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Gender and the Literate Culture of Late Medieval England

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July 1998

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the impact of gender ideologies held by medieval readerships on the production of books and circulation of texts in late medieval England. The first chapter explores how the professional book trade of late medieval London circulated booklets of Chauceriana which constructed masculinity and femininity in strict adherence to the courtly love literary tradition. In the second chapter, I demonstrate that such a standardized representation of courtly gender could be adapted by a readership removed from the professional book trade, in this case the rural gentry producers of the Findern manuscript, who present a revised vision of femininity and courtliness in their anthology. This revised femininity includes several texts which privilege the female speaking voice. The third chapter goes on to investigate the use of the female voice in one particular genre, the love lyric, and asks if the female lyric speaker can be associated with manuscripts in which women participated as producers or readers. Finally, the fourth chapter turns to masculinity, examining how the commonplace book of an early 16th century grocer, Richard Hill, contains selections from didactic and recreational literature which reinforce the ideals of masculine conduct in the merchant community of late medieval London. The dissertation concludes that manuscript contexts must be taken into account when reading gender in medieval English literature.

Cette dissertation étudie les façons dont les constructions du genre à l'époque médiévale étaient véhiculées dans certains manuscrits des quatorzième et quinzième siècles ainsi que du début du seizième siècle. Elle examine ce que ces manuscrits révèlent quant aux conceptions du sujet masculin et féminin des lecteurs de l'époque; des notions qui émergent de textes médiévaux anglais qui circulaient à titre de lecture récréationnelle. Ma recherche se base sur la codicologie, c'est-à-dire que les manuscrits sont à la base de mes recherches et guident mes lectures. Cette dissertation examine comment les interprétations du genre (gender) se manifestent dans les différents contextes des manuscrits, intégrant parfois les mêmes extraits dans plusieurs manuscrits.

Le premier chapitre, *Reading Gender in the Oxford Group*, étudie une série de textes d'amour courtois retrouvés dans trois manuscrits bodléiens : Fairfax 16, Bodley 638 et Tanner 346. Au deuxième chapitre, *Reading Women in the Findern Manuscript*, je démontre que le manuscrit, Cambridge University Library Ff.1.6, emprunte le style de l'amour courtois, ce qui l'amène à adopter une représentation plus favorable de la femme. Le troisième chapitre est un survol des manuscrits médiévaux anglais qui utilisent la voix féminine. Au quatrième chapitre, *Constructing Masculinity in Balliol 354*, j'examine comment un épicier de Londres, Richard Hill, utilise des sources littéraires pour élaborer une vision masculine du marchand dans le contexte médiéval.

Acknowledgements

I ask the reader to bear with me for these extended acknowledgements; ten years of study at a single institution inevitably results in extensive professional and emotional ties that cannot be contained in a few brief sentences.

Having completed all three degrees at McGill University, virtually every professor in the Department of English has assisted my studies at some time--best wishes to all of you. Special mention must go to the medievalists, however: thanks to C. Abbot Conway and Martin Puhvel, for their infectious enthusiasm which inspired my studies as an undergraduate, and for their continued instruction and support throughout graduate school. To Dorothy Bray and David Williams: thank you for broadening my vision in the field and your continuing interest in my research over the years. Thank-you also to Professors Cooke, Hensley, Hjort, Kilgour, Lieblein, Livingston, and Trehearne, for all the years of instruction and advice which have helped to direct my studies and shape my career. Special thanks to the Chair of the department, Gary Wihl, for giving me so many professional opportunities, which enabled me to be the kind of academic that I wanted to be.

I greatly appreciate the assistance of many scholars from other institutions over the years, in particular, my gratitude goes to Judith Bennett, Catherine Innes-Parker, Anne Klinck, and Ann Marie Rasmussen for giving me opportunities to share my work, and for the helpful prompts.

Heartfelt thanks to all the administrative staff in the Department of English, especially Valentina Matsangos, for always being there, and to Dorothy Alleyne, Soula Doufas, Linda Figsby Sina Troiano--its been a pleasure working with you.

To Diane Ryan, Eyal Baruch, Ginette LeBlanc and Alison Schaefer of the Department of Athletics, thanks for getting me through the last tough year, and for the laughs.

Thanks to McGill University for the McConnell Major Fellowship, the Principal's Dissertation Fellowship, and for the

Humanities Grants that enabled me to travel to the United Kingdom for my research. Thanks especially to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the Doctoral Fellowship from 1994 to 1997.

To the librarians in Canada and the United Kingdom, tremendous thanks, with special mention to Kendall Wallis at McGill, and the librarians in the manuscript rooms: Godfrey Waller at Cambridge, Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield at the Bodleian, and Dr. Bulloch at Balliol College.

Regarding the production of the dissertation, I thank Brian Lynch for his extensive comments, Jean Boudreau for translating the abstract, Stephane Nicolopoulos and Alirio Ferreira for their help in the Computing Centre, and Marilyn Gombe and Maria Vasile for smoothing over the last-minute emergencies. To my external examiners, Professors Kathleen Ashley and Maria Predelli, thank you for your detailed comments on dissertation, and your suggestions for future research.

To my supervisor, Sarah Westphal: "Thank you" does not begin to cover it, of course, but thank you anyway. Few are as fortunate in their supervisors as I have been in working with you.

Love and thanks to my friends and family for the years of encouragement. Thanks especially to Basil, Hilary and Zoë Rogers for their unconditional love, to Mack Rogers for his intellectual support, to Grace Rogers for her wisdom and weekly morale boosts, and to Ann and William R. Rogers, for absolutely everything.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Reading Gender in Middle English Manuscripts

This dissertation is an examination of the ways in which medieval literary constructions of gender circulated in certain English manuscripts during the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. I explore how individual medieval manuscripts reveal ideas about masculinity and femininity held by readers and users of the books, ideas that were developed out of Middle English texts that circulated as recreational reading. Manuscript producers, owners and readers from a variety of social circumstances constructed books out of circulating poetry. These books were often highly individual in their selections and presentations of literature, and these different presentations can be attributed, at least in part, to the different social circumstances of book production. This study will consider how concepts of gender changed from manuscript context to manuscript context, even when these concepts were engendered by the same or similar poetic sources.

The basis of my research is codicological, that is, manuscripts direct my study and determine the literature I read for gender. My research therefore carries with it the codicological assumption that the physical makeup of the manuscript is a key, not just to the interpretation of the texts it contains, but also to the social and historical circumstances in which it was produced. This project aims to show that not only the literature but also the codicological object of "les

manuscrits eux-mêmes" contain signifiers of gender (Alphonse Dain 77).

Manuscript Culture

While the definition of term "manuscript culture" is, according to John Dagenais, "nebulous," it is nevertheless generally accepted by those who work in medieval studies (221). In this dissertation the term "manuscript culture" is intended to recognize the historical and social realities that result directly from the circumstances of pre-print text production methods. Book production in a manuscript culture requires individuals with certain skills to assemble, reproduce, and circulate texts. In the latter half of the Middle Ages, these books producers were part of the broader community, not sequestered in monasteries. The assignation of the term "culture" to the world of manuscript production (as opposed to, say, "system," or "method") recognizes that the physical realities of text production, especially scribal and compiling activities, had a definite impact on the way medieval people thought about and used literature.

This psychological dimension--that access to books was experienced, and therefore thought of, differently by medieval people--combines with historical and social dimensions to produce a "culture" of manuscript production. In the case of England in the fifteenth century and onwards into the Renaissance, the manuscript culture co-existed with an emerging print culture. As

N.F. Blake demonstrates, for a period of a century or so the two cultures were far from distinct. They often shared and circulated the same texts, copying from manuscript to print and back again: "There was no conflict between the two means of production, for they complemented each other" (419). Although all the books I discuss in this paper are manuscripts, at least one (Balliol 354) is a direct product of the dual manuscript and print culture. Other manuscripts in the study may have been influenced indirectly by print sources, although this would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove. In recognition of the relationship between manuscripts and printed material in the late Middle Ages, I use the more inclusive term "literate culture" in my title, and in the dissertation where appropriate. Nevertheless, my research is principally concerned with hand-produced material.

Authorship and Readership in a Manuscript Culture

Concepts of authorship and readership in manuscript cultures have their origins in methods of monastic scolasticism on authoritative Latin texts (auctoritates), which reproduced and glossed codices in scriptoria.[1] M.B. Parkes has demonstrated

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[1] See M.B. Parkes 35-6. The authors of the auctoritates were the auctores. This role, as A.J. Minnis explains, goes beyond our modern conception of authorship: "the term auctor denoted someone who was at once a writer and an authority, someone not merely to be read but also respected and believed." He goes on to explain that the "writings of an auctor contained, or possessed, auctoritas in the abstract sense of the term, with its strong connotations of veracity and sagacity. In a specific sense, an auctoritas was a quotation or an extract from the work of an auctor" (Medieval

how monastic culture of the twelfth century "gave way to the culture of schools," wherein the auctoritates had to be made more accessible to new readers by means of new page layouts that subdivided the text into books, chapters, paragraphs and so forth (35). These new methods of imposing order on the text were called ordinatio (52). Following this, the auctoritates were extracted and compiled into more convenient and condensed forms, creating the compilatio, as well as the role of the compilator, which was added to the roles of author, scribe and commentator in the production of text (58).[2] The thirteenth century, remarks Parkes, was the "age of the compiler"(60), and the principles of the compilatio were transmitted to the production of vernacular texts, changing the way readers encountered literature, and the way authors conceived of themselves (69).

Medieval vernacular poets, sensitive to the principles of text production in academic reading, connected their writing activities to the editorial activities of ordinatio and, especially, compilatio. Minnis has argued that Chaucer saw the creation of the Canterbury Tales as an act of compilatio:

Theory 10). Jesse Gellrich explores how the concepts of auctor and auctoritates were translated into medieval thinking about all learning, as the "'idea' of the Book" is not only related to textual production in the literal sense, but as a metaphor for understanding and writing about the world at large (20). On the gloss as manipulation of text in vernacular literatures, see Dagenais and Robert W. Hanning.

[2] Parkes, working from Bonaventure, defines the role of the compilator: "The compiler adds no matter of his own by way of exposition (unlike the commentator) but compared with the scribe he is free to rearrange (mutando). What he imposed was a new ordinatio on the materials he extracted from others" (59).

constructing his own role as poet as analogous to a compiler who collects the diverse tales of the pilgrims, professing to transcribe them without alteration.[3] While not all medieval poets took on the mantle of compiler (Gower, Minnis points out, was interested in being read as a auctor, a "modern author"), Chaucer's theory of authorship demonstrates the psychological and theoretical conflation of reading and writing roles and activities in a manuscript culture (Minnis 209).[4] As Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall are quick to point out, the medieval role of the author was not devalued or made less distinct by these constructions which accommodated the realities of manuscript culture (2).[5] The medieval idea of authorship was, however, substantially different from modern ideas of authorship, because it acknowledged and participated in the principles of manuscript production.

Likewise, readership was conceived of differently in a manuscript culture. Transmission of literature depended on the attitudes and opinions of readers regarding texts they were

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[3] See Minnis, Chapter 5, esp. 190-4. For scribal acts of compilatio in the Ellesmere MS of the Canterbury Tales, see Parkes and Doyle, esp. 227-9, and Janet Coleman, 199-200, who links the compiling principles of that manuscript to the compilatio (in Minnis's sense) of the Tales as a whole.

[4] Gower's interest in assuming an auctor role might be further reflected in the amount of control he maintained over manuscript production and circulation of his work. On the issue of Gower's control of manuscripts, see Parkes and Doyle, 237-8, and A.S.G. Edwards and Pearsall, 258.

[5] H.S. Bennett shows that medieval authors did not excuse scribal error or variance, for example. See esp. 173.

reading: what they liked, they could reproduce and circulate further; what they did not like, they could abandon or manipulate to suit their purposes; what they did not understand, they could bungle altogether. In some ways, the manuscript acts as a physical artifact of what Hans Robert Jauss calls the "horizons of expectation" of medieval readerships: the contextualizing of circulating texts within a given reader's previous experience of literature (of genre in particular).

As individual products of their cultural surroundings, individual readers might have, as Stephen Nichols reflects, projected "collective social attitudes. . . onto the parchment" (7). Dagenais sees medieval reading, therefore, as an "ethical" activity: readers were responsible for the texts in circulation (16-17). The agency and the ethical principles of the medieval reader, which originated in the traditions of gloss, ordinatio and compilatio, carried over to the production of vernacular texts which, in late medieval England, occurred not in the monastic scriptoria, but in mercantile London.

The production of Middle English manuscripts after the thirteenth century is intrinsic to the social and economic developments of English society. The increasing social mobility of the middle classes--gentry, professionals, merchants, craftsmen--augmented their power in government and the economic life of the country.[6] Literacy in English was required to

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[6] In this dissertation I will use the term "middle class" as a shorthand for those social groups ranked below the nobility, but above labourers, subsistence farmers, servants and the like. The

participate in business and government, and therefore most members of the middle classes, particularly those among the gentry and merchant communities, possessed at the very least what Parkes calls the "pragmatic" literacy for business purposes (285).[7] Pragmatic literacy later developed into "cultivated," recreational literacy, a process that was fuelled in part by a

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rough lines of demarcation of the middle-class, therefore, would be the gentry at the top, and independent craftsmen at the bottom. Not only were the lines between medieval social hierarchies extremely blurry because of the tendency for families to move between ranks, but they are made blurrier by shifting definitions used by both medieval and modern social theorists. My inclusion of the gentry in the middle class requires, I believe, the most justification, since some scholars merge the gentry and nobility. While I acknowledge that "the distinction between 'gentles' and 'nobility' is at best a fuzzy one" (Kate Mertes, The English Noble Household 4)," it is a distinction I choose to maintain in this project. Most of the families I discuss are placed firmly on one side or the other of the noble/gentry border (with the exception of John Stanley, owner of the Fairfax 16 manuscript, described by Seth Lerer as "armigerous gentry" and "aristocratic" in Chaucer and His Readers 244). I will follow Joel Rosenthal's example in defining the noble class as being comprised of families of the parliamentary peerage (The Purchase of Paradise 4-8). Sylvia Thrupp explores the definition and mobility of the merchant class, especially in relation to the gentility, in the fifth and sixth chapters of The Merchant Class of Medieval London. She also provides an excellent discussion of the medieval concept of the mediocres, those occupying the economic position between the very rich and very poor, in her seventh chapter. F.R.H. Du Boulay discusses the increasing "mobility" of class in the late medieval England, not only in terms of the "classic but literary and soon-decayed division" of the three estates dissolving into the intermediary classes, but also in terms of mobility between the different ranks of the middle classes themselves (61, 69-70, see also Coleman 47). The gentry, for example, was being both "attacked and infiltrated" by wealthy merchants and professionals (67). On the role of the London guilds in municipal government see Coleman, 52-57. Coleman also notes that literacy became a "survival skill" for those from rural areas wanting to participate in London's rapidly growing market culture (47).

[7] On the rise of English and pragmatic literacy of the middle classes see Parkes, esp. 278-9, and Coleman 20-25.

desire (especially among the gentry) to emulate the reading habits of the nobility (288).[8] Reading material circulated across social barriers (such as they were), especially in London: "Court and city," notes Doyle, "were not unconnected economically, socially, or culturally" ("English Books" 177). As Carol Meale has discussed, certain types of vernacular texts, especially romances, appealed to this broader reading public ("Patrons, Buyers and Owners" 216-17).[9]

With this burgeoning of middle-class recreational reading came the development of the professional book trade, based in the London mercantile and craft communities. As Graham Pollard and C. Paul Christianson have shown, those connected to the book-making--stationers (those who actually organized the sale of whole books),[10] scribes, limners, bookbinders and parchminers--

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[8] Parkes discusses the reading habits of the gentry and bourgeoisie on 291-3. Du Boulay observes that in the fifteenth century, "men felt a sharpening self-consciousness about their social status" (61), which involved anxiety about being gentil. On books as objects of prestige and indicators of social status, see Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners." For a discussion of the economic and social requirements of a gentleman see Du Boulay 70-7.

[9] See also Meale's article on romance audiences. On a discussion of medieval attitudes towards reading for pleasure generally, see Glending Olson.

[10] Pollard discusses the professional associations of book makers before the establishment of the Stationer's Company (1557), which encompassed all related crafts. Previous to this date, the crafts operated as smaller guilds and associations, which gradually consolidated. On the role of stationers see Parkes and Doyle 235-6. Discussing the fourteenth-century definition of the term "stationer," Pollard remarks that it emphasized "the individual's importance as a dealer rather than a craftsman, as an intermediary between the producer and the public rather than an actual maker of the goods he sells" (5). Christianson adds that, "with the exception of bookbinders, "stationer" became the predominant tag

were clustered around St. Paul's Cathedral, particularly in Paternoster Row.[11] Vernacular books were often produced by London stationers in booklets: self-contained textual units that could be compiled at a later date into a larger codex containing other booklets.[12] Booklet exemplars, perhaps containing one

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for all book craftsmen after the 1440s, at about the same time when the "Mistery of Stationers" became the prevailing name for the craft guild" (88).

[11] Parkes and Doyle note that the close proximity of individuals in the book trade to one another would have enabled them to "draw on each other's skills and imitate each other's products. The conditions of a bespoke trade would encourage cross-imitation and cross copying: whenever the book was commissioned the patron or the stationer would have to rely on the availability of exemplars, scribes and illuminators to produce the copy" (241). On the London book trade, see also Coleman, 202-3. Other studies of book production in London include Laura Hibbard Loomis's examination of the Auchinleck manuscript (NLS Advocates MS 19.2.1), which she regards as the professional product of a London "bookshop," or scriptorium, where all the scribes (and some authors) copied the manuscript under one roof (624, see also H.S. Bennett 174). P.R. [Pamela] Robinson re-works the bookshop theory to accommodate her idea of booklet production in the manuscript, which she still sees as being produced in a bookshop (see note 12, below). Parkes and Doyle contest the likelihood of the existence of a bookshop at the time, and see the production of large books like Auchinleck as the achievement of a stationer with an specific order from a client, who farmed out different sections of the manuscript to scribes working independently, and sometimes "leapfrogging" over one another in copying out consecutive booklets (see esp. 205, 237-8). Discussions of the commercial use of the booklet method for manuscript assembly also occur in Edwards and Pearsall, esp. 261-2, as well as in Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, esp. 280-1. For further discussion of the assembly of the Auchinleck MS, see Timothy A. Shonk, as well as the introduction to the facsimile by Derek Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham. Discussion of booklet assemblies of specific manuscripts studied in this dissertation will occur in the relevant chapters.

[12] The centrality of booklets, or fascicles, to English book production was identified first by P.R. Robinson, and her theories were extended by Ralph Hanna III, who defines a booklet as "a group of leaves forming at least one quire, but most likely several, and presenting a self-contained group of texts. Booklets thus form

large text or several smaller texts, would have been available to help the client select materials for the prospective manuscript. A book would have been assembled from at least one, usually more, of these booklets on a made-to-order or "bespoke" basis.[13] These methods kept book production relatively cheap, although books were always something of a luxury.

Booklet assembly, then, was a version of compilatio, with different texts or excerpts from texts being compiled into a larger codex. With the compilatio principle, therefore, comes the ethical dimension of medieval reading.[14] With each new manuscript, late medieval book producers, professional and otherwise, re-contextualized the work of established authors. The new manuscript contexts, each involving different extractions

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units intermediate in extent between the quire and the full codex" ("Booklets" 100-1). On booklet methods in the production of auctoritatas in monastic scriptoria see Parkes, 54-5.

[13] On the "bespoke" trade see Pollard, and Parkes and Doyle, esp. 235-6. Meale notes that while this method might have been cheaper, it also might have limited customer selection regarding specific texts, since the booklets were predetermined by the exemplars: "The recurrence of the same texts within the component booklets of a volume... suggest that scribes and/or stationers increasingly came to rely on reproducing a set combination of texts within units which, although self-contained and relatively inexpensive to produce, could be collected together by a purchaser to create a more substantial 'library'[ie: in a single manuscript].... Such anticipation of the economic rationale of printing, whilst benefiting the reading and buying public at large by reducing costs, inevitably lessened the opportunities for the exercise of individual preference" ("Patrons, Buyers, and Owners" 220). On the idea of a single anthology as a "library", see Phillipa Hardman.

[14] On "ethical" reading in manuscript culture of the Middle Ages, see Dagenais's Preface and Introduction, esp. xvii.

from and juxtapositions of old texts, were capable of reflecting the interpretation of an individual reader-compiler.

Reading in England's late Middle Ages, then, was not a privilege reserved for the very wealthy or the very learned, nor was book-production operating on the margins of mainstream society. Instead, the making of books was a daily economic and social reality, particularly in London. Those who could not afford professionally produced books would have been easily inspired to make their own--time, materials and skill providing. Many of the manuscripts I discuss in this dissertation are either the products of the professional London book trade, or are homemade anthologies that may have obtained some sources from the professional trade. The fact that the middle-class culture was a manuscript culture has many implications for readings of gender in the books.

A spate of recent scholarship on "women and the book" in medieval studies has done much to debunk old assumptions that placed women on the margins of the medieval reading public. Using wills, household accounts, inscription evidence and anecdotal testimony, we have been able to sketch out a fairly detailed picture of the ways in which women participated in medieval literate culture.[15] While much of this evidence

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[15] Three key anthologies: Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500 (ed. Carol Meale), Women, the Book, and the Worldly and Women, the Book and the Godly (both edited by Lesley Smith and Jane M.Taylor) provide the bulk of research on women's literate culture in medieval Europe. Studies that focus specifically on England include the following: Susan Groag Bell has examined will evidence for women's book ownership in western Europe (including England).

applies to noblewomen and female royalty, all of whom would have had the rank and financial resources necessary to act as literary patrons and book commissioners, there is increasing evidence of female literary activity in the lower strata of society.[16] An expanded sense of medieval female readership--one that sets aside the issue of female ownership of books--has also imbued recent scholarship. The psychology of the medieval woman reader, as the recipient of master texts, has been of particular interest, especially regarding her complicity in or resistance to textual constructions of gender identity.[17] Investigations of female

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Meale adds inscription evidence for English women's ownership of books in "...Alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," and looks closely at the case of one particular woman reader in "Reading Women's Culture in Fifteenth Century England: the Case of Alice Chaucer." Doyle finds a number of woman-owned manuscripts in "English Books In and Out of Court." David Bell looks at reading in nunneries, and Felicity Riddy considers the circulation of religious texts in women's communities both inside and outside of religious houses, suggesting that "it seems clear that the literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable" ("Women Talking" 110). For further information on women circulating of religious books, see Anne Dutton. Julia Boffey discusses female literacy, authorship and reading activities in "Women Authors and Women's Literacy," and also looks at the role women played in the commissioning and circulation of Lydgate's texts in "Lydgate's Lyrics and Women Readers." Some individual manuscripts have also been read in the light of female readership, for instance the Findern and Devonshire manuscripts, which are discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

[16] As I discuss in Chapter Two, the Findern manuscript, for instance, comes from a gentry milieu. Felicity Riddy looks at the possible use of Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19 by a merchant's wife in her discussion of What the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter ("Mother Knows Best" 80-5).

[17] Some of the most substantial discussions of various medieval female readerships and reading strategies include Anne Clark Bartlett's Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and

reading has opened critic's eyes to the fact that "women's literature" is not defined by authorship alone, and that a "literate culture" can include even members of society who do not produce text directly, or who might not have even been thoroughly literate. As Meale remarks, "In an age when 'reading' could be a communal activity ... the term 'reader' may need radical redefinition if we are to understand women's use of books" ("...Alle the Bokes" 133).[18]

With both male and female readers participating in the literary culture of late medieval England, it is to be assumed that they would have, on occasion, different interpretations of the material circulating through their social worlds. It is also to be assumed, given the production processes of a manuscript culture, that some of these different interpretations would become textualized in the manuscripts that some readers were commissioning copying, compiling and reading. Medieval readers, like readers in all periods, interpreted texts from an array of perspectives (political, economic, religious, etc). My purpose in this dissertation is to focus predominantly on the perspective of gender (recognizing that gender often implies other

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Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature, E. Jane Burns's Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature, Roberta Krueger's Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance, and Elizabeth Robinson's Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience.

[18]. On this point see also Boffey "Women Authors," as well as Alexandra Barratt's anthology Women's writing in Middle English, which does not restrict its selections to texts authored by medieval English women, but includes translated and anonymous texts, as well as those that could have been compiled by women.

perspectives, particularly class), as it is textualized in individual manuscripts on a number of subjects.

Of course, not all manuscripts lend themselves to readings for gender: in many cases, it is simply not the predominant concern of a given collection. But I will demonstrate that we can read certain manuscripts for medieval ideas (and ideals) of masculinity and femininity. In some cases, such concepts of gender are related to class or cultural milieu. Reading for a gender bias in a manuscript requires at least a hint of the provenance or ownership history of the book, preferably one that gives some sort of indication of the gender of the user or users. To obtain this information, I have turned to inscription evidence which is, I realize, an imprecise and contentious strategy.

The imprecision of inscription evidence comes largely from the circumstances of manuscript production itself. Often we have no way of knowing the precise meaning of a name in a codex--whether it is meant to signal ownership (original or second-hand), a dedication, scribal or other production activity, or mere vandalism. In cases where a manuscript contains several names, these problems are multiplied accordingly. In this study, I have attempted to avoid too much debate by choosing manuscript that are fairly clearly signalled as books used by readers of one or the other gender. I have required that inscription evidence be substantial enough to place male or female usership of a given book "beyond <u>reasonable</u> doubt." Naturally (and unfairly) the

cases that must be proved most strenuously are manuscripts suggesting female readership.

While I have, in this project, not really challenged general scholarly opinion regarding the gender of any given readership, I wish to point out that the tendency to require more stringent proofs of female usership of manuscripts is akin to what Alexandra Barratt calls the "unwritten law of literary scholarship, so deeply embedded that it does not have to be made explicit, that anonymous texts are assumed to be written by males" ("'The Flower'"1). According to this thinking, assigning female authorship to a text requires the presence of a particular woman's name indicating authorship. We would feel even more secure with our female author if we could find "signature evidence"--some kind of physical inscription by the female author testifying that she was responsible for the actual act of writing the text, as opposed to anecdotal evidence provided by a third party. The issue of the importance of the female signature to feminist literary criticism has been debated by Peggy Kamuf and Nancy K. Miller, who weigh (respectively) the restrictions that this insistence on name and signature evidence places on "reading women," against the significance of the historical (and known) female author to literary representations of women.[19]

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[19] In "Writing Like a Woman" Peggy Kamuf discusses the restrictions signature evidence places on feminist criticism, and how such reading for a centralized author/authority figure plays into the hand of a tradition that has marginalized women's texts according to the same principles: "If the inaugural gesture of this feminist criticism is the reduction of the literary work to its signature and to the tautological assumption that a feminine

Scholars seem to also require inscription and signature evidence as proof of female readerships of manuscripts: we need a name, preferably a signature (preferably matching another signature in, perhaps, a legal document), in order to accept that a woman used a book. Even then (as will be seen in the case of the Findern manuscript) the true nature of female readership is often embattled ground: accepting the authority of any individual over a text or book (as authors, scribes, compilers, owners, and readers) suddenly requires stringent evidence when a female name is involved. Manuscript study has thus been employed <u>against</u> investigations of women's writing and women's reading: it proves an absence, instead of reaffirming a presence.

In this dissertation, I reclaim the boggy ground of codicology for reading women's reading activities, assuming that significant inscription evidence speaks of female usership of certain manuscripts. In terms of Kamuf's or Miller's debate over whether or not the female signature really matters to "reading

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'identity' is one which signs itself with a feminine name, then it will be able to produce only tautological statements of dubious value: women's writing is writing signed by women" (285-6). But as Nancy K. Miller suggests in her response to Kamuf, feminist literary criticism has a heavy and legitimate ideological investment in the female signature in terms of establishing the historical female subject: "If feminists decide that the signature is a matter of indifference,....[the] text's heroine will become again no more than a fiction" (118).

women,"[20] this dissertation comes down on the side of Miller's "yes." I do so, however, with the caveat born of Kamuf's concerns: that beyond a certain point, interrogating the female signature for "authenticity" becomes dangerous to feminist literary criticism and readings of gender generally. In fact, Kamuf's post-structuralist liberation of the author from the text is a right I claim when discussing reader manipulations of meaning in transmissions of texts, but in the case of the manuscript, I retain an interest in knowing the gender (and as much other information as possible) of the individual who produced or read it.

It should not be expected that all manuscripts associated with female readers address constructions of femininity, nor, conversely, that all constructions of femininity come from female-owned manuscripts. Obviously, the same is true for men's books and constructions of masculinity. But in some cases (such as the ones I discuss here), the gender of a manuscript producer and reader has an impact on depictions of gender within the literature contained in the bindings. This implies that ideas of gender in everyday life are connected to ideas of gender in secular literature.

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[20] My use of the term "reading women" deliberately conflates the historical fact of medieval female readerships of manuscripts (women reading), codicological evidence of those readerships (reading for women readers), and modern readings of female characters as displayed in the manuscripts of the female readerships (reading women reading). The same principle hold true for "reading men."

Medieval Ideals of Gender

Medieval gender (socially constructed definitions of masculine and feminine identities) has long been a favourite subject of historians and literary critics alike.[21] Since Joan Kelly's questioning of whether or not we can accurately talk about the "Renaissance" for women, we have been more sensitive to the fact the men and women often have different histories, as well as different (fictional) representations resulting from those histories. In the past, this interest has most often manifested itself in questions regarding the status of historical medieval women, and the representation of fictional medieval women.[22] More recently, medieval men have become the focus of scholarly inquiry, as we realize that long-held assumptions regarding the nature of medieval manhood and its representations are over-generalized and often unsubstantiated.[23]

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[21] For a discussion of gender as a basis of literary inquiry generally, see Myra Jehlen. Nancy Partner discusses gender studies and medieval studies in "No Sex, No Gender," as does Allen J. Franzten in "When Women Aren't Enough."

[22] Examples in both disciplines abound. For historical studies of women in medieval England see Eileen Power, Shulamith Shahar, David Herlihy, Joel T. Rosenthal (Medieval Women) and P.J.P. Goldberg. See also collections by M. Erler and M. Kowalski, as well as Renate Bridenthal et al. For studies of women and secular English literature (in addition to the studies mentioned above in note 14), see anthologies of criticism by Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley; Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski; Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury; as well as Alcuin Blamires, Muriel Whitaker and Juliette Dor. See also studies by Peter Dronke, Joan Ferrante (Woman as Image), Margaret Hallissy, and Katherine Rogers.

[23] See, for example, the collection by Clare Lees, as well as the first section of Fisher and Halley. On masculinity in Chaucer, see Susan Crane, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Anne Laskaya and Angela Jane

Historians and literary critics often raid each other's sources concerning gender. In older scholarship this was done somewhat carelessly (see Eileen Power, for example), which led to a more rigorous division between the two disciplines (although scholars would sometimes sneak guiltily to the border, snatching a scrap of tax role or romance text from the opposite camp and the stuff it into their research with much apology and qualification).[24] Recently, scholars are beginning to study gender by combining historical and literary perspectives.[25] Reading gender in particular manuscripts is part of this latter endeavour. History and literature come together in the manuscript, an object once used by medieval men and women which also contains textual representations of men and women.

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Ideals of gender in the Middle Ages are just that: ideals. How textually constructed visions of ideal masculinity or femininity connected to the real lives of men and women is difficult to determine through the screen of text. Medieval constructions of idealized gender are worth considering briefly

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Weisl, and the collection edited by Peter G. Beidler.

[24] For discussions of the history of the relationship between historical and literary studies see, Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," and Lee Patterson, "Literary History." Patterson's Negotiating the Past argues that studies of literature require a "usable past" that is discovered through empirical methodologies such as textual criticism (113).

[25] Research of this sort that I have found relevant to my own studies includes the recent work of Judith Bennett, Barbara Hanawalt, Ruth Mazo Karras and Nancy Partner.

here, however, as they have an impact on some of the texts discussed later in the dissertation. Discussing medieval gender inevitably involves a consideration of class, for, as Susan Crane remarks, gender is "a socially instituted construct that interacts with other constructs of class, faith, and so on," and appears "very differently, for instance, in the experience of a provincial countess and a London alderman" (6). Since medieval concepts of social strata were androcentric, it makes sense that the class/gender intersection is especially relevant to discussions of masculinity.

Definitions of masculinity in the Middle Ages were based on a system of intersecting hierarchies, wherein the individual was positioned in a way that determined his social and personal identity. Three major hierarchies were involved. The first was the Ages of Man--child, youth, middle-aged and elderly-- which were usually aligned with other temporal progressions, such as the seasons or time of day (Margaret Hallissy 3). Add to this the estaat, the hierarchy of social position, made up of the oratores (those who pray), the bellatores (those who fight) and the laboratores (those who work).[26] Other elements were also factored in, involving narrower social roles or employment, seen in the Canterbury Tales themselves where characters are "not only

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[26] There is a body of estaat literature in Middle English, defined by Crane as "a recurring nexus of ideas about social difference to be found in sermons, verse satires and complaints, books of conduct and moral instruction, and capacious fictions such as the Romance of the Rose, Piers Plowman, and John Gower's longer works" (95-6). On representations of the three estates, see Ruth Mohl.

individuals but representatives of their specific group" (Hallissy 3-4).[27]

As the Middle Ages evolved, however, these traditional categories were disrupted by the development of a powerful merchant/middle class, a class which was being increasingly recognized by the de facto social theorists of the day (3).[28] In response to such social mobility, the bellatores found that "the concept of moral gentillesse offered the second estate a new ground on which to base its claims to superiority when its more fundamental economic and political superiority were being eroded" (Crane 97).[29] This ethos of gentility was, however, quickly appropriated by the very strata the nobility scorned. This appropriation was achieved in part by means of the broad circulation of texts addressing gentillesse, as we shall see in the case of Balliol College MS 354.

Although these visions of social hierarchy were posited for humanity in general, they were in actuality exclusively masculine. Therefore, they functioned as definitions of masculinity. One particular definition of masculinity, then, was inherent to a particular social position, which was in turn

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[27] See also Crane 96-7.

[28] See also Crane 97. Paul Strohm, in Social Chaucer, discusses Bishop Thomas Brinton's inclusion of "mercatores" or merchants in the social order, as well as "devoted craftsmen," and "citizens and burgesses" (2-4, 10, 23).

[29] Du Boulay likens gentry class anxieties to the "acute attack of snobbery" suffered by Victorian England because of "that intensely mobile society" (61). He provides a detailed account of the economic and social requirements of a "les gentils" on 70-7.

located along a spectrum of society containing a number of other masculinities. One was not simply a man, but a certain type of man at a certain point of life, and some men were privileged with more masculine authority--more masculinity--than others.[30] The basic investment, however, in all of the definitions of medieval masculinity, as Vern Bullough explains, was that "the male was not only different from the female, but superior to her" (31). Beginning with Aristotelian theories of gender which emphasized the difference and inferiority of the female, masculinity was constructed on the premise of separating from the feminine. Therefore, masculinity was automatically dependant on the existence of the feminine because it required something to be different from. The inevitable result of this dependence on the feminine as a point of orientation was an inherent anxiety and instability in all definitions of maleness (Bullough 43).

Nevertheless, within the intersecting social hierarchies, only men were subjects: women did not factor into the Ages of Man or the estaats, except as attributes of the bellatores and laboratores, specifically, as wives. After an initial distinction between religious and secular life, a woman's estaat was wholly attached, through marriage or birth, to the estaat of

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[30] Adolescent males, for instance, were not considered wholly men, and this qualified their very masculinity. Vern L. Bullough illustrates this in citing the tolerance for youths to play women on stage, in a society in which, as Hallissy explains, cross-dressing by men was otherwise seen as highly transgressive (36). On medieval perceptions of men who somehow confused the standard gender definitions (by being a prostitute for example, or impotent), see Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, as well as Partner.

the men in her family (Hallissy 5). There was, however the "tripartite formula" of the three stages of a woman's life: virginity, wifehood and widowhood (Hallissy 2). The primary component of these three points of life was the same: sexual purity (Hallissy 5). According to medieval definitions of femininity, it was not so much a woman's social rank, age or work that positioned her along a spectrum of femininity (as men were positioned along a spectrum of masculinity), but exclusively her sexual status. To be sexually impure was to be ejected from the tripartite formula altogether, to a form of rogue femininity--to whoredom.[31] The tripartite vision of femininity, like the three estates of manhood, is the "oldest [of the] topos"--perhaps we could say the auctoritas--of medieval gender formation (Crane 95). Middle English literature, however, followed continental culture in developing other visions of masculinity and femininity, the most important of which (for this study) is courtly gender ideology.

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[31] Karras and Boyd explain that medieval whoredom or prostitution was more a designation of a particular type or character of women, than it was a type of behaviour by women: "[The] conflation of all women who had sex with multiple partners and commercial prostitutes is the key to understanding the deployment of the concept of metetrix [whore/prostitute] in medieval society. Those who had sex for money were recognized as a group; but because of the way whoredom or prostitution was defined, any woman who was sexually deviant, or any woman who was not under the control of a man, could be placed in that group as well.... In this way, prostitution was intimately tied up with femininity" (105).

Courtly Masculinity and Femininity

As has been recently demonstrated by David Burnley's extended study, Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England, courtliness is a vast subject. This discussion will be restricted to the most well-known element of it, the literature of courtly love.[32] The central players in courtly love literature embody the gender ideals of the genre: the lover and the lady. Their relationship, patterned on feudal hierarchies, has the male lover emotionally subjected to the lady, to whom he must perform service in order to prove his devotion and win her heart.[33] The gender implications are, at first, fairly obvious. The lady must embody perfection itself, since she must inspire the lover to tremendous feats of prowess. Her idealized womanhood involves both physical beauty and gentillesse--the latter quality requiring her to remain distant from the lover. The lover, in turn, must also be perfect in appearance and conduct, to which he must add the performance of certain heroic

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[32] I refer the reader to Burnley's comprehensive coverage of the common debates surrounding courtliness, such as those concerning the historical veracity of courtly ethos, the relationship between the literature and court politics, courtly qualities and personal values, courtliness and religion, etc. His bibliography is, to date, one of the most complete on the subject that I have seen, especially as a study of courtliness in medieval England. The only respect in which I find Burnley's book lacking is a discussion of feminist interpretations of courtliness, the major points of which will be covered below.

[33] These requirements of courtly love (a "code") were established by Gaston Paris in 1883. C.S. Lewis applied Paris's principles of courtly love to English literature in the book The Allegory of Love in 1936. For an overview of courtly love in English, see Burnley's Chapter 9.

(often fantastic) feats that will prove him "man enough" for the lady. The surface power dynamic of the courtly couple requires, then, that the lover is, in the words of C.S. Lewis, "always abject" before the lady (2).

The abjection of the courtly lover is, however, scripted by male poets. The poets also script the story that will direct the lover to his eventual conquest of the feminine, and to his accompanying masculinization. The result of masculine poetic control of the courtly text is twofold. First, the lover's abject masculinity is only rhetorical, and does not signal female dominance beyond the text, since the male poet actually controls the text. Second, the character of the lady, placed out of reach on a pedestal and subjected to the male gaze of adoration, is nothing more than a two-dimensional idealization of womanhood, for whom real subjectivity is impossible. She serves only to define the male courtly subject, who experiences the humanizing processes of victory and defeat, by her contrasting inhumanity. She is, through her impossible reserve, both inhuman and inhumane.

Courtly love literature involves (to borrow Elaine Hansen's expression) a grand fiction of gender. Professing to "be about" ideal men and women in love, courtly love literature is actually about men almost exclusively (I will return to this qualification later on). The male poets write the stories of masculine accomplishment in the name of the lady, trading identities with the fictional lovers, who themselves are usually poets. An

androcentric system is set up then, with the lady as an object of exchange between male poets, and between male poet and their male characters. Fisher and Halley remark that "for a male author to write women in [the medieval and Renaissance] periods was not to refer to women, but to men--to desire not relationship with women, but relationship to the traditions of male textual activity, and, by extension, of male social and political privilege" (4).[34] The problem for the courtly homotextual plot is, however, that masculinity, dependent on femininity as a point of difference by which men can "see" themselves, is similarly emptied of a masculine subject in the female-less universe of courtly love literature. Just as the courtly feminine ideal is a hollow illusion of a female subject, so too is courtly masculinity emptied of a male subject. The difference is that the lover figure, however meaningless, is the textual property of male poets, who are free to "work" the material, while women are denied access to the lady figure. Masculinity is also a grand fiction of courtly love, but it is a male-generated fiction, so

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[34] Anne Laskaya regards the courtly realm as being as androcentric and homo(sex/text)ual as the three other dominant literary constructions of ideal masculinity in secular English literature: the epic hero, the Christian hero, and (later) the man of learning. The epic hero waged battles, conquered lands and then ruled them (15). The Christian ideal of masculinity was focused on religious values that "praised non-violence, self-renunciation, and devotion to an inner world" (16). The man of learning, or clerkly masculinity was born of the development of humanist education in the universities, and stressed intellectual achievement (18). These three literary masculine ideals involve the hero's "recognition, reward and acceptance into an ordered hierarchy of men" (19).

what is lost in the subjectivity of the lover-character is gained in creative control.

The first chapter of this dissertation, "Reading Gender in the Oxford Group," directly addresses this problem of the "illusion" of gender in courtly texts. The Oxford group is a small family of manuscripts (I look at three core books) that share a series of poems by Chaucer and his literary followers. These texts, mostly love (or dream) vision poetry, construct the dominant discourse of courtly ideology, including courtly gender, discussed above. As courtly collections par excellence, the overall effect of the Oxford group's very restrictive and text-based vision of masculine and feminine ideals is to negate the possibility of any real male or female subjectivity in its depictions of gender.

The uniformity of the Oxford collections is the direct result of the professional book trade in late medieval London. While not all manuscripts in the extant group were professionally produced, their textual homogeneity testifies to the extreme likelihood that the exemplum originated with a professional stationer or stationers. The Oxford group could very well be a relic of the intimate community of London craftsmen in the book trade. The group, with manuscripts of varying quality and, presumably, varying social provenances, also reflects the transmission of reading material through the social strata of late medieval England.

As Seth Lerer suggests, these collections serve as "a fable of patronage," a fiction of text production meant to make the book owners feel aligned with a more elevated cultural existence (Chaucer and His Readers 61). Reading like a catalogue of courtly love, the Oxford group is no more about male or female personalities than courtly love itself is. Instead, the central "character" of the Oxford collections is the book itself; specifically the methods that produced it and its texts. Courtly love actually evades gender through a process of referring back to other meanings: it is not really about heterosexual love, but about homosocial masculinity; it is not really about homosocial masculinity, but is about the production of text. The emptiness of courtly gender through these layers of meaning constantly forces the reader to shift the grounds of interpretation, and the subject of gender is quickly abandoned.

The Oxford group is a codicological manifestation of interpretations of courtliness. The books layer courtly poems within the folios of manuscripts produced in layers of dissemination--multiple exempla, multiple arrangements, multiple assemblies over a period of years. If the codicologist goes back through the layers of the production of the Oxford group, she comes to the same point reached by critics of courtly texts: the book was made, the text exists--the "meaning" of the text is the book.[35]

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[35] As Toril Moi points out in her discussion of interpretations of Andreas Capellanus's The Art of Courtly Love, the self-referentiality and ambiguity of the courtly text places

How can it be that an entire group of texts populated by dozens of male and female characters can have nothing to say about gender? This returns me to my previous qualification that courtly love literature is "almost exclusively" about men. While it is evident that the lady character is a male fiction, not based of a vision of real women, some readers of courtly texts have suggested that the character of the lady contains subversive possibilities for female voices, simply by virtue of her presence in the text. A shred of evidence, a cipher of the feminine, these readers suggest, is all that is necessary to find the woman in the text. Ruth Cassel Hoffman calls this the "shadow voice" of the woman: we have to read through the actions of the male poet to hear her behind him. For Hoffman the poet's actions reflect the lady's very existence, and if she exists, then she must contain some kind of feminine identity that can recovered by the reader.[36]

In the courtly paradigm, the only way the lady (or the lover, for that matter) can be recovered is to halt the process

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the reader in the same position as the abject courtly lover. The courtly text is the sphinx-like lady, looking down on the critic-lovers as they twist themselves into knots while trying to figure out what she wants, what she represents (30).

[36] Frederick Goldin offers a similar analysis of the subversive subject of the lady, seeing her role as a mirror to the poet (intended to reflect his own identity back at him) with the same sort of power that the mythical pool held over Narcissus. In the anti-courtly genre of the fabliau, E. Jane Burns has offered another reading of the potential for male fictions of womanhood to "talk back" in the text, through the very fact of bodily existence in the text. See note 17, in Chapter Two, for further explanation of Burn's Bodytalk theory.

of referring back: to extract one particular moment of the courtly text and to draw out the gendered subject latent in the text, now accessible in an excerpt that can not longer slip away to another level of interpretation. In Chapter Two, "Reading Women in the Findern Manuscript," I demonstrate how at least one medieval readership found a way to extract courtly gender ideologies by extracting courtly texts, some of which are found in the Oxford group. These extracts were then compiled with a variety of other texts, producing a reworked vision of courtliness that accommodated more meaningful constructions of gender--and of femininity in particular.

The Findern manuscript was produced by a Derbyshire community which involved a number of women who took active interest in the book, as evidenced by the female names in the margins. From the perspective of the book trade, Findern is interesting because it seems to have a foot in both the professional and amateur worlds of manuscript production. Although essentially a homemade anthology that took about a century to develop, and that involved several participants, Findern also contains some polished copying (perhaps "semi-professional"), as well as texts that obviously originated in professionally produced exempla, including some from the Oxford group.

Findern's reworked professional material manages to rework the conventional courtly gender ideology of the type found in transmissions like the Oxford group--into a gender ideology more

appropriate for the rural gentry. The difference is most notable in the construction of femininity. Instead of a series of silent ladies manipulated by the male courtly text, Findern gives voice to female characters who, while not being un-gentil, nevertheless embody a much more empowered vision of medieval womanhood. This new ideal of femininity is produced through a compilatio that combines love vision poetry with material from other sources (most notably romance and lyric texts), and with extracts from Gower's Confessio Amantis. The gender constructions of the manuscript have an impact not only on ideals of masculinity and femininity, but also on ideals of class.

The gynocentric courtliness on the Findern manuscript privileges (and is based on) the female voice. My third chapter, "Female-Voiced Lyrics in Middle English Manuscripts," examines the issue of whether or not we can safely associate the female voice with female manuscript producers or users in general. The answer is a qualified "yes." In my survey of manuscripts containing female-voiced lyrics I do find instances in which a textual privileging of the female voice reflects a female production or reading influence on a book.

Certain book production circumstances, like those responsible for the Findern manuscript, or the court-associated Devonshire manuscript, appear to have provided a site for women's literary activities. In these manuscripts, there is a corresponding compiling interest in female-voiced lyric texts. Female-voiced lyrics in these manuscripts are generally courtly

in nature, and reflect the cross-pollination of reading interests between the classes of medieval England. Through the characters of the lover and the lady, these lyrics seem to act out a courtly "game" of reading and writing. The female-voiced lyrics participate in a larger literary tradition of courtliness, one that is based on the circulation of literature itself.

Other female-voiced lyrics, however, are considerably less courtly, even misogynist, in nature. These often appear in manuscripts produced in a clerical milieu. A third manifestation of the female-voiced lyric, which intersects with both of the courtly and anti-courtly genres, is represented in the texts that were circulated in song books, as a singer's role in a performance. This suggests that in medieval England, the female voice was transmitted in oral, as well as written, circumstances. The woman's voice, therefore, cannot be isolated as a single contribution in Middle English, for it means different things to different readerships.

In the fourth chapter, "Constructing Masculinity in Balliol 354," I consider how a grocer in late medieval London, Richard Hill, used literary sources to flesh out a vision of merchant manhood. Appearing alongside religious texts, courtesy books and professional material, the English recreational literature in Hill's book (extracts of the Confessio Amantis, a fabliau, and assorted lyrics) served to reinforce the ideals of masculine conduct demanded in the mercantile milieu of late medieval London. The ideal of merchant masculinity textualized in Hill's

book both reflects the world that shaped him as a reader, and acts as a guide to manhood for future generations of male readers. Produced at the close of the Middle Ages, Hill's book highlights the differences between the gender concerns of the economically, politically and socially powerful mercantile community, and the gender representations established in books inspired by courtly tradition--books such as those found in the Oxford group.

Chapter 1: Gender in the Oxford Group

The facing page of the first full folio of literary text in Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16 contains a lovely illumination of three panels, each of which display one primary figure.[1] On the left, in the first panel that comes to the viewer's attention, is the figure of Mars. Dressed in full martial garb, he is slightly larger than Venus, in the panel on the right, and Jupiter, who floats above both Mars and Venus in the panel at the top of the illustration. Mars, therefore, dominates the picture. He is carrying a shield and raises an unsheathed sword in his right hand, but his pose is not combative. Instead, his arm is raised in a gesture of salute or supplication--the latter possibility being lent weight by the facial expression, which is one of sorrow or petition. His gaze is directed upwards, towards the Jupiter panel, and his lips appear to be parted slightly.

The left panel contains Venus, nude, standing in a body of water and holding a book under her left arm. She is making a similar gesture of salutation as Mars's gesture, although her arm is not as fully extended. Her face, given less detail by the artist than Mars's, appears mildly morose. In an horizontal panel above these two vertical one is Jupiter, looming over everything below, his gaze directed at Mars. The three-panel

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[1] Bodleian MS Fairfax 16 is available in facsimile, including a colour reproduction of this illumination, edited by John Norton-Smith.

illumination is bordered by flourishes and the coat of arms of the manuscript owner, John Stanley of Hooton[2].

This illumination is meant to illustrate the first two texts of the first booklet of the Fairfax 16 collection (ff.1-186): Chaucer's "Complaint of Mars" and "Complaint of Venus." The texts that follow these in the Fairfax manuscript are as follows: Lydgate's "Complaint of a Lover's Lyfe (or, The Black Knight)", Chaucer's Anelida and Arcite, Clanvowe's "Boke of Cupid (or, the Cuckoo and the Nightengale)," Chaucer's "Truth", Hoccleve's "Letter of Cupid," the anonymous "Ragman Roll", Roos's La Belle Dame sans Merci, Lydgate's Temple of Glass, Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, Parliament of Fowls, and The Book of the Duchess, the anonymous "Envoy to Alison" and "Chance of the Dice", Chaucer's House of Fame and "Complaint unto Pity." The first booklet of the Fairfax manuscript is, then, a substantial collection of texts by major authors, especially Chaucer, and Chaucerian apocrypha (works formally attributed to Chaucer).[3]

This large text cluster of Chauceriana contained in the first section of Fairfax 16 is shared by two other Bodleian manuscripts, Bodley 638 and Tanner 346. There are also a number of other manuscripts which share smaller pieces of the text cluster found in the three Fairfax, Bodley and Tanner

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[2] On Stanley see Norton-Smith's Introduction to the fascimile xiii-xiv. Stanley was an "Usher of the Chamber to Henry VI from 1450-1455" (Boffey and Thompson 304, n14).

[3] For brief discussions and bibliographic references for the Chaucerian Apocrypha see Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Chaucerian Apocrypha" and Russell Peck, Annotated Bibliography 243-337.

manuscripts. This family of textually associated manuscripts, and the three main Bodleian manuscripts in particular, are often referred to as the "Oxford group" manuscripts.[4] Of the three core Oxford group manuscripts, Fairfax is the middle sister (c.1450), the youngest being Bodley (c.1475-1500), and the eldest Tanner (c.1425-1450). The three manuscripts in the core group alone demonstrate the range of production circumstances of anthologies containing very similar, almost identical reading material. In terms of genre, these manuscripts are primarily made up of "love-vision" poetry and apocryphal lyrics.[5]

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[4] Eleanor Prescott Hammond first grouped these manuscripts together in Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual (333-39), with a table showing the different arrangements of texts in the three Bodleian manuscripts. Aage Brusendorff later suggested that the group be caled the "Hammond Group" in her honour, but the suggestion was never really taken up by other scholars (191). The satellite manuscripts include Bodleian MS Digby 181, Longleat MS 258, Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19 and Cambridge University Library Ff.1.6 (the Findern Manuscript). Thynne's printed edition, The Workes of Geffray Chaucer of 1532 is also connected to the group. On Digby 181 see Hammond, Chaucer, 340; and Brusendorff (who included it in the group of core manuscripts), 182-6 and 190. On Longleat 258 see Hammond, "MS Longleat 258--A Chaucerian Codex," Brusendorff, 190-1, Boffey and Thompson 281-3, George B. Pace and Alfred David, The Minor Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer 17-18. On Tynne's edition see Derek Pearsall The Floure and the Leafe 2-4, 7-8.

[5] The order of the texts in the three manuscripts is not the same, and the Tanner and Bodley manuscripts do not include all of the smaller material found in Fairfax (although their exclusions are not the same). All three manuscripts contain the Legend of Good Women, the Parliament of Foules, the Book of the Duchess, (in that order in Fairfax and Bodley, but not Tanner) Anelida and Arcite, and Complaint unto Pity. The House of Fame, "ABC," "Complaint unto Fortune" are in Fairfax and Bodley, but not in Tanner. The Complaint of Mars, and the Complaint of Venus is excluded only in Bodley. "Truth" is found only in Fairfax. Regarding the texts by the other four known authors, all three manuscripts share the same four pieces: Lydgate's Complaint of a Lover's Life and the Temple of Glass, Hoccleve's Letter of Cupid

Producing the Oxford Group

The Oxford group manuscripts are the direct product of professional booklet production methods in the later Middle Ages, and of the expanding reading interests of the middle class--particularly gentry readers.[6] The production of so many related, but different, transmissions through the three key manuscripts and related cousins (none of the extant core manuscripts is a direct copy of another) could only be the result of the circulation of several booklet exemplars which evolved in slightly different directions over time.[7]

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and Clanvowe's Book of Cupid (Cuckoo and the Nightengale), while only Fairfax has Roos's Belle Dame Sans Merci. Of the anonymous contributions, none appear in all three manuscripts. Fairfax and Bodley contain the "Chance of the Dice," Fairfax and Tanner contain "Envoy to Alison," while the rest are single entries in Bodley and Tanner: "Complaint Against Hope," "Complaint D'Amours," "Ragman's Roll," and "Order of Fools" (in a group in Bodley) and "Lover's Plaint," "Complaint for Lack of Sight" (Tanner). Fairfax, a much larger manuscript, also contains a number of other items not connected (by Hammond) with the Oxford Group texts, and therefore not included in this discussion.

[6] For detailed discussion of booklet compilation of the Oxford group manuscripts, see Brusendorff 182-91, Robinson's introduction to the Bodely and Tanner fascimiles, and Boffey and Thompson 280-3. Robinson applies her theories of booklet production to Tanner 346 in the introduction to its facsimile. Although Bodley itself is not copied in booklet form, its copyist either used a booklet exemplar or an decendant thereof (Boffey and Thompson 281-2).

[7] Thinking on the relationships between the manuscripts has evolved somewhat since Hammond's suggestion that there must have been a single ancestor containing all of the texts in the collections (related directly to Tanner) for the three extant core books (338-9). Brusendorff refined this to suggest that the exempla of the group came together from smaller exempla circulating in "a number of independent booklets" (187). This idea has been refined even further by Robinson and Norton-Smith, the editors of the fascimiles of Tanner 346 and Bodley 638, and Fairfax 16. An overview of the debate is provided by Kate Harris ("Patron, Buyers,

Booklet production meant that these texts were easily accessible and relatively cheap to produce, although there was nothing stopping a wealthier client from commissioning a more ornate version, as did Stanley with Fairfax 16. Eventually, the versions of the group found their way into the hands of private copyists who could produce the texts for themselves, as did the Bodley scribe. Courtly love, the subject of the Oxford group texts, is therefore no longer associated exclusively with the court poets and their audiences by this time. Middle class interest in this subject is responsible for (and encouraged by) the collections like the Oxford group (Boffey and Thompson, 282). Fairfax 16, produced for a man "whose connections with the court are well documented" (Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners" 218), represents the social connection between gentry and the court, while Tanner 346 and Bodley 638 demonstrate the extension of the same reading interests outside the court. More distant cousins of the Oxford group, like the Findern manuscript, which I will

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and Owners" 309-12) and Boffey, Manuscripts 92-3, who concludes that the three core codices are "less closely related to each other than has sometimes been supposed" (92). Boffey's point is that they do not indicate the existence of a single exemplar containing all the texts. The presence of multiple exemplars, "each containing one longish poem" (Brusendorff 187), reinforces my point that group reflects the broad dissemination of the courtly literature common to the manuscripts: they were by no means restricted to one sort of readership. I suspect that the group is a direct result of the geographical proximity of professionals in the London booktrade to each other, which resulted in the similar selection of texts in different stationer's businesses.

discuss in the next chapter, take courtly reading even further afield.[8]

Fairfax 16, a commissioned book, was produced by a single scribe in five distinct units.[9] The collection is well organized, well copied and well assembled, apparently the result of a professional alliance of producers, including a scribe, a rubricator and a flourisher (Norton-Smith, ix). According to John Norton-Smith, the facsimile editor, the manuscript is a "nearly perfectly preserved example of a manuscript produced to order by a commercial scriptorium or bookseller (either in Oxford or London) for a single owner belonging to the landed gentry" (vii). Although Norton-Smith sees the book as something less than "an edition de luxe," Carol Meale suggests that the illumination indicates that it was a "treasured book" ("Patrons, Buyers, and Owners" 218).

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[8] I do not wish to suggest that these three manuscripts represent a chronological progression of courtly texts being appropriated by middle class readers--from Fairfax to Bodley. The manuscript evidence contradicts this idea, since Tanner, a less extravagant book, pre-dates Fairfax. By the time these three manuscripts were produced in the fifteenth century, court and city culture, as Doyle has pointed out, was already well mixed (see esp. 171). The three manuscripts do reflect, however, the results of the earlier "seepage" of courtly reading to the middle classes, which is the late medieval exchange of texts and books between social groups. On another textual association between Fairfax 16 (involving texts not in the Oxford group) and a more modest book from the merchant milieu (Pepys MS 2006), see Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners 218)

[9] Only the first section of the Fairfax manuscript, a booklet of 186 folios, is part of the Oxford group, although the other texts include many more items by major authors thematically related to the Oxford texts.

A step below Fairfax's fine professional production is the earliest of the group, Tanner 346. Like Fairfax, the makers of Tanner 346 produced individual booklets on parchment for the specific purpose of being included in a particular commission--a bespoke book for a certain client.[10] But Tanner's production method is significantly different than Fairfax's centralized production by a single scribe and his associates. The Tanner stationer employed a few scribes who copied different sections simultaneously, "leap-frogging" one another as they each completed various sections, which were later assembled together (Boffey and Thompson, 281). This method produces a somewhat less perfect copy than the single scribe method, with some imperfect connections between the sections. It would, however, have been quicker, and perhaps cheaper, than the more polished Fairfax production.

After being copied, the booklets were assembled and given "modest" decoration of bordering and initialling (Robinson,

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[10] In the introduction to the facsimile Robinson remarks that there "is nothing to indicate for whom Tanner 346 may have been written or by whom it was first owned" (xxvi) but Seth Lerer sees the quality of the production as being "closer to the ambiance of Fairfax 16 (a presentation by a member of armigerious gentry) than it is to Bodley 638" (Chaucer and His Readers 243-4, n15). For this reason, he attributes the commissioning of the manuscript to Sir John Greystoke, whose signature is the earliest that can be identified in the book (60). Robinson points out, however, that this might indicate second-hand ownership by Greystoke, and that the original owner remains unknown (xxvi). For the purposes of this discussion we agree with both Lerer's assertion that the book is associated with the gentry milieu, and Robinson's assertion that it is impossible to know whether or not Greystoke way the original owner. In my discussion, the general milieu is more important than the specific history of the book.

"Introduction" xxvi). It appears that the original owners invested enough money to commission a modest but attractive book with no pre-used booklets, although they were either not wealthy enough, or not sufficiently enamoured of the texts, to request the more lavish type of book such as Fairfax 16 (xxv).

If Fairfax, and to a lesser extent Tanner, are evidence of the value that might have been placed on the texts of the Oxford group, Bodley 638 is evidence of a more casual readership, perhaps of the broad-ranging appeal of these texts.[11] The book was copied continuously (not in booklets, although probably using a booklet exemplar) by a single scribe called "Lyty" (Robinson xvii, Boffey and Thompson 281). The book is, as Boffey and Thompson point out "carefully but economically made" (281). Although there is no evidence that the original owner or producer of Bodley (it is unknown if Lyty also owned the book, of if the owner was someone different) was actually poorer than the Fairfax or Tanner owners, the homemade Bodley manuscript can be seen as the kind of literary endeavour that were produced within the means of less advantaged readers. The book eventually fell into

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[11] While Tanner and Fairfax share the circumstance of the booklet production method, Bodley and Fairfax seem to share textual similarities, including the some of the ordinatio, such as the Latin citations and subheadings: "Whereas in Manuscript Fairfax [sic] these formed part of the design of the book (each book had wide margins in which the learned apparatus was neatly written in red ink and prefaced with a blue paragraph mark) in Manuscript Bodley they were squashed onto the outer margins of the page" (Robinson xxvi). While it is unknown whether or not Fairfax and Bodley shared an exemplar, the textual similarities between the two manuscripts suggest that at the very least, the exemplars themselves were closely related.

the hands of a boys' school, as is evidenced by the substantial marginalia of male names written in hands of various skill. Not surprisingly, the book is now considerably battered, although the extent to which the boys themselves are responsible for the abuse remains open to conjecture.[12]

We have in the Oxford group, then, a cluster of texts repeated through three very different manuscripts with different production and circulation histories. This in and of itself should attest to the breadth of the reading audience of these texts, and therefore to the importance of these texts to medieval readerships generally. In the case of Fairfax we have an example of courtly love literature, specifically, the love visions, connected to the court through its ownership history.

The definition of "love-vision" rests primarily on poetic convention, requiring courtly machinery: "a spring setting in a meadow; the poet's dream or vision, a magnificent court of Cupid or Venus, organized on a feudal system; buildings often with walls of glass and gates of gold, and decorated with pictures of famous lovers; personified abstractions serving as courtiers ... introductions of birds, often as attendant on the God of Love; ... swooning lovers and unusually stony-hearted mistresses (whose

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[12] In her discussion of the possibility that Bodley 638 was part of the library of a grammar school in Leominster, Herefordshire, Robinson suggests: "It would not be unusual for a book of Chaucer's verses to be read in a grammar school at this time. The respect in which Chaucer was held as a rhetorician and the assimilation of his works to the classics would ensure that Chaucer was considered suitable reading for boys" (xxxix-xli).

beauties are catalogued); and parliaments of love" (Robbins, "Chaucerian Apocrypha" 1086).[13]

As exemplary courtly love texts, the love visions are part of the "grand fiction of gender" discussed in my introduction. Robbins suggests that fifteenth century authors and audiences were aware of the vapidity of the courtly code, that they were "questioning the standards of courtly love." The main point of such poetry, Robbins asserts, was "as much in their acceptance of the courtly code as in their awareness that the code was bogus" (1086-7). But the quality of the production of the Fairfax 16 manuscript raises the questions as to whether all readership really saw the courtly code as "bogus." The parchment, the professional copying, and the fine illumination in the school of master William Abell all speak of a heavy financial and cultural investment in the courtly code.

The investment into Fairfax, and perhaps in Tanner, was probably motivated by class interests. Members of the gentry, suggests Seth Lerer, attempted to inscribe courtliness into their own social identities through production and ownership of manuscripts containing courtly material. The Oxford group itself has been seen by Seth Lerer as a "fable of patronage", wherein the processes of middle-class book production replace the

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[13] See also Brian Stone (11). Robbins also uses the term "aunter" poetry in reference to Chauceriana and love-visions authored by Chaucer's literary disciples (1086).

patronage system of the court (61).[14] The courtliness of the text may well have been read, then, with some earnestness, with an eye to cultural advancement. Subversions of the courtly code, while perhaps built into the texts by the authors, are weakened by the social circumstances of the text circulation in the Oxford group. Furthermore, the inclusion of so many such courtly texts has the effect of reinforcing, not subverting courtliness through the sheer homogeneity of the collections.

It is also significant that these "fables" of literate culture are acted out on the grounds of gender--through texts that deal exclusively with the amorous relationships of a particular sort of men and women. That so many of these similar

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[14] Lerer's study used the Tanner manuscript almost exclusively. Anthologies like Tanner, he suggests, were the the result of the efforts of the gentry not only to familiarise themselves with the literature of the court, but also to inscribe themselves into the literate culture of patronage and auctoritas, wherein books were commissioned as poems had once been, with figurehead Chaucer as the "progenitor of vernacular love verse" (63). But in order to place the anthology on the same level as the commissioned poem, the auctoritas of the author must be destabilized (codicologically demonstrated in Tanner 346 by the absence of authorial recognition for poems copied into the manuscript), so that the compiling and reading processes overtake the creative processes of the poet: "The concerns of Tanner lie less with Chaucerian authority or problems of authorship than they do with issues of patronage. The poet's name does not appear because its poems come to be concerned less with their origin than with their use: that is, less with their genesis in authorial imagination than with their generation out of royal commission and their transmission through courtly patronage.... These poems come together, therefore, to give voice to the literary aspirations of a readership, rather than to ground that readership in the named authority of authors." (82) This readership was the gentry class, and their patronage of books was, according to Lerer, expressly linked to their desire to "define themselves as a class," and "to imitate a pattern of behaviour that distinguished their social superiors" (84).

texts were central to the development of a middle-class, book-making community surely requires that the visions of gender they portray be examined more closely. When we factor in the historical evidence that many of these books, although often commissioned, produced and owned by men, were actually read (and meant to be read) by women, the gender intersection in this literate culture becomes even more salient. The relationship between gender and text in the Oxford group can be established by a closer examination of the illumination of Mars and Venus in the Fairfax manuscript, and of the two attendant poetic extracts.

Venus and the Book

In the image, Venus is holding a book. Norton-Smith speculated that this "unusual detail perhaps derives from Boccaccio's Genealogia III 22, where it is said that one aspect of the planetary Venus aids poets in the composing of verses" or that "it may symbolize Venus's own poetic complaint" (Fairfax 16 xii).[15] It might also tempt us to see an assertion of feminine authority over language and text, one that might be found in the following folios of the manuscript. I would suggest, however, that such a reading of female textual authority in the figure of Venus and the book is misleading in the broader context of the textual/sexual dynamics of the Oxford group texts.

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[15] Indeed, as Norton-Smith also points out, Chaucer refers to Venus as a poetic muse in the Parliament of Foules (l.113).

In the illumination, Venus's lips are closed: she is not portrayed as actually speaking, unlike Mars, whose lips are parted as he addresses Jupiter above him. Venus's book, like her mouth, is also closed. Elaine Tuttle Hansen has suggested that the voices of the female characters in Chaucer's poems are little more than auditory illusions--that they are only mimicry on the part of male authors, in their ongoing exchange of texts. Eternally anxious about their masculine authority of authorship, poets write their exchanges on the mute female body, which they occasionally animate with voice in order to distinguish their own gendered subject more clearly. "What often sounds like a woman's voice," observes Hansen, "what is spoken in the name of women inflected by different and highly realistic, sometimes subversive dialects, always enters and leaves the Chaucerian story not as the enunciation of an autonomous speaker, but as an urgent problem for the gendered identity of male characters, male narrators, and (?male) [sic] readers" (Fictions of Gender 12). Similarly, Venus possessing the book in the Fairfax illumination is an illusion of textual authority, betrayed by her closed and silent mouth.

This is confirmed if we consider the poem that the illumination illustrates, Complaint of Venus, where we need only to turn to the history of the composition of the poem to hear the male voice behind the lady's voice. Chaucer adapted the poem from three ballads by Oton de Granson, all of which were originally written in the male voice. He made only as many

alterations as were necessary to transfer the text to the female voice. In Chaucer's translation, however, the use of the female voice does not make the poem's subject femininity. Instead, it is a meditation on masculinity, and the intimate relationship of the two male poets, Granson and Chaucer.

The first section is primarily a meditation "Upon the manhod and the worthynesse" of Mars (l.4), with special attention paid to his "gentil" masculinity, the adjective being repeated four times in the twenty-four lines of the first section (ll. 8,16,18,24). In the second and third passages Venus describes the victimization of Love (male) at the hands of Jealousy (female), and states her allegiance to the masculine element, and cursing the feminine personification: "Jelosie be hanged by a cable!" (l.33).[16]

The androcentric imperative of the poem is finally betrayed by the envoy, which slips off the topic of love altogether, and speaks only to the male poetic anxiety over the translation from French into English:

Princes, receyveth this compleynt in gre,
Unto your excelent benignite
Direct after my litel suffisaunce.
For elde, that in my spirit dulleth me,
ath of endyting al the subtilte
Wel nygh bereft out of my remembraunce,
And eke to me it ys a gret penaunce,
Syth rym in Englissh hath such skarsete,
To folowe word by word the curiosite
Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in France. (73-82)

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[16] All citations form Chaucer's works in this dissertation are taken from The Riverside Chaucer, edited by Larry D. Benson.

Although there is no clear signal that the first person speaker has been changed, we are suddenly conscious of the fact that the voice we are listening to is not Venus's, but Chaucer's. The poet is concerned that his mother tongue might not be adequate to the "subtilte" of the courtly text.[17] He is also concerned that his source and literary forefather, Granson, be properly acknowledged. So tenuous is the feminine persona of the complaint that it cannot be fully sustained to the end of the poem.[18] The envoy reveals that the "Complaint of Venus" is, as Hansen suggested of Chaucer's female voices generally, simply acting as a vehicle for the discussion, between men, of masculinity and the courtly literary endeavour.

Indeed, we see in the illumination that it is actually Mars who is speaking to Jupiter, who gazes down on Mars in turn. The

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[17] This professed poetic anxiety may actually be, as the Riverside editor of the poem suggests, an ironic form of self-confidence. As the poet of the Complaint of Venus declares the inadequacy of the rhymes of the English language, he does so in a complex ten-line verse that uses only two rhymes. Therefore, he is actually demonstrating his immense skill as a poet (Riverside Chaucer 1081).

[18] This conflation of the male poet and the female speaker is exemplified in the textual problem of the address of the envoy, "Princes." According to the explanatory notes of the Riverside Chaucer, there is some critical confusion over whether it is meant to be read as "Princes" (plural male) or "Princesse" (singular female). Not only is the gender (and the number) of the addressee confused by this, but also, perhaps, the gender of the addresser. It seems to me (and the Riverside editors)to be more likely to be the male poet addressing a male community of superiors; yet it could also be an address to a female patron figure by the male courtly poet, or an address to male or female authorities by Venus (although I find this last suggestion unlikely, for there is no previous evidence in the poem that she is addressing such figures). See note for line 73 on page 1082 in the Riverside Chaucer.

discourse is between the two male figures, with the female looking on, mute. In deference to the king of the Gods, Mars must censor himself. Therefore Jupiter exerts ultimate authority over the text, directing it, shaping it. He is like the patron who controls the court poet, or the poet who controls the speech of the character, or the narrator-character of the "Complaint" who controls the retelling of Mars's story. The interaction of the two men in the illustration, then, symbolizes the historical interaction between men of different status in the literate culture, and the relationship between author and text in the literary process.[19]

But this subjection of one male poet figure to another is not equal to the annihilation of the female speaker by the poet's literary authority. The male poet figure of Mars is imbued with authority as an author-character, which is shown in his own literary anxiety and self-consciousness. The first stanza of Mars's complaint proper (which comes after the story) addresses the issue of the act of composing the complaint itself:

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[19] In some of the other texts of the Oxford Group, a third layer is added to this interaction between two male characters, in the form of the relationship between the lamenting male lover (especially the Black Knights of The Book of the Duchess and the Complaint of a Lover's Life) and the narrator-dreamer-lover-poet character who is responsible for relating the lover's story. Like the relationship between the courtly lover and the courtly lady, the narrator professes subjection to the original version of the lamenting lover's tale of woe (as told by the lover himself), stating repeatedly in Complaint of a Lover's Lyfe, for instance, that he is merely "rehearsing" the words of the Knight, with no scribal emendations of any kind. But, as in the lover-lady relationship, ultimate control over the text reveals this subjection to be false.

The order of compleynt requireth skylfully
That yf a wight shal pleyne pitously,
Ther mot be cause wherfore that men pleyne;
Or men may deme he pleyneth folily
And causeles; alas, that am not I.
Wherfore the ground and cause of al my peyne,
So as my troubled wit may hit attenye,
I wol reherse; not for to have redresse,
But to declare my ground of hevynesse. (155-63)

Unlike Venus, whose complaint simply begins with the poem, with no stated consciousness of poetic tradition or audience, Mars is acutely aware of the rules or "order" of the poetic tradition that must be respected by the (male) poet, lest the (male) audience deem his text "foolish," his complaint without "cause" or "ground." By doing so, Mars actually demonstrates his proper subjection to the auctores, and thereby asserts for himself (as a lesser son of poetic tradition) the role and rights of the poet to state his case.

That Mars's voice is relayed through and subjected to the narrator-poet of the broader poem the Complaint of Mars is obvious. But while poetic process is suppressed in "The Complaint of Venus," in Complaint of Mars it is highlighted: here the narrator makes a great show of handing the text over to Mars (professing, in his turn, subjection to the text), just as Mars makes a great show of putting on the mantle of the poet. The performative aspect of this, the fact that it is all show, is important to sustaining the literary process of courtly love. It is a fictionalization of the historical exchange of text between men in the courtly literate culture. Mars's tenuous and temporary authority over the text still enables him to be part

of the discussion, whereas Venus, in her complaint, is not accorded due respect by the poet as an author figure. Chaucer bestows and then snatches back her text (rather lazily adapted from a favourite male poet) without any ceremonious preamble legitimizing her voice. Mars, on the other hand, is accorded the respect due to him as another courtly male, albeit of inferior rank.

To return to the Fairfax illumination, instead of interpreting the book in Venus's hand as a symbol of female authority over the text in the illustration of Venus with the book, we should realize that Venus is the book. She is the object under discussion between the two men; the object exchanged between two men in the patron-poet relationship and in the relationship between book-owner and stationer. It is not simply that the female ideal of Venus is created like a text. She is actually created in and through the text.

Another example of this woman-as-text paradigm of the Oxford group is found in the small poem "Envoy to Alison" included in Fairfax and Tanner.[20] It is four stanzas long, three of which involve the supposed author/lover invoking his "lewde book" to carry his message to his loved one. The final stanza is supposedly the actual "envoy"--a six line acrostic spelling "Alison." The lady herself is merely text--her identity is

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[20] W.W. Skeat transcribes the poem, in The Complete Works of Geoffery Chaucer, Vol. 7, 359-60.

constructed by the poet, who builds her name into his poem, and describes her for the reader:

Aurore of gladnesse, and day of lustinesse,
Lucerne a-night, with hevenly influence
Illumined, rote of beautee and goodnesse,
Suspiries which I effunde in silence,
Of grace I beseche, alegge let your wrytinge,
Now of al goode sith ye be best livinge. (Skeat 360; 22-27)

Alison and Venus <u>are</u> male-authored poems and male-produced texts. Venus has no "say" in the text: like her lips, the book is closed, unreadable, unspoken. The women/texts on the Oxford group are feminine exempla controlled by male poets and poet figures. They are perfect, immortal objects of masculine literary desire with no voice, or text, of their own (Hansen 93). The Venus of the illumination exemplifies the other courtly women in the collections who suffer from male "textual harassment":[21] being at the mercy of the exchange of text between male participants in the literate culture. But Venus is not the most abject female in courtly discourse, some female characters in the Oxford group suffer additional levels of subjection to the male text.

<u>Women and Text</u>

Some female characters in the Oxford group are victimized not only by their lack of control over their own stories (since that rests in the hands of the male poets), but they are further

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[21] My use of the term "textual harassment" is different from Robert Hanning's use of it in his article on medieval glosses. My application is meant to invoke an association with "sexual harassment": an explicitly gendered interaction.

victimized within the text by their inability to negotiate the "false" words of male figures. Examples of these women in the Oxford group include Anelida, victimized by "fals" Arcite, Alcyone in Book of the Duchess, and many of the "martyrs" of the Legend of Good Women, especially Dido: "In her world, words are unreliable; men rely on that unreliability to seduce and abandon women; and women are incapable of resisting, although with hindsight they can both lament their doom and avow its universality and predictability" (Hansen 96). This is the problem of many of the women in the Legend of Good Women.

Take Philomela, for instance. The literal embodiment of a woman who has had language forcibly removed from her control by having her tongue cut out, Philomela is easily read as the female victim of male control of text. Violated, mutilated and imprisoned by her brother-in-law rapist, Philomena weaves her story into a tapestry and sends it to her sister. But while some versions of the tale focus on her eventual reclamation of text by means of her tapestry, Chaucer downplays this victory. In Chaucer's version, Philomela and her sister Progne are repeatedly and ultimately silenced by Tereus's violence. Not only does Philomela lose her power of speech, but when Progne finds her sister, she too loses her voice:

And whan that Progne hath this thing beholde,
No word she spak, for sorwe and ek rage,
But feynede hire to gon on pilgrymage
To Bacus temple; and in a litel stounde
Hire dombe sister sittynge hath she founde,
Wepynge in the castel, here alone.
Allas! The wo, the compleynt, and the mone
That Progne upon hire doumbe syster maketh!

In armes everych of hem other taketh,
And thus I late hem in here sorowe dwelle. (2373-82)

Although we are told that Progne makes a "compleynt," we do not hear it. Her complaint is associated with the wordless "mone" and "wo." Progne is inarticulate with grief over her "dumbe sister" and, in effect, the two become "dumbe sisters," left to "dwelle" in the sorowe and (significantly) in the prison. This is the end of Chaucer's tale, he does not follow Ovid's story to the women's gory revenge (as Gower does, as I shall discuss in the next chapter). The two women are left grieving inarticulately, passively. Philomela's attempt to regain her control over the text through weaving her story into the tapestry does not bring about justice or freedom; instead it brings her sister into prison and silence.

If women in the Oxford group texts are not silenced outright like Philomela and Progne, then they run afoul of masculine control of language in other ways. Poetic ability, for instance, the ability to fictionalize, is a tool that is used against women by men. This is stated clearly by Dido herself in the House of Fame; "We wretched wymmen koone noon art," she says (Hansen 94). "Art," in this construction, is the ability to separate truth and fiction: a man's poetic inheritance that permits him to create fictions with "kunnying" and "craft." With their words, men can sustain a "double" discourses, truth and fiction, intended to deceive women, who have no such talents for duplicity. Women are, in turn, described as "pleyn," they function on only one level of discourse.

Dido, of course, falls victim to masculine fictions, as do a number of other women in the Legend of Good Women. Another such victim in the Oxford group texts is Anelida in Anelida and Arcite. Here, Arcite is repeatedly described as being "double," and two-faced. While this is a condemnation of his character, it is also an acknowledgement of his superior abilities in handling fiction; because he can create stories and lie, he can control Anelida, who is "pleyn" and who "hiden nothing from her knyght" (l.116). Yet there is another female character in Anelida and Arcite, and although she is described as being the negation of all that Anelida represents on the surface, she actually shares the common problem of Chaucerian women in that she lacks control over text and courtly discourse. This is the figure of the "cruel lady," who, although a speaker in the text and not an obvious victim of the machinations of male textual control in the way that Dido is, nevertheless exemplifies the feminine inability to be responsible with language. Arcite, we hear, "dredth" her "every word ... as an arowe" (l.185).

In this unnamed "other woman," Arcite appears to have met his match. But the "cruel lady's" misuse of courtly discourse is related to the victimization of other female characters by courtly discourse. Her words are not described as duplicitous, but as abusive, and Arcite is addicted to this abuse: "For what he may not gete, that wolde he have" (l.203). Her linguistic control over Arcite is not of the masculine variety that would give her privileged ability with fiction. She is still "pleyn,"

simply "driving" him like a harnessed beast: "His newe lady holdeth him so narowe / Up by bridil, at the staves ende ... [She] drof hym forth" (ll.183-90).

In the Oxford group, the cruel lady running rampant with language (a much rarer figure than the textualized Venus-type or the victimized Philomela/Anelida-type) is exemplified by the Belle Dame Sans Merci--a name that is given (of course) to both the woman in the poem, and the poem itself. In this prolonged, rather tedious debate poem, the male lover assumes the usual position of being subjected to the lady, and the lady's text: "your yen haue set the prynte," he says, "which [th]at I fele / withyn myn herte" (ll.477-8). He professes to be totally hopeless at the "skylle" of courtly love, for he claims he cannot sing, and that "his tonge is most his enemy" (ll.733-40). The savvy and articulate "cruel lady," immediately calls his bluff, stating her oft-repeated observation that women should not trust the words of men--especially, she implies, when they insist on their inability to handle the language of love:

Male-bouche in court hath gret commaundement;
Ech man studith to say the wurst he may.
. . . .
Wherfor, to ladyse what men speke or pray,
It schuld not byleuyd in no wyse. (ll.741-8)

Living up to her name, the Belle Dame sends the lover away, with the harsh condemnation that he is "wastyng all [th]is wynde." In a final, cold-hearted gesture, she goes off to dance while he goes off to die.

Although the Belle Dame wins the argument outright, ultimately her control over language is an illusion. Her words (such as they are) are actually the words of the male narrator who, as is established at the beginning of the poem, is eavesdropping on the conversation. It is he who shapes the story and defines the woman as the "belle dame sans mercy." The narrator takes over the lover's story after the lover dies, re-establishing male control of the text. As with the Complaint of Venus, masculine dominance over discourse and textual exchange is given yet another level in the English tradition, as Roos's poem is, of course, a translation of Chartiers' original in French. In the envoy of the Belle Dame, the English poet displays all the appropriate false modesty, which also mimics the lover's anxieties regarding his own clumsiness with courtly language.

It may seem bizarre to suggest that the death of the lover in La Belle Dame Sans Merci is just another courtly ploy, but that is what it is (albeit in an extreme form). In another manuscript context (and we shall see one in the case of the Findern manuscript) the lover's extreme passive-aggressive tactic could easily be interpreted as ridiculous. There is a heavy irony to the entire poem, which most modern readers of the poem see as, in Robbins's words, a medieval acknowledgement of the "bogus-ness" of courtliness. But in the Oxford group, irony is another form of male double-speak that textually harasses women.

Hoccleve's Letter of Cupid is the most salient example of the dangers of masculine use of irony in the Oxford group. This

poem is a rare example of a male poet "exchanging text" with a female poet, in this case, Christine d'Pisan. But the first irony here is that Hoccleve twists Christine's defense of women so that it can be read as a defamation of women: in effect, he turns her words against her, and her own sex. Hoccleve places his own masculine manipulation of language in the larger tradition of classical and vernacular auctores whose words regarding women are "two-faced": Chaucer, Ovid, Jeun de Meun and the Bible are all mentioned as defamers and defenders of women. In the Oxford group collections this lineage of male textual duplicity is made a codicological reality, as the Letter of Cupid shares manuscript space with some of these authors directly, or with their literary progeny.

Just as Hoccleve purports to speak on behalf of Christine's text, Cupid's letter purports to speak on behalf of women generally. But of course this advocacy is false, and the letter (addressed to men) becomes just another discussion between men on the negative qualities of women. Therefore Cupid's "defense" actually comes out as a backhanded attack on female behaviour. Although much ink is spilt at the beginning of the poem on the misdeeds of men, Cupid begins to lay it on a bit thick further along, so that reader quickly becomes suspicious of his intentions. He also has the unfortunate tendency to give graphic illustrations of feminine misconduct while supposedly defending (most) women against the against the charge:

Al-be-hyt that man fynde / o[ne] woman nyce,
In-constant, recheles / or varriable,

Deynouse, or proude / fulfilled of malice,
Wythouten feyth or love / and deceyvable,
sly, queynt, and fals / in al vnthrift coupable,
Wikked, and feers / and ful of cruelte,
yt foloweth nat / that swich, al wommen be. (ll.148-54)

Such a catalogue of feminine abuse, of course, serves only to remind us of the men in the Oxford group who have fallen victim to women "ful of cruelte." At the same time, the irony falls into the category of the other masculine paradigm in these collections, the "false" lover, who possesses "kunnyng" in language. These two types of male conduct in courtly love are oxymoronic: male victimization at the hands of women co-exists with male abuse of women, but in the end, it all serves the dominant masculine discourse of courtliness. The contradictory-but-complimentary paradigms of male behaviour are a mix of masculine and feminine qualities that are required in the standard courtly construction of masculinity. The Oxford group texts provide one of the richest grounds for understanding courtly masculinity in English literature.

To "speke of manhode"

Two poems in the Oxford group, Chaucer's The Book of the Duchess and Lydgate's Complaint of a Lover's Life, explore the construction of courtly masculinity through the character of the Black Knight, who appears in both poems. Hansen has described how the feminine qualities of the mourning Black Knight are presented in The Book of the Duchess. Appearing in the narrator's dream vision, in a role similar to the apparition of

the fairy lady in many romances, the Knight is described as non-aggressive, adolescent (perhaps pretty), and physically weak (his head droops) (61).[22] Furthermore, in The Book of the Duchess, the loss of the Knight's Blanche is analogous to Alcyone's loss of her husband (her story was the text the narrator was reading before he fell asleep), therefore the knight is put in the same position as the grieving wife (63).

Moreover, the narrator himself is associated with Alcyone. The legend of Alcyone involves her pain at not being sure whether her vanished husband is alive or dead. The narrator of the Book of the Duchess displays a similar "self-conscious epistemological uncertainty" regarding his inability to interpret the message that the Black Knight's beloved is dead (Hansen 63). This epistemological problem of reading intersects with the larger problems of reading gender in courtly love. This includes gender anxieties resulting from the socially inferior and feminized position of the court poet--a feminized masculinity that is extended to figures like the Black Knight: "the narrator's feminization specifically implicates the particular circumstances of the medieval court poet and explicitly draws into the problem

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[22] Like the narrator himself, and many other men in the courtly texts, the Black Knight is suffering from "lovesickness." This illness is another aspect of feminization. As Vern L. Bullough explains, the literary trope of lovesickness was related to a historical understanding of excessive love as unmanly; "love beyond measure was called 'womanly love' (38). The "cure" for this emasculating illness was to prove one's virility through intercourse, preferably in an impressive sexual performance that resulted in orgasm for the woman and pregnancy (39-40).

of gender instability the problems of meaning and interpretation" (Hansen 64).

This feminization, however, is the key to building the male homosocial and homotextual associations upon which the courtly literary tradition rests. In order for the texts to pass between men, one man (historical or fictional) must be in a superior position in order to pass on the masculine privilege of literary and textual control to an inferior male, just as the patron is superior to the poet, and the narrator is superior to the Black Knight. Feminine attributes appearing in male characters--weakness, tearfulness, passivity and victimization--serve to position them, like poets, in the masculine hierarchy of textual authority. Since they are never actually excluded from textual control, courtly men are never in danger of being wholly or permanently feminized.

Fictional constructions of women in courtly texts, who are completely without textual control, serve to prevent the total feminization of the courtly male. The masculinity of male characters (who are the fictional extensions of male poets) is ultimately re-asserted when they are compared to these powerless female characters. Women in the Oxford collections, then, become a "crucial fiction," meant as "the figure of both difference and stable gender identity essential to the healing of the polymorphous, disordered condition of historically gendered subjectivity and discourse" (Hansen 74). In other words, the historical male poet can embrace his inferior, feminized status

as a part of his poetic identity because, as the poet, he will never really be a woman, who cannot be a poet: her difference (in her inability to control text) reestablishes his male gender identity.

Lydgate's Complaint of a Lover's Life illustrates the androcentricity of the courtly literary process even more completely.[23] This poem combines the elements of Chaucer's bereaved Black Knight in The Book of the Duchess with the cruel lady of La Belle Dame Sans Merci. Our narrator, by implication a lover, has arisen with an unspecified "sekenes" in his own heart, and goes into the wood to seek some kind of comfort. He finds himself in a green arbour in a corner of the forest, where he spies a man, "pale and wan," lying on the ground, with "hurtes greene, and fresh[e] woundes nyw" (131/133). This is the Black Knight, and although the narrator professes to be appalled by the man's suffering and immediately recognizes that the man is totally alone, he does not rush to his aid:

Wherof I had routhe and eke pite;
I gan so softly as I coude,
Amonge the busshes me priuely to shroude; (145-7)

This strange action is justified by the narrator as a means of getting information, as to the circumstances of the Knight's plight, which he clearly values over the well-being of the poor man himself. The broken figure of the Knight, however, is seen by the narrator merely as a means of obtaining that precious

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[23] This poem is also called The Complaint of the Black Knight, and is published under that title in the EETS edition edited by Henry Noble MacCracken, 382-410.

resource, a courtly text: "With al my myght I leyde an ere to,/ Euery worde to marke what he sayd[e]" (151-52).

Before the narrator tells the Knight's story, he digresses to give his readers two important and related descriptions: one is of the Knight's masculinity, and the other is of poetic process itself. Unlike the adolescent Black Knight of The Book of the Duchess, this Lydate's Knight is described as being manly and strong (had he not been laid low with illness): "in sothe, with-out excepcioun,/ To speke of manhod oon the best lyve" (157-8). Apparently, to "speke of manhood" is also to speak of poetry, for the Knight's masculinity leads the narrator directly to discussing his own poetic process. Demonstrating appropriate subjection to the masculine Knight, the narrator stresses repeatedly that he is only "rehearsing" the exact words of the Knight (l.175). He characterizes himself as a mere scribe to the author-Knight:

And who that shal write[n] of distresse,
In partye nedeth to know felyngly
Cause and rote of al such malady.
But I, alas, that am of wytte but dulle
And haue no knowyng of suche mater,
For to discryve and wryte[n] at the fulle
The wofull compleynt which that ye shul here;
But euen-like as doth a skryuener,
That can no more what that he shal write,
But as his maister beside dothe endyte: (187-96)

When the narrator finally turns to his "audyence," we find that he envisions it as made up of "trwe men" who have suffered for love (204-17). This all-male dynamic continues into the complaint itself, as the Black Knight manages to discuss at length his betrayal in love without actually mentioning the lady

in question. He names himself, for instance, a victim of "coldness" without ascribing that coldness to the lady directly. He speaks of personified figures like "Love," who is male. "Love" in this poem is lord and master to whom male lovers must pay service. It is a feudal or military relationship, and more often than not the master Love is abusive to his "trwe" servants:

Lo her the fyne of lover[e]s seruise!
     Lo how that Love can his seruantis qutye!
Lo how he can his feythful men dispise,
     To sle the trwe men, and fals to respite!
     Lo how de doth the suerde of sorowe byt
In hertis suche as must his lust obey,
To save the fals and do the trwe dey! (400-06)

Love then, is troped here as a relationship between two male figures. Furthermore, it is not only <u>between</u> men, but <u>about</u> men--or more specifically, about deeds of masculinity or "chivalry."

The qualities of "chivalry" are synonymous with "manhood" in <u>Complaint of a Lover's Life</u>. Masculine character here is dependent on "truth" and "honesty"--concepts that are constructed in military metaphors. In his list of worthy and unworthy male lovers, the Black Knight begins with Palamides, who he describes as:

     The trwe man, the noble worthy knyght,
That euer loved, and of hys peyne no relese,
     Not-withstondyng his manhode and his myght;
     Love vnto him did ful grete vnright,
For ay the bette he did in cheualrye,
The more he was hindred by Envy; (131-36)

The natural enemies of "trwe men," apparently, are slander and falsehood. It is to these evils and their brethren that the Black Knight has fallen victim:

Ayn[e]s me, and [Despite's] arowes to file,
     To take vengeaunce of wilful cruelte,
And tonges fals throgh her sleghty wile
     Han goone a werre that wol not stynted be,
     And fals Envye of wrathe, and Enemyte
Haue conspired ayens al rygght and lawe,
Of her malis that Trouthe shal be slawe.

(38)
And Male-bouche gan first the tale telle,
     To sclaundre Trouthe of indignacioun
And Fals-report so loude rong the belle,
     That Mys-beleve and Fals-suspecioun
     Haue Trouthe brought to hys dannacioun
So that alas wrongfully he dyeth,
And Falsnes now his place occupieth.

(39)
And entred ys in-to Trouthes londe,
     And hath therof the ful possessyoun. (253-68)

All battles are waged on the fields of discourse. Love, chivalry and masculine virtue are literally "speech-acts", where words are equated with military action. Courtly discourse is all powerful--the black Knight makes it very clear that in the hierarchies of acts of manhood, the language of love is highest in value. All champions of other masculine activities, such as (real) war, crusading and adventuring, are impotent in the face of Love. In making this point, the metaphor of military action for love, and the historical military action, become completely entangled:

(59)
For feythe nor othe, worde ne assuraunce,
     Trwe menyng, awayte, or besynesse,
Stil[l]e port ne feythful attendaunce,
     Manhode ne myght in armes worthinesse,
     Pursute of wurschip, nor [no] high provesse
In strange londe rydinge, ne trauayle,
Ful lyte or noght in love dothe avayle.

(60)
Peril of dethe, nother in se ne londe
     Hungre me thurst, sorowe me sekenesse,
Ne grete emprises for to take on honde,

Shedyng of blode, ne manful hardynesse,
Nor ofte woundynge at sawtes by distresse,
Nor iupartyng of lyfe nor dethe also:
Al ys for noght, Love taketh non hede therto. (407-20)

So androcentric is this vision of courtly love that, amazingly, no female characters or personifictions appear on the scene (except by inference) until five hundred lines into the text where, in a single stanza, a female personification of Nature and a direct reference to a "lady" appear in the poem:

The myghty Goddesse also of nature,
That under God hath the gouernaunce
Of worldly thinges commytted to her cure,
Disposed hath thro her wyse purveaunce,
To yive my lady so moche suffisaunce
Of al vertues, and therwith-al Purvde
To modre Trouthe, hath taken Daunger to gyde. (491-97)

With the introduction of feminine figures, there is a significant shift in the terms of debate regarding gender: what was previously a war between military men now becomes a battle of the sexes. It is the lady, we discover, who, spoilt by Nature with an abundance of charms, is conscripted to "hinder Trouthe" (504). The lover, in turn, is now in <u>her</u> service, and not in the service of the male personification of Love. The androcentric struggles of love are now under the influence of feminine wiles and "womanhede." At this point the address becomes directed at the lady herself (who is absent, of course):

But and so be that I shall deye algate,
And that I shal non other mercye haue,
Yet of my dethe let this be the date
That by youre wille I was broght to my graue,
Or hastely yf that ye list me saue
My shape woundes that ake so and blede,
Of mercie charme, and also of womanhede. (519-25)

After this turn towards the cruel lady convention, the complaint quickly comes to an end. It is inferred that the Black Knight, like the lover of La Belle Dame Sans Merci, expires with his text (although we don't actually see his death within the text): "Haue her my trouthe and thus I make an ynde" (574). But of course the text is not permitted to die, as it is quickly picked up by the narrator-poet, whose tears of empathy indicate a complete transfer of the Knight's experience and, and the Knight's text, to himself.

The Game of Love

Reading the texts of the Oxford group as they appear together in the manuscripts, we see the same motifs of gender repeated again and again. The rhetorical subjection (and feminization) of the courtly lover, the sharing of the text between men, and the conflation of the authorities of poet, narrator and male character. Female characters and their stories are bandied about by the male poets and their fictional counterparts who, as Hansen observes, "can't seem to help loving women," and "can't stop trafficking in stories about women" (3). Because of this relentless obsession with and textualization of the feminine, the poems actually empty themselves of female subjects: female characters only serve as fictional foils to reinforce constructions of masculinity, which are lent subjectivity by virtue of their association with their poet-creators.

But of course, without a female subject as a stone upon which to sharpen himself, the male subject is similarly "emptied out" of the poems. This is especially true in the Oxford group manuscripts, which layer courtly text upon courtly text, in a codicological reflection of courtly circularity self-referentiality. The overall affect of the Oxford texts, read as a group, is a cacophony of meaningless male "noyse" like that seen in the Parliament of Fowls as the lovers argue over the (largely silent) formel. Readers, like the birds in the Parliament, can find no answers in the debate, and finally, we simply wonder "Whan sholde your cursede pletynge have an ende?" (490-5). Like the bird's parliament, no decisions are reached in the Oxford group texts, they don't provide us will any meaningful understanding of medieval gender. All these texts do, when piled on top of one and other, is speak to each other about courtly masculinity and femininity.

My own (admittedly) cynical reading of courtly love is anticipated and rejected in Clanvowe's The Boke of Cupid (The Cuckoo and the Nightengale). In this rather fun text, the narrator overhears a nightingale arguing with a surly and disgruntled cuckoo over the value of love (the cuckoo claims it's worthless). The narrator chases off the naysayer, reflecting the tendency of the Oxford group texts to exclude all other, perhaps more realistic perspectives on love. Here the narrator-poet has undertaken the task of policing the pages of the courtly text, bouncing dissenters from the exclusive club.

Courtliness, however, did function in historical terms as an "exclusive club," since familiarity with courtly literary tradition was required in gentle society. The Oxford group manuscripts were produced by various readers who wanted to participate in that society. They invested good money, and sometimes personal time, into the production of these texts. This leads us to another oxymoron; that gender in the Oxford group texts was both crucially important and meaningless at the same time. The understand this, we must consider two important realities of the Fairfax manuscript.

First, we must view the illumination as an indication of the reverence medieval readers had for the literature of the court. Common sense dictates that such financial expense and artistic effort would not have been expended on a collection of literature that readers felt to be substandard. The illumination exemplifies the gender principles of courtly love: Mars and Jupiter are discussing (the book of) Venus, "trafficking" in stories about women, like the texts were some kind of illicit drug. Books (or booklets) of these texts, like the Oxford group, were also "trafficked" by the book-makers (largely professionals, but also amateurs) of late medieval England, to readerships who craved "social self-definition through literary patronage" (Lerer 60). In the case of the three core manuscripts of the Oxford group, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of producers and owners of the books were male, and that their exchange of

books parallelled other levels of masculine exchange of text in courtliness.[24]

The second aspect of the Fairfax manuscript which we must consider in reading gender in the Oxford group, is the existence of courtly games found in Fairfax and Bodley (although not Tanner).[25] "Ragman Roll" and "The Chance of the Dice" are both literary games of chance to be played by a group, wherein the participants draw or choose a stanza that describes a character.[26] In "Ragman," all of the characters to be drawn are female. By contrast, most of the stanzas in "Chance" could be spoken by either male or female characters, and so the game was probably played by men and women together.

In these games, virtue, especially as it pertains to courtly ideals of masculinity and femininity, is the result of nothing more than the luck of the draw. As William Hazlitt remarks in the introduction to Ragman Roll, "a certain amount of amusement and drollery was, no doubt, afforded by the frequent discrepancy between the choosers and their choices" (69). These games might

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[24] Women could have only become members of the book-trade if they were widows of craftsmen in the business, and Pollard relates no instances of this in his (admittedly restricted) study of the London book producers to 1557. As for the name marginalia in the Oxford group, most of it is male, although a few female names appear, indicating that while women might not have commissioned or owned the manuscripts directly, some probably had access to the books, which were ideal for family reading.

[25] "The Chance of the Dice" is transcribed by Hammond, and "Ragman Roll" is transcribed by Willian Carew Hazlitt.

[26] In "Chance" the selection would have been made by rolling three dice, and then matching the resulting score to a stanza marked by a drawing of the combination in the margin.

have ended at the drawing of the stanzas, or perhaps they went on to have become a dramatic presentation, with the players acting out scenarios based on the characters assigned to them (maybe even in a game of charades). Either way, the games indicate an awareness on the part of the Oxford group readers of the extremely literary nature of courtly codes and gender ideologies. Courtly constructions of men and women were not intended to be taken seriously, they were a parlour game. Men and women who played these games were highly accomplished "readers" of courtly love. They were able to grasp the ironic representations of character, and, assumedly, find humour in unflattering representations for the sake of entertainment. Perhaps it was not unusual to play the opposite sex.

Therefore, taken together, the illumination and the courtly games demonstrate the paradox of the courtly text production for non-noble readerships. It was crucial to play the game. The empty fictions of masculinity and femininity were vital to the "social self-definition" of middle-class readerships.

Both masculinity and femininity in these courtly collections, however, lack real subject positions as a result of the extended construction of literature and the literate culture as an exclusively male enterprise (even Christine was run off the page by Hoccleve). If the production of courtly texts and vernacular anthologies is <u>inherently gendered masculine</u>, where does that leave the medieval female reader? In theory, book production would be a closed circle of androcentricism, with all

the courtly texts and books chasing each other's tails. As I said in the introduction, gender can only be extracted from courtly love if the cycle of self-referentiality is stopped. In manuscript culture, this disruption in the courtly cycle can be achieved by breaking the patterns of manuscript production that resulted in the homogeneity of the Oxford group. In the next chapter I will explore how one readership that functioned on the margins of the professional book-trade took some of the same texts and stories found in the Oxford group, and re-presented them in the Findern manuscript. In this non-professional book production milieu, several women had access to the manuscript, which lent a very different interpretation to constructions of masculinity and (especially), femininity then those we see in the Oxford group.

Chapter 2: Reading Women in the Findern Manuscript

Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 1.6, better known as "the Findern manuscript" or "the Findern anthology," is a modest collection of literature, written on paper by many different hands.[1] It dates from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century--having been assembled over roughly a one hundred year period.[2] The book obviously had several different owners and contributors and yet it is fairly uniform in theme and tone--most of its items fall into the broad category of "courtly love" literature.[3] It is the result of multiple moments of production: its compilers used a version of booklet compilation (although not the work of a professional bookshop), including some material that probably circulated independently before being

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[1] For the hypothesis on the make-up of the manuscript, see Brusendorff 187-90, and the fascimile introduction by Richard Beadle and A.E.B. Owen viii-xii. Kate Harris undertook the most complete description of the manscritpt's assembly in "The Origins and Make-up of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6," see esp. 312-18, but Ralph Hanna has some reservations regarding her theory that the book was largely assembled through a single production effort, see his article "The Production of Cambridge Univcersity Library MS Ff.1.6."

[2] Julia Boffey, in Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages, describes the manuscript as an example of "layers of copying" that "changed in scope and focus, and in methods of compilation, as it passed from owner to owner" (24-5).

[3] Boffey remarks on the courtly love theme and "noticeable and unusual homogeneity of tone" in the manuscript (Manuscripts 25). The Findern manuscript resembles a group of medieval German manuscripts described by Sarah Westphal that were assembled as collections of courtly love texts. Like the Findern manuscript, these "minne constellations" include courtly texts from various genres. See the "Minne Constellations" chapter in Textual Poetics of German Manuscripts 1300-1500 (104-143).

bound into the current collection (Brusendorff 188).[4] Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson suggest that, "like Topsy, the collection 'just grow'd' as suitable texts became available and as an existing sequence of loosely assembled, blank, or sometimes partly filled quires was supplement by new material" (295). They go onto remark that the "present physical state of this well thumbed and fragmentary miscellany may itself represent successive scribal attempts to organize its contents and preserve items intact as the collection continued to grow as it was being read" (295).[5]

In his article "The Findern Anthology" Rossell Hope Robbins pinpointed the role the manuscript was to play in the study of Middle English literature--the role of witness to the book-making activities of individuals who were not directly involved in the professional book-trade of the later Middle Ages as commissioners or producers of a single codex (630). While the Findern compiler may have had access to some professionally produced booklets, and booklet exemplars, the overall assembly of the book was a

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[4] V.J. Scattergood was one of the first to look at the Findern manuscript in terms of booklet production. He believed that the manuscript was produced in several different folio sections, which were bound together later. Scattergood pointed out that this opened up the possibility that individuals other than "local women amateurs and itinerant professional scribes" were responsible for the copying or composing of texts found in the manuscript (141). Other scholars, including Gisela Guddat-Figge (93) and the facsimile editors (ix) agreed with the vision of the manuscript as an artifact of multiple moments of production which included pre-produced and pre-circulated materials.

[5] See also Thompson "Collecting" page 32.

"homemade" endeavour. The Findern manuscript is, in Ralph Hanna's words, significant as "one of the most important vehicles for fifteenth century poetry," especially as a witness to the circulation of literature in the middle-class gentry, and the "spread of London poetic taste to the hinterlands"--specifically, Derbyshire ("Production" 62).[6] The Findern manuscript gives us an idea of how books were produced outside of the London bookshops, or, in Thompson's words, on the "fringes of the fifteenth-century English book-trade" ("Collecting" 18).

General speculation that women were involved in the production of the manuscript has been inspired in large part by the presence of several women's names in the manuscript.[7] Robbins suggests that "local women amateurs and professional scribes" were mainly responsible for the copying ("Findern" 630). While Scattergood is correct in pointing out that with such a protracted period of production (141), it is difficult to pin down the identity of only two groups of producers, the women's names in the Findern manuscript have led most readers to accept

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[6] For discussion of manuscripts produced in a similar social milieu see Thorlac Turville-Petre, who discusses Findern on 140, as well as Boffey and Thompson, esp. 294-7. On histories of the families whose names are found in the Findern manuscript, see Harris, 299-307. On the Findern family itself, see Maureen Jurkowski's study.

[7] There are five women's names--four of them appear only once ("margery hungerford" appears on f20v, "Elizabet Koton" and "Elisabet Fraunceys" appear on f109v, "Anne Shirley" appears on f118r), and one appears at least twice, and possibly three times (the name "Crvker" appears on f63v, followed closely by "ffrancis Crewker" on f65v, and "ffraunces Cruker" appears on f95v). There are also a number of male names in the collection.

the idea that women had, in some way, a prominent role in the book's circulation. It certain makes sense to see the informal, homemade production method as an opportunity for gentry women to gain access to manuscript copying and assembly projects.

At least two readers, Elizabeth Hanson-Smith and Sarah McNamer, interpret the presence of the women's names and a relatively high number of female- and neutral-voiced lyrics as evidence that women were authors of some flyleaf texts in Findern.[8] Their ideas have been disputed to a certain extent by Boffey in her article "Women Authors and Women's Literacy in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England," who points out the difficulty in determining the relationship between the names (which may or may not be signatures) and the texts.[9] I will save my discussion of the lyrics texts for the third chapter. For the moment, I wish to examine the possibility of women's participation in the Findern manuscript through a form of compilatio, aside from and in addition to the role of author.

Hanson-Smith and McNamer suggest that the Findern lyrics were authored by Derbyshire women who had decided to add their own perspectives to the manuscript, in response to the courtly love material it contained. Hanson-Smith characterizes these

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[8] I will discuss the Findern lyrics in more detail in my next chapter. Alexandra Barratt anthologized some of these lyrics in her book, Women's Writing in Middle English (268-74); Her definition of "women's writing" is not restricted to authorship, but also includes readership and book-making activites (12-16).

[9] Boffey points out that, with the exception of the "Elisabet" names, "the hands of the names do not correspond with hands evident anywhere else in the volume" ("Women Authors" 170).

lyrics contributions buy women as "minority reports" on courtly love (179). The hypothesis that the woman-voiced texts were added to the manuscript in a postscript stage of production, as filler or flyleaf voices exclusively, suggests a codicological reflection of women's writing as secondary to the dominant literary tradition. Marginalia, by this design, reflects marginalization.

There is, however, some evidence to suggest that female participation in Findern might not have been restricted to secondary contributions to the book. Its layered production would have accommodated a variety of readers and contributors at a number of points, and some of these participants may have been women. If women were in fact involved in the production of the manuscript at various points during its long and gradual assembly, then their contribution may be seen as part of the general literary life of the period, not just as personal marginalia added as private responses to the dominant canonical texts penned by men. I agree with Carol Meale, who observes that Findern "shows every sign of <u>having been assembled</u> as a woman's book" ("'...Alle the Bokes,'" 141, my emphasis). Their presence as readers may have resulted at times in concrete "evidence" like names and unique female-voiced lyrics, but it also could have had a more subtle effect on the collection, in the form of a general bias towards female interests and perspectives.

Most substantial texts in Findern involve strong female characters--especially women who have a large amount of

intellectual and rhetorical power. If we read courtly love as a literary game, or a war of words between the sexes (it depends on your point of view) then the Findern manuscript as a whole shows women holding their own in courtly discourse and gender conflicts. Even more important, however, is that the Findern manuscript disrupts courtly constructions of gender that are found in more polished anthologies like the Oxford group manuscripts. With this disruption in courtliness comes a more substantial female literary subject, one that could easily reflect the lives of rural gentrywomen.

The Findern manuscript is connected to the Oxford group through a small cluster of three lyrics, Chaucer's "Complaint unto Pity" and two anonymous texts, that are numbered as items four, five and six in the collection. These three items are found in the exact same order, with many similar scribal quirks and orthographic characteristics, in Tanner 346, leading scholars to speculate that the copyists of the two manuscripts were working from the same exemplar.[10] Findern also shares a number of other texts with the core manuscripts of the Oxford Group, but the transmissions of those texts are not connected to Fairfax 16, Tanner 346 or Bodley 638 (Harris 311-2). The same texts were circulating in different transmissions, and evidently the Findern compilers had access to a few different key exemplars (although perhaps not simultaneously) (Boffey and Thompson 283).

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[10] On this textual relationship see Brusendorff 188-9, Boffey, Manuscripts 92-3 and Harris "Origins" 310-11.

The exact editorial decision-making process regarding the choice of texts in different exemplars is, of course, impossible to discern from this distance. It is impossible to say whether or not the Findern producers deliberately rejected Oxford group exemplars in favour of other transmissions of the same material. It is possible that these editorial "decisions" would have been determined by whatever exemplar was available at the moment. But with the range of text that seemed to be accessed by Findern community, as evidenced by the very breadth of the resulting collection, it is not impossible that some versions or adaptations of certain key pieces were chosen over others.[11]

It is certainly interesting to see which of the texts found in the Oxford group, the courtly collection par excellence, appear in the Findern manuscript--and to see how some of them were adapted to this collection. Clanvowe's Cuckoo and the Nightingale (Boke of Cupid), with its cynical, anti-courtly bird, appears in Findern, as does the sly Parliament of Fowls, with its male birds producing mindless "noyse." Hoccleve's Letter of Cupid and Roos's La Belle Dame are also present.[12] There are

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[11] Boffey notes that some provincial owners might not have been as culturally isolated from London literary culture as has been previously believed (123).

[12] Boffey and Thompson note that these two texts often appear in the same manuscript, along with Anelida and Arcite. Findern's version of Roo's translation is related to TCC R.3.19, Longleat 258 and Sloane 1710, which make up an "A" group out of six Belle Dame manuscripts overall. The "B" group is made up of Fairfax 16 and Harley 372 (283). The Findern transmission of La Belle Dame, therefore, is not directly related to the core manuscripts of the Oxford Group, but is is related to the more distant Oxford relation, Longleat 258.

also two extractions from longer texts found in (although not descended from) the Oxford Group. The tale of "Thisbe" is taken from The Legend of Good Women, and Anelida's complaint is extracted from Anelida and Arcite. It is also notable that the "Complaint of Venus"is present in Findern, but not the "Complaint of Mars." These last three extractions from Chaucer's work are clustered together in a single quire, with "Thisbe" contained in a two-bifolia insert, between Anelida's complaint and the "Complaint of Venus." Other contents of this quire are a woman-voiced lyric ("My wooful hert") and Hoccleve's Letter of Cupid.[13]

Excerpting the female-voiced passages exclusively from Complaint of Venus and Anelida has the effect of not only privileging the female voice, but also has the effect, at least partially, of removing them from their subjection to the exchange of text between male poets and poet-figures. Although the envoy addressing the translation process of The Complaint of Venus is retained in the Findern manuscript, it is no longer interacting with the larger trope of male poetic exchange that I discussed in the first chapter. Similarly, Anelida's voice is heard without being secondary to the narrative of her betrayal by "false" Arcite. Interestingly, this privileging of Anelida's voice might have been the way the poem Anelida and Arcite was meant to

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[13] It was unusual for a tale from the Legends to circulate independently. The only other extant example is a copy of the "Legend of Dido," which exists in Bodleian MS Rawlinson C.86, part 3. On Legend manuscripts, see M.C. Seymour, who includes a description of Findern on 89.

function originally: A.S.G. Edwards has suggested that the text (which, according to the manuscript evidence, might actually be two texts) was transmitted in other manuscripts with the "Complaint" preceding the story ("Unity" 181-2).[14] The extraction of Anelida's complaint is not unique to the Findern manuscript, four of the sixteen Anelida and Arcite manuscripts record the complaint separately.[15] But it does, nevertheless, fit into the manuscript's tendency to prioritize women's voices.

Like these extracts and several lyrics in the manuscript, many of the other Findern texts either contain a fair portion of lines given over to women's voices, or depict scenes in which women are described has having a large amount of authority over text. An example of the latter is the little quasi-debate poem, "The Parliament of Love," which begins:

Now [y]ee that wull of loue lere,
I counsell yow [th]at [y]e cum nere;
To tell yow now is myne entent,
Houth loue made late his parleament,
And sent for ladyes of euery londe,
Both mayde, and wyfe [th]at had housbande,
Wythe gentyll wymmen of lower degre,
and merchauntz wyfes grete plente,
wythe maidenes eke [th]at where theym vndre,
of wyche there were a ryghte grete numbre. (1-10)[16]

A parliament on the subject of love is called by "Love" himself, and is presided over by Venus. Women of a broad

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[14] Edwards also questions whether both the story and complaint are actually authored by Chaucer ("Unity" 184-5)

[15] The other three are TCC R.3.20, Pepys 2006 and Huntington Hm 140 (Edwards "Unity" 180).

[16] Citations of this poem are taken from Furnivall, Political, Religious and Love Poems 76-9.

assortment of social ranks, married and unmarried, are called to attend. Specifically mentioned are "gentyll women of lower degre and merchauntz wyfes." These are the women who will witness (and perhaps participate) in the debate. These are the authorities on love. They are, in all probability, the kind of women who read (and perhaps produced) the Findern manuscript itself.

The male speaker/poet does give brief mention of the fact that there are men in the assembly as well: "and all tho men [th]at louers were / They had there charge for too be there" (l.11-12). But it is clear that the men are an afterthought--not just in the poet's attentions, but also in the process of the parliament itself. Although it is never stated explicitly, one suspects that this parliament called by "Love" is to be a debate between women. After an opening ballad sung by a "grete company" of gentlewomen, the parliament begins. The poet describes only the female, not the male, participants. The women arrange themselves in order of rank:

And when this songe was sung and done,
Then went these ladyes eueryschone
Vn-too A schambyr where they scholde
Take theire places, yong and old,
like as [th]at they where of astate
For tescheue all maner debate.

Whether the women are the debaters or the audience is somewhat unclear--at any rate, their activity takes precedence over any other. The confusion regarding the particulars of the parliament arrangements becomes moot at this point anyway, since at the point of its commencement, the poet begins his rhapsodies over one particular woman in the audience. Debate never occurs in the

poem, instead, the text evolves into a love lyric composed by our smitten narrator.

"The Parliament of Love" encapsulates in many ways the Findern manuscript as a whole. The most important audience--or rather, debaters?--in the poem appear to be mostly women. The most significant readers--or rather, producers?--of the manuscript appear to be mostly women. The poem, like the anthology itself, begins in the love-vision tradition and ends up mostly in the tradition of courtly love lyrics. The "Parliament" is unlike the Findern manuscript as a whole, however, in that the voices of the women are silenced by the male love lyric. Yet, the positioning of women front and centre in the poem reflects the tenor of the Findern manuscript generally.[17]

If the focus of the Findern manuscript was on women, why then do we find that of The Legend of Good Women, only the "Tale of Thisbe" is transmitted in the Findern manuscript? Surely a whole catalogue of women's stories of martyrdom to love might have added to Findern's female focus. But therein lies the problem with the Legends: the portrayals of women in the Findern manuscript do not tend towards depictions of female martyrs of any sort, rather towards women of action. Despite her tragic end, Thisbe fits the profile of an active woman in many ways.

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[17] This is not to suggest that men have no voices in the Findern manuscript, or that the the book was under the exclusive control of women. There are men's names in the margins, many male voices in the texts, and even moments of misogyny. My point is that Findern displays a much greater slant towards female perspectives than similar compilations.

"Thisbe" is, as Elaine Hansen notes, a tale about the dangers of achieving masculine sexual maturity for the adolescent Piramus who, unlike Thisbe, is undone by his confrontation with the lioness. On the other hand Thisbe successfully negotiates "her confrontation with the feminine aggression and appetite figured in the lioness" (Hansen 4). She is a survivor of the lioness, and the bloodying of her clothing by the lioness's gory mouth signifies menarche, the evolution into womanhood. What Thisbe falls victim to is not love or sexual maturity, but the failure of her lover to gain his own sexual maturity with similar success. Masculine weakness and immaturity is also the issue at the heart of the original problem in the tale, the failure of Thisbe's and Piramus's fathers to act reasonably and diplomatically towards each other. Thisbe is victimized by the weakness and ineptitude of men who cannot carry out some of the most basic negotiations of life: getting along with one's neighbours and growing into a mature person.

The "Tale of Thisbe," removed from its original context of the Legend, is more about adolescent rites of sexual passage, especially for girls, than about female martyrdom to love. Love actually figures very little in Thisbe's martyrdom; instead, she runs afoul of male stupidity (not, as in the Oxford group, male "craft" with courtly text). "The Tale of Thisbe" fits in well with other texts in the Findern manuscript that address themes of women's intelligence and resourcefulness, their control over their own sexuality, and failures of men in civic diplomacy and

familial harmony. Because the manuscript contains over forty items, it would be impossible to read through all of the texts for their depictions of womanhood here. I will, however, examine two of the larger entries not found in the Oxford group: the extracts from Gower's Confessio Amantis, and the romance Sir Degrevaunt.

The Extracts of the Confessio Amantis

In her book on women and medieval French literature, E. Jane Burns opens with the tale of Philomela. According to Burns, Philomela is an example of the ability of women to "speak" without voices--to deliver the text through "bodytalk."[18] The Findern manuscript also opens a tale about Philomela, in this case the "Tale of Tereus" by John Gower. Despite the shift from the female to male name for the piece, Gower's version reads very

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[18] In Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature Burns reads the female voice as a disruption of the dominant discourses that are channelled through it: "A man's words spoken through a woman's body, however fictive and fabricated, are not perceived or received by the reader as thoroughly male," Burns explains, "their valence changes in accordance with the gender of the speaker articulating them" (16). Burns calls this resisting subtext in male-authored female speech "bodytalk." The anti-feminist message of the male author still exists, but there is also another voice present: the resisting woman subject. For Burns, this "doubled speech" results in a multiplicity of meaning, with both feminist and anti-feminist messages. "Bodytalk" is a reading strategy, "[it] is not something that authors--consciously or not--make their characters do," Burns notes, "rather bodytalk is something that we as feminist readers can choose to hear" (7). Burns finds a "continuum of historical women reader/listeners and their inscribed literary counterparts [that] stretches into the twentieth century to capture and also to represent--in a nonspecular reflection--the contemporary feminist medievalist" (15).

well as a story about feminine empowerment. He places great emphasis on the speech and verbal power of the female characters, especially Philomela (called Philomena in Gower's version).[19] After her rape by the "tyrant" Tereus, Philomena threatens to tell her sister about the violation in a speech that is almost thirty lines long.[20] Her speech is about verbal power--all the different ways she will denounce him with her words:

And with mi speche I schal fulfille
The wyde world in brede and lengthe.
. . . .
Unto the poeple I schal it telle;
And if I be withinne a wall
Of Stones closed, thanne I schal
Unto the Stones clepe and crie,
And tellen hem thi felonie;
And if I to the wodes wende,
Ther schal I tellen tale and ende,
And crie it to the briddes oute,
That thei schul hiere it al aboute.
For so loude it schal reherce,
That my vois schal the hevene perce,
That it schal soune in goddes ere. (5660-75)

Tereus reacts by cutting out her tongue. But Philomena is not silenced. In accordance with the myth, she weaves her tale into a tapestry. Gower then adds another level to Philomena's reclamation of speech. In his version, Philomena is given two

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[19] All citations of the Confessio Amantis are taken from Macauley, The English Works of John Gower. The "Tale of Tereus" is in Book V, ll.5921-6052; pages 98-111 in Vol.2 of Macauley, with a summary on lxxii.

[20] Gower often uses the word "tyrant" to describe a rapist or other sexual predator, especially in cases of incest, or in cases of sexual abuse where the victim is of a lower rank than the abuser. On line 5921 Progne uses the word "tirannye" to describe Tereus's crime. See my discussion of Gower's extracts contained in Balliol MS 354 (especially "Appolonius of Tyre"), in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

speeches that take place "withinne hir herte." The first is a prayer to Jupiter (5741-52), and the second a silent address to her sister (5759-68). To the reader, Philomena is never silenced.

After Philomena is rescued by her sister Progne, she is empowered further in her ability to tell her story, for Progne can translate Philomena's sign language. Bound together by "sorwe which was hem betuene," the two women swear vengeance on Tereus:

> Thus pleigneth Progne and axeth wreche,
> And thogh hire Soster lacke speche,
> To him that alle thinges wot
> Hire sorwe is noght the lasse hot:
> Bot he that thanne has herd hem tuo,
> Him oughte have sorwed evermo
> For sorwe which was hem betuene.
> With signes pleigheth Philomene,
> And Progne seith, "It schal be wreke,
> That al the world therof schal speke." (5856-70)

Obtaining justice depends on their ability to articulate Tereus's crime, which in turn depends on female partnership, for without Progne, Philomena's story cannot be heard. Communication between women will, in turn, become what "al the world therof shal speke."

While Chaucer's version of the tale ends with the grieving sisters in the prison, Gower's continues through Progne's revenge of serving Tereus the body of his murdered son for dinner. In Gower's text Progne's violence is justified by connecting the

infanticide to Tereus's original violation of Philomena.[21] The actions of Progne are explained as the result of her having been driven "mad of wo" by the "grete wrong" done by Tereus (5882, 5891-2). The incestuous nature of Tereus's "grete wrong" or "tirannye" causes the family to implode; his consumption of his own son is the extreme and literal extension of his own crime. In Progne's final attack on her husband, she raves that the world will never forget his crime what it "wrogh t," insisting that people will forever "singe and rede" the story. At the point at which Progne is about to kill Tereus, the gods step in and turn all three characters into birds. In effect, they are turned into literary symbols: "Philomena to a nightingale, which complains ever for her lost maidenhead, Progne to a swallow, which twitters around houses and warns wives of the falseness of their husbands, and Tereus to a lapwing, the falsest of birds, with a crest upon his head in token that he was a knight" (Macaulay lxxii).

This adds yet another layer to the process of giving Philomena voice, as her tale is symbolically embedded in courtly tradition. Bird imagery, especially the image of the nightingale, is employed in Parliament of Fowls and The Boke of Cupid, both of which are part of Oxford group collections and the Findern manuscript. But the Findern manuscript establishes at the outset that there is a raped and mutilated woman behind the

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[21] Lepley outlines Gower's manipulation of Ovid's original story, especially the vindication of Progne's infanticide: "While Ovid described Procne [sic] as a ferocious tigress and demonic avenger, Gower stresses her role as a sorrowing sister and wife" (67).

nightingale symbol, which provides an insidious gloss to the courtly bird imagery that appears further along in the collection. Not only would Findern readers understand the sexual danger embedded in the symbolism of the nightingale in other texts, but the reappearance of the nightingale in different texts ensures that, as Progne predicted, Philomela's tale will be told and re-told.

Gower's "Tale of Tereus" establishes a compilatio that empowers women's words and female community in the face of divisive and silencing male violence. The other five Confessio extracts extend these strands of female agency and control of text. Following the "Tale of Tereus" is the "Discourse on Idleness," which is a preface to the third entry, the "Tale of Rosiphele." The "Discourse on Idleness" is little more than an extended description by Amans (the lover in the narrative frame of the Confessio, which is a prolonged discussion between himself and his Confessor, a priest of Venus) of the many ways he pays homage to his lady.[22] In isolation of the rest of the massive dialogue between Amans and the Confessor in the ways and meanings of love, Amans's subservience in the "Discourse on Idleness" makes him less an exemplary penitent, and more a pathetic sop, like the lover in La Belle Dame Sans Merci ("I serve, I bowe, I loke, I loute" l.1169).

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[22] The "Discourse of Idleness" is in Book IV, ll.1114-1244 (Macauley Vol.1 331-4, and summary, lviii-lix). The "Tale of Rosiphee" follows, ll.1245-1466 (Macauley Vol.1, 335-41 and summary, lix).

Furthermore, since this extract is compiled without the larger courtly trope of the duplicity of male subservience, as found in the Oxford group, the subversive meaning of masculine courtly subservience (the understanding that it is actually a form of masculine empowerment) is stripped, like the narrative frame, from the text. The "Discourse on Idleness," like the "Discourse against Somnolence" that is also entered in the Findern manuscript (somnolence being another charge of laziness in love that Amans defends himself against), reads in this manuscript context as straightforward female chauvinism.[23] These passages are simply opportunities for Amans to declare his unqualified abjection to the lady.

Despite Amans's impressive recitation in "Idleness" of the many ways he does service to his lady, the Confessor turns to the tale of Rosiphele, a Princess who, out of "idelness" preferred not to partake in courtly love games. Therefore, after a brief interlude in which the role of the male lover is discussed, the manuscript quickly switches back to the issue of female conduct.

The "Tale of Rosiphele" is actually a retelling of a section of Andreas Capellanus's The Art of Courtly Love.[24] Rosiphele, walking alone in the woods one day, encounters an eerie

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[23] The "discourse on Somnolence" is found eight pages further on from the first Confessio extracts in the Findern manuscript. Like "Idleness" and "Rosiphele" it is extracted from Book IV of the Confessio, ll.2746-2926. See Macaulay Vol. 1, 375-80, and summary on lxii).

[24] Gower's version is a simplified and condensed adaptation of Andreas's tale, which is told by a man to a lady in an attempt to persuade her to give him "favour" in love. See Andreas 75-8.

procession of women. First comes a group of very beautiful women, with lovely horses and finery. Following them is a woman alone, on a black, broken-down horse, wearing torn clothes, and carrying many halters. When the princess approaches this woman, she is told by the beleaguered lady that this is the punishment for being idle in love (ll.1388-90). Specifically, her crime was not reciprocating the affections of suitors in due time. She is now doomed in the afterlife to lagging behind the annual procession in May, dressed in tatters and carrying the halters for the other women, who were more generous in love.

In Andreas's version the individual who witnesses the procession is a man--a squire. Like the switch from discussion of the conduct of Amans in the "Idleness" to discussion of the conduct of the princess in "Rosiphele," the switch of character of the squire to the character of Rosiphele re-centers the courtly experience from masculine to feminine. This switch in the sex of the witnesses of the processions in the two versions of the tale has significant implications for reading courtly gender. In Andreas's version the tale of the procession was meant to persuade women to make themselves sexually available to men. The tale of the poor woman on the black horse is interpreted and relayed by the squire to his lady; it is about female sexual conduct. In Gower's version, the woman on the black horse tells her story to Rosiphele herself, and, in turn, the Confessor tells it to Amans. The message is no longer about sexual manipulation, but about courtly conduct for both sexes.

Instead of the woman on the black horse being presented as a deterrent for reluctant ladies, a tool of a lecherous male lover, she is presented as a sisterly advisor to the princess. She addresses Rosiphele as "Sister" and says she will "teche" the girl of the dangers of refusing to play the courtly game (1374). The courtly game, in Gower's text, does not mean courtly sexual politics as much as it means participating in the broader tradition of courtly culture, which includes an education in the "tales" on courtly literature "that couthen love teche" (1405).

Like other "tales" in the Findern manuscript, Gower's "Rosiphele" seems to emphasize the power of female community. Not only do the successful female lovers travel as a group in the procession, but the lone woman on the black horse manages, through establishing contact with Rosiphele, to both save the princess and redeem herself. The two women form a partnership that provides Rosiphele with information and education. As a result, Rosiphele decides to change her ways, and participate in courtly love. This puts a more positive spin on Andreas's story, which in the original ends with the bleak vision of the failed lady-lover riding off, still alone, while the squire appropriates her story for the purposes of seducing his lady.

The last of Findern's Confessio extracts I will discuss is the "Tale of the Three Questions."[25] In this story, an envious

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[25] Book 1, ll.3067-3425 (Macauley Vol.1 119-29, and summary, xxxix).

king, jealous of the intellect of one of his knights, challenges the man to solve a riddle in the form of three questions (I cite Macauley's summary): "(1) What is it that has least need and yet men help it the most? (2) What is worth most and yet costs least? and (3) What costs most and is worth least?" (xxxix). The king gives the knight three weeks to come up with the answer and threatens him with death for failing to answer correctly.

The knight finds himself unable to come up with any answers, and is at his wits end when his fourteen-year old daughter, Petronella, intervenes, saying that she will approach the king in her father's stead. She suggests that they tell the king that the knight has transferred the challenge to the girl, and that the he "upon hire wordes forto stand" (3233). The girl's wisdom is already evident here, particularly when she notes that the king would be more likely to be lenient with a woman than with a man: "For ofte schal a woman have / Thing which a man noght areche" (3207-8). They go to the king, to whom the daughter gives the answers to the three questions. The answer to the first question is "the earth," the answer to the second is "humility," and the answer to the third is "pride."

The king, delighted with the girl, says that he will give her whatever she wishes for a gift, mentioning in passing that if she were of a higher rank, he would marry her. The wise girl asks him for an earldom for her father. Once this is granted she immediately points out that she is now the daughter of an earl,

and suggests that the king can now rightfully marry her, which he does.

Again the words of women are seen as powerful and positive. The knight is even willing to stake his life on his daughter "and hire wordes wise" (3224). Although this story affects to be a discourse on Humility (the king is guilty of pride and jealousy), this lesson doesn't really come through in the Findern extract. In fact, we see almost the exact opposite moral if, instead of examining the king's conduct, we look at the girl's confidence and shrewd manipulation of the situation. Her observation that women can get away with things that men cannot is extended to the moral of the tale. Here female chutzpah benefits not only the woman herself, but her entire family. High-ranking males are controlled by a fourteen year old girl, with only good results.

The positive interpretation of female intellect and action seem in the Gower extracts ties in very nicely with another key selection in the Findern manuscript, the romance Sir Degrevaunt. This piece demonstrates the virtues of women who possess large measures of intelligence, diplomacy and community spirit as they solve the problems of male tyranny and escalating violence. Unlike the Gower extracts, however, this romance is peopled by characters that might be found among the gentry of rural England--not among the royalty of far-off, mythological lands. The lessons of Philomena, Rosiphele and Petronella are relocated to medieval England, in a fictional setting very similar to the

world inhabited by the producers and readers of the Findern manuscript.

Sir Degrevaunt

Sir Degrevaunt is a relatively short and simple romance, with a small cast of central characters, of whom almost half are female. It has been read as a commentary on the social concerns of families rising through the social ranks.[26] The fact that the romance has a positive bias towards women has been noted by readers such as A.S.G. Edwards, who remarks:

> . . . Sir Degrevaunt seeks to validate the female in ways that seem to have little parallel elsewhere in Middle English romance, where it is identified generally either as the inspiration to such male prowess or as an impediment to its effective realization. . . . The various female characters in the romance all embody qualities that are shown to contribute to the larger social, emotional and moral wellbeing in ways that stress the limitations os male achievement in isolation.[27] ("Order" 62)

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[26] On the Findern family, and some of their possible interests in Sir Degrevant from the perspective of regional and social politics in Derbyshire, see Jurowski, 216. Edwards notes the the second extant copy of Sir Degrevaunt is in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 (the "Thornton" manuscript), which also came from a provincial milieu ("Order" 62-3).

[27] See Meale's article "'Gode men" for connections between Sir Degrevaunt and other romances, esp. Partonope.

In this section I will explore these female characters and their actions more closely, connecting them to other concerns about women found elsewhere in the manuscript.[28]

The connection between female users of the manuscript and Sir Degrevaunt is made explicit by the presence of two women's names written at the bottom of last folio containing the romance (f109v). These names, "Elisabet Koton" and "Elisabet fraunceys" [sic], are written in the second of the two hands responsible for copying the romance, leading naturally to the speculation that they might be scribal signatures (McNamer 281).[29] Unfortunately, as Boffey points out, there is no definitive proof that historical women were actually responsible for entering the names in the manuscript by their own hands. Boffey cautions: "Do the names identify the two women as two scribes, or were they rather written in deference to the commissioners or future owners of the copying? We cannot tell" ("Women Authors" 170).[30] Although I personally believe it is likely that these are scribal signatures, the association of the women's names and the text surely indicates, at the very least, that women were familiar with the romance either as readers or as book(let) owners at some

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[28] All citations of the romance are taken from the EETS edition edited by L.S. Casson.

[29] See also Harris, "Origins" 303 and Hanna, "Production" 63.

[30] John Thompson also points out that the "Elisabet" names could be inscriptions written in by someone else on behalf of the women, likening it to the use of amanuenses by the Paston men and women in their letters ("Collecting" 35).

point. As we shall see, Sir Degrevaunt had much to say to the female reader among the rural gentry of medieval England.

Because the romance is not an especially popular one with modern readers, I will take the time here to review the plot. The basic story is as follows: Sir Degrevaunt, a good and honourable knight with lands and good hunting grounds, is travelling in the Holy Land. While on the Crusades, his neighbour, an Earl, begins to poach on Sir Degrevaunt's property.[31] The knight is summoned home, and demands recompense from the Earl for the damage which, in addition to slaughtered animals, includes the murder of his foresters and raids on the homes of his tenants. The Earl refuses, and a battle ensues, which Sir Degrevaunt wins. When he goes to the Earl's castle to pursue his rightful compensation, still unpaid, the Earl's daughter, Melidor, catches sight of him while her mother attempts (unsuccessfully) to dissuade him from doing any further damage to the Earl's estate. Both Sir Degrevaunt and Melidor are smitten, and the courtship begins, aided by Sir Degrevaunt's squire, and

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[31] Barbara Hanawalt examines the gender significance of medieval poaching in "Of Good and Ill Repute." She concludes that it is intrinsically bound to masculine identity: "The most fundamental element in poaching, however, was and still is the expression of male gender identity. Poaching permits all of the same challenges and skills of hunting, but adds elements of stealth, danger, violence, sexuality and assertion of independence. Not only does the act of poaching offer opportunities for the assertion of manliness, but so too does the recounting of the exploits" (154-5). The Earl's poaching, and Sir Degrevaunt's retaliatory hunting, by this design, are expressions of "male gender identity" (142).

Melidor's maid who shows the knight a secret entrance to the Castle.

Melidor at first resists the knight, on the reasonable grounds that he is her father's enemy. During a tournament, however, Sir Degrevaunt defeats the foreign Duke to whom she was originally betrothed, and Melidor's resistance is eventually overcome. The two begin a year-long love affair during which Sir Degrevaunt visits her every night. Eventually they are betrayed by a servant of the Earl's, whereupon another battle ensues as the servant ambushes the knight on behalf of his master. Again, the knight is victorious, and the Earl, enraged by the loss, finally confronts Melidor and threatens to kill her. Again his wife intervenes, and this time she is successful in thwarting violence. The Earl has a change of heart and is reconciled with Sir Degrevaunt. The lovers marry and live out their lives together until Melidor dies, and Sir Degrevaunt returns to the crusades, where he eventually perishes.

From the outset of the romance, it is made clear that there is man's world and woman's world in the tale--a man's way of doing things, and a woman's way of doing things. Sir Degrevaunt, a nephew of King Arthur and a knight of the Round Table, is very much part of the man's world. His extensive lands and properties are described, and his generosity and good governance of his tenants is lauded (l.65-96). And although he possesses all of the necessary courtly accomplishments, such as the ability to play musical instruments and sing, it is clear that he does not

employ them in a courtly love endeavours, in order to impress ladies. Instead, these accomplishments are part of the chivalric tradition of knighthood, like hunting, a skill mentioned alongside Degrevaunt's musical ability.[32] To reinforce the impression that Sir Degrevaunt's chivalry is not connected to women or sexuality, the poet finishes the description of Sir Degrevaunt's musical and hunting activities with these words:

Certus, wyff wold he non,
Wench ne lemon,
Bot as an anker in a ston
He lyved ever trew. (ll.61-4)

The images of the anchor and stone are obviously meant to be complimentary, to illustrate the steadfast virtue of Sir Degrevaunt's character--but they also imply stagnation, a lack of progression or development, which are aspects associated elsewhere in the story with masculine conduct. Likewise, the Crusades in which Sir Degrevaunt participates appear to be a series of endless, hopeless quests with little or no progression or resolution. They contribute to the chivalric character of knighthood, and yet they never end: there is no final victory and therefore, in a sense, no movement forward. In fact, the Crusades are waiting for the widowed Sir Degrevaunt at the end of the story, and they finally claim his life. Furthermore, as this story so aptly demonstrates, crusading meant that the domestic sphere, in the sense of one's own home and properties, was neglected and left vulnerable. While Degrevaunt is in the Holy

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[32] On hunting as a courtly skill, see Burnley, 55-6; and on hunting manuals as courtly literature, see his discussion on 132-5.

Land, his lands are raided by a man who, significantly, participates fully in the domestic sphere--maintaining lands of his own and a family.

Despite being a family man, the Earl, in the beginning of the story, is still very much part of the masculine world, undertaking a sort of mini-crusade against Degrevaunt's lands. The Earl's pillaging and killing are a reflection of Degrevaunt's own activities in the Holy Lands, and by implication, raises the question of the legitimacy of such military action. But the Earl's domesticity gives him an advantage over Sir Degrevaunt, because he has immediate access to female wisdom, in the person of his wife. When he returns from his second raid on Sir Degrevaunt's lands, having been chased off by the knight who by that point had returned to deal with his domestic problems, the Earl is chastised by his wife, (who is called "the Countess" in the tale):

Offte she cryed, "Alas!
Haue ye nat parkus and chas?
What schuld ye do at this place
Swych costus to kythe?" (377-80)

He immediately swears not to do it again--and to his credit, he never does, although he is guilty of other crimes later in the story.

The Earl's one moral advantage over the knight is that he listens to the Countess the first time she points out the error of his ways. Unfortunately, Sir Degrevaunt cannot find it in himself to heed the pleas of the Countess when she begs him to stop the cycle of violence and spare the Earl's land. Instead,

he proceeds to take revenge by poaching on the Earl's property. Despite Sir Degrevaunt's resistance to the Countess, however, the masculine world he inhabits is already being disrupted by a female presence. His revenge is soured by the fact that he can take no pleasure in the hunt, for he is preoccupied with his thoughts of Melidor (ll.520-8).

At this point the story turns to the development of the relationship between Melidor and Sir Degrevaunt, and we begin to see the female characters in more detail--especially Melidor and her maidservant. These two women, along with the Countess, are the antithesis of the standard misogynistic vision of women found in medieval literature. Misogynistic literature portrays women as irrational and loquacious, their speech foolish, their counsel harmful. Everything the Countess says, however, is wise and perceptive--and the men ignore her at their peril. The maid servant, likewise, is intelligent and persuasive, interceding on behalf of Sir Degrevaunt to talk Melidor into accepting him. Melidor has verbal strengths of her own: first she employs these skills against Sir Degrevaunt's courtship, and then she uses them more tactfully to talk him out of pre-marital sex.

Melidor is not a wholly likable character at the beginning of the romance, and part of the story is concerned with the maturation of her character, which involve switching from her father's violent methods of coping with problems to her mother's more reasonable methods. For obvious reasons it is important that Melidor does not fall foolishly in love with Sir Degrevaunt,

who is her father's enemy. The adherence to the courtly code means that familial loyalties are important; thus Melidor cannot reject her father and side with Sir Degrevaunt. The harshness of the words she uses to keep Sir Degrevaunt at bay is not due to her being "the conventional romantic heroine of rather shrewish temper," as Casson reads her (lxxv). Instead, she is demonstrating filial loyalty and judiciousness in her affections, for she is far from the stereotype of the fickle courtly lady who loves unwisely and without serious consideration of the consequences. Melidor is very aware of her social responsibilities. Her rejection of Sir Degrevaunt reflects her acknowledgment of where she stands in relation to her father and his tenants. Using the pronoun "our", she includes herself in the administration of the Earl's lands. An attack on him, therefore, is an attack on her, and she has no qualms about condemning Sir Degrevaunt's aggression:

Sche said, "Tratur [th]ou shalt bye!
Why were [th]ou so hardye
To do <u>me</u> [th]is vylanye
     by day ar by ny[g]th?
For <u>our</u> folk [th]at [th]ou hat slayn
[Th]ou shalt be honged and drawyn;
[Th]erof my fader wol be fayn
     To see [th]at with sy[g]th." (753-60, my emphasis)

If there can be any charge levied against Melidor here, it is that she is too much her father's daughter. She matches her father's physical violence with her own violent words, suggesting Sir Degrevaunt should be horribly executed for "treason." But her loyalties also save her from being regarded as wanton or foolish. She resists Sir Degrevaunt for a considerable time,

even when her maidservant begs her to reconsider. Ultimately she displays admirable strength in controlling her feelings towards Sir Degrevaunt, to whom she felt attracted from the first moment she met him.[33] Even when she finally does admit her feelings for him, she does not foolishly give into his requests for intercourse.

Although the female characters in the story condemn the destructive habits of male chivalry, they do not reject the principles of courtliness altogether. In fact, they reinforce some of them, especially those having to do with sexual conduct. Melidor is a woman fully in control of her sexuality. It is only when Sir Degrevaunt bests her betrothed in a tournament that Melidor accepts his courtship, and even then she swears off premarital sex. She does, however, consent to what amounts to "heavy petting"--lying in bed with him, without full-fledged coitus:

[Th]ai lay doun in [th]er bede,
In ryche clo[th]us was spred,
Wytte [g]e well, or [th]ei wer wed,
[Th]ei synnyd nat [th]are. (1557-60)

Although this may have been a "widely spread folk custom," as Casson suggests in his notes (144), it is also an interesting manoeuvre on the part of Melidor to avoid the classic sexual "Catch-22" of the courtly lady. By engaging in non-penetrative sex, she manages to retain her virginity and with it the virtue required of the courtly lady, while avoiding the charge of

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[33] On another heroine named "Melidor" who possesses a "strong subject role" see Meale, "Gode men" 224, on the romance Partonope.

frigidity (or, in Rosiphele's case, "idleness"), which was levelled against women who would not submit to their lover's advances. This might have been a valuable example for some of the readers of the Findern manuscript! Like Thisbe's survival of her encounter with the lioness, and Philomela's survival of rape, Melidor is yet another female character in the collection who solves a problem related female sexuality.

That sexual conduct, specifically virginity, preoccupies Melidor is also demonstrated in a moment of conflict with her maid. Realizing that her maid has been spending time with Sir Degrevaunt, Melidor bursts out "[Th]i maydynhed is lorn; / God gyf [th]e care." The maid quickly denies it, telling Melidor the truth: that she had spent time alone with Sir Degrevaunt in order to listen to his petition for Melidor's love, and receive on the gift of a ring for Melidor. In fact, the maid had further facilitated Sir Degrevaunt's case by showing him the secret entrance to the castle, and by telling him about the opportunity to compete against the Duke who was engaged to Melidor--victory in the tournament being the only way Sir Degrevaunt would be able to overcome his disadvantage in status in winning the Earl's daughter (apparently being nephew to the king was not sufficient). The maid also defies misogynist expectations about female sexuality by getting sexually involved with Sir Degrevaunt herself. She is evidently not one of the lower-class maidens

found in popular carol tradition who so commonly run afoul of men.[34]

The maid's ability to smooth over this rough moment with her mistress, and to continue to be an advocate of Melidor's best interests by persistently trying to talk her into loving Sir Degrevaunt, is indicative of the sense of fellowship and loyalty demonstrated between the three women in the story. Aside from her somewhat spiteful outburst, Melidor listens to her maid, and the two women have extended discussions of the situation in which Melidor finds herself.[35] These discussions take up almost seven full stanzas (at sixteen lines each) of the romance, and although the maid never succeeds in convincing Melidor to accept Sir Degrevaunt, it is clear that she has softened Melidor up by the time of the tournament. Upon receiving Sir Degrevaunt's ring from the maid, Melidor admits, before returning to her (now somewhat desperate) arguments against his courtship, "[Th]is ys a merveylous [th]ing" (l.995). Again, we see in the maid's actions the female ability to respect courtly tradition (it is she who points out Sir Degrevaunt's social disadvantage) while simultaneously finding a solution to the problems those codes present.

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[34] I will discuss some of these carols in Chapter Three.

[35] Edwards points out the unusualness of women speaking to each other in Middle English: "Conversations between women are, as far as I can tell, of considerable rarity in Middle English metrical romance, and indeed, elsewhere in Middle English literature." He notes that other romances with female conversations include Ywain and Gawain, Ipomadon, Partonope of Blois and Generydes ("Order" 58).

With way thus paved by the maid, it remains only for Sir Degrevaunt to beat the Duke in the tournament (which he does easily) in order to win Melidor's heart. The actions of the knight in combat are matched by the actions of the maid in argument: if not for the words of women, Sir Degrevaunt would not have succeeded in his quest. Indeed, he would not have participated at all, since it was the maid who informed him of the Duke and the tournament. The maid upholds the codes of courtliness and class (she never actually challenges Melidor's authority), while making them work for--instead of against--the lovers, as they appeared to do initially.

Finally, however, Sir Degrevaunt's heroic actions are not enough, even with the help of the maid and the love of Melidor. It takes the intervention of the highest-ranking woman in the text, the Countess, to bring the tale to a happy conclusion. The intervention of the Countess is a remarkable exception to the romance tradition, not only because it demonstrates the wise counsel of women, but also because the woman in question is an older woman. As Jessica Cooke discusses, there is an ingrained prejudice against older women in courtly literature. But the Countess in Sir Degrevaunt is by far the most positive character in the story, possessing almost saint-like qualities. She is ruthlessly fair minded and courageous, not hesitating to point out the errors of her vitriolic husband. Early in the story, it is the Countess, not the Earl, who tries to talk Sir Degrevaunt out of taking further revenge on their properties. Like Melidor,

she speaks of the Earl's land as "our place," bringing herself into its administration. Although she is not successful at that time in dissuading the revenge-bent Sir Degrevaunt, he maintains respect for her: his courteous (if childish) response is to remind her that the Earl started it. It is important to note here that Melidor, the only child and heir of the Countess, is present as a witness to her mother's intercession, although she does not participate directly in this scene.

The Countess's interception at the climax of the story represents everything that is reasonable, fair, chivalrous and loving. By the time of the finale, men in the romance have participated in a spying operation, an ambush, an ensuing slaughter, and finally, (with the Earl blaming it all on Melidor and threatening to kill her), slandering and uttering death threats. By now the reader is desperate to hear the voice of reason, to witness one truly selfless and heroic act, and the Countess is the character who fulfils these wishes. The Countess's plea to her husband has four movements. First she points out the sheer perversion of his behaviour, since he is about to kill their only child. She then goes on to condemn the entire prolonged dispute between the knight and the Earl, proclaiming that their conduct has by this point completely invalidated their honour: both of them now have nothing but "wicked tongues" and "shame" (1763-4). Then she turns on her husband and attacks him alone for his part in the affair, reminding him (and us) of the original assault on the knight's

lands. Finally, she presents, nay demands, the only possible solution to the entire mess: that Sir Degrevaunt should be granted Melidor's hand in marriage.

Shielded by her mother's words, Melidor is now able to speak for herself, in the cause of true love.[36] Here, her position as heiress is given a moral dimension: she now appears to be more her mother's daughter than her father's, suggesting that the Earl's tyrannical and violent qualities as a ruler will not live on in his daughter. Finally, she has stepped into her own as a woman--not standing silently in her mother's shadow, not mindlessly parroting her father's violent tendencies, but making her own arguments, with her own priorities. At no point, however, is she disrespectful of the Earl. Like her mother, Melidor maintains the courtly codes of respect and hierarchy. The combined arguments of the Countess and Melidor finally sway the Earl's opinion--and result in his rather startling change of heart.

Sir Degrevaunt presents ways of manipulating courtly patterns of honour to accommodate patterns of behaviour for men and women that might have been more applicable to a gentry household. This more domestic version of courtliness is not antithetical to traditional courtliness: in many ways it upholds some of the traditional principles of chivalry--humanity, mercy,

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[36] As Jennifer Fellows has demonstrated, the few Middle English romances that involve a mother/daughter relationship usually depict that relationship as negative. Only a couple of other romances have offer mothers or mother-figures who have a positive effect on their daughter's lives (54-5).

reason, love.[37] It is chivalry adapted to real life. It acts as counterpoint to the tragic ending of Chaucer's "Thisbe", which involves a similar sort of feud between intractable (male) neighbours. Sir Degrevaunt suggests that if Thisbe had a mother, or a maid, to help her as Melidor had, things might have been different.[38]

While the strength of the maternal role in this romance may be unusual in Middle English literature generally, in the Findern manuscript it makes perfect sense, as it is another vision of empowered femininity. The Countess, Melidor and the maid perform very similarly to other strong female voices in the manuscript.

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[37] In the Findern manuscript there is another re-working of courtly love in romance form: a translation of "Le Voeux du Paon," by Jacques de Longuyon. This work has been described as being excessively focused on "courtoisie" of a particular sort--not necessarily the "courtoisie" of courtly love, but as an ethical code concerned with "magnanimity" or magnanimitas associated with Alexander (Grisby 572-3). This concept of magnanimity/courtoisie involves "the virtue of doing good to others, and whose definition corresponds to common meanings in modern English: 'respect for and consideration of others', as well as superficial 'gallantry and polished manners' according to Merriam-Webster" (Grisby 573). Specific connections of this fragment to Sir Degrevant are contained in lines 15-18 and 1481-4 of Sir Degrevaunt. There is also an association between the names of the heroines in the two romances (see Casson 143). On Les Voeux du Paon, see Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Grisby. A Middle Scots translation of the French romance is available in The Buik of Alexander edited by, Graeme Ritchie.

[38] The lioness in Chaucer's version, while threatening as a symbol of feminine aggression, also symbolises feminine strength, pride and perhaps maternal protection (although there is no direct reference to a litter in the story). As I discuss more fully in my conclusion to the dissertation, the lioness is both a threat to Thisbe (although the animal really does no direct harm to anyone in the story), and a missed opportunity: she disappears, silently, back into the wood.

These women's voices are not of a single literary type, and they have many different stories to tell. They are the voices cruel ladies, star-crossed lovers, rape survivors, foolish princesses, child geniuses, maids, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. Some, like Venus, Anelida and Petronella, stand as women alone: either defeated by a "man's world," or excelling in it. But more often than not, female characters form partnerships in the Findern manuscript: Philomena and Progne, Rosiphele and the dark lady, Melidor and her maid and mother. Female community is characterized again and again in this manuscript as redemptive.

Male voices are by no means excluded here, yet they do not dominate the literature in the way that we see in the Oxford group texts. Nor do they have the textual control of the feminine in the same way. In the Findern manuscript, we see men as a topic of discussion, here we have women trafficking in tales of men both within, and between, the texts in the Findern binding. An example of this would be, conversations between Melidor and her maid, who trade opinions of Sir Degrevaunt in a fairly objective manner. Similarly, a small lyric "What-so men seyn," is constructed in the voice of a woman speaking to other women. As its first line indicates, puts male behaviour of the defensive.[39] But the Findern manuscript also contains many

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[39] Boffey reads the woman's voice in this poem ironically, suggesting that the lyric "slyly introduces the subject of women's inconstancy'" ("Women Authors" 170). While I agree that this meaning does exist in the poem, I would like to consider it from another perspective. In this lyric, the suggestion that women should match duplicity with duplicity comes after a lengthy description of the failings of men. More precisely, the emphasis

conversations between women and men, and extends these conversations between and through different texts throughout the book.[40]

Female participation in the production of the Findern manuscript does not seem to be limited to the latter stages of the book's compilation, with the final inclusion of flyleaf lyrics. At many points in the prolonged and "layered" process of the Findern production there was ample opportunity for the participation the female reader. This, I believe, creates a "layered" vision of womanhood, much different from the thin veneer of the courtly lady created in the Oxford Group collections.

In understanding depictions of women in Middle English texts, then, we must question our own assumptions about women's participation in the literate culture generally, such as the assumption that women only participated as patrons, or as

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of the poem is on deceptive male discourse in the game of love. This should prompt the reader to ask if the speaker is sincere in her suggestion the women should cheat on their lovers. After all, it might be only a joke between women, or a rhetorical tactic on the part of the woman speaker to intimidate the (eavesdropping) male reader into good behaviour. The speaker may be attempting to beat men at their own game of verbal trickery and persuasive speech. Alternatively, the ambiguity about sexual conduct fits in with Melidor's pre-marital, non-penetrative sex and other references to women's tactics in negotiating sexuality and sexual politics. The slyness of the poem contains as much potential for empowerment as for disempowerment. For a discussion of "ambiguous" female character that can be interpreted in both positive and negative ways, see Janet Cowen.

[40] In the next chapter I will look more closely at one small "conversation" between men and women in the Findern manuscript, that takes palce in a series a string of lyric texts.

contributors to secondary, flyleaf moments of book compilation. Manuscript production circumstances such as those seen in the case of the Findern manuscript would have permitted women access to the book in progress (especially if the production occurred over a long period of time). The influence of women in the readership of a book in development could well impact on the textual representations of women in the folios.

Chapter Three:

The Manuscript Contexts of Female-Voiced Lyrics in Middle English

In recent years interest in the original manuscript contexts of Middle English lyrics has contributed to a greater understanding of how these texts circulated in medieval books.[1] This chapter will combine this interest in the manuscript contexts of lyrics with another recent scholarly focus, the female-voiced lyric or, "woman's song."[2] I will provide a survey the female-voiced lyrics in some English manuscripts ranging from the mid-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries.

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[1] While there have been many studies of lyrics in individual manuscripts, Julia Boffey's The Manuscripts of Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages is the most complete study of lyric manuscript contexts generally in Middle English. See also her article "Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Fifteenth Century." In earlier scholarship, Richard Leighton Greene and Rossell Hope Robbins, and John Stevens included entries on manuscripts in their collections of carols, songs and lyrics. See also Robbin's article "The Middle English Court Love Lyric." J.A. Burrow also considers the implication of manuscript contexts of lyric texts in English, and Sylvia Huot discusses the French tradition in From Song to Book.

[2] The woman's song corpus in Middle English was established by John Plummer and Maureen Fries, and has grown continually since their studies in 1981. See also Alan Deyermond's article "Sexual Initiation in the Woman's-Voice Court Lyric." Judith Bennett will be publishing a forthcoming article on the depictions of maidens and singlewomen in female-voiced English lyrics, and I thank her for sharing her research with me in advance of publication. There is much more literature on women's songs in other languages, see: Kathleen Ashley, Meg Bogin, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner (several articles, and her anthology of lyrics edited with Laurie Shepard and Sarah White), Clifford Davidson, Doris Earnshaw, Joan Ferrente ("Notes Towards the Study"), Theodore Frings, Kemp Malone, William Paden, Anne Howland Schotter, and Leo Spitzer.

In this chapter "female-voiced lyrics" means lyric texts which are thematically concerned with issues of love and sexuality viewed the perspective of a female speaking subject. The female speaker is indicated (in an admittedly heterosexist bias) by reference in the lyric to a male beloved or sexual partner. Like many others, my definition is dependent on voice: the gender of the author does not determine whether or not a text is a woman's song, although it does, of course, factor into our readings of the significance of the female voice (Plummer v).[3]

This definition requires a few qualifications. I have excluded such texts as the "good gossips" songs in alewife voices. Although these texts often address issues of marriage and sex, I feel at this time that they are more about urban tavern culture generally than about women's experiences with men.[4] I have also excluded poems written in the voices of historical figures, on the grounds that these works are focused

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[3] On a discussion of "voice" in female-voiced lyrics see Earnshaw, esp. the first and second chapters of her book.

[4] It is with some reluctance that I exclude this material, since it contributes such a large number of women's voices to the debate. Ultimately I think the alewife songs are related to the forsaken maiden laments. Both employ women's voices to examine transgressive female sexual behaviour in a way that intersects with social concerns of class and civic responsibility. Likewise, and they both make heavy use of irony, humour and obscenity. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation I discuss many of these gossip and alewife songs as they appear in Oxford, Balliol MS 354.

more on political, historical or didactic interests than love and sexuality.[5]

In my definition of the female-voiced lyric I have included what I call the "framed" woman's song. These pieces are predominately in the female voice, but the tale is relayed through a male narrator, who has a few introductory stanzas explaining how he came to hear the woman's tale. Of the manuscripts in this chapter, the framed female voiced text occurs only in songbooks that would have been used for performance purposes. Placing male-voiced frames on female voiced lyrics may have been adapted such texts to the voices of male performers. It is possible (although not provable) that framed songs may have originally circulated as a straightforward female-voiced text.

In addition to framed texts and texts that are wholly female voiced, in this chapter I will consider some dialogue poems. A very popular form of lyric was the dialogue between a lover and a lady, usually switching speakers from stanza to stanza. Although I do not define dialogue poems as female-voiced lyrics per se, I have included them in the discussion when they appear in manuscripts containing other female-voiced texts, in order to better understand how the female voice operates in a given manuscript. I have only included, however, dialogue poems

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[5] An example of a female-voiced historical poem from a manuscript I will be considering in this paper is "The lamentatyun of the Ladye Gryffythe" found in Rawlinson c.813. It is a love lyric insofar as it expresses the sentiments of the lady, but its express historical context makes it function as part of the commemoration of Sir Griffith, whose epitaph it follows in the manuscript (Padelford 347-50).

wherein the female role makes a substantial contribution to the debate. Similarly, neutral-voiced texts--lyrics that could be read as male- or female-voiced--are discussed when they appear in manuscripts of female-voiced lyrics.

Female-voiced lyrics make up an extremely small percentage of Middle English lyrics, and therefore their appearance in manuscripts is fairly unusual. It is even more striking when more than one female-voiced lyric appears in a single manuscript. While there are many manuscripts containing a single female-voiced lyrics, less than a dozen books contain two or more. This paper is concerned with manuscripts that contain more than one female-voiced lyric. Although woman's songs may appear in just about any sort of manuscript, I have found in my research that three particular manuscript contexts tend contain more female-voiced lyrics than others: songbook collections of texts meant for musical performance; clerical commonplace books that contain lyric marginalia; and literary anthologies meant for recreational reading purposes. This chapter will be an examination of these three general manuscript contexts for Middle English female-voiced texts.

The Song Books

The first two manuscripts I will consider are large, formal song books containing lyrics and music collected for the purpose of preserving singing material. These are Henry VIII's Manuscript (BL Additional 31922), obviously associated with the

court; and Ritson's Manuscript (BL Additional 5665), which has been connected to Exeter Cathedral.[6]

There are only two texts in Henry VIII's manuscript that are unequivocally written in the women's voice, and one other that is a framed female-voiced lament. Large songbooks like Henry VIII's manuscript were probably used for "ceremonial or social occasions at court" (Boffey 95), making the presence of female-voiced material in the book quite appropriate, since women were certainly included in many of the courtly entertainments.[7] Although there are only two wholly female-voiced lyrics in Henry VIII's manuscript, many other songs, including framed texts, dialogue poems, and neutral-voiced texts, also accommodate women's voices, or address gender issues more broadly. Many of the lyrics engage the courtly tradition, involving character roles of the lover and the lady.[8] Others are popular carols,

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[6] Both these songbooks have been discussed at length by Stevens, who also transcribed the English texts in Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court. See also many entries in Boffey, Manuscripts, especially pages 40 and 116-7 on Henry VIII's manuscript, and page 128 on Ritson's manuscript. There is a third famous lyric manuscript, the Fayrfax MS, which is another Tudor songbook connected to the courts of Henry VII and VIII. Although it is one of the major collections of courtly lyrics, many of which are written in neutral voices, it includes no positive "women's songs" that I could find--although one song ("That was my joy is now my woo and payne") is written in a woman's voice for the first stanza, and in a man's for the responding second stanza. On the Fayrfax MS see Stevens, especially 351-85, and several entries in Boffey, Manuscripts.

[7] On musical performances at court see Stevens, 233-335.

[8] These songs may have been part of a courtly "game" or performance in which members of the court participated in together. For an extended discussion on the "Game of Love," see Stevens's chapter by that name (154-202). See also Richard Firth Green, esp.

peopled with maidens and their seducers. The two wholly female-voiced songs in the book represent one of each of the courtly and popular forms.

The courtly lyric "Whilles lyve or breth is in my brest" celebrates the courtly ritual of tournaments.[9] A lady, perhaps meant to represent Queen Katherine, sings the praises of her jousting lover, who is possibly meant to represent Henry himself (Stevens 406):

My soverayne lorde for my poure sake
     Six coursys at the ryng dyd make,
Of which four tymes he dyd it take;
     Wherfor my hart I hym beqwest,
And of all other for to love best
          My soverayne lorde. (Stevens 405-6; 1-6)

The other wholly female-voiced text in Henry's manuscript is the carefree "And I war a maydyn:"

And I war a maydyn,
     As many one ys,
For all the golde in England
     I wold not do amysse.

When I was a wanton wench
     Of twelve yere of age,
Thes cowrtyers with ther amorus
     They kyndyld my corage.

When I was come to
     The age of fifteen yere,
In all this lond, nowther fire nor bond,
     Methought I had no pere. (Stevens 418-9; ll.1-12)

A third song in this collection written substantially in the female voice is a framed text. It is also a carol, wherein the

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115-17.

[9] This song is attributed to composer William Cornish in the manuscript (Stevens 406).

singer relates the words of a betrayed maiden whom he heard "Ryght peteusly complayne" (1.3):

Sshe said, alas,
Withowt trepas
Her dere hart was untrew;
'In every place
I wot he hace
Forsake me for a new.' (Stevens 397; ll.7-12)

Somewhat unusual for the genre, this song has a happy ending, with the lover returning to the lady.

Many of the texts in Henry's manuscript, however, are written in neutral voices--the speakers could be either male or female. Some of these neutral-voiced texts are written in the first person, but the sex of the "I" isn't clear. Others are eschew the first person subject position, and are contemplations of issues concerning gender, love and sexuality. Three such neutral-voiced songs, written in couplet form and attributed to King Henry in the manuscript, meditate on the influence of love on the courtly character:

Whoso that wyll all feattes optayne,
In love he must be withowt dysdayne,

For love enforcyth all nobyle kynd,
And dysdayne dyscorages all gentyl mynd.

Wherfor to love and be not loved
Is wors then deth? Let it be proved! (Stevens 399; ll.1-6)[10]

A couple of other neutral-voiced poems in Henry VIII's manuscript are less courtly in tone, employing the pastoral and

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[10] See also "If love now reynyd as it hath bene" (Stevens 403) and "Thow that men do call it dotage" (406-7).

popular imagery of foresters and hunting.[11] Although loaded with sexual double entendres, most of these poems are fairly restrained in their sexual imagery, especially in comparison to other carols on the subject, and are in keeping with the courtly focus of the manuscript:[12]

Yow and I and Amyas,
     Amyas and yow and I,
To the grenewode must we go, alas!
     Yow and I, my lyff, and Amyas.

The knyght knokett at the castell gate;
The lady mervelyd who was therat.
. . . . . .
She asked hym what was his name;
He said, "Desyre, you man, madame."
. . . . . .
Thus how thay dyd we cannot say -
We left them ther and went ower way.
(Stevens 402: l.1-6/11-2/19-20)

Henry's manuscript also accomodates female voices in its dialogue songs. There are two of dialogue songs in Henry's manuscript. The first of them is short and sweet. The first voice sings:

Farewell, my joy, and my swete hart!
     Farewell myne owne hart rote--
Frome yow a whyle must I depart;
     Ther ys none other bote.

Then the second voice replies:

Thowgh you depart now the me fro,
     And leve me all alone,

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[11] See Stevens's 222 and 249-50 on hunting and forestry imagery. On hunting motifs and lyric texts, see Anne Rooney 112-6.

[12] One forester song, "I have bene a foster" (Stevens 408-9) is a better example of the sexual double entendres of these songs. It is the comic lament of an aging lover, in which the bawdiness is focused on towards the foibles of the aging male body. A similar text is found in Ritson's manuscript (338-9).

My hart ys yours where ever that I go;
For yow do I mone. (Stevens 409)

It is not absolutely clear which voice is supposed to be the lover's and which the lady's--and this information is not necessary in order to enjoy the little song.[13] Some courtly conventions could be voiced equally well by both men and women.

In the second dialogue song in the manuscript, gender roles are much clearer. In this Joly Jankyn-style carol, a man is attempting to coax a maiden into a roll in the long grass. The maiden protests, citing fear of discovery by her mother:

Hey troly loly lo!
Mayde, whether go you?
I go to the medowe to mylke my cow.
Than at the medow I wyll you mete
To gather the flowres both fayer and swete.
Nay, God forbede! That my not be--
I wysse my mother then shall us se!

Now yn this medow fayer and grene
We may us sport and not be sene;
And yf ye wyll, I shall consent;
How sey ye mayde? Be ye content?

[Refrain]
Nay, in good feyth, I wyll not melle with you;
I pray you, sir, lett me go mylke my cow!
Why, wyll ye nott geve me no comfortt,
That now in the feldes we may us sport?
Nay, God forbede! That may not be;
I wysse my mothyr than shall us se! (Stevens 424-5; ll.1-11)

Finally, the man gives up this particular argument ("The for this onse I shal you spare") and the two separate without the bawdy

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[13] Sarah McNamer's has suggested that men were more likely to leave than be left. Using such logic, we might read the the first voice as male and the second as female (289-90). In my opinion, however, this places an unnecessary restriction on the song.

sex scene found in many carols of this type. Therefore, this carol is a relatively tame version of the genre--fitting in fairly well with the tone of the courtly songs in the manuscript.

Ritson's manuscript and Henry's manuscript resemble each other in many ways: they are similar in compilation method, share a purpose as collections, and are similar in their mixing of popular carols, courtly material, and devotional songs. Yet they differ in provenance and, in all probability, readership milieu. Possibly used at Exeter Cathdral, Ritson's manuscript includes material composed by at least one known rector of Exeter (Stevens 5).[14] Given this religious, masculine provenance, the female-voiced material in it might seem surprising. Yet as both Stevens and Boffey have pointed out, clerical communities often took it upon themselves to collect songs and literary material that, to our minds, might considered less devout than we would expect of them (Stevens 5-6, Boffey, Manuscripts 77, 127-9). Therefore, courtly love and popular texts, including female-voiced texts, could conceivably find their place in such collections, at least for the purposes of entertainment, if not for the sake of music preservation generally.

There is, however, an important qualification to the woman's voice as it appears in Ritson's manuscript--one which might be associated with the clerical users of the manuscript. None of Ritson's songs are wholly female voiced. Instead, there are two

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[14] See also Greene 307-8 and Boffey, Manuscripts 128.

framed female-voiced texts, one dialogue poem and one small neutral-voiced piece that reads in its entirety:

Alone, alone,
Here Y am mysylf alone;
With a dulfull chere here I make my mone,
Pyteusly, my own sylf alone.

My blossum bright ys gone,
Takyn away from me bycause of hevynes;
With a dulfull chere [here I make my mone,
Pyteusly, my own sylf alone.] (Stevens 346; l.1-8)

Stevens, bestowing a female speker on the poem, glosses "hevyness" as "her illness" with a parenthetical question mark, and I think he is essentially correct, although there is no gender pronoun elsewhere in the song to indicate that the speaker is female.[15] Although I think it more likely that "Alone, alone" is female-voiced, in the final analysis I would not want to detract from its ability to be adjusted to a male or female voice, since it works so nicely as a bridge between the texts on each side of it in the manuscript: one male voiced, the other female voice (albeit in a framed text).

Three other songs in Ritsons's manuscript are carol texts that employ the stock character of the betrayed maiden, who appears to be suspect in her sexual conduct. They are all framed texts; the following is an example:

In wyldernes
Ther founde I Besse
Secret, alone,

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[15] One possibly type of illness and "heaviness" for women is, of course, pregnancy. The term has also been used in the courtly context to refer to love-sickness or broken hearts. In another lyric in Ritson's manuscript it is used in the context of religious despair (Stevens 341).

In grete dystres,
Remedyles,
Makyng her moone.

"Alas," she seyd,
"Y was a mayde
As others be,
And at-a-brayde
Y was afrayde
Right pyteusly;

A wanton chyld
Spake wordes myld
To me alone,
And me begylyd,
Goten with child
And now ys gone. (Stevens 346-7; ll.1-18)

This song comes in small cluster of similar material that engages the abandoned maiden tradition.[16] Whether some of the abandoned maiden laments came to the compilers of Ritson's manuscript already in their male-voiced frames, or whether they were adapted to the particular uses of the clerical community, it seems clear that the users of the manuscript rarely, if ever, felt comfortable singing in an woman's voice unqualified by the narrative set-up that positioned the female-voiced text as a recorded, second-hand text.

Another framed woman's song close to "In wyldernes" is a bilingual English/Latin maiden's lament. Anne Howland Schotter has discussed how Latin in vernacular woman's songs adds another layer to the ironic victimization of the female speaker--a further "exploitation of women's ignorance" in the maiden's

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[16] Following this piece is a short male-voiced text which, using the same stock character name of "Besse," reinforces the anti-feminist perspective in the cluster regarding women who are "mankynde"--that is, kind to men. See Stevens 348 on alternative transmissions of this song in the form of a religious carol.

inability to understand the words that are placed in her mouth (26):

Up Y arose in verno tempore (in the time of spring)
And found a maydyn sub quadam arbore, (under a certain tree)
That dyd complayne in suo pectore, (in her breast)
Sayng, "Y fele puerum movere;" (a child moving)
(Stevens 348-9; ll.1-4)

The Latin certainly would not have been lost on the male religious community that produced Ritson's manuscript.

A fourth piece that contains a female voice is a dialogue song that combines the sexual seduction of an abandoned maiden's lament, and the tavern setting of a drinking or alewife song. It may be varient of the alewife convention, but alewifes are not usually sexually active within the context of a song, though their libidinous behaviour may be suspect generally. This speaker makes no reference to her martial status, and appears to be sexually available. She may, in fact, be a prostitute.[17] By the last stanza her protestations are humorously inadequate; she only wonders at her partner's lack of "gentery" in the beery tryst:

Cum kys me! "Nay!" Be God ye shall!
"Be Criste Y nelle, what ses the man?
Ye herts my legge agenste the wall;
Ys this the gentery that ye can?"
Take to gev all, and be stille than!
"Now have ye leyde me un the flore,
But hadde Y wyste when ye bygan,
Be Criste Y wolde have schytte the dore!"
(Stevens 340; ll.17-24)

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[17] On the association of prositutes with alewives and taverns, see Ruth Mazo Karras, 140-1, and Barbara Hanawalt 105-10.

This speaker, then, fits into the anti-femininst depictions of women seen in the abandoned maiden lament tradition that seems to predominant the representation of female voice in Ritson's manuscript. Perhaps the anti-feminisim of the representations of the female voice in this manuscript are not wholly surprising considering the milieu in which the book was used. We might contrast the tone of the female-voiced material in Ritson's manuscript to that of Henry VIII's manuscript, which contains its share of maiden laments, but they are more restrained in their sexuality. Henry VIII's manuscript also creates a balance of sorts by presenting other, more dignified female voices.

Cleric Manuscripts

Ritson's manuscript is not the only manuscript connected to clerical life that contains female-voiced songs. Among the other key female-voiced lyric manuscripts in Middle English are smaller exercise and commonplace books like Gonville and Caius College MS 383/603, British Library MS Sloane 1584, and Cambridge University Library Additional 5943. Like Ritson's manuscript, the female-voiced texts in these three books are typically to be carols of the abandoned maiden variety. Unlike Ritson's manuscript, however, not many of the songs have been placed in male-voiced narrative frames, suggesting that the more personal and casual transcription process did not give the copyists pause over the appropriateness of the female voice. It is doubtful that these

songs were intended for public performance in the way that the songs in Ritson's manuscript might have been.

The first of the cleric manuscripts, Gonville and Caius MS 383/603, suggests that some clerical compilers read the woman's voice as a distraction and comic relief from the drudgery of scholarly life. Gonville and Caius MS 383 was probably the exercise book of one "Wymundus London", a student of Magdalene College, Oxford (Boffey Manuscripts 97, 128). It is a commonplace book full of lessons (especially Latin grammatical exercises), a lot of memoranda, accounts and the like, as well as a number of short lyric texts in English, most of them carols (Greene 324-5). Two are religious carols, one is a pious convivial carol, one is a male-voiced lover's plea, and another is a male voiced satirical lament on the departing of his lady (he's so broken hearted that he has never he has never slept so soundly, etc.).

In the female voice, there are three carols and a short poem, "Summe men sayon that I am blak." Of the three female-voiced carols, two are definitely of the betrayed maiden's lament variety.[18] The song "Al this day ic han sought" ends:

Sone my wombe began te swelle
A[s] greth as a belle;
Durst Y nat my dame telle
Wat me betydde this holyday. (Greene 275-76; ll.37-40)

The third carol, "Y louede a child of this cuntre," is also a woman's lament, but less overtly sexual in nature (Greene 277-8).

The poem "Summe men sayon that I am blak" is one of those

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[18] Both songs are found on page 41 on the manuscript.

ambiguous texts that could be read as either misogynist or feminist. It is a complaint about the medieval preference for "fair" feminine beauty as an ideal:

Summe men sayon that I am blak
yt ys a colour for my prow;
[th]er y loue [th] ys no lac,
y may not be so wyte as [th]ou.
(Schmolke-Hasselmann 320; ll.1-4)

The attitude towards women in this poem is ambiguous; it could be interpreted as either a legitimate defense of dark women, or a snide reinforcement of the prejudice against them, since the woman speaker might be read as something of a sore loser.

In the Gonville and Caius manuscript it appears that the female-voiced lyrics were collected not simply out of some general interest in song preservation, as they were in the songbooks, but more casually, perhaps as a distraction for a weary student. They are squeezed sloppily into the pages of the manuscript with other memoranda without any real regard for accurate preservation; sometimes it is difficult to figure out where one song ends and another begins. The entries are copied in an haphazard and rough manner, obviously for personal use and not for posterity.

For the most part, the lyrics in Gonville and Caius 383 are without musical notation, although some of them are accompanied by headings of other songs--or timbres--intended to suggest a melody for the complete song (ie, "sung to the tune of...") (Boffey Manuscripts, 97-8). The timbres suggest that these texts, at the time of their being copied, were still in

circulation as songs that were actually sung, and not simply copied as literary texts.

The relative dominance of the woman's voice, as well as the misogyny, in the lyrics of this little collection may be merely the result of the copyist's personal taste, or may indicate a more general inclination among members of the clerical community to use the woman's voice as a vehicle of sexual humour. There are fewer female-voiced lyrics in BL Sloane 1584 and CUL Addit 5943 then in Gonville and Caius 383, but they also contain some fairly rouwdy passages.

British Library MS Sloane 1584 is a commonplace book, apparently produced and owned by John Gsyborne, a canon from North Yorkshire (Boffey, "The Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics," 11).[19] One of the two female-voiced texts in the collection is rather fun: it is in enthusiastic praise of the charms of serving men (or perhaps one serving man in particular). While it can be read as a risque celebration of the physical charms of a young hussy's lover, it also contains a small feminist reversal of the blazon, the courtly motif of cataloguing the beauty of the lady from head to toe.[20] The ode to serving men makes a similar evaluation of the male body: "His bonet is of

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[19] On Gysborne's ownership see also Boffey Manuscripts 43, 129; and Greene 603. It is perhaps too tempting to read his possible sexual proclivities into the lyrics when we suspect him of being the same John Gysborne charged with sodomy in 1536.

[20] On the catalogue of beauty in French and English lyrics see the article by Schmolke-Hasselman. For a discussion of the blazon, and courtly attitudes towards male beauty see Burnley, 37-52.

fyne scarlett,/ With here as black as giett," etc. This song is not especially raunchy, nor is the female speaker's virtue seriously compromised, except by the possibility of her generic association with the abandoned maid: the most overtly sexual reference in this poem is the statement that "His kysse is worth a hundred pounde." And the last words of the speaker are to the effect that her man possesses her heart until death, a sentiment which has a ring of betrothal.

The other female-voiced poem in this manuscript is even more restrained. Although it is the lament of a broken-hearted lady, there is little in the poem's tone to suggest a sexual indiscretion that would connect her to the bawdy betrayed maidens. The poem begins:

Grevus ys my sorowe
Both evyne and moro.
Unto myselffe alone
Thus do I make my mowne
Refrain: That unkyndnes haith kyllyd me
And putt me to this peyne.
Alas, what remedy
That I cannot refreyne.

The poem is so benign that one can easily imagine how effortlessly the editor of a 1567 printed book, The Gude and Goodlie Ballatis, turned it into a moral/religious text (Stevens 125). This sort of transfer from one speaking postion (that of a betrayed woman) to another (that of a pentitant) indicates how medieval readers exploited the flexiblity of the lyric voice to suit different reading purposes. In the final clerical manuscript of this discussion, Cambridge University Library Additional MS 5943, we see that flexiblity in the character of

the lyric speaking voice can even change a male voiced text to a female voiced text.[21]

CUL Additional 5943 is a late 14th-early 15th C. trilingual commonplace book that includes, at the end of the manuscript, one fascicle ruled for music, wherein there are a number of songs in English, French and Latin. Preceding folios of the manuscript, which was owned at one time by a Carthusian monk, are filled with a variety of sermons and other memoranda related to clerical life (Greene 323).[22] Some of the songs are accompanied by music, while others are written in verse form without regard for the rulings.

The subjects of these songs range from praises of the Blessed Virgin, to lullabies, to some fairly raunchy humourous pieces, including the female-voiced "Silver White" (Robbins Secular Lyrics 26-7). From the perspective of the reader interested in female-voiced texts, the carol commonly anthologized as "The man that I loued altherbest," offers an interesting codicological twist. Here female pronouns have been written above the original male pronouns (which indicate the beloved), and the words "The man" are replaced with "Sche." So

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[21] The gender of the speaking voice of "Grevus ys my sorowe" is not absolute, either: "Although the majority of the references indicate a woman's point-of-view . . . , other lines might refer to a man . . . unless this is a warning from one woman to another" (Robbins Secular Lyrics 289). My own reading favours the latter interpretation.

[22] Greene describes the manuscript on 323-4, and Boffey gives it brief mention in Manuscripts 94 and 107. The songs of the manuscript were transcribed by L.S. Mynors.

the poem can be read either as "The man that I loued altherbest" or "Sche that I loued altherbest." Assuming heterosexuality, this means that the poem was meant to be read either in the male or the female voice (Boffey 169):

The man/Sche that I loued altherbest
In al thys contre, est other west,
To me/sche he ys a strange gest;
What wonder est thow I be woo?

When me were leuesy that he/sche schold duelle,
He/sche wold nought sey onys farewelle;
He/sche wold noght sey ones farewell
Wen tyme was come that he/sche most go. (Mynor 44)

The added pronouns are inscribed in the same hand as the rest of the entry, and are neatly written in (if a bit squished). These additions do not seem to represent a correction of the original, but an alternative. Elsewhere in the song the scribe did not hesitate to make corrections or substitutions by crossing out parts of the original text. Because the original pronouns remain untouched, I think the copyist was simply trying to keep an open mind about the gender of the speaker in this pretty little love song. Like the neutral-voiced texts, this is an indication that medieval lyrics did not always insist on one gender or another for the speaking voice.

In the informal, personal collections associated with individual scholars and clerics, the woman-song entries are marginalia or filler items. The texts in the female speaking voice are squeezed into the margins and the flyleaves of the books. Their status as marginalia in the codices may well reflect the marginal existence of women in clerical life. The

dramatic characters of the female speaking voices in these texts are largely maidens (young, single women--often servants) characters. Many of these young ladies, although by no means all, are lascivious: on a fictional level, they are sexually available to the male reader. Even the more modest maiden characters, however, are quite clearly objects of male desire.

Is this uniformity of female representation of any significance to the clerical milieu? Well, we might compare these maidens to the female characters found in the lyrics of one merchant's manuscript. As I discuss in the next chapter, Richard Hill, a grocer and family man, has almost no maiden characters in his commonplace book; Balliol College MS 354. Instead, the female-voiced lyrics in that book are characters of unruly wives: gossips and scolds. There may be some correlation between the social circumstances of men who compiled female-voiced (unmarried clerics vs. married merchants), and the depictions of feminine characters in lyric texts (sexy maidens vs. nasty wives), but with such a small control group of manuscripts, a definitive conclusion regarding this issue is unfeasible.

Literary Anthologies

The final group of female-voiced lyric manuscripts in this discussion is made up of three literary collections which include large numbers of lyrics generally. Bodleian MS Rawlinson c.813, the Devonshire manuscript (British Library Addition MS 17942), and the Findern manuscript (Cambridge University Library Ff.1.6)

are all collections of literature that would have been read mainly for recreation. They are homemade anthologies: Devonshire is the product of Henry VIII's court during the time of Anne Boleyn, Rawlinson c.813 was produced by a London lawyer, and Findern was produced by a gentry community in Derbyshire.[23] The lyrics in these texts are largely of a literary, not musical, transmission, in contrast to most of the the lyrics in the songbooks and many of the lyrics in the clerical collections.

Rawlinson c.813 is a "small and scappily-written volume" containing an interesting mix of lyrics and prophecies (Boffey Manuscripts 26).[24] Some of the lyrics are actually extracts and adaptations of longer texts by Stephen Hawes and John Lydgate, as well as a number of passages from Troilus and Criseyde.[25]

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[23] For descriptions of Rawlinson c.813, and transcriptions of its poems, see Frederick Padelford, as well as Sharon Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan. Other discussions of the manuscript are found in articles by Martine Braekman and Edward Wilson. On the Devonshire manuscript see discussions by Elizabeth Heale, Raymond Southall, and Helen Barron. Seth Lerer's book Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII includes a number of entries on these two manuscripts, see esp. 129-43 on Rawlinson c.813, and 143-60 on Devonshire. Alexandra Barratt transcribes some of the female-voiced texts of Rawlinson c.813 and the Findern manuscript: 264-74. Boffey also discusses all three of these manuscripts in several entries in Manuscripts.

[24] Rawlinson is ususally described as being written by a number of different scribes (Padelford 310, Jansen and Jorden 60-2, Boffey Manuscripts 26, Barrett 264), although Edward Wilson has passed along the suggestion made by M.B. Parkes that the manuscript was written entirely by one person, its owner Humphrey Welles (13). Seth Lerer seems to base his research on the assumption that the collection was produced by Humphrey Welles himself.

[25] This tendency to turn longer texts into lyrics is also seen in Devonshire and Findern. On extracting lyrics from longer texts, see Boffey Manuscripts 69-71 and Braekman 127. On the extraction of Hawes texts in Rawlinson c.813 see A.S.G. Edwards, Stephen Hawes

Rawlinson contains a handful of female-voiced lyrics, with some additional female voices found in dialogue poems.[26]

The technique of lyric extraction from larger texts emphasizes that in this anthology, lyric collection was a literary, not musical activity. This literariness is further reinforced by the use of the epistolary conventions employed in many of the lyrics, as well as metaphors involving methods of book production.[27] In one lyric a lady petitioner beseeches her lover to "prynte" her love "yn your mynde," while she undertakes the project of translating a courtly lyric from French into English. The literariness of this lyric is given a yet another

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90-1. Lerer discusses the extracts of Hawes, along with other poets in the Rawlinson manuscript, in light of their relevance to the "courtly politics" of the reign of Henry VIII. See also his article "The Courtly Body and Late Medieval Literary Culture."

[26] There are also female voices in Rawlinson that belong to specific literary and historical characters, like Lady Griffith (widow of Sir ap Rhys, executed in 1521, and immortalized in the lament of his wife and another epitaph), or the goddesses Juno, Venus and Pallas in an extended debate poem that dramatizes the mythological competition over which of the three was the most beautiful. I do not discuss the female voices of these texts here because the lack the formal or thematic requirements of my working definition of "female-voiced lyric" that I established at the outset of this paper, but their precence in the manuscript adds to the general chorus of female voices in the book.

[27] In the latter part of the middle ages the "love epistle" was on of the most popular courtly love conventions, see Green 116-19 and Robbins, Secular Lyrics 286. On the epistolary convention see Norman Davis, "The Litera Troili and English Letters," Review of English Studies n.s. 16 (1965): 233-44. Lerer considers the significance of love letters and the epistolary conventions of the love lyrics in Rawlinson c.813, and in early Tudor court politics. See Courtly Letters 7-13, 122-43, and his chapter on the letters of Henry VIII.

layer by the fact that the last two stanzas are lifted from Lydgate's "Churle and the Bird":[28]

O resplendent floure! prynte [th]is yn your mynde,
how as yet vnto yow I was neuer vnkynde;
& therfore, dere harte, rote of tendernes,
to comforth me of my care & sease my paynes stronge
shortly come speke with me of your gentylnes,
or elles of dyscomforthe shalbe my songe.

For yn your confydence my worde I haue closyde,
bothe locke & kay ye haue yn your gouernance,
& to yow my mynde I haue sayllyde;
of very pety exyle me nott owt of remembrance.

Thys I doo synthe my symple byll;
at owr metyng ye shall knowe more of my wyll.
Vnto yow I nede nott to wryte my name
for she [th]at louethe yow best send yow [th]is same.

Goo, lyttle queare, & recommende me
vnto my master with humble affectyon,
beseachyng hym lowly of mercye and petye
of my rude makyng to haue compassyon.

and as towchyng [th]is letter of translatyon
owt of Frenche, how-so-euer [th]e Englyshe be,
all [th]is ys said vnder correctyon,
with the supportatyon of your benyngnyte. (Padelford 37, l.1-22)

There is a small gesture in the first stanza to the musical heritage of the love lyric ("my songe"), but in general the woman's expression of love has been transposed to the realms of the literate and the literary. Here, the writing of a love letter is significant not only as a courtly act, but also a

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[28] Robbins notes that it is difficult to tell if the poem was actually translated from French, but notes that, at the very least, the reference to translation "indicates some connection with formal love poetry" (Secular Lyrics 289). On the relationship between French and English lyric traditions see Boffey, Manuscripts 45-7, 138-40.

metaphor for the emotional experience of love itself.[29] The use of long lines and stanza formation also define the text as literary, not musical, and is typical of the Rawlinson texts.

Another of Rawlinson's female-voiced epistolary texts is written in Chaucerian seven-line rime-royal stanzas. The literary aspirations of this lyric have not impressed modern critics, one of whom speculated that it might have been written "as it purports to be, by some earnest but untalented lady" (Utley 227):

Right best beloved and most in assurance
Of my trewe harte, I me recommende
Hartely unto you withowten vareance;
And have receyved the whiche ye to me did send,
Wherby I perceyve your loving harte and minde;
Desiring you in the same soo to continewe,
And then for your grett paynes comfforte may insuye.
(Padelford 51, Barrett 267; ll.1-7)

Like "O resplendent floure," "Right best beloved" presumes that the courtly lady character is highly literate; she is depicted as possessing skills in the areas of translation, composition and copying.

The lyric "O resplendent floure" is placed in Rawlinson c.813 alongside another female-voiced text, "Grene flouryng age of your manly countenance":

grene flouryng age of your manly countenance
your youthe you lustynes and your delectable corage
causythe me to haue ytt yn remembrance
Soo [th]at day and nyght yn my harte I rage

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[29] A parodic version of the epistolary female-voiced text is one of the first poems in the manuscript. Thematically, this poem, in which a bawd writes to an old friend and recounts tales of their old high jinks, is related to ale-wife texts (Wilson 23-25; Lerer 137-40).

For by cause I am Soo farre owt of your presens
yet shall ye fynde [me] trew yn your obseruance
In owr hartes we may be ryght glade
for Ioy of owr prupoose I [th]at shall wende
lett neuer [th]e loue of trew louers be lost
for my amyable loue I doo to yow promysse
with all [th]e sparkes of my harte vnlasyde
how be ytt dayly I am Sory and sade
and shalbe tyll I know more of your mynde
for harte yn your mynde ys closyde
In my bodye ytt wll nott abyde.
(Jansen and Jordan 209; ll-1-15)

These two songs might have been paired because of their female voices, or to other poetic qualities that they share, such as their "irregularity in form" (Jansen and Jordan 35). But other female-voiced lyrics appear elsewhere in the manuscript, including the earnest "Swet harte I loue yow more feruent than my father":

Swet harte I loue yow more feruent than my father
yet knowe I wyll your loue Soo feruent ys
In a noder place that I dare nott desyre
your loue a geyne not nought I wyll I wysse
but I beseke gode of your loue grante yow blysse
and preserue yn grace bothe yonge and olde
grante me my loue I aske noo more I wysse
amonge your new louers yet remebre your old.
(Jansen and Jordan 233, ll.1-8)

The evidence that the compiler of Rawlinson c.813 saw the woman's voice as a thematic basis for organization, therefore, is actually quite slight--two consecutive texts is not really sufficient evidence for editorial policy.[30] There does seem to be some organization according to courtly and popular texts,

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[30] Lerer, however, does see gender as a determinent in the organization of some of the Rawlinson lyrics, where male and female voices <u>together</u> participate in an "epistolary dialogue and commentary" (143). On another theory regarding the organization of the Rawlinson lyrics, see Wilson 30-31.

however, and women's voices are included in selections form both traditions of lyric. In Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII, Seth Lerer demonstrates that some of the lyrics (including the female-voice texts discussed above) explore the politics of early Tudor courtliness.[31] On the popular side, the manuscript contains a small cluster of chansons d'adventure ballad texts that share the stock character of the maiden found in the carols of the clerical manuscripts.[32] As in Ritson's manuscript, some of these texts are dialogue poems involving the maiden and her seducer--or would-be seducer, as in the case of the following song:

Through a forest as I can ryde,
to take my sporte yn mornyng,
I cast my eye on euery syde:
I was ware of a bryde syngynge.

I sawe a fair myde come ryding;
I speke to hur of loue I trowe;
she answered me all yn scornyng,
& sayd, "the crowe shall byte yow."

[Sportsman] "I pray yow, damesell, scorne me nott;
to wyn your loue ytt ys my wyll,
for your loue I haue dere bought
& I wyll take good hede ther tyll."
. . . . . .
He toke hur a-bowte the myddell small
& layd hur downe vpon the grne;

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[31] Most of the texts Lerer reads regarding their portrayal of women and the feminine do not qualify as women's songs in the definition I am using for this paper, such as the "alewife" song "My loving ffrende, amorous bune." See his discussion 136-43.

[32] Three of these chansons d'adventure come together in a cluster of four quatrain texts, on folios 56v to 60v. The stanza formation of these texts, while not precisely ballad form, is nevertheless sufficiently reminisent balladry, and evokes the musical heritage of lyrics that, in this transmission, were literary.

twys or thrys he served hur soo with-all;
he wolde nott stynt yet, as I wene.
. . . . . .
[Maid] "Fare well! corteor, ouer the medoo;
pluke vp your helys, I be-shrew yoo;
your trace wher-so-euer ye ryde or goo
Crystes curse goo wythe yow.

"Thoughe a knave hathe by me leyne,
yet am I noder dede nor slayne nor slayne;
I trust to recouer my harte agayne;
& Crystes curse goo wythe yow." (Padelford 40; 1.1-12/33-68)

The girl's feistiness here makes her a more sympathetic character than many of the maidens who suffer similar fates in other songs. But female sexuality in the Rawlinson manuscript is not always portrayed with such sympathy. There are also handful of anti-feminist texts in the manuscript, including one interesting prose piece that provides the reader a catalogue of the varieties of female sexual impropriety.[33] Lerer comments that on several occasions women in the Rawlinson collection "are subject to derision as untrustworthy dissimulators; they are objects of erotic fantasy, the subjects of lyrics that revel in both a fearful anonymity as well as in a glib eroticism" (124).

Whether or not women were involved in the manuscript's assembly, or were a part of its readership, remains an open question. Unlike the Devonshire and Findern manuscripts, no

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[33] The prose reads: "A harlatt ys she [th]at man kepes and yf anoder make labour for petye hur kynd harte can nott say nay. A huntere ys she that ij or iij good felowes kepys and yet she seches moo for hur aduantage. A hore ys she [th]at medel[es] with whoo some euer cummys soo [th]at she hath medled with Soo many that she knoweth nott nombre of them" (Jansen and Jordan 165). In case a woman's sexual status is not easily apparent to the naked eye, the manuscript also provides a couple of charms that are tests for virginity. These are located just prior to the catalogue of harlots, hunters and whores (Jansen and Jordan 164).

convenient marginalia testifies to female participation in Rawlinson c.813. Welles was married, but we have no way of knowing if his wife or his other female acquaintances, would have used the book. As the Devonshire manuscript proves, however, the presence of misogyny in a collection is not a sure sign that women were excluded from the production of the book, or its readership.

A small autograph book written in many different hands, Devonshire apparently circulated in Henry VIII's court during the time of Anne Boleyn, under the primary control of three women. Although there has been some debate amongst scholars regarding the exact nature of its circulation, there is agreement about the general milieu in which it was produced. The three women, (Margaret Douglas, Mary Shelton and Mary Howard Fitzroy, who was the Duchess of Richmond and the Earl of Surrey's sister), used the book both in and out of court.[34] At various times the book may have been communal property, while at other times only one of these women (especially Mary Shelton) may have taken charge of it (Heale 300).[35]

Knowing, as we do, some of the details of the lives and loves of the main contributors to the Devonshire manuscript--in particular Margaret Douglas and Thomas Howard--the temptation to

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[34] See Boffey, Manuscripts 8-9; Southall "Devonshire Manuscript" 144-5, and Heale 298-300.

[35] For details of the compilation and ownership history, I refer the reader to Helen Baron's detailed article "Mary (Howard) Fitzroy's Hand in the Devonshire Manuscript," which discusses the debates surrounding individual contributions to the book.

read the songs biographically is very strong, and some have done so.[36] As one of the earlier students of the manuscript speculated, the texts could be testimonies from these star-crossed lovers on the dangers of "impolitic love" in the world of courtly intrigue (Southall, 148-9). Only one of the Douglas/Howard texts, "I may well say w[ith] Joyfull hart," is written in the female voice, although some of the texts associated with the couple are in neutral voices (Heale 305).

There is certainly the possibility that some of the Devonshire texts (including others than the Douglas/Howard poems) were biographic in nature, but like the Rawlinson manuscript, Devonshire is largely a collection of recreational texts. The literary tradition of courtly love, in particular, seems to have been both a favourite subject, and a favourite style for creative expression in Devonshire. Creative expression was not necessarily restricted to authorship, but could have included copying and compiling activites, some of which were undertaken by women.[37] In her article on the manuscript, Elizabeth Heale

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[36] Margaret Douglas was Henry's neice, and eloped with her lover Thomas Howard. For this violation (Henry had wished to marry her off to a political ally) they were imprisoned in the Tower in 1536. Howard perished there, but Douglas was released and was later married by Henry to the Earl Lennox, by whom she had a son, Harry Stuart, Lord Darnley, who was fated to marry Mary Queen of Scots (Southall 146, Heale 298, 309).

[37] Boffey cautions that although "scribal copies of some of the lyrics in the Devonshire Manuscript . . . have been attributed to identifiable figures . . . whether they were the <u>authors</u> of the pieces is not clear" (<u>Manuscripts</u> 85-6n).

unravels the many varities of female participation in Devonshire, some of which should be considered here.

As Heale explores in some detail, subtle but important changes were made to previously circulating lyrics to have them address women's perspectives. For example, the participants in the book changed pronouns and extracted lyrics from longer texts (Heale 304).[38] It was not required that a lyric's author be female, in order to be employed by the female contributors to the manuscript. Mary Howard Fitzroy copied a female-voiced poem written by her brother, the Earl of Surrey, perhaps in honour of a specific event (Heale 309, Baron 329). In fact, it was not even required that the original text be sympathetic to women. Even misogynist texts could be redeemed by copying or compiling activities (Heale 303-4).[39] One fascinating example involves a text that was copied with one very significant line alteration. Where the original text read "euery man beyng a parfyte scribe & good / the cursydness yet and disceyte of women," in the Devonshire version the text reads "euery man beyng a parfyte scribe and & good / the faythfulnes yet and prayse of women" (307). We cannot know for sure, of course, whether the Devonshire versions of these texts composed especially for this manuscript, or if they were received from an exemplar that has

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[38] On the extraction of lyrics from longer texts by the Devonshire compilers see Boffey, Manuscripts 69-70 and 72.

[39] Misogynist texts that found their way into the manuscript appear to have been "stomached, with spirit" by the woman users of the book--indeed, Mary Shelton herself was responsible for copying one onto the folios (Heale 310,313).

been now lost. But it is evident that the Devonshire was a manuscript space that welcomed literary "play" with gender.[40]

In the Devonshire manuscript, women contributors wrote themselves into the courtly tradition. Mary Shelton did this quite literally when she entered a poem into the manuscript containing the acrostic "sheltvn" (Boffey "Women Authors" 173, Heale 301). This text also provides evidence of the communal nature of the compiling enterprise, with a marginal exchange between Shelton and Mary Douglas. In the margin of this text is the (somewhat harsh!) criticism of Douglas: "fforget thys," to which Shelton responded "yt ys worhy [sic]" (Heale 301). Courtly love literature, often seen by scholars such as Sheila Fisher and Janet Halley as a "homotextual" exchange of women between men, has, in this moment in Devonshire, become an exchange <u>between women</u> (Fisher and Halley 4).

But these women involved in the Devonshire manuscript do not replace courtly androcentrism with gynocentrism. There remain a number of male voices in the manuscript, as well as several points of exchange between the sexes. The female contributors to the Devonshire manuscript seem to have regarded themselves as full participants in courtly literary culture, not simply as marginal players, or as the objects of exchange by male court

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[40] Female contributors were not the only ones who played with the gender of lyric voices in the Devonshire manuscript. It is possible that Thomas Howard was responsible for entering some of the female-voiced texts into the book (Heale 307; Lerer 145). Moreover one of the female-voiced texts, a carol written in the voice of Anne Boleyn, was penned by Wyatt (Greene 284-5, 500-1).

poets. Altogether the manuscript is, as Julia Boffey suggests, a "valuable reminder of the area of unofficial, unpublished, female literary accomplishment which we are unlikely to be able to resurrect in other ways" ("Women Authors" 174).

In the case of the Devonshire manuscript, female participation in the courtly love lyric tradition comes directly from the court milieu, but in the case of the Findern manuscript, we have evidence of similar sorts of female literary activity from a non-courtly milieu. As I discussed in my second chapter, the Findern manuscript is an anthology that is more than usually accommodating to women's voices, and women's perspectives, in the literature. There are at least four women-voiced short poems here, and possibly more, since a number of other texts are written in a neutral voice that could have been read or recited as either male or female.[41]

I read the female-voiced lyrics in Findern as part of a larger dialogue on the nature of courtly love and gender issues in the manuscript between male and female voices and, perhaps,

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[41] The woman's songs of the Findern manuscript are discussed at length by Hanson-Smith and McNamer, who also transcribed the woman-voiced and neutral-voiced lyrics. McNamer's attempt to assign female characters to the neutral-voiced material is a worthy but problematic experiment that has not always been well recieved (Jurkoskwi calls it "strident", 196). Certainly all of the poems she discusses read very well as women's songs, and that could well be the way medieval readers regarded them. While Boffey is correct in noting the complications of inferring female authors from female voices, it is difficult to justify placing the onus of proof on readers who wish to do so (169-170). Aside from a traditional bias towards assuming male authorship of anonymous texts, evidence that male participants in the Findern manuscript wrote or copied the pieces is equally ellusive (Barrett 1-2).

readers. Such a dialogue are exemplified by the debate poem La Belle Dame Sans Merci by Richard Roos, where the a lover and a lady present their arguements over the nature of love (and his love for her) in alternating stanzas.[42] In this long poem, the gender of the speaking voice alternates with the stanzas. In a string of lyrics following La Belle Dame it is possible to discern a continuation of this pattern of alternating gender in the speaking voices--from lyric to lyric, in this case.

There are two sections of lyrics following La Belle Dame.[43] The first fills the last pages of the four-quire booklet that contains Roos's poem. Originally, these pages would have been left blank: the lyrics are later additions.[44] After the lyrics in the Belle Dame booklet comes another whole booklet of lyric texts. This second booklet was circulated independantly before being bound into the larger compilation.

It is the first group of lyrics, in the Belle Dame booklet, that interests me the most in terms of reading women's voices.

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[42] Roos's poem is available in Frederick J. Furnivall, 80-111.

[43] Four small quires make up the Belle Dame booklet (I to M), all made with paper stock number nine, although there are two sheets of paper stock number four in quire K (Harris 314-5; Hana 67). The long poem runs from the beginning of quire I to just past the middle of quire L, originally leaving three leave blanks, although the last leaf of L has been cut out. Quire M was then added to the booklet, and there are two leaves missing from the end of this quire. The lyrics, therfore, begin in quire L, and carry over to M (Hanna 69-70).

[44] The last two folios of quire M were cut or torn out. The last extant lyric in these string of poems ends, complete, on f.139v. There may or may not have been more lyrics on the missing folios.

Some of these lyrics are female-voiced, some male-voiced, and sone are neutral voiced. As it appears directly after the debate poem, this lyric cycle reads like a continuation of the exchange between the lover and his lady in La Belle Dame, borrowing its "underlying 'narrative thread'" from the longer poem.[45] This interpretation is possible if we read the texts in the cycle that are written in neutral voices as female.

The cycle begins with the female-voiced "Welcome be ye, my souereine," wherein a lady bemoans her lover's absence (McNamer 305-6). It is followed by a male-voiced carol reaffirming a lover's devotions to his lady, though her "vnkyndness do me wo" (Greene 269-70, 1.27). After the male-voiced lyric comes a neutral-voiced stanza, which accomodates itself easily to a woman's voice:

Sith Fortune hath me set thus in this wyse,
Too loue you best callyd be,
You to seue and trewly plese
Is my desyr and hertus esse. (McNamer 306)

From here we return to a male-voiced piece (Mason 169-70), and so on for a total cycle of nine songs. Only once is the pattern of alternation disrupted, in the seventh and eighth texts, both of which are female- or neutral-voiced.

It might be seen as overly manipulatative to read the neutral-voiced texts as female-voiced in order to sustain the

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[45] On lyric cycles see Boffey, Manuscripts 62-3. My use of the word "cycle" here is a more casual application of her definition of a cycle as a series of lyrics "organized so that, some sort of "narrative thread" is intended to become apparent" (62).

pattern of alternation. But there is a codicological affiliation of the female voice with the neutral voice in this section, one that visually reinforces the alternating voices. The ink colour appears to alternate with the voice of the texts: all of the male-voiced texts are written in an ink that is now dark, and all of the female/neutral-voiced texts are written in an ink that is now reddish-brown. It is impossible to tell if this is deliberate or not, because we cannot tell if the ink, now very aged, looked different at the time the lyrics entered.[46] But it is somewhat suggestive that the changes of ink should correspond so exactly with the voice of the text--even in the single instance when the pattern is disrupted: the seventh and eighth lyrics, both female/neutral-voiced texts, are both written in the lighter ink. When looking at the manuscript today, however, the appearance of the alternating inks triggers readings of alternating gender in this cluster of lyrics.

The lyrics at the end of the Belle Dame booklet suggest literary games in the courtly love tradition. The roles of lover and lady are voiced through the lyric texts (Hanna 64). This lyric section and the lyric booklet which follows it might have represented a modest attempt at the kind of autograph games found in the Devonshire manuscript. Perhaps the Findern community was imitating a social habit of the court, (particularly of court

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[46] There are also some scribblings in quire M in both inks--alphabets, an incomplete ruling for music, a small drawing of two fish and a barrel, which may be a visual pun on a name ("luce-tun" or Lewiston), and another probable pun ("A God When," or Godwin), the latter item occurring twice (Harris 303).

ladies), by collecting lyrics and using them in a literary "game of love" (Boffey 123).

The role of the women in such games was not necessarly limited to the female-voiced lyric. If male poets like Wyatt (in the Devonshire manuscript) did not restrict themselves to the male voice, there is no reason to assume that female poets or copyists would restrict themselves to the female voice. In fact, the Findern manuscript suggests strongly that such lyrical cross-dressing took place. The lyric booklet that immediately follows the Belle Dame booklet (and its lyric cycle) begins with two male-voiced lyrics written in one of the two hands responsible for copying the romance Sir Degrevaunt into Findern. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a fairly strong possibility that those two copyists were women. Therefore, it is entirely possible that the two male-voiced lyrics beginning the lyric booklet were entered by a woman.[47]

The literary anthologies of Rawlinson c.813, Devonshire, and Findern illustrate that the male and female voices of courtly lyrics put gender "into play," more than they indicated real men and women behind the texts. These lyrical games were, however, dependant on manuscript production activities like copying and compiling which allowed women to participate equally in the

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[47] Heale has a similar reading of the courtly uses of gender in the Devonshire manuscsript: "Such language was available for appropriation by men, but also, potentially, by women. In a system of manuscript copying, appropriation, and adaption, the question is perhaps less one of the name or gender of an originating author than of the kinds of voices and gestures the available discourses make possible to copiers and readers of both sexes" (307).

process. Reading the female voice in these contexts is significantly different, then, from reading the female voice in manuscripts that excluded women readers.

In clerical manuscripts, produced in an exclusively masculine milieu (including, perhaps, Ritson's songbook), the female voice seems to be typified by character of the pastorelle maiden. These songs may present her sympathetically, or not, but she usually fits well into the profile of that stock character. In manuscripts produced in a gender-mixed milieu like the court or family homes, however, not only is female lyrical voice more sympathetic to women, but the manuscripts themselves accommodate the female contributor in ways extending beyond female-voiced lyrics. Misogyny is by no means absent in these manuscripts, but it does not often appear <u>via</u> the female voice. Nor is sexuality avoided altogether, but it is often softened considerably when compared to the maiden carols. Regarding female-voiced lyrics in Middle English manuscripts generally, we may conclude that certain instances of lyric collection were more accommodating to the female voice than others, and that some, but not all, of these collections involved female contributors. The female voice was not the exclusive literary property of either men or women circulating Middle English lyrics, but certain <u>types</u> of female voices in lyrics were more likely to be found in manuscripts associated with women users, while other types found their way into manuscripts associated with male users.

Chapter Four: The Construction of Masculinity in Balliol 354

Oxford, Balliol College MS 354 is a small sixteenth-century anthology (c. 1503-1536) copied and compiled by one Richard Hill, a London grocer.[1] It is usually referred to as a commonplace book, and includes a wildly diverse range of texts--from literature to mathematics, religious verse to bawdy carols, practical recipes to frivolous riddles.[2] At first glance, it might appear that the book was meant to be a textual catch-all for a man who could not afford a larger library--a repository for anything and everything that Hill came across on paper. However, in this chapter I will suggest that Hill's production methods were more discriminating and deliberate than they might first appear.

Although the book contains many items that would make it a highly practical record-keeping and reference volume for a busy grocer, it also includes a number of more literary works that lend the books an ideological, as well as practical, application.

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[1] On a comprehensive study of medieval London grocers, (to 1485) see Nightingale's book on the Grocers' company. On medieval merchants generally, see Thrupp.

[2] A.G. Rigg asserted that Balliol was one of the "best examples" of a commonplace book (26). The manuscript is kept with a typescript copy by D.C. Browning (1920), who provides commentary in his Balliol College dissertation of 1935. Other descriptions are available in Froude; R.A.B. Mynors 352-54, Coxe 110-15, Ogilvie-Thomson 8-14, and most completely, Dyboski, who describes the manuscript in his introduction, and transcribes most of the short poems. Citations of these shorter texts in this chapter are taken from Dyboski, unless otherwise indicated.

Considered in the broader professional context, the vernacular literature in Balliol 354 constructs a particular vision of masculinity--specifically, a vision of what it meant to be a man with a family in the merchant community of late medieval London.[3] The book, which was eventually passed on to Mr. Hill's son, both reflects Hill's status and role in the community and prescribes that role by means of the texts it contains.[4] Parts of the book might very well have been used by Hill for the purpose of educating his children, perhaps his sons in particular. In the case of male children (including, perhaps, apprentices), the education they received through the book was not only in the areas of history, language, mathematics and business, but also moral education regarding the responsibilities of masculinity in merchant London.[5]

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[3] Carol Meale groups Balliol 354 with other manuscripts from London which "share the interest in history and topography . . . and occasionally they also contain items of concern to merchants" ("Compiler at Work" 100). She connects items in Balliol to Harley 2252, a book compiled by another London merchant, John Colyns, although she notes that the two compilations differ in scope, as "the literary taste of Richard Hill ran to both the popular lyric and aureate traditions," while Colyns's book "seems to have been largely subsumed to his dominant interest in the world of practical affairs in which he lived" (101). For other books associated with London merchants see Parkes 283-4 and 291-3.

[4] Richard Hill's own hand is the primary one, with only a little marginalia from later owners of the book, including the signature of his eldest son, John Hill ("John Hylles boke"), to whom the book was apparently passed on (Dyboski xiii-xv; R.A.B. Mynors 353).

[5] Although it is not impossible, I think it is unlikely that the women of Hill's family participated to any great extent in production or readership of the book. Not only is there a significant absence of codicologial evidence for their reading

The manuscript is a rather plain "holster book" bound without boards in vellum, making it rather fragile given the stresses of aging on the unprotected material.[6] Nevertheless, the manuscript does not appear to have been ill-treated in its day, for it does not bear the marks of manhandling or casual use that we see in more solidly constructed volumes. Heather Collier notes that "in terms of its layout, there is something very ordinary, practical and functional about Hill's manner of presenting his texts and he obviously wasted little money on the book" (320). There is very little blank space left in the book, and little marginalia of a graffiti-type. While his book is very modest in presentation, it seems that Hill did not treat the book too roughly, or permit others to do so.

The variety of texts in Hill's book is quite wide, even for a commonplace book, as Hill himself recognized when he titled it "a Boke of dyveris tales & balattis & dyueris reconyngis."[7] We can, however discern some general textual directions for the

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presence, but also because of the nature of the material it contains. As the book is so obviously a business tool, it would be surprising that a merchant's wife would use it, at least while her husband and son were alive, since historical evidence suggests that wives did not participate in merchant business. See Hanawalt, Of Good and Ill Repute 82.

[6] "Holster books" are long, narrow, rectangular-shaped volumes, so named on the speculation that they were carried about in saddle holsters. Whether or not this is was the true motivation for their shape is debatable, but the name has stuck: see Guddat-Figge 30-6, Boffey and Thompson 313 and (on the construction of Balliol 354 in particular) Collier 320. Holster books were often used for account books (Parkes 293).

[7] This is the title Hill give the book at the top of the table of contents, on f.3r.

book, rough categories of business or household records, educational tools and literary texts.[8] Many of these categories are closely related of course, and several texts would fit into more than one of them.

Immediately apparent are items that relate directly to Hill's social and professional milieu, which include lists of merchant groups and fair locations; lists of taxes and assizes for various products (especially bread); information about the parishes, wards, mayors and sheriffs of London; and scores of recipes for medicines and other products. Some of this, as Heather Collier has explained, was copied by Hill from Arnold's Chronicle (or, The Customs of London, STC 782) of 1502, which was printed in Antwerp by Van Berghen (323).[9]

Moving from items of obvious practical value for merchant business, to the literature, we see that even there, business interests are presented in the texts. In one case, the rules for purchasing land have been set in verse (Dyboski 137-8). There is an ode to London that focuses to a great extent on the city's mercantile glory, of which Hill probably felt himself to be a

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[8] See Dyboski, xxxiv-lix, for a complete list of the one hundred and forty-six key items in the book (most lyrics, of which there are scores, are not numbered separately).

[9] Collier notes that it "is clear that Arnold's Chronicle acted as a source for Hill and not vice versa since the earliest date that can be assigned to Hill's manuscript is 1503 and Arnold's book first appeared in print in 1502" (323). A second edition of the Chronicle was printed in 1521, STC 783. See Collier's detailed discussion of Hill's use of the Chronicle, 323-28. Thanks to A.S.G. Edwards for referring me to this source in advance of its publication.

part.[10] There also a number of texts that address historical and political events of the day.[11] The practical items, then, meld with the literary ones to present a vision of a man in the middle of mercantile England; a man who is quite aware of his own "politics of location."

Many texts in the manuscript probably served dual functions as educational and memoranda items. Take, for instance, the mathematical tables. While undoubtedly useful for a businessman and grocer, they would have become surely superfluous to daily work that was based on a few stock transactions. But these pages of mathematical calculations would have been ideal for teaching children, especially a son (or apprentice) who was expected to take over the business. Other items, like the medical recipes, the recipes for dyes and the treatise on grafting trees, also

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[10] "A Treatise of London" is transcribed by Dyboski on 100-02, who attributes it to Dunbar. The author of the poem is actually unknown, it has been rejected as Dunbar's by J.W. Baxter (88 and 25) and Tom Scott (324).

[11] These include two poems in women's voices: Thomas More's "The Lamytcion off Quene Elyzabeth" (Dyboski 97-9) and the anonymous "The Lamentacioun of the Duches of Glossester" and The Lamentation of the Duchess of Gloschester (95-6). While these two poems are anthologized by Dyboski as "Historical Poems", they also have a didactic, as well as historical, interest. They act as the female-voiced accompaniment to poems such as "Earth upon Earth" (90-2), a meditation of the transitory nature of worldly wealth and prestige in the face of mortality. These woman-voiced poems are not the only material in the manuscript pertaining to women's lives (the book also contains the dialogue poem "The Nutbrown Maid"), but their presence does not substantially alter the direction of the volume, which is toward men and masculinity. As I shall discuss further on, much of the female-voiced material (especially lyrics) is actually addressing masculine, not feminine, interests.

could have acted both as a record for Hill himself and as an educational resource for others.[12]

Richard Hill has done us a great favour (in terms our understanding of his family situation) by making clear records of the births of his seven children: five boys and two girls (Dyboski xiii-xiv), four of whom survived past the age of eight.[13] His family is "textualized" with songs, prayers, historical information and business memoranda in this collection. Also set down in these entries are his connections to other members of the community, by the fact that in the birth entries he records the gifts of the children's godparents.[14] The seemingly innocuous personal record of his children's births, therefore, provides an autobiographical intersection with the two key themes that run throughout many of the literary entries in

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[12] Not all of the items in the book are serious-minded. Some of texts seem to be intended as entertainment, they would be appealling especially to children. These include a number of magic tricks and riddles entered in a small section of the book (Dyboski xxxiii).

[13] The deceased children's entries are crossed out in the manuscript, with additional notes recording the deaths. Two of the remaining four may have died later, as their birth entries have been crossed out in the manner of the three dead younger children, but without definitive records. This leaves only the entries of son John and daughter Kateryn uncrossed in the records. Perhaps they were the only ones to survive to full adulthood, or to survive their father (or whoever took over the family records). Dyboski transcribes the records and other Hill memoranda on xiii-xv. See also Collier 322.

[14] Thrupp notes that some of the godparents of Hill's children came from higher ranked families (38). This could have been one of the reasons why Hill was so careful about making note of the baptismal gifts: he did not want to lose track of social debts, and thereby lose face to those above him. On the role of godparents in late medieval London see Hanawalt Growing Up.

Hill's book: the role of the father and a man's standing in his community.

In a time where there was little distinction made between adult's and children's literature, Balliol 354 is distinctive for its unusually frequent references to child readers. It contains no less than four courtesy books written for children, one of the few forms of literature in Middle English that addressed itself specifically to young people. While adults surely read courtesy books, I believe that the unusually large collection of such books found in this one manuscript suggests that it was probably used as a tool for teaching children--not necessarily its only purpose, but an important one.[15] In this chapter, I will consider how these courtesy books interact with the other literary genres in the collection. I will not focus on entries of religious, didactic or moral poetry in the collection (since connections of those genres to courtesy books is fairly obvious), but on other types of literature which are usually seen recreational in purpose, including lyrics, a fabliau, and extracts from the Confessio Amantis. Together, the courtesy

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[15] It is very likely that books were read to daughters as well as sons, but the repeated references to boys and masculine conduct in the four courtesy books in Balliol make the intended male audience fairly explicit. Furthermore, the existence of courtesy books directed at women, such as How the Good Wijf taugte hir Dougtir, or The Goode Wife Wol A Pylgrymmage, suggests that the educational focus for girls might have been somewhat different. Both of these poems are transcribed by Furnivall in A Booke of Precedence and The Babees Book. On women's courtesy books, especially in a merchant milieu, see Riddy, "Mother Knows Best." How the wyse man tawght his son was transmitted in some manuscripts along with How the Good Wijf taugt hir Daughter, for instance, in BL Ashmole 61 and Lambeth 853.

books and the recreational texts in Balliol 354 combine to send very clear signals to the reader about ideal masculinity in the world of Richard Hill.

Table Manners and Tavern Culture

The four courtesy books of Balliol 354 appear in the following order: a bilingual version of The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke, (called The Boke of Curtasye in the manuscript), How the wyse man tawght his son,[16] Stans Puer ad Mensam by Lydgate, and Caxton's Book of Curtesye (or Lytill John).[17] Although not anthologized continuously, the four courtesy books appear fairly close together (between folios 142r and 165r) in this "dyverse"

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[16] Jonathan Nicholls places How the wyse man tawght his son on the margins of the courtesy book genre, on the grounds that it is less focused on the practical rituals of courtesy and more on morality generally. But he notes that such books are very closely aligned with the courtesy book tradition, and are really "neither fish nor fowl." How the wyse man was seen be medieval readers as part of or related to the courtesy tradition, and often accompanied courtesy books in manuscripts. This is certainly the case in Balliol 354, and I have decided that for the purposes of this discussion, I will include Wise man as a courtesy book (Nicholls 16-17, n.34).

[17] Furnivall collects the first three of these texts in The Babees Book. The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke is anthologized in two versions on facing pages of 16-24. Neither of these versions is from Balliol 354. For the purposes of citation, I have used the version BL Harley MS 541. How the wyse man taught his son is on 48-52 (from Lambeth 853), and Stans Puer ad Mensam is on 26-33 (from Harley 2251). Caxton's Book of Curtesye was published separately by the EETS, edited by Furnivall (bound with the A Book of Precedence at the Maclennan Library, McGill University). This version contains the Balliol verson of the text, and it is my source for Caxton's courtesy book when it is cited in this chapter.

manuscript. This suggests that at a certain point in the compilation, Hill made a conscious attempt to collect such works. His collection of courtesy books also suggests that, although originally written for readers of the court, courtesy books had found audiences in the middle classes towards the close of the Middle Ages.[18]

The first of the courtesy books, The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke, is found in a few folios of the manuscript that function as a French reader and an elementary French/English grammar.[19] Its transmission as part of a French lesson text evidently was the result of Hill (or the editor of Hill's exempla) copying from a printed version of a similar "manual de conversation" produced in England by William de Worde and Richard Pynson, although the exact exempla of the version in Hill's

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[18] In her article "Aristocrasy" Kate Mertes states: "While ostensibly aimed at the children on yeoman farmers and artisans, poems like 'The Godemans Son' and 'The Godewyfe's Doghtere' mostly survive in noble commonplace books" (43). In the fifteenth century, however, there was "an enormous explosion of books of advice for training children, as well as books for youth who wished to make their way up the social ladder, or find profitable positions" (Hanawalt "Good and Ill Repute" 173). This involved the "middle ranks of English society," especially merchant communities (179). See also Lerer, Chapter Three, Chaucer and His Readers. Other merchant-associated manuscripts with courtesy texts include Colyns's manuscript, BL Harley 2252 (see Meale "Compiler at Work" 94), Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19 and, perhaps Lambeth MS 853 (see Riddy 80-5).

[19] On French texts for teaching in Medieval England, see Rothwell.

manuscript has not survived (Nicholls 70-2).[20] As it is stated in the courtesy book, the printed manual was produced for the purposes of French business conversation between merchants--"so much as it is good for such as vse merchandise."

The Lytil Boke provides an appropriate point to begin our discussion of the courtesy books in the manuscript. The Lytil Boke begins by explaining courtesy as a holy phenomenon, established when the angel Gabriel came to Elizabeth with news of her pregnancy, and when Elizabeth met with Mary (Nicholls 8).[21] Moving from there to make a few brief points about morning prayers, the poem quickly directs its focus to the subject of mealtimes.

The backbone of courtesy books in general is the detailed description of manners and good conduct at the dinner table.[22] As Stephen Ozment has noted, the formal dinner table was the

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[20] It is interesting that Hill copied this text by hand into the manuscript when the printed version was obviously circulating in the merchant community of London at the time (Nicholls 70). Furthermore, the editions of Caxton's courtesy book and Stans Puer ad Mensam by Lydgate were also copied from printed sources (Blake 425), as were excerpts from Arnold's Chronicle (Collier 323). The fact that he took the time to copy these texts meticulously into the manuscript indicates, as Nicholls notes, "the lengths to which Hill was prepared to go in search of personal improvement" or, I would add, the personal improvement of his children (72).

[21] Nicholls has explored how this is a reflection of religious feasting rituals, and of monastery daily life, (18-21, 31-8). For a full discussion of the connections between courtesy books and religious life, see Nicholls's second chapter, "Courtesy and the Religious Orders."

[22] For an overview of medieval food and meal presentation, including place settings, see Singman and Mclean.

arena where the rituals of rank and class were acted out. Hill might well have been of the opinion that the table was "the most regular occasion and the most structured setting for teaching a child his place in the family and in society" (Ozment 140). In Hill's case, the number of courtesy books he collected attests to his concerns regarding table etiquette, as do two other entries: a list of the "howshold stuff as must nedis be occupied at [th]e mayres fest yerely kepte at [th]e Yelde hall," (f.103r-v), and a book of precedence, which gives the social "ordre of goyng or sittyng" at social occasions, starting with a pope (later scratched out in the manuscript) to a "yeman of good name".[23] In this latter item, "marchant" is placed towards the bottom of the list, but above "a gentylman" (Furnivall, Babees Book 381).[24]

One of the primary concerns of the courtesy books is the manner in which a young man presented himself verbally. Gentlemen were supposed to be well-spoken, courteous, and not overly verbose. All of the courtesy books address this issue, sometimes quite extensively. While prohibitions on the speech of

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[23] Both of these items are transcribed from Balliol by Furnivall, Babees Book 378-81. On the "ordre of goyng and sittyng," and other books of precedence in Middle English, see Nicholls 197.

[24] For Richard Hill, who described himself in an ex libris on f.176r as "servuant to M. Wynger, alderman of London," the details of social functions might have been very important to him as he was required to participate in the complicated society of late medieval London, where representatives of various social strata co-existed, with merchants, according to the "ordre," somewhere near the bottom of the scale.

women is well documented in patristic, legal and literary texts, here it appears that male verbal transgression was also the cause of anxiety and social disorder: "with moche speche," warns the Lytil Boke, "[th]ou mayste do synne" (1.58). In this case the lesson is similar to the adage that "it is better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it." There is a long section in Caxton's courtesy book on various verbal infractions, such as lying, gossiping, spreading rumours, whining, interrupting, being vague or unclear, and not keeping secrets (11.127-75, 273-94).[25]

In the context of the rank-sensitive mercantile culture, the warning that the wrong word can "hurte or bryng folke to disparge" would certainly be salient (1.161). Prudence is always the better part of valour here, and the texts recommend an extremely high level of self-consciousness of one's own speech in public:

Avyce ye well what ye say, & in what place,
Off whom, & to whom, in your mynd compace;
How ye shall speke, & whan, take good hede:
this cownsyled the wyse man withowten drede. (144-47)

Speech is an indicator of class standing. Poor table manners, warns the Lytil Boke, might cause men to "sey [th]ou come of cherlis" (1.34). Churlish behaviour would include

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[25] G.R. Owst demonstrates that one verbal transgression in particular, swearing, was perceived by English clergy as a growing problem, and that concern over this matter was finding its way into Middle English literature (for instance the Gesta Romanarum, an extract of which is found in Hill's manuscript (414-25). Owst also includes discussion on condemnations of slander and "back-biting" in English sermons (450-8).

stuffing one's face with food "as done brothellis" (i.e., as is done by "rude low people" 1.38) and belching, "As a karle [th]at comys oute of a cot" (i.e., as a churl from a cottage) (11.48). The figure of the churl tends to lurk in on the margins of Hill's book as a whole, appearing in a copy of Lydgate's "Churle and the Byrd," wherein in the man is outwitted by the bird, who notes the impossibility "to teche a cherl termys of gentilness."[26]

Just as the gentleman must control his speech, much of what distinguishes the him from the churl relates to control over his body. The courtesy books as a group warn against belching, spitting, breaking wind, and over-eating (Nicholls 40-1). This anxiety regarding transgressions of the male body is also seen in the Confessio extracts, as I will discuss a little further on. Table manners in the courtesy books in Hill's manuscript make the man, displaying his moral state, his political rank, and his social position.

Reputation gained at the table was everything, and a man's goal was to impress his fellows: "Then men wylle say therafter / That a gentleman was heere" (11.95-6). Should one be so ill-advised to eschew the standards of manners and conduct prescribed in the text, then "He is not worthy, . . ./ Nether at good mannes tabulle to sitte, / Ner of no worship for to wytte" (Stans Puer ad Mensam 11.98-100). That is, the churlish man is exiled from good company and thus from important professional opportunities. Obviously, this would be a devastating blow to a merchant whose

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[26] Transcribed in MacCracken, 468-84.

success depended on business connections at all levels. As Caxton's courtesy book makes clear, one can never be too attentive to the observance of rank and the whims of one's betters:

Reward also thy loke & contenavnce,
Off you master or of your soverayne,
so shall ye best preve what ys his plesavnce
or ellis his dysplesavnce: this ys sertayne,
The chere discovereth oftyn bothe twayn,
& eke the chere sumtyme may yow addresse
In thyngis the language may not then expresse. (127-33)

Courtesy was not simply a matter of assuming standardized manners and gestures; it also included a moral and ethical foundation intrinsic to the "gentleman's" character. The relationship between courtesy and basic morality is reflected in the literary structure of the courtesy books, which frequently combine points of table conduct and moral advice. Courtesy books hint at a world strained by class anxiety, where the slightest misstep in conduct could result in disgrace and banishment to the realm of the ever-present churl on who inhabited margins of good society, as well as the courtesy text.

One of the most conspicuous conflations of concerns regarding courtesy, morality and class in Balliol 354 occurs in representations of drinking. An impressive amount of the manuscript is devoted to subject of drunkenness and the what we might call a "tavern sub-culture" of drinking and carousing.[27]

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[27] Peter Clark's extensive study of English alehouses makes the distinction between inns, taverns and alehouses (in decending order of respectability), but notes that these terms were frequently conflated or confused, and that the establishments themselves sometimes defied definition (5). Furthermore, Clark

How the wyse man dictates that a good man will avoid the taverns, gambling and "letcherie" (11.57-64). Yet this advice is contradicted to some extent by the manuscript's small collection of drinking songs. The reader seems to be pulled in two directions on the subject of drinking, a fact which possibly reflects some broader social conflict on the subject.

As Lyndal Roper has demonstrated in the case of sixteenth-century Germany, drinking was a cause of some anxiety in urban, guild-and-fraternity-based culture.[28] While ritual drinking was a constructive part of the culture in that it ritualized male bonding and was a sort of social glue, it was also a threat to public order when it led to excessive drunkenness.[29] Guilds in medieval England, Hanawalt demonstrates, were similarly concerned

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posits that alehouses (as opposed to taverns) emerged during the waning of the Middle Ages, in the sixteenth century (around the time, in fact, that Hill was producing his book) (31-4). He posits that before this emergence of alehouses, medieval taverns were the places that were associated with questionable reputations and public disorder (12). One of the reasons the alehouse did not develop earlier in the Middle Ages, Clark speculates, was that public drinking might have been done in other social situations, for example guilds (33). Therefore, the emergence of the alehouse in the sixteenth century might have perceived as a threat to guild solidarity. On the ecomonic and social world of women involved in brewing professionally, see Judith Bennett's comprehensive study Ale, Beer and Brewsters: Women's Work in an Changing World 1300-1600.

[28] On the social and legal implications of medieval taverns in London, see Hanawalt's chapter "The Host, the Law, and the Ambiguous Space of Medieval London Taverns," in "Of Good and Ill Repute."

[29] On social and ritual drinking in English guilds see Clark, 27-8.

about maintaining public order.[30] Legal steps were taken to control drinking, focusing on controlling locale of drinking--the taverns (Hanawalt 111-16; Roper 111).[31] Religious authorities also attempted to intervene. G.R. Owst gives numerous examples of English sermons which portrayed drunkenness as the "modir of vices"(431), and condemned tavern culture (425-49).

The Balliol drinking songs exemplify the ambivalence of such civic attitudes in medieval merchant culture. On one hand, they are humorous and (being drinking songs) the invite the reader to participate in the revelries. There is, for example, the cheerfully ironic "A treatise of wyne" which asserts that "Gentill blod loveth gentill drynk" (Dyboski 105-6; l.81). On the other hand, they depict unflattering images the male drunk; there is a realistically belligerent edge to in the character of the drunk in these songs, an example being a man who harangues his fellow drunken singers:

Be gladly, masters euerychon;
I am cum myself alone
To appose you on by on;
Let se who dare say nay.
Sir what say ye?
Syng on; lett vs see.

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[30] The guilds were interested in maintaining civic order to avoid royal intervention into city life, or the cancellation of city charters which gave guilds considerable social and economic control. See Hanawalt, "Of Good and Ill Repute," Chapter Three, especially 36-7.

[31] Clark notes that in England, from "the mid sixteenth century town governments and country justices devoted and ever-increasing amount of time to the supervision of the popular drink trade. . . . Most of the initial impetus for regulation came from the surge of concern about alehouses and drunkenness among the respectable classes before 1640" (166).

Now will it be
Thys or another day? (Dyboski 18-19; ll.10-18)

Another song portrays merrymakers bawling repeatedly for the butler to come and replenish their bowls--not their cups ("let the cup rowght"), which would be more appropriate vessels for gentlemen. Surely the behaviour of the speaker here would have been condemned by the courtesy books:

I am so dry I cannot spek;
I am nygh choked with my mete;
I trow the butler be aslepe;
With how, butler, how! Bevis a towght!
Fill the boll butler, [and let the cup rowght.][32]

While the songs provide humour and fun nonsense rhymes, they also mock the characters who engage in inappropriate drunken behaviour. Such behaviour might be a concern for a professional man raising his family, especially his sons, in one of the most vibrant and intense urban cultures of the time, where the temptations of the taverns were a constant threat to the social well-being of the family.[33] In his social history of English alehouses, Peter Clark remarks that life in the alehouse was "an alternative to, rather than an extension of, established family life," and the songs in Balliol indicate the same was true for taverns (132).

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[32] This poem is also anthologised in Robbins, Secular Lyrics, 10-11.

[33] Hanawalt discusses the kinds of anxieties medieval fathers, masters and civic authorities had about the trouble that young men could get into in London, particularly concerning tavern life. See "Good and Ill Repute" 112 and 187-90.

Male drunkenness did not just threaten status and health of individuals and families, but also the well-being of the community at large. As Roper explains, it was perceived as leading to a destructive sort of hyper-masculinity stemming from lack of control over the male body (what a friend of mine would call "testosterone poisoning"):

> Man is understood as a creature who is always breaking through the boundaries of his own body, to the point that he threatens social order. He is a volcano of drives and fluids which constantly threaten to erupt, spilling outwards to dirty his environment through ejaculation, bloodshed, vomiting, defecation. Drinking, which, in the view of the preachers, released all social inhibitions, gave free rein to lusts.[34] (Roper 112)

English clergy were highly aware of the types of transgression that stemmed from drinking, especially sexual transgressions: "First, [drink] deranges man's senses: secondly, it alienates the

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[34] Certainly the preacher responsible for Sermon 40 in BL MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii was sensitive to the connection between the drunk and the transgressive male body--perhaps a little too sensitive. He ends his sermon by equating sinning with indulging in alcohol when he compares the purgative effects of vomiting with the salvation of confession: "Neuer[th]eles it is taugth in fisike [th]at a vomyte is a profitabull medecyn to suche dronkon men," he concludes, "And [th]is vomyte to oure porpose is [th]e sacrament of confession, to [th]e wiche I counceyll euery man [th]at is seke in anny maner [th]at I haue spoke of [th]at he draw to itt" (Ross 240). If sin is wicked drinking, salvation is a wicked hangover.

mind: thirdly, it excites to shameful and improper things" (Master Ralph of Acton, cited in Owst 427).[35]

In Balliol, these anxieties regarding drinking and the masculine body are manifested in two extracts of the Confessio Amantis: the tale of Pirotous and Ipotacie, and the tale of Gabla and Vitellus. In these pieces, drunkenness leads men to acts of horrific violence and psychotic sexuality.[36] In the first tale, drunken wedding guests abduct and gang-rape the bride. Similarly, Galba and Vitellus, two rulers of Spain, are drunken, habitual rapists who are eventually put to death by their own people. In these two Confessio tales, inebriation is aligned explicitly with excessive and destructive masculinity and male sexuality.

But concern over the effects of drinking on sexual behaviour is not restricted to men in Balliol 354. A number of songs also portray women in the tavern culture. These female characters, commonly called "gossips" in the texts, embody a male anxiety about controlling women and female sexuality; specifically, they depict male fears of the unruly wife.

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[35] On clerical fears of masculine "drives and fluids" in nocturnal emissions, see Dyan Elliot, who notes that on the subject of sexual pollution, "discourse was inescapably framed around masculine embarrassments" (2, my emphasis).

[36] Owst records a number of English sermons and tales that illustrate the horrific violence acted on a family when a man is drunk, see 427-8.

Unruly Wives and Whipped Husbands

How the wyse man tawgt his son is the only courtesy book in Balliol that gives more than brief mention of the relationship a husband and wife. While the other texts are primarily focused on men's public behaviour, How the wyse man also focuses on domestic conduct, recognizing that private conduct affects public standing. Since marriage, as a legally sanctioned relationship, is the most obvious point at which the civic intersects with the personal, the poem values "pees" between spouses (l.89), so that peace in the community can be maintained. For instance, the book advises that compatibility is more important than the wife's wealth (ll.73-80). How the Wyse man also stresses that a man should be kind and soft-spoken to his wife (ll.89-104) and consider the nature of her needs and abilities when making decisions regarding the household:

Loke [th]at [th]ou be not so woode
To charge hir to greuously;
Butrewle [th]ee faire and eesili,
And cherische hir weel for hir good dede,
For ouer-doon [th]ing vnskilfully
Maki[th] grijf to growe whanne it is no nede. (l.83-88)

The book firmly places responsibility for public representation of the family in the hands of the husband, who is to monitor his family in the public sphere. Wyse man warns against permitting one's wife to speak for the family in the community (ll.107-12). In case this last point is not made clear enough for the reader of Balliol 354, Hill's manuscript contains texts that clearly demonstrate the negative consequences of allowing a wife too much freedom in public places. These texts

are the songs of the gossips and unruly wives. As these songs illustrate, the poorly governed household, especially one with an unhappy wife, can wreak havoc on civic order; "pees" in the family meant "pees" in the community.

While most of these songs are anti-feminist, they carry a message that is as much about the failures of husbands as about the unruliness of wives. The anti-feminism of the songs is not directed at the sexual immorality of women (such as we find abandoned maiden laments), but rather at the potential of an unruly wife to destroy a man's public reputation, as well as his finances. In the famous "Good Gossips" song, a group of wives meet in a tavern to drink, squandering their husband's income:

"Now be we in [th]e tavern sett,
A drawght of [the] best lett hym fett,
to bryng owr husbondis owt of dett;
For we will spend
Till God more send,
Good gossippis myn, a!" (Dyboski 106-8; ll.49-54)

In another poem, which contains the ironic burden "Of all creatures women be best/Cuius contrarium verum est," one stanza echoes the grievances against such women as the gossips in the previous poem:

To [th]e tavern they will not goo,
Nor to [the] ale-hows neuer the moo,
For, God wot, [ther] hartis wold be woo
To spende ther husbondis money soo:
Cuius [contrarium verum est.] (ll.41-5)

And in yet another song we find the burden "Women women, love of women / maketh bare pursis with sum men."[37] The poem specifies that "Sum will be dronkyn as a mowse" (l.19).

These women represent an unholy alliance of bad wives who have wrenched the control of virtually every aspect of the households from their husbands. They are portrayed in a way that aligns them with other negative female archetypes, especially the scold and the alewife, which are conflated in medieval legal records as well as literature (Karras 139). The gossips' presence in the tavern makes them more than slightly sexually suspect, as all women associated with taverns, including patrons, had "a very bad reputation" (Hanawalt, "Of Good and Ill Repute" 105).[38] Merely displaying themselves in public places puts the gossips on par with prostitutes, and the husband's inability to control his wife's sexuality cuckolds him by default (Karras 138).[39] A woman's public drinking habits, therefore, can

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[37] This line might also be a reference to another intersection of female sexuality and economy that concerned late medieval society, prostitution. See Karras 88-95 on other representations of whoredom, and the commodification of female sexuality in literature. See also James Brundage.

[38] See also Clark, 131-2.

[39] On medieval prohibitions of women appearing in public spaces, see Hanawalt "Of Good and Ill Repute," Chapter Five. She notes that women "stepping outside physical boundaries and becoming transients . . . connoted a moral lapse in itself" (73). Guilds enforced these ideals of female conduct amongst women in their community. Hanawalt gives the example of one goldsmith who was fined for making his maid venture inappropriately into a public space, "to the dishonour of all the fellowship" (73). See also Ann Roselind Jones 52-3. Also see Owst, 385-9, on clerical concerns about women roaming about the town in public.

destroy the home economy, her own virtue, and by extension, her husband's virility.

Further evidence that the husband has lost control of his wife is his inability to discipline his wife by beating her.[40] In the "Good Gossips" poem the women publicly complain about beatings from their husbands, and one woman boasts of hitting back:

Margret meke said: "So mot I thryve,
I know no man [th]at is a-lyve,
[Th]at gevith me II strokis, bvt he haue V:
I am not afferd,
Thowgh he haue a berde,
Good gossippis myn, a!" (ll.91-96)

This passage depicts a man who, without spousal authority over is wife, literally and figuratively "whipped."

In another poem, a quarrel between husband and wife starts when she attacks him as a "thef" and a "traytor" for having disposed of some property that she perceived to be hers:

"Thou knave, [th]ou churle," gan she say,
"In the XXte devyls way,
Who bade the geve my gud a-way
At the townys end? (ll.13-16)

The wife herself makes clear the lower-class nature of such public quarrels when she directs the word "churle" at her hapless husband. When the husband attempts to reassert his

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[40] The issue of wife-beating in the Middle Ages is a complex one. Men were allowed to beat their wives, but only up to a point--they weren't allowed to maim or kill the women. But husbands could also be punished for being physically abused by their wives in the manner that some of the Balliol lyrics illustrate. On the issue of spousal abuse see Shahar 89-90 and Laskaya 26. On the control of husbands over wives as portrayed by English clergy, see Owst 376-86.

authority by striking his wife, she calls him a "stynkyng coward" and swears vengeance on him by threatening to spread malicious gossip about his thievery and abuse. Desperate to regain control, he responds by hitting her.

He lent her a strype, two or III,
"Owt, alas!" then cryed she,
"I aske a vengance, thef, on the,
At [th]e townys ende.

Thou stynkyng coward! so haue I grace,
[Th]ou daryst not loke a man in the face,
Now lett them say I know the cace,
At [th]e townys ende." (11.21-8)

This causes the man to lose his temper so completely that he beats his wife about the head. At this, she falls to the ground, claiming to be mortally wounded, although, as the text notes, "yet [th]er was no blod shed" (1.39). The text does not tell us if the wife really dies, or if she is simply faking (probably the latter--she's yelling for a priest to "shryve" her). Either way, the implication is that the husband is now in serious trouble. At the very least, the woman has gained victory over her husband on a psychological level by causing him to be excessively violent, which makes him a moral outlaw, if not an actual outlaw. The refrain makes it clear who is the winner of the quarrel: "'Alas,' sayd [th]e gudman, 'this ys an hevy lyff'; / 'And all ys well [th]at endyth well,' said [th]e gud wyff."

The wife's verbal aggression in this poem reflects another great concern expressed in many of the anti-feminist texts in

this book: the issue of female verbosity and deceptive language.[41] As the "Good Gossips" song suggests, the tendency to talk too much is symptomatic of women who are beyond the rightful control of their husbands and society in general (Karras 111).[42] Another Balliol poem is devoted exclusively to this subject of female verbosity:

On thyng for-soth I haue esspyed;
All women be not tong-tyed;
For yf they be, they be by-lyed
In villa.

Yff owght be sayd to them, sertayn,
Wene you [th]ei will not answer a-gayn?
Yes for euery word, twayn!
In villa. (ll.13-20)

Not only do women talk too much, but the intent and meaning of their words is not to be trusted. In "Of all creature women be best/"Cuius contrarium verum est," four of the ten stanzas are directly concerned with the dishonest or inappropriate female

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[41] There was considerable anxiety in medieval culture and law about the alleged tendency of women to slander men. Karras notes that "women were accused of defamation far more often than men," although whether that is because defamation was a particularly female tactic, or because female defamers were more likely to be prosecuted thatn male ones, is difficult to say. Karras suggests that accusations of defamation, scolding, gossiping and disturbing the peace may have been crude legal methods of labelling unruly women (139).

[42] Owst gives an example of the explicit class associations of women's speech. He cites the Speculum Laicorum: "There are two kinds of dogs, for some are well-bred, others low-bred. The well-bred, indeed, are silent and free from guile; the low-bred are ill-tempered and fond of barking. So is it with women: the daughters of nobles are artless, silent, and lovers of solitude; the ignoble to be sure are loud and roamers in the streets" (386-7). Perhaps, then, attitudes like these caused the socially anxious merchant class to be concerned about the public reputation of their womenfolk.

speech. So untrustworthy are women that the wise husband should not delegate any of his authority to them, nor should he seek their counsel in household matters.[43] Thus, the poem "Whan netillis in wynter bere rosis rede" warns:

Whan netillis in wynter bere rosis rede,
& thornys bere figgis naturally,
& bromes bere cheris in [th]e croppis so hie,
& and okys bere datis so plentvosly,
And lekis geve hony in [th]er superfluens;
Than put in a woman your trust and confidens. (ll.1-7)

The consequences of placing too much trust in a woman, particularly in regard to domestic matters, are made clear in the fabliau of Jak & his Stepdame & of the Frere.[44] Here a stepmother mistreats her husband's son, slandering him to his father, even persuading the foolish man to deny the boy food and drink. When this son is sent out into the fields at her

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[43] Another text in Balliol 354 that warns men not to trust the words of women is an extract from an English version of the Gesta Romanorum. In this tale, called "Godfirdus A Wise Emperoure," a son loses his father's inheritance (three magic items that brought him wealth and respect merely their possession) because he hands it over to his girlfriend, who tells him that she will take care of it. Instead, she steals it, and abandons the youth, who bewails his foolish trust in her: "for this disease I have wele deserved, synne I shewed all my counsail to the woman." Eventually, the inheritance is restored, and the youth gets revenge on the scheming girl. The complete version of the tale is accompanied by a moral which glosses the story as a parable of the Fall, but in Balliol, this moral is missing. Therefore, in Balliol, the tale reads more as a warning about women, then a religious parable. Its tale has many parallels to the fabliau Jak and his Stepdame, which I discuss below. Both stories involve the loss of patriarchal power through misplaced trust in a woman. On the Gesta Romanorum in English see Sidney Herrtage: "Godfirdus" is on 180-96, in a parallel-text edition from two manuscripts, neither of which is Balliol 354.

[44] This fabliau was transmitted in a number of other manuscripts, see entry in Dyboski, xxxvii.

insistence, he meets an old wanderer who, in reward for the boy's charitable gesture of sharing food with him, grants the boy three wishes. One of these wishes is that whenever his evil stepmother gives him a dirty look, she breaks wind:

Full angerly loked she on hym tho,
An-o[th]er ffarte lete she goo,
And fowle she was shente.
The goodman siad: "By my lyff,
I know not what eileth my wyff;
I trowe her arse be rent."

The father, repulsed by his wife's loss of control over her body, switches his allegiances back to his son, and the rightful patriarchal and patrilineal nature of the household is restored. The woman's attempt to control the house is punished with the loss of all control, even of her own body.[45]

The image of the farting, shrewish wife is a coarse reminder that women's words are nothing but hot air. In another, equally crude text, a woman's deceptive mouth is equated with her "ars".[46] This short carol is a version of Chaucer's "Miller's

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[45] Jak's two other wishes also pertain to the regaining of male power in the story. He is given an enchanted pipe, which causes animals to follow him when he plays, thus establishing his control over lesser beings. The third gift is a magic bow that always hits the bird at which it has been aimed. This gives the boy his rightful patriarchal control over food, which had been denied him by his slandering stepmother and "whipped" father. In this tale of patriarchal rights, it is significant that the granter of wishes is an old man, instead of the seductive young female fairy-figure of many other fairytales, since the exchange of power between is kept between men.

[46] On the conflation of women's mouths and women's asses in French fabliau, see Burns, who remarks that the "defining features of the female body invoked by [husbands in the texts]--head and ass--are ciphers for the woman's mouth and vagina, female orifices that, within the anti-feminist discourses of the French Middle Ages, typically make trouble for men" (31).

Tale," and bears a similar message for male readers about the dangers attempting to woe a younger woman. In "Hogyn cam to bowers dore" a foolish old man (a churl, to be exact) attempts to bed a woman, only to find himself impotent: "When [th]ei were to bed brought, . . .The old chorle he cowld do nowght." The woman, apparently disgusted by his failure, takes revenge on him by humiliating him in an explicitly sexual way:

"Go ye furth to yonder wyndow,
. . . . .
And I will cum to you within a throw;"
hum ha trill go bell!

Whan she hym at [th]e wyndow wyst,
. . . . .
She turned owt her ars, & [th]at he kyst,
Hum, ha, trill go bell!

"Ywys, leman, ye do me wrong;
. . . . .
Or ellis your breth ys wonder strong,"
Hum, ha, trill go bell! (11.19-35)

Although the Hogyn is the victim of the more powerful woman in this text, there is no sympathy for him. His sexual humilation is his own fault, because attempted to take an inappropriately young mate. While this and many other lyrics in Balliol depict unflattering images of women, depictions of men in these same texts are hardly complementary. Men who run afoul of abusive and destructive women are ridiculed for their stupidity and weakness.

As many of the texts in the manuscript make clear, men must take responsibility their own reputations, and the reputations of their families. For merchant culture the control of women had special significance, as the community found itself at the unstable crossroads of class. Hill's book demonstrates that

female public disorderliness was explicitly associated with the lower classes, especially gossips who drink in taverns, or wives who brawl with their churlish husbands in the streets. Therefore, the unruly merchant wife would reflect poorly not only on her own husband, but on the merchant community generally. In Balliol 354, even discussions of female conduct can be read as illustrations of ideal masculine ideology. A good merchant citizen keeps his woman in line.

While the lyrics and the fabliau reinforce the ideals of merchant masculinity through humour, another substantial collection of texts in the manuscript looks at the issue of masculinity in a much more somber way. The extracts from Gower's Confessio Amantis in Balliol 354 provide further commentaries on masculine responsibility in the home and community.

The Confessio Amantis: A Man's Home is his Castle

Caxton's Book of Curtesye tells us that reading was a part of the moral education of the young; not all lessons came from immediate experience, even in an apprentice-oriented, mercantile culture.[47] Some lessons were learned from the page:

Excersyse also your selfe in redyng
Off bokes enorned with eloquence,
ther shall ye fynde both pleyre & lernynge,
so that ye may in euery good presence
Some-what fynde as in sentence
that shall accorde the tyme to occupye,
That ye not nede to stonde ydellye. (1.309-15)

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[47] On the guild literacy requirements for their apprentices see Hanawalt, "Good and Ill Repute" 181.

In Caxton's courtesy book there is a long "digression" (so-called by the narrator) on literature and the importance of the four primary medieval authors--Gower, Chaucer, Lydgate and Hoccleve (l.430). Each author is described as making a particular contribution to English literature, and the reader is advised to read certain authors for certain reasons. Gower's Confessio Amantis, the courtesy book suggests, offers the reader a "vertuvs tretye":

Refyth gover in his wrytyng morall,
  That Auncyente ffader of memorye. [Ancient]
Redyth his bookes called confessyonall,
  with many a-nothere vertuvs tretye
ffull of sentence sett full fructvously,
  That hym to rede shall geve you covrage,
  he ys so full of frute, sentence, & language. (11.323-29)

That is to say, the Confessio can be read as a didactic text, one that will give a young man "covrage," meaning "heart," or character. It seems that Hill took this advice in compiling his book, for in it are a number of Confessio tales that exemplify Gower's "wrytyng morall," and that provide depictions of good and bad men.

The Confessio, which survives in about fifty manuscripts, is John Gower's lengthy work "Of love, which doth many a wonder / And many a wys man hath put under" (l.75-6).[48] For "morall

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[48] On the Confessio manuscripts see Macauley, cxxxviii-clxvii, Doyle and Parkes, Edwards and Pearsall (including a chart in an appendix, although this does not include manuscripts containing extracts of the text) and Nicholson. On the manuscripts containing fragments, including Balliol 354, see Harris, "John Gower's Confessio."

Gower," however, "love" means more than romantic attachment.[49] As Derek Pearsall explains:

> For Gower, love is a principle of existence, a blind natural force, in itself neither good nor evil, but providing the strongest motive to good or evil and therefore for the display of man's moral nature. He recognizes that talk of love and tales of love are interesting in themselves, but he recognizes too that this interest can be used to probe human behaviour in its most vulnerable and sensitive areas, that it is, where man is passionately involved, and so quicken moral receptivity (Gower and Lydgate 12).

The tales of the Confessio, already closer to the didactic tradition than the courtly tradition, in Balliol have been excised almost entirely from the original narrative frame of the discussion between Amans and the Confessor. A reader with no prior knowledge of the Confessio, encountering the extracts in Balliol 354, would be hard pressed to guess the tales came from an original work on the subject of love. Whether this was due to the editing efforts of Richard Hill, or of the efforts of the editor an exempla he used, is difficult to say. In her discussion of the manuscripts of Confessio extracts, Kate Harris speculates that it "appears likely that the editor was Richard Hill himself," given the evidence that "the editor's second

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[49] "Morall Gower" is the oft repeated and much discussed tag given to the poet by Chaucer himself (Troilus and Criseyde V 1.1856). On the impications of this designation, and the resulting debate see Minnis "'Moral Gower'" and Pearsall "Gower Tradition."

thoughts are embedded in the text in the form of deletions and rewriting" ("John Gower's Confessio" 34).[50]

Most of the stories describe the conduct of kings and other rulers, many of whom are guilty of poor governance--both in their private lives, and in their public duties. In Hill's manuscript, Gower's figures of failed kingship read as figures of failed manhood, particularly husbands and fathers.[51] Many of the Confessio texts in Balliol tell tales of paternal affection and control gone horribly wrong. Incest, rape, abandonment, and attempted murders of children abound. Such violation of paternal responsibility results in other forms of tyranny and perversion.

The word "tirannye" itself in the Confessio Amantis expresses this conflation of private and public identity. The tyrant is an abusive political ruler, but is also an abusive husband and father. The penultimate tyrant is the figure of the incestuous father, like that seen in the first Confessio extract in Balliol, "Appollonius of Tyre."[52]

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[50] For other discussions Of Confessio manuscripts ass Peter Nicholson and Parkes and Doyle.

[51] The Confessio was intended to function in part as a condduct book, like the Regiment of Princes (Minnis 184). See Coleman on Gower's representation of kings as "model citizens" (152). For a broader study of Gower's ideals of kingship see Russell Peck, Kingship and Common Profit.

[52] As Judith Ferster has noted word "tyranny" is used by Gower in direct connection the criminal sexuality of men. Sexual crime is extended to political crime, as the ruler's libido exemplifies the avariciousness of their other desires. See pages 119-20 of Fictions of Advice, on her discussion on another tale from the Confessio, the tale of the Roman tryrant Apius, who attempts to rape a young woman, Virginia. Elizabeth Archibald has traced incest narratives through the Middle Ages, focusing on

The tale "Appollonius of Tyre" is long and convoluted; I offer only the briefest summary here. A corrupt king, Antiochus, rapes his daughter and then attempts to prevent her from marrying by making her suitors answer a riddle (which pertains to the incest). Those suitors who cannot speak (or even comprehend) the unspeakable by answering the question are killed. Antiochus is afraid, however, that a foreign prince, Apollonius of Tyre, might be capable of solving the riddle, and therefore attempts to kill him in advance, causing Appollonius to flee for his life. During his flight, Apollonius is shipwrecked in another country, and proceeds to win the heart of the princess. The king of this country, being a good ruler and a loving father, agrees that the two should marry, after his daughter makes it clear to him that she desires Appollonius. The good king's healthy and respectful relationship with his daughter is clearly meant to contrast with Antiochus's perversion.

Shortly after the marriage comes news that Antiochus and his unfortunate daughter have been struck by lightning, evidently as divine punishment for "their" sins. Thus free from persecution, Appollonius and his wife are now able to return to Apollonius's

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their proliferation in twelfth and thirteenth century vernacular stories. She speculates that in part, incest stories became more popular because of religious developments in the thirteenth century, especially concerning the rules of marriage: "The incest theme seems to have come into fashion just at the time when the church was insisting on the scrutiny of relationships before marriage, on the awful sin incurred by those who married within the prohibited degrees, and on the separation of couple found to have broken the rules". See her article, "'The Appalling Dangers of Family Life,'" and her dissertation Appollonius of Tyre in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

homeland by ship. En route however, Apollonius's wife dies in childbirth, and the grieving husband must bury her at sea. He then sails to Tharsis, where he must leave his infant daughter, Thaise, with his friend Strangulio, and Strangulio's wife Dionise.

The plot then becomes labyrinthine, with Apollonius's wife being brought back to life (yes!) in a foreign land, and living there unbeknownst to her husband, who is equally unaware of his daughter's trials at the hands of the jealous Dionise, who wants to protect her own daughter. Thaise manages to escape a murder plot attempt arranged by Dionise, as well as the brothel in which she ends up, by possessing such overwhelming virtue and purity that no man can bring herself to harm her in any way (demonstrating by example the qualities that Antiochus's daughter must have lacked, and thereby explaining why she was punished along with her father). In the rest of the story Apollonius recovers his family, and subsequently takes his place as ruler of Pentapolim, while his daughter and her husband rule over Tyre.

Incest, occurring on a very literal level in the story, also acts as a larger metaphor of poor parenting by fathers, and of poor governance by kings.[53] Apollonius's dedication to his

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[53] Georgiana Donavin has suggested that incest in the Confessio Amantis is to be read as an over-riding motif for the entire poem. Gower ultimately seeks to convince the reader that courtly love is an incestuous corruption of true contemplative life, as seen through the lessons taught to Amans by the Confessor. Amans and the reader are to recognize that all secular love, represented by the court of Venus, is incestuous and corrupt because of an underlying incestuous relationship between Venus and her son, Cupid. She posits that the structure

family stands in obvious contrast to the acts of the corrupt and incestuous Antiochus. The two rulers are images of positive and negative parental conduct. Both fathers are widowers (although Apollonius only thinks he is a widower). But while Antiochus allows his affections for his daughter to grow into incestuous cruelty, Apollonius controls his affection and finds what he (mistakenly) believes to be appropriate foster parents for his daughter. This provides enough distance between him and his daughter to avoid the risk of unnatural affection, while maintaining a high degree of parental concern, which he demonstrates when he takes revenge upon those responsible for her mistreatment in Tharsis.

The character of Apollonius demonstrates that it is better for a father to relinquish some control over the lives of his children, even at the risk of their being abused by others, than to commit the sin of attempting to control what it not rightfully the his, namely, the child's own body. In a culture where

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of the Confessio contributes to the moral development of Amans, as well as the story's readers, and that the story of Apollonius, coming at the end of the extensive collection of exempla that is the Confessio, is the poetic climax and ultimate example of the dangers of incest--the point at which the reader must finally renounce secular life (86). The fact that the Balliol manuscript strips the Apollonius story from the larger structure of the Amans/Priest story suggests that not all medieval readers would have shared Donavin's reading of incest in "Appolonius"; without the frame, the tale focuses on the sins of the father, not the lovers. Furthermore, in Balliol "Apollonius" has been moved from its original position at the end of the Confessio to the beginning of the extracts in the manuscript. Therefore, the editor of this compilation had little regard for Donavin's structural interpretation. On Donavin's monograph, see the review by Elizabeth Scala in Speculum.

children were often sent out as apprentices, servants and wards to other households, and where daughters might be married off at an early age, this lesson in the relinquishment of paternal control may have justified such painful decisions.[54] The lines that end the extract in Balliol 354 emphasize that paternal possessiveness and "pride" (in the sense of insisting on tyrannical control of one's offspring) is actually "unkind" love:

Antiochus with al his Pride,
Which sette his love unkindely,
His ende he hadde al sodeinly,
Set ayein kinde upon vengance
And for his lust hath his penance. (1.2004-8)

In contrast, there is the balanced and even-handed affection of Apollonius; this, in the Confessor's telling of the tale, is "trewe" love:

Lo, what it is to be well grounded:
For he hath ferst his love founded
Honesteliche as forto wedde,
Honesteliche his love he spedde
And hadde children with his wif,
. . . .
Lo thus, mi Sone, myht thou liere
What is to love in good manere,
And what to love in other wise:

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[54] Hanawalt notes that fostering was more the habit of the nobility, and that middle-class children would have been apprenticed in their teenage years ("Good and Ill Repute" 169). In Chapter Eleven of "Good and Ill Repute" she explores a fictional narrative of an apprentice in "The Childe of Bristowe," paying particular attention to the emotional attachments of an apprentice to his master. For a discussion of the historical evidence of the "emotional underpinnings" of child-rearing traditions that sent children out of the family home see Chapter Ten, especially 171-74. For further discussion of the circumstances of apprenticeship, see Hanawalt, Growing Up, Chapters Eight and Nine; on children who became servants, see Chapter Ten. On fostering in noble English families, and their use of courtesy books, see Mertes, The English Noble Household 174-5.

The mede arist of the servise;
Fortune, thogh sche be noght stable,
Yit at som time is favorable
To hem that ben of love trewe. (1993-7, 2009-15)

The next Confessio extract, the "Tale of Constance," is another piece demonstrating the dangers of masculine mismanagement of the family. The "Tale of Constance" is notable for being one of the few texts in Balliol 354 that has a (good) woman as its main character. But like the misogynist lyrics about women discussed earlier, the "Tale of Constance" actually speaks more to masculine concerns, then feminine ones. Despite the virtue of the title character, the "Tale of Constance" also contains negative images of women, and these, like the unruly wives of the lyrics, are meant to show the danger of allowing a woman run the household, along with the danger of taking female counsel. In this case, the danger comes not from a wife, but a mother. The lessons about male control of the household, therefore, intersect with the anxieties about excessive parental control and incestuous desire expressed in "Appollonius." This time, however, the male heads of the house are the victims, not the perpetrators, of familial tyranny.

Take, for instance, the Oedipal nightmare who is the mother of Constance's first suitor, the Sultan. She is so enraged by the prospect of losing her son to the girl that, during a feast, she kills him and several others in a display of incredible violence. The imagery of the blood-soaked dishes that had been used for the feast--household objects that would usually symbolize family unity and hospitality--is obvious:

This worthi Maiden which was there [i.e. Constance]
Stod thanne, as who seith, ded for feere,
To se the feste how that it stod,
Which al was torned into blod:
The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al
Bebled thei weren overal; (l.695-700) [blood-stained]

In her "false wordes" and "sodein rage" (l.672-6), the mother of the Sultan possesses character traits similar to some of the abusive gossips of the lyrics. Domilda, the mother of the man Constance eventually marries, exemplifies even more powerfully the male anxiety about women's words. Domilda's malice is more controlled and directed than the Sultan's mother, for she restrains herself from wholesale slaughter. But she is equally dangerous as a "home-wrecker": she attempts to destroy her son's family and, by extension, the entire royal line (Constance's husband is the king of Northumbria).

Constance's son is born in Northumbria while her husband is away in Scotland on a campaign. A messenger on his way to the king with news of the birth stops overnight at the Domilda's castle. While the man sleeps, Domilda switches the letter with a false note that says that Constance has delivered a monster. This note reaches the king, who writes a response stating that no harm should be done to his wife or his child. But the unwitting messenger again spends the night on Domilda's property, and again she switches letters, this time sending a message stating that the king wishes Constance and the baby to be set adrift. In this case, it is entirely through the <u>words</u> of a woman havoc is wreaked on a family. The fact that Domilda lives in her own castle is also significant. Not only does this remove her from

her son's immediate control, but it also reflects medieval anxieties about the increased independence of widows. An example of feme sole, Domilda is clearly a widow with too much power. Constance's husband is partially to blame for Domilda's activities, as he failed to keep her under sufficient control.

Constance's husband finally corrects his mistakes concerning his mother by executing her for "tresoun," a charge which clearly conflates familial and political spheres.[55] Executing his own mother might seem unnatural, as the narrator takes pains to point out, the king's responsibility as ruler demands that he treat his own mother's "tresoun of hire false tunge" with the severity it deserved, in order that he might regain his control as king and father:

And tho sche was to dethe broght
And brent tofore hire Sones yhe:
Wherof these othre, whiche it sihe
And herden how the cause stod,
Sein that the juggement is good,
Of that hir Sone hire hath so served;
For sche it hadde wel deserved
Thrugh tresoun of hire false tunge,
Which thrugh the lond was after sunge
Constance and every wiht compleigneth. (l.1292-1301)

The idea of familial betrayal as political treason is seen again in the text following the tale of Constance, the tale of Philip of Macedonia and his two sons. Again, part of the blame is laid upon the father, who takes bad counsel from biased or

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[55] The ideological model of the family as a political unit in the Middle Ages in both law and literature is discussed by Strohm in "Treason in the Household" in Hochon's Arrow 121-44. See especially 123-128.

jealous family members, in this case a son. The younger of Philip's sons is jealous of his elder brother's privileges as heir, and tells their father that the elder is a traitor. Philip then executes the heir for treason. Because Philip took bad counsel, he is not rewarded for these action by regaining control of his family--quite the opposite: the real traitor, the younger son, seizes his father's kingdom entirely. Predictably, the younger son is a tyrant. Even after Philip becomes aware of the deception, he is cannot regain control of is family or his land, and eventually dies of grief:

More sori than the king was tho
Was nevere man upon this Molde,
And thoghte in certein that he wolde
Vengance take upon this wrong.
Bot thother parti was so strong,
That for the lawe of no statut
Ther mai no riht ben execut;
And upon this division
The lond was torned up so doun:
Wherof his herte is so distraght,
That he for pure sorwe that caght
The maladie of which nature
Is queint in every creature. (l.1736-48)

For the Gower extracts in Hill's manuscript, social justice begins in the home. If there in no domestic peace, "the law of no statut" can set things to rights. Philip's moment of weakness, amounting to a failure to understand the politics of his own family, leads him to make a serious political mistake in matters of the state.

The other selections of the Confessio Amantis in Balliol 354 go further into issues of social justice and a man's responsibility to the community, especially where matters of

wealth and charity are concerned. The tale of Lazarus and Dives warns against "Delicacy," which is particular form of Gluttony. Delicacy is an over-love of riches and fine foods which detracts from, or starves, one's moral character. The Confessor exhorts the wealthy reader to feed and clothe not only his body, "bot his soule" also (l.1144). The "Tale of Adrian and Bardus" illustrates the social duty of a man to act with generosity, charity and honesty. It reinforces the message in the Lytyll Childrenes Lytil Boke to consider the situation of the poor (ll.16-18). Adrian, a lord of Rome, reneges on a promise he made to the poor man Bardus, who rescued him (along with an ape and snake) from a well. Adrian had promised Bardus half his goods, but changed his mind once he is brought to the surface. The ape, on the other hand, rewards Bardus with a jewel that will magically reappear in his purse each time he sells it, so that it can be sold again. Even animals, the poem moralizes, can be charitable. How can any less be expected of a "wise" man?:

Wherof that every wysman may
Ensamplen his, and take in mynde
What schame it is to be unkinde;
Ayein the which reson debateth,
And every creature it hateth.

The "Tale of Constantine," combines a moral regarding charity with a moral regarding tyranny. One day the leprous Constantine decides to suffer through his malady instead of curing himself by bathing in the blood of innocent children (which he had been doing up to this point). As divine reward, he is sent a vision and cured of the disease by baptism. In an

over-zealous attempt to conform to his new religion, he commands that all his subjects be baptized on pain of death, and founds excessively opulent churches dedicated to Peter and Paul:

Bot how so that his will was good
Toward the Pope and his Franchise,
Yit hath it proved other wise,
To se the worchinge of the dede:
For in Cronique this I rede;
Anon as he hath mad the yifte,
A vois was herd on hih the lifte,
Of which al Rome was adrad,
And seith: 'To day is venym schad
In holi cherche of temporal,
Which medleth with the spirital.' (1.3482-92)

Thus, Constantine's charity is corrupted by materialism and a tyrannical application.

The remaining Confessio extracts continue such lessons against hubris and the abuse of leadership. Nabugodonosor, who, like the Roman Emperor, is a ruler blinded by pride and "vain glory", and for this reason he fails to be humble before God. As a result, he loses his kingdom (I.2785-3066). King Alexander, in the tale immediately following Nabugodonosor's in Balliol, avoids the same fate though humility. Alexander accepts the lesson of the philosopher Diogenes on the dangers that a man's "will" possesses for his moral character: "thi will," warns Diogenes, "is cause of Sinne" (1.1290). Similarly, the tale of Midas is a cautionary tale on the evils of greed.[56] All of these meditations on moderation and balance in material life might have been particularly relevant to a man living in a mercantile

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[56] This is the last of the Gower extracts in the volume, and appears to be unfinished in copying, stopping short of the end of the original tale, leaving two blank leaves.

culture, where stock acquisition and hard currency formed the basis of daily existence.

In the midst of all these tales about the moral failures and successes of rulers and kings, and how the impact of these personal successes and failures on social and political life, there comes the "Tale of Piramus and Thisbe." This tale of adolescent romance does not immediately appear to fit in with the tales of kings and other rulers in Hill's manuscript, but Gower's version has an particular emphasis that makes "Piramas and Thisbe" function as a text on the development of masculine character. The conclusion that the Confessor offers Amans regarding the tale (and this conclusion is included in the Balliol transmission) is about the dangers of "folhaste." "Folhaste" is what causes Piramus to kill himself without waiting for a full understanding of the true meaning of Thisbe's bloodied veil. The moral is that rushing into action without thinking only leads to grief: "Do thou nothing in such a res,"[57] warns the Priest, "For suffrance [forbearance] is the welle of Pes" (1.1671-2, my emphasis). We see here further emphasis on the need for a young man to be, as Lydgate's Stans Puer ad Mensam says, "softe in mesure, not hasti, but tretable" (1.78).

Appearing alongside mathematical formulas, prayers, historical annals, economic reports and recipes, recreational vernacular texts in Balliol are adapted to the concerns of the family man of mercantile London. Using a combination of positive

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[57] "res" means "haste", or "rush."

and negative examples of masculine conduct in the courtesy books, lyrics, Confessio extracts and other literature, Balliol 354 addresses the question of "what makes a man?" The answer lies in the compilatio of the manuscript as a whole. A man must be "gentil" at table, and avoid losing control of himself in drunken escapades. He must choose his mate wisely, and maintain control over her public conduct. He must not, however, abuse his wife or their children. He must have a clear vision of the politics of his own household, and understand the personalities in it. Likewise, in public administration he must be judicious and prudent. He must be honest and charitable, not miserly. All of the literature of Balliol contributes to this vision of the ideal merchant citizen in late medieval London.

Conclusion: Painting the Lion

Richard Hill's book exemplifies the circular nature of the dissemination of gender ideologies in a manuscript culture: gender is both descriptive and prescriptive in all of the manuscripts that I have discussed in this project. Medieval readers found ways to construct their own perspectives on gender using texts that they often did not write themselves, but that they read. Often, in fact, they helped themselves to the "master texts" of the day--like Chaucer's love visions, for example, or the Confessio--to compile their views of masculinity and femininity. Manuscripts like Findern and Balliol 354, in particular, demonstrate that medieval readers, while respectful of the vernacular auctors (if we use the term in an expanded sense), nevertheless did not restrict themselves to the original presentations of gender ideologies in the major texts. These readers, like the compilators, brought new interpretations of gender to the texts through the workings of their manuscript culture. Medieval readers extracted, copied, and compiled the literature in ways that provided several "glosses" on gender, many of which can be understood by present-day readers.

With this study I wish to emphasize that individual texts do not contain singular, inflexible meanings regarding gender. Different readers, be they medieval or modern, extrapolate different readings of masculinity or femininity from the same text. We need only to compare the multiple manuscript contexts of the same poems or stories read in this dissertation alone, to

understand the depth of possible interpretations of gender in individual texts.

Take, for example, the tales of Thisbe, which exists in three different manuscript contexts here: the Oxford group, the Findern manuscript and Balliol 354. Chaucer's version is found in the Oxford group, embedded in the Legend of Good Women, and also as a single extract in the Findern manuscript. In Richard Hill's manuscript, Gower's version appears as part of a series of extracts from the Confessio. While the tale is the same in both the Oxford group and Findern transmissions, the different manuscript contexts lend different meanings to Thisbe's victimization. In the Oxford group, she appears to be a victim of forces beyond her control, and thus resembles other women in the Legends. Thisbe's encounter with the figure of mature female sexuality, the lioness, is especially threatening in the context of the Legends, in which mature, sexualized characters routinely come to bad ends. Sandwiched between Cleopatra and Dido in the complete Legends, Thisbe's fate as a "martyr" is sealed before the her story even begins.

When Chaucer's version of the tale is placed in the gynocentric context of the Findern manuscript as an extract, however, it reads differently. It shares manuscript space with Sir Degrevaunt, and these two stories also share thematic similarities: the concern over warring neighbours, the complexities of female sexuality, the importance of maternal figures (in the lioness and the Countess), as well as the power

of female solidarity. In Sir Degrevaunt the Countess's "lioness" qualities--her bravery, her fierce protection of her daughter--illustrate what Thisbe missed by fleeing the lioness. After all, Chaucer's lioness does not really seem (to the reader) to be especially threatening: she has just feasted (thus her bloody mouth), and she has tranquilly "dronke hire fille" at the well before ambling it (Chaucer uses the very sedate verb "to wynde" to describe the lioness's actions). Moreover, her treatment of the veil seems strangely benign for a beast that is supposedly threatening: she does not attack it, but "fynde[s]" it and tears it (as a hymen is torn), without consuming it, or even stealing it (ll.800-22). Chaucer does not describe the lioness as ferocious or violent; rather he calls her "wilde" (l.805). She is beyond the control of men, who are blind to her power. This masculine blindness to feminine power is emphasized by the fact that Piramus never actually sees the lioness. In fact, he assumes it was a male lion, so he is twice blind, in the sense that he cannot even imagine that the lioness (the powerful feminine) exists (ll.842-4). Thisbe's story has the same ending in the Findern manuscript as it does in the Oxford group, but the lessons learned from the Findern version are different. Later in the manuscript we see a second chance for young women in love with their father's enemies, as Melidor successfully negotiates the complexities of filial loyalties, and her own emerging sexuality, as she wins her lover.

In Gower's "Thisbe" found in Richard Hill's book, however, the focus of the tale is shifted from issues of femininity, to issues of masculinity. First, Gower represents the lion as male, not female. The beast is described as being in a "wilde rage" (l.1398). The moral of the tale, as told by the parental Confessor to Amans, emphasizes that this version is Piramus's story, not Thisbe's: "Ensample that is falleth thus, / That might wel take of Piramus" (ll.1659-1660). Piramus, accused by Chaucer for being too slow to come to the well, is faulted by Gower for acting in "folhaste" (l.1497). In the courtly scenario of the Legends that appear in the Oxford group and the Findern manuscript, a man can never be too quick to affirm his devotion to a woman. Yet, according to Richard Hill's manuscript, with its emphasis on level-headed, practical governance, a man must weigh all the evidence before deciding on action. In Balliol 354 the love story becomes an parable of caution, told by a father to his son.

Gower did not write the Confessio Amantis to reinforce merchant visions of masculine conduct, but the text carries these messages in the Balliol manuscript. Nor did Gower write the "Tale of Tereus" demonstrate the power of feminine discourse, or to champion the cause female solidarity, but the text accommodates these interpretations very well in the context of the Findern manuscript. As discussed in Chapter Two, Gower's Philomela is never fully silenced by Tereus, and reclaims a "voice" through a partnership with her sister. In Findern,

Philomela's empowerment extends beyond the boundaries of the extract itself, into other texts. This is accomplished through her nightingale symbol, which flits through other poems containing courtly bird imagery. Philomela-the-nightingale serves as both a warning (as a violated woman) and a figure of female agency (as a survivor) to Findern readers.

As the first text in the Findern manuscript, Gower's "Philomela" sets the standard for a book that celebrates the "wordes wise" of women. By contrast, Chaucer's version in the Oxford group ends with female silence and defeat: the end of the tale depicts the two sisters "In armes everych of hem other taketh ... in here sorwe dwelle" (2381-2). Here, Progne suffers an empathetic muteness because of her sister's tragedy. Both versions of "Philomela" portray sisters coming together and creating a female community, but Chaucer presents a community of female subjection. On the other hand, Gower depicts female solidarity and as means of achieving justice. These two tellings of the same tale exemplify the different visions of women in the Oxford group and its Findern cousin: one manuscript context consistently subjects female figures to masculine dominant discourse, while the other reworks that vision to empower the female voice.

In the case of "The Three Questions," an extract from Gower's Confessio that is found in both Findern and Balliol 354, we see yet again that the same story can have different messages about gender in different manuscripts. In Findern, with its

"women's parliament" of strong female voices, Petronella fits into the dominant representation of female characters as intelligent, articulate, and active. In Balliol, her basic character is no different than in Findern, but she is more important as figure of a devoted daughter. Like the example of Appollonius, who is a good, even-handed parent, the father-and-daughter relationship in the "Three Questions" illustrates an ideal family dynamic, with mutual respect between parent and child.

Similarly, meanings of courtly gender in La Belle Dame Sans Merci shift from manuscript to manuscript. In the Oxford group, the Belle Dame character fulfils one of two roles open to women in the courtly discourse of the collections--the martyr to love, or the cruel lady. As the latter, the Belle Dame is portrayed as the woman who abuses courtly language and courtly privilege. In the Oxford group, the Belle Dame functions as an implicit justification for the larger repression of the female subject by male poets; she demonstrates that women cannot be trusted with courtly language, as they only use it to abuse men.

In the Oxford group, the hapless lover of La Belle Dame is meant to be read sympathetically. Part of the homosocial paradigm of courtly love, we hear his story through the eavesdropping male narrator, who is a creation and representation of the male poet, who translated the story from another male poet in French. The Oxford group collections exemplify the masculine "exchange of women/text," as La Belle Dame is anthologized with

other poems of courtly love, thereby becoming part of the "trafficking" in stories about women that makes up the courtly corpus. Add to this codicological history of the group itself, which is the result of the "trafficking" of booklet exemplars in the book trade.

The Findern context of the poem could be characterized as a the result of a renegade transmission, one that moved outside of the central book production circle. Accordingly, in the Findern manuscript new light is shed on the Belle Dame character. Despite her brutality, the reader comes away with little sympathy for the male lover, who comes across as truly pathetic. He is thoroughly trounced by her intellect: while she offers several good reasons why he should not love her (in addition to her evident unpleasantness), he can do little better than to reaffirm his devotion ad nauseam. The Belle Dame herself gains credibility in her association with other strong, intelligent female characters in the manuscript. Her voice joins the voices of other women in the manuscript who criticize masculine conduct and the conventions of courtly love:

Ladyes beth not so symple ([th]us I mene),
So dulle of wyte, so sotyd of folye,
That, for wordes which said ben of [the] splene,
In fayr langage, paynted ful plesantlye,
Which ye and mo holde scolys of dailye,
To make hem all grete wondyrs to suppose;
But sone thei cane, away her hedes wrye,
and to fayr spech, lyghtly [th]air yeres close. (ll.325-32)

The Oxford group, with its female characters like Anelida, Venus, and the host of martyred women in the Legends, all of whom have been "paynted" "pleyne," does little to support the Belle

Dame's argument that women, on the contrary, are "not so symple." But re-contextualized in Findern, her suggestion that intelligent women can close their ears to what the Parliament of Fowls would call male "noyse" is validated by similar attitudes in other texts. This does not make her a more likable character, but it prevents the reader from dismissing her as simply another cold-hearted courtly bitch.

In different manuscript contexts we see different meanings for certain literary conventions, as well as individual texts. Take, for instance, acrostics that spell out the names of women in the Oxford group and the Devonshire manuscript. In Fairfax 16 and Tanner 346, the poem "Envoy to Alison" exemplifies the textualization of women in the courtly tradition by creating her name and identity in the last lines of the poem (the piece could equally be called "Envoy <u>is</u> Alison"). But in the Devonshire manuscript a female contributor uses the same convention--this time to spell out her own name "Sheltvn." This has been read--by myself along with a number of other scholars--as a literary assertion of feminine control over the text, and of an authorial investment in the female subject. Here, I must align myself with Nancy Miller, who sees the female "signature" (or the inscription of the female self into the text) as an important signal for the participation of historical women in literate culture. It matters to me whether or not Mary Shelton inscribed her own name into a text, or that her name was written in by a male court poet. But in a manuscript culture authorship was not the only

opportunity for women (and men) to inscribe gender into literature.

Reading for gender in medieval manuscripts should not be limited simply to determining whether particular books are geared more towards male or female readers. Different readerships of the same sex do not produce the same readings of gender in their books. An example of this is the difference between Richard Hill's book, and the books owned by clerics. In each case, we have manuscripts under masculine control, wherein texts and memoranda relating to the daily professional tasks have been entered.

If we consider, however, some of the more recreational items in these books, particularly the lyric texts and carols, we see a small but definite differences in depictions of women. In the clerical manuscripts, we find a number songs about betrayed maidens: some are bawdy songs, with lusty voices of women who can hardly be regarded as innocent victims. There are also other songs in these clerical manuscripts with genteel or sad female voices. Virtually all of these women's voices in clerical manuscripts, however, are the voices of young, nubile, and (presumably) attractive women, who are clearly intended as targets of male sexual desire.

Richard Hill's book, on the other hand, contains almost no such young female voices. With the exception of the anomalous (in this manuscript) "Nutbrown Maid," the female singing voices we hear in Balliol 354 are not young maidens, but the older wives

of the "good gossips" songs. These women hardly appear to be objects of sexual desire! The figure of the beguiled or lusty maiden is not of primary importance in Balliol 354, but the figure of the controlling, loud-mouthed, lying, profligate and wanton wife seems to have captured the interest of Richard Hill. The implication here, I wish to emphasize, is not directly biographical (we have no evidence of Hill's relationship with his wife), but is rather of a more general vision of the gender concerns of a representative of the London merchant class. For the guild-member and family man, certain anxieties about gender took precedence over others. The clerics would presumably not have such domestic concerns, and thus they seem to have been drawn more towards representations of women that featured (perhaps optimistically) the rogue sexuality of servant girls.

The extent to which these patterns of gender can be attributed to <u>deliberate</u> editorial agendas is, of course, highly debatable. Many of these books, particularly the commonplace books that were produced haphazardly, have been read by modern readers with the assumption that the compilers included any texts they stumbled across, out of what Boffey refers to as an "inertia" in compilation.[1] But regardless of the precise nature of the project--whether these book-producers made decisions

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[1] Regarding the female-voiced bias of the filler items in Findern, Boffey suggests that the similarity in tone and voice can be attributed to a "kind of inertia by which contributor followed the example of those who had gone before, rather than through any specific desire to voice gender-related concerns" ("Women Authors" 171).

regarding gender representation at the outset of their projects, or whether the representations evolved slowly over the course of compilation--gender patterns can be distinguished in individual manuscripts. It is not necessary to trace ideological agendas of gender back to individuals, but it is important to recognize the influence of certain social milieus in which individual book-producers operated. We must consider the circumstances that shaped people who, in turn, shaped books. I believe that the small collection of manuscripts I have considered in this dissertation demonstrates that medieval readers and manuscript producers, even those whose access to texts was limited, had more control over the ideological mandates of their books than we have previously assumed.

If we turn to the example of courtly love literature in the manuscripts I have discussed, we see clear alterations from compilation to compilation. In Fairfax 16 courtly love is meticulously and lavishly constructed, and reinforced visually with the illustration of Mars and Venus, which incorporates the coat-of-arms of an owner associated with the court. Fairfax was commissioned by Stanley (or an appointed representative of the household), and the text selections would probably have been made in advance by using a selection of pre-produced exemplars used in the book trade.

In Findern, courtly love takes a step down the social scale in terms of both readership and presentation. The homemade anthology of a gentry community, Findern retools courtly love to

accommodate both women's voices and perspectives more applicable to the immediate social and economic circumstances of its owners. The intersection of class and gender in Findern is, I think, important when we consider circumstances of the book production, which allowed women readers access to the book in progress. Findern was assembled haphazardly, in a domestic setting, possibly involving several different locales, and definitely involving dozens of contributors. If a number of these compilers were women, or were working on behalf or women, this participation of gentry women could account for the re-visioning of courtly love we find today in the book.

Finally, there is virtually no trace of courtly love in Balliol 354.[2] None of the courtly texts of the Oxford group appear in Balliol, which shares only one text with Findern ("The Three Questions"). As a man who obviously had access to many exemplars, both in manuscript and print, Hill's restriction of major author texts to Gower and Lydgate (mostly Lydgate's religious and didactic material, and Stans Puer ad Mensam) is interesting. He did not seem to find Chaucer, for instance, very appealing. Perhaps he did not consider the "fader and fownder of ornate eloquence" (so-called in Caxton's courtesy book, 1.330) relevant to the practical purposes of Balliol 354. Richard Hill,

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[2] Julia Boffey also remarks on Hill's apparent allergy to courtly love: "Rather surprisingly, Richard Hill's book contains no courtly love lyrics, despite its large number of carols and lyrics on other subjects. His familiarity with the form is demonstrated only by his inclusion of a parody, Lord, how shall I me complayn (Index 1957)" (Manuscripts 22-3).

like the compilers of all the other manuscripts discussed in this chapter, definitely had his biases when selecting texts for his book, and some of his selections have significant implications for reading gender.

"Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?"

The Wife of Bath's question (WBP 1.692) directly addresses the issue of textual representation of gender, and echoes the Belle Dame's accusation that "fayre language" paints a false portrait of women.[3] The Wife's answer to her own question articulates the reality that those in control of a text--authors, in her example--can manipulate representations of gender. Alison is particularly concerned with representations of women in clerical texts. She suggests that texts produced by women would have a different hue: "By God, if wommen hadde writen stories," pronounces the Wife vehemently, "They wold have writen of men moore wikkednesse / Than al the mark of Adam may redress" (ll.693-6). Men, says Alison, through their exclusive control of authorship (and here we might add the control of professional book production) have misrepresented women (not to mention lions!) in the texts they produce. Like the Belle Dame, who describes the process of textual representation of women as "paintings" of masculine discourse, the Wife of Bath demands

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[3] For a fuller discussion of this passage in the Canterbury Tales, see Priscilla Martin, 1-13.

recognition of gender and the social circumstances of the producer of the text: the one who "peynted the leon."

Alison's comparison of textualized women and lions has particular resonance in this study, when we consider the appearances made by Thisbe's lion(ess) in three of my four chapters. Each time the beast appears in a different manuscript context, it is represented differently. A gender chameleon, the lion winds its way through the folios, taking on different characteristics according to the specific features of each codicological forest it inhabits. Just as authors can paint the lion differently, manuscript production methods like compilatio re-present the lion in a different context. Like Alison herself (that wily manipulator of text), participants in the literate culture of late medieval England found ways to inscribe their visions of gender into both the literature and the book.

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