . . . .
> (A. 3867-68)

The speech which follows is a curious combination of self-pity for having aged, pride in still having "a coltes tooth," and moralizing. Finally the Host stops him roughly.

The urging of the Host seems to renew the confidence of the Reeve and he says that he intends "with force force of-showve":

> 'This dronke Millere hath ytoold
> How that bigyled was a carpenteer,
> Peraventure in scorn, for I am oon.
> And, by youre leve, I shal hym quite anoon;
> Right in his cherles termes wol I speke.
> I pray to God his nekke mote to-breke;
> He kan wel in myn eye seen a stalke,
> But in his owene he kan nat seen a balke.'
> (A. 3913-20)

As we have seen, the Reeve is the one who has called attention to his connection with the preceding tale. His pride has driven the Reeve to inadvertently help the Miller give him an image as a foolish, old cuckold. His vengeance is to take the form of a tale in which pride leads to the "blerynge of a proud milleres ye." The tale which follows will show the miller the possessor of four "gleedes" which the Reeve says old men have --

> Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise
> (A. 3884)

all faults of which the Reeve himself stands convicted in greatest measure. In reacting against the Miller, his aim misfires enough to make him the real victim.

The two clerks in this tale speak in a Northern dialect and attend Cambridge, in contrast to the Miller's two Oxford clerks. It may be that in this contention between the Miller and Reeve lies some regional prejudice as well as their natural professional ill-feeling. Certainly the Reeve himself is from Norfolk and uses the Northern form of the first-personal pronoun, "ik."

As the Miller's main intention was to reply to the Knight (contrary to what the Reeve thinks), he began his tale with a picture of hende Nicholas. If his target had been the Reeve -- in more than an offhand way -- he would surely have found time to paint a picture of the old carpenter which would have made this clear. As has been noted, time was taken for three rather long descriptions. The three chosen, however, show what he is doing -- substituting for the Knight's love-triangle a trio of his own. Because the Reeve's main target is not the tale but the teller, he begins with a long portrait of Symkyn, his version of the Miller. The two other formal descriptions in the tale are not of the clerks but of Symkyn's wife and daughter.

Oswald the Reeve has said that he will show a proud miller getting his comeuppance, and it is pride which he emphasizes in the portraits of both Symkyn and his wife. This pride is the means of much of the comedy in those descriptions:

As any pecok he was proud and gay.
(A. 3926)
A wyf he hadde, ycomen of noble kyn;
The person of the toun hir fader was.
(A. 3942-43)

And eek, for she was someel smoterlich,
She was as digne as water in a dich,
And ful of hoker and of bisemere.
Hir thoughte that a lady sholde hire spare,
What for hire kynrede and hir nortelrie
That she hadde lerned in the nonnerie.
(A. 3963-68)

There is no evidence in any of the analogues of this same trait of pride in miller and wife. It seems to be Chaucer's addition, and it serves two purposes: first, it allows the Reeve to strike at the Miller through the comic description of Symkyn; and second, it heightens the effect of the eventual revenge of the two clerks. In fact, the fall of Symkyn's pride is foreshadowed by and motivated by that of the two clerks.

Like the two young knights of the first tale, the two clerks are described quickly and conventionally, little more than one line sufficing:

Testif they were, and lusty for to pleye. . . .
(A. 4004)

With their Northern dialect, this is pretty much the sum of what we know about them by the end of the tale. By implication both possess the sexual animality of hende Nicholas, and their approach, like his, is the direct one. This facet of their nature comes out at night, and is strikingly foreshadowed during the day, when Symkyn looses their horse:

And when the hors was laus, he gynneth gon
Toward the fen, ther wilde mares renne,

> And forth with 'wehee,' thurgh thikke and thurgh thenne.
> (A. 4064-66)

Although, as Aleyn says, they are entitled to "som esement" for the injustice they have suffered, the fact that they choose sex as their instrument of "esement" puts them on the level of the horse and mares. The response of Malyn to Aleyn's advances puts her there likewise; and with that response, the miller's social pretensions fall in ruins.

These pretensions have already been established in the descriptions of Symkyn and his wife, and they are both emphasized and ridiculed in the echoes in the tale of the courtly tradition. The baby of the households is a "propre page"; the daughter is lovely, with the grey eyes and beautiful hair of a standard heroine. She is an heiress, no less, and destined for a great marriage by her grandfather, the town parson:

> For hooly chirches good moot been despended
> On hooly chirches blood, that is descended.
> (A. 3983-84)

Unfortunately, from her socially inferior father she has inherited a "camus" nose, a mark of other ways she fails of the ideal.

Though there is parody of the courtly tradition in the Reeve's Tale, its function is different from that in the Miller's Tale. In that tale the ridicule of the courtly tradition was an end in itself; the Miller had decided to "quite" the Knight's Tale by ridiculing certain of the courtly values in it. In the Reeve's Tale, on the other hand, ridicule of the courtly tradition is quite subsidiary. Parody of that tradition is brought in to emphasize the gap between the pretensions of the miller

to high social status and the reality of what he and his family really are. The making of the wife the illegitimate daughter of the town parson, together with her absurd pretensions because of "hire kynrede and hir nortelrie" have already served this purpose in the opening descriptions. The various echoes which the audience is to hear in the night-scene to follow also serve to gloss the real by means of the ideal.

Appropriately, the evening begins with a service (of a sort) -- a complyn, an evening-song.

> This miller hath so wisely bibbed ale
> That as an hors he fnorteth in his sleep,
> Ne of his tayl bihynde he took no keep.
> His wyf bar hym a burdon, a ful strong;
> Men myghte hir rowtyng heere two furlong;
> The wenche rowteth eek, par compaignye.
> Aleyn the clerk, that herde this melodye,
> He poked John, and seyde, 'Slepestow?
> Herdestow evere slyk a sang er now?
> Lo, swilk a complyn is ymel hem alle,
> A wilde fyr upon their bodyes falle!
> (A. 4162-72)

If the undercutting of Symkyn and family were not well underway, such a passage would be blow enough to their pretensions.

When Malyn is spoken of in this tale, she is called a "wenche." Although Robinson does not see fit to gloss the word, Skeat glosses it as follows: "wench, girl, (usually) light or wanton girl or woman. . . ."[1] This last seems to be Chaucer's use of the word; certainly this is the

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[1] Walter W. Skeat, ed., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, (Oxford at the Clarendon Press: second edition, 1899), VI, p. 287.

meaning in the Friar's Tale (D. 1355-62), in the Manciple's Tale (H. 215), and in the Merchant's Tale, when May declares stoutly,

> I am a gentil womman and no wenche.
> (E. 2202)

That the Reeve is using the word in this way of Malyn, he soon proceeds to indicate. For all her high descent and nurture, Malyn responds at least as readily as Alison did in her tale, when Aleyn creeps into her bed:

> This wenche lay uprighte, and faste slepte,
> Til he so ny was, er she myghte espie,
> That it had been to late for to crie,
> And shortly for to seyn, they were aton.
> (A. 4194-97)

The unwariness of the wife saves her from the same charge of lightness.

Just before dawn, Aleyn speaks to Malyn in a parody of the aube, or dawn-song. This is a form which receives its highest expression in Book III of Troilus and Criseyde (1415-1533, 1695-1712). In the Reeve's Tale, the nature of the love scene which has preceded it makes it not romantic but bathetic:

> Aleyn wax wery in the dawenynge,
> For he had swonken al the longe nyght,
> And seyde, 'Fare weel, Malyne, sweete wight!
> The day is come, I may no lenger byde;
> But everemo, wher so I go or ryde,
> I is thyn awen clerk, swa have I seel!'
> (A. 4234-39)

Malyn's reply is likewise a parody of the traditional scene in which the lady weeps that her lover must leave and gives him a favor to wear in remembrance of her:

'Now, deere lemman,' quod she, 'go, far weel!
But er thow go, o thyng I wol thee telle:
Whan that thou wendest homward by the melle,
Right at the entree of the dore bihynde
Thou shalt a cake of half a busshel fynde
That was ymaked of thyn owene mele,
Which that I heelp my sire for to stele.
And, goode lemman, God thee save and kepe!'
And with that word almost she gan to wepe.
(A. 4240-48)

Not the least of the comedy in this reply is that, unlike the usual parting gift of a rose or a kerchief, Malyn's gift to Aleyn is "a cake of half a busshel."

All that is left is for Symkyn to receive the two crowning blows -- the last one literally. The first is a blow to his pride of family and the key to it is to be found in the word "disparage":

'Who dorste be so boold to disparage
My doghter, that is come of swich lyngage?'
(A. 4271-72)

Muscatine points convincingly to the force of this word:

> To translate "disparage" simply as 'dishonor' or 'discredit' is to miss the point. In context the word has clearly a strong flavor of the older meaning, "to match unequally; to degrade or dishonor by marrying to one of inferior rank." The miller is chagrined, not at what has been done to his daughter, but that it has been done by someone of lower class.[1]

That it is a story to be noised about has been convincingly demonstrated to Symkyn by the manner in which he learns of his daughter's adventure. Aleyn is no romantic lover, determined to protect his lady's good

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[1] Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, (University of California Press: 1957), p. 207.

name, as he demonstrates in his first words to Symkyn, whom he mistakes for John:

> He seyde, "Thou John, thou swynes-heed, awak,
> For Cristes saule, and heer a noble game.
> For by that lord that called is seint Jame,
> As I have thries in this shorte nyght
> Swyved the milleres doghter bolt upright. . . .
> (A. 4262-66)

The final blow is to his personal pride. The two main points about Symkyn are his pride in his family and in his physical prowess. The first is shattered by Aleyn; his own wife inadvertently helps to shatter the second when she smites him "on the pyled skulle." That the clerks finish the job is utter humiliation to one who has felt such utter contempt for all their breed:

> 'Yet kan a millere make a clerkes berd,
> For al his art. . . .'
> (A. 4096-97)

True to his habit of moralizing, as well as consonant with the parody elsewhere in the tale, the Reeve ends the tale with a formal epilogue such as might be found in either a religious or a courtly poem. In it he sums up the outcome and draws a moral:

> Lo, swich it is a millere to be fals!
> And therfore this proverbe is seyd ful sooth,
> "Hym thar nat wene wel that yvele dooth";
> A gylour shal hymself bigyled be.
> (A. 4318-21)

With this tale we are far removed from the spirit of the Knight's Tale, but not so far from its subject matter as we might have thought. All three tales deal in their own ways with the "woman question," and all

three take cognizance of the phenomenon called courtly love. It is a code which Chaucer neither wholly accepts nor wholly rejects. Except for Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer's courtly lovers have much more to do with marriage than other heroes and heroines in the tradition: the Knight's Tale ends in marriage, the Wife of Bath's Tale has a marriage in the middle of it, and the Franklin's Tale is wholly concerned with a marriage's surviving a great test. Again with the exception of Troilus and Criseyde, it is in the comic tales that Chaucer represents adultery -- the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's Tale, the Shipman's Tale, the Merchant's Tale. That Chaucer was not untouched by the beauties possible to the courtly tradition he proves in the highest flights of Troilus and Criseyde and the Knight's Tale. That he saw the great, even comic flaws in that same tradition, he shows vividly in the Miller's Tale and the Reeve's Tale.

CHAPTER XIII

MARRIAGE AND THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

> The causes which brought about monasticism prevented the recognition of the absolute holiness of marriage within the Christian communities . . . . So marriage fell below the demands of Christian idealism; it was not raised to their level, but was definitely numbered with those things which might be tolerated but could not be admired. Absolute holiness lay only in virginity. This was the monastic outcome.[1]

> The pilgrims are represented as affected by a variety of destructive and restorative kinds of love. Their characters and movement can be fully described only as mixtures of the loves that drive and goad and of the love that calls and summons.[2]

In Chapter VI we saw the official attitudes toward marriage and virginity as they were developed and expounded from Paul through the years to Aquinas. For the most part these attitudes are well summed up in the reading given to the parable of the seeds, some of which produced thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some a hundred-fold. From the time before Augustine and Jerome throughout the Middle Ages, writers on

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[1] Henry O. Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (Columbia Univ., 1903), p. 193.

[2] Arthur W. Hoffman, "Chaucer's Prologue to Pilgrimage: the Two Voices," ELH, v. 21 (1954), p. 16.

marriage and virginity explained this parable in the same way: marriage is the seed which produces thirty-fold, chaste widowhood the seed which produces sixty-fold, and virginity the seed which produces a hundred-fold. Chaucer alludes to this traditional reading of the parable in the Parson's Tale (I. 868-69).

He also alludes to the attitude implied in this reading in the Wife of Bath's Prologue when he has her say that virginity is "greet perfeccion" and an ideal for those who "wolde lyve parfitly." In fact, in view of the theory of a "marriage group" in the Canterbury Tales in which the Wife of Bath is the central figure, one might easily start a discussion of Chaucer and marriage with her Prologue and Tale. There is reason, however, for preferring other tales. In the first place, the Wife's prologue deals with a great deal besides the question of chastity, either in or out of marriage. Although she spends some 163 lines at the beginning of her prologue on the subject of marriage, remarriage and virginity, the rest of her prologue and her tale are concerned with her marital adventures and her theories about "sovereyntee" in marriage, which she claims women desire most of all. The tale which was originally intended for her, the Shipman's Tale, seems more rewarding as a subject for extended study in this chapter, as being an extension of the views expressed and implied in the first part of her prologue.

Before beginning on that tale, however, we may turn to two other tales in which Chaucer expresses the official attitude toward marriage

and virginity, the Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia and the Parson's Tale. Because the latter is an exposition of the central tenets of orthodoxy, a short discussion of it should serve as a good introduction to Chaucer's relation to the subject.

The traditional dichotomy of spiritual and earthly love is expressed early by the Parson. In hell, he says,

> the lovynge children, that whilom loveden so flesshly everich oother, wolden everich of hem eten oother if they myghte. / For how sholden they love hem togidre in the peyne of helle, whan they hated everich of hem oother in the proseritee of this lyf? For truste wel, hir flesshly love was deedly hate . . . .
>
> (I. 202-3)

This is in line with traditional writing on the subject, as indeed is the whole of the Parson's Tale, which has been called both a "sermon"[1] and a manual of religious instruction.[2]

In reply to the first of these suggested descriptions, Pfander, in an important article setting forth the second, observes:

> Although it contains some of the characteristics of the sermon, such as Text and Protheme, it lacks the Salutation, the Recitation, the Benediction. Treatises, not sermons, opening with a Text are as old as the days of St. Augustine.[3]

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[1] Coolidge Otis Chapman, "The Parson's Tale: A Mediaeval Sermon," MLN, v. 43 (1928), pp. 229-34.

[2] H. G. Pfander, "Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in England and Observations on Chaucer's Parson's Tale," JEGP, v. 35 (1936), pp. 243-58.

[3] Ibid., p. 254n.

Pfander's approach seems closer to the truth, both as to features found in the Tale and as it corresponds with the analogues which have been discovered.

Pfander starts by pointing out the late origin of "the medieval manual," beginning with the Fourth Lateran Council:

> The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215-1216 altered considerably the regulations relating to confession. Confession to some priest once a year had long been required of every true Christian; the Fourth Lateran Council declared that everyone should make confession once a year to the priest of the parish in which he lived. Many priests, especially parish priests, were inadequately instructed in these duties, and therefore both bishops and lesser churchmen undertook to guide priests in the performance of their duties by composing manuals in which special stress was laid on the Deadly Sins and Penance. [1]

Pfander further points out that the growth of the friar orders and their being granted the privilege of hearing confession caused them to write manuals to suit their needs.

> The decrees, in 1281, of Archbishop Peckham (himself a friar and well aware of the needs of both friar and parish priest) influenced the manuals especially as to content. These decrees stated that the people were to be instructed four times a year in Six Points -- the Articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments, the Works of Mercy, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Virtues, and the Sacraments; the portion of the manual dealing with the Sacraments tended to give special emphasis to Penance, that is, to Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. [2]

As Pfander notes, these manuals varied greatly in length and inclusiveness, but the debt of the Parson's Tale to one of them seems clear. He demonstrates convincingly that though the portion on penitence and the

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[1] Pfander, p. 243.

[2] Ibid., p. 244.

remission of sins derives from the Summa of St. Raymund of Pennaforte and the section on the Seven Deadly Sins may come from the Summa vitiorum of Guilielmus Peraldus, this derivation is not immediate. Of the monograph by Kate O. Petersen on the sources of the tale,[1] he says,

> To arrive at her conclusions as to ultimate sources (i.e., that the Parson's Tale is a fusion of Peraldus and Pennaforte) is analogous to tracing all sermons or any sermons on the Book of Job back to the Book of Job.[2]

This matter of sources need not detain us, except to note that whatever the immediate source or sources of the Parson's Tale, to be able to trace its content back to Pennaforte and Peraldus is to give convincing evidence of its orthodoxy. A glance at it in terms of the earlier discussion of the clerical tradition concerning love and marriage and virginity will serve to indicate this orthodoxy.

In the beginning of the second part of the Tale -- that on confession -- the Parson begins by telling how sin entered the world -- through Adam. In pointing out that all sin has three causes, the Parson makes use of the traditional identification of the woman with the flesh and the man with reason:

> There may ye seen that deedly synne hath, first, suggestion of the feend, as sheweth heere by the naddre; and afterward, the delit of the flessh, as sheweth heere by Eve; and after that, the consentynge of resoun, as sheweth heere by Adam.
> (I. 331)

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[1] Kate O. Petersen, The Sources of the Parson's Tale (Boston, 1901).

[2] Pfander, p. 254.

Later, he makes use of this traditional view and also the traditional symbolism comparing marriage to the relation of Christ and the Church to prove that a woman should only marry once:

> . . . for marriage is figured bitwixe Crist and holy chirche. And that oother is for a man is heved of a womman; algate, by ordinaunce it sholde be so. / For if a womman hadde mo men than oon, thanne sholde she have moo hevedes than oon, and that were an horrible thyng bifore God. . . .
>
> (I. 922-23)

The first metaphor -- the woman as the flesh and the man as reason -- goes back at least as far as St. Augustine; the second we have seen used as early as Paul and Origen.

From his introduction to the topic of sin, the Parson proceeds to that favorite target of celibates and the almost inevitable subject when the story of the Fall is mentioned -- concupiscence.

> Of thilke Adam tooke we thilke synne original; for of hym flesshly descended be we alle, and engendred of vile and corrupt mateere. / And whan the soule is put in oure body, right anon is contract original synne; and that that was erst but oonly peyne of concupiscence, is afterward bothe peyne and synne. / . . . the peyne dwelleth with us, as to temptacioun, which peyne highte concupiscence. / And this concupiscence, whan it is wrongfully disposed or ordeyned in man, it maketh hym coveite, by coveitise of flessh, flesshly synne, by sighte of his eyen as to erthely thynges, and eek coveitise of hynesse by pride of herte.
>
> (I. 333-36)

We saw in Chapter V passages from St. Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings in which he also said something very close to this, particularly in the treatise On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants. Later in this introduction to the tract on sin, the Parson makes

specific application of this point of view to marriage. Among the venial sins which a husband commits is the sin

> . . . whan he useth his wyf, withouten sovereyn desir of engendrure to the honour of God, or for the entente to yelde to his wyf the dette of his body . . . .
>
> (I. 375)

Besides these passages and others before the tract on the Seven Deadly Sins, in that tract the description of and remedies for lechery occupy 121 lines, more lines than are devoted to pride or to any other sin except anger (to which are devoted a surprising 143 lines). We are not long in learning why so much time is taken with this sin, for the Parson says that the devil gets more sinners by it than by any other.

> This synne, as seith the prophete, bireveth man and womman hir goode fame and al hire honour; and it is ful plesaunt to the devel, for therby wynneth he the mooste partie of this world. / And right as a marchant deliteth hym moost in chaffare that he hath moost avantage of, right so deliteth the fend in this ordure.
>
> (I. 850-51)

Here is the celibate speaking like a voice from St. Jerome's day: not pride but lechery is the devil's favorite sin and the trap which catches the most sinners. He follows this with the declaration that men who think they cannot sin with their wives are fools.

> Certes, be it wyf, be it child, or any worldly thyng that he loveth biforn God, it is his mawmet, and he is an ydolastre. / Man sholde loven hys wyf by discrecioun, paciently and atemprely; and thanne is she as though it were his suster.
>
> (I. 860-61)

The Parson proceeds from this to the deadly sins commited by men and women out of wedlock, of which one is

> to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede; for he that so dooth, certes, he casteth a mayden out of the hyeste degree that is in this present lif, / and bireveth hire thilke precious fruyt that the book clepeth the hundred fruyt. . . .
>
> (I. 868-69)

This reading of the parable of the seeds, of course, has been around as long as virginity has been an ideal.

Most of the last part of the description of lechery is devoted to the various kinds of adultery. The Parson is not reluctant to refer to its occurrence among those in holy orders. "And evere the hyer that he is in ordre, the gretter is the synne." (I. 891) The Parson is so much against this sin that he allows himself to state a view which seems not accordant with orthodox doctrine: these clerics, he says,

> lyven of the peple, to preye for the peple, and while they ben suche traitours, here preyer avayleth nat to the peple.
>
> (I. 895)

One of the kinds of adultery which the Parson lists takes place between man and wife and follows Aquinas on the subject.

> The thridde spece of avowtrie is somtyme bitwixe a man and his wyf, and that is whan they take no reward in hire assemblynge but oonly to hire flesshly delit, as seith Seint Jerome, / and ne rekken of nothyng but that they been assembled; by cause that they been maried, al is good ynough, as thynketh to hem.
>
> (I. 904-5)

This must have been a hard point to take, and the Wife of Bath is significantly silent on this point when refuting the clerics, though many writers on the subject had asserted it (including Augustine and Aquinas).

As this survey indicates, the Parson's Tale follows rigorous orthodoxy in its discussion of sex and marriage. As Pfander's comparison

of it with various manuals of instruction designed primarily for clerics indicates, the Tale as a whole closely follows ecclesiastical tradition as it had been built up over the years. And it is not the only tale in which Chaucer expresses the official viewpoint concerning marriage and virginity. There is also the Second Nun's Tale.

Although the Second Nun's Tale seems to be a very direct translation of one or more earlier works on the St. Cecilia legend, this should not cause it to be passed over -- any more than the Parson's Tale should be -- in an examination of Chaucer and the woman question. The fact that Chaucer chose it to translate and (perhaps later) chose to insert it in the Canterbury Tales makes it a part of his canon and an expression of him as an artist. We are no more entitled to call it 'uncharacteristic' than were earlier critics ~~who said~~ the ~~same~~ of the Shipman's Tale and the Merchant's Tale. An excision from consideration of all that which someone has called 'uncharacteristic' would result in the loss of tales almost from the beginning of the Canterbury Tales -- the Man of Law's Tale -- to the very end -- the Retractions. To find and accept both the Shipman's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale in the Canterbury Tales is to feel the force of Hoffman's observation about the General Prologue -- the impulsion of the two voices, one natural and the other supernatural.

The Saint Cecilia legend was one of the most popular in the Church, and she herself was one of the select group of Roman saints. That Chaucer is taking his version directly he himself declares:

> I have heer doon my feithful bisynesse
> After the legende, in translacioun
> Right of thy glorious lif and passioun . . . .
> (G. 24-26)

As G. H. Gerould has pointed out,[1] Chaucer clearly implies that this is a single text, at the end of the prologue:

> . . . I do no diligence
> This ilke storie subtilly to endite,
> For bothe have I the wordes and sentence
> Of hym that at the seintes reverence
> The storie wroot, and folwen hire legende. . . .
> (G. 79-83)

Although the version which Chaucer used is not known, Claude Jones has noted that

> The Second Nun's Tale of Chaucer is, both in form and content, an almost perfect example of the de sanctis type of sermon. These sermons were preached on the day of the saint concerned, and usually took the form of panegyrics.[2]

Whether it was a sermon which Chaucer was translating, the tale itself is addressed to certain favorite themes of the preachers and would not have been out of place in the mouth of the Parson.

The prologue begins with four stanzas on idleness, a favorite target of the preachers. Although, as Gerould says, no source has been discovered for these stanzas, none need be sought, "since the device they embody has been shown to be a convention frequently used in

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[1] "The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale," Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan, Germaine Dempster, et al, (Univ. of Chicago Press: 1941), pp. 664-84.

[2] Claude Jones, "The 'Second Nun's Tale,' a Mediaeval Sermon," MLR, v. 32 (1937), p. 283.

Chaucer's time and later."[1] These stanzas are followed by what Jones identifies as the theme, the formal beginning of the sermon.

> As is usual with the de sanctis sermon, this takes the form of a simple statement of the saint's name (l. 28).[2]

This is followed by another feature of the de sanctis sermon, the invocation.

> This Invocacio ad Mariam is based for the most part on St. Bernard's prayer at the beginning of Canto xxxiii of Dante's Paradiso, but has other elements as well, as Lowes and others have discovered.[3]

Robinson sums up the matter:

> The Invocacio ad Mariam is a fabric made up of elements from the Paradiso of Dante, several Latin hymns, or anthems, the Anticlaudianus of Alanus de Insulis, and the Commentary of Macrobius on the Somnium Scripionis.[4]

This invocation to Mary, while it is traditional and has many analogues in the liturgy, is peculiarly appropriate to this tale.

In the first place, Mary is addressed as the 'flour of virgines.' We have seen in Chapter VIII how Mary took the place of Christ as the type of virginity. As the type of virginity, she is very appropriately invoked in the beginning of the tale of another virgin saint. Also, she is addressed as 'Mayde and Mooder,' underlining the paradox of her

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[1] Gerould, p. 664.

[2] Jones, p. 283.

[3] See especially John L. Lowes, "The Second Nun's Prologue, Alanus, and Macrobius," MP, v. 15 (1917), pp. 193-202.

[4] Robinson, p. 756.

becoming a mother while remaining a virgin. The paradox of St. Cecilia's story, of course, is that she was both wife and virgin -- like, as a matter of fact, the Second Nun, who is a bride of Christ.

As Lowes has shown,[1] lines 71-74 of the prologue echo, either directly or indirectly, a passage from Macrobius's Commentary on the Dream of Scipio:

> And of thy light my soule in prison lighte,
> That troubled is by the contagioun
> Of my body, and also by the wighte
> Of erthely lust and fals affeccioun . . . .
> (G. 71-74)

The otherworldly philosophy at the basis of the glorification of virginity is apparent in such a passage, as the nature of its source might have led us to expect.

In keeping with the theory that the original of the Second Nun's Tale was a sermon is the prominence of the didactic in relation to the narrative in the tale. The entire account of St. Cecilia's earlier life and how she came to her wedding day takes up only two stanzas of the tale proper. Another stanza suffices to indicate, through her prayer, her determination to remain a virgin and to bring her to the marriage bed. After the visitation of the angel and Valerian's conversion, much of the rest of the tale is an exposition of doctrine, as when Valerian sets to the conversion of his brother:

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[1] Lowes, pp. 196-97.

'In dremes,' quod Valerian, 'han we be
Unto this tyme, brother myn, ywis.
But now at erst in trouthe oure dwellyng is.'
(G. 262-64)

Whatever the original of the tale, the reference which follows to "Seint Ambrose in his preface" serves to place the tale in the setting of the time at the beginning of the veneration of virginity in the West when it seemed that a necessary condition of the best Christian life was total sexual abstinence. Whatever the exact origin and interpretation of the 'corones two' borne by the angel, it seems clear that the lilies could not have been in the crown nor the crown of such worth without the decision of Cecilia and her husband to maintain their virginity.

The fear expressed by the brother, Tiburtius, of death which may follow any contact with Urban enables the narrator to put in St. Cecilia's mouth a recitation of the other worldliness which was always intimately linked with the ideal of virginity. "Men," says Cecilia,

"myghten dreden wel and skilfully
This lyf to lese, myn owene deere brother,
If this were lyvynge oonly and noon oother.
But ther is bettre lif in oother place . . . ."
(G. 320-23)

Indeed, we have seen that virginity, otherworldliness, and the ideal of martyrdom which are the concerns of this tale were closely associated early; so that when the age of martyrdom was past, those who chose the ideal life of virginity and otherworldliness were called martyrs.

As Donald R. Howard points out, the Parson makes this kind of comparison.

> He argues that virginity is the highest form of chastity, that the virgin is the bride of Christ and is equal to the martyrs. [1]

Howard argues, convincingly, that Kittredge's theory that the Franklin's Tale is Chaucer's final solution of this problem of marriage does not fit the fact that

> the Franklyn's solution has a thoroughly worldly purpose. It is designed, in his own words, to produce bliss, quiet, and rest (V, 744, 760), and from the viewpoint of medieval Christianity these were very limited aims. [2]

He argues that the first topic of the Wife of Bath,

> whether one can marry and still follow Christ's command 'Be ye therefore perfect' gets left along the way . . . .
>
> It is possible, however, that Chaucer meant to return to that initial and basic question of perfection, in either the Physician's Tale or the Second Nun's Tale, or even in both. [3]

The last chapter of this work is a more suitable place to consider what the relative positions of these tales says about Chaucer's attitude. For now it seems pertinent to remember that whenever we doubt the extent to which Chaucer shared the traditional Christian ideals we have only to remind ourselves that it is to the Parson that Chaucer gives the final tale and that that tale is followed by Chaucer's Retractions. The juxtaposition of these varying points of view should warn us against taking any tale -- even the Parson's Tale -- as Chaucer's 'final' solution.

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[1] Donald R. Howard, "The Conclusion of the Marriage Group: Chaucer and the Human Condition," MP, v. 57 (1960), p. 226.

[2] Ibid., p. 227.

[3] Ibid., p. 224.

Because he translated the legend of St. Cecilia and because he inserted it in the Canterbury Tales, there is every reason to believe that Chaucer shared with his age an attraction to the legend and the ideals which it embodied. But the present world had its own appeal and its own insistent assertion of its reality, as is seen in the very worldly Shipman's Tale.

In approaching the Shipman's Tale, it is well to begin with the virtual certainty that this tale was originally meant for the Wife of Bath. It is proper to begin with this point because the prior assignment of the tale to Alison seems to have led to certain alterations of the source -- alterations which would fit the tale better to the Wife's narration of it. Although some objections have been made to the theory that the Wife was the original teller,[1] the weight of evidence, conveniently summed up and added to by Lawrence in an important article, seems conclusive.[2] As early as 1907, Tatlock could very confidently state that

> the Shipman's Tale was certainly written not for the Shipman but for a woman . . . . there cannot be the smallest doubt that the woman is the Wife of Bath . . . . The Shipman no doubt had his faults, but muliebrity was not one of them. Nor is the subject, drawn from trivial social life, appropriate to him.[3]

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[1] See, for example, Robert L. Chapman, "The Shipman's Tale Was Meant for the Shipman," MLN, v. 7 (1956), pp. 4-5.

[2] William W. Lawrence, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," Speculum, v. 33 (1958), pp. 56-68. My debt to this piece is great.

[3] J. S. P. Tatlock, The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works, (Chaucer Society, Second Series, no. 37: London, 1907), p. 205.

Because it does seem clear that the tale was originally assigned to the Wife of Bath, an important question arises as to the alterations in the tale which were the consequence of that assignment. The reasons for the transfer of the tale away from the Wife will concern us in the next chapter. On the question of Chaucer's alterations, Spargo asserted,

> There is no a priori reason why the Shipman's Tale should not have been taken over almost verbatim from an Old French fabliau.[1]

As a matter of fact, on the contrary there are certain elements in the closest -- and earliest -- analogues, those of Boccaccio and Sercambi, which are different; furthermore, these differences may be explained in terms of the adaptation of the tale to the Wife of Bath.

In the first place, as Lawrence points out, whereas the usual fabliau focuses strictly on the story at hand (Bédier says that the spirit of the fabliau "manque de metaphysique")[2], the teller of the Shipman's Tale "can hardly wait to philosophize."[3] The tale begins with a prologue which hardly accords with the present masculine teller, but which reminds us forcibly of the boasting of Alison in her present prologue:

> The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,
> He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye,
> Al for his owene worshipe richely,

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[1] J. W. Spargo, Chaucer's Shipman's Tale: the Lover's Gift Regained (FF Communications, no. 91; Helsinki, 1930), p. 56.

[2] Joseph Bédier, Les Fabliaux, (Paris, 1898; rev. 1925), p. 317.

[3] Lawrence, p. 58.

In which array we daunce jolily.
(B2. 1201-04)

Lawrence's judgment on this prologue sums up the matter well:

> The immediate introduction of the philosophizing vein reminds us strongly of the Wife's prologue; the remark that the attention bestowed on women passes like a shadow on the wall accords with her lament for her lost youth. Moreover, as has often been observed, we seem to hear Dame Alison speaking when the merchant's wife tells the monk about the six things which women desire in marriage (B. 1363ff.).[1]

The evidence before the appearance of Lawrence's essay seemed conclusive enough: the tell-tale reference in the prologue to the female identity of the tale, with the Wife the only female pilgrim not in orders; the woman in the tale listing the six things which women desire most, recalling the Wife's tale of what women desire most; and the philosophical vein of the first eighteen lines. Lawrence's discussion of the probable plot changes and their relevance to the Wife's role as the teller seems to put the matter beyond reasonable doubt.

Although the original source is not known, there are two very close analogues written within roughly the same time period by Boccaccio and Sercambi. Each of their tales ends with the woman tricked and forced to give up her money. Lawrence observes that, since the other analogues tend to be later,

> In attempting to reconstruct the general lines of the lost fabliau it seems entirely legitimate to end with the wife's discomfiture, since that is the case in the Italian, and since the fabliau makers were always glad to take a fling at unfaithful wives.[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Lawrence, p. 59n.

The Shipman's Tale, on the other hand, ends on a note of triumph for the wife:

> 'Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;
> By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde!
> Forgyve it me, myn owene spouse deere;
> Turne hiderward, and maketh bettre cheere.'
> (B2. 1613-16)

Here indeed is a "wys wyf" following the dictum which Alison expresses in her prologue:

> 'Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely,
> Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde.
> Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde;
> For half so boldely kan ther no man
> Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.
> . . . . . .
>
> A wys wyf shal, if that she kan hir good,
> Bere hym on honde that the cow is wood . . . .
> (B2. 224-28, 231-32)

A plot change in which the wife managed, in the face of the evidence, to save herself and keep the use of the hundred francs would point again to the Wife of Bath as the original teller of the tale.

Also in contrast to the analogues, there is in the Shipman's Tale no condemnation of the merchant's wife. Although this can be explained as being in line with Chaucer's usual practice in his comic tales, it is strikingly at variance with the tales of both Boccaccio and Sercambi. Boccaccio's teller, Neifile, says in a kind of prologue that a woman who sells herself deserves to be burned. In the tale which follows, the lover is so angered by the wife's avarice that he begins to hate her and plans the trick as just vengeance on her. The title of Sercambi's tale

sets the tone for it -- "De Avaritia et Luzuria" -- and the heroine of his tale has regularly sold herself to other men. This tale makes the wife a more specifically evil character than Boccaccio's and ends with the woman incorrigible and determined never to let herself be caught again.

Robert Pratt expressed the belief that this tale of Sercambi has been passed over too lightly as a possible source of the Shipman's Tale.[1] With Chaucer's simplification of the Teseida in the Knight's Tale as evidence of his handling of an indisputable source, he proceeded to list the ways in which the versions of Sercambi and Chaucer agree, both differing from Boccaccio's version, although it has generally been taken as the original of Sercambi's tale. Briefly, these correspondences are: the giving of the money on the following Sunday, the request by the husband of the loan's prompt repayment, the husband's leaving on the next day, the pair's spending the following Sunday night together, the husband's expressed surprise that his wife failed to tell him of the return of the loan and her reply that she had not thought the money was a loan. Although the list is not enough to make the conclusion more than tentative, as Pratt says, the changes -- if they are changes of Sercambi's tale -- are in accord both with Chaucer's temper and with the original assignment of the tale:

> If Chaucer deliberately gave up the witnessing of the payment of the money. . . , he exercised skilful economy and tended to make

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[1] Robert A. Pratt, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale and Sercambi," MLN, v. 55 (1940), pp. 142-5.

> the motivation human rather than mechanical. If he made the meeting of the wife and her lover clandestine . . . , and simplified the steps leading up to the meeting . . . , Chaucer made their rendezvous somewhat casual, and intensified the characterizations of both the lover and the wife. And finally, if Chaucer decided to allow the wife to spend the money on array and then offer to repay her husband abed, the poet thereby made the wife more real than ever before, and gave the tale -- at first intended for the Wife of Bath -- one of its most original and feminine touches. [1]

When we turn to Chaucer's tale, we find the manner of the wife's infidelity more spontaneous than in the analogues. Whether Chaucer was modifying Sercambi's tale or not, there was great opportunity for him to do as Boccaccio and Sercambi did -- make the wife a cold and avaricious schemer, and moralize about her infidelity. Whether such was in his source or not, Chaucer refused the opportunity to draw an unsympathetic villainess and moralize about her, just as he did in Troilus and Criseyde. There is in the Shipman's Tale much the same kind of ambiguous handling of the woman as of Criseyde. There is a difference of degree, partly one suspects because of the smaller compass of the work, but it is scarcely a difference in kind. The Criseida of Il Filostrato is almost as cold and wanton as the heroine of Sercambi's tale. Criseyde differs from her indubitable model in much the same manner as Pratt suggests that the wife in the Shipman's Tale differs from the Sercambi analogue.

The point that Chaucer effected any real lightening of the character of the wife would be rejected by many. Root spoke for many in his strictures on the tale:

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[1] Pratt, pp. 144-5.

> Though much more delicate than the tales of the Miller and the Reeve, the tale of the Shipman is essentially more immoral. Hende Nicholas receives a righteous retribution for his deeds; and the two Cambridge students have at least a certain provocation for theirs. The monk, Dan John, is false not only to his professions as a man of God, but violates also the sacred laws of hospitality and of common gratitude . . . . The story ends with the laugh all on his side. The moral of the tale seems to be, as Mr. Snell has put it, 'that adultery is a very amusing and profitable game, provided that it is not found out.' The intrigue is, of course, a clever one, the actors are clearly characterized, and the narrative is well conducted; but neither the intrigue, nor the art of the tale, is brilliant enough to blind us, even partially, to the disagreeable picture of treachery and lust. [1]

Because this has been a traditional view, one may hesitate before opposing it. But there are objections which may be raised to it.

In the first place, hende Nicholas may have received 'a righteous retribution,' but there is no evidence that the wife did. The question of 'righteous retribution' has little to do with the fabliau, as a genre which manque de metaphysique. This does not mean that the critics may not have a legitimate reason for their feelings of repulsion; it simply means that to require 'righteous retribution' or a moral from the fabliau is to require of it what it lacks by its very definition. As a matter of fact, Chaucer has made it a more successful tale than the analogues, however it may suffer by comparison with his best fabliaux.

A second objection to the view expressed by Root, as well as others, is in the fundamental reading of the tale itself. It does not seem true that "the story ends with the laugh all on [the] side" of Dan

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[1] R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer (Rev. Ed.; Peter Smith; Gloucester, Mass., 1957), p. 189.

John. In the analogues, the cleverness of the lover and the duping of the wife form the central feature. But in the Shipman's Tale, as Germaine Dempster has pointed out, the "basic irony of the tale [is that of] a husband lending money that will be used to buy the favors of his wife."[1] In contrast to the analogues, the tale goes on for some time after the departure from it of the trickster. Unlike the analogues, Dan John is not even present to witness the wife's discomfiture at his trick; rather, "the laugh" is neither on his side nor does it even concern him. It is rather concerned with a bit of humorous byplay between the merchant and his wife. Although the story must leave a reader with nagging reservations in his mind about the total effect of the tale, surely it is too strong to call it "a disagreeable story of treachery and lust." This is the picture in the analogues, but there are certain touches which do tend, if not completely to remove the disagreeableness of the picture, at least to lighten it considerably. A brief comparison with the analogues should help to make this clear.

Boccaccio begins his first tale of the eighth day with a short introduction by Neifile. Because of the inherent nature of such a story of double deceit -- of a wife deceiving her husband and a lover deceiving his mistress -- Boccaccio has Neifile say that she tells the story with a moral purpose -- as a warning to women. This naive subterfuge is

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[1] Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, (Stanford Univ. Press: 1932; rep. Humanities Press, New York, 1959), p. 39.

quite common to the tellers of bawdy tales in the Middle Ages, but it is one which Chaucer will not allow himself, even when he is troubled about a tale's possible reception (as he obviously is in his introduction to the Miller's Tale). The tale which follows the preface fits it fairly well. The woman is shown to be completely mercenary; and the love of the soldier, Gulfardo, turns to hate and righteous indignation when he learns the true nature of the woman for whom he has nursed his courtly passion. Gulfardo is a fellow quite unlike Dan John; he is a good soldier, stout and loyal; it is because he is such a man of good character that he gets the loan from the husband so readily. He is guileful only in the cause of righteous vengeance on the mercenary woman. Sercambi's hero is a German soldier also, but unlike Gulfardo he comes to the woman because he has heard that she is inclined to sell herself. He is put off not by the fact that she sells herself, but by her price, which shows her to be avaricious (in keeping with the title of the story, "De Avaritia et Luzuria").

When we turn to Dan John, we find a quite different man. In the first place, of course, he is no longer a soldier, but is now a cleric. This is quite in keeping with the new character given him, the crafty cleric up to no good being a stock member of the fabliau triangle. His actions once he has deceived his way into the household are in keeping with the advice given to L'Amant in the Roman de la Rose to gain the favor of those around the lady by means of gifts:

Free was daun John, and namely of dispence,
As in that hous, and ful of diligence
To doon plesaunce, and also greet costage.
He noght forgat to yeve the leeste page
In al that hous; but after hir degree,
He yaf the lord, and sitthe al his meynee,
Whan that he dam, som manere honeste thynge;
For which they were as glad of his comyng
As fowel is fayne what that the sonne up riseth.
(B2. 1233-41)

In keeping with his kinship with hende Nicholas, Dan John is always at hand, managing the affair toward his predetermined conclusion. Because he does take a more active, and a much more cynical, role, he serves to make the wife more passive in the whole affair. He has correctly read her character and he gives her the opportunity to reveal herself easily.

"But deere nece, why be ye so pale?
I trowe, certes, that oure goode man
Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan,
That yow were nede to resten hastily."
(B2. 1296-99)

When she hesitates again, he tells her the whole story of his guilefulness:

"He is na moore cosyn unto me
Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!
I clepe hum so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce,
To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce
Of Yow, which I have loved specially
Aboven alle wommen, sikerly."
(B2. 1339-44)

The character of Dan John, then, serves to take the emphasis away from the woman's waywardness. Light she is, but it is a lightness in much contrast to the dark pictures in the analogues.

There are also some rather significant differences between the husband in the Shipman's Tale and those in the analogues, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, some additions. Although Boccaccio's merchant is named as Chaucer's is not, the former is little more than a name, Guasparruol Cagatraccio. We learn only the barest details of him--that he is a rich merchant and is much the acquaintance and friend of the soldier, Gulfardo. Sercambi's husband, Pierosso, is a banker and merchant who makes a business of lending money, especially to foreign soldiers; the loan is thus explained without any reference to the friendship of husband and lover. Chaucer's merchant is more subtly drawn.

As mentioned, the wife in the tale lists six qualities which women most desire in a man:

> They wolde that hir housbondes sholde be
> Hardy, and wise, and riche, and therto free,
> And buxom unto his wyf, and fressh abedde.
> (B2, 1365-67)

In the course of the tale, he shows himself to be all of these things with the possible exception of "hardy," though this would seem to follow from the very conditions of his profession at that time. His wealth enables him to lend the money to Dan John; his liberality is shown in making the loan; and the other qualities are manifestly evident in the scene with his wife at the end of the tale. Many fabliau husbands, however, have a fatal flaw, and this one is no exception. With many, it is jealousy which drives them almost out of their wits. With this husband, it is a pride

of family which causes him to fail of his usual caution, for it allows Dan John's entrace into the household on terms of greatest familiarity:

> The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage;
> And he agayn, he seith nat ones nay,
> But was as glad therof as fowel of day;
> For to his herte it was a greet plesaunce.
> (B2. 1226-29)

Albert H. Silverman has written an important essay on the Shipman's Tale which addresses itself to the question of the significance of one of the most important of the changes made by Chaucer in the story. Although he has reported the facts and given some insights into the tale, his analysis of the effect and intention of the tale is so opposed to the reading to be offered here that a brief consideration of his position seems obligatory. In the first place, in discussing the gentler treatment which some critics since Tatlock, such as Spargo and Stillwell, have given the tale, he states,

> Both Spargo and Stillwell, I think, are disposed to neglect the less usual cynical side of Chaucer, and their inclination has, in my judgment, resulted in their overlooking several significant differences between Chaucer's Shipman's Tale and the other 'Lover's Gift Regained' fabliaux. Moreover. . . these differences tend in the direction of an increasing sardonicism rather than, as these critics imply, toward the mellowing of a sordid tale.[1]

This is a reading akin to Root's and one which seems mistaken.

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[1] Albert H. Silverman, "Sex and Money in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," PQ, v. 32 (1953), p. 329.

Silverman then goes on, now more correctly it seems, to interpret the last lines as involving a pun.

> Thus endeth now my tale, and god us sende
> Taillynge ynough unto oure lyves ende. Amen.
> (B2. 1623-24)

There is a good possibility that the 'taillynge' which the Shipman prays for is not only 'tallying' in money matters but also in sexual intercourse. This possibility, though it has been denied,[1] is reinforced by the less disputable pun some lines earlier when the wife tells her husband,

> I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille,
> And I shal paye as soone as ever I may.
> (B2. 1606-7)

As mentioned before, this ending is one of the big differences between the Shipman's Tale and the analogues. In the analogues, the wife still has the money and the humor lies in her having to give it up to her husband. Silverman is also quite correct when he states,

> Far from simplifying the narrative of the 'Lover's Gift Regained,' as Spargo has suggested, Chaucer has added another significant plot element.[2]

But he seems fundamentally mistaken when he states the significance of this added plot element:

> If the puns at the end of the tale involving the double entendre of money and sex really hold, they express with apical concision

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[1] Robert A. Caldwell, "Chaucer's 'Taillynge Ynough,' B2. 1624 (ShT, 434)," MLN, v. 55 (1940), pp. 262-5.

[2] Silverman, p. 330.

> the chief ironic point of the Shipman's Tale: the commercialization of the marriage relationship.[1]

Long ago, Lounsbury made a comment about Chaucer's practice in these matters which still seems sound:

> There is about the most objectionable of his stories nothing of that steamy licentious atmosphere which enervates the moral sense, even if it does not directly stimulate the passions. . . . the interest of the story as story does not depend upon the sin that enters into it. That may be essential to its development. It is not, however, the point to which the attention is supremely directly. Ordinarily it is in truth little more than an incident.[2]

As a matter of fact, in opposition to Silverman's view, the whole of the bedroom scene seems rather to be designed to represent this as a marriage stronger than the wife's commercial instincts. This is admittedly a difficult point to demonstrate, but an examination of the nature of the marriage depicted should, with the earlier discussion of the Parson's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale, help to shed light on the subject of Chaucer and marriage.

In the beginning of the tale, the wife is described as not only "of excellent beautee," but "compaignable and revelous." She is just the sort, that is, to attract a clever manager like Dan John. Whereas in Boccaccio's tale it is a courtly passion which the soldier feels for the lady and whereas in Sercambi's it is a simple business deal, the

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[1] Ibid., p. 329.

[2] Thomas R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer, (Harper & Bros.: N. Y., 1892), III, p. 357.

affair in the Shipman's Tale is different from either. There is no evidence that Chaucer's heroine makes a habit of selling her favors as Sercambi's does; and neither is Dan John, as Boccaccio's hero is, the sort to be righteously indignant that the woman wants money. On the contrary this presents him with just the opportunity he has been awaiting. He reveals as much to the wife:

> He is namoore cosyn unto me
> Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!
> I clepe hym so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce,
> To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce
> Of yow, which I have loved specially
> Aboven alle wommen, sikkerly.
> (B2, 1339-44)

His subsequent trick reveals the true nature of this deep love of his, but there seems no reason to doubt his statement about his reason for claiming the husband as his cousin. This is one detail to make the tail less sordid than the analogues. By having the wife a habitual prostitute and the lover's indignation simply a matter of the price, Sercambi makes his tale the most sordid of the three; but Boccaccio darkens his tail also, by bringing in courtly love. The woman's request for money is a betrayal of the pure courtly passion of the hero and as such makes it a sordid story of treason and revenge. Chaucer's heroine is neither a famous prostitute nor the betrayer of a pure passion. This is one way he has made the story lighter.

Another way he has chosen, though not so successfully this time, is by expanding the character of the husband. Whereas the husband is

a shadowy figure in the analogues, in the Shipman's Tale he is as real as the two other members of the triangle. Although he is not made as ridiculous as the husband in either the Miller's Tale or the Reeve's Tale, there is some attempt to make him a comic figure. In the first place, he is totally absorbed in his business at the wrong time. He is introduced as rich, "for which men helde hym wys." (B2. 1192) This wisdom is not much in evidence, however, until the final scene, when he is wise enough not pursue the matter of the money. His greatest folly comes in his yielding to Dan John's claim that they are related:

> The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage;
> And he agayn, he seith nat ones nay,
> But was as glad therof as fowel of day. . . .
> (B2. 1226-28)

Throughout the tale, however, these touches of ridiculousness in his character seem too mild to make him a true comic husband, deserving his cuckoldry in the manner of the husbands in the Miller's Tale and the Reeve's Tale. As do his other faults, his accepting the monk's claim of their kinship seems a very mild weakness. For example, although as Gardiner Stillwell has pointed out, his seriousness does make him rather pompous and comic,[1] it hardly makes him ridiculous enough to make his cuckoldry readily palatable. As a matter of fact, as with his other faults, this fault of being overly serious is mitigated. In a long

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[1]Gardiner Stillwell, "Chaucer's 'Sad Merchant,'" RES, v. 20 (1944), pp. 1-18.

speech to his wife, the merchant is enabled to defend his preoccupation with his business.

> 'Wyf,' quod this man, 'litel kanstow devyne
> The curious bisynesse that we have.
> For of us chapmen, also God me save,
> And by that lord that clepid is Seint Yve,
> Scarsly amonges twelve tweye shul thryve
> Continuelly, lastynge unto oure age.
> (B2. 1414-19)

Although his tending to one business while his wife tends to quite another one does make him somewhat comic, "the treatment is delicately ironic rather than sharply satiric."[1] Like his age,[2] his business is not a barrier to satisfying his wife's demands when he feels the proper time has come.

Of the three treatments of the story, the Shipman's Tale is the only one in which the wife does not give up the money. In the two analogues, the wives have no apparent pressing need for the money. It is avarice which impels them. In the Shipman's Tale, however, there seems no reason to doubt that the wife has indeed a debt to pay and has already paid it when her husband mentions the money.

The Shipman's Tale ends with a final scene which has no counterpart in the analogues. Indeed, such a scene could not have place in

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[1] Ibid., p. 1.

[2] In discussing the "figure of the aged or feeble lover," Robinson puts the Shipman's Tale in the tradition. In light of his later actions, it is difficult to say how much weight should be given to the monk's possible reference to him as "an old appalled wight." (B2. 1292)

the other tales due to their different intention. This scene does as much as is possible with this story to make it lighter. Rather than focussing on "the commercialization of the marriage relationship," it gives an intimate glimpse of the easy give and take which Eileen Power says probably characterized actual marriages among the common people.[1] Given the opportunity the wife will probably fall again, for this is what fabliau wives so often do; but there is in this tale what is so difficult to find in popular literature of the period, a picture of a marriage stronger than the weaknesses of the man and wife. At times she may be weak and he may be blind, but they have a cameraderie which is extremely rare in a comic tale. The Miller's Tale ends with the husband made ridiculous before his neighbors. The Merchant's Tale ends with a bigger fool made of foolish January. The Reeve's Tale ends with the social pretensions of Symkyn and his wife at an end. If the Miller's Tale and the Reeve's Tale bother us less -- and they do -- this has less to do with the morality expressed than it does with the characters involved.

What troubles many readers about the tale is probably not that Dan John goes scot-free, for many fabliau heroes trick and go free to trick again. The trick played on the wife should put off no one, for fabliau

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[1] Eileen Powers, "The Position of Women," The Legacy of the Middle Ages, ed., C. G. Crump and E. F. Jacob, (Oxford, 1932), 11. 401-33. "Certainly medieval records as a whole show a cameraderie between husband and wife which contrasts remarkably both with the picture of woman in subjection which the Church delighted to draw and with that of the worshipped lady of chivalry." p. 416.

wives are the second favorite target of the tricks of clever monks. What troubles most about the tale must be the husband.

The merchant of Saint Denis is made real enough to get the reader's interest, but he is not made ridiculous enough to gain our assent to his being tricked with impunity. The husbands in the tales of the Miller, and Reeve, and Merchant all seem to be getting what is coming to them, but the case of the merchant seems different. Granted that it is his own fault that the monk has such easy access to the house and hence to his wife, the qualities which he displays in the final scene make him too human and too likeable. Although Robinson puts him in the tradition of the "aged or feeble lover," he scarcely fits:

> His wyf ful redy mette hym atte gate,
> As she was wont of oold usage algate,
> And al that nyght they bisette . . . .
> (B2. 1563-65)

The Shipman's Tale is not a perfectly realized tale. As a comic fabliau, it fails because the necessary comic distance is lacking. This distance, or objectivity regarding the victim of a trick, can be achieved, in one way, by placing the butt of the joke in such a light that the trick is poetic justice; this is the way with the husbands in the tales of the Reeve and the Merchant and with the summoner in the Friar's Tale. The other convenient way to achieve this comic distance is by making the character a shadowy or cardboard character; this is the case with the husbands in many fabliaux and with the old ones who had such a bad time from the Wife of Bath. The greatest threat to comic distance is

the sympathy which may quite naturally be felt for the victim of a trick. On the other hand, this sympathy for a character may be functional if after a trick is played on him he is able to get revenge, as in the Reeve's Tale. In the Shipman's Tale, this sympathy is not only not functional; it actually hampers enjoyment of it as a comic tale.

The best part of the Shipman's Tale seems the part added by Chaucer -- the scene in the bedroom. This scene set beside the one in the Second Nun's Tale graphically demonstrates the ambiguous attitude toward sex and marriage which Chaucer shared with his age. There is first of all what Lovejoy has called the "official" ideal -- otherworldliness, with virginity a necessary condition of perfect service to it. But there is also what Lovejoy has called "this-worldliness" -- which recognizes that this world is an undeniable fact, as are its demands and rewards. The same ambiguous attitude expressed in the epilogue of Troilus and Criseyde is discernible in a juxtaposition of these two tales. On the one hand, to indulge in sex for its own sake is to follow the example of Adam and Eve and to put the demands of the flesh before those of the spirit. On the other hand, the final scene of the Shipman's Tale gives an impression of the goodness of natural impulses and the rewards of the flesh. If, as the Parson's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale say, sex can lead astray, as the final scene of the Shipman's Tale implies, it can also restore. If the supernatural communion of the sexless marriage in the Second Nun's Tale represents an element in Chaucer's attitude

toward marriage and virginity, the very human cameraderie of the marriage-bed in the Shipman's Tale is another.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WIFE OF BATH AND WOMAN'S PROPER ROLE

> The Wife proceeds, with infinite zest, to give the history of her married life, unfolding, as she does so, another heretical doctrine of a startling kind, which, in fact, is the real subject of her discourse. This is nothing less than the dogma that the wife is the head of the house. Obedience is not her duty, but her husband's.[1]

> Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience,
> And bothe atones buryed in Ytaille;
> For which I crie in open audience,
> No wedded man so hardy be t'assaille
> His wyves pacience in trust to fynde
> Grisildis, for in certein he shal faille.[2]

As with all else in the affairs of men, there was in Chaucer's day a discrepancy between the ideal relationship of man and wife and the reality. Even the ideal was subject to discussion. In this chapter we shall be concerned first with what that ideal was, summarizing some of what was said in earlier chapters. In connection with this, a discussion

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[1] G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Harvard Univ. Press: 1915), p. 188.

[2] "Lenvoy de Chaucer," Clerk's Tale, E. 1149-1212. All references are to Robinson's revised edition of Chaucer's works.

of the Clerk's Tale will show Chaucer dealing, however obliquely, with this ideal. Next, we will consider the reality of wifely disobedience as it receives its comic treatment in the Wife of Bath's Prologue. And finally the possibility of an ideal compromise which Kittredge saw in the last tale of the Marriage Group, the Franklin's Tale, will bring us to a consideration of the Wife of Bath's Tale, leaving the Franklin's Tale and two other tales which in many ways are equally revealing, the Merchant's Tale and the Tale of Melibee, for the concluding chapter.

Briefly, the ideal role of the woman was strict obedience, first to her father and later her husband. The husband was expected to be just, but his performance in this regard was irrelevant. The role of the wife was not to oppose or question but to submit and obey. Support for this was not hard to find, as we have seen. Church tradition provided much: a wife is to her husband as the Church is to Christ; the first Eve had sinned and brought ruin through disobedience, and the second Eve had provided a model of behavior and was the means of redemption through her perfect obedience; the husband is as the head, reason, the wife as the body, emotion, and it is proper that she and the body be ruled by the husband and reason.

The Knight of La Tour-Landry counsels his daughters to this ideal submissiveness, telling them the story of the woman who was disobedient to her husband and who chided him before others. Finally,

> he, that was angri of her gouernaunce, smote her with his fiste downe to the erthe; And thanne with hys fote he struck her in the

> uisage and brake her nose, and all her lyff after she had her nose croked, the whiche shent and dysfigured her uisage after, that she might not for shame shewe her uisage, it was so foule blemisshed. . . . And therfor the wiff aught to suffre and lete the husbonde haue the wordes, and to be maister, for that is her worshippe. . . .[1]

Although the completeness of the submission and obedience required of the wife seem improbable now, the Ménagier de Paris must have had something very close to just such a respectful submissive wife, for he wrote his book of instructions for her at her own request. His prologue makes her seem quite like another Griselda:

> You being the age of fifteen years and in the week that you and I were wed, did pray me to be indulgent to your youth and to your small and ignorant service, until you had seen and learned more; to this end you promised me to give all heed and to set all care and diligence to keep my peace and my love, as you spoke full wisely, and as I well believe, with other wisdom than your own, beseeching me humbly in our bed, as I remember, for the love of God not to correct you harshly before strangers nor before our own folk, but rather each night, or from day to day, in our chamber, to remind you of the unseemly or foolish things done in the day or days past, and chastise you, if it pleased me, and then you would strive to amend yourself according to my teaching and correction, and to serve my will in all things, as you said.[2]

As a matter of fact, the first example he gives in the section on the duty of a wife to be humble and obedient to her husband is the tale of Griselda.

He begins the section with a list of four particulars. The first particular, he says, is that the wife is to be obedient to her husband,

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[1] The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, ed. Thomas Wright (Early English Text Society, Original Series, vol. 33; London, 1868), p. 25.

[2] The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris), tr. Eileen Power (George Poutledge & Sons, London: 1928), p. 41.

"and to his commandments whatsoe'er they be, whether they be made in earnest or in jest, or whether they be orders to do strange things . . ."[1] Also the wife is to do everything as she feels her husband would wish it done. Third, she is to take care not to do anything her husband forbids, "whether he forbid. . . in jest or in earnest . . . ."[2] The fourth particular is that the wife is to refrain from answering back her husband and contradicting him.

The Ménagier than proceeds to tell the story of Griselda at some length after which he draws a moral. His conclusion is illuminating in view of the many strictures laid on the tale as told by Chaucer on the ground of its complete monstrosity:

> Dear sister, this story was translated by master Francis Petrarch, crowned poet at Rome, in no wise only to move good ladies to be patient in the tribulations that they suffer from their husbands for the love of those same husbands alone, but 'twas translated to show that since God and the church and reason will that they have much to suffer, and since to escape worse things it behoves them of need to submit them in all things to the will of their husbands and to suffer patiently all that those husbands will, and since again and natheless these good ladies ought to bide and be silent concerning them and notwithstanding appease them and recall them and ever with good cheer bring themselves nigh again to grace and love of those husbands that be mortal, by how much the greater reason behoveth it for men and women to suffer patiently the tribulations which God, who is immortal, eternal and everlasting, sendeth. . . . ever ought we to suffer patiently and return, join and recall ourselves lovingly and beseechingly to the love of the immortal ruler . . . by the example of this poor woman . . . .[3]

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[1] Goodman of Paris, p. 110 [2] Ibid., p. 111.

[3] Ibid., pp. 136-37.

This is not the whole story of the Ménagier's attitude to the tale. He manifests both of what, as Sledd and others have mentioned, have been from the beginning the two very different reactions of readers of the story. As Sledd observes,

> Some readers have been moved to compassion and wonder, others to contempt and disbelief, and for some generations now, the contemptuous and the skeptical have outnumbered the compassionate admirers.[1]

Although the Ménagier can draw a moral from the story for his young wife, that he is uneasy about the story he quickly admits:

> . . . excuse me if the story telleth of cruelty too great (to my mind) and above reason. And wot you that it never befel so, but thus the tale runs, and I may neither correct it nor make another, for a wiser than I compiled and told it.[2]

As Sledd wisely points out,[3] despite many modern feelings of revulsion the fact remains that many authors since Boccaccio and Petrarch have found the tale worth telling and many more readers have found the tale worth reading. It may be that modern readers have no taste for it for the same reason that they have no taste for reading over saints' lives -- for much in the tale seems to demonstrate its kinship with that type. Not the least important is the relating of the tale to the story of Job.

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[1] James Sledd, "The Clerk's Tale: The Monsters and the Critics," MP, v. 51 (1953), p. 73.

[2] Goodman of Paris, pp. 137-38.

[3] Sledd, pp. 73-74.

There are numerous general parallels between the stories of Job and of Griselda to begin with. Each is the story of the testing of an individual by taking away all that that individual has. Job is reduced to poverty, and death takes his seven sons and three daughters; Griselda is also reduced to poverty and death apparently takes her son and daughter. After surviving all of the tests, each is returned to wealth. Griselda gets back her son and daughter, the latter the most beautiful in all the land; Job gets again the same number of children he has lost -- seven sons and three daughters, the latter the most beautiful in all the land. After all the trials of the stories, each ends his life in great peace and contentment.

The author specifically draws this parallel at the end of Part V:

> Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblesse,
> As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,
> Namely of men, but as in soothfastnesse,
> Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,
> Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite
> As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe
> As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.
> (E. 932-38)

This is an addition to the tale by Chaucer and an important passage, both for the light it sheds on the import of this tale and on his usual handling of the women in his works. For the light it casts on his work generally, it must be considered in the last chapter; for this tale, the comparison of Griselda and Job helps to emphasize the religious, ethical import of the tale and its relation to saints' lives. This is not an isolated passage, however; it could not be and be of much effect in so long a tale.

Another passage is a direct echo of the Book of Job. Griselda has been ordered away by Walter.

> "Naked out of my fadres hous," quod she,
> "I cam, and naked moot I turned agayn."
> (E. 871-72)

This should have reminded the Clerk's listeners immediately of Job i. 21:

> "Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

If Griselda is, as some readers have said, a 'monster' of virtue -- and she does refuse even to talk about her afflictions, quite unlike Job -- her tale is yet very deliberately made to parallel his.

In regard to this charge that Griselda is a 'monster' and unreal, the answer may be given that Chaucer's readers knew no human could have anything approximating such strength without the grace of God. This is so evident to the author that he alludes to the action of the grace of God in introducing her and never again throughout the telling of the tale.

> Amonges thise povre folk dwelte a man
> Which that was holden povrest of hem alle;
> But hye God somtyme senden kan
> His grace into a litel oxes stalle . . . .
> (E. 204-7)

We are not far from this passage when we find that it is in fact in "an oxes stalle" that she meets Walter:

> The marky cam, and gan hire for to calle;
> And she set doun hir water pot anon,

> Biside the thresshfold, in an oxes stalle,
> And doun upon hir knes she gan to falle,
> And with sad contenance kneleth stille,
> Til she had herd what was the lordes wille.
> (E. 289-94)

Although Chaucer probably was not familiar with the earlier, fairy-tale form of the tale in which Walter is specifically a divine visitant, the ambiguous nature of Griselda's kneeling and waiting to know "the lordes wille," with the fact that it is in "an oxes stalle" where he has earlier said God sometimes sends his grace, indicates he is not unaware of the possibility of such a role for Walter. Underlining this awareness is the inescapable echo of the Mass in Griselda's reply to Walter's proposal:

> She seyde, "Lord, undigne and unworthy
> Am I to thilke honour that ye me beede,
> But as ye wole youreself, right so wol I.
> (E. 359-61)

Surely the Clerk's listeners would have been reminded of the passage from the taking of the Eucharist:

> "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter beneath my roof, but say only the word, and my soul will be healed."

The religious nature of the tale is displayed throughout the tale, most insistently at the end of it:

> This storie is seyd, nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in hymylitee,
> For it were importable, though they wolde;
> But for that every wight, in his degree,
> Sholde be constant in adversitee
> As was Grisilde . . . .
> (E. 1142-47)

The tale, then is partly an exemplum of the proper stance of man in the face of adversity, just as Job's story was and as saints' lives in general are. But the role of the woman in a marriage is also an important theme in the tale.

In keeping with its role as both a kind of saint's life and as an exemplum for wives, the Clerk's Tale heightens, as Severs has pointed out, the cruelty of Walter. Severs says of the result of Chaucer's practice in this regard,

> By adding half-a-dozen passages, ranging in length from a few lines to a stanza or more, he heightens throughout the gentle submissiveness and meek obedience of Griselda. [1]

The limits of ideal wifely patience and humility are depicted in the Clerk's Tale. It is right that Griselda be rejected as unreal but such a rejection is irrelevant; she is the religious, ethical ideal. Even Job could complain and wish to be dead; Griselda's forbearance is inhuman -- or rather it is superhuman, a result of the action of grace. The Clerk is not so sanguine as to believe that his tale will create any Griseldas; his ironic envoy dispels any such notion. But a representation of an ideal must either be explicit or implicit in an exemplum. Saints' lives are not told in the hope of creating new saints but to establish ideals for frail humans to attempt to follow. And if there is in the Clerk's Tale a religious level on which perfect humility and obedience to God

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[1] J. Burke Severs, "The Clerk's Tale," Sources and Analogues, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, (Univ. of Chicago, 1941), p. 290.

are the ideals, there is also the temporal level on which the same humility and obedience to the husband are the ideals for the wife.

This placing together of the duty of the woman to God and her husband was not unusual. On the contrary, the manuals of instruction for women of this time made much of the relationship between a woman's religious and wifely duties, as when the Knight of La Tour-Landry casually places the two duties in conjunction in alluding to St. Elizabeth:

> She serued furst God, and after her husbonde, and loued and dradde hym. And yef there hadde ani thinge befalle withinne hys hous that shulde haue turned her vnto his displesaunce, she wolde amende it, or kepe it secrete vnto the tyme that it were amended, in such wise that her husbonde fonde neuer occasion of displesaunce; for she was so good, so well auised, and of so noble attemperaunce, that she kepte her husbonde in Ioye and pees, and oute of wrathe. And so aught euery good woman to do in the same wyse as this holy woman, that louithe and dredithe God, and bare faithe and honoure vnto her husbond. [1]

As the wife's duty to her husband could, in these manuals of feminine instruction, become a part of a woman's duty as a Christian, it is not surprising to see the story of a woman of perfect wifely obedience and humility such as the Clerk's Tale operating within a religious context.

In fact, as Sledd points out,

> By the introduction of Christian assumptions, the initial framework of largely secular values and probabilities is thus gradually extended. If the prototype of Walter had superhuman power in the folk tale, the Griselda of Chaucer's version enjoys the grace of God; and at her marriage, the power of divinely favored virtue is immediately manifested. [2]

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[1] Knight of La Tour-Landry, p. 131.

[2] Sledd, p. 80.

Before her marriage, Griselda is beautiful and virtuous, a model of filial devotion and industry. After her marriage, she grows so much in virtue and the graces which belong to a woman of noble class that she seems transformed.

> To every wight she woxen is so deere
> And worshipful that folk ther she was bore,
> And from hire birthe knewe hire yeer by yeere,
> Unnethe trowed they, -- but dorste han swore --
> That to Janicle, of which I spak bifore,
> She doghter were, for, as by conjecture,
> Hem thoughte she was another creature.
> (E. 400-6)

After her marriage grace has been given Griselda to be a far greater person than she was before marriage, although even then Walter commends

> in his herte hir wommanhede
> And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight
> Of so yonge age, as wel in chiere as dede.
> (E. 239-41)

Accepting the fact of her trials which follows, the reader cannot be surprised at her endurance but can only feel a "compassionate wonder."[1]

Sledd makes the salutary point that the storyteller must be granted the moral premise of his story if he is to hope even to begin.

> For the purposes of the Clerk's Tale wifely obedience to husband, lord, and benefactor is explicitly set up as a good, and in accordance with the medieval tradition of exalting a single virtue in its essence, other signs of Griselda's goodness are not much needed.[2]

This focussing on a single virtue to the exclusion of others is quite often the case in a saint's life and the fixed epithet so often applied to the

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[1] Ibid., p. 82. Sledd, p. 78.

heroine -- "patient" Griselda -- indicates the justice of the point which Sledd makes. However, the author is at some pains in the beginning of the tale to provide her with a number of other virtues.

Are some women inclined to lecherous thoughts and to drink too much and work too little? Not Griselda.

> No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne.
> Wel ofter of the welle than of the tonne
> She drank, and for she wolde vertu plese,
> She knew wel labour, but noon ydel ese.
> (E. 214-17)

She practices thrift and honors her father also.

> And whan she homward cam, she wolde brynge
> Wortes or othere herbes tymes ofte,
> The whiche she shredde and seeth for hir lyvynge,
> And made hir bed ful hard and nothyng softe;
> And ay she kepte hir fadres lyf on-lofte
> With everich obeisaunce and diligence
> That child may doon to fadres reverence.
> (E. 225-31)

It is both her "wommanhede, / And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight" which first attract Walter.

In fact a key to understanding the tale lies in the comparison of Griselda to Job. She is not only a saint but a saint who represents her sex. The Clerk answers those of his profession who in the past have treated women so badly. Against his ironic envoy must be set this comparison of Griselda to Job:

> Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblesse,
> As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,
> Namely of men, but as in soothfastenesse,
> Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,

> Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite
> As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe
> As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.
> (E. 932-38)

Just as Mary was said by a very few clerks to have redeemed her sex from the blame of Eve's part in the Fall, so the Clerk in this tale implicitly makes the comparison of his heroine with Job and the comparison is all in her favor. His view is not just this simple, of course. Besides the depiction of a woman who is a model of both wifely and Christian devotion, there is in this tale the Envoy.

Despite Kittredge's assertion about the dramatic nature of the tale itself, the Clerk's Tale seems detached from any object of debate until the end. Indeed, as the passage just quoted shows, the Clerk's intent is to defend the opposite sex, just as the wife intended. That his defense is infinitely more effective than hers his envoy reminds us. There are only two or three Griselda's in any town, he says, implying that Archwives like the Wife of Bath are responsible.

> For which heere, for the Wyves love of Bathe --
> Whos lyf and al hire secte God mayntene
> In heighe maistrie, and elles were it scathe --
> I wol with lusty herte, fressh and grene,
> Seyn yow a song to glade yow, I wene;
> And lat us stynte to ernestful matere.
> (E. 1170-75)

Although the Clerk says that in his song he will "stynte of ernestful matere," his envoy draws an ironic parallel between Griselda and the Wife of Bathe and "al hire secte." No modern husband should try his wife hoping to find her another Griselda, "for in certein he shal faille." The

ironic advice to wives has a two-fold purpose. First, it serves to thrust at the Wife of Bath by carrying her doctrines to their logical extremes.

> Ye archewyves, stondeth at defense,
> Syn ye be strong as is a greet camaille;
> Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offense.
> And sklendre wyves, fieble as in bataille,
> Beth agre as is a tygre yond in Ynde;
> Ay clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille.
> (E. 1195-1200)

The similes in the advice give away the Clerk's second, related purpose. Griselda has just exhibited the most ideal kind of human behavior. In contrast to this, the Clerk advises women to be like animals, a camel, a tiger, or like a mill, always chattering. Far from being an excrescence, as some have called it, the envoy serves to bind a tale written before the Marriage Group within it. The ideals in the tale are still ideals and the Clerk still holds to them, but in replying to the Wife of Bath it will not do to remain on the level of the ideal. He has learned this lesson from her detailed and vigourous attack on his fellow clerks and the entire clerical tradition in her prologue.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue divides itself naturally into two parts, with the Pardoner's interruption marking the end of the first part and the beginning of the second.[1] Although some have argued

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[1] This is a point made by R. F. Jones in "A Conjecture on the Wife of Bath's Prologue," JEGP, v. 24 (1925), pp. 512-47. Pratt convincingly demonstrates that in some ways the second part is divided into the story of the three old husbands and that of the last two in "The Development of the Wife of Bath," Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Albert Croll Baugh, ed. MacEdward Leach (Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1961), pp. 45-79. Although I am much indebted to this study, I feel that the second part is of a piece, though perhaps written at different times.

otherwise, the first part of the Wife's prologue seems to have been designed as a reply to something which went, or was to go, before. Some have suggested that she begins in answer to the Nun's Priest's Tale which was to be placed just before the Wife's prologue and which presents a tale of Pertelote's feminine common sense overthrown by event, in contrast to the soundness of the doctrines of the authorities which Chauntecleer cites. Pratt says, in line with this argument, that the beginning of the Wife's prologue

> sounds as if the subject of marriage were already under discussion, and in a number of passages appears to have been written expressly to counter certain satirical thrusts in the Nuns' Priest's Tale. The Nuns' Priest satirizes women, wives, and married life, and makes fun of a rooster for taking a woman's advice. In her 'sermon' Alice of Bath defends 'wyves' and 'wyfhod' and marriage. [1]

It is impossible to say with certainty now -- though studies like Pratt's indicate that the probability is strong -- that it was the Nun's Priest's Tale, or another tale, or even one which Chaucer planned to write and did not, to which the Wife's reply is directed. At any rate, the argumentative tone which she adopts from the beginning --

> "Experience, though noon auctoritee
> Were in this world, is right ynough for me
> To speke of wo that is in mariage. . . .
> (D. 1-3)

-- and maintains throughout the first part seems to indicate the kind of dramatic interplay to be found elsewhere in the Tales.

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[1] Pratt, p. 62.

Whether or not it was a clerk who was meant to have provoked this reaction -- and the Nun's Priest would serve the purpose -- the Wife's quarrel is not so much with an individual as with the whole clerical tradition of feminist theory. Because this is true, she directs herself to the most famous antifeminist tract of all, Jerome's Epistle Against Jovinian. In an all-out attack, the wife chooses the side of the heretic, as Pratt notes:

> The Wife of Bath has been praised, in our time, for the modernity of her defense; but the modernist in this controversy is the fourth-century heretic Jovinian who, flying in the faces of St. Paul and monasticism, declared that virginity and marriage are equally worthy in the sight of God, and favored a married clergy.[1]

In the mouth of Alice of Bath is put an explicit defense of a "this-worldliness" which was usually only implicitly opposed to what Lovejoy has called the 'official' ideal of "otherworldliness."[2] The first part of her prologue is an aggressive attempt to assert the rights of the natural impulse to reproduce and seek pleasure against the extranatural ideals of virginity and asceticism.

> God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;
> That gentil text kan I wel understonde.
> (D. 28-29)

That Marriage is a positive good and not just a lesser evil she aggressively states:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

[2] Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Harvard Univ., 1936), pp. 25-26.

Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!
Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal.
(D. 44-45)

If this is true, it might be objected, she has no reason to begin her prologue with an assertion of her ability, because of her experience, "To speke of wo that is in mariage." (D. 3) Alice is replying to the theorizing of the celibate "auctoritees" with the weight of her very considerable experience in marriage. She has been told lately that Christ counseled by example that people should wed only once. And if this were not enough, a cleric has just been applying abstract "auctoritee" to the subject she knows best. She is quite willing to admit that there is woe in marriage -- who should know better than she, who has dealt so much of it? But these clerks have too long had the stage on this subject while the real experts such as Alice of Bath have been ignored. Now, just at the time that she is looking for another husband, one clerk has told her that she should only have married once and another has just finished telling some tale at a woman's expense.

Alice first throws Solomon in the faces of the clerks. There is in this example, however, a double impact which is evident throughout her prologue. Her prologue is simultaneously a defense of herself, her point of view and her sex, and a more damning indictment of all these than any clerk could have managed. The Wife attempts to use the example of Solomon to support her own practice:

God woot, this noble kyng, as to my wit,
The firste nyght had many a myrie fit

> With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve.
> Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!
> (D. 41-44)

Jerome and others, however, had long put Solomon in a trio of great men brought low by women:

> Who was strenger that Sampson, wyser that Salomon, holyer that David? And yit thei were al overcomen by the queyntise and whiles of women. [1]

The rest of her prologue works in much the same way. By echoing the most famous antifeminist tract of all in her defense, and by revealing that in her case there is a basis for much of the abuse heaped on women, the wife supports clerkish "auctoritee" at the same time she is so vigorously opposing to it her own "experience."

These first 163 lines manage to concisely summarize the main points of the long discussion of perfection and fecundity, virginity and marriage. This portion of the Wife's prologue could have been profitably discussed in the last chapter, had this not done violence to the rest of the prologue, and indeed these lines, in some form, may at one time have been designed to introduce the Shipman's Tale.

The Wife brings forth enough evidence to support her side to have made Jovinian proud of her. First, she brings forward examples of Old Testament polygamists, Solomon, Abraham, and Jacob. Next, she recounts Paul's pronouncements on the subject of marriage in

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[1] Quoted in G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1933), p. 385.

I Corinthians and reminds her listeners that virginity is not a commandment of God but only a counsel of Paul. She accepts the gradation which tradition allotted to virginity, chaste widowhood, and marriage, using Jerome's metaphor of vessels of wood, of silver, and of gold. But, accepting this, she refuses to be shamed by the comparison.

> For wel ye knowe a lord in his houshold
> He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
> Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.
> God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,
> And everich hath of God a propre yifte,
> Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.
> (D. 99-104)

Part of the appeal of this part of the Wife of Bath's prologue is this forthright answering of all the clerkish clichés concerning marriage and her determined assertion of the worth of the married state. In an age when a staple feature of pulpit literature was the chastisement of women, the Wife's listeners must have felt a sneaking admiration for her vigorous rebuttal.

Even before the end of this first part, however, the Wife begins to shift from the subject of virginity and marriage and the number of times she is allowed to marry to an account of her experiences in marriage and an assertion and defense of her theory concerning the proper roles of men and women:

> An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette,
> Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
> And have his tribulacion withal
> Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
> (D. 154-57)

Marriage is to be a purgatory for the man who marries Alice. Here is a religious function of marriage for these clerks to think about!

After the Pardoner's interruption, the Wife begins to recount her experiences.

> I shal seye sooth, the housbondes that I hadde,
> As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.
> (D. 195-96)

She soon shows why she calls the three old husbands 'good.' They gave her their riches and gave themselves up to her governance.

> I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,
> That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe
> To brynge me gaye thynges from the fayre.
> (D. 219-21)

She uses the story of how she gained the upper hand as an exemplum for wives. Here again she uses antifeminist literature for a different purpose from that of the clerks. Her account of the way she railed at her husbands is taken directly from Theophrastus's passage quoted in Jerome's epistle Against Jovinian. Alice says,

> A wys wyf shal, if that she kan hir good,
> Bere hym on honde that the cow is wood,
> And take witnesse of hir owene mayde
> Of hir assent; but herkneth how I sayde:
> 'Sir olde kaynard, is this thyn array?
> Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?
> She is honoured over al ther she gooth;
> I sitte at hoom, I have no thrifty clooth.
> What dostow at my neighebores hous?
> Is she so fair? artow so amorous?
> (D. 231-40)

This is directly from Theophrastus:

> Matrons want many things, costly dresses, gold, jewels, great outlay, maid-servants, all kinds of furniture, litters and gilded coaches. Then come curtain-lectures the livelong night: she complains that one lady goes out better dressed than she: that another is looked up to by all: 'I am a poor despised nobody at the ladies' assemblies.' 'Why did you ogle that creature next door?'[1]

It will be noticed, however, that whereas Theophrastus has assumed that all of these 'curtain-lectures' are delivered in earnest, the Wife reveals that they are delivered for reasons of policy.

> O Lord! the peyne I dide hem and the wo,
> Ful giltelees, by Goddes sweete pyne!
> For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.
> I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,
> Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.
> Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;
> I pleyned first, so was oure werre ystynt.
> (D. 384-90)

The Wife's prologue, especially this part of it, is among other things a compendium of the most famous charges made against women. In her account of the way she railed against her three old husbands, she summarizes the substance of the passage of Theophrastus quoted in Jerome's epistle. Next, much is taken from the passage of the Miroir de Mariage in which Deschamps reworked this passage. Of this part of the prologue, Pratt says it shows signs of being written at a different time from the first part.

> In the Miroir the old woman was presented as addicted to Pilgrimages and punctilious about precedence at offerings; hence it may have been at this time that Chaucer's figure (that is, the portrait of the Wife

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[1] Jerome, Against Jovinianus, trans. W. H. Freemantle ("Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," Second Series, No. 6), p. 383.

> in the General Prologue) took on these characteristics. In the Miroir, too, is the delicate touch of the widow who buries her husband inexpensively and at his funeral has an eye out for his successor -- motifs by means of which Chaucer was to fuse the adventures of husbands four and five. [1]

Pratt's argument that the account of the last two husbands is different in tone from that of the first three and was probably written at a different time is persuasive. There seems, however, at least a dramatic unity in all that follows the Pardoner's interruption.

Most obviously, there is the reference to the unspecified husband of the first three who is suspicious of her friendship with "oure apprentice, Janekyn." Alice exlaims,

> I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed tomorwe!
> (D. 307)

This helps to prepare for the scene at the funeral of her fourth husband when in her bereaved state she notices the legs of "Jankyn, oure clerk":

> As help me God! whan that I saugh hym go
> After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
> Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
> That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.
> (D. 596-99)

As evidence of Alice's constant and incorrigible nature, this reference to the two Jankyn's serves to tie the narrative of the first three husbands to that of the last two.

Also, and much more importantly, the unity of this last part of the Wife's prologue lies in the bearing the story of her marriages has

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[1] Pratt, p. 57.

on her doctrine of sovereignty, to which the tale which follows is addressed, and also this unity lies in her character -- in the ambiguous nature of her relation to the three "goode" husbands and to the two "badde" ones.

Alice says that the first three husbands -- old, rich, and uxorious -- were the "goode" ones, and indeed it is easy to perceive the zest with which she engaged in her contests with them for mastery. But they are undifferentiated in her mind. The long speech which she gives as an example of the way a woman should talk to her husband is addressed to an unspecified one who represents all three. Her memories of them are humorous:

> As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
> How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!
> (D. 201-2)

But she has no fond and tender memories of them to make one stand out from the rest. In fact, though they would seem to fulfill her requirements of a husband, who is to be rich and liberal and wise enough to relinquish sovereignty, she says,

> They loved me so wel, by God above,
> That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!
> (D. 207-8)

This should be compared with her account of Jankyn, the second of her two "badde" husbands:

> I trowe I loved hym best, for that he
> Was of his love daungerous to me.
> (D. 513-14)

Here as elsewhere in the Wife's prologue, contrast and paradox work to present Alice of Bath as a more complex character than she seemed at first glance.

The old husbands were the good ones, yet she did not love them.

> And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit;
> That made me that evere I wolde hem chide.
> (D. 418-19)

She got from them their wealth, in keeping with her philosophy of the relations of the sexes (echoing La Vieille in the Roman de la Rose):

> Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
> With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
> (D. 414-15)

But her "selling" is the most vivid memory she has of them -- and the kindest. She gives away the reason for this in her account of her fifth husband, Jankyn, who was both the worst and best of her husbands:

> We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
> In this matere a queynte fantasye;
> Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
> Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.
> Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
> Preese on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.
> With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;
> Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,
> And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:
> This knoweth every womman that is wys.
> (D. 515-24)

This is an important passage. In it the Wife gives away more than she realizes. She said before her account of the way she treated the old husbands that she was addressing "wise wyves, that kan understonde." (D. 225) In this passage, however, she admits that "every

womman that is wys" knows something else, and this something else puts her story about the way she gained mastery of the old husbands in a different light. She was not satisfied until she gained sovereignty, but once she had it she was not satisfied with it. Dramatically the account of the first three husbands prepares for the resolution which is approached in the fourth marriage and attained in the fifth, a resolution to be echoed to some extent in the tale which follows it.

In the fourth husband, Alice almost meets her match. Unlike the first three husbands he is young. He is also like her in other ways than age:

> My fourth housbonde was a revelour;
> This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour,
> And I was yong and ful of ragerye,
> Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.
> (D. 453-56)

The tables are starting to be turned on her. In her other marriages the husbands were old and easily led. This one is almost a match for her -- enough so to give him a place as an individual in her remembrance. As she had played false with her other husbands, he is playing false with her; for the first time she is truly bothered. Until now she has merely used jealousy as a cover for her own activities:

> I swoor that al my walkynge out be nyghte
> Was for t'espye wenches that he dighte;
> Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.
> (D. 397-99)

Now, however, her jealousy is real:

I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit
That he of any oother had delit.
(D. 481-82)

Nevertheless, in the end this husband is no match for her either. She is his purgatory as she was that of the first three, for which reason, she says,

For which I hope his soul be in glorie.
(D. 490)

This is a hope she has not expressed about the other husbands, and indeed her memory of him expresses a tenderness not manifested in her prior account:

Lat hym fare wel, God yeve his soul reste!
He is now in his grave and in his cheste.
(D. 501-2)

Nevertheless, the account of his funeral shows that his memory is not so dear as to interfere with her commercial and amatory instincts. His funeral was quite inexpensive; it would have been wasteful to have had an expensive one. And it was at the modest funeral of the fourth husband that she noticed Jankyn's legs.

For the first time, the positions are reversed for Alice. Now she is older than the husband -- forty to his twenty. And more than this is different from the first marriages:

What sholde I seye? but, at the monthes ende,
This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,
Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee;
And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
That evere was me yeven therbifoore.
But afterward repented me ful soore.
(D. 627-32)

This last might have been the utterance of one of Alice's old husbands. Just as they gave up their wealth to her, she has given up hers to Jankyn. And just as even that action did not buy peace for the old husbands, she is subjected to nightly readings from anti-feminist literature. Here is reason enough for her great familiarity with Jerome's epistle Against Jovinian. She has heard it often.

> 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 . . . .
> (D. 669-75)

Little wonder that she should come to take the side of Jovinian.

Retribution has come to Alice for all the woe she has dealt her former husbands.

> Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,
> The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?
> (D. 786-87)

But if she is in the plight of her former husbands, she is not the one to suffer passively. While she has admitted that she received her "lust," her likerousnesse" from Venus, she also added that Mars

> yaf me my sturdy hardinesse.
> (D. 612)

Her "hardinesse" finally aroused by his incessant reading from his anti-feminist collection, she tears three leaves from his book and throws them in the fire, receiving in return the blow on the ear which deafens it.

Alice says that Jankyn's remorse allowed her finally to gain the mastery which she has been accustomed to in her other marriages.

> He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
> To han the governance of hous and lond,
> And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
> And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
> (D. 813-16)

It seems at first glance that all has ended for her in this marriage as before. She had more difficulty in gaining mastery this time, perhaps, but now, she says, she is in control. There is, however, in what follows an expression of the paradox which is implicit in her account of three "goode" husbands who did not leave her with tender memories and the two "badde" ones who did.

> And whan that I hadde geten unto me,
> By maistrie, al the soverayntee,
> And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,
> Do as three lust the terme of al thy lyf;
> Keepthyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat' --
> After that day we hadden never debaat.
> God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
> As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
> And also trewe, and so was he to me,
> I prey to God, that sit in magestee,
> So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.
> (D. 817-27)

According to the doctrine expressed by the Wife in her account of her first three marriages, the old husbands should have been perfect. They gave her their wealth, their subservience, and the freedom to pursue her extramarital adventures. Yet she remembers those marriages with more laughter than joy; those husbands all merge in her memory. Her fourth husband gave her pain and jealousy before she subdued him

and should, by her theory, have been a bad husband. Yet she remembers him with tender words not given the first three. The fifth husband should have been the worst of all. Alice says that she is still reminded of him by the aching of her ribs; yet

> I trowe I loved hym best. . . .
> (D. 513)

In fact, her account of her experiences belies her doctrine. She has said "al is for to selle," yet she married her best husband "for love, and no richesse." She has advised wives to be shrewish with their husbands in order to gain mastery and to cover their infidelities; yet her fondest memory is of the period when she was true to her husband and

> as kynde
> As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde . . . .
> (D. 823-24)

It is not the Wife's experience that is at fault, but her interpretation of it. Instinctively she knows what she denies intellectually -- that marriage is best when there is none of the contention which she advises. The doctrine of sovereignty which she propounds in her tale is belied in her prologue. Jankyn was no more the sort to suffer passively than she, and she was careful never to provoke him again. This is the paradox of her prologue. Her worst husband was her best; the poorest and most quarrelsome was the best loved. She could only be happy with sovereignty when she was wise enough not to try to exercise it. It is the same kind of resolution, on another level, which Kittredge saw in the Franklin's Tale, at the end of his version of the Marriage

Group. It is also the same kind of resolution which is expressed in the tale which follows.

In comparing the heroine of the Wife's tale with the Wife herself, Kemp Malone ends the comparison by asserting

> . . . the greatest contrast of all comes at the end, when the lady, no longer loathly, yields to her husband the sovereignty she has just won and becomes an obedient wife the rest of her days. Not so the Wife of Bath! There is no need to labour the point. The two women stand at opposite poles. [1]

On the contrary, the ending of the Wife's prologue and her tale seem so very similar as to warrant a great deal of discussion of the point. How are we to take the assignment of the tale to her, given the very deliberate manner in which the author has reassigned a tale which at first glance seems so much more in keeping with her personality? Professor Malone's answer does not seem convincing:

> That the Wife of Bath should tell a tale about a woman so different from herself is perhaps to be taken ironically. The Wife's prologue and her tale both have the same subject: sovereignty in marriage. It would be hard to imagine two treatments of this subject more different from each other. And the cream of the joke lies in the Wife's unawareness of this difference. Her epilogue shows us that she thinks she has fortified her position by her tale, whereas the tale itself shows us the contrary. [2]

Is the accord reached at the end of the Wife of Bath's Tale so different from that reached by Alice and Jankyn? We have seen that as soon as Jankyn gave up governance to her she became as kind to him

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[1] Kemp Malone, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," MLR, v. 57 (1962, p. 489.

[2] Ibid.

as any wife in the world. If we hear of no more conflicts with a young, hot-tempered one like Jankyn, almost a carbon copy of her own young self, it must surely be because she has wisely refrained from pushing this mastery very far. She learned in her fifth marriage what she could not know in her other four -- that contention for mastery is not so good as a concord in which there is no such striving. Jankyn's giving up sovereignty to her has not been followed by wanderings and infidelities and added trials as had been the case with the other husbands. Rather she became "kynde" and "trewe."

What is the ending of the Wife of Bath's Tale? Much the same. The knight gives up the mastery entirely into the hands of his loathly bride. Her answer echoes the end of the Wife's prologue.

> 'Kys me,' quod she, 'we be no lenger wrothe;
> For by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe,
> This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.
> I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,
> But I to you be also good and trewe
> As evere wyf, wyn that the world was newe.'
> (D. 1239-44)

Rather than part of a very different ending, these last lines sound strikingly like the words with which Alice closes her account of her fifth marriage:

> God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
> As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
> And also trewe, and so was he to me.
> (D. 823-25)

The Wife's prologue ends happily for the same reason her tale ends happily: no one is really employing mastery.

Why does the Wife remember Jankyn with an affection not felt for the three "goode" husbands and only partially for the other "badde" one? If sovereignty is what she really desires, the first three should have been the good ones indeed. Her mastery over them was the most complete and the most easily obtained. Her mastery over the fourth was more difficult to attain and apparently less complete, yet he is remembered with a prayer as she has not the first three:

> Lat hym fare wel, God yeve his soul reste!
> (D. 501)

Her greatest affection is reserved for the husband who was hardest of all to gain mastery of and for love of whom she ceased her former nagging, faithless ways. What has been the source of her happiness is not sovereignty but something else which is the subject of much discussion in her tale -- gentillesse.

It is the loathly bride's sermon on gentillesse which finally convinces the knight to give in to her. Her sermon takes the form of three broad arguments. The first is that he should not doubt her gentillesse simply because of her low lineage: gentillesse is not a matter of heritage.

> 'Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.
> Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace;
> It was no thyng biquethe us with oure place.'
> (D. 1162-64)

Secondly, it does not befit his own gentillesse to be hostile to her because of her poverty. Poverty is honest: Christ himself chose a life of poverty.

'And therfore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve,
Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.
(D. 1205-6)

Thirdly, she says, it befits his gentillesse to respect her for her age rather than despise her for it. Besides, age and ugliness are good guardians of chastity.

'But nathelees, syn I knowe youre delit,
I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.
Chese now,' quod she, 'oon of thise thynges tweye;
To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,
And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
And take youre aventure of the repair
That shal be to youre hous by caus of me,
Or in som oother place may wel be.'
(D. 1217-26)

The young knight, met with this dilemma, gives himself up to her guidance. This is the same dilemma which Theophrastus had posed:

> It is difficult to guard what many long for. It is annoying to have what no one thinks of possessing. [1]

Inevitably he perceives that the solution of the dilemma depends on the character of the wife. The antifeminists might have said that if it were left to her all was lost. But there is a solution. The wife will be both fair and "gentil." Although fair, she will spite Theophrastus and other antifeminists and be also "good and trewe." This is much akin to the solution of Alice's fifth marriage. It was not in her power to recapture the beauty of her youth, but once Jankyn has started to be

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[1] Jerome, "Against Jovinianus," p. 383.

gentil toward her, she also is to him both kind and true. Gentillesse is the solution in both her prologue and tale.

In his article on the Clerk's Tale, Donald Baker says of gentillesse and that tale,

> The premises of Chaucer's poem are closely linked with idea. For when young and volatile Walter is urged to marry, he clearly expresses his distrust of heredity, and announces his determination to marry one of true, not inherited gentillesse.[1]

As Baker points out, it is Griselda's gentillesse which attracts Walter and it is her gentillesse which he wishes to test. Like the loathly bride, the Clerk emphasizes the point that this gentillesse is the product of grace, which can come even "into a litel oxes stalle." (E. 207) Once he is satisfied, Walter finally decides to manifest his own gentillesse toward his wife.

Professor Malone warns about the Clerk's Tale,

> The Clerk's Tale is not concerned, at bottom, with the problems of married life, but with the human predicament as a whole, and the moral to be drawn from it is that we mortals should take life as it comes and bear our misfortunes in patience, secure in the knowledge that God knows best.[2]

Indeed, as Professor Malone points out, this is the first moral which the Clerk draws from it. There is, however, the ironic Envoy, which draws a second, ironic moral. And that second moral, however ironic, points the tale at marriage and the Wife of Bath.

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[1]Donald C. Baker, "Chaucer's Clerk and the Wife of Bath on the Subject of Gentillesse," SP, V. 59 (1962), pp. 633-34.

[2]Malone, p. 490.

Because the advice in the envoy is ironic, the opposite ideal of conduct may be drawn from it. Do not be humble, it advises wives. Be always talking, nagging, fighting with your husbands. Do your husbands no reverence, and also,

> Be ay of chiere as light as leef on lynde,
> And lat hym care, and wepe, and wrynge, and waille!
> (E. 1211-12)

The opposite of all this fits well with the gentil conduct manifested in all three -- the prologue of the Wife, her tale, and the tale which the Clerk has just told.

In putting himself in the governance of his bride, the knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale tells her,

> 'My lady and my love, and my wyf so deere,
> I put me in youre wise governance. . . .'
> (D. 1230-31)

Courtly theory said that no one could love his marriage partner; no woman could be both wife and love-object of the husband. But the lie is given to this in all three works (and also in others, as Kittredge saw in the Franklin's Tale).

It is only in theory that the Wife and the Clerk are opposed. In fact, he does not follow traditional clerkish antifeminism, as proven by his comparison of Job and Griselda to the advantage of the latter, for, he says,

> Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,
> Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite
> As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe

As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.
(E. 935-38)

And in fact, the Wife does not desire strife and governance and infidelities nearly so much as she desires this same gentillesse in marriage, as shown by her tale and by the happy outcome of her fifth marriage:

God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
And also trewe, and so was he to me.
I prey to God, that sit in magestee,
So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.
(D. 823-27)

CHAPTER XV

CHAUCER AND HIS WOMEN

> There is no need for us . . . to labour the point that here we are concerned with another literary conceit that springs direct from preachers. To the vast mass of the middle and lower orders, for whom no romantic minstrelsy had provided a chivalrous ideal, the pulpit, their one oracle of learning and refinement, presented a picture of womanhood, ill-balanced, indeed, but sufficiently realistic and lively to appeal to the lay mind. Thus early there grew up in popular verse a traditional satire, half-comic, half-tragic, from which neither the greatest of medieval English poets nor the greatest of all our dramatists could escape in their day. . . [1]

The philosophical tradition of the Middle Ages was a dualistic realism. Huizinga observes of the competing system,

> Undoubtedly there were also nominalists. But it does not seem too bold to affirm that radical nominalism has never been anything but a reaction, an opposition, a countercurrent vainly disputing the ground with the fundamental tendencies of the medieval spirit. [2]

Although this may go too far if it is meant to include the humanists and some of the theologians of the late Middle Ages, it seems basically

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[1] G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge University, 1933), p. 377.

[2] J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (repr. Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., New York: 1954), p. 204.

sound as a description of the relative positions of realism and nominalism.

This realism, from Plato ultimately but transformed by Neoplatonism, had inherent within it the grounds for the dualism of thought in the Middle Ages. What is not of the spirit is of matter, says this dualism. Reality is not here, in this world; it is there, in the other one. This is the 'otherworldliness' of which Lovejoy speaks:

> the belief that both the genuinely 'real' and the truly good are radically antithetic in their essential characteristics to anything in man's natural life, in the ordinary course of human experience, however normal, however intelligent, and however fortunate. [1]

The spirit wishes to soar to that other world, but its attachment to matter, through the material body, weights it down.

But to be human is not only to be a thing of spirit but also to be subject to the demands of the flesh. So this dualism produced a dilemma for medieval Christians -- a dilemma of being in the flesh and in the world and of having a duty to renounce this world for the sake of the other. The dilemma manifested itself in many ways but in none more strongly than in the question of love and the relation of the sexes. Ascetic writers demanded sexual abstinence almost above all else.

Asceticism strives to suppress the physical senses, to turn from sensuous desires, and to live in the perpetual contemplation and service of the divine. To this end, ascetics have traditionally sought to

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[1] Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Harvard Univ., 1936), p. 25.

find physical refuge from the world. But such physical refuge is not necessarily a physiological refuge -- a refuge from the promptings of sexual desire. Given, then, the universal human trait of seeking to establish responsibility in others for one's trials and ills, it was only natural that some ascetic writers should turn from railling against sexual desire to railling against woman as the symbol and object of that sexual desire, as a temptress from the life of the spirit.

If Neoplatonism provided the philosophical justification for an asceticism which could be turned to antifeminism, Biblical examples were not wanting to provide scriptural authority for that antifeminism. The examples chosen at the first were the examples used by writers and preachers more than a thousand years later -- Eve, Bathsheba, Delilah (though Noah's wife came somewhat later).

Probably the ascetic tradition and its offspring, antifeminism, would have had great effect on the history of Christianity if St. Augustine had never lived. The fact is, however, that St. Augustine did live -- and write. His giant figure casts its shadow over most of the intellectual life of the following centuries, into the Reformation, and beyond. Three facts about Augustine's career have especial importance for the history of antifeminism. First, he decisively brought into medieval Christian religious thought the ascetic, dualist philosophy of Neoplatonism. Second, he guaranteed a permanent emphasis on Original Sin in that religious thought. And third, because of his extreme reaction

against his former life, he expressed a special horror of sexual indulgence and, as George Foote Moore says, "from that time forth 'concupiscence' was for him the prime and typical sin."[1] With St. Augustine, asceticism as an official ideal thoroughly and permanently entered the mainstream of Christian thought. With him a bias was confirmed in clerical writings to dwell less on the possibility and capacity for good in man than on Original Sin and man's unworthiness and incapacity. And with Augustine 'concupiscence' as the subject for constant revilement received the stamp of enormous authority. These three -- asceticism, Original Sin, and the horror of concupiscence -- became inextricably meshed, and with them the name of Eve. And with Eve, her entire sex.

The capacity of man for holding seemingly incompatible points of view simultaneously is manifest in the fact that beside this antifeminism and coexistent almost from the beginning in official Christian thought was the ideal of Mary, the second Eve, who was widely acknowledged to have made good all of the faults of the first Eve and was the glory of her sex. But the same man could and very often did praise Mary and revile her sex, acknowledge that she had redeemed the fault of the first Eve, and yet use the first Eve and not the second as the type of woman and the eternal reproach of her sex.

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[1] George Foote Moore, History of Religions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913 & 1919; repr. 1949), vol. II, p. 194.

Presenting a striking parallel to this state of affairs in the religious tradition is that in the literary tradition, where a courtly poet could honor his lady as semi-divine while calling the other members of her sex the tools of Satan. Both the clerical and literary tradition had established formal modes of satire on women; in fact, each tradition provided material for the other. On the other hand, both traditions had established formal modes for the elevation of a particular woman -- the Virgin and the lady of courtly love -- and here again each tradition was directly influenced by the other. Both the clerical writer and the secular writer could hold and express these two apparently antithetical attitudes of worship of a woman and condemnation of women.

Part of Chaucer's achievement is that he successfully brought into his art these traditions -- clerical and literary antifeminism, and clerical and literary idealization of woman -- there to exist together in a tension of opposing viewpoints. Part of Chaucer's irony is in these oppositions embodied in his work -- authority versus experience, the ideal versus the real, the satirical cliché which is both affirmed and proved inadequate by the living fact. Although it is impossible to describe finally what it is, except perhaps obliquely, one nevertheless feels that out of these countless oppositions and modifications of these ways of perceiving and thinking and speaking about the world, there emerges a statement which is none of these single

statements but is yet a product, through modification and opposition, of all of them. There is much else in Chaucer which has of necessity been left out of this study, but there are two tales (among others) in the Canterbury Tales which are deliberately set against each other and which involve in condensed fashion these same subjects of love, marriage, infidelity, gentillesse -- the relations of the sexes generally -- which we have been concerned with. Although Chaucer's canon is not finally to be summed up except by the whole of that canon, practical considerations demand some way of fixing on a less ambitious method of summation. Because of their richness and their tension of statement and counterstatement, the Merchant's Tale and the Franklin's Tale will bring this study to a close.

In keeping with his insistence on the dramatic character of the linked Tales -- especially in the Marriage Group -- Kittredge insisted on a reading of the Merchant's Tale strictly as the bitter statement of a disillusioned man. In this way he was able to do something for the defense of its propriety as well as to see it as being appropriately assigned:

> In the Merchant's Tale, a cynical fabliau is expanded by discussion and comment into a savage satire on husbands and wives, from the point of view (be it always remembered) not of Geoffrey Chaucer, but of the disillusioned Merchant, who has been married but two months and is seeking solace in a pilgrimage to St. Thomas. [1]

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[1] George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (London, 1915), pp. 25-26.

This is a view of the tale which has long held sway; however, as Robert M. Jordan has pointed out,[1] there is too much in this tale which cannot be taken as "savage satire" except by an inordinate effort of the will.

> The tale is less a unified presentation than a composite of several narrating attitudes and positions, often mutually contradictory.[2]

This contention of attitudes and points of view, so evident in much of the work of Chaucer already examined, is nowhere more evident than in the Merchant's Tale. The debate which takes up the first part of the tale proper concerning the various reasons for and against January's marrying is only the most obvious manifestation of the statement and counterstatement within the tale. If the final effect is primarily negative, we should remember that something similar to the problems in the tale is presented in the Franklin's Tale, and the resolution of that tale is essentially positive. This opposition of attitudes functions not only within the tales but also between them, as we saw, for example, in the tales of the first day. In fact, there is not only a link between the Merchant's Tale and a tale which follows it, the Franklin's Tale, but also one with a tale which precedes it, the Clerk's Tale.

The Merchant bursts out at the end of the epilogue to the Clerk's Tale with an echo of the end of it:

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[1] Robert M. Jordan, "The Non-Dramatic Disunity of the 'Merchant's Tale,'" PMLA, V. 78 (1963), pp. 293-99.

[2] Ibid., p. 299.

'Wepyng and waylyng, care and oother sorwe
I know ynogh, on even and a-morwe,'
Quod the Marchant, 'and so doon other mo
That wedded been.'
(E. 1213-16)

This fits well enough with the Clerk's Tale which precedes it. Missing the point of the tale, the Merchant would be saying that he, a man, has also known trouble in marriage. No need for the Clerk to advise women to give their husbands care and sorrow; they know only too well how to do so.

This prologue, however, fits even better if it is taken as the Merchant's reply, after all this time, to the Wife of Bath. In such a reading, the Merchant has been prompted by the boasts of the Wife to brood over his own case. Her confession has only confirmed to be general what he has learned in his specific case in only two months. Her tale of what women desire most only confirms that his wife is no exception. The Clerk's Tale of Patient Griselda is meaningless to him as he broods over his own ills. It is the Clerk's envoy which finally jars him out of his reverie. The Clerk ironically advises wives to follow the doctrine of the Wife of Bath. At this, he loses his normally cautious manner and bursts out, not against the Clerk but against the Wife of Bath and her boasts about her practices with her own husbands.

In regard to the connection between the Merchant and the Wife of Bath, two analogues to it are interesting to consider, one from the Roman de la Rose and the other from the Decameron. Gunn's discussion

of the 'debate' in the Roman de la Rose[1] develops the idea that of the voices of experience, it is La Vieille who tells the woman's side and advocates ways to turn the tables on men and it is Le Jalous who gives the other side. La Vieille and Le Jalous have, of course, long been considered among the sources of the characterizations of the Wife of Bath and the Merchant. An analogue of the tale originally told by the Wife, the Shipman's Tale, begins the Eighth Day of the Decameron, the day on which all are to tell the tricks which have been played on women. Much of the narrative of La Vieille is of the tricks played on her in her youth by men, just such tricks as the one played in the Shipman's Tale. These tales of the Eighth Day are in answer to those told on the Seventh -- tales of the tricks women play on men. These tales of the Seventh Day are akin to the tale told by the Merchant of the duping of old January. It is far from proven that Chaucer ever saw any part of the Decameron; however, he need not have done so, for the point of the comparison is that however much we may be convinced by a study such as Jordan's of the inadequacy of a reading of the Merchant's Tale as consistently a dramatic utterance of the Merchant, there is still inherent drama in his characterization, as evidenced by such analogues as the debate in the Roman de la Rose and the answering tales in the Seventh and Eighth Days of the Decameron.

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[1] A. M. F. Gunn, The Mirror of Love. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1952.

The dramatic links with the Clerk's envoy are even more apparent. In his Envoy, the Clerk has ironically advised wives not to be like meek Griselda; rather, he has told them, be like Echo, who always answers back. The Merchant responds with a tale which is, among other things, the story of where women got the ability always to answer back.

> 'Ye shal?' quod Proserpyne, 'wol ye so?
> Now by my moodres sires soule I swere
> That I shal yeven hire suffisant answere,
> And alle wommen after, for hir sake . . . .'
> (E. 2264-67)

In his Envoy the Clerk advises wives,

> . . . sklandre wyves, fieble as in bataille
> Beth egre as is a tygre yond in Ynde;
> Ay clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille.
> (E. 1198-1200)

As another link with the Clerk's Envoy, the Merchant swears, in line 1230, "by Seint Thomas of Ynde." And the Merchant is swearing that husbands "lyven in sorwe and care" because their wives <u>are</u> as "egre" as Indian tigers.

As a last instance of the close integration of this tale with the Clerk's Envoy, there is the counsel of the Clerk to wives not to be afraid of their husbands:

> Ne dred hem nat, doth hem no reverence,
> For though thyn housbonde armen be in naille,
> The arwes of thy crabbed eloquence
> Shal perce his brest, and eek his aventaille.
> (E. 1201-4)

Here we have a link with the end of the <u>Merchant's Tale</u>; at that time May, using the gift of Proserpine, does indeed employ her "crabbed

eloquence" to turn the weight of blame back on January (just as Proserpine has just done against Pluto). These links are definitely in the tale and serve effectively to tie it to the Clerk's Tale. They are in varying degrees dramatic, also. Compared with the links of the tale with the Wife of Bath's Prologue, however, they are few and of secondary importance.

In the context of the tale, these links with the Wife of Bath's Prologue are hardly dramatic, for the very good reason that the figure of the Merchant as the teller of the tale is too seldom with us. If he remained in the tale throughout in his guise of uncontrollable anger and bitterness, as some critics have said, then these links would be as dramatic as Kittredge alleged. And the tale would lose most of its undeniable humor. On the other hand,

> Once the pervasive influence of a supposedly full and rich psychological characterization of the teller is revealed not to exist, we are able to respond in a more relaxed fashion to the humor of the tale, a humor that is sometimes subtle and ironic, sometimes exuberant and coarse.[1]

The Merchant's Tale seems not to have such a psychological or formal unity as many critics have said; it does not even have a unity of tone. Although the precise word to describe it is lacking, the unity of the Merchant's Tale seems rather a thematic unity, or a unity of interest. In the complex unity of this tale, the links with the Wife of Bath's Prologue are an integral part, but the part they play is not

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[1]Jordan, p. 293.

such as to make the tale a reply to her. The Merchant's Tale is a part of a continuing discussion of marriage and the relations of the sexes, but it is not a dramatic reply for the simple reason that the man who would be provoked to such a reply is seldom in evidence in the tale after the prologue. As Jordan says,

> . . . the tale as a whole is an extremely varied and discordant mixture of many of the voices which Chaucer habitually uses. Much of the difficulty of the tale is caused by this clashing of styles, no single one of which dominates the narration. [1]

This clashing of voices and styles in this tale, together with the counterpoised points of view so often to be found in Chaucer's poems, serves to make this perhaps the most reserved and enigmatic tale of all. Not only is attitude set against attitude, but also voice is poised against voice in one of the most detached of all of Chaucer's poems. Indeed, it is this very detachment which has occasioned such harsh words from critics as Holman's "savagely obscene, angrily embittered, pessimistic, and unsmiling." [2] Strong words indeed for a tale by Chaucer and words we need not accept as inclusive of the greater part of the tone of the tale. Rather it seems that the very great variety of shifting tones succeeds in producing a detachment so complete as to bother critics enough that they should deny it the name of detachment and call it harsher names.

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[1] Jordan, p. 296.

[2] C. Hugh Holman, "Courtly Love in the Merchant's and Franklin's Tales," ELH, v. 18 (1951), p. 242.

This detachment is evident from the very beginning. At the age of sixty, after years of enjoyment of the fruits of marriage out of wedlock, the "worthy knyght" begins to feel the desire to be married, and the narrator avows,

> Were it for hoolynesse or for dotage,
> I kan nat seye . . . .
> (E. 1253-54)

While this is ironic, it seems an anazingly detached irony for a man in the frenzied state in which the Merchant is said to be narrating. Here seems, rather, another appearance of a favorite persona of Chaucer, somewhat innocent or detached, who is at a loss to explain what is going on about him. January is not, of course, planning to marry for "hoolynesse." He gives his motive later:

> She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn;
> Oold fissh and yong flessh wolde I have ful fayn.
> (E. 1417-18)

But more important, January has now reached his sixtieth year, a great age in the Middle Ages and high time to be turning his eyes from things of the flesh to those of the spirit. Just as there is a time on the pilgrimage to Canterbury to renounce earthly vanities, there is a time in the pilgrimage of life to renounce them. Marriage was at best a secondary state; in an old man it was even more unseemly. Instead of becoming wise and continent in his old age (as is the ideal old man in the Pardoner's Tale, for example), January has become all the more foolish and goatish.

January rhapsodizes about marriage, explicitly connecting it with the image of the earthly paradise:

> 'Noon oother lyf,' seyd he, 'is worth a bene;
> For wedlock is so esy and so clene,
> That is this world it is a paradys.'
> Thus seyd this olde knyght, that was so wys.
> (E. 1263-66)

This is the first reference in the tale to the earthly paradise, a motif soon to be picked up and to be returned to again at the end of the story. January does not know what any man in the Middle Ages with any intelligence at all could not forget: man has lost his earthly paradise, and another one, in this life, is not available to him. And according to popular medieval theory, he lost it because of his 'wyf,' Eve. This is made more explicit later when Justinus answers January's raving that his wife will be his 'paradys terrestre' by pointing out that she may become his purgatory instead, an allusion not lost on those who remember the Wife of Bath's boasts about being a purgatory for her husbands. Here is proof of a kind of blindness which not even Pluto can sure -- January thinks to gain paradise without purgatory. If tribulation in this life were enough to insure paradise, he would indeed soon be on his way, for he is soon to have his 'purgatorie terrestre.'

After this brief preparation, the first part of the Merchant's Tale begins -- the mock encomium on marriage. The beginning fits well with Kittredge's description of the passage as bitter irony:

> To take a wyf it is a glorious thyng,
> And namely whan a man is oold and hoor . . . .
> (E. 1268-69)

But even dramatically, Chaucer's irony is hardly bitter or heavy-handed for long. Soon he is comparing the life of a husband with that of a bachelor in irony of quite another key:

> They lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,
> In libertee, and under noon arreest.
> Ther as a wedded man in his estaat
> Lyveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat,
> Under this yok of mariage ybounde.
> (E. 1281-85)

This use of a form of the image of binding in connection with marriage is paralleled elsewhere, as when the old knight prays to God

> to graunten him that he
> Mighte ones knowe of thilke blisful lyf
> That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf,
> And for to lyve under that hooly boond
> With which that first God man and womman bond.
> (E. 1258-62)

Here as elsewhere the reference to the first marriage is ambiguous. Man and woman were 'bound' in it by God, but the outcome of it in Original Sin could never have left the medieval consciousness. But here and throughout the encomium on marriage, Kittredge' characterization of the tone as one of bitter irony proves untenable. It seems hardly possible, as Jordan has pointed out, to read the entire 126 lines straight through and still keep the impression of a bitterly ironic man speaking:

> Try as we might to maintain a sense of an embittered husband pretending to praise matrimony -- and we must envision a remarkably poised and subtle raconteur -- the illusion disintegrates after twenty or thirty lines, about one-fifth of the way through the encomium . . . . The speaker before us at this point -- inconsistent though the

> fact may be -- is actually the familiar Chaucerian innocent, here engaged in a foolish and to us comical attempt to defend wedlock.[1]

To say that there is an inconsistency of tone in this passage and elsewhere in the tale, however, is not to take away from the art of the tale. In fact, paradoxical as it may seem, this very inconsistency is a feature of the art of the tale. There must be, first of all, enough sharpness at the beginning to give at least the impression of the Merchant's bitter voice. On the other hand, how unpalatable a tale this would be if that voice were always speaking. It is all in the refusal to take anyone or anything in the tale completely seriously. A January who was not comically deflated would be a heartless villain indeed, marrying a poor, innocent young girl like May. Except she is not really a poor, innocent young girl (the Wife of Bath says that deceit is given to women at their births). Young love thwarted in the tale would finally triumph if May's character were such as to cause it to be thwarted for a while, and if Damian were a little more high-minded. Just at the point when someone in the tale is on the point of gaining our sympathy, he does something which laughs it all away. January is almost poignant in his joy that May is supposedly bearing a child; then he embraces the tree to insure that no one can follow her up into it. May's plight in being married to January no sooner touches us than she is in the privy reading the note from Damian and vowing to love him forever. In shifting his

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[1] Robert M. Jordan, "Chaucer's Sense of Illusion: Roadside Drama Reconsidered," ELH, v. 29 (1962), pp. 28-29.

ground continually, Chaucer becomes ironical about his own irony.

Some of the same antifeminist material is made to support the comedy of the mock-encomium on marriage which we have encountered in the Wife of Bath's Prologue. First, that old favorite Theophrastus is brought in for eleven lines, to be followed by the ludicrously inadequate rebuttal of the comic persona who, as usual, damns his case in presenting it:

> But tale no kep of al swich vanytee;
> Deffie Theofraste and herke me.
> (E. 1309-10)

As if Theophrastus were not unlikely enough in an encomium on marriage, the narrator next brings in the example of Eve!

> The hye God, whan he hadde Adam naked,
> And saugh him al allone, bely-naked,
> God of his grete goodnesses seyde than,
> 'Lat us now make an helpe unto this man,
> Lyk to himself'; and thanne he made him Eve.
> (E. 1324-28)

These references to Adam and Eve not only function for the comedy here; at the end of the tale, after January has fashioned his version of an earthly paradise, May acts another Eve in connection with another tree.

Chaucer continues his list of good women with the example of Rebecca, who, as Tatlock observes,[1] is mentioned in good faith in the

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[1] J. S. P. Tatlock, "The Marriage Service in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," MLN, v. 32 (1917), pp. 373-4.

marriage ceremony but who also assisted her son Jacob in deceiving her sick old husband (just, it might be added, as May is to deceive hers). Next, there is a favorite name of the antifeminists, Judith. In keeping with his praise of these good wives, the narrator relates with approbation how Judith slew Holofernes while he slept. Another unlikely example of the advantages of marriage.

At the end of this mock encomium, the barest of transitions brings the reader back to the narrative, which turns out to lead to another long excursion from the story-line, the debate on marriage. The debate is doubly gratuitious, for January makes it plain from the outset that he is not really asking his friends whether he should marry; they have only to admire the wisdom of the plan.

> For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
> And that anoon in al the haste I kan.
> (E. 1405-6)

Not only is he determined to marry, but he is determined to have a young wife. These old widows know too much, he says to readers who cannot miss the relevance of this to the Wife of Bath:

> And eek thise olde wydwes, God it woot,
> They konnen so muchel craft on Wades boot,
> So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,
> That with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste.
> (E. 1423-26)

But the old man never does live in rest with his young bride either. May's case indicates the truth of the Wife's assertion that deception does not have to be learned by women because it is natural to them:

. . . al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;
Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
(D. 400-2)

The four reasons January gives for marrying are conservative and conform to Church doctrine; however, he is merely rationalizing, as he soon shows. If a man, he says,

ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,
Take hym a wif with greet devocioun. . . .
(E. 1446-47)

This is in keeping with Paul's admonition in I Corinthians; January's life of dedicated lechery until his old age (and even then) shows the spuriousness of attributing such a reason for marriage to him. Besides he has already said in telling his friends to find a young wife for him,

Oold fissh and yong glessh wolde I have ful fayn.
(E. 1418)

On the last reason for marrying, to live together 'in chastitee ful holily' (E. 1455), he hastily adds,

But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I.
For, God be thanked! I dar make avaunt,
I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt
To do all that a man bilongeth to . . . .
(E. 1456-59)

Here is another echo of the Wife of Bath's Prologue. When Alice is discussing virginity, she says that the counsel to live a life of sexual abstinence was given

to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;
And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.
(D. 111-12)

January feels, he tells his friends, not just young but very young indeed:

> Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
> That blosmeth er that fruit ywoxen been;
> And blosmy tree nys drye ne dreed.
> (E. 1461-63)

The analogy of this old goat with a tree in blossom just about to bear fruit is funny; but it is also the foreshadowing of another fruit tree, the one at the end of the tale. If the incident in that tree bears fruit, it will not be January's (though he will think it his, since May's trick to get into the tree is to pretend pregnancy). The fruit of this marriage will be that of every marriage of youth and age in comic tale.

The debate on marriage is begun by Placebo, who commences with a quotation from Solomon:

> 'Wirk alle thyng by conseil,' thus seyde he,
> shaltow nat repente thee.'
> 'And thanne
> (E. 1485-86)

First of all, this is like the earlier citation of authorities, brought in for an ironic commentary -- Placebo is not planning to offer 'conseil' and January would not take it if he were. Also, the name of Solomon is planted here to recall all the antifeminist uses of his name. Solomon is not only the type of wisdom for the Middle Ages; he is also the man whose wisdom could not avail for him where women were concerned. He is connected with the Song of Songs, but also with the embittered Preacher of Ecclesiastes. If it is ironic to find old January later singing

a song which recalls the Song of Songs, it is more so when we reflect that he is soon to get a chance to become nearly as wise as the later Solomon. This is in fact the wisdom which he should ideally already have approximated, but denied to him even after the restoration of at least his physical sight. At any rate, the references to Solomon both serve to keep before the reader the prototype of aged wisdom as a standard for measuring the foolishness of January and to recall the wealth of antifeminist literature bearing his name.

In his part of the debate, an argument against marrying, Justinus with his judicial advice to use caution reminds us of the debt which this tale owes to the Tale of Melibee and its sources. Like Prudence in that tale, Justinus advises prudence and patience (E. 1521ff.) Also he quotes Seneca and goes on to give some sage counsel. He is not the rabid anti-feminist we might expect if the Merchant's voice were still in evidence, despite his use of Theophrastus; rather, he urges caution and lack of haste because 'al this axeth leyser fo t'enquere.' (E. 1543)

January's answer is again reminiscent of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and, as such, is a direct hit at her:

> Straw for thy Senek, and for thy proverbes!
> I counte nat a panyer ful of herbes
> Of scole-termes.
>
> (E. 1567-69)

This strikes at Alice by associating her with the response of a fool to 'auctoritee.' The Wife began her prologue in just such fashion:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage . . . .
(D. 1-3)

Also, the Wife and January oppose these authorities for the same reason: they are both eager to get married, she for the sixth time and he for the first.

Childish as he is, January enters the alliance 'bitwixe ernest and game.' In 'heigh fantasye' he begins to portray, 'in his herte and in his thought,' the charms of May. Included in the list is 'hir gentillesse.' This is a quality much in evidence, as we have seen, in the Clerk's Tale and in the Wife's prologue and her tale; it also is brought up again in the Franklin's Tale. As might be expected, however, gentillesse means something different to May from the usual. Whether the Merchant-narrator is striking out at the Wife of Bath through his representation of gentillesse in the person of May, or whether this is simply more of the tendency of the tale to name one quality while representing its counterfeit is difficult to say. So much of the tale is irony compounded by irony.

January is still speaking 'bitwixe ernest and game' to his friends when he tells them of the one thought which bothers him:

'I have,' quod he, 'herd seyd, ful yoore ago,
Ther may no man han parfite blisses two, --
This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevene.
For though he kepe hym fro the syn es sevene,
And eek from every branche of thilke tree,
Yet is ther so parfit felicitee

> And so greet ese and lust in mariage,
> That evere I am agast now in myn age
> That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,
> So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,
> That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.
> (E. 1637-47)

The relevance to January's later attempt to build an earthly paradise and what happened in connection with the fruit tree within it seems clear. Dr. Dempster notes,

> The relative frequency of the mentions of trees in the early part of the tale suggests intentional dramatic irony. In ll. 1461-66, January compares himself first with a tree in blossom, then with a laurel 'alwey grene.' Trees are supposed to wear more blossoms the year before they die, and a laurel green throughout the year is said not to be in the best of condition.[1]

Also we may remember that the tree of sin in his garden is one which he has planted himself. The irony of lecherous old January's referring to himself as keeping 'fro the synnes sevene' is balanced by the irony of his later staying, with bad consequences, away from the tree in his garden which is being figuratively foreshadowed.

What follows in January's merry speech is also fraught with meaning for his future.

> 'For sith that verray hevene is boght so deere
> With tribulacion and greet penaunce,
> How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce
> As alle wedded men doon with hire syvys,
> Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?
> (E. 1648-52)

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[1] Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, (Stanford Univ., 1932; repr. Humanities Press: New York, 1959), p. 53n.

January has no understanding of the real force of this. He is trying to 'buy' an earthly paradise by the simple means of marrying a young wife. The price, as is usual in comic tale, is exorbitant. For his spurious little imitation of heaven he has indeed to pay with 'tribulacion and greet penaunce.' For, as Justinus says,

> God forbede but he sente
> A wedded man hym grace to repente
> Wel ofte rather than a sengle man!
> (E. 1665-67)

Justinus ends his last speech and the debate with a direct reference to the Wife of Bath. With the echoes of her prologue already mentioned, the dramatic relevance of this long debate to her and the continuing discussion of marriage seems evident:

> The Wyf of Bathe, if ye han understonde,
> Of mariage, which we have on honde,
> Declared hath ful wel in litel space.
> (E. 1685-87)

With this, the long debate on marriage comes to an end in a very definite way, all of this, like the Wife's long sermon and confession, has been a long prologue to a tale. The tale which follows is among other things an exemplum of the implications of the mock encomium and the debate.

The transition from this first part to the second is characteristically rapid. When January's friends find him so set, they arrange the wedding. Next, May is 'feffed in his land,' and we may remember the Wife's boasting of getting from her old husbands control of their lands and treasure. Appropriately, the wedding celebration honoring this misalliance

is attended by pagan gods -- just as the later overseers of the marriage are not guardian angels but other pagan gods, infernal ones. Venus attends the wedding, laughing,

> For January was bicome hir knyght. . . .
> (E. 1724)

In fact, there is a great deal of laughter, for

> Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age,
> Ther is swich myrthe that it may nat be writen.
> Assayeth it youreself, thanne may ye witen
> If that I lye or noon in this matiere.
> (E. 1738-41)

As mentioned before, the Merchant's Tale leaves a primarily negative feeling; the humor is essentially iconoclastic. After the iconoclastic treatment of women and marriage in the first part, the tale turns to what might be called an "anti-romance" in much the same way the Miller's Tale might be so labeled, but with more biting satire. Both Damian and January take their turns representing the courtly lover, and a comparison of either with Absolon is enough to indicate the difference in the tone of the satire.

Like the traditional courtly lover (like Dante!), January is 'ravysshed in a traunce' by the beauty of his beloved. But, unlike the ideal lover,

> in his herte he gan hire to manace
> That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne
> Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.
> (E. 1752-54)

The reference to the love of Paris and Helen might remind us that there

too was a match which brought disaster. At any rate, the comparison of January with Paris and of that love with this one is bitingly ironic. January is so carried away with his imaginings that he thinks himself as virile as a youth. He is even afraid of the strength of his passion and thinks,

> 'Allas! O tendre creature,
> Now wolde God ye myghte wel endure
> Al my corage, it is so sharp and keene!
> I am agast ye shul it nat susteene.
> But God forbede that I dide al my myght!
> (E. 1757-61)

January as a courtly lover turned husband is ridiculous enough; Damian, who is to be the more traditional courtly lover of another man's wife, serves to do something else with the code.

When Damian first sees May, his reaction is much the same as January's. He too is 'ravysshed' (E. 1774) as the lover is supposed to be. But he is not one to languish as Absolon does. The narrator blandly reveals his imminent success immediately after revealing his passion:

> Namoore of hym as at this tyme speke I,
> But there I lete hym wepe ynogh and pleyne,
> Til fresshe May wol rewen on his peyne.
> (E. 1780-82)

The anti-romantic in the descriptions of both January and Damian lies in the implicit assumption that beneath all the posturing and sighing is the desire for sexual union; it serves to strip away the idealization of courtly love and reduce it to its baldest terms.

The reaction of May to the note from Damian also serves the same purpose, although the effect of her easy acceptance is softened by the descriptions of January's appearance and actions following their marriage.

> . . . Januarie hath faste in armes take
> His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.
> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
> With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
> Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere --
> For he was shave al newe in his manere --
> He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face . . . .
> (E. 1821-27)

The cruelly specific nature of these descriptions, objected to by many critics, serve not only the antiromantic purpose of this part of the tale, but also underline another theme of the Miller's Tale -- that of the senex amans. In this tale the theme of the aged lover is pressed almost to its ultimate limit. The ingenuous observation about the wedding rites is one indication:

> Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age,
> Ther is swich myrthe that it may nat be writen.
> (E. 1738-39)

The lack of sympathy for the old husband in the Miller's Tale is a mere shadow of the implications of the graphic descriptions of January:

> He was al coltisshe, ful of ragerye,
> And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.
> The slakke skyn about his nekke shaketh,
> Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh.
> (E. 1847-53)

These implications are made more poignant by indicating, by omission, the effect of all this on May:

> But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte,
> Whan she hym saugh up sittynge in his sherte,
> In his nyght-cappe, and with his nekke lene;
> She preyseth nat his pleyyng worth a bene.
> (E. 1851-54)

If the treatment of May had ended with this last line, so full of implications, she would be a touching figure indeed. But she is to be taken no more seriously finally than anyone else in the tale. The theme of the senex amans has within it not only the explicit condemnation of the husband, but a more or less implicit justification of the misconduct of the wife. The anti-romantic theme, however, will not allow May this sympathetic role. No sooner is a little sympathy aroused for May than the narrator prepares to turn his irony on her. This is done first of all in his mock-earnest address to Damian.

At this time in the tale, the irony shifts away from January to Damian and May. Until this time, they have escaped all but the lightest of satire. With the address to Damian the satire is broadened to include them:

> Now wol I speke of woful Damyan,
> That langwissheth for love, as ye shul heere;
> Therfore I speke to hym in this manere:
> I seye, 'O sely Damyan, allas!
> Andswere to my demaunde, as in this cas.
> How shaltow to thy lady, fresshe May,
> Telle thy wo? She wole alwey seye nay.
> Eek if thou speke, she wol thy wo biwreye.
> God be thyn helpe! I kan no bettre seye.'
> (E. 1866-74)

The narrator's despair is premature, of course. In fact, in thus setting forth the standard of conduct of courtly love, May's later instantaneous

reaction to Damian's note is made even more strongly ironic. Damian is not the courtly lover to languish like a Troilus, either. If on the one hand he is like Absolon in the Miller's Tale, he is also as clever and managing as Nicholas. In his person the author manages to embody the satire on the courtly code expressed by the two lovers in the Miller's Tale.

May's reaction to Damian's note is even more immediate than that of Alison to Nicholas's more direct approach. The most natural place for her to read the note -- the privy -- is also the unkindest anti-romantic cut of all, to be compared only with the cut at gentillesse, the Wife of Bath, May, and everything else at the end of the following passage:

> 'Certeyn,' thoghte she, 'whom that this thyng displese,
> I rekke noght, for heere I hym assure
> To love hym best of any creature,
> Though he namoore hadde than his sherte.'
> Lo, pitee renneth soone in gentil herte!
> (E. 1982-86)

This last line has been called Chaucer's favorite sentiment. Certainly it is used with perfect seriousness in the Knight's Tale, the Squire's Tale, and the Legend of Good Women. How much more the inexpressible irony of putting it in such a context as this.

Both a moral judgement and a reference to the courtly tradition is expressed in January's desire to build a beautiful garden. The moral judgement implied in a foolish man's attempting to have his paradise on this earth has already been alluded to. Such an activity is in conflict

with the entire otherworldly tradition and expressed by Chaucer in his advice to 'yonge, fresshe folks' at the end of the Troilus to

> thynketh al nys but a faire
> This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.
> (V. 1840-41)

The connection with the courtly tradition is made in the comparison of the garden with that in the Roman de la Rose. For all of the pretty allegory, anti-romance says, the object is sexual gratification. If this attitude reflects on the glossing over of the gross facts by the courtly tradition, the moral judgment passed on the tradition by having the culmination of the affair take place in this garden is more telling still. Calling this garden an earthly paradise and associating the sexual act with a fruit tree forcibly connects the consummation of the affair with the first Fall in the first Garden. Nothing positive is said about the courtly tradition; the iconoclasm of the tale has merely struck at its apparent weaknesses and hypocrisies. This is a garden, be it noted, presided over not by angels but by pagan gods, and infernal ones at that.

With the episode of Pluto and Proserpina, the third part of the tale is reached. To Pluto is given the voice of the antifeminist:

> 'O Salomon, wys, and richest of richesse,
> Fulfild of sapience and of worldly glorie,
> Ful worthy been thy wordes to memorie
> To every wight that wit and reson kan.
> Thus preiseth he yet the bountee of man:
> 'Amonges a thousand men yet foond I oon,
> But of wommen alle foond I noon.'
> (E. 2242-48)

Proserpina in her reply sounds for all the world like the Wife of Bath attacking such sentiments:

> What rekketh me of youre auctoritees?
> I woot wel that this Jew, this Salomon,
> Foond of us wommen fooles many oon.
> But though that he ne foond no good womman,
> Yet hath ther founde many another man
> Wommen ful trewe, ful goode, and vertuous.
> (E. 2276-81)

Proserpina has just been telling Pluto of her determination to give May 'suffisant answere,' and like the Wife of Bath, she proceeds to give a demonstration of it, overbearing Pluto until he sighs, 'I yeve it up!' The energy of her long tirade has triumphed in obscuring the fact that she is not preparing to aid the maligned Constance, but to hide the guilt of a woman about to be caught in the act of adultery.

The scene of the pear tree toward which the tale has been slowly, digressively moving is over quickly. Less than a hundred lines suffice to get May up into the tree and the tale concluded. The brevity is explicable partly in terms of the speed necessary for comic action at its height, and partly also in terms of the nature of the action. Mostly, however, this brevity is due to the interest of the tale for the author. It is not in building up to a busy comic climax as in the Miller's or Reeve's tales, but rather in the satire, irony, and discussion along the way. Few poems of Chaucer illustrate the Gothic tendency of his art so well. The point of this Gothic tendency is not in making any single, inclusive statement to which all else is subordinate; it is rather

to be found in variety and co-ordination. It is not a tale to require, or even allow, a focussing on the climax of the plot. Part of the past critical difficulties with the tale lie in treating the tale in the same way as such a tale as the Miller's Tale. While the ending does not have the comic savor of the Miller's Tale or the Reeve's Tale or the Summoner's Tale, this matters much less with this tale than a defect in the ending would in any of those others because of this fact that the ending is in no way subordinate to much else in the tale. We can say of this tale what Muscatine says of the Nun's Priest's Tale, that it

> does not so much make true and solemn assertions about life as it tests truths and tries out solemnities. If you are not careful, it will try out your solemnity. . . .[1]

This last is a wise reminder. Despite the undeniable religious imagery connected with the Fall especially, the Merchant's Tale is, when all is said and done, a comic tale and a very funny one. Only in the Wife of Bath's Prologue is the antifeminist tradition made more entertaining. If the anti-romance in the Miller's Tale is more entertaining, it is also more subdued. Both the antifeminism and the anti-romance are answered stoutly in the Franklin's Tale.

Like the Merchant's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Tale, the hero of the Franklin's Tale is a knight. But unlike both of those tales, he is a wholly wise and worthy man. In his profession, his courtly qualities,

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[1] Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, (Univ. of California, 1957), p. 242.

and his wisdom, this knight serves as an excellent reply to the foolish and jealous hero of the Merchant's Tale and the ungentle former rapist of the Wife of Bath's Tale. The themes of romance and gentillesse and much else in the story serve to make it hearken back to the other discussions of marriage.

Like any good knight, Arveragus is a courtly lover. But courtly love in Chaucer, when it is represented in a moderately serious poem, leads to or is compatible with marriage. Although courtly love was often, or even usually, directed toward another man's wife, in Chaucer it is not. Criseyde is a widow, Emily of the Knight's Tale is unmarried, so is the heroine of the Wife of Bath's Tale, and so is Dorigen until she marries Arveragus. The courtly tradition said that a man could not love his wife and a wife could not love her husband. Indeed, the conditions under which many noble marriages were contracted made this a natural conclusion. Yet the Knight's Tale ends with marriage, the Wife of Bath's Tale has a marriage at its center, and the Franklin's Tale begins with the marriage of the hero and heroine.

Although such an action is not at all consonant with much of the literature of the courtly tradition, in the Franklin's Tale the knight's labors and sufferings in the cause of love are represented as leading as a matter of course to marriage:

> But atte laste she, for his worthynesse,
> And namely for his meke obeysaunce,
> Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce

That pryvely she fil of his accord
To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,
Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves.
(F. 738-43)

Not only does courtliness lead to marriage in this tale, but the courtliness is not to end there. The knight swears that he will never be the tyrannous husband of both medieval fable and fact. Although the courtly tradition decreed that such was impossible, he promises that he will remain the courtly lover of his wife and never

Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
As any lovere to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree.
(F. 747-52)

Here is answer enough to the Wife's doctrine; the husband will take no more than the name of sovereignty. And because hers is a true and not a false gentillesse, Dorigen courteously declines to employ the proferred sovereignty:

She seyde, 'Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,
As in my gilt, were outher werre or stryf.
Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf;
Have heer my trouthe, til that myn herte breste.'
(F. 754-59)

The Franklin's comment on this action fits with what we have seen in the resolution of both the Wife of Bath's Tale and her fifth, good marriage. It is not sovereignty, he says, which women really desire.

> Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
> Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
> Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
> Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
> And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
> Ans so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal.
> (F. 765-70)

Not sovereignty but liberty is the desire of everyone, he says in reply to the Wife who has just done such damage to the reputation of her sex as would make any antifeminist proud. As we have seen, she knows this subconsciously herself; this is a tale to make explicit much that is tacitly assumed elsewhere. The Christian and courtly values of humility, patience, and temperance are values to work in all relations.

> Looke who that is moost pacient in love,
> He is at his avantage al above.
> (F. 771-72)

The whole accord is stated in a paradox about this marriage.

> Heere may men seen an humble, wys accord;
> Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord, --
> Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
> Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage.
> (F. 791-94)

To the ridiculous and gross image of January acting the part of a debased courtly lover to May on their wedding night, the Franklin answers with a picture of an ideal courtly pair bringing the best of the courtly tradition into their marriage, the same gentillesse which has been given such merciless treatment in the Merchant's Tale in the person of May, who haughtily replies to January's entreaty to be true to him -- at the very time she is signaling to her lover --

'I am a gentil womman and no wenche.'
(F. 2202)

Through its function as a reply both to the Wife of Bath and to the Merchant, the description of Dorigen and her great love for her husband is an answer to both the courtly tradition that great love occurs only out of wedlock and the popular tradition that absence is for most women merely an opportunity to misbehave.

Now wol I stynten of this Arveragus,
And speken I wole of Dorigen his wyf,
That loveth hire housbonde as hire herte lyf.
For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
(F. 814-18)

The courtly episode occasioned by her husband's absence is the result of that great love of hers. She is wooed by a squire just as May was, and as proper an object for love as one might find,

Oon of the beste farynge man on lyve;
Yong, strong, right vertuous, and riche, and wys,
And wel biloved, and holden in greet prys.
(F. 932-34)

And she is importuned not just four days after her marriage, as May was, but much longer than a year after. May acquiesced quickly and in cold blood:

Who studieth now but faire fresshe May?
(E. 1955)

Dorigen answers 'in pley' and in the great concern she has for her husband's life: he must remove the rocks which menace the life of the man she loves best and then, she promises,

'Thanne wol I love yow best of any man,
Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan.'
(F. 997-98)

Both seem equally impossible to her. Her love is so great and constant and the labor involved in moving any of the rocks so overwhelming that she quite naturally equates the enduring quality of the rocks with that of her love. The menace that those rocks offer to her love makes her innocent answer altogether natural.

Dorigen's complaint when she thinks that the rocks have been removed shows graphically how this tale may be heir to the courtly tradition and yet a revision of it. In standard courtly fashion, the young square has made his suit to his lady, performed the imposing labour which she has enjoined, and now should get his reward. It would be dishonorable to refuse what had been promised him. But Dorigen sees yielding as greater dishonor.

'Allas,' quod she, 'on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,
That unwar hast me in thy cheyne,
Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,
Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour;
Oon of thise two bihoveth me to chese.'
(F. 1355-59)

Within the closed system of the courtly tradition, such a statement would be meaningless, but just as the values of courtly love have been brought into the marriage relationship in this tale, so the values of the courtly code which allow adultery are placed within the context of a larger morality in this reaction of Dorigen's. The reaction of Arveragus keeps it in this context:

'I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
For verray love which that I to yow have,
But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe'. . . .
(F. 1476-79)

The whole wise, forbearing manner is a devastating commentary on the foolish jealousy of January and the Wife's first husbands.

The resolution of the story is a graphic affirmation of the values which went under the name of 'gentillesse.' Involved in it is a tacit agreement among all three men to observe the desire for liberty which the narrator has affirmed all people desire. Because of the liberality of Arveragus, Aurelius is liberal:

'. . . right as frely as he sente hire me,
As frely sente I hire to hym ageyn.'
(F. 1604-5)

Because he is not churlish, the philosopher can do no less than the others:

'Everich of yow dide gentilly til oother.
Thou art a squier, and he is a knyght;
But God forbede, for his blisful myght,
But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede
As wel as ny of yow, it is no drede!'
(F. 1608-12)

When Chaucer is functioning most clearly within the bounds of a literary tradition, we know it in one way by his tendency to generalize. Constance in the Man of Law's Tale is generalized in this way, in keeping with the medieval habit of having a character represent a single dominant trait. Of his other women who are in the same tradition, we can think of Griselda, Cecilia, Prudence, and Virginia. These are

his virtuous women, and they are the creations of his which are closest to the fixed types of other medieval literature. The Wife of Bath might have been such a fixed type if she had been given the Shipman's Tale and only the first part of her prologue; she might, that is, have been a Chaucerian version of La Vieille. That she is much more lies at the heart of Chaucer's art. If Chaucer's unequivocally good women are simple, the unfaithful ones are often more complex. Criseyde was the fixed type of infidelity in earlier literature and legend. But she, like Alice of Bath, is much more. Chaucer at his best transformed these types into individuals who yet bear the marks of the types.

Chaucer's irony is partly to be explained by this tension between the type and the individual. This tension ranges all the way from May, typically named and the type of the woman in the crooked-rib tradition, to Criseyde and the Wife of Bath who belie any fixed assertion which is made about them. Even with May, however, the tension is there. She is not functioning in a vacuum but in the context of a marriage to the worst of them all, January. Her infidelity is both justice for January and no justification for her. That of Alison of the Miller's Tale is the same.

Part of Chaucer's irony is in the tension between literary tradition and traditional morality. Adultery is one of the 'givens' of both the courtly and popular traditions. The fact that in many of his tales it is not accepted as such is a measure of his expanding beyond the bounds

of those literary traditions. Both the strength and the danger of this intrusion of ordinary moral considerations are evident in Chaucer's work. That we can be troubled by the endings of the Shipman's Tale and the Merchant's Tale shows graphically the inherent dangers. That we can join the author in an endless fascination with the confession of the Wife of Bath shows what can be done with this realism. If she began as allegorical type out of the Roman de la Rose and the anti-feminist tradition, she succeeds in compelling us to accept her as paradoxically the most damning witness against her sex and a defender of women's right to be free. The demands of literature and the demands of life are not separate in the best of Chaucer's work. If the Knight's Tale began as an artificial trial of which is the worthiest of two courtly lovers, it ends as an exemplum that all must endure and make the best of things. Philosophical discourse in this courtly tale serves to take it outside the narrow, artificial confines of the courtly tradition.

The bringing together of courtly love and burlesque in the Miller's Tale serves the same purpose. The comedy of this tale like the philosophy of the tale which precedes it serves to submit the courtly tradition to judgment outside its own artificial values. As courtly lovers, Absolon and January help to laugh away the absurd in the courtly tradition. But there is a residue of that which endures despite the ridicule, all in the courtly tradition which goes by the name of 'gentillesse.'

Whether in a saint's life like the Clerk's Tale, a comic piece like the Wife of Bath's Prologue, or a romance like the Wife of Bath's

Tale or the Franklin's Tale, 'gentil' conduct is both the measure of a character and the resolver of human conflict. Although the word 'pity' with its modern, sentimental connotations is not quite equivalent, Chaucer expresses this in his line that 'pitee renneth soone in gentil herte.' 'Pitee' is what causes Jankyn to relent in the Wife's prologue and the knight to relent in her tale; it is the quality so present in the conduct of the characters in the Franklin's Tale and so notably absent in the Merchant's Tale.

If comedy is brought into contact with the courtly tale, however, -- as it is most notably in Troilus and Criseyde -- courtly values are never far removed from his comic tales. The actions of the characters of the Merchant's Tale can burlesque what is inadequate in the courtly tradition while not scoring with the hits at gentillesse for precisely the same reason -- the actions of the characters are not 'gentil.' The comedy goes out of the Wife of Bath's Prologue, to be replaced by touching sentiment, just when the Wife reaches the part where she and Jankyn were acting toward each other with 'gentillesse.' The revival of the long-overdue gentillesse of Walter at the end of the Clerk's Tale changes that tale from a saint's life of martyrdom to a romance. The reciprocal gentillesse of all at the end of the Franklin's Tale establishes a perfect harmony.

What, then, is this part of the courtly tradition called 'gentillesse'? It is that part consistent with the values of philosophical and religious

tradition of the Middle Ages. The ethical, social values of humility, pity, generosity, and understanding had already been taken into the courtly tradition to exist there in conjunction with other values at odds with the religious tradition. Chaucer was conservative in holding these values, but his uniqueness lies in his sane winnowing of the fruit from the chaff in the courtly tradition.

Like men through the centuries of the Middle Ages, he responded to the otherworldly values, as expressed in the Second Nun's Tale and the Parson's Tale. But like all secular men, he recognized the demands of this world, its goodness as well as its imperfections. 'Gentil' conduct represents that portion of the Christian tradition which is available to all. It is the standard by which all of his heroes stand or fall. The fun is with those who do not act gently -- Nicholas, Absolon, the characters of the Reeve's Tale. Ungentle conduct can also lead to grief, as he shows in Troilus and Criseyde.

Nevertheless, Chaucer's usual conduct is to try to soften the guilt of his unfaithful women in spite of themselves. May's conduct is not really justified by January's appearance and actions, but she at least has the closest thing to an excuse. It is impossible to condemn the Wife of Bath in spite of everything. Criseyde's is the most difficult case of all. By any standards, she would seem to be as hateful as she was traditionally represented. Chaucer himself, however, illustrates the truth of his dictum that 'pitee' runs soon in the gentle heart:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
Forther than the storye wol devyse.
Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
Iwis, I solde excuse hire yet for routhe.
(V. 1093-99)

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