

## ABSTRACT

The polarized, bipartite construction of woman in the Middle Ages is a recognized and accepted division of the female into either Virgin or Eve. It is this second category of the female, however, that dominates the medieval view of woman, and even the woman herself. This negative depiction of woman gains its power by aggressively stressing her "female" differences. This repeated emphasis on woman as a creature other than man transforms her into a being who is less than human: a female grotesque. The target of these antifeminist attacks is almost invariably the bourgeois woman. As an example of this type of construction of woman as grotesque, five of the female characters from Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales will be examined.



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

THE MAKING OF A MONSTER:  
THE FEMALE GROTESQUE IN CHAUCER'S CANTERBURY TALES

by

Suzanne Klerks, B.A.

A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University  
Ottawa, Ontario  
March 23, 1992  
© copyright  
1992, Suzanne Klerks



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N1

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

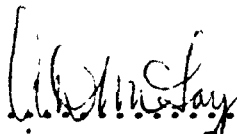
L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-75925-9

Canada

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty  
of Graduate Studies acceptance of the thesis  
"The Making of a Monster: the Female Grotesque  
in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales"  
submitted by Suzanne Klerks  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts.

  
.....  
Thesis Supervisor

  
.....  
Chairperson, Department of English

Carleton University

March 23, 1992

## ABSTRACT

The polarized, bipartite construction of woman in the Middle Ages is a recognized and accepted division of the female into either Virgin or Eve. It is this second category of the female, however, that dominates the medieval view of woman, and even the woman herself. This negative depiction of woman gains its power by aggressively stressing her "female" differences. This repeated emphasis on woman as a creature other than man transforms her into a being who is less than human: a female grotesque. The target of these antifeminist attacks is almost invariably the bourgeois woman. As an example of this type of construction of woman as grotesque, five of the female characters from Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales will be examined.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Douglas Wurtele for both his patience and his helpful suggestions. I would further like to thank Mitchell Owens and Geoffrey Eden for allowing me to give them endless lectures on feminism and Chaucer. Finally, my parents deserve much credit for all the love and support they have lavished on me during the writing of this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter Two: "Miller's Tale"</b>	21
<b>Chapter Three: "Reeve's Tale"</b>	37
<b>Chapter Four: "Merchant's Tale"</b>	54
<b>Chapter Five: "Shipman's Tale"</b>	70
<b>Conclusion</b>	88
<b>Works Cited</b>	93



## Chapter 1: Introduction

In studies of female "types" in the Middle Ages, two images of women have emerged: one is defined through the Virgin, as the representative of ideal female qualities, and the other through Eve, her polarized opposite, who signifies all that is base in woman. The difficulty presented by this critical categorization of women appears easily enough when the images of women in the religious and the secular writings of the period are examined: in their depictions of women, these medieval texts do not necessarily construct their female characters according to a strict reliance on this two-fold image of the Virgin and Eve. Instead, the dichotomy between female types may be seen simply through images of "good" and "bad" women (Weissman 95). Thus, figures such as Patient Griselda and the Lady of courtly love become representatives of Mary, while bourgeois women like those in the Old French fabliaux are sisters of Eve (Fries 80-81). It is this second association which is particularly significant to the understanding of the medieval view of women because the attacks levelled against the bourgeois woman in literature ran counterpoint to antifeminist attacks on women in other areas of medieval society. This (con)fusion between Eve, the bourgeois literary woman, and the misogynist construction of actual women in society results in the creation of a figure who is not based on a "real", flesh-and-blood image of woman, but on a distorted, unnatural creature: a grotesque. This

figuration of woman, which lacks the typically exaggerated physical features of the grotesque, can be nevertheless so categorized because of the emphasis placed on her so-called "female differences" by a patriarchal society. Margaret R. Miles, in a discussion on the female grotesque in sixteenth-century literature, states that she is "the creature closest to the male subject, but who is innately, disturbingly different" (147). Thus, in order to demonstrate that the medieval concept of the bourgeois woman manifested itself through the image of the grotesque, it is first necessary to briefly examine the history of this image from its origins in classical thought and early Christian theology to its appearance in the religious and secular works of the Middle Ages. Next, this concept of woman as grotesque Other will be examined in relation to a medieval secular text, to demonstrate not only the pervasiveness of this image, but how it is used to control female behavior. The text will be Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, since the tales of the Miller, Reeve, Merchant and Shipman present five depictions of bourgeois women who can be classified as grotesque. First, however, the term "grotesque" will be defined.

Wolfgang Kayser, in his book The Grotesque in Art and Literature, terms the grotesque as:

a monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman  
elements...The same monstrous quality,  
constituted by the fusion of different  
realms as well as by a definite lack of

proportion and organization". (24)

Kayser, however, stresses the vague nature of the term through a quotation from the 1771 Dictionnaire universel de la langue française by Schmidlin: "Figuratively speaking, grotesque means odd, unnatural, bizarre, strange, funny, ridiculous, caricatural, etc." (28).

For M.M. Bakhtin, the grotesque is governed by the principle of "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20). Bakhtin further characterizes the grotesque by "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (303). Bakhtin underlines the connection between the idea of the grotesque and the body: "The grotesque body...is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed" (317). Moreover, it is the bowels, the genitals, the mouth and the anus which play "the leading role in the grotesque image" (Bakhtin 317). He further notes that "the entire logic of the grotesque movements of the body... is of a topological nature. The system of these movements is oriented in relation to the upper and lower stratum; it is a system of flights and descents into the lower depths" (353). Thus, for Bakhtin, one of the key elements of the grotesque is its inverse nature; its ability to represent a distortion of all that is ideal and admirable.

Finally, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in his book On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and

Literature, repeats Bakhtin's emphasis on the inverse nature of the grotesque: "most grotesques are marked by such an affinity/antagonism, by the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, 'high' or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerated, 'low' or material" (9). On another level, Harpham comments that the figures in Martin Schongauer's engraving of "the Temptations of St. Anthony" (c. 1470), "are grotesque not because they are hideous...but because, in the midst of an overwhelming impression of monstrosity there is much we can recognize, much corrupted or shuffled familiarity" (5). Harpham's observation is particularly relevant for a study of woman and the grotesque, because it suggests that the grotesque is not merely a completely alien construction, but one which also possesses recognizable traits. Thus, the concept of the grotesque can be applied to the distorted construction of the (bourgeois) woman in the Middle Ages.

Miles, in a brief examination of the female characters who appear in Sir John Mandeville's fourteenth-century travelogue, suggests that, because the women described in this work lack typically grotesque features, in a text whose function it is to "titillate", "it is not merely that some women were thought of as grotesque in socially defined, culturally specific ways, but that an element of the grotesque is present in every woman" (147; my emphasis). Again, woman is grotesque because she is different from man. It is through an emphasis on these female differences that a

(male) fear of woman can be contained. In other words, through the act of creating a negative image of woman, any positive, powerful female qualities can be overlooked. As Mary Russo notes, in her article "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory", woman's actions and speech can be controlled through the implication that her behavior has gone beyond the standards of "normal", "acceptable" female activity (213). Thus, woman becomes grotesque through an emphasis on the body/bawdy: she is presented as a spectacle, as making a spectacle of herself. A female grotesque, then, is a woman perceived to be spectacle through a "kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries", with an emphasis on the publicly "unruly" or disorderly female body (Russo 213-14). Moreover, while arguing that Chaucer's Wife of Bath uses the "power" that comes from a manipulation of the audience's fear of the unruly female body, Lee Patterson notes: "This fear of woman's shamelessness is at the domestic heart of medieval misogyny" (291-92). This idea is further underscored by Philippe Ménard in Les Fabliaux: "Au Moyen Age une femme sans pudeur (femina sine pudicitia) était un monstre, une des choses scandaleuses absolument contraires à la nature (134).

This removal of any barrier between woman and the grotesque is typified in Valerius' dissuasio, when he warns his friend that his passion has blinded him to the fact that he loves a monster:

Thou are all aflame with thy desires, and  
being ensnared by the beauty of a lovely

person, thou knowest not, poor wretch, that  
 what thou seekest is a chimera. But thou  
 art doomed to know that this tri-form monster,  
 although it is beautified with the fact of a  
 noble lion, yet is blemished with the belly  
 of a reeking kid, and is beweaponed with the  
 virulent tail of a viper. (qtd. in Miller 439)

As I noted above, in order to construct woman as grotesque, the (male) medieval mind had to perceive her in terms of her female difference. Through this perception of woman, a hierarchical system of gender relations is invoked. That is, woman is posited beneath man through her role as grotesque Other, while he attempts to control it. As Margaret Miles notes:

that which is familiar but alien [woman] is  
 finally the most confusing and troubling,  
 and it requires figuration that reassures  
 by indicating how the disturbing figure can  
 and should be managed. (147)

This schema is invoked in the Bible, notably in the story of Creation in Genesis 2.4-23:

And the Lord God formed man of the slime of  
 the earth and breathed into his face the breath  
 of life; and man became a living soul...And the  
 Lord God said: It is not good for man to be  
 alone; let us make him a help like unto himself.  
 And the Lord God having formed out of the ground  
 all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls

of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: for whatsoever Adam called a living creature the same is its name. And Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and all the cattle of the field: but for Adam there was not found a helper like himself. Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: "This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. (King James version)

The Latin Church Fathers believed that Creation was the basis for the hierarchical division between men and women.

As Stephen G. Nichols notes, for these men it was:

an event in real [historical] time which viewed gender differentiation and hierarchy as part of the divine model for humans. In this view, sexual differentiation at the time of creation showed God's wisdom in creating a weak, inferior being, woman, as the instrument of the Fall which, although not preordained, was anticipated. Woman's sexual differentiation emphasized the body, the seat of sensuality and irrationality, which qualities were said to characterize

feminine discourse. (72)

This combination of the concept of gendered hierarchy and female difference is repeated by St. Paul in I Corinthians 11.8-10:

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. (King James version)

Equally damaging to the image of woman in the Middle Ages was the polarization of female types, first drawn by Tertullian in the third century, when he created a parallel between Eve, the cause of the Fall, and the Virgin, mother of humanity's redeemer. In his "On the Apparel of Women", Tertullian was also careful to connect the "odious" image of Eve with that of womankind in general, when he told his audience of "beloved sisters":

Do you not believe that you are [each] an Eve? (I.i)...You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. Because of your desert, that is, death even the Son of God had to die. (I.2)

The antifeminism of patristic writers like Tertullian,



however, was not limited to the creation of direct connections between Eve and woman. Woman was attacked on a number of levels.

In the fourth century, St. Jerome's popular antifeminist tract, "Against Jovinianus", glossed other Pauline teaching with the observation:

He did not say, it is good not to have a wife: but, it is good not to touch a woman, as though he who touched her, would not escape from her who "hunteth for the precious life", who causeth the young man's understanding to fly away. (I.7)

Jerome's discussion of the woes of the much-married Solomon was also used by later misogynous and misogynist writers. In this section of his work, Jerome "follows an ironic syllogism: Women either are odious or too passionate. The possibility that there might be something in between seems to have escaped the polemicist" (Wilson and Makowski 41). Barely a hundred years later John Chrysostom issued a warning to men against the dangers of female beauty:

Should you reflect about what is contained in beautiful eyes, in a straight nose, in a mouth, in cheeks, you will see that bodily beauty is white-wash tombstone, for inside it is full of filth. (167)

These views of the early Church Fathers, wherein woman is deceptively different and inferior to man, were adopted

by medieval theologians. Hugh of St. Victor, for example, argues in a famous passage from the De sacramentis Christianae fidei (c.1134) that woman belongs beneath man in a socio-religious hierarchy: "Yet in a certain way she was inferior to him, in that she was made from him, so that she might always look to him as to her beginning" (329). Medieval theologians, however, were also influenced by early Jewish philosophers, such as Philo of Alexandria, and the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Philo, whose ideas were incorporated by both Augustine and Ambrose, argued that "the female gender is material, passive, corporeal, and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought" (I.8.15). Aristotle, who influenced men like Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, saw woman as a deformed man:

Just as it sometimes happens that deformed offspring are produced by deformed parents, and sometimes not, so the offspring produced by a female are sometimes female, sometimes not, but male. The reason is that the female is as it were a deformed male; and the menstrual discharge is semen through an impure condition: i.e. it lacks one constituent, and one only, the principle of soul. (Generation of Animals (716a. 9-17))

Interestingly, this concern with menstruation is repeated not only in Albertus and Thomas (in both Commentary

on the Sentences and in Summa Theologiae), but in the works of a number of other medieval theologians, including St. Bonaventure, and Innocent III, who wrote at the close of the twelfth century:

It is evident that the embryo is fed by the menstrual blood; this is why women stop menstruating after having conceived the child.

This substance is said to be so detestable and impure that it makes trees barren and vineyards unproductive. It can kill grass and if a dog eats out of it rabies result. Should the menstrual blood infect the male seed it may cause leprosy and elephantiasis

(On the Misery of the Human Condition 1.4)

This preoccupation with female bodily functions was so prevalent among medieval theologians that R. Howard Bloch has even gone so far as to observe: "there can, in fact, be no distinction between the theological and the gynecological" (20). At the very least, this clerical interest in the various aspects of female reproduction was at least partly responsible for the medieval view of woman as grotesque Other, with its attempt to demystify her mystery, while at the same time creating a monstrous mythology. This construction of woman as a distorted being does not remain solely in the hands of the ecclesiastic community, however, since this view of woman is also propagated through the secular literature of the period.

The secular texts of the Middle Ages helped form the view of woman as inherently different from man through repeated emphasis on her "evil" nature. The classical author Boethius, in what Miles terms "a description of the genesis of grotesque forms...extrapolated from Christian neoplatonism" (151), provides a similar schema:

[A]nything which turns away from goodness ceases to exist, and thus...the wicked cease to be what they once were. That they used to be human is shown by the human appearance of their body which still remains. So it was by falling into wickedness that they also lost their human nature. Now, since only goodness can raise a man above the level of human kind, it follows that it is proper that wickedness thrusts down to a level below mankind those whom it has dethroned from the condition of being human. (The Consolation of Philosophy 4.3)

These secular texts, then, which perform the function of debasing woman, include John of Salisbury's Policraticus, Walter Map's De nugis curialium (notably the Letter of Valerius to Rufinum), Andreas Capellanus's Art of Courtly Love (book 3), the .XV. Joies de mariage and Jehan Le Fèvre's translation of the Lamentations de Matheolus, as well as what can be termed "les genres du réalisme bourgeois":

the comic tale of the fabliaux (including

Middle English and Italian versions); the animal fable (Roman de Renart); the comic theater of farce; but also certain mixed or unclassified forms like the chantefable Aucassin et Nicolette or Adam de la Halle's Jeu d' la feüllée; and, of course, Jean de Meun's portion of the Roman de la rose.

(Bloch 1)

The image of woman that emerges from these texts is of one who is variously lecherous, proud, vain, envious, deceptive, gluttonous, avaricious, and above all garrulous and quarrelsome. This concern with female speech in particular is exemplified by Jehan Le Fèvre, who states of woman: "Faindre et dissimuler convient" (1.1024); "Oultre les tençons et les limes/Par cing manieres de sophismes. La femme meine l'omme a methe" (1.843-45); and:

Pourquoy sont femmes plus noiseuses,  
 Plaines de paroles oiseuses  
 Et plus jangleuses que les hommes?  
 Car elles sont d'os et nous sommes  
 Fais de terre en nostre personne:  
 L'os plus haut que la terre sonne.

(2.241-46)

As Edith Benkov notes, this concern actually manifests itself as a male fear of women's speech:

Indeed, so genuine is the fear of the creative power of language as a weapon in women's arsenal in regard to the battle of the sexes,

that much of medieval literature seems to have as its subtext that women's speech must either be carefully controlled or in some cases violently suppressed. In short, female discourse, like female sexuality, could be a genuine threat to established order (whether husband or king) and was often as closely guarded in the male-dominated world of medieval French fiction. (245)

Furthermore, Lee Patterson states: "For the male audience feminine speaking is never wholly divest of the titillating ambivalences of eroticism" (292). Thus, at least one "goal" of these texts is to silence woman, to render her mute so that she cannot object to the transformations her body and character undergo. Moreover, Patterson's quotation suggests another fear aroused by these secular medieval texts: the fear of female sexuality.

The medieval concern with woman's sexual appetite flows through a vast amount of the secular literature: like her prototype Eve, the bourgeois woman of the Middle Ages cannot contain her monstrous desire. This preoccupation with excessive female desire is a common theme, for example, in the Old French fabliaux, where tales such as Porcelet, La Dame qui aveine demandoit pour Morel, and La Veuve are all characterized by their portrayal of a bourgeois woman "sexuellement insatiable, lassata, sed non satiata, comme dit Juvénal de Messaline" (Ménard 134-35). It is noteworthy

that the fear of female sexuality was not limited to the literature of the period, but was apparent in its visual arts as well. For example, female figures revealing splayed vaginas were often displayed on church facades during the later Middle Ages, "reminding viewers of the dangerous power of female sexual organs" (Miles 156).

The fact that misogynist medieval texts include a wide variety of genres, from the dissuasio de non ducenda uxore to courtly allegory to rhetorical exercises to popular works like the animal fable, suggest that this type of medieval antifeminism was not restricted to any class or type of author or audience. The pervasiveness of misogyny in the Middle Ages is further highlighted by the fact that even women actively participated in the writing of the dissuasio: Heloise herself penned one of the earliest extant examples of this genre. She uses St. Jerome's antifeminist treatise as her source, and also cites St. Paul and Theophrastus. As Mann observes, the disssuasio of Heloise is a serious condemnation of women by a woman:

is no rhetorical exercise or literary game;  
it is delivered in passionate earnest. Yet  
not only does it issue from a woman, but  
from the very woman who stands to gain most  
from the man's decision to marry...Heloise  
sees herself as the temptress of anti-feminist  
tradition, as one of those women who are the  
ruin of men. She applies to herself the  
Solomonic warnings against women: "I find

woman more bitter than death; she is a snare,  
 her heart a net, her arms are chains [Eccl.  
 7:26]". (Mann 51-53)

Heloise's belief in the grotesque nature of woman, so clearly exemplified in her final image of the female, and at the same time contrary to her own accomplishments as a woman of letters, suggests the pervasive power of the circulating misogynist rhetoric.

The medieval concept of woman as a grotesque being is not reflected only in the religious and secular literature (and art) of the period, but in the very socio-political and legal structures of the society. While the literature of the Middle Ages emphasized the grotesqueness of woman by highlighting her (negative) physical and behavioral differences from men, the other social structures affirmed these beliefs by limiting her power and freedom. No class of women felt these limitations more strongly than what the legal system defined as the "free burgesses or citizens of the town" (Sheehan 25).

From the time of her birth, the bourgeois woman in late medieval society was controlled and subsumed by the patriarchy. Her youth was spent in preparation for her marriage. She existed in her premarriage household in a state of legal subjectivity to the male members of her family: "her upbringing was mainly devoted to inculcating the feminine ideal of passivity and submissiveness to her parents and a future husband" (Labarge 27). Furthermore, in



this patrilineal system "the daughter is treated as a marginal member of her father's lineage, and after her marriage, her children will leave it entirely; their allegiance passes to her husband's line" (Herlihy 82). Moreover, as Herlihy also notes, the medieval woman lost the claim to a full share in the family patrimony, with the dowry remaining as the only "material support" shown her (82).

When she married, the bourgeois woman immediately came under her husband's guardianship. She was expected to bring a dowry into the new household, which, like all of her possessions, reverted to the new husband (Sheehan 31). Margaret Wade Labarge summarizes the position of a married woman in the Middle Ages:

Her marriage, often at a very young age, meant total domination by her husband, and, for all practical purposes, the extinguishing of her legal rights during the term of the marriage. Despite this, she was also supposed to be competent and resourceful in running the household once she was married, since its material comfort and maintenance was primarily her responsibility. (27)

Therefore, to all intents and purposes, a wife herself was the property of her husband. This is reinforced by canon law, which "specifically allowed wife beating" as a way to correct "undesirable" behavior (Powers 16). The fourteenth-century English law gave permission to the

husband "lawful and reasonable correction" (Gies 46).

Eileen Power notes, too, that this law was practised:

judging by chansons de geste and by  
anecdotes related by the Knight of La  
Tour Landry for the edification of  
daughters, such punishments were practised  
in the highest of circles. (18-19)

The married woman, especially one of the bourgeois class, then, was essentially without rights of any kind. She was physically and essentially legally limited to the domain of the home: she had no money; no access to higher education, since the universities were closed to women; she could not even write a will. Her functions were to run the household, care for her husband, and to produce and care for children. Thus, as Stephen Nichols notes: "Marriage, like literature, was mimetic, a symbolic representation of the political order" (70). Marriage, then, is "at the center of any system of values, at the junction between the material and the spiritual. It regulates the transmission of wealth from one generation to another, and so underlies and cannot be dissociated from a society's 'infracstructures'" (Duby 19). It is important to note, too, as Luce Irigaray reminds us, that this "system of values" is based on a patriarchal system:

women's bodies--through their use, consumption,  
and circulation--provide for the condition  
making social life and culture possible,  
although they remain an unknown "infrastructure"

of the elaboration of that social life and culture...In still other words: all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued and rewarded in these societies are men's business. (171)

Perhaps most disturbing of all, the average (married) woman had no recourse to transform the misogynist views of the time. She was trapped inside her home, where she had to endure the verbal and written distortions of her body and her character by men whose image of woman was based not on experience, but on abstract literary, religious, social, and legal constructions. The concept of the bourgeois woman in the Middle Ages becomes, then, a fusion of misogynist ideas from every aspect of the society. The figure that results from this fusion is a grotesque.

Of course, this image of woman as a grotesque can work only if the audience is aware of the standards of behavior that are being inverted and distorted. These ideals of feminine behavior were explicitly stated, for example, in medieval didactic treatises, courtesy literature and the sermons disseminated by wandering preachers, which echoed the teachings of the early Church Fathers (Benkov 246; Owst 386). Guidelines to female behavior were also provided through exemplary tales, such as that of Patient Griselda, repeated by Chaucer's Clerk. A medieval audience would recognize the codes of female behavior expressed in this

tale, because of the association of Griselda with that symbol of womanly perfection, the Virgin Mary.

Within the framework of the antifeminism manifested in medieval culture through the religious, socio-political, literary and legal systems, the image of woman, particularly the bourgeois woman, is easily transformed into a grotesque; a monstrous Other. This transformation can occur in literature without the addition of physically deforming features; rather, a female figure can become grotesque through an author's reliance on antifeminist cultural artefacts, either by reference to overtly misogynist material, or through a comparison to an ideal image of woman. This is the schema followed by Chaucer in his depiction of the five female characters in the tales by the Miller, Reeve, Merchant, and Shipman. These five women represent not only the bourgeois class, but, by association, all the negative and fearful aspects of bourgeois female behavior, particularly excessive sexuality and excessive speech. In order to excise this fear, these women are figured and thereby controlled through their depiction as women who transcend the boundaries of acceptable female behavior. As Bakhtin himself notes: "All that was terrifying becomes grotesque" (91).

## Chapter 2: "Miller's Tale"

Usually considered the best of Chaucer's fabliaux-based tales, the "Miller's Tale" offers the most detailed portraits of its characters. Ironically, while critics have accepted the parodic nature of Alison's celebrated portrait (of a courtly lady), it has been viewed by scholars as primarily innocent and playful in tone. Her description is believed to function as "light-hearted amoral animality" (Rowland, "What Chaucer Did" 210) and "delightful realism" (Reidler 93). As Derek Brewer notes: "the vivid country images in which Alison is described do full justice to her allure" (257). In other words, the focus of the portrait is assumed to focus on her "delectable" qualities (Muscatine 228). In their perception of Alison, these critics ignore the medieval antifeminist tradition of woman-as-grotesque that underlies Alison's portrait, in favour of a more personal response. Once the figure of Alison is explored within its medieval context, it becomes apparent that the narrator's construction of Alison <sup>1</sup> demonstrates not only an awareness of the dialogue between the two standardized, polarized images of woman in the Middle Ages (Mary and Eve),

---

<sup>1</sup>I have chosen not to use the term "author" as the title of the speaking subject because, like Michel Foucault, I believe that "this 'author' is not identical with the subject of the statement; and the relation of production that he has with the formulation is not superposable to the relation that unites the enunciating subject and what he states" (The Archaeology of Knowledge 92). Finally, I prefer the more "innocent" term "narrator", which carries the least amount of either autobiographical or critical baggage.

but also his reliance on this dialogue in order to disempower Alison and all she--as bourgeois woman--represents. Alison is a sister of Eve: she is lecherous, seductive and deceptive. Thus, it is not the "innocence" of the portrait which is emphasized, but rather her grotesque nature. She becomes the anti-model of the ideal woman, with her dangerously exposed body and her ability to elicit "overmastering desire from the men in her world", an ability which can only lead to destruction (Patterson 286). At the same time the image of woman-as-grotesque must be continuously undercut, in order that the male narrator and audience will not lose their dominant position in the sexual hierarchy. Finally, the exposed figure of Alison, however, does not alone evoke the grotesque nature of woman. The characters of both Nicholas and Absolon are "feminized" to further establish the dangerous power of woman.

Alison's portrait (3233-3270) immediately sets up a dichotomy between the idealized version of womanhood (the Virgin Mary), and the bourgeois woman, in order to emphasize the flaws inherent in this later figuration of the female. Thus, Alison is established as a grotesque from the beginning, through an analogy between the young wife's body and that of a weasel:

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal

As any wezele hir body gent and smal.

(3233-34)

In medieval iconography, the weasel is a symbol of the

Virgin. It was believed that the animal, like Mary, conceived through the mouth and gave birth through the ear (Réau 100). To apply this animal metaphor to the lustful Alison is a particularly ironic act since the image is deployed to draw the eye of the audience to Alison's body, rather than to elicit religious devotion. At the same time, to recall Harpham's definition of the grotesque, this indirect reference to the Virgin serves to underscore Alison's "affinity" with "the abnormal, unformed, degenerated, 'low' or material" (9).

The focus on her young body also recalls the medieval antifeminist discourse on female sexuality: Alison/woman is a snare, of which the bait is sex. Thus, Alison's entire portrait is designed so that the male gaze can travel unrestrained over her body, pausing at the more intimate areas. For example, the narrator takes care to describe the belt cinching her waist, the apron draping her thighs, and the smock or shift worn next to the skin:

A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,  
 A barmclooth as whit as morne milk  
 Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.  
 Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore  
 And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,  
 Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.  
 (3235-40)

Furthermore, the emphasis on "bifoore" and "bihynde", coupled with the "withinne and eek withoute" in the

following line, underscores the physical pervasiveness of the portrait. There is no part of this mute female body that cannot be explored. Her body takes on the qualities of a statue or an animal that can be examined at leisure by the more powerful masculine spectator. To recall Mary Russo's word for the grotesque female body: Alison is a "spectacle", who transgresses the limitations placed on female behavior through this display.

The obviously eroticized description of Alison's laced-up body reaches a climax in line 3244:

And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye.

Alison's gaze is not passive. It is symbolic of female temptation as it invites men to respond to her body. She is the Eve who will lead Adam, man, to partake of humanity's downfall. Furthermore, Alison is transgressing the sexual boundaries with her aggressive gaze, which treads on male territory. Again, she is not innocent here, but a creature who deliberately sets out to destroy man through sin.

Another jarring note is struck in the portrait with the inclusion of the reference to the "pere-jonette tree" (3248). According to the description of the fruit in the C-text of Piers Plowman, the "pere-jonette" is a sweet, succulent early-ripe pear, that rots quickly (Skeat 99). Intertextually, the connection of the pear with Alison also directly recalls John Chrysostom's grotesque metaphor, quoted above, where female beauty is compared to a white-washed sepulchre. Therefore, underlying this



description is the implication that woman is literally and figuratively rotten. Furthermore, Skeat states that the term "pere-jonette" was also applied to quick-ripening apples (99). This conflation of meaning between pear and apple allows the former to assume the Biblical fruit's connotation of sexuality. This ambiguity is visually represented in the painting by Jan Mabuse (Gossaert) of The Fall of Man (c. 1520), where Eve proffers the apple to Adam, while below an ape--symbol of concupiscence--bites into a pear (Wentersdorf, "Imagery" 51). The association of the pear with the "likerous" Alison therefore reinforces her position in the text as a sister of Eve. It is for this reason, then, that Alison's breath still reeks of that first apple:

Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,  
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.  
(3261-2)

The idea that woman is inherently evil is further expressed through the iconographic history of the pear itself. As Wentersdorf ("Imagery" 50) and Brian Stone (102) reveal, both the pear and pear tree were frequently symbols of Venus. This association goes back at least as far as the Roman poet Lucretius, who writes in his De Rerum Natura: "In the woods, Venus linked lovers, flesh to flesh,/for mutual lust would bring the two together,/or else the man's raw force and wild desire,/or a bribe: acorns, arbutes, or fresh-picked pears" (5.962-650). As D.W.

Robertson notes, in the Middle Ages Venus was a bipartite construction: she was the symbol of both fleshly concupiscence and chaste or virtuous love (126). The pear tree of Alison's description, however, is the symbol of the "unlawful passion" of Venus, further exemplified in the erotic medieval poem, "I have a new garden", and more literally in Chaucer's own "Merchant's Tale". Thus, these two Venuses were set up in a dichotomy much like that of the Virgin and Eve. The two Venuses also have another association in the iconography of the Middle Ages, one which is echoed in Alison's portrait: music (Nordstrom 99). As Robertson observes, there are two very different kinds of "melodye"--one the music of the spirit and the flesh in harmony with created nature, and the other "the music of the flesh as it seeks inferior satisfactions as a result of its own concupiscence" (126). In the "Miller's Tale", less than ten lines after the reference to the pear tree, there appears the following observation:

But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne

As any swalwe sittynge on a barne.

(3258-9)

The two types of music were visible in the marginalia of Gothic manuscripts, where, for example, the bagpipe was often used to signify lechery (Robertson 128). Chaucer's awareness of the significance of musical iconography is most often acknowledged in his famous inclusion of that same instrument in his description of the Miller in the General

Prologue. This connection between Alison and the negative connotations of the image of Venus and musical iconography is strengthened by the comparison of her voice to that of a swallow.

Edmund Reiss, discussing the significance of the swallow-as-symbol for Chaucer, notes that the story of Procne and Philomela in The Legend of Good Women is "to be regarded as an instance of foul lust and false love. Dominant in [the poet's] treatment is sorrow" (36). As well, in Troilus and Criseyde, the appearance of the swallow that wakes Pandarus just before he is to visit his niece on Troilus' behalf (II.64), "suggests ironically the movement from the mind to the flesh" (Reiss 36). Furthermore, singing birds often appeared in medieval manuscripts "to suggest the attractions of Deduit, just as they do when the lover enters the garden in the Roman [de la Rose]" (113).

On one level, then, Alison's description stresses the sexual danger that underlies her beauty. That is, she is constructed as a grotesque through the repeated exposing of her body, and through the continued emphasis on her "low" status. Her grotesque nature is not limited, however, to her role as Eve-like temptress. At the same time she is posited as a grotesque through her dehumanization and objectification:

In al this world, to seken up and down,  
 There nys no man so wys that koude thenche  
 So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.  
 Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe

Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.

(3252-56)

The first part of this quotation places Alison in the realm of the abnormal through its emphasis on her difference. She is reminiscent of the women in Mandeville's Travels because, like them, she is "outside experience, exotic" (Miles 146), yet without any real physical distortions. Moreover, the metaphor, "So gay a popelote", itself conjures the image of a unique, brightly-plumed bird. Of course, Alison is no radiantly-colored creature; she is a "wenche" beyond man's imagination. This desire to reduce and exterminate the dangers implicit in woman's difference is apparent not only in this image, but in the reference to Alison as a little doll, a toy of little value. This grotesque objectification is continued in the comparison of Alison to a coin.

Sheila Delany has noted that this "social, urban, manmade, technological" image of the coin is discordant in a passage that relies on natural imagery (163). She argues that the numismatic image places woman as an object of trade, an object of exchange value to be continuously passed along (163). This image, however, carries a two-edged sword: on one hand, Alison does pass between men, an action for which she is implicitly condemned. Conversely, the social structure of marriage in the Middle Ages demanded that a woman be transferred from her father's hand/home to that of her husband.

The objectification of Alison is most overtly dealt with at the end of the description:

She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,  
 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,  
 Or yet for any good yeman to wedde. (3268-70)

Like the image of woman as a "popelote", the flower references here also act to reduce the danger presented by the overtly sexual depiction of Alison, and all bourgeois medieval women. She is not active in these lines; her lecherous eye is closed. Rather, she is to be passively placed in the man's bed, or passively taken in marriage.

This desire to devalue woman/Alison is apparent later in the tale, when she bares her buttocks for Absolon's kiss. Peter Beidler discovered that Chaucer's tale is the only early example of the misdirected kiss where a woman performs this action (92). The action itself signifies woman as grotesque on several levels: the female who is beautiful on the surface displays the reverse image for all to see, literalizing the medieval belief that woman exists to deceive men and Bakhtin's image of the grotesque body which represents an inversion of hierarchy. Furthermore, while the exposure of the buttocks is usually read as a gesture of defiance, in his article "Figurae Scatologicae", Karl P. Wentersdorf has pointed out that this action was often representative of mortal sin (7). Alison's gesture can therefore be read not only as an action which debases her but one which also reveals the threat she poses as a (lecherous) woman.

While Alison's portrait posits her in the tradition of

the female grotesque (as spectacle and as inverse representation of all that is low and base in woman), the concept of woman as grotesque is also present in the depictions of Nicholas and Absolon. In her article, "The Feminization of Men", Elaine Tuttle Hansen discusses the antifeminist connotations that arise from the feminization of the male protagonists in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women. Citing the eleventh-century writer Orderic Vitalis and his Historia Ecclesiastica as an authority, Hansen suggests that in the Middle Ages there was an ongoing concern with "excessive heterosexual interest", which was equated with homosexuality through the stereotype of the "feminine" man (53). In her conclusion, Hansen notes that this feminization of male characters occurs throughout The Canterbury Tales, and specifically in the "Miller's Tale", although she does not elaborate on her claim (68). This feminization of men, which the historian Natalie Zemon Davis has noted was popular in the literature, art and festivity of early modern Europe (129), does take place in the tale, particularly in Alison's ardent suitors, Nicholas and Absolon, and is strongly rooted in the evidence offered by the text on the nature of women in Alison's portrait. The narrator, then, uses his feminization of men to complete his unfavourable characterization of women, not only through his condemnation of the "female" qualities exhibited by the males, but also through the blame placed on women as the solicitors of desire.

Nicholas becomes the target of the narrator's feminization almost immediately, through the implication that his desire transforms him into a woman:

This clerk was cleped hende Nicholas.  
 Of deerne love he koude and of solas;  
 And therto he was sleigh and ful privee,  
 And lyk a mayden meke for to see. (3199-3202)

The fact that Nicholas is compared to a "mayden" in the fourth line of his description, while his character spends the entire tale exhibiting excessive and deceptive lust ("deerne love"), points to the association of this type of behavior with women. Moreover, the very act of male excessive heterosexuality recalls Orderic's use of the term "effeminati" to characterize just such behavior (188).

Another suggestion that both feminizes Nicholas and undercuts the image of woman occurs in a play on words, when the student attempts to seduce Alison:

As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte;  
 And prively he caughte hire by the queynte.  
 (3275-6)

The repetition of the homonym "queynte", which carries the dual significations of "ingenious" or "pudendum", underlines the interchangeability of its meanings to the extent that Nicholas is "tainted" by the femaleness of the word, with its suggestions of ripe, dangerous and above all womanly sexuality. The narrator does not stop with this initial "infection" of Nicholas through his association with female

genitalia; he continues to censor the foolishness that accompanies heterosexual desire by again using the word "queynte" to describe Nicholas' plans for the carpenter: "What al this queynte cast was for to seye" (3605). The link between Nicholas and the most disturbing characteristic of medieval woman--rampant sexuality--certainly undermines not only the clerk but also reinforces the grotesque image of woman depicted in the text. The continued focus on the female sex organs both demystifies woman, by repeatedly bringing to light what is normally kept hidden, and emphasizes her blame as the instigator of male desire. (In fact, the narrator's systematic destruction of any positive remnants in the image of woman is set up in the contrasting pictures of the "pryvetee" of God and that of a "wyf" in the "Miller's Prologue" [3164]).

The feminization of Absolon has been previously noted, most completely by Paul Beichner, who has observed that the medieval audience would have considered the beauty of Absolon "feminine" in light of his Biblical namesake, especially with the Chaucerian emphasis on the clerk's abundant golden hair (121-22). In Orderic Vitalis's repudiation of excessive heterosexual desire, the two physical traits he focuses on are "long, luxurious locks like women and...over-tight shirts and tunics" (189). In addition to his mass of curly hair, Absolon is said to be clad "ful smal and proprely/Al in a kirtel of a lyght waget" (3320-21). Like Nicholas, Absolon is mocked by the narrator



for his womanly traits. This mockery goes beyond the examples already proffered by critics, who tend to focus on his physical beauty, his squeamishness and his fastidious, gentle manner. One such example which has been overlooked is the comparison of the clerk's voice to that of a "nyghtyngale" (3377). The combined references to both the swallow and the nightingale in the "Miller's Tale" demonstrate that the images evoke the myth of Procne and Philomela, with its message of the danger of lust. To associate Absolon with a nightingale at once places him in a female role, one that has connotations of passion, madness and death.

One of the dangers of Absolon's assumption of a female role is that he disturbs the sexual hierarchy by shifting woman/Alison from her "natural" position on the bottom to one on top. This is perfectly literalized when the young man plants his kiss on Alison's nether region, especially in light of the fact--as noted above--that Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" is the only early version of the story of the misdirected kiss where a woman and not a man is its recipient. Peter Beidler calls Alison's behavior in this instance "unladylike" (93), further emphasizing the reversal of sex roles between the young woman and the clerk. The world of the "Miller's Tale" can only be "righted" when the "proper" gender roles are regained. Absolon can only become "heeled of his maladie" (3758) when he borrows the overtly phallic burning coulter to seek his revenge. It also

suggests that the assumption of a male role brings with it more than a hint of violence, since the combination of these two objects seems to point to rape. Jill Mann, after examining works from Peter of Blois to Chaucer, reminds us that: "There is plenty of evidence that the 'conventional' pattern of male aggression and female submission was a familiar one in medieval literature, as doubtless also in life" (99). The final blow to the topsy-turvy world occurs when Nicholas moves to accept the ring and inadvertently receives the coulter. The structure of the tale cannot stand under the weight of this symbolic sodomy, and so it comes crashing down, literally and figuratively. Laura Kendrick has observed that the "two round containers and an oblong one" suspended over the tale are actually "a burlesque, carnivalesque version of 'Goddess pryvetee'" (6). If this image is carried further, might not their destructive fall in some way symbolize God's wrath for the homoerotic nature of the encounter between Absolon and Nicholas? This condemnation of homosexuality/excessive heterosexuality can be interpreted again as a condemnation of all that is "feminine", since (as I noted above) homoeroticism is seen in the Middle Ages as the male manifestation of supposedly inherently female traits.

The last lines of the tale underline the return to order:

Thus swyved was this carpenteris wyf,  
 For al his keyping and his jalousye,  
 And Absolon hath kist hir nether ye,

And Nicholas is scalded in the towte. (3850-3)

The restorative punishment received by the male characters is clear, and it can be assumed that each has learned a lesson. It is only the condition of Alison that appears problematic.

The "Miller's Tale" is pervaded with images of woman as a grotesque creature. She is the antithesis of the "good" woman in medieval thought, through her association with what Bakhtin calls the "lower bodily stratum". The danger presented by Alison is recognized by the narrator as the chaotic disorder created by the lust she arouses. This danger must be eradicated because it allows for female control or power. As I have stated in my Introduction, the infrastructures of the Middle Ages did not allow for female power, especially of the bourgeois woman. Therefore, Alison's punishment takes the form of an official resumption of her role as passive female. This is indicated in the line "Thus swyved was this carpenteris wyf". Here the passive voice indicates that Alison is now controlled rather than in control. Interestingly, the Middle English verb "swyve" can apparently be used only in the active voice by a male. This particular usage is found not only in the "Miller's Tale", but in the "Reeve's Tale" (4178, 4317), and "Manciple's Tale" (256) as well. While the verb is defined by Benson as "copulate with" or "copulated" (1296), it is, in effect, an act to be performed by men on women.

Finally, the image of woman which dominates the

"Miller's Tale" is the grotesque. There are no positive qualities associated with woman in the text; rather, it is her duplicitous, sexual nature which is constantly reiterated, either directly through the portrait of Alison, or indirectly through the characterization of Nicholas and Absolon. She is Mary Russo's "grotesque spectacle", with her clearly-defined body, and exposed "queynte" and anus. The portrait of Alison is ostensibly presented as the embodiment of female beauty, yet it is continually undercut by the conditions of the grotesque; that is, a series of inversions that continuously displace the ideal with the degenerate. The text, then, defines femininity according to the guidelines patristic and other secular writers set for the "bad" woman: a woman whose distorted nature must be controlled at all costs.

### Chapter 3: "Reeve's Tale"

In the "Miller's Tale", woman's grotesque nature is made apparent primarily through a repeated focus on the female body and on female sexuality in and of itself. In the "Reeve's Tale", however, the monstrous nature of woman is revealed not only through the sexuality of Malyne and her mother, but also through the repeated emphasis given to their position at the bottom of the class and gender hierarchies. Woman here is grotesque because she transgresses her "proper" gender role and the rigid class boundaries. At the same time, woman's inherent difference (from man) manifests itself through her role as a lesser being; more specifically, as an extension of the male members of her family. In the "Reeve's Tale", this difference can be seen in its very plot structure, which revolves around the notion that Malyne and her mother are the property of the miller.<sup>1</sup>

The description of the miller at the beginning of the tale is used to set up Malyne and her mother as "objects" or property. The repeated emphasis on the fact that he is well-armed (3929, 3931, 3933) and physically aggressive (3932, 3937-38) immediately suggests that if the miller were to be harmed, it would not be through physical injury. When

---

<sup>1</sup>It might be argued that the grotesque aspects of the "Reeve's Tale" are not limited to the female characters, since Symkyn also struggles against the class hierarchy, and thereby leaves himself open to ridicule. Symkyn, however, retains a certain amount of power and respect as the superior figure in the sexual hierarchy, while his wife and daughter do not.

it is revealed that the miller's adversaries are to be two university students, the audience is at once aware that any action taken by the young men against Symkyn must assume a form deriving from mental rather than physical force. The objects of the clerkly vengeance are Malyne and her mother, as "natural" extensions of the figure of the father/husband. The tale is schematized in such a way that the wife apparently deserves the treatment she will receive at the hands of the students, and that Malyne not only deserves it, but wants it as well. Thus, the ensuing treatment of wife and daughter springs exclusively from their grotesque nature, rather than from any action they have taken against the two young men.

In the Middle Ages, the social structure that most strongly positioned woman outside the male sphere was the institution of marriage. As I noted above, the medieval system of marriage maintained woman's status as a tool to limit her social power by reconstructing the wife as a creature different from man. Her difference lies in her passive--rather than active--role within the system of marriage. The first female figure described in the "Reeve's Tale" is Symkyn's spouse, who is defined in the text through her role as "wife". The role of wife in the medieval social structure meets the criterion of the grotesque in that it posits woman as "low", to borrow Harpham's word. It also continues the association of the female with the world of the flesh, through her joint roles as sex partner and

childbearer. To be a wife also meant an association with the material world, based on her household duties, as opposed to the spiritual world still open for her husband. The clerks' treatment of the wife in the "Reeve's Tale", then, depends upon the mutually inclusive social and gender hierarchies of the Middle Ages.

When Symkyn's spouse is introduced in the tale, it is almost immediately in the context of her role as wife:

She was yfostred in a nonnerye;  
 For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,  
 But she were wel ynorrised and a mayde,  
 To saven his estaat of yomanrye. (3946-49)

This passage again reduces woman to a faceless body, since Symkyn demonstrates concern only with her social suitability ("wel ynorrised") and her sexual status ("mayde"), in terms of how these qualities will affect his social status (which he ironically believes to be "yomanrye"). It is worth noting that the term "wel ynorrised", which denotes "well-brought up", also carries with it the suggestion that she is well-nourished, and therefore will be a good breeder. This devaluation and reduction of woman is further instituted in the text through the blatant omission of the wife's name.

The omission of the wife's name is underlined by the conspicuous naming of Symkyn in the line immediately preceding the wife's description (3941), and then four times within its body (3945, 3947, 3955, 3959). Mieke Bal, in a

reading of Genesis 1-3, explores the significance of naming. She points out that the proper name is "the label that makes [character] memorable" (334), and that "Naming...is the labeling of the character that completes its formation" (336). Philippe Hamon, in his work Le Personnel du Roman: Le Système des personnages dans les Rougon-Macquard de Zola, says of the proper name:

Etudier un personnage, c'est pouvoir le  
nommer. Agir, pour le personnage, c'est  
aussi, d'abord, pouvoir épeler, interpeler,  
appeler et nommer les autres personnages du  
récit. Lire, c'est pouvoir fixer son  
attention sur des points stables de texte,  
les noms propres. (107)

What does it mean, then, if a central female character is not named?

In the "Reeve's Tale", the narrator's omission of the name appears to be based on the fact that the wife is an imperfect, grotesquely different, mirror of her husband. By withholding her name, the narrator does not allow the wife's character to come to any kind of fruition: she cannot be viewed as whole; merely as a lesser extension of her class-conscious husband. Again, it emphasizes her difference and her social devaluation.

The wife's self-naming with the generic title "dame" suggests that she is aware of her own insignificance: "Ther dorst no wight clepen hire but 'dame'" (3956). Her very



public insistence on the aristocratic title, in the face of her illegitimacy (3944), recalls Mary Russo's grotesque woman, who has "stepped...into the limelight out of turn" (213). The insistence on the inappropriate title is merely part of the makeup of the female grotesque, since a woman who draws attention to herself out of turn simultaneously renders her character "smoterlich" (3963) or dirty. Furthermore, while the wife in the analogues to Chaucer's tale (including the Old French fabliau De Gombert et des II Clers) is physically beautiful, the wife in the "Reeve's Tale" has had the description of her beauty excised, so that as an unattractive woman she will be a more "fitting target for degradation" (Arthur 3).

Much of the initial description of the wife is devoted to an exposition of her proud nature, and her desire to move out of her lowly social position: "And she was proud, and peert as is a pye" (3950); and "Ther dorste no wight clepen hire but 'dame'" (3956). These lines suggest that the wife shares her husband's concern to "saven his estaat of yomanrye" (3949). This class-consciousness is further emphasized in the following lines:

And eek, for she was somdel smoterlich,  
 She was as digne as water in a dich,  
 And ful of hoker and of bisemare,  
 Hir thoughte that a lady sholde hire spare,  
 What for hire kynrede and hir nortelrie  
 That she hadde lerned in the nonnerie. (3963-68)

The text, however, makes quite clear that the wife has no real basis for her pride. For example, her illegitimate birth is stressed through its inclusion in the second line of her description:

The person of the toun hir fader was. (3943)

This mention of illegitimacy, which does not appear in the analogous tales, not only undercuts the wife's social pretensions, but at the same time stresses that her position in society is not legitimate.

The wife's pretensions and lack of physical beauty, then, make her a subject/object of amusement and mockery for the medieval audience, who understands the "impossibility" of hiding or changing one's position in the social hierarchy. Finally, it is not only the wife's beauty which has been removed from Chaucer's tale, but any sympathy on the part of the medieval audience. This stands in direct contradiction, for example, to the Boccaccian analogue. In the Decameron, the wife is permitted an existence independent of her husband's since it is she who, through her "intelligence", ultimately gains control of the situation (9.6.713). The wife's ingenuity and adroitness are actually admired by Adriano, one of the young men in Boccaccio's version (9.6.713). Finally, as Ross G. Arthur explains: "Even within the plot structure [of Boccaccio's tale] she is treated with a certain amount of deference" (3).

The unsympathetic portrayal of the wife is continued in the scene where she actually attempts to help the clerks find their missing horse:

The wyf cam lepyng in ward with a ren.  
 She seyde, "Allas! youre hors goth to the fen  
 With wilde mares, as faste as he may go.  
 Unthank come on his hand that boond hym so,  
 And he that bettre sholde han knyht the reyne!  
 (4079-83)

The wife's attempt to help the clerks becomes a subject of mockery, since she at once is aiding those whom her husband has set out to cheat, and is inadvertently cursing Symkyn. Thus, in spite of the innocence of the wife's action, she is presented here both foolish and ignorant, reaffirming the grotesque nature of woman, especially the bourgeois woman.

The image of woman as grotesque is realized most overtly in the scene when John decides to rape the wife, and acts on this desire. The word "rape" has been used in this context for several reasons. Firstly, before the rape occurs, the wife expressly states, that had she gone to the clerk's bed by accident: "Ey, benedicite! Thanne hadde I foule ysped" (4220). Furthermore, the wife, through trickery, believes that John is her husband. Helen Hazen, in a comment on "odd" rape cases where men were accused of "impersonating husbands, of getting into the wrong beds, of raping sleeping women", notes that the rapes were not defined as such until the correct identity of the man was established (17). Yet, the wife in the "Reeve's Tale" is not allowed to know that the man who "swyved" her was not her husband. This is another change from the analogues,

where the wife always discovers the truth. When the same situation occurs in the analogue in The Decameron, the narrator comments on the "dishonour" felt by the wife when she finds out that the man who visited her bed was the young Adriano (9.6.713-14). As well, in the "Reeve's Tale", John is shown deliberately making the equation between the female body and the physical matter that is owed both to him and his companion by the miller:

Yet has my felawe somewhat for his harm;

He has the milleris doghter in his arm.(4203-04)

His invocation of the proverb "'Unhardy is unseely'" (4210) several lines later suggests that John cannot differentiate between the act he is about to commit and any other that will bring a "reward". The proverb's call to action also implies that John has placed the wife/woman in the realm of an unknown territory about to be conquered. Hélène Cixous defines this aspect of the male view of woman more full in "The Laugh of the Medusa":

For what [men] have said so far, for the  
most part, stems from the opposition  
activity/passivity from the power relation  
between a fantasized obligatory virility  
meant to invade, to colonize, and the  
consequential phantasm of woman as a "dark  
continent" to penetrate and to 'pacify'. (247)

Thus, in this scene the wife/woman is presented as spectacle once again, since she ultimately enjoys what is undoubtedly a

rape, while the medieval audience watches and condemns her. Even without the context of the rape, the text still relies on the medieval belief that a woman enjoys sex regardless of the circumstances, since John's performance can hardly be giving her physical pleasure: "He priketh harde and depe as he were made" (4231).

It is at the end of the tale that the image of the woman as grotesque (as represented by the wife) reaches a climax. The wife, who throughout the tale has been ridiculed and transformed into grotesque female spectacle by her own insistence that she does not belong in the bourgeoisie (a fact easily demonstrated to the medieval audience by her sexual appetite and stupidity), becomes even more ridiculous at the end of the tale. Her utter confusion when she is woken by her husband and Aleyn, who tumble on top of her during their fight, is used to mock her:

And with the fal out of hir sleep she breyde.

"Help! hooly croys of Bromeholm," she seyde,

"In manus tuas! Lord, to thee I calle!

Awak, Symond! The feend is on me falle.

Myn herte is broken; help! I nam but deed!

Ther lyth oon upon my wombe and on myn heed.

Help, Symkyn, for the false clerkes fighte!"

(4285-91)

This speech works on several levels to highlight the grotesque nature of the wife. Firstly, it demonstrates her stupidity, which has already received attention in the tale.

She is completely unaware of the events which have transpired, including her own rape. Secondly, her social pretensions are at issue, since her invocation of Christ's words on the cross is inappropriate to her on all levels. Finally, it is her cries which wake the second clerk, and prompt him to take action.

The wife's indiscriminate, mad behavior which follows her speech further presents her as spectacle:

And by that light she saugh hem bothe two,  
 But sikerly she nyste who was who,  
 But as she saugh a whit thyng in hir ye.  
 And whan she gan this white thyng espye,  
 She wende the clerk hadde wered a volupeer,  
 And with the staf she drow ay neer and neer,  
 And wende han hit this Aleyn at the fulle,  
 And smoot the millere on the pyled skulle.

(4299-4306)

This scene does not appear in appear in any of the analogues to the "Reeve's Tale". For example, rather than going on a mad rampage, the wife in Le Meunier et les II clers is given the more favourable role of reprimanding her husband for his suspicion that she was deliberately unfaithful, and for his thievery (313-20). Moreover, as I observed above, the wife in The Decameron (9.6) is commended by one of the clerks for her cool head because she avoided any violence by convincing convincing her husband that he had dreamt the entire scenario. Any potentially positive elements in the ending

of the story, however, are erased in the "Reeve's Tale". This removal of any positive vestiges in the depiction of Chaucer's wife is summarized by the narrator's final comment on the wife. Like the narrator of the "Miller's Tale", the narrator of the "Reeve's Tale" reminds the audience of woman's proper role beneath her husband: "Thus is the proude millere wel ybete.../His wyf is swyved" (4313-17).

The wife in the "Reeve's Tale" ostensibly deserves the indignity thrust upon her by the narrator, for making a spectacle of herself by transgressing the codes of her gender and her class. These female transgressions are stated and finally condemned even more explicitly in the figure of her daughter, Malyne.

As in the case of Alison in the "Miller's Tale", much of Malyne's grotesque nature is rooted in her lecherous character. In the depiction of Malyne, however, more emphasis is given to the link between female sexuality and the bourgeois female. Tamarah Kohanski notes that Malyne is repeatedly called a "wench" (3973, 4167, 4178, 4193, 4194), a word evocative of "loose morality", and used in the Middle Ages to denote a lowborn woman or a servant (7). Alison, the adulterous and lecherous wife in the "Miller's Tale", is also called a wench (3254), while Chaucer's "Manciple's Tale" actually contains an explanation of the use of the word:

But that the gentile, in estaat above,  
 She shal be cleped his lady, as in love;  
 And for that oother is a povre womman,

She shal be cleped his wenche or his lemman.

(217-20)

The fact that a condemnatory judgment has been reserved for the overtly sexual peasant female in the form of Malyne is expressed not only through Aleyn's disdainful use of the word, when he says that "yon wenche will I swyve" (4178), but through its application by the narrator, in his description of the rape of Malyne:

And up he rist, and by the wenche he crepte.

This wenche lay uprighte and faste slepte,

Til he so ny was, er she myghte espie,

That it had been to late for to crie

And shortly for to seyn, they were aton.

(4193-97)

The narrator's continued use of the word wench, even after Aleyn has inadvertently and unpleasantly contextualized it, implies that he condones the clerk's treatment of the young woman. The narrator's acceptance of the rape encourages the audience to accept the premise that, because all lower-class women possess a voracious sexual appetite, a man is perfectly within his right to be sexually aggressive with any one of them. This idea of the narrator's complicity is taken further by Kathryn Gravdal in her discussion of rape in the medieval genre of pastourelle. Following Freud's premise that the "text (the dirty joke)...constitutes an act of sexual aggression performed by the teller on behalf of one listener and at the expense of another (the woman)",



Gravdal notes that "the rape scenes of the pastourelle would be an act of sexual aggression on the part of the medieval poet who...would like to 'rape' the female listener on behalf of the male audience" (109). Implicit in this argument as well is the idea that woman is deliberately posited as Other.

The division between the levels of sexuality in aristocratic and peasant women also accounts for the parodic inclusion in Malyne's description of two standard features of the romance heroine: "eyen greye as glas" (3974) and fair hair (3976), amidst the more stereotypically peasant-like features. The inclusion of these other features, the "buttokes brode and brestes rounde and hye" (3975), encapsulates the "titillating ambivalences of eroticism": woman is at once a creature who arouses desire and who must be condemned for it. Once again a woman is physically inspected and investigated by the more powerful male figure, in an attempt to demystify her mystery. Furthermore, the combination of features from both classes also reveals the inversion from high to low that is an inherent condition of the grotesque, and which suggests that Malyne is operating outside her acceptable role as a submissive, sexless female.

After her description, Malyne does not figure prominently in the tale until Aleyn decides that, to shorten the "lange" night, "yon wenche wil I swyve" (4178). As we have noted in the context of the "Miller's Tale", the Middle English verb, "swyve", is a sexual act performed by men on

the female body. The fact that critics are unwilling to examine the implication of the lack of mutuality inherent in the word, even in the context of the "Reeve's Tale", is illustrated in Robert Worth Frank's definition in relation to Malyne: "'raped' is too strong and 'seduced' is too kind" (59). Since the concepts of a "seductive rape" or a "forceful seduction" are oxymorons, the term "rape" will be used here.

Aleyn's speech of justification for his rape of Malyne deserves to be quoted in full:

Som esement has lawe yshapen us,  
 For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus:  
 That gif a man in a point be agreved,  
 That in another he sal be releved.  
 Our corn is stoln, sothly, it is na nay,  
 And we han had an il fit al this day;  
 And syn I sal have need amendement  
 Again my los, I will have esement. (4179-86)

One of the most striking aspects of the passage is its heavy reliance on the law. With his use of legal terminology, the narrator is trying to set up a system whereby his audience will be able to translate the rape as an act deserved by Malyne. The need to recuperate Aleyn's crime was rooted in the rape laws of the high Middle Ages. The Statute of Westminster II (1285), for example, while it was certainly not always stringently enforced, "imposed the penalty of death or dismemberment for the illegal, forcible intercourse

with any female, regardless of class or marital status" (Carter 153; my emphasis). John Marshall Carter also notes that both the accused rapist and his victim were almost invariably members of the lower classes (155). The Statute of Westminster and others like it represent the theoretical consideration of rape; actual documented rape cases reveal that it was the community as jury who had the power to decide whether or not a particular rape was to be viewed as a felony, with the accompanying punishment, or as a less serious crime (Carter 154). Thus, it is essential that the medieval audience (the community) view Aleyn's rape as the proper punishment for Malyne. Like her mother, however, Malyne has done nothing to the clerks to merit such treatment. Instead, as I mentioned above, the two young men feel their behavior is exempted on the grounds that they are "quyting" the miller. Malyne, with her father's camus nose (3934; 3974), is an extension of the paternal figure. This relation between father and daughter, however, does not seem to be sufficient justification for the rape. Malyne, like her mother, deserves the treatment finally because of her inherently grotesque nature. Grotesque, here, in the sense of non-male Other. Thus, Aleyn's above speech acknowledges that he views woman as less than human, since the one he is actually "screwing" is the miller.

Finally, Malyne is posited as a grotesque figure during the post-coital farewell scene with Aleyn (4234-4256). R.E. Kaske has recognized in this episode the parody of the

courtly aube or dawn-song, where two lovers--a knight and his lady--are urged to part by a nightwatchman (296). This parodic framework explains what would otherwise be a complete reversal on the part of Aleyn and his medieval opinion of the bourgeois woman. Aleyn's reason for departure is hardly romantic--he had "swonken al the longe nyght" (4235)--and, as Kaske points out, this is hardly akin to the lover's more sentimental attitude in the aube (305). The absence of sentimentality on the part of Aleyn is again based on his view of women, the view which permeates the tale: that woman's nature is such that she deserves whatever pain she receives. Malyne's one and only speech reveals this nature:

"Now, deere lemman," quod she, "go, far weel!  
 But er thow go, o thyng I wol thee telle:  
 Whan that thou wendest homward by the melle,  
 Right at the entree of the dore bihynde  
 Thou shalt a cake of half a busshel fynde  
 That was ymaked of thyn owene mele,  
 Which that I heelp my sire for to stele.  
 And, good lemman, God thee save and kepe!"  
 And with that word almoost she gan to wepe.  
 (4240-48)

Unlike the wife/mother, Malyne participates in her father's crime. By revealing this fact to the audience, Malyne's grotesque nature is expressed on two levels: firstly, and most obviously, she is not honest; secondly, her admission

of guilt and offer of help to a man who has used her to avenge himself against her father betrays both family duties and her own gullibility. Malyne does not deserve the love granted to the upper-class female in the aube, since as a bourgeois woman her worth is purely sexual.

The most important line of the parodic scene is the narrator's observation that Malyne "almost" began to weep because of her "lover's" imminent departure. Kaske reads the use of the word "almost" as a parodic "anticlimax, in the context of Malyne's preceding speech, and comic litotes by comparison with what might be expected of the lady in an aube" (306). Malyne's inability to cry serves to underscore the difference between the lower-class and the aristocratic woman: Malyne is lacking the "sensibilities" of the courtly woman. Thus, the narrator's final mention of the woman reiterates her essentially sexual nature, when, like her mother and Alison in the "Miller's Tale", Malyne's role in the story is summarized with the disempowering verb "swyved" (4317).

Finally, the depictions of Malyne and her mother are contingent upon their lower-class status. The aube parody in particular reveals that had the two women belonged to the aristocracy, their roles in the tale would have been radically different. Instead, they are locked in the world where women can be raped and mocked for no reason other than their gender.

#### Chapter 4: "Merchant's Tale"

Leigh A. Arrathoon, in her article "'For craft is al, whoso that do it kan': The Genre of 'The Merchant's Tale'", argues that this tale can be read as a text on medieval marriage:

But the devices of this tale, especially its allegorical elements, lead us to the partial recovery of a lost culture, for we learn just about everything Chaucer and his public knew and believed about marriage. (243)

At the same time, then, the "Merchant's Tale" reveals medieval views on woman. Unlike the tales by the Miller and the Reeve, the "Merchant's Tale" relies openly on the antifeminist discourse of the Middle Ages, overtly setting up opposing paradigms of woman, and placing the figure of May in the category of the "bad" woman. This is easily managed through the figure of January, who allows his lust to create a single--rather than a dual--image of woman. The old man rejects the misogynist and misogynist teachings of Theophrastus, in favour of the concept of a woman who is molded in the image of the Virgin Mary (or Griselda). As if this were not enough, January's two counselors, Placebus and Justinus, further discuss the pros and cons of marriage/woman. The image of woman that is finally allowed to emerge in the figure of May is that of the female grotesque in its most common form: the woman-on-top.

In its negative representation, the woman-on-top is the

inversion of what medieval society deemed appropriate female behavior, which was exemplified and exaggerated in a figure like the clerk's Patient Griselda. At the same time, of course, May is to act as the Bakhtinian "bodily grave of man" where she serves as "a foil to his avarice, jealousy, stupidity, hypocrisy, bigotry, sterile senility" (96). Typically, this woman-on-top effect would be achieved, on the most obvious level, when the female character in the tale throws off the sexual shackles imposed by her aged husband--and by societal strictures--to commit adultery with a handsome young man, while simultaneously exposing the flaws of her husband. The depiction of May as a grotesque character would therefore depend on the medieval dialogue that exists between what Percy calls "concepts of a rationalistic utopian society at one extreme, and its subversion by the forces of irrationality and depravity at the other" (334). The woman is posited in this dialogue as the symbol of all that is irrational and depraved because her behavior directly contradicts the medieval paradigm of the good woman.

Conversely, the positive image of the woman-on-top would be represented in medieval thought through the "punishing aspect" of the strong woman, as an allegorical figuration of the Virgin or the Church. Emerson Brown has demonstrated that this type of woman can be seen in the relationship between Pluto and Proserpina in the "Merchant's Tale", where the king of the underworld cedes control to his wife ("I yeve it up" 2312):

This Triumph of a woman over the ruler of the underworld is a central theme in the Christian view of human history. After the Fall, the Lord assured the serpent that "I will put enmities ~~between~~ thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel" (Gen. 3:15). This mulier is interpreted as the Church or Virgin, and the promise is fulfilled when Mary gave birth to the redeemer. ("Biblical Women" 409)

Arrathoon follows Brown's interpretation of Proserpina in relation to May:

It is the theme of the strong woman triumphant over the male deserving punishment which ties together the allusion in this narrative to Rebecca, Abigail, Judith, Esther, Sara, and the Sponsa of Canticles with the fabliau action of Chaucer's tale: May's triumph over Januarie. (277)

Arrathoon further argues that in a reading of May as a type of the Virgin/Church, the negative qualities attributed to her in the tale itself can be totally disregarded, on the grounds that a man like the Merchant, with his cynical and blasphemous attitude towards the Old Testament--reflected in the words of the foolish January--cannot be trusted:

Chaucer's listeners certainly would not have put their trust in a narrator who was



so deeply plunged into the sin of ire that

it clouded his vision of holy Scripture.(266-68)

This complete rejection of the misogyny in the text beyond its immediate function to expose the vices of January seems too easy, particularly in light of the fact that the sources from which the negative image of woman is gleamed were part of medieval cultural thought. The "Merchant's Tale", then, rather than rejecting all medieval antifeminism, uses it to simultaneously disempower the image of the "triumphant woman" it seeks to glorify. In other words, a woman who exhibits activity, an inherent characteristic of the grotesque woman-on-top, which Hélène Cixous has noted is part of the male domain ("Sorties" 64), must be controlled, and her actions placed in the realm of the abnormal. The potential for rebellion against society, inherent in this image of the uncontrolled female grotesque (May), must then be subverted within the text. The narrator exhibits the need to disempower Cato's proverb, mentioned in the tale, lest it come true: "Suffre thy wyves tonge, as Catoun bit; She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it" (1377-78). The subversion of the female is achieved in the "Merchant's Tale" through the continuous undercutting of the image of the woman-on-top, of the powerful female, by affirming the ultimate control of the male. This debunking of the image of the woman in control is also managed through the evocation of a series of negative expectations about female behavior. The Merchant's expectations are essential to the

narrative thrust of the tale, and especially to its closure. May must fulfill these expectations in order that January, as the target of the unhappily married narrator, can receive the punishment he deserves for his mistaken belief that a wife is her husband's "paradys terrestre" (1332), and for his antidoctrinal emphasis on the equation of lust and the holy institution of marriage. Again, May must also fulfill these expectations in order that her image never become too powerful. These expectations are first introduced in the prologue to the tale, before the audience is even aware of May's existence.

In the prologue to his tale, the Merchant recalls the medieval dichotomous view of woman through the contrasting depictions of his wife and the figure of Griselda from the preceding "Clerk's Tale":

I have a wyf, the worste that may be;  
 For thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,  
 She wolde hym overmacche, I dar wel swere.  
 What sholde I yow reherce in special  
 Hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al.  
 Ther is a long and large difference  
 Bitwix Grisildis grete pacience  
 And of my wyf the passyng crueltee.  
 Were I unbounden, also moot I thee,  
 I wolde nevere eft comen in the snare. (1218-27)

Thus, on one side sits the figure of Griselda, a type of the Virgin, who embodies what were considered the positive

qualities of a medieval woman: patience, loyalty, modesty, and an understanding of her position at the bottom of the sexual hierarchy. Conversely, there is the Merchant's wife, who is aggressive and forceful. The "snare" represented by woman here directly recalls Valerius' warning to his besotted friend. To introduce the tale by polarizing Griselda, a "personified abstraction" according to Robertson (250), and the ostensibly "real" figure of the Merchant's wife, creates a conflict between the behavioral possibilities of an idealized version of womanhood, and those of an actual woman. As the text demonstrates through the example of the Merchant's wife, "real" women can only operate within the discourse of the grotesque female. There is no happy medium between these strictly polarized concepts of woman.

Within the body of the "Merchant's Tale" the role of the grotesque female appointed to the Merchant's wife in the prologue is reassigned to May, as another descendant of that archetypal (female) troublemaker, Eve. The role of the idealized Griselda is naturally given to the Virgin Mary. The tale itself now becomes a playground where the female oscillates between these two rigidly constructed images of woman. Just as he promised in the prologue to the tale, the narrator will use his bipartite construction of woman to effectively control May. She will be forced to remain within her dictated niche, since there is no other option in a system where women are permitted to exist only within the

sharply-defined categories of "good" and "evil". It now remains to locate and to explore the specific characteristics evoked within the text which reaffirm the sexual hierarchy.

Both Wentersdorf ("Imagery" 41-42) and Mann (64-67) have discussed the rape motif that is manifested throughout the "Merchant's Tale". Rape, of course, is the obvious manifestation of male power over the female, as I observed in the context of the Reeve's tale. The first instance provided by Wentersdorf occurs when January gives himself over to fantasy as he waits to bed his new bride:

This Januarie is ravysshed in a traunce  
At every tyme he looked on hir face;  
But in his herte he gan hire to manace  
That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne  
Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne. (1750-54)

Wentersdorf also notes the implication of rape in the reference to Priapus in the Merchant's description of January's garden (2034). The myth of Priapus' rape of Lotis was well-known in the Middle Ages, and is even mentioned in the Parliament of Fowls (253). A third suggestion of rape, discussed by both Wentersdorf and Mann, appears when the figures of Pluto and Proserpina are introduced:

Pluto, that is kyng of Fayerye,  
And many a lady in his compaignye,  
Folwyng his wyf, the queene Proserpyna,  
Which that he ravysshed out of [Ethna]. (2227-30)

Wentersdorf and Mann have explained away the presence of these allusions as either the symbol of "the harsh truth of an unnatural union between a naive and libidinous dotard and a lusty wench" ("Imagery" 42) or the "ironic reversal in the relation of predator and victim" (Mann 65). The textual allusions to rape actually function to remind the audience that all power lies, both literally and figuratively, in male hands, and that the female body remains under the dominion of the male. The fact that this reiteration of male power can occur in a tale whose primary function is to debase a male figure suggests that this further debasing of the female serves to remind the audience of the established gender hierarchy of the society.

The repeated references to rape are used to reaffirm the tale's subtext of woman as grotesque Other. Another manner in which this effect is achieved is through May's silence. Firstly, she is not even mentioned in the first 350 lines of the "Merchant's Tale". When she finally does appear, it is as a nameless, faceless, voiceless entity, whom January has chosen to be his bride: "He atte laste apoynted hym on oon" (1595). May does not actually speak until the tale is nearly over, when, as she goes to meet her lover, she assures her now-blind husband that she will always be faithful:

"I have," quod she, "a soule for to kepe  
 As wel as ye, and also myn honour,  
 And of my wyfhod thilke tendre flour,  
 Which that I have assured in youre hond,

Whan that the preest to yow my body bond;  
 Wherefore I wole answere in this manere,  
 By the leve of yow, my lord so deere:  
 I prey to God that nevere dawe the day  
 That I ne sterve, as foule as womman may,  
 If evere I do unto my kyn that shame,  
 Or elles I empeyre so my name,  
 That I be fals; and if I do that lak,  
 Do strepe me and put me in a sak,  
 And in the nexte ryver do me drenche.  
 I am a gentil womman and no wenche.  
 Why speke ye thus? But men been evere untrewē,  
 And wommen have repreve of yow ay newe.  
 Ye han noon oother contenance, I leeve,  
 But speke to us of untrust and repreeve."  
 (2188-2206)

At this point it should hardly be surprising that May here connects her faithfulness with her social class (2202). May, of course, is not a "gentil womman", but a member of the lower class. The narrator gives careful emphasis to her low social status when January announces to his friends that her has chosen a bride:

He seyde ther was a mayden in the toun,  
 Which that of beautee hadde greet renoun,  
 Al were it so she were of smal degree.  
 (1623-25)

Again, in the depiction of May we have a connection between

social class and sexual behavior. May is a wench and she is lecherous.

May's entire speech is based on lies. In her discussion on female silence and speech in medieval French texts, Edith Joyce Benkov notes that such works, especially the Old French fabliaux, operated on the precept that it was foolish to trust the speech of women, whose "manipulation of language and...skillful ways of blending truth and lies appear as constant sources of worry and even danger in both romance and fabliau alike" (245). Benkov points out that this belief in the danger of female speech is manifested in "medieval didactic treatises and courtesy literature" (246), and reflected in a work like La Borgoise d'Orliens, a popular fabliau where the wife plays with language to hide an adulterous act from her suspicious husband (258-59). While medieval culture associated speech with women, at the same time language was considered a "property to be owned and controlled" by men (Benkov 262). Thus, May's earlier silence, which should be read as "exemplary" female behavior, is undercut by her first speech, where she reveals her deceptive nature, since her words are meant to falsely soothe her jealous husband.

What apparently differentiates May's deceptive speech from that of her literary sister the "Borgoise" is the intervention of Proserpina, and the goddess' decision to provide May with:

suffisant answere,

And alle wommen after, for hir sake,

That, though they be in any gilt ytake,  
 With face boold they shulle hemself excuse,  
 And bere hem doun that wolden hem accuse.

(2266-70)

In light of Benkov's conclusion that men own and control language, Proserpina's "rescue" of May through a gift of speech could be interpreted as a valorization of May's complaint that men have made woman what she is: an untrustworthy adulteress. The difficulty with this argument lies in the fact that, as I noted above, Proserpina's speech is simply affirming her position as the woman-on-top. While Emerson Brown argued that Proserpina represented the positive allegorical representation of the dominant female, there is really nothing in the goddess's speech to warrant such a view. In fact, Proserpina's speech seems to operate on the level that woman is incapable of escaping her destiny as sister of Eve. Proserpina's speech, at a lengthy 46 lines, proves that female are "jangleresses". Also, her reference to women whose truth, goodness and virtue depended on "martirdom" to prove "hire constance" (2281-83) reflects negatively on her own myth, since she does not opt for suicide.

Furthermore, scholars have variously noted that the figure of May is a parody of the Virgin Mary, based primarily on January's paraphrase, in lines 2138-48, of the "Canticum Canticorum" (Bleeth 55; Wurtele 67). Mary's task, of course, was to bring forth the Word made flesh. The



relationship between Proserpina and May becomes an inversion of the sacred relationship between God and Mary, since "the word" Proserpina gives to May is hardly a life-sustaining gift but rather a weapon with which to "bere [men] doun" (2270). Moreover, Proserpina's promise to May is unnecessary; in her first speech May has already demonstrated her ability to dissemble in the female tradition. Proserpina is thereby again made to prove Solomon's accusation. Her comment, "...nedes moot I speke,/Or elles swelle til myn herte breke" (2305-6), is more antifeminist jargon, no less harmful because it has been placed in a female mouth.

May's role as woman-on-top has been demonstrated through the control she exerts over her husband as the figure of his debasement. At the same time, her own simultaneous disempowerment has been revealed through the various allusions to rape in the text, and through the tale's emphasis on woman's deceptive nature, exemplified in her speech. Nowhere in the "Merchant's Tale", however, are the ambiguities of the image of the woman-on-top so apparent as in the final scene.

May literally becomes the woman-on-top when she climbs onto the back of her husband to reach her lover waiting in the pear tree, a move she initiates:

"But wolde ye vouche sauf, for Goddes sake,  
The pyrie inwith youre armes for to take,  
For wel I woot that ye mystruste me,  
Thanne sholde I clymbe wel ynogh," quod she,

"So I my foot myghte sette upon youre bak."

"Certes," quod he, "theron shal be no lak,  
Mighte I yow helpen with myn herte blood."

He stoupeth down, and on his bak she stood,  
And caughte hire by a twiste, and up she gooth--  
(2341-2350)

Moreover, her pretext for climbing the tree is to gather a few "smale peres grene" (2333), an action which, as Kenneth Bleeth observes, reveals May's pregnancy through a parodic recollection of a similar action performed by the Virgin in the Ludus Coventriae cycle and the "Cherry-Tree Carol" ("Joseph's Doubting" 58). May's position on top of her husband, combined with her pregnancy, combine to form a classic picture of the female grotesque: the woman-on-top, complete with distended belly, who inverts the sexual hierarchy to expose the follies of her husband.

May is further allowed to flaunt her position when she convinces January that she is not committing adultery in front of him:

"Ye, sire," quod she, "ye may wene as yow lest.  
But, sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep,  
He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep  
Upon a thyng, ne seen it parfitly,  
Til that he be adawed verrailly.  
Right so a man that longe hath blynd ybe,  
Ne may nat sodeynly so wel yse,  
First whan his sighte is newe come ageyn,  
As he that hath a day or two yseyn."

Til that youre sighte ysatled be a while  
 Ther may ful many a sighte ycw bigile.  
 Beth war, I prey yow, for by hevene kyng,  
 Ful many a man weneth to seen a thyng,  
 And it is al another than it semeth.

He that mysconceyveth, he mysdemeth." (2396-2410)

Had the tale ended here, May's function as the positive figuration of the woman-on-top could possibly have been argued with some validity. In fact, this is the standard reading of May's final position in the tale: that it is she, and not January, who comes out "on top", because she, like Eve, has successfully fooled man (Olson 212-13; Bleeth, "Joseph's Doubting" 64; Wentersdorf, "Imagery" 54). Unfortunately, the tale continues. The misogynist narrator cannot allow the tale to close with the sexual hierarchy inverted. To do so would suggest that in certain circumstances woman could possess authority and validity. Rather, the narrator wishes to contain and control woman by keeping her in her role as grotesque. She has served her purpose--the mockery of an old man foolish enough to believe in good women--and must now be returned to her rightful position below the male. This final return to "order" occurs in the last paragraph of the tale:

This Januarie, who is glad but he?  
 He kisseth hire and clippeth hire ful ofte,  
 And on hire wombe he stroketh hire ful softe,  
 And to his palays hoom he hath hire lad. (2412-15)

On the most obvious level, May has once again been slotted into a passive role: January assumes control by forcibly leading his wife home, and she has no choice but to follow. While she can probably continue her affair with Damyan, she must still endure the old knight's lechery, as a good wife should. January's stroking hand on May's womb, or perhaps on an even more intimate part of her body (Robbins 3-6), forcibly reminds the audience that woman stands beneath man in the sexual hierarchy. At the same time, January's gesture exposes the female body to the probing male gaze, and once again reduces woman to grotesque Other, or what Dorothy Dinnerstein calls "the carnal scapegoat-idol" (124).

Finally, in spite of her role as the "bodily grave of man" (or perhaps because of it), woman in the "Merchant's Tale" is figured as the antithesis of all that is "worthy" in humanity. What is "worthy" or "good", in fact, becomes an unattainable goal for woman. It is this element of unattainableness that differentiates the sexes in the "Merchant's Tale". Obviously the figure of January is not portrayed in any more positive a light than May. Wentersdorf has stated it is this "balance" that makes Chaucer's tale unique in the literature of the period:

What sets "The Merchant's Tale" apart from other anti-feminist writings of the Middle Ages is the fact that the sexuality of young May, leading swiftly to her infidelity, is offset by the sordid manifestation of old January's sexuality. (55)

It is this unique quality of Chaucer's depiction of a man who matches the "evil" character of the female figure in the tale that serves to emphasize my point that the grotesque nature of woman here reflects popular medieval cultural beliefs. January's unpleasant character is not a comment on all medieval men; rather, it is used to make a point about a specific type of man (certainly more specific than ideas of bourgeois womanhood reflected in the construction of May). It is the very pervasiveness of the grotesque image of woman that is argued here, exemplified by the narrator's description of Fortune (a woman), a description which relies on qualities which I have shown are often assigned to woman:

O thou Fortune unstable!

Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,

That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt  
stynge;

Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenymynge.

O brotil joye! O sweete venym queynte!

O monstre, that so subtilly kanst peynte

Thy yiftes under hewe of stidefastnesse,

That thou deceyvest bothe moore and lesse!

(2057-64)

## Chapter 5: "Shipman's Tale"

At 434 lines, the "Shipman's Tale" is the shortest of the fabliaux-based tales in The Canterbury Tales, and the one most like the French type. While there are no direct extant sources for the tale, it maintains most closely the format of an Old French fabliau, with little physical description, and much dialogue (Lawrence 56-7). While the tale has officially been assigned to the Shipman, the feminine pronouns in its introductory lines have led scholars to an almost unanimous belief that the tale was originally intended for a woman:

The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,  
He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye,  
Al for his owene worshipe richely,  
In which array we daunce jolily.  
And if that he noght may, par aventure,  
Or ellis list no swich dispence endure,  
But thynketh it is wasted and ylost,  
Thanne moot another payen for oure cost,  
Or lene us gold, and that is perilous. (11-19)

The tone of the introduction recalls the Wife of Bath's prologue, and it is again generally assumed that the original narrator of the tale could only have been Alison (Lawrence 58). This attribution of the introduction of the "Shipman's Tale" to the Wife is relevant only to give a logical context to the discussion of the "array" (12), since the accusation of excessive female interest in attire has

long been part of misogynist discourse, from Tertullian's "The Apparel of Women" to the early fifteenth-century work by France's Christine de Pisan (Labarge 144). In fact, the first twenty lines of the "Shipman's Tale" introduce the discourse that will be elaborated throughout the work.

In 1953, Albert H. Silverman proposed that it is the "identification of sex with money [that] informs the entire tale in a meaningful way" (331). Silverman's suggestion has never been questioned seriously, despite the fact that the text explicitly connects economics and the female body, rather than the more abstract (and neutral) concept of sex. Once this more specific program is acknowledged as the guiding force behind the tale, we can begin to examine the repercussions for the figure of the wife.

This idea that woman is a marketable commodity is hardly unique to the "Shipman's Tale"; its pervasiveness in medieval culture has already been briefly touched upon in previous chapters. What has not been acknowledged or examined, however, is the universality of this belief (at least within Western culture). In "Women on the Market", Luce Irigaray explores what can be called the discourse of woman-as-object of exchange, through an emphasis on its construction and perpetuation by a male-dominated culture, or what she calls "the reign of ho(m)mo-sexuality":

all the systems of exchange that organize  
patriarchal societies and all the modalities  
that are recognized, valued, and rewarded  
in these societies are men's business. The

production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he "pays" the father or the brother, not the mother...), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. (171)

Thus, the grotesque nature of woman arises from the tale's underlining of the behavioral patterns of a woman caught in a system of relations where she is solely a commodity. This discourse of female body/commodity will be examined in order to contextualize the words and actions of the wife as a female grotesque.

The placement of the (nameless) merchant's wife in a dialogue of exchange first occurs at the outset of the tale, in a structural incorporation. She is introduced directly after the narrator has emphasized the merchant's chief characteristic of monetary wealth:

A marchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys,  
That riche was, for which men helde hym wys.  
A wyf he hadde of excellent beautee. (1-3)

Not only does the word "wyf" follow "rich", but the structure of the third line reveals that the wife, as the direct object of the sentence, has been categorized as one of her husband's possessions. The fact that the wife is particularly beautiful also suggests that the merchant probably paid a considerable sum to "acquire" her on the marriage market. The passage continues to put a price on



female beauty, as one of the necessary feature of a "good" wife (11-13). It is worth noting here that these "motifs" of paying a price for a woman and putting a price on one also appear in the respective tales by the Miller and the Merchant. While Absolon does not offer to marry Alison, he does attempt to "buy" her favors: "And, for she was of town, he profred meede" (3380). The idea that marriage is a market-place is expressly stated in the "Miller's Tale", when the narrator compares January's pre-marital sexual flights of fancy to a polished mirror which has been set in "a commune market-place" (1583). This metaphor is actually instituted earlier in the tale, when January uses the terms of the butcher-shop to list the qualifications of a wife: "oold fissh", "yong flessch", "pyk", "pykere1", "old boef" and "tendre veel" (1416-20). These quotations serve to demonstrate the fact that woman is less than human; an object to be used by the man to improve his social status.

Equally important to the reductive and grotesque construction of woman in the "Merchant's Tale" is the time and energy this dismissal of the female allows him to dispend on his relationships with other men. As Irigaray observes:

ho(m)mo-sexuality is played out through  
the bodies of women, matter, or sign,  
and heterosexuality has been up to now  
just an alibi for the smooth workings of  
man's relations with himself, of relations  
among men. ("Women" 172)

Irigaray further explains that because the process of exchange is controlled by men, it "requires homosexuality as its organizing principle" ("Commodities" 192). The "Shipman's Tale", which centres upon an exclusively male system of exchange, itself depends upon the homosexual relationship between the merchant and the monk. (Homosexual, in this context, need not necessarily mean a physical relationship between two men, only the complete exclusion of the female).

The (non)value of woman in the tale, based on her role as object-of-exchange, is underlined by the space devoted to the relationship between the merchant and daun John. The audience is first told that their friendship grew out of a shared background:

And for as muchel as this goode man,  
And eek this monk of which that I bigan,  
Were bothe two yborn in o village,  
The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage,  
And he agayn. (33-37)

Furthermore, for the merchant "it was a greet plesaunce" (39) that they were "knyt with eterne alliaunces" (40). The apparent affinity between the two men contrasts sharply with the dismissive treatment accorded the wife.

When the merchant invites John to his home before he travels to Bruges, no mention is made of the wife for the two days that the men "ete and drynke and pleye" (73). This exclusive male-bonding ritual is repeated later in the tale, immediately before the monk's departure:

They drynke, and speke, and rome a while and  
pleye,

Til that daun John rideth to his abbeye. (297-98)

The word "pleye", which occurs in both citations, has as one of its meanings to "have sexual intercourse" (Benson 1277.2). Chaucer also uses the verb in its erotic context in the Romaunt of the Rose (B 4827) and in the "Merchant's Tale" (1841). Its repetition in the "Shipman's Tale" underscores the homoerotic element in the relationship between the two men. In fact, both passages serve to illustrate that there is no room for the female in a "man's world", of speech and drink. The wife's complete absence from the tale up to this point serves to emphasize her exclusion from this world, and her marginalized, Other role in the text.

When the wife first appears in the text, she is seen walking in the garden, accompanied by a young girl, "which as hir list she may governe and gye" (96). On one level, this description further points out the difference between men and women: not only does the woman seek company with another female, but she is physically removed from the men and their games. Furthermore, her location in a garden recalls the image of woman (represented by the Virgin) as hortus conclusus, which again reiterates the difference between the sexes, where woman is literally closed off. If the woman, then, actually does leave the house to spend the hundred francs, the text makes no mention of it. Conversely,

the monk, as an outrider, is able to roam "wyde" (66) on his business for the abbey, and is obviously free to visit the merchant. The chapman not only has his friendship with John, but during the course of the story travels both to Brussels and to Paris. Thus, the lesson to be learned by the little girl will most likely be on the different rules society has constructed for each sex.

This lesson is delivered effectively by the monk, with his intrusive remark touching the sex life of his "niece":

I trowe, certes, that oure goode man

Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan. (107-8)

The insinuating laugh that follows illustrates John's unconcern with the nature of his comment. In fact, the noise of the laughter can be compared to what Hélène Cixous calls the "commotion of the phallic stance" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 262). The monk knows that he stands at the top of a sexual hierarchy: has not the merchant allows his friend to be "in his hous as famulier.../As it is possible for any [male] freende to be?" (31-32). The monk is perpetuating the devaluation of the wife that has been an inherent part of the text since its inception, through his assumption of a husbandly--and therefore more powerful--role (Woods 144). The sudden reddening of John's face reveals his excitement at the lewd thoughts his own comment has inspired. This flush, coupled with the sudden stare he turns upon her (124), demonstrates the monk's complete disregard for the wife: it is not she who turns him on, but rather his own words and thoughts.

depended on a strong female figure who was not afraid to stand up for her beliefs. At the same time that the merchant's wife wants to speak, however, she is aware that her survival depends on her silence. To speak, as the lives of woman saints have shown her, is to die. There is, however, a price to her silence, as she has earlier lamented:

"For I may singe 'allas and weylawey  
That I was born,' but to no wight," quod she,  
"Dar I nat telle how that it stant with me.  
Wherfore I thynke out of this land to wende,  
Or elles of myself to make an ende,  
So ful am I of drede and eek of care." (118-23)

Scholars, when they have bothered to address the wife's threats of departure and suicide, have mostly interpreted her words as simply part of a "[habitual] language of exaggeration" (McGalliard 5). Within the context of her isolation in a male-centered system of exchange, the wife's desperate suggestions and her despairing tone are justifiable expressions of the pain her silence has caused. When the monk combines his sexual pass with a falsely sympathetic ear (156-57), the wife knows how she must respond: she has to inject herself into the dialogue of female body/commodity if she wants to be heard. McGalliard has noted that the wife is given more functional dialogue than either the monk or the merchant (5). Most of that dialogue is futile: no one in the tale responds to any of

the monk to the wife; therefore, she becomes his property, and he can embrace her as "harde" and as often as he likes. In his first speech to the wife, the monk disempowers her by adopting the role of husband in a typical medieval marriage, where, as Sheila Delany has observed in another context, "woman remains, structurally, the exchanged item" (164).

In the first dialogue between the merchant and his wife, in the course of which he advises his spouse on how she must behave in his absence, the woman is reduced through a parodic intertextual reliance on the biblical figure of the ideal wife, the mulier fortis of Proverbs 31:10-31 (Coletti 172):

...my deere wyf, I thee biseke,  
 As be to every wight buxom and meke,  
 And for to kepe oure good be curious,  
 And honestly governe wel oure hous.  
 Thou hast ynough, in every maner wise,  
 That to a thrifty household may suffise.  
 Thee lakketh noon array ne no vitaille;  
 Of silver in thy purs shaltow nat faille."

(241-48)

It is worth noting that, regardless of the "spirit" behind the image of the mulier fortis, the passage from Proverbs is echoed by didactic treatises from the Middle Ages, including one on wifely behavior by the *Ménagier* of Paris (Labarge 28). Thus, Coletti observes that the merchant's adjuration to his wife to guard "our good" is an ironic echo of the

biblical passage, which "explains how a wife contributes to the dignity of her husband", since it foreshadows the affair between his spouse and the monk (176). Therefore, the merchant, like the narrator and the monk before him, posits the wife as merchandise. In addition, the audience is not allowed to forget the stake the merchant has claimed in the good/wife through his role as husband, by prefacing the word with the possessive pronoun "our". This suggestion of the merchant's proprietorship is repeated again in the tale, when the chapman offers his "chaffare" to John (285).

The suggestion that the wife is disempowered through the merchant's speech can be countered by the argument that the husband actually passes the reigns of power to his spouse by giving her control not only of the household, but also of his business (Scattergood 218). This would hardly be a unique situation: merchants' wives often helped their husbands in their business dealings (Uitz 24). Furthermore, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Christine de Pisan wrote on the "family nature" of all aspects of trades, and the importance of the wife learning all aspects of her husband's work (167-68). A closer look at the "Shipman's Tale", however, belies the assertion that the merchant's wife participated in her husband's business.

When the merchant enters his counting-house, he shuts the door "faste" behind him (85), in order that "no man sholde hym lette/Of his accountes" (86-87). When the merchant's wife goes to fetch him at his office, and speaks

disparagingly of his "somes...bookes...and things" (217), her husband informs her that she has no understanding of their financial difficulties:

"Wyf," quod this man, "litel kanstow devyne

The curious bisynesse that we have. (224-25)

When the merchant leaves the counting-house, he is quite careful to close the door behind him (249), effectively shutting out his wife. Finally, if the merchant expected his wife to conduct his affairs, he would have left her with gold in her purse, instead of silver. As he tells the monk: "But goldlees for to be, it is no game" (290). Scattergood has recalled the wife's speech at the end of the tale to demonstrate that she needs gold, not silver, to pay her debt (218):

"Marie, I deffie the false monk, daun John!

I kepe nat of his tokenes never a deel;

He took me certeyn gold, that woot I weel--

(402-4)

The high value the merchant has assigned to gold as a useful trading tool, combined with the concept of the female body as a marketable commodity, implies that money can be associated with the male. Money, of course, is itself a symbol of power: for the merchant, it is the means to "buy" a showpiece wife; to be mobile, and it is a way to return to sexual potency, as we see at the end of the tale (Woods 147). The monk also obtains power from the availability of money: he buys a sexual liaison with his friend's wife;



and, as an outrider, money is essential to conduct the business affairs of the monastery ("For yet to-nyght thise beestes moot I beye" [278]).

The merchant's financial discussion with John yields a metaphor that conflates the male body with purchasing power:

But o thyng is, ye knowe it wel ynogh

Of chapmen, that hir moneie is hir plogh. (287-88)

The plow is a common phallic symbol. Janette Richardson has uncovered a similar usage of the word in the Middle English fabliau Dame Sirith, and in the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius (109). If language is used to confirm male hegemonic control, it also works to objectify and 'commodify' the wife in the "Shipman's Tale".

This is achieved through the inclusion in the text of several double-entendres which refer back to female genitalia. The first to appear in the tale is "queynte":

And therfore have I greet necessitee

Upon this queynte world t'avyse me. (235-36)

The dual significations of the word, of which the other meaning is simply "tricky", have been interpreted as the merchant's unwitting comment that it is his wife's "commercial attitude towards her 'queynte' that bears investigation" (Richardson 108). The second word to appear in the text is "reconnyssaunce" (330). "Cony", the medieval word signifying either rabbit or female genitalia, is the "etymological excuse for this pun" (Woods 149). The third word, which doubles as both record of account or pudendum,

is "taille" (416). Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued that women "are circulated between clans, lineages, or families, in place of the words of the group, which are circulated between individuals" (61). The words of the anthropologist imply that "the female must be identified with language used by men in the perpetuation of culture" (Gubar 294). The inherent danger in double-entendres, then, like "queynte", "reconnyssaunce" and "taille" lies in their limited focus on a single fragmented part of the female.

While John P. Hermann ignores the linguistic fragmentation of woman in his article on female dismemberment in the "Shipman's Tale", he does note the presence of the pervasive male gaze, as it dismembers the female and scatters her body throughout the text (308). The male fear of woman's sexuality can be neutralized by fetishizing the feared object, and by recuperating that object back into a male-dominated language. As Josette Féral states: "Woman remains the instrument by which man attains unity, and she pays for it at the price of her own dispersion" (7). Thus, the wife in the "Shipman's Tale" has been reminded on all levels of her role as grotesque Other in a male-dominated society. Finally, even the words she herself speaks are tainted.

In her book, Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature, Susan Griffin discusses how the pornographic ideal of woman in society can affect female development:

For since all the structures of power in

her life, and all the voices of authority--  
 the church, the state, society, most likely  
 her own mother and father--reflect pornography's  
 fantasy, if she feels in herself a being who  
 contradicts this fantasy, she begins to  
 believe she herself is wrong. Wordlessly,  
 Even as a small girl, she begins to try to  
 mold herself to fit society's image of what  
 a woman ought to be. And that part of her  
 which contradicts this pornographic image  
 of woman is cast back into silence. (202)

Thus, the wife's attitude towards her body emerges from a  
 text/society that has inscribed the discourse of woman-as-  
 object-of-exchange into its language, in order to perpetuate  
 the power-imbalance between the sexes.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous writes of woman's  
 need to write and speak "herself", to "return to the body  
 which has been more than confiscated from her, which has  
 been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (250).  
 When the wife first appears in the tale, she confesses to  
 the monk a desire to "speak the body":

"Cosyn," quod she, "if that I hadde a space,  
 As I have noon, and namely in this place,  
 Thanne wolde I tell a legende of my lyf,  
 What I have suffred sith I was a wyf." (143-46)

Saints' lives or legends were one of the few literary forms  
 in the Middle Ages that not only focused on women, but which

depended on a strong female figure who was not afraid to stand up for her beliefs. At the same time that the merchant's wife wants to speak, however, she is aware that her survival depends on her silence. To speak, as the lives of woman saints have shown her, is to die. There is, however, a price to her silence, as she has earlier lamented:

"For I may singe 'allas and weylawey  
 That I was born,' but to no wight," quod she,  
 "Dar I nat telle how that it stant with me.  
 Wherefore I thynke out of this land to wende,  
 Or elles of myself to make an ende,  
 So ful am I of drede and eek of care." (118-23)

Scholars, when they have bothered to address the wife's threats of departure and suicide, have mostly interpreted her words as simply part of a "[habitual] language of exaggeration" (McGalliard 5). Within the context of her isolation in a male-centered system of exchange, the wife's desperate suggestions and her despairing tone are justifiable expressions of the pain her silence has caused. When the monk combines his sexual pass with a falsely sympathetic ear (156-57), the wife knows how she must respond: she has to inject herself into the dialogue of female body/commodity if she wants to be heard. McGalliard has noted that the wife is given more functional dialogue than either the monk or the merchant (5). Most of that dialogue is futile: no one in the tale responds to any of

her demands or complaints, and even her request for money is not taken seriously. Moreover, the passage assumed by scholars to represent the expression of the wife's control of her own voice (173-77) is merely a displacement of standard antifeminism, with the emphasis on a woman's greed and lechery. The wife's only venue for expression becomes her body.

The fact that the wife succumbs to the sexual hierarchy is made apparent through an intertextual reliance on a speech made near the end of the Man of Law's epilogue:

And therfore, Hoost, I warne thee birforn,

My joly body schal a tale telle. (1184-85)

Lawrence has argued that the "body" in the speech belongs to the Wife of Bath, not only because the tone is reminiscent of that character, but because the utterance appears to be echoed in the "Shipman's Tale", her original story (66). This line in the "Shipman's Tale" is spoken by the merchant's wife, who says, as she lies in bed with her husband at the end of the tale:

Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;

By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde! (423-24)

Hermann has pointed out that, in this final scene, the wife's body becomes "an object to be written upon", as her "taille" is slashed by the penis/pen of her husband (312):

For I wol paye yow wel and redily

Fro day to day, and if so be I faille,

I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille,

And I shall paye as soon as ever I may. (414-17)

This correlation between phallus and stylus recalls the words of Nancy K. Miller, who has observed that female identity is constructed through the combined "interdigitated productions" of these two symbols of male power (359).

The wife in the "Shipman's Tale" undergoes a transformation within the work. Before her decision to be subsumed by male-centered discourse, she is full of "drede" and "care", and yet by the end of the tale "This wyf was nat afered nor affrayed" (400). She knows she will be able to overcome her husband's anger over the matter of the hundred francs because, at the expense of her own voice, she will speak a language the merchant can understand. Furthermore, she will encourage him to perform a reading of her body that will remove all suggestions of anything unpleasant or problematic: "...be not wrooth, but lat us laugh and pleye" (422; my emphasis).

Finally, as with the other women in Chaucer's fabliaux-based tales, the scholarly consensus is that the wife in the "Shipman's Tale" comes out on top, since she receives those things which she desires, her "array and her husband" (McClintock 135). We are never told, however, what the wife really wants, because she has positioned herself within an antifeminist discourse. This is expressed in her prefaced remark to the list she gives of the things that women most desire:

And wel ye woot that wommen naturelly

Desiren thynges sixe as wel as I. (173-74)

Of course her companion the monk already knows of the things that women want: he belongs to the masculine tradition that has dictated them. The desires of the wife outside of the standard misogynist discourse exist in a vacuum. As the wife observes to her husband: "'I stonde in this disjoynt'" (411).

## Conclusion

It would be reductive to say that the image of woman gleaned from the preceding tales by Chaucer's Miller, Reeve, Merchant and Shipman the exactly the same in all instances. What can be stated fairly, however, is that certain aspects of medieval antifeminism do surface in the four tales. These similarities develop the idea that woman--especially the lowerclass or bourgeois woman--is inherently different from man, and that this disturbing difference must be controlled. This female difference is made manifest in the text through the repeated assertion (directly or indirectly stated) that woman is inferior to man. One of the most commonly targeted aspects of "female" behavior is, of course, her rampant sexuality.

On the most obvious level, all five of the women discussed above have sexual relations with a man outside of marriage, a grave taboo in a patrilineal (and patriarchal) society. At least four of the five female characters appear to enjoy these encounters, with the possible exception of the wife in the "Shipman's Tale". In order that the text of The Canterbury Tales not be read as propaganda for female sexual freedom these figures are all disempowered. That is, while they demonstrate a love of the carnal, again at least four of the women are victims of some form of sexual assault, with the Miller's Alison the possible exception. The association of the lowerclass female with sexuality is not merely expressed in the



actions of the women. It is also expressed in the language of the text, and what must be the language of the society.

In this language woman is further reduced and made grotesque through synecdoche, wherein part of the woman is made to replace the whole. This is reflected in the repeated appearance of the word "queynte", for example, with all its various meanings subsumed under its female sexual referent. (Obviously, the use of synecdoche is not always negative, but to reduce woman to her genitalia can certainly not be considered a positive technique). This focus on part of the woman helps to construct her as a grotesque, by focusing on the physical qualities that separates her from mankind.

Another common element shared by the four tales is the subtext of the "good" and the "bad" woman, represented by the Virgin and by Eve in their most common form. The women in these Chaucerian tales must fall under the category of "bad" women, because the other category of idealized womanhood is closed to them as "real" women. They are "real" woman in that these female figures are associated with the material world, the bourgeois economy, and therefore cannot escape the metaphoric connection with the literally carnal world. In fact, their connection with a market economy on a social level is echoed in their sexual function.

In all the tales, but notably in those by the Reeve, Merchant and Shipman, the female characters are presented

as passive objects of exchange. They are passed from father to husband through the institution of marriage, and from partner to partner outside it. This exchange further establishes that the role of woman in medieval society was unlike that of the male, since the male role, as the controller of the economy, was aggressive and stable. Woman, then, becomes an exotic creature to be purchased and used by men. Her humanity is undercut through this objectification, until it disappears.

In spite of the subtext of male dominance, many scholars believe that tales by the Miller, Merchant and Shipman share the image of the powerful woman-on-top; that is, a woman who obtains her desires at the expense of the man. But what are these desires? Invariably, they are simply the production of a misogynist society which believes that women want only adulterous liaisons or financial gain. We are never told by women what they "moost desiren"; only by men who assume or appropriate the female voice. Where does this leave the two female characters in the tales under study whose chief desires are other than sex or money?

Both Malyne and her mother in the "Reeve's Tale" dare to look higher: Malyne, for a union based on what she believes is love; and her mother, on social betterment. Yet, these desires look beyond what these characters are seen to deserve. As women of the bourgeois class, with their exposed "lendes", "ers" "queynte", "brestes", and

# 2

PIONEERS IN METHYLENE BLUE TESTING SINCE 1974



**Micro-P**  
OF THE FUTURE

1900 COUNTY ROAD 5 BURNINGWELL MN 56327 USA  
TEL 812 635 2087 FAX 812 635 2087 TLE 5100000000

"taille", they are allowed one purpose within the text, and this is to satisfy the desire in the male gaze. This "right" of the male, to perform whatever acts he wishes upon the female body, leads inevitably back to a cultural belief in the sexual availability of women of a lower social strata. Thus, when Alison of the "Miller's Tale" says:

"I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!

Why, lat be!" quod she. "Lat be, Nicholas,

Or I wold crie 'out, harrow' and 'allas'!

Do wey youre handes, for curteisye!" (3284-87)

we are not to take this seriously. Nor are we to pay attention to a comment like "it had been to late for to crie" when Aleyn steals up to the sleeping Malyne (4196). We must ignore January's desire to "manace" (1752) his new bride. We are deaf to the wife's cry of "Namoore" (380) in the "Shipman's Tale". The women in these tales have no need for defense against the actions men take against them, since their monstrous construction has allowed violence to be transformed into desire.

It could be stated that this thesis inadvertently argues that the men in the tales examined above are not themselves portrayed as reprehensible or do not conform to certain medieval stereotypes of male behavior according to class or occupation. This is not my intention. While certain codes for male behavior did exist in medieval culture, they were not propagated with the same vehement

force as those which pertained to women. Furthermore, man's respective social, legal and political freedom in the Middle Ages constantly gave him the chance to displace or dispel any stereotypes regarding his behavior. Woman, conversely, was not generally given this opportunity, and certainly not a woman from the bourgeois class. We can recall the figure of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, who does have the temerity to speak her mind, and who is beaten by her husband for her boldness, and still ridiculed by modern scholars.

Finally, I would like this thesis to function as an implement to help shift the critical focus from the male characters in so-called bourgeois literature equally onto the female figures. To quote John Lechte, in his discussion of Julia Kristeva's work on the abject (woman) in Powers of Horror:

the control exerted by horror--the abject--  
can only be the greater if it remains hidden,  
unknown--unanalysed. (158)

As Kristeva herself notes:

For abjection, when all is said and done, is  
the other facet of religious, moral, and  
ideological codes on which rest the sleep of  
individuals and the breathing spells of  
societies. Such codes are abjection's  
purification and repression. (209)

# Works Cited

- Aristotle. The Generation of Animals. Trans. A.L. Peck. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1943.
- Arrathoon, Leigh A. "'For Craft is Al, Whoso that Do it Kan': The Genre of 'The Merchant's Tale'." The Craft of Fiction. Ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon. Rochester: Solaris, 1986. 241-327.
- Arthur, Ross G. "'Why Artow Angry': The Malice of Chaucer's Feeve." English Studies in Canada 13.1 (1987): 1-11.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. Rabelais and his World. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Bal, Mieke. "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1-3)." The Female Body in Western Culture. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985. 317-38.
- Beichner, Paul E. "Characterization in the 'Miller's Tale'." Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales. Eds. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor. Notre Dame: Notre Dame P, 1960. 117-29.
- Beidler, Peter G. "Art and Scatology in the 'Miller's Tale'." Chaucer Review 12.1 (1977): 90-102.
- Benkov, Edith Joyce. "Language and Women: From Silence to Speech." Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature. Eds. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1989. 245-65.
- Benson, Larry D. and Theodore M. Andersson, eds. The Literary Context of Chaucer's Fabliaux. Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1971.
- Bleeth, Kenneth. "Joseph's Doubting of Mary and the Conclusion of the 'Merchant's Tale'." Chaucer Review 21.1 (1986): 58-68.
- Bloch, R. Howard. "Medieval Misogyny." Representations 20 (1987): 1-24.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. Trans. G.H. McWilliam. New York: Penguin, 1972.
- Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy. Trans. V.E.Watts. London: Penguin, 1976.
- Brewer, Derek. "The Fabliaux." Companion to Chaucer Studies. Ed. Beryl Rowland. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1968.

247-267.

- Brown, Emerson Jr. "Biblical Women in 'The Merchant's Tale': Feminism, Antifeminism and Beyond." Viator 5 (1974): 387-412.
- . "Of Mice and Women: Thoughts on Chaucerian Allusion." Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction. Ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon. Rochester: Solaris, 1986. 63-84.
- Carter, John Marshall. Rape in Medieval England: An Historical and Sociological Study. Lanham: UP of America, 1985.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Riverside Chaucer. Ed. Larry D. Benson. 3rd edition. Boston: Mifflin, 1987.
- Chrysostom, John. Jean Chrysostome: A Théodore. Paris: Cerf, 1966. Vol. 117 of Sources Chrétiennes. 1948- .
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Signs 1 (1976): 875-94. Rptd. in New French Feminisms. Eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. New York: Schocken, 1980. 245-64.
- . "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." The Newly Born Woman. By Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. Vol. 24 of Theory and History of Literature. 24 vols.
- Coletti, Theresa. "The Mulier Fortis and Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale'." Chaucer Review 15.1 (1980): 236-49.
- Davis, Nathalie Zemon. "Women on Top." Society and Culture in Early Modern France. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1965. 124-51.
- Delany, Sheila. Medieval Literary Politics. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy. The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise. New York: Harper, 1977.
- Duby, Georges. The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France. Trans. Barbara Bray. New York: Pantheon, 1983.
- Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 1969.
- Frank, Robert Worth, Jr. "The 'Reeve's Tale' and the Comedy of Limitation." Directions in Literary Criticism: Contemporary Approaches to Literature. Eds. Stanley

- Weintraub and Philip Young. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1973. 53-69.
- Fries, Maureen. "Feminae Populi: Popular Images of Women in Medieval Literature." Journal of Popular Culture 14.1 (1980): 79-85.
- Gies, Francis and Joseph. Women in the Middle Ages. New York: Crowell, 1978.
- Gravdal, Kathryn. Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991.
- Griffin Susan. Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature. New York: Harper, 1982.
- Gubar, Susan. "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity." Writing and Sexual Difference. Ed. Elizabeth Abel. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982. 73-94.
- Hamon, Philippe. Le Personnel du Roman: Le Systeme des Personnages dans les Rougon-Macquard d'Emile Zola. Geneva: Droz, 1983.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. "The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women." Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings. Eds. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989. 51-69.
- Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982.
- Hazen, Helen. Endless Rapture: Rape, Romance, and the Female Imagination. New York: Scribner's, 1983.
- Herlihy, David. Medieval Households. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985.
- Hermann, John P. "Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse: Sign and Symbol in the 'Shipman's Tale'." Chaucer Review 19.4 (1985): 301-337.
- Hugh of St. Victor. On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith. Trans. Roy J. Defferrari. Cambridge: Medieval Academy, 1951.
- Innocent III. On the Misery of the Human Condition. Trans. Bernard Murchland. New York: Ungar, 1966.
- Irigaray, Luce. "Commodities on Their Own." New French Feminisms. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Trans. Claudia Reeder. New York: Schocken, 1981.



- 107-10. Rpt. in This Sex Which is Not One. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 192-97.
- . "Women on the Market." This Sex Which is Not One. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 170-191.
- Janson, H.W. Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. London: Warburg, 1952.
- Jerome. "Against Jovinianus." The Principal Works of St. Jerome. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2. Trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954. 82 vols. 1890-1990.
- Kaske, R.E. "An Aube in the 'Reeve's Tale'." ELH 26.3 (1959): 295-310.
- Kayser, Wolfgang. The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. New York: McGraw, 1966.
- Kendrick, Laura. Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in The Canterbury Tales. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Kohanski, Tamarah. "In Search of Malyne." The Medieval Studies Society of the University of CT. Mss. Spring 1990: 7-10.
- Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- Labarge, Margaret Wade. Women in Medieval Life. London: Hamilton, 1986. Rpt. as A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life. 1990.
- Lawrence, William W. "Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale.'" Speculum 33.1 (1958): 1-68.
- Lechte, John. Julia Kristeva. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Le Fèvre, Jehan. Les Lamentations de Matheolus. Ed. A.-G. Hamel. Paris: 1872.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. Structural Anthropology. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic, 1963.
- Lucretius. The Nature of Things. Trans. Frank O. Copley. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Mann, Jill. Geoffrey Chaucer. Feminist Readings. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1991.
- McClintock, Michael W. "Games and the Players of Games: Old French Fabliaux and the 'Shipman's Tale.'" Chaucer

Review 5.2 (1970): 112-36.

- McGalliard, John C. "Characterization in Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale'." Philological Quaterly 54.1 (1975): 1-18.
- Ménard, Philippe. Les Fabliaux: Contes à Rire du Moyen Age. Paris: PUF, 1983.
- Miles, Margaret M. Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West. New York: Vintage: 1991.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Rereading as a Woman: The Body in Practice." The Female Body in Western Culture. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985. 354-62.
- Miller, Robert P, ed. Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Muscatine, Charles. Chaucer and the French Tradition. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.
- Nichols, Stephen G. "An Intellectual Anthropology of Marriage in the Middle Ages." The New Medievalism. Eds. Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1991.
- Nordstrom, Folke. Virtues and Vies on the Fourteenth-Century Corbels in the Choir of Uppsala Cathedral. Stockholm: Almqvist, 1956.
- Olson, Paul A. "Chaucer's Merchant and January's 'Hevene in Erthe Heere'." ELH 28.3 (1961): 203-14.
- Orderic Vitalis. The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis. Vol. 4.7-8. Ed. and Trans. Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford: Clarendon, 1973. 4 vols.
- Owst, Gerald. Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. 2nd ed. New York: Barnes, 1961.
- Patterson, Lee. Chaucer and the Subject of History. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.
- Pearcy, Roy J. "The Genre of Chaucer's Fabliau-Tales." Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction. Ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon. Rochester: Solaris, 1986. 329-84.
- Philo. Questions and Answers on Exodus. Trans. Ralph Marcus. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1963.
- Pisan, Christine de. The Treasure of the City of Ladies. Trans. Sarah Lawson. New York: Penguin, 1985.

- Power, Eileen. Medieval Women. Ed. M.M. Postan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.
- Réau, Louis. Iconographie de L'Art Chrétien. Vol. 1. Paris: PUF, 1955. 3 vols.
- Reiss, Edmund. "Chaucer's Thematic Particulars." Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry. Eds. John P. Hermann and John J. Burke, Jr. University: U of Alabama P, 1981. 27-42.
- Richardson, Janette. Blameth Nat Me: A Study of Imagery in Chaucer's Fabliaux. The Hague: Mouton, 1970.
- Robertson, D.W. A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962.
- Rowland, Beryl. "The Play of the 'Miller's Tale': A Game Within a Game." Chaucer Review 5.1 (1970): 140-146.
- . "What Chaucer Did to the Fabliau." Studia Neophilologica 51 (1979): 205-13.
- Russo, Mary. "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory." Feminist Studies/Critical Studies. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986. Vol. 8 of Theories of Contemporary Culture. 8 vols. to date.
- Scattergood, V.J. "The Originality of the 'Shipman's Tale'." Chaucer Review 11.3 (1977): 210-31.
- Sheehan, Michael M. CSB. "The Wife of Bath and her Four Sisters: Reflections on a Woman's Life in the Age of Chaucer." Medievalia et Humanistica ns 13 (1985): 23-42.
- Silverman, Albert H. "Sex and Money in Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale'." Philological Quarterly 32.4 (1953): 329-36.
- Skeat, Walter W., ed. The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. 2nd ed. Vol. 5. Oxford: Clarendon, 1894.
- Stone, Brian, trans. Medieval English Verse. Middlesex: Penguin, 1964.
- Tertullian. Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works. Trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain. New York: Fathers, 1959. Vol. 6 of The Fathers of the Church. 82 vols.
- Uitz, Erika. The Legend of Good Women: Medieval Women in Towns and Cities. Trans. Sheila Marnie. New York: Moyer, 1988.

- Weissman, Hope Phyllis. "Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterization of Women." Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. George Econonou. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975. 93-110.
- Wentersdorf, Karl P. "Imagery, Structure, and Theme in Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale.'" Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction. Ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon. Rochester: Solaris, 1986. 35-61.
- . "The Symbolic Significance of Figurae Scatologicae in Gothic Manuscripts." Word, Picture, and Spectacle. Ed. Clifford Davidson. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U, 1984. 1-19.
- Wilson, Katharina M. and Elizabeth M. Makowski. Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer. Albany: State U of New York P, 1990.
- Woods, William F. "A Professional Thyng: The Wife as Merchant's Apprentice in the 'Shipman's Tale'." Chaucer Review 24.2 (1989): 139-149.
- Wurtele, Douglas. "Ironical Resonances in the 'Merchant's Tale.'" Chaucer Review 13 (1978): 66-79.

**END**

**22/1 2/92**

**FIN**