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IRONY AND THE ANTIFEMINIST NARRATOR IN CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN*

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This paper addresses two problematic issues in Chaucer studies: the tone of the *Legend of Good Women*, which has come to be the central enigma of the poem for many modern readers, and the broader but equally puzzling question of Chaucer's attitude toward women. Recently, some persuasive investigations of Chaucer's treatment of women in his fictions have led to one of two conclusions. Some scholars now assert that Chaucer is essentially profeminist, able to create women who are "the moral equals of men," or even "practicing feminists";[1] others emphasize his ability not to create strong, free women, but to explore in his fictions the reasons why women are not equal to men, to consider the "interplay of character and social environment," and even perhaps to expose the impact of the antifeminist tradition on women.[2] Neither camp, however, has successfully argued from the evidence of the one text that purports to deal most exclusively with women, the *Legend of Good Women*. In fact, one recent critic has explicitly refused to examine the poem: "It is no help to look at the *Legend of Good Women*, the tone of which is so subtle that critics still can't decide whether the poet is making fun, or saints, of all those women."[3] While I agree that the tone of the poem is subtle, I am not so sure that we

[1] The "moral equals" view is Daniel M. Murtaugh's, in "Women and Geoffrey Chaucer," *ELH*, 38 (1971), 492; Maureen Fries sees the Wife of Bath as "a truly practicing feminist" in her "'Slydynge of Corage': Chaucer's Criseyde as Feminist and Victim," in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 59.

[2] Robert Hanning comments on Chaucer's exceptional concern with the "sociology of women" and the "interplay of character and social environment" in "From *Eva* and *Ave* to Eglentyne and Alisoun: Chaucer's Insight into the Roles Women Play," *Signs*, 2 (1977), 580–99. For other recent discussions of this aspect of Chaucer's work, not cited elsewhere in these notes, see David Aers, "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society," *Chaucer Review*, 13 (1979), 177–200; Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," *PMLA*, 94 (1979), 209–22; Harriet Hawkins, "The Victim's Side: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*," *Signs*, 1 (1975), 339–61; and Kenneth J. Oberembt, "Chaucer's Anti-misogynist Wife of Bath," *Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), 287–302.

[3] Arlyn Diamond, "Chaucer's Women and Women's Chaucer," in *The Authority of Experience*, p. 65.

need despair utterly of deciding what the poet is up to, or what he thinks of his heroines. The tone of the *Legend of Good Women* is, I would argue, systematically and profoundly ironic, and an understanding of the thrust of Chaucer's irony simultaneously depends on and elucidates his attitude toward women.

John Lydgate was the earliest reader to record his belief that the *Legend of Good Women* does not offer straightforward praise of women.[4] Five centuries later, Harold Goddard reawakened modern interest in this possibility by proposing that the poem should be understood as "a most unmerciful satire upon women."[5] Despite continued arguments against ironic readings, the notion has persisted: few readers would now maintain that Chaucer intends the poem as pure antifeminist satire, and many opt for a kind of playful, parodic tone rather than any unified satiric intent.[6] But proponents of any sort of ironic reading have as yet to make their views universally accepted because they do not persuasively explain the purpose of Chaucer's irony; if the *Legend of Good Women* is not an antifeminist work, then who or what is the object of the ironist's attack?

I would like to suggest that Chaucer's irony is directed not, indeed, at women, but at Cupid, at the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women*, and at the antifeminist tradition to which both unwittingly perhaps but nevertheless certainly subscribe. Both Cupid's views of female virtue, in accord with the canons of his Religion of Love, and the narrator's treatment of women in his Legends are, as I shall try to show, as inherently antifeminist as Lydgate and Goddard suggested. But together Cupid's ideals and the narrator's execution of the penance imposed on him so obviously fail to describe a truly "good" woman and are so patently comic, misguided, and unreliable that we are ultimately led to see not the limitations of the female nature itself, but the limitations of the attitudes toward female virtue and the idealization of women in which Cupid and the narrator conspire. I do not mean to imply that Chaucer holds to a particularly modern view of woman's place or is even especially profeminist, but that, as readers of other

[4] See John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS, e.s. 121 (1924; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), Prologue, ll. 330–36.

[5] Harold C. Goddard, "Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," *JEGP*, 7 (1908), 101.

[6] Goddard's heretical view was immediately answered by John Livingston Lowes ("Is Chaucer's Legend of Good Women a Travesty?" *JEGP*, 8 [1909], 513–69), who, like most anti-ironists, accused Goddard of an anachronistic reading of medieval poetry. But several scholars since Goddard have built on or refined his argument, including Robert Max Garrett, "Cleopatra the Martyr and her Sisters," *JEGP*, 22 (1923), 64–74; Robert Estrich, "Chaucer's Maturing Art in the Prologues to the *Legend of Good Women*," *JEGP*, 36 (1937), 326–37; Paull Baum, "Chaucer's 'Glorious Legende'," *MLN*, 60 (1945), 377–81.

works have begun to demonstrate,[7] it is at least plausible to argue that his poetry explores the effect of literary and social idealization on women and implies that the literary models and courtly conventions offered to women—like those offered to men and artists, too[8]—render them incapable of independent action, moral growth, and finally even life itself.

In the past two decades, the best criticism of the *Legend of Good Women* has focused on the Prologue, in order to rescue it from the contamination of the problematic Legends and discuss its "aesthetic implications."[9] My purpose is neither to repeat nor to challenge that work, but rather to show that the Legends themselves are not such a failure as has been assumed. My reading of the martyrology is supported, however, by the revisions in the G-version of the Prologue that, as R. W. Frank has persuasively argued, "make parody a stronger possibility."[10] For the purposes of my argument, the most important change in the opening dream-vision is the expansion of Cupid's initial tirade against "Chaucer," the dramatized narrator of the poem, from twenty (F,320–40) to seventy (G,246–316) lines. The revision emphasizes the inherent antifeminism in the Religion of Love, at least as Cupid here understands and articulates its doctrine.

First, the angry god shifts his accusation from the dreamer's general heresy against Love to his failure to tell stories of women "goode and trewe" (G,272);[11] this reminds the audience that traditionally women are those human beings for whom love is all and who are

[7] See, for example, Hanning, Aers, Hawkins, and Oberembt. I am particularly indebted to Hope Phyllis Weissman's definition of antifeminism for my understanding of Chaucer's attitude: "The literary tradition of antifeminism may, however, be defined in a wider sense to include not simply satirical caricatures of women but any presentation of a woman's nature intended to conform her to male expectations of what she is or ought to be, not her own . . . indeed, the most insidious of antifeminist images are those which celebrate, with a precision often subtle rather than apparent, the forms a woman's goodness is to take" ("Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterization of Women," in *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Collection of Original Articles*, ed. George D. Economou [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975], p. 94).

[8] See Dorothy Bethurum, "Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems" (*PMLA*, 74 [1959], 511–20), for a discussion of the social and literary ideals offered to men and poets in Chaucer's day, and of his use of a *persona* who resists "identification with the idealistic courtly view" (p. 511) and whose comic spirit "does not condemn the ideal, but marks it as pretty far from normal human experience" (p. 516).

[9] The phrase is Robert O. Payne's in *The Key of Remembrance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 107; see also his "Making His Own Myth: The Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," *Chaucer Review*, 9 (1975), 197–211, and Robert B. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 33–44.

[10] R. W. Frank, *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 25.

[11] All Chaucer quotations are from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Fred N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

judged solely in terms of their conduct in this one sphere of action. Moreover, Cupid's frame of reference for an understanding of women is explicitly and exclusively literary: he does not accuse the dreamer of failing to serve or honor some real woman, but repeatedly asks him why he could not find "in alle thy bokes" (G,271), in "sixty bokes olde and newe" (G,273), some *stories* of good women. And when Cupid names some of the "clerkes" whom the dreamer might have consulted, his list includes the kind of well-known antifeminist treatises we meet again in Jankyn's book, such as "Jerome agayns Jovynyan" and "Valerye."

As Cupid's subsequent remarks reveal, clerics and poets of this sort have very limited views of the ways in which women can be good. They traditionally divide virtuous females into three categories, depending on their sexual relationships with men: "clene maydenes," "trewe wyves," and "stedefaste widewes" (G,282–83; the point is reiterated in ll. 294–95, where Cupid points out that all good women in this clerical tradition keep their "maydenhede," "wedlok," or "widewehede"). In each of these three estates, Cupid notes that the characteristic, defining act of the good women is to suffer; all their stories are "pite for to rede, and routhe" (G,286) because of "The wo that they endure for here trouthe" (G,287). All the good women in the literature Cupid has in mind willingly choose death rather than infidelity, and he cheerfully goes on to catalogue the "sondry wyse . . . as the story wol devyse" (G,290–91) in which women die: "And some were brend, and some were cut the hals, / And some dreynt, for they wolden not be fals" (G,292–93). Their motivation is not Christian virtue ("they were hethene, al the pak" [G,299]) but their fear of falling short of men's expectations ("for men schulde sette on hem no lak" [G,298]) and their concern with their reputation ("That were so sore adrad of alle shame. / These olde wemen kepte so here name. . ." [G,300–301]). Men, Cupid says, are not thus renowned for a suicidal devotion to sexual purity (G,302–304), but this kind of virtue in women is a universal literary topic: "Ek al the world of autours maystow here, / Cristene and hethene, trete of swich matere" (G,308–309).

This lengthy addition to the later version of the Prologue emphasizes not just Cupid's blindness to the intent and meaning of Chaucer's earlier works, but also the narrowness and oppression inherent in his definition—an explicitly literary one—of the ideal female. As Alceste herself implies, a few lines later, Cupid is "tyraunt and crewel" (G,357). Given such apparently universal assumptions about their roles, and given the models of good women available in literature,

women are as likely to be trapped as those "smale foules" who sing in the earlier part of the dream vision, in the G-version. Only in a dream, after all, could they have escaped the "foule cherl" who "for his coveytyse / Hadde hem betrayed with his sophistrye" (G,124–25). Other critics, like Frank, have already argued that many of the revisions in the Prologue reveal Chaucer's concern with freeing himself from the limitations and restrictions of courtly love. I further suggest that in seeking for himself as artist to move toward "a poetry more of the world and less of the garden, to a realm of experience beyond the patterned and polite, the limited and predictable emotions and movements of courtly love,"[12] the artist becomes aware of and ironically exposes the imprisonment of women in that same garden.

As he writes the Legends themselves, the dreamer / narrator of the Prologue is awake and yet still apparently under the influence of Cupid's angry rebuke. His consistent, peculiar, and otherwise inexplicable treatment of the ten heroines whose stories he manages to complete repeatedly calls our attention to the inadequacies of Cupid's views and the narrator's implementation of them. If we begin by examining the first two legends, the *Legend of Cleopatra* and the *Legend of Thisbe*, separately and in some detail, we can then see how the strategies set forth at the beginning of the project are carried out and developed in what I believe to be a unified and complete collection.

Many readers would no doubt agree that the story of Cleopatra is an "odd" and "unfortunate" choice for the beginning of a martyrology of good and faithful women, and in itself "a failure, finally, because it lacks imaginative unity."[13] One might perhaps argue that the choice of heroines, at least, is not the narrator's fault; Cupid commanded him, "At Cleopatre I wol that thow begynne" (G,542). But presumably "Chaucer" (as implied author) is finally accountable for Cupid's command, and I think it is hardly sufficient to excuse the poet for an apparent error by noting that his treatment of Cleopatra here is responsible "for launching her on her English career."[14] I would instead argue that Chaucer knew exactly what he was doing when he made Cupid choose Cleopatra for the first heroine of the poem, and that he thereby launched his Legends on precisely the course that he intended them to take.[15]

Throughout the *Legend of Cleopatra*, the narrator attempts to sup-

[12] Frank, p. 36.
[13] Frank, pp. 37, 44.
[14] Frank, p. 39.
[15] Beverly Taylor makes exactly this claim in "The Medieval Cleopatra: the Classical and Medieval Tradition of Chaucer's *Legend of Cleopatra*" (*JMRS*, 7 [1977], 249–69), but suggests that the purpose of Chaucer's irony is to expose "the destructive results of

press his heroine's reputed lust and aggressiveness; as Frank puts it, the infamous queen here becomes "a gentle, timorous creature, properly passive and colorless."[16] The first five lines of the Legend identify her only as the successor to a male ruler and imply by omission that her reign was an uninteresting and irrelevant interlude between the death of one man and the arrival of the next:

> After the deth of Tholome the kyng,
> That al Egipt hadde in his governyng,
> Regned his queene Cleopataras;
> Tyl on a tyme befel there swich a cas,
> That out of Rome was sent a senatour. . . . (ll. 580–84)

It is not unreasonable to expect that a fourteenth-century audience would recall here that Tholome died because Cleopatra poisoned him, and that before Antony arrived she had an affair with another important Roman;[17] the narrator clumsily attempts to gloss over these facts because he understands that conventional medieval ideals for women demand a more passive figure than the "historical" Cleopatra.[18]

Moreover, as poet and as man, this narrator is simply more excited about the world of politics and war than about the woman whose story

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excessive passion" (p. 250). The problem is that the "excessive passion" Cleopatra is supposed to represent—and apparently does represent, according to Taylor, elsewhere in classical and medieval tradition—is exactly what is omitted, in Chaucer's treatment, by the narrator's suppression of all details that would remind us of the traditional view of such characteristics as her lust and greed. Moreover, much of Taylor's case rests on the positive medieval interpretation of Octavian as a figure of reason and justice, but Octavian plays a very small part in the Legend as the narrator tells it. It is also difficult to see how the ironic purpose Taylor finds in *Cleopatra* would work for other legends. The essay nevertheless raises a number of interesting issues, such as the discussion of medieval attitudes toward suicide; I certainly agree that Chaucer attacks a tradition that honors women for resorting to such a course of action.

[16] Frank, p. 41.

[17] The question of how much the audience can be expected to know becomes more problematic when the narrator's omissions or alterations from his sources are less obvious. See John Fyler's discussion of the problem in *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), where he notes: "One must admit that some of his distortions are explicable only as private jokes: for their recognition they require us to read Chaucer with his sources also in hand. Others are accessible to anyone who has an elementary acquaintance with classical mythology. But the cumulative effect of Chaucer's deletions is compelling: we cannot avoid recognizing a consistent pattern of censorship" (p. 99). See also Emerson Brown, Jr., "Chaucer and the European Literary Tradition," in *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Collection of Original Articles*, pp. 37–54.

[18] I am aware, of course, that, as Ann S. Haskell points out in "The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth-Century England" (*Viator*, 4 [1973], 460–71), "There are a number of ideal concepts of medieval women" (p. 460). She argues that marriage, obedience, and chastity, however, were the three features of the ideal pattern that were "definite," and her discussion underlines the passivity inherent in and essential to the ideal.

he has been coerced into telling. He continues to focus on Antony's career rather than on Cleopatra's (see ll. 587–605); he uses *occupatio* (ll. 616–23) in order to devote almost thirty lines (or one-fifth of the whole Legend) to the battle of Actium, celebrated in a richly alliterative passage as a fourteenth-century naval engagement (ll. 624–52).[19] Here Cleopatra is mentioned only once, in line 632, as "his [Antony's] wif."[20] Her Legend is two-thirds over, in fact, before the narrator turns to its heroine, and then we are shown that her only acts are to run away "for drede" (l. 664), to bury her lover in a shrine made of rubies, and to commit suicide. Cleopatra's first and last words in the poem (ll. 681–95) reveal her concern with her reputation vis-à-vis Antony. She asserts as if to futurity that she has fulfilled her "wyfhod" (l. 691) and her "covenant" (l. 693) with Antony; "and that shal ben wel sene, / Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene" (ll. 694–95).

The narrator himself has the last word in this story, and uses it to bring us back to the subject of men:

> And this is storyal soth, it is no fable.
> Now, or I fynde a man thus trewe and stable,
> And wol for love his deth so frely take,
> I preye God let oure hedes nevere ake! (ll. 702–705)

His words ironically remind us to question the "storyal" nature of his rendering—the medievalized sea battle, for instance, is just one of many obvious departures from historical truth that might undermine his claim and make us read the legends as "fable" indeed, highly colored by the personal and time-bound perspective of this narrator. And one indisputable piece of historical evidence that the narrator does include, the fact that Antony committed suicide first (in ll. 657–62), also undercuts his final comment; he has already found, and shown us, a man who took his death for love (at least as much as Cleopatra did). The comic, antiheroic, unromantic tone of the last line supports what we may have begun to suspect in the Prologue: the narrator here is much like that blundering jolly innocent we meet in so many of Chaucer's works. Following Cupid's instructions, he has

[19] Compare the noted alliterative description of battle in the *Knight's Tale*, I.2605–16.

[20] A straightforward reading of the *Legend of Good Women* misses the double irony here: the narrator not only identifies Cleopatra incorrectly as Antony's wife and thus reminds us again that she was his mistress, but also, on another level, suggests that the narrator hardly remembers, at this point, that she is the heroine of the story, and identifies her, like all his other heroines, in terms of her relationship to a man. Compare my reading, however, with Edgar Shannon's, in *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1929): "Chaucer's reiterated conception of Cleopatra as the wife of Antony serves to give dignity to her character and to ennoble her grief and despair at his death" (p. 185).

tried to make Cleopatra fit the image of the good woman available in the clerical and courtly tradition. Passive, obedient, timid, subordinate, and devoted to "wyfhod," in his version of her life she is able to act only in the last resort, to kill herself, for love, "with good cheere" (l. 700). But in fact the narrator's peculiar treatment of the legend encourages the audience to remember that Cleopatra is not, in many ways, a virtuous woman; it devalues the nobility of her suicide, and it reveals the teller's own lack of enthusiasm for her story.

Even if we tried to blame some of the problems of the *Legend of Cleopatra* on Cupid's bad judgment, the narrator alone can be held responsible for choosing the next heroine of the poem, Thisbe. Thisbe's story is for the most part a virtual translation from Book IV of the *Metamorphoses*, but superficially minor variations effectively alter the whole thrust of the original tale and confirm our suspicions about this narrator's attitude toward women. At the beginning of the *Legend of Thisbe*, for example, the narrator subtly reminds us of the larger political and social forces that impinge on the free expression of love for males and females alike. Where Ovid begins by naming and describing the protagonists of the love story, "Pyramus et Thisbe, iuvenum pulcherrimus alter, / altera, quas Oriens habuit, praelata puellis,"[21] Chaucer's version tellingly begins by locating the narrative in time and space—"At Babiloyne whylom fil it thus" (l. 706)—and noting that the city was surrounded by "walles . . . / Ful hye, of hard tiles wel ybake" (ll. 708–709). Underlining the role of paternal authority, the narrator first introduces the lovers' fathers, "two lordes" (l. 711); Piramus and Thisbe are initially identified as "a sone" (l. 715) and "a doughter" (l. 717), and not named until nineteen lines into the Legend (ll. 724–25). He also adds an apparently irrelevant reference to local gossip about the lovers (ll. 719–23), which enables him to call attention to the fact that "in that contre . . . / Maydenes been ykept, for jelosye, / Ful streyte, lest they diden some folye" (ll. 721–23).

Some seventy-five lines later in the *Legend of Thisbe*, the narrator briefly departs from his source again to hint at Thisbe's rashness and overeagerness. His moralizing observation—"allas! and that is routhe/That evere woman wolde ben so trewe/To truste man, but she the bet hym knewe!" (ll. 799–801)—seems at best gratuitous and again irrelevant to a celebration of Thisbe's "trouth," and Ovid certainly never supplied such a moral to this story. Similarly, he invents a scene in the cave where she hides from the lion (ll. 853–57) that can only be intended to reveal her timidity, another generally "feminine"

[21] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, with English translation by Frank Justus Miller, Vol. I (1921; rpt. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), 182–83.

flaw not stressed in the Ovidian version. Most important, at the end of her last speech the narrator creates some entirely new lines for his heroine:

> "And ryghtwis God to every lovere sende,
> That loveth trewely, more prosperite
> Than evere yit had Piramus and Tisbe!
> And lat no gentil woman hyre assure
> To putten hire in swich an aventure.
> But God forbede but a woman can
> Ben as trewe in lovynge as a man!
> And for my part, I shal anon it kythe." (ll. 905–12)

Like Cleopatra before and so many of the heroines to come in this poem, Thisbe regards herself as a legendary standard of female fidelity to love; the Chaucerian good woman repeatedly seems to be motivated by the thoughts of her literary image. As Thisbe specifically warns other "gentil" women against following in her footsteps (something she does not do, in Ovid), the exalted, star-crossed love of Thisbe and Piramus celebrated in the *Metamorphoses* is reduced to "swich an aventure." The suggestion of regret in her warning confirms the narrator's own earlier judgment (ll. 798–801); even Thisbe admits that she acted unwisely. The universal terms of her advice further imply that all women are doomed in their attempts to escape social constraints on their sexual and emotional freedom; the narrator attempts to give even greater credibility to this pronouncement by forcing Thisbe to speak it herself.[22] The passage also underlines the implicit paradox of Thisbe's exemplary story, as the narrator tells it: Thisbe must die because she is not bold enough to succeed in defying her father's wishes, although she is too bold, according to conventional assumptions about what maidens and gentlewomen can and cannot do; she is too timid and weak to fight off that lioness, but not as incapable of survival as Piramus automatically assumes. As Thisbe's speech reminds us, her fidelity to love gives a woman only enough strength to destroy herself; only in committing suicide can she prove herself to be as free and powerful as a man.

One final and more obvious change in the Thisbe legend that we

[22] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick comments on this apparently timeless technique in her study of the career of marriage in Dickens and Thackeray: "There is an unspoken rule of propaganda . . . that goes like this: whenever an ideological judgment against a woman is so crushingly cruel that even the institutions of the society cannot bring themselves to pronounce it—for instance, that a mother must give up her child, or that a wife must die to further her husband's moral growth—in those cases it is the woman herself who is forced to pronounce and justify the sentence" (I quote from Sedgwick's paper delivered at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, March 1980).

need to consider is the omission of the metamorphosis. In Ovid, when Piramus stabs himself, the blood spurts out and stains the white fruit of a mulberry tree; Thisbe prays that the tree always bear crimson fruit in remembrance of their tragic love, and her wish is granted. The narrator in Chaucer's version mentions the gushing blood (ll. 851–52), but omits the transformation of the mulberry fruit, and in light of the other changes we have examined, his purpose is clear. The metamorphosis elevates and memorializes Piramus and Thisbe's love, but the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women* wishes to convey a different tone and a different message. In his version, Thisbe is less noble than foolhardy, timid, regretful, and desperate to save her reputation in the only way left to her. The narrator shows us her love in a social, not a mythic context, doomed from the start, like Cleopatra's, by the operation of forces more powerful than the heroine or even the hero.

Like Cleopatra and in fact all of the heroines of the poem, Thisbe does not even have the last word in her own story; instead we hear again, as at the end of each subsequent legend, the narrator's commentary on the preceding narrative. Here he calls attention to his defiance of Alceste's injunction to tell of true women and false men:

> Of trewe men I fynde but fewe mo
> In alle my bokes, save this Piramus,
> And therfore have I spoken of hym thus.
> For it is deynte to us men to fynde
> A man that can in love been trewe and kynde. (ll. 917–21)

He has exhausted the supply of good men in literature, the narrator implies, and in fact his remaining stories will tell us more stories of false men than he or his audience may care to hear. But he has made sure that we see first how men too can be true, because, as we will repeatedly perceive, this narrator identifies with his own gender and is much more concerned with men and their affairs than with women, good or bad. Moreover, the narrator's initial defiance of Alceste's command shows us that while all the false men in the remaining stories may live on to betray again or beget false sons, men too must die if they are true to love. Thus the *Legend of Good Women* suggests that for both sexes, human beings who define themselves with respect only to the sphere of love suffer. While for men such "virtuous" conduct is rare, for women, as this poem proves, fidelity to the God of Love and vulnerability to the tricks of men are so natural, time-honored, and predictable as to be ultimately, for this narrator at least, boring.

I have focused in some detail here on the legends of Cleopatra and Thisbe because they together serve to introduce us to the narrator and his techniques. The first two heroines represent the two kinds of

legendary female the narrator will deal with, the infamous and the innocent. If the heroine is traditionally passionate, aggressive, and in some respects even wicked, her forcefulness must be reduced while at the same time her iniquity is ineptly covered up; if she is in earlier works shown to be innocent and good, other flaws in her character or motives must be hinted at, her virtues devalued, and her model behavior punished. Furthermore, while the first two legends might appear anomalous because Antony and Piramus both die for love before the heroines do, Chaucer in fact deliberately uses this pattern to show us from the outset that both Cupid and the narrator would prefer to tell of true men, if they could; neither is really "womanis frend,"[23] and the narrator's manipulations, intrusions, and blunders reveal his antifeminist prejudice and his inherent loyalty to men.

Alterations in all of the Legends consistently work toward reshaping the remaining heroines, as needed, into figures like the narrator's Cleopatra, less active, aggressive, and passionate, or like his Thisbe, less noble, more flawed and feminine.[24] Sometimes the narrator has to omit the well-known crimes of his heroines; Medea, for example, is traditionally a lascivious, barely controlled, powerful female, a murderess in league with Hecate; the narrator tones down this image by making no mention of how her brother dies, or how she avenges Jason's betrayal.[25] It might be argued that he omits her crimes because he wants to praise women, as Cupid ordered, but this excuse only supports my view of the narrator's blindness to the effect of his poem, since undoubtedly his audience would know of Medea's crimes, or, in the *Legend of Philomela*, of Procne and Philomela's cruel revenge, which is also suppressed. Through the narrator's choice of heroines like Medea and Cleopatra, female virtue is subtly undermined by the audience's awareness of "storyal" fact; at the same time, the capacity of women to act, for good or bad ends, is reduced by the narrator's editorial policy.

[23] Gavin Douglas, "Venerabill Chaucer, all womanis frend" (1513), cited in *Chaucer, the Critical Heritage*, Vol. 1: *1385–1837*, ed. Derek Brewer (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

[24] See John Fyler's insightful discussion in *Chaucer and Ovid* (pp. 96–123) of the "caricaturing effect" of the narrator's treatment throughout, to which my reading is indebted.

[25] Interestingly, the Man of Law, in his inaccurate allusion to "the Seintes Legende of Cupide" (*Canterbury Tales*, II.61) makes no attempt to hide "the crueltee of the, queene Medea, / Thy litel children hangynge by the hals" (II.72–73). This suggests, of course, that whether he had or had not read the *Legend of Good Women*, the Man of Law knew the "true" story of Medea, which in turn supports my assumption that the audience would be well aware of most of the narrator's omissions, and hence that his efforts would be ironically counterproductive.

In other instances, the narrator leaves out facts in his sources that would show the power of women in general and the unique strength, loyalty, and compassion of his heroine. In Hypsipyle's legend, for instance, he fails to mention that the Lemnian women reputedly murdered the men on their island because they were false, and that only Hypsipyle, a leader of the women, showed mercy on her father, King Thoas, and spared him from the general slaughter. Although charged to document the falsity of men (and increasingly warming to his task), the narrator perhaps deletes both the violence of the Lemnian feminists and the sins of their husbands and lovers because he does not want to indicate that men suffer any consequences when they betray women. Moreover, by omitting this part of the story, the narrator diminishes Hypsipyle's stature and removes all evidence of her capacity for independent, defiant action. In his version we first meet the heroine not in the act of ruling her kingdom, but "pleying" (l. 1469) and "romynge" (l. 1470) by the sea, suitably frivolous and idly waiting for some man to be shipwrecked so that she can "don him socour, as was hire usaunce" (l. 1476).[26]

The narrator suppresses not only the independent actions of his heroines, virtuous or vicious, but also their emotional forcefulness. Just as Cleopatra and Thisbe calmly and quietly commit suicide, their fellow heroines never get angry when they are raped, left behind, or stranded on desert islands with wild beasts; they are sad but not frenzied or vindictive, and at worst they weep and swoon. Dido is the most familiar case in point: in Virgil, she rages, insults, and curses Aneas; in Ovid, she is more pathetic, but still proud and at times scornful of her lover; in Chaucer, she begs, kneels, cries, offers to be "His thral, his servant in the leste degre" (l. 1313), and faints at his feet. Like the other heroines, Dido worries about what the neighbors will think. She believes that wifehood is all, and implores Aneas to marry her first and then kill her, "For thanne yit shal I deyen as youre wif" (l. 1322). In Ovid she suggests that she might be pregnant, but chiefly to aggravate Aneas' guilt; in the narrator's version, she archetypically uses her alleged pregnancy as a last ineffectual weapon—"I am with childe, and yeve my child his lyf!" (l. 1323). One recent critic's response testifies to the effect of the narrator's strategy: Chaucer deviates from tradition to show us in Dido, we are told, "a queen on her knees, reduced to a fundamental feminine condition, begging for love and life and reputation."[27]

[26] The motif of the wandering or shipwrecked hero tossed by fatal waves into the ministering arms of the waiting heroine (Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Phyllis) is repeatedly used to underline the passive and compassionate role of the good woman.

[27] Frank, p. 72.

The archetype of this supposedly "fundamental feminine condition," the nadir of all this passivity, is the last heroine in the poem, Hypermnestra. As in the case of Hypsipyle, the narrator's version of the legend omits a detail of the story that makes women seem capable of violence, and the heroine too noble, virtuous, and superior to other females. In Ovid's version, Hypermnestra and her forty-nine sisters are all ordered to kill their husbands, and only Hypermnestra disobeys. The Chaucerian narrator not only neglects to mention the crimes of the other forty-nine women, but also invents a lengthy description of the stars at Hypermnestra's nativity (ll. 2584–99)—Mars, for instance, was very feeble—that gives the credit for her virtuous act not to her own compassion and courage but to "The Wirdes, that we clepen Destine" (l. 2580). This Hypermnestra is, we are told, congenitally unable even to pick up a knife in self-defense (ll. 2594–95), let alone use one to kill her husband. Torn between pity and fear, she cannot act; she is too weak and helpless even to follow her husband when he escapes, and so she sits and waits to be imprisoned.

At least two more of the Legends suggest that all this submissiveness and vulnerability that the narrator has tried to prove inherent in the female condition can be dangerous and even fatal, as it was in Thisbe's case; in other ways too it can backfire, especially as model passive behavior tends to inflame men's lusts. In Lucrece's legend, we do not see the heroine, as we do in Ovid's *Fasti*, playing the role of hostess, along with her sisters-in-law, to her husband and his friends. The narrator here focuses on her seated by her bed, "Dischevele" (l. 1720), lamenting her husband's absence and shedding tears that "Embelished hire wifly chastite" (l. 1737). Unfortunately for Lucrece, it is her perfect embodiment of "wifhod" that causes her husband to boast and take Tarquinus to spy on her, and notably it is after Tarquinus has seen "the verray wif" (l. 1686) in tears that he burns with passion for her. Similarly, Procne's exemplary "humblesse of wifhod, word and chere" (l. 2269) ironically results in Tereus' agreement to fetch Philomela, and it is after Tereus has seen his beautiful sister-in-law pleading with her father "with salte teres" (l. 2284) that "He [Tereus] caste his fyry herte upon hyre so" (l. 2292). As in the *Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer seems to be aware that the victimization of women can be sexually exciting to certain types of men.[28] And we may be reminded here of a related irony one critic has perceived in Criseyde's fate: "the same qualities which made her desirable brought about her fall from grace."[29]

[28] See Morton W. Bloomfield, "The *Man of Law's Tale*: A Tragedy of Victimization and a Christian Comedy," *PMLA*, 87 (1972), 384–90.

[29] Constance Saintonge, "In Defense of Criseyde," *MLQ*, 15 (1954), 313.

Lest it seem that in giving us a narrator who reduces the heroism and heightens the passivity, powerlessness, and innocent suffering of his heroines the poet aims to augment the pathos of their legends, we should also note that the tendency to deromanticize and lower the tone, which we saw in *Cleopatra* and *Thisbe*, is sustained. The narrator consistently inhibits our sympathy for their suffering by increasing the sheer stupidity and blindness of his heroines, playing up the comic potential in their stories, pointing out the ignobility of their motives, and devaluing the love for which they suffer and the men to whose charms they so willingly succumb. Once again, by recognizing this over-all design, we are able to make sense out of some otherwise inexplicable and apparently irrelevant changes the narrator makes in his sources. For example, in Virgil, her sister Anna supports Dido's love for Aneas, but in Chaucer, when Dido asks Anna if she should marry Aneas, Anna "somdel it withstod" (l. 1183). The narrator does not tell us Anna's "sermounynge" because "it were to long" (ll. 1184–85), and simply concludes that "Love wol love, for nothing wol it wonde" (l. 1187). Surely the effect here is to underline Dido's irrationality, her impassioned refusal to listen to reason and her defiance of the sisterly bond.

The narrator underscores this same idea later in the story of Dido with a lengthy apostrophe to "O sely wemen, ful of innocence" (l. 1254) asking why, with so many literary examples of folly, women still fail to see the falsity of men—"Ye may as wel it sen, as ye may rede" (l. 1263). As in Thisbe's story, the narrator's strategy is to make Dido emblematic of a common female defect; women can read, but they cannot learn. Like Thisbe, they are so hasty: in lines 1601–1602, Medea's father makes her sit beside Jason, and by line 1610, "She wex enamoured upon this man." In the *Legend of Ariadne*, the narrator makes Phedra the one who carefully plots the details of Theseus' escape; Ariadne apparently has neither as much beauty nor as much intelligence as her sister. In another of the narrator's inventions, Hypsipyle is effortlessly taken in by Hercules and Jason's conspiracy to "bedote" her. The narrator makes Phyllis' similarly instantaneous capitulation to Demophon seem more foolish by stressing, in a long introductory passage, Demophon's heritage of falsity from his father Theseus, whom we saw in action two legends back, and by quoting contradictory admissions from her letter. First Phyllis blames herself for innocently trusting "upon youre lynage" (l. 2526), and then a few lines later reveals that she knew Theseus' story all along: "ye ben lyk youre fader as in this" (l. 2544). Hypermnestra's powers of reasoning are similarly devalued when, in her crisis of indecision, she makes this

unexceptionable observation: "And shal I have my throte korve a-two? / Thanne shal I blede, allas!" (ll. 2695–96).

Elsewhere the narrator's tendency to exaggerate the ludicrous rather than the pathetic sounds a similarly comic note. Perhaps the best-known instance of this is seen in Lucrece's death scene, where the narrator mischievously renders two lines from Ovid, "tunc quoque iam moriens ne non procumbat honeste, / respicit; haec etiam cura cadentis erat" ("Even then in dying she took care to sink down decently: that was her thought even as she fell"),[30] thus:

> And as she fel adoun, she kaste hir lok,
> And of hir clothes yet she hede tok.
> For in hir fallynge yet she had a care,
> Lest that hir fet or suche thyng lay bare. (ll. 1856–59)

The potentially comic ignobility of his heroines' motives is also revealed by the words the narrator puts in their mouths: after Theseus agrees to marry her, for example, Ariadne whispers to Phedra, "Now, syster myn . . . / Now be we duchesses . . . / And bothe hereafter likly to ben quenes" (ll. 2126–29).

All told, the pervasive and sometimes comic passivity, irrationality, and stupidity of the composite good woman depicted in the Legends tempts the reader to agree with the critic who thinks that these ladies only get what they ask for,[31] and it is essential to note that the men in their lives—especially after Antony and Piramus—fare no better in the hands of this narrator. As other commentators have noted, the heroic stature of figures like Aneas, Jason, Hercules, and Theseus is completely undercut. Typical is the alacrity with which Theseus assents to Ariadne's terms: "'Ye, lady myn,' quod he, 'or ellis torn / Mote I be with the Mynotaur to-morwe!'" (ll. 2103–2104). Lyno, Hypermnestra's husband and the last of these unheroic heroes, is perhaps the *locus classicus* of the male instinct for saving his own skin and abandoning women. As soon as Hypermnestra warns her bridegroom of danger he leaps from the nearest window, and the narrator adds: "This Lyno swift was, and lyght of fote, / And from his wif he ran a ful good

[30] Ovid, *Fasti*, with English translation by Sir James George Frazer (1931; rpt. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 116–17. Other readers have less trouble taking this passage seriously; Frank, for example, suggests: "the modesty and chastity that have been her way of life are reasserted as she dies. . . . The detail . . . borders on the sentimental or the grotesque and perhaps slips over that border for some, but it makes vivid one final time the sense of modesty and chastity that were assaulted in her rape and the agony of her experience" (p. 108). And Martin J. Lahood even argues for the Christianization of Lucrece; see "Chaucer's 'The Legend of Lucrece'," *PQ*, 43 (1964), 274–76.

[31] Paull F. Baum, "Chaucer's 'Glorious Legende'," p. 381.

pas" (ll. 2711–12). Male falsity, as the *Legend of Phyllis* seems solely aimed at illustrating, is hereditary, "By preve as wel as by autorite" (l. 2394). Even fathers only pretend to love their daughters while using them for their own ends, as the narrator demonstrates in the comic scene, apparently invented by Chaucer, where Egiste alternates assurances that he loves his daughter Hypermnestra more than all the world (ll. 2628–32, 2635–38) with warnings that "but thow do as I shal the devyse, / Thow shalt be ded" (ll. 2641–42). Men's motives for treating women as they do are either personal gain, lust, or the kind of thoughtless dallying that Jason unwittingly admits to when he tells Hypsipyle that "we wery be, / And come for to pleye, out of the se, / Tyl that the wynd be better in oure weye" (ll. 1494–96).

In his pervasive devaluation of heroes and forthright censure of false men, the narrator actually belittles his heroines too and reveals a great deal about his own bias. As we saw in the *Legend of Cleopatra*, by his frequent and often delayed use of *occupatio* he overtly indulges his own predilection for men and their affairs while omitting details that would conflict with the monotonous and debased image of the good women he portrays.[32] In the *Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea*, the narrator uses other techniques to achieve this same end. First, after introducing the double legend with a lengthy apostrophe, not found in any of his sources, to "Thow rote of false lovers, Duc Jasoun" (l. 1368), he offers a barnyard analogy comparing Jason to a fox and the women he betrays to tender capons, which effectively diminishes the stature and worth of Hypsipyle and Medea as well. The fact that two women are dealt with in one legend because they are betrayed by the same man also reminds us that a woman is classified only, in the narrator's system as in Cupid's, by her association with men; moreover, the juxtaposition of two women so easily taken in by one man makes it seem, again, common and inevitable that men betray and women beg for more. Furthermore, over one third of Hypsipyle's portion of the legend is devoted to the details of the Pelleas plot that lead up to Jason's

[32] The narrator's repeated uses of *occupatio* are too numerous to consider here; for just one more of the many examples, see the beginning of Dido's Legend, where the narrator's opening apostrophe to Virgil and description of Aneas' departure from Troy (ll. 924–53) is cut short by his reluctant and delayed realization that all this "acordeth nat to my matere" (l. 955). Typically, this comes too late to disguise the narrator's by now familiar enthusiasm for war and epic adventures. Only when a letter can be used to show a woman's stupidity does the *occupatio* go unheeded: Phyllis' letter, as I have mentioned earlier, is quoted *ad nauseam*, although the narrator twice promises us just "a word or tweyne" (ll. 2489, 2495) and interrupts his lengthy citation (more than fifty lines) to tell us that it is too long, but that he has quoted "There as me thoghte that she wel hath sayde" (l. 2517).

voyage. Frank says that this digression is "too long for the tale of which it is part,"[33] but I would argue that it is just the right length for showing us again the narrator's obdurate preference for the politics and plots of men as opposed to the sad tales of the women they incidentally encounter and readily abandon.

Fundamentally, although this fact too is often hidden by his apparent eagerness to attack false lovers and debunk his heroes, this narrator identifies, as he first admitted at the end of the *Legend of Thisbe*, with "us men." He most openly joins the side of the tricky foxes when, after those lengthy and unflattering quotations from Phyllis' letter to Demophon, he draws this moral:

> Be war, ye wemen, of youre subtyl fo,
> Syn yit this day men may ensaumple se;
> And trusteth, as in love, no man but me. (ll. 2559–61)

Even though, as Cupid told us in the Prologue, the narrator is "therto nothyng able" (G,246), he is clearly not free of the natural tendency of men to beguile women. His own little joke here thus proves, "by experience," what his repeated use of "autorite" has asserted: men keep on trying, on the presumption that women never learn. A consideration of the interaction of fictional and real worlds reflected in this passage, and in fact throughout the poem, can help us to understand both the narrator and the tradition in which he participates as the objects of Chaucerian irony and can also explain the poem's problematic ending.

First, the nature of the narrator's repeated intrusions of his personal opinions and interests reminds us that the storyteller is a fictional character whose behavior and attitude throughout the poem are part of its meaning. Keeping this in mind, we can further see that his consistent and unifying manipulation of all his "storyal" materials—his omissions, additions, jokes, and intrusions, his barely concealed desire to please "us men" (and to fool "ye wemen"), and his enthusiasm for the masculine elements of his stories—does not help him to create portraits of truly good women by any standards (except possi-

[33] Frank (p. 91). In much the same way, at the beginning of *Ariadne*, the narrator devotes almost eighty lines to the events leading up to Theseus' imprisonment in Minos' dungeon, including a fourteen-line allusion to the story of Scylla (not named, but referred to only as "Nysus doughter" [l. 1908]). Here too Frank remarks that this story is "unnecessarily" (p. 114) included, but if my reading is correct, such digressions and allusions emphasize the narrator's view that human history is full of stories of women who take one look at a man, fall in love, betray their fathers and homelands, and are repaid by their lovers with abandonment and death; predictably, the narrator neglects to mention the metamorphosis of Nysus' daughter.

bly Cupid's implicitly antifeminist ones), does not atone for earlier works reputed to show "unstedefastnesse" (G,526) in women, and does not "fortheren" (G,430) in any persuasive way Cupid and his Religion of Love. Instead, the narrator's treatment of his heroines reduces the stature and heroism of the good woman to that same oppressive model that is inherent, as we have seen, in the views Cupid expresses in the Prologue. His own lack of interest in women and his insensitivity to the plight of his heroines makes this narrator a personification of the subtle antifeminism of the courtly and clerical tradition he draws on. Prevented by his overt limitations and inadequacies from identifying ourselves with or trusting this narrator very far, then, we see how his selection and treatment of good women ironically defines the double bind in which the female is caught: victimized if she follows the rules of Love and lives up to feminine ideals; unworthy, unloved, and unsung if she does not.

Let me parenthetically point out here that I am assuming, for the sake of interpretive clarity and simplicity, that the narrator and Cupid are both unaware of the antifeminism implicit in their attitudes and practices. A strong case might be made, however, that there is a further irony: the narrator might well be awake to the implications of his treatment, and thus he may be attempting to carry out his imposed sentence while in fact he is poking fun at Cupid by giving him a poem whose effect is exactly the opposite of what the god ordered. The narrator, then, is much closer to the implied author than I have been arguing—but the object of the irony is still the antifeminist tradition; the narrator dons the mask of the antifeminist to achieve his ends; and the reader perceives the irony only by identifying that mask, by discerning the contradictions and limitations, pretended or real, inherent in the narrator's attitude and treatment. I only draw the line at imputing the antifeminist sentiment, conscious or unconscious, to Chaucer as implied author, not only because of the external evidence of Chaucer's attitude toward women in other works, but also because the *Legend of Good Women*, by such a reading, becomes a very silly poem, unworthy of a subtle intelligence, and one that implicates men, too, in a way that a straightforwardly antifeminist work would not.

Another passage in which the narrator conflates his fictional and real worlds clarifies my suggestion that we are meant to see, behind the mask of irony, how problems for real women arise from a literary tradition that theoretically idealizes their gender. At the beginning of the *Legend of Philomela*, following an outraged apostrophe to the "yevere of the formes" (l. 2228) asking why Tereus was born, the nar-

rator openly confesses to his involvement with the matter of his story:

> And, as to me, so grisely was his dede
> That, when that I his foule storye rede,
> Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also.
> Yit last the venym of so longe ago,
> That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde
> The storye of Tereus. (ll. 2238–43)

The narrator's response sounds the familiar Chaucerian theme: real human beings, both as storytellers and as audience, are profoundly influenced by fiction. Even when they know they are telling a fable, even when they are warned against applying a story too literally to life, they make earnest out of the game; they use literature to their own personal ends, they identify with fictional characters, model their own behavior on fictional types and codes, and judge living people and events against literary ideals and images. Given this irrepressible human tendency, "old bokes," as the narrator asserted in the Prologue, are indeed an important way in which we learn about life. And hence the potential "venym" for women, in their search for ways to be good, is signalled by those heroines of the poem who, like Criseyde before them, are a little too conscious of their reputation in future literary works. Given the standards set by the heroines of poems like the *Legend of Good Women*, the woman who seeks in literature a model for virtue—say, for instance, a Dorigen—is left with few options: to join the ranks of the true and famous, she must certainly suffer, and preferably commit suicide.

Finally, the narrator's personal involvement in his story also explains what has been rightly perceived but wrongly interpreted as his growing boredom with the Legends and his failure to complete his penitential labors. Frank has persuasively refuted the theory that Chaucer was bored with the *Legend of Good Women*,[34] and I will not repeat his arguments; I would simply add that the theory clearly arose from a failure to remember that Chaucer uses a *persona* here, as elsewhere, and that an openly bored narrator does not prove a bored poet, any more than the obviously naïve or insensitive or blundering narrator elsewhere justifies us in thinking that Chaucer was naïve, insensitive, or blundering. In fact, the undisguised boredom of the narrator is just one more piece of evidence that he is an untrustworthy figure whose assumptions and attitudes we must, therefore, question, and certainly cannot unthinkingly conflate with Chaucer's.

[34] Frank, pp. 189–210.

The lack of conclusion in the poem, if we read it this way, is not a problem, but further proof that the narrator's inadequacies are being satirized throughout. The poem ends with the line "This tale is seyd for this conclusioun" (l. 2723); modern readers assume that the work is incomplete and respond with some confusion to this state of affairs. In Robinson's edition, the end is explicitly marked "Unfinished," and in an explanatory note the editor points out:

> It is a little surprising that the legend should have been left incomplete, when the story was finished and a very few lines would have sufficed to make the application. Possibly the ending was written and lost. More probably Chaucer left it to be added when he should continue the series.[35]

On the other hand, a more recent editor of Chaucer's works, John Fisher, says that it is not at all surprising that the ending is incomplete, and he uses the boredom theory, despite Frank's arguments, to explain the inconclusion.[36] But Fisher's own textual note on the last line of the poem suggests another interesting possibility:

> The legend ends with this line in most complete MSS. Modern critics consider it unfinished and assume that Chaucer would have added a line or two of moralization, but many contemporary scribes evidently considered this a satisfactory concluding line.[37]

Did contemporary scribes, then, know something we do not? Perhaps they knew that this narrator was hardly to be taken too seriously: the last line of the extant poem suggests that he was about to add some moralization of his own, but whatever "conclusioun" he might offer would obviously be like his other moralizations—all women are true (but weak), all men (except me) are false—and equally untrue to the more perceptive and sophisticated conclusions that the poet might expect a perceptive and sophisticated audience to be able to draw. For once, and at the crucial point, the narrator is not allowed to sound his hackneyed, monotonous, and by now unconvincing pieties; he is not allowed the final word so that the ironic message of the stories he tells and the way he tells them, although it cannot, in the circumstances, be said, can be silently understood, as all irony must be. The last complete sentence of the poem has shown us the Chaucerian Hypermnestra, a frail and innocent woman, who sees that she has been abandoned by her husband and knows that she cannot keep up with or

[35] Robinson, p. 854.

[36] John H. Fisher, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 620.

[37] Fisher, p. 665.

follow him. Resigned to her fate, like the other heroines "sittynge in hire drede," she waits until she is caught and imprisoned. With this archetypal image of the destiny of the good woman, indeed the narrator is tired and "agroted"; the poet, however, has made his point. To the story of Hypermnestra, capped by the narrator's silence, he cannot and need not add.