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Source: *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), pp. 22-42

Published by: [Penn State University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096115>

Accessed: 08-03-2016 15:35 UTC

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CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN*, LADIES AT COURT AND THE FEMALE READER¹

by Nicola F. McDonald

The *Legend of Good Women* is undoubtedly Chaucer's most enigmatic poem. It is constructed on the model of saints' lives, but records the histories of markedly unholy pagan women. It promises to be a comprehensive legendary, but breaks off abruptly after only nine legends with the conclusive, yet incomplete, observation: "This tale is seyde for this conclusioun—" (2723).² It insists on the authority of written sources, yet diverges dramatically from the very authorities it cites. The narrator is vociferous in his expression of his complete and utter boredom, yet there is compelling evidence that the poet had a serious and ongoing interest in the project.³ And, crucially, while recent scholarship sites Chaucer's audience in the male world of court bureaucracy and administrative officialdom, the narrative voice identifies its public as predominantly female.⁴ The purpose of this article is to take up Chaucer's invocation to women, to place an eminently troublesome text in dialogue with its female audience. The analysis falls into two parts: a critical reading of the women in the *Legend's* implied audience followed by an examination of the fifteenth-century female readership to which the manuscripts attest.

I

Evidence for an implied audience in the *Legend of Good Women* is sparse (the Chaucerian narrator is not the loquacious commentator readers have come to expect, although he is still elusive and playful), but the citation of women is remarkably persistent. Chaucer's earliest reference to the *Legend* is coincident with the first identification of a female public. In the final verses of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrator famously asks the indulgence of the women in his audience for his unsettling portrayal of the false Criseyde. He then hints at an *apologia*:

THE CHAUCER REVIEW, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2000.

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Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe,
 And every gentil womman, what she be,
 That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
 That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.

.....
 Gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
 Penelopeës trouthe and good Alceste

(V 1772–75, 1777–78).

The fiction of the *Legend of Good Women* being written as an antidote to, or as penance for, the *Troilus* is established in the *Legend's* Prologue by the God of Love and Queen Alceste; and while there is no explicit reference back to the coterie of “gentil” women awaiting the penitential volume’s production, there is the, often dismissed, promise, in the F Prologue, of a presentation of the legends to Queen Anne of Bohemia, Richard II’s consort. Alceste orders the narrator:

“whan this book ys maad, yive it the quene,
 On my byhalf, at Eltham or at Sheene.”

(F 496–97)

The reference to the Queen, neatly underscored by rhyme, is omitted in the revised G Prologue, and Anne’s death in 1394 is commonly regarded as the impetus for the revision. I will return to the question of Anne as dedicatee below; for the moment I want simply to document the text’s construction of a female audience. Directives to women readers or listeners can also be traced through the legends themselves. In *Dido*, the narrator interjects his account of Dido and Aeneas’s consummation of their love with the warning:

O sely wemen, ful of innocence,
 Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience,
 What maketh yow to men to truste so?
 Have ye swych routhe upon hyre feyned wo,
 And han swich olde ensamples yow beforn?
 Se ye nat alle how they ben forsworn?

.....
 Ye may as wel it sen as ye may rede.
 Tak hede now of this grete gentil-man.

(1254–59, 1263–64)

A similar caution concludes Lucretia’s legend:

Crist himselve telleth
 That in Israel, as wyd as is the lond,

That so gret feyth in al that he ne fond
 As in a woman; and this is no lye.
 And as of men, loke ye which tyrannye
 They doon alday; assay hem whoso lyste,
 The trewest ys ful brotel for to triste.

(1879–85)

In the *Philomela*, the account of Tereus serves to alert women: “ye may be war of men, if that yow liste” (2387); and the *Legend of Phyllis* is neatly framed by references to a female audience. The legend opens with the narrator imagining the response of women who hear his account (“God, for his grace, fro swich oon kepe us!’ / Thus may these women preyen that it here” [2401–02]) and concludes with the teasing assertion: “Be war, ye wemen, of youre subtyl fo, / . . . / And trusteth, as in love, no man but me” (2559, 2561).

Narrative constructions of an audience or reader are, of course, always just that: constructions, part of an intricate network of textual signals designed to shape a particular response.⁵ Yet, implied audiences are also not necessarily fictitious, simply by virtue of their being implied. Curiously, the very critics who discount the idea of a (substantially) female component to Chaucer’s audience, simultaneously use the *Legend’s* “courtly” references to posit a readership that is both exclusive and socially elevated.⁶ Aside from the paucity of documentary evidence, the greatest impediment to any inquiry into the *Legend’s* female audience is the interpretation of the poem, first offered in 1908/1909 by H. C. Goddard and regularly reiterated ever since, as an “unmerciful satire.”⁷ Chaucer, surely, would not have insulted Queen Anne, or other aristocratic women, with his comic rendition of the “good woman”—the pathetic victims, predatory men (the narrator included), and thinly veiled sexual innuendo. Yet this is more indicative of modern than medieval sensibilities, and it should not substitute for historical accuracy. Take, for instance, the line quoted above from the legend of Phyllis: “trusteth, as in love, no man but me” (2561). It is often read as an ironic crescendo, aligning the poet-narrator, a shameless opportunist, with the “bad men” of the legends; and undoubtedly it is. But this type of humor does not, of necessity, exclude women. Unless a chorus of knowing female laughter is imagined in reply, the joke, I think, misses its mark. Indeed, if we don’t imagine an audience comprised of both men and women, both equally “in the know,” then much of the poem, and especially the narrator’s banter, just doesn’t work. The tastes, literary or otherwise, of aristocratic, fourteenth-century women are emerging only slowly, yet there is nothing to suggest that the *Legend’s* blend of compliment and comedy would have offended them.⁸ Strohm’s assertion that “[c]ommon sense

supports the likelihood that [a] Westminster-London audience of gentlemen and clerks was at the heart of Chaucer's public,⁹ is undoubtedly right for most of Chaucer's poetry. But, in the instance of the *Legend of Good Women*, common sense equally suggests the addition of a female component to that public.

Over the past five or so years, the *Legend* has been the subject of unprecedented scholarly interest and, despite ongoing debate, there are significant points of consensus. Most surprising (and most interesting) is the assumption of textual transparency. What the poem says about itself, its composition and reception, is (once again) a starting point for analysis. A renewed confidence in the veracity of Alceste's injunction "give it the queen" (F 496) leads both Minnis and Percival to propose a court audience (for the initial "performance" at least) and this accords with Quinn's insistence on the poem's "inherent performability."¹⁰ Wallace further argues that the *Legend* provides evidence of the intersection of English and Bohemian culture and places Anne at the center of the cosmopolitan exchange.¹¹ The narrator's allusion to the flower and leaf debate (F 72, 82), a gender game popular with continental aristocrats, offers more detailed evidence for the poem's function at court, and May or spring-time (the season of the *Prologue*) entertainments are consistently cited as the appropriate occasion for a public, or coterie, reading. In its festive guise, the *Legend* is, of course, best understood as ludic: Quinn imagines a "comic performance" while Minnis and especially Percival, consider the opposition between "ye women" and "us men," the exaggerated abuse and unequivocal gender bias, as precisely those traits that mark out sexual sparring as a recreational activity for mixed gatherings. A playful diversion for the sophisticated Ricardian courtier: what interests me most about recent readings of the *Legend* is the implication that women are an important and prominent feature of the initial audience. Yet, with one exception, the question of who these women actually are (women who are conventionally distinguished by their absence) is ignored; similarly little attention is paid to how Ricardian women (as opposed to men) may have responded to the poem.

Alastair Minnis's proposal that Chaucer's wife, Philippa de Roet, may have provided the poet (and thus his poems) with access to high-ranking women is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it reminds us that some of Chaucer's most obvious associations with England's social and political elite were mediated through a woman.¹² Philippa de Roet was *domicella reginae* of Philippa of Hainault, Edward III's queen, and she was subsequently in the service of Constance of Castile, John of Gaunt's second wife; furthermore, Philippa was also, apparently, the sister of Katherine Swynford, initially Gaunt's mistress and ultimately his third wife. The life-records indicate that Philippa

received annual annuities for her service to Queen Philippa and Constance of Castile, that she was admitted to the fraternity of Lincoln Cathedral in 1386 (as part of a lavish ceremony to celebrate the admission of Gaunt's son, Henry of Derby, into the same fraternity), and that, during the 1380s, she was regularly at Kenilworth castle for Gaunt's Christmas and New Year's celebrations (as part of Constance's household).¹³ Philippa's service in different royal households, her participation at various festive occasions, and her blood relationship with Gaunt's mistress remind us that the late-medieval royal court and aristocratic households were remarkably fluid bodies; they regularly shifted location and included an ever-changing assembly of high status men and women. If Philippa did function as some kind of conduit between Chaucer and aristocratic women, what I would argue is that that group of women was part of an intricate web of aristocratic social connections, a web that, although based, in later years, around the household of Constance of Castile and John of Gaunt, by no means excluded the royal court.

Thomas Walsingham famously accused Richard II's courtiers of being "more knights of Venus than of Bellona, more vigorous in the bedroom than on the field of battle, armed with words rather than the lance."¹⁴ Walsingham's sentiments, undoubtedly skewed by his pro-Lancastrian bias, are not unique. The Evesham chronicler's criticism is more specifically directed at Richard himself, whom he charges with being "prodigal with gifts, extravagant at banquets and in dress and unlucky and timid at war," while noting more specifically that he was often awake for "orgies and other unmentionable activities that would sometimes last half, if not the whole, night."¹⁵ Even the Westminster chronicler, altogether more sympathetic to Richard, remarks on the king's oversized (and underworked) household.¹⁶ Nigel Saul, and other modern historians, have read Walsingham's condemnation as evidence that Richard's court was "shedding the character of a military household" and "evolving into the sophisticated, civilianized, court of the Renaissance."¹⁷ Walsingham's accusation merits closer attention. Although governed as much by rhetoric as reality, it locates the distinctive quality of Richard's court in the interplay of sex and language and transforms his *camera* into a *thalamos*: Venus's knights, at play in the royal bedroom, spar with words. The importance of games and other entertainments at court festivities is well documented,¹⁸ but Walsingham's citation of Venus draws attention to a particular kind of game.

One or two public sex scandals may have been enough to generate the chronicler's opprobrium,¹⁹ but the depiction of the courtiers as Venusian knights may also point more generally to the prominence of women in Richard's court. Historians regularly remark on the closeness of the king's and queen's households, a fact commonly attributed to Richard's real

affection for his wife. Documentary evidence suggests that Anne spent most of her time with Richard, that she regularly accompanied him as he travelled about the country, and that personnel moved fluidly between the two households (a feature indicative of their relative equality).²⁰ Consequently, I think we can assume that the queen's female attendants were a regular feature of court life, a fact which may have contributed to the overall impression of excess numbers. More than either his grandfather or usurper, Richard seems to have integrated women into his household's daily routine, and it is not surprising that the chroniclers found that irregularity worth noting. One feature of the "feminization" of Richard's reign that has until recently received almost no attention at all is the king's sponsorship of a sorority of the garter, an informal but nevertheless significant adjunct to the prestigious and highly politicized Order of the Garter, founded by Edward III c.1349.²¹ James Gillespie, the only historian to study the sorority in any detail, has argued that no other monarch "came close to matching Richard II's largesse to the Ladies of the Garter."²² Wardrobe accounts indicate that Edward III granted garter robes to Philippa (his wife) and Isabella, Countess of Bedford (his daughter) on two separate occasions (1358 and 1376 respectively), and Philippa is cited for her attendance at mass at Windsor as part of the 1361 Garter festivities; several unidentified ladies were also invited to the 1358 feast of St George. There is no other record of Edward's inclusion of women in the order's roll call or its festivities. The evidence for Richard II's reign is markedly different. From 1379 to 1399 Richard regularly invited women to the St George's Day celebrations and granted them robes and hoods (distinguished, as were those of the Knights, by color and material) in accordance with their status. The number of named recipients (dubbed "*Dominae de Secta et Liberatura Garterii*") varies from two to twenty-two, and it is not clear if the sorority ever achieved, or strove to achieve, full membership (the Knights of the Garter were limited to twenty-five plus the king). The evidence suggests that, in the absence of formal rules for selection, choice of the ladies rested with Richard, or his immediate advisors, and that he cultivated the sorority in accordance with the demands of politics, patronage, and personal whim. Richard's wives were both members of the order (Anne received her first robes in 1384), as were a series of high-ranking women, some but certainly not all, distinguished as Plantagenet kin or as wives, widows, or daughters of Garter knights. Richard seems, on occasion, to have used the honor to forge useful alliances, and this, Gillespie notes, is particularly true in the case of his powerful uncle, John of Gaunt. A number of Gaunt's daughters (Philippa, Elizabeth, Catherine, and Joan Beaufort) as well as daughters-in-law (Margaret Holland, wife of John Beaufort, and Mary de Bohun, Henry of Derby's wife) are named among the recipients, and in 1387

Katherine Swynford (Chaucer's sister-in-law) is admitted to the society. The political significance of the Garter sorority is by no means clear, but it suggests a rather more crucial role for women than has hitherto been noticed; and once again it shows the prominence of women at Richard's court.

My interest in the Garter sorority is ultimately not related to the place of women in Ricardian politics. Instead, I want to consider for a moment the possibility that these women might reasonably constitute a kind of *ad hoc* community for thinking about the women who were included in the *Legend's* initial audience. I want neither to argue that the *Legend* was made specifically for the Garter sorority or the St George's Day festivities (although either or both may be possible). Instead I want to use these women to think about the potential for "women at play" in or around the Ricardian court. The evidence is limited and some of it postdates (by a few years) the period of the *Legend's* composition, but what can be teased out suggests that the sorority was an elite group of literate women, familiar with the rules of public and coterie performance and not innocent of play's erotic potential. The observation of St George's feast comprised religious and secular celebrations, and both appear to have included members of the sorority. The festivities centred on a sumptuous banquet which was followed by elaborate, and regularly ludic, entertainments. While there was no formal requirement for Garter knights to meet outside of the annual Windsor Assembly, one chronicle, at least, suggests their common presence at other royal events. The *Brut* chronicler identifies the Garter knights as performers in the procession leading up to the Smithfield tournament of 1390. According to the chronicler, "xxiiij ladieȝ ladde þese xxiiij lordeȝ of þe Garther with cheynys of goolde, and alle yn þe same sute of hertis as is afore sayde, from þe Tour on hors bak prouȝ the cite of London yn-to Smythfelde, þere þe Iustes schulde be do."²³ Although dressed in matching costume (here Richard's badge of the white hart), the ladies are not explicitly identified as "of þe Garther" and indeed such official recognition would have been inappropriate for the relatively informal sorority. Yet the Smithfield procession is distinguished for its social exclusivity²⁴ and there is almost certainly some overlap between the Smithfield performers and the *Dominæ de Secta et Liberatura Garterii*. What interests me most, however, is that the parade is distinctly, and unavoidably, erotic. The device of ladies leading mounted knights by chains or gold cords, used in other English tournament processions by both Richard II and Edward III, has its most immediate origin in the 1330 civic *feste* of Valenciennes (capital of Hainault and natal home of Edward III's queen Philippa).²⁵ At Valenciennes, the parade of chained knights followed a Castle of Love tableau, a scene which underscored the sexual interplay between the knight and his lady captor. The

absence of the tableau from the London procession does not, however, erase its erotic significance, and it functions as an appropriate preface to the more subtly eroticized tournament that followed.

The initial audience for the *Legend* was undoubtedly more intimate than my citation of public, or official, performance might imply. Other evidence, however, hints at a fuller profile for the sorority. I have already referred to the women as literate, a term which I use loosely to include book ownership and an active participation in textual culture. Karen Jambeck's recent study of medieval women's literary patronage examines the bookish activities of the women of four families and their immediate descendants (a constellation of mothers, daughters, and granddaughters): Elizabeth Berkeley (d.1422), Blanche of Lancaster (d.1369) and her daughter Philippa (d.1415), Joan FitzAlan (d.1419) and Joan Beaufort (d.1399).²⁶ Most of the texts Jambeck cites are devotional or didactic, the type of edifying material we have increasingly come to regard as the standard textual diet for late-medieval women. At first glance, then, these women are not obvious candidates for the *Legend's* audience; yet such an assumption implies an impenetrable barrier between the consumers of religious and secular literature. Richard II, lambasted by the chroniclers for his intemperance, was also an avid consumer and patron of devotional material as were other of his courtiers. Restricting myself to those of Jambeck's women who were active in the period surrounding the *Legend's* composition, there is evidence to suggest that they also participated in a secular textual culture. This is most interestingly found in the case of Philippa, daughter of Blanche of Lancaster and John of Gaunt. Eustache Deschamps, in a balade composed before 1386 (*Des deux Ordres de la Feuille et de la Fleur*), implies Philippa's participation in Flower and Leaf debates and identifies her as a partisan of the Flower.²⁷ The balade thus places Philippa in precisely the environment (courtly and textual) in which Chaucer locates the *Legend*. Curiously, of the women studied by Jambeck, only Elizabeth Berkeley and her family do not also have an explicit connection with the sorority of the Garter. Philippa of Lancaster received her first robes in 1379, Joan FitzAlan's daughter Eleanor, Countess of Buckingham in 1384, and Joan Beaufort, in 1399, the year of her death. None of this proves anything definite about either the Garter sorority or the *Legend's* initial audience, but it indicates that there is documented evidence for an informal group of women, active in the late fourteenth century, who shared the kind of interests and experience required by the *Legend* as ludic interlude.

I want now to turn my attention to the *Legend* itself to consider how an audience of court women, familiar with amorous, or specifically gendered, play, might have understood it. How, in other words, can the

notion of ludic performance shape a female response to the poem and where in the text do we find it. Scholars have argued that the differences between the F and G Prologues (commonly dated c.1386–88 and 1394 or later, respectively) shift the *Legend* away from a court-based coterie audience and render it more compatible with conventional (more specifically clerical) anti-feminist discourse.²⁸ There is no evidence that the legends themselves changed to accommodate this shift, but the two Prologues do generate quite different readings. The F Prologue, distinguished for its comfortable intimacy, invites the audience's participation as part of a community of lovers and identifies them as amorous sophisticates thoroughly familiar with fashionable (that is, flower and leaf) gender games (F 68–77). The narrator signals his own allegiance to the flower, the party traditionally associated with women and their defenders (F 81–83), and the God of Love, in an explicitly comic gesture, links the penitential legendary to the 20,000 (and more!) good women sitting nearby, awaiting its production (F 557–61). In the G Prologue, the intimacy is gone, only to be replaced by bookish irony (G 270–77) and a humor rooted in the incongruity of Jerome and “Valerye” (arch anti-feminists) and “good woman” narratives (G 280–87). Even more crucially, the woman is effaced: not only is the compliment to Queen Anne removed, but so too are the references that imply an active female presence in the *Legend's* audience. The G Prologue disrupts, but more importantly, I want to argue, regenders the ludic experience.

The process of regendering is vital to any reading of the *Legend* and not simply because it points to the dynamic nature of Chaucer's audience. When the narrator sets out to make a “legende / Of goode wymmen . . . trewe in lovyng al hire lyves” (F 483–85), he is ordered to “telle of false men that hem bytraien” (F 486). The conventional burden of inconstancy (recorded, for instance, in Chaucer's account of Criseyde) is transferred from the woman to the man and a process of rhetorical regendering is initiated. It is often argued that the *Legend* disrupts its audience's expectations, and critics regularly cite the poet's reworking of Guido delle Colonne's “woman as matter” topos as prime evidence. In his denunciation of Medea, the author of the *Historia destructionis Troiae* extends his vitriol to all women:

we know the heart of woman always seeks a husband, just as matter always seeks form. Oh, would that matter, passing once into form, could be said to be content with the form it has received. But just as it is known that matter proceeds from form to form, so the dissolute desire of women proceeds from man to man, so that it may be believed without limit, since it is of an unfathomable depth.²⁹

In the *Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea* the analogy is inverted: a deft rhetorical flip renders woman constant form and man insatiable matter.

As mater appetith forme alwey
 And from forme into forme it passen may,
 Or as a welle that were botomles,
 Ryght so can false Jason have no pes.

(1582–85)

But the analogy does not finish here. Chaucer's collocation of "apetiten," "desyren," and "devouren" incorporates, as Percival has noted,³⁰ Guido's image in a narrative of sexual consumption that runs right through the fourth legend, a narrative that figures Jason as both barnyard fox ("sly devourere . . . of gentil wemen, tendre creatures" [1369–70]) and raging beast ("of love devourer and dragoun" [1581]). Despite long standing critical interest in these lines (1582–85), with the exception of Percival, no one has noted the extent to which Chaucer incorporates Guido's inverted image in his own narrative. It is more common for readers to isolate the quotation and its inversion (as Percival also does) as evidence of Chaucer's engagement with "vigorous philosophical antifeminism."³¹ Modern readers thereby align themselves with the audience implied by the G Prologue, men, prompted by the identification of "Valerye" and Jerome, in search of ironic intent. Equally interesting, however, is the way in which this image of Jason as "apetiting" matter participates in an extended game of rhetorical inversion that does not rely on source recognition for its effect. It is this game, a kind of heightened, rhetorical, performance of gender difference, that makes most sense in terms of the directives of the F Prologue and the experience of court women. To demonstrate how Guido's inverted image works in dialogue with a broader scheme of inverted gender rhetoric, I will continue with the fourth legend.

The *Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea* opens with a twenty-eight-line prologue that functions as a synopsis of the paired conquest narratives that follow; action, theme, and rhetoric are rapidly outlined. It is the announcement of rhetorical strategy that interests me here: "Thow rote of false lovers, Duc Jasoun, / Thow sly devourere and confusioun / Of gentil wemen" (1368–70). The identification of Jason as the "confusioun" of women inverts the proverbial definition (familiar in its English and Latin forms³²) of woman as man's confusion, *mulier est hominis confusio*, and alerts the audience to the way in which the defamation will proceed. The process by which Jason's "badness" (for medieval audiences, a reasonably uncontested verdict) is constructed is one of gender reversal; the legend is built up around a resonant core of redeployed antifeminist commonplaces. Although much of the rhetoric can, ultimately, be traced

to authoritative Latin sources, it is equally alive in vernacular literature and does not require a learned male audience to understand or appreciate it. The negative stereotype of woman found repeatedly in vernacular works as diverse as lyric, fabliau, moral or religious narrative (and including the *Roman de la Rose*, a text to which the *Legend* is specifically opposed) is completely reworked, and more specifically regendered, during the course of the legend. The constituent parts of the proverbially deceptive, inconstant, destructive, and sexually insatiable woman are neatly isolated, inverted, and then restitched into a narrative of male villainy. Jason is the “feynyng” (1556) sexual predator (“devourer and dragoun” [1581]), a “traytour” (1659) whose consumption of women (“tendre creatures” [1370]) is as single-minded as it is insatiable: “And wedded yit the thridde wif anon” (1660).

The extent to which gender inversion permeates the poem (it is by no means limited to the fourth legend) is also evident in the way in which the gender-value of individual lexical items is disrupted. In other words, Chaucer takes the gender commonly associated with individual words and inverts it. Take, for instance, the adjective “brotel” (and its noun form “brotelnesse”), glossed in the *Middle English Dictionary* as changeable, uncertain, morally weak, fickle, vacillating or untrustworthy.³³ Outside of the *Legend*, with few exceptions, Chaucer uses “brotel” (or “brotelnesse”) to designate female inconstancy. The most “brotel” is, of course, Fortune, the consummate fickle woman (examples include *Tale of Melibee* 1449 and *Fortune* 63), but she is not alone. In the *Merchant’s Tale* Pluto lectures Proserpina:

Th’experience so preveth every day
 The tresons whiche that wommen doon to man.
 Ten hondred thousand [tales] tellen I kan
 Notable of youre untrouthe and brotilnesse.

(E 2238–41)

In the unascribed ballade *Against Women Unconstant* the narrator berates his lover for her “newefangelnesse” (1) and asserts: “Ye might be shryned for your brotelnesse” (15). In Book III of *Troilus*, Criseyde assures Pandarus that she could never “falsen Troilus” (III, 806), and turns briefly to a Boethian reflection on mutability. The irony of her discomfiting excursus on the “brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!” (III, 820) points to her own responsibility for Troilus’s “brotel wele,” his “joie unstable.” In the *Legend of Good Women*, this simple gender dichotomy is disrupted. Women are here the victims of men’s “brotelnesse.” In the legend of Phyllis, the narrator concludes with Phyllis’s suicide, the direct result of her learning “how brotel and how fals” (2556) was her lover Demophon. The legend of Lucrece ends on a similar note. The narrator records

Tarquin's vicious rape of Lucrece and her consequent shame-filled suicide. He then offers a sweeping denunciation of men: "assay hem whoso lyste, / The trewest ys ful brotel for to triste" (1884–85). Deducing universal truths from a specific example is a standard rhetorical feature of antifeminist commonplace, but here Chaucer reverses it. One man's "brotelnesse" condemns the whole sex.

This investigation of rhetorical and lexical regendering needs to be extended to the whole of the *Legend*, but it is sufficient to give a sense of how the game "good women" and "false men" is constructed. I began this analysis by thinking about the women who, in all likelihood, participated in the poem's initial audience, court women who, I argue, are familiar, perhaps unusually so, with the conventions of gendered, even erotic, play. What I want to underline is that it is these women, sophisticated and literate, who are the most logical audience for the poem's rhetorical game. Outsized, fashion-conscious, and extravagant, the Ricardian court provides precisely the right environment for the production and consumption of the *Legend* as ludic interlude.

II

The purpose of this essay so far has been to explore the possibility, indeed probability, of women's participation in the *Legend*'s initial audience. I want now to turn my attention to the evidence of female readers (or listeners) provided by the manuscripts of the poem. The importance of manuscripts to our understanding of the reception of medieval texts has long been acknowledged. They bear witness, albeit imprecise, to matters as diverse as the geographic and social distribution of texts, the commercial trade in vernacular poetry, individual, and often idiosyncratic, reading habits, and the flexibility of genre. Despite the absence of incontestable proof of ownership, some manuscripts also contain imperfect, but nonetheless provocative, evidence of a female readership. Two manuscripts of the *Legend* offer just such evidence, and I want to use them to construct, or more precisely to begin to construct, a picture of the *Legend*'s female reader.³⁴

Manuscript evidence for the *Legend* is confined to the fifteenth century,³⁵ and offers information about how it was read in the century after Chaucer's death. The *Legend* was evidently a popular poem. Twelve copies survive: six are virtually complete, missing only the odd line, or, in two instances, the occasional folio;³⁶ four are fragmentary;³⁷ and two contain only a single legend, purposefully excerpted from the frame and functioning as a complete narrative.³⁸ The fifteenth-century readership was both geographically and socially diverse. The provenance of the man-

uscripts extends from London (Rawlinson C 86), through East Anglia (CUL Gg.4.27) and Derbyshire (CUL Ff.1.6), to Scotland (Arch. Selden B.24); and they include sumptuous commercial productions (CUL Gg 4.27), undecorated and economically compiled paper volumes (Rawlinson C 86), and a home-produced family anthology (CUL Ff.1.6). With the exception of the three copies now in the British Library (in which it is the only text³⁹), Chaucer's *Legend* is contained in large verse anthologies. Their contents are a heterogeneous mixture of secular and courtly material regularly interspersed with didactic (including religious) works. What the manuscripts demonstrate most clearly is the breadth of the *Legend's* appeal; medieval readers, like modern commentators, molded its malleable text to suit a variety of needs and interests. A full consideration of the poem's manuscript context is long overdue, but for the moment I will confine myself to the two manuscripts which bear evidence of female readership: Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19 and Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6.

Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19 is a late fifteenth-century commercial production of a London origin.⁴⁰ Carefully executed, but unadorned, the manuscript is comprised of thirteen booklets, each foliated in the same fifteenth-century hand, and it appears to have functioned as a discrete entity from its inception. Its contents (Chaucer, Lydgate, and a selection of unattributed didactic verse) evidence a taste that Bradford Fletcher, editor of the Variorum facsimile, designates "eclectic."⁴¹ Our knowledge of fifteenth-century reading tastes remains inadequate, but the distinctive mixture of didactic, devotional, and recreational material that characterizes this and other composite anthologies points to the reading habits of the mercantile household. These manuscripts, which occur with marked frequency in the second half of the fifteenth century, were designed for a literate domestic readership for whom the book was at once a signal of social aspiration and a repository of conservative values.⁴² The manuscript offers no clear evidence of medieval ownership, but Fletcher ventures the well-to-do mercer Roger Thorney and subsequently his widow's second husband, William Myddelton, as likely candidates. What interests me most about this attribution of ownership is that it also points to Eleanor, wife to both men, as not only the conduit of domestic property, but as a reader herself.⁴³

Evidence for women reading Trinity R.3.19 is found in the form of the short courtesy text "The good wyfe taught hyr dowghtere" that the manuscript contains.⁴⁴ Promising good motherly advice, the text surveys how a young girl should conduct herself at home and abroad, how she should gain a husband, run a household, raise her children, and marry off her daughters. Felicity Riddy has argued that this instructional verse for women is a deeply paternalistic text, the product of "a meeting of inter-

ests between male clerics and city fathers,"⁴⁵ designed to regulate potentially errant female behavior and to establish a model of married and domesticated womanhood. Riddy cites Eleanor as the likely reader of the instructional verses, but suggests that they were destined not for her daughters (who could learn by example) but for the female servants or apprentices in her household, young girls separated from their natural mothers and in need of a "bourgeois" education. Regularly punctuated with injunctions to be well-mannered, honorable, and verbally restrained, the verse instructs women on topics as diverse as chattering in church and avoiding taverns. Yet, ultimately, its teaching centers on the two most serious threats to the young woman's well-being: public disrepute and fast-talking men. The "dowghtere" is exhorted to bear herself "so þat men sey the no shame" (34), to remember that "euyll name ys euell fame" (45) and that "a good name many folde ys more worthe then golde" (95). Men's "velany" (64) looms over her and she is counselled that "all men be nat trew þat fayre spekyng" (65).

In her reading of the manuscript, Riddy posits two different female audiences: the servants who receive instruction from the household manager (for whom the courtesy text is destined) and the family's daughters. More suited to the reading needs of the daughters, Riddy argues, are the volume's courtly poems. The educational and leisure-time requirements, as well as aspirations, of merchant daughters and their family's servants are undoubtedly different; but ill-repute, in particular as a result of sexual misdemeanor, was a threat to both groups of women. I want to suggest that the regulatory ethos of the courtesy text extends naturally to the *Legend*. Although the frame of reference is changed, the women of the *Legend* are uniformly noble and exotic; Chaucer's poem is similarly preoccupied with the consequences of errant female behavior. The central motif of the *Legend* is, of course, men's "vileyne" (2541); "flaterye" (2540) and "feyned trouthe" (1374) are the common tools of seduction. What is especially interesting is that, while most of the women die in unhappy circumstances, the real punishment is the shame that accompanies the loss of name and reputation. Crucially, it is the women themselves who adopt the moralizing tone: Dido primly inquires of Eneas "what woman wole ye of me make?" (1305) and laments "my name is lost thourgh yow" (1361); Medea upbraids Jason with the self-condemning question: "Whi lykede me thy yelwe her to se / More than the boundes of myn honeste?" (1672-73); Lucesse's response to Tarquin's assault is understood within the conventionally accepted bounds of womanly propriety:

These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name
At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame,

That, what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth,
 She loste bothe at ones wit and breth.

(1812–15)

And the abandoned Phyllis explains Demphon's failure to return in words which make her the moral reprobate: "But I wot why ye come nat," quod she, / "For I was of my love to yow to fre" (2520–21). For all of their social divergence, the *Legend* and 'What the good wyfe taught hyr dowghtere' are complementary texts. In the context of Trinity R. 3.19, they function in dialogue, reminding us that for both merchant's daughters and female servants, virtuous womanhood was learned behavior.

The other manuscript which indicates that Chaucer's *Legend*, or at least part of it, was read by women is Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6, the so-called Findern Anthology.⁴⁶ Extensive research into the production of the anthology has revealed a manuscript compiled over almost a century (c.1446–1550) by, at last count, at least forty scribes; the copying of the literary material is dated to the second half of the fifteenth century. The identification of the manuscript with the Findern family has been controversial, Kate Harris arguing that "it is as accurate, if not more accurate, to call the manuscript the 'Cotton,' 'Frauncis' or 'Shirley' Anthology."⁴⁷ But names aside, there is no doubt that the manuscript belonged to a provincial gentry family and that its predominantly secular, yet idiosyncratic contents (including butcher's bills and a clothing inventory), point to household use. More unusual, however, is that it is also something of a women's anthology. The names of five women appear in the manuscript, two as scribal signatures, following lengthy stints of copying, and three in the margins of various texts. The families of all five named women can be traced among the prominent landholders living on the estates in the immediate vicinity of the Findern family seat in Derbyshire. What most distinguishes the Findern anthology from Trinity R.3.19 (apart from its provincial origin) is that the household (and here I include the friends and relations who sporadically joined it) was a constant and active participant in its compilation.

The anthology contains only the legend of Thisbe; it is not a fragment, but a purposefully excerpted piece. The name Frances Cruker, one of the women associated with the manuscript (but not the scribe, who identifies himself as "nicholaus"), appears half way through the legend in the lower margin of folio 65v. Only one other manuscript (Rawlinson C 86) includes an excerpted legend, but the practice of selection is not unfamiliar. Individual *Canterbury Tales* are regularly included in fifteenth-century composite manuscripts, as are "short stories" from Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In the case of the *Canterbury Tales*, critics are confident that, in the process of selection, anthologizers exercised choice and judgement,

conforming to, while simultaneously shaping, the reader's taste. I will discuss the evidence provided by these fifteenth-century editors below. Working on the assumption that Thisbe's narrative is similarly a result of choice, it is worth considering what distinguishes it from the other lives in Chaucer's *Legend*. Although the lives resist easy classification, Thisbe's is unequivocally the least ambiguous. It is a straightforward narrative, wholly devoid of unsettling digression, in which the lover's sin is his fateful tardiness. Believing Thisbe dead (mauled by a lion), Pyramus commits suicide, and Thisbe, finding his near-dead body, does the same. More remarkably, it is the one legend that it is totally devoid of sexuality. With the exception of Hypermnestra, who may or may not have consummated her marriage (the text is deliberately silent on this matter), Thisbe is the *Legend's* only virgin; her amorous experience is distinguished by the fact that it has been mediated through (or, more precisely, obstructed by) a large stone wall.

The *Legend of Thisbe* appears at the beginning of what has elsewhere been identified as the volume's "feminist" sequence;⁴⁸ the items in question include Chaucer's *Complaint of Venus*, Hoccleve's *Lepistre de Cupid*, and the unique lyric "My woofull hert this clad in payn." These texts are unified by the voice of female complaint, a voice that articulates female passion while insisting on its inevitable pain. The distinctive quality of the complaint sequence, at once exultant and dejected, similarly characterizes the series of unique lyrics that Sarah McNamer has argued were written by the women associated with the manuscript.⁴⁹ The fifteen lyrics (of which "My woofull hert" is one) are renamed by McNamer "A Woman's Lament" and she reads them as frank expressions of female sentiment: "the real lives and loves of fifteenth-century provincial women."⁵⁰ Whether or not the lyrics are "sincere" in the manner McNamer implies is not my interest here. I want, rather, to consider how she gets to this conclusion. What McNamer argues is that, although conversant in the courtly idiom of lyric poetry, the women have "missed the meaning." Courtly lyrics, *pace* Stevens, are love games, flirtatious and playfully insincere, which take their significance from their social context. Removed from that context, the charmed court circle, the distinctive idiom—love-sickness, unrequited torment, Fortune's cruelty—becomes the vehicle of "earnest and personal" expression.⁵¹ The lives of fifteenth-century gentry women, often separated from husbands and lovers for months at a time, duplicate in a very real way, McNamer insists, the sentiment of the lyrics. It is the argument that these women poets have "missed the meaning" of playful court lyric that I find intriguing; it corroborates my impression of how the manuscript recasts Thisbe's legend. Excised from its originally ludic framework, and distanced from the sexual energy that characterizes the other lives, Thisbe is simply a victim.

She is the victim of a jealous father ("Maydenes been ykept, for jelosye, / Ful streyte, lest they didnen som folye" [722–23]), a tardy lover, and a stone wall. The legend provides a model of womanhood (chaste and suffering) that matches the paternalistic sentiments of "The good wyfe taught hyr dowghtere," and here, as in Trinity R.3.19, we are forced to consider women's complicity in the perpetuation of that model. If, in CUL Ff.1.6, women worked as scribes and poets, we cannot dismiss the possibility that they were also editors, selecting texts to match their reading interests.

I mentioned above that the edited Chaucer is also a feature of fifteenth-century composite manuscripts that include individual *Canterbury Tales*. Analysing the process of tale selection, Paul Strohm identifies what he calls a "narrowing of the 'Chaucer tradition'" in that century.⁵² Fifteenth-century readers (or editors) repeatedly eschewed the generically unstable, parodic, or bawdy, tales in favor of less ambiguous works like the *Clerk's Tale*, the *Prioress's Tale*, the *Tale of Melibee*, the *Second Nun's Tale*, the *Monk's Tale*, and the *Parson's Tale*. Citing a general economic and political conservatism in the fifteenth century (the result of arrested economic development and widespread recession), Strohm posits a parallel literary conservatism, characterized by an emphasis on traditional themes, the prevalence of didactic and moral material, and a preference for increased artistic control over genre and subject matter. The tales popular in the fifteenth century tend, he argues, "to reaffirm *obeisance* and subordination to the authority of lord and husband (. . .) or to Fortune (. . .) or to God (. . .) or to the domination of one's own reason over unruly impulse (. . .)."⁵³ A similar process is at work, I think, in the two fifteenth-century "editions" of the *Legend* that I have considered here, the two manuscripts of the poem that offer evidence of a female readership. One thing that is different about the *Legend*, however, is that the "narrowing" or change evident in the poem's readership is a feature of both "editions," the single life of Thisbe (CUL Ff.1.6) and the complete text (Trinity R.3.19). In both instances the editor and/or the reader seem, perhaps purposefully, to have "missed" the *Legend's* original ludic meaning.

The relationship between the *Legend* and its female audience has certainly "narrowed," in Strohm's sense of the term, between the late fourteenth century (when the poem is first "performed") and the late fifteenth century (the readership to which the manuscripts attest). But the narrowing, I think, is less a result of fifteenth-century economic conditions, literary conservatism falling in line with nationwide social and political conservatism, than of the poem's domestication. The two audiences, the Ricardian court and the fifteenth-century urban or gentry household, are divided by much more than time. Our knowledge of the

place of women at the Ricardian court is far from complete, but there is little doubt that the court provides a space for "women at play" that is unmatched in any late-medieval merchant or gentry household. In a recent study of Chaucer's readers, Seth Lerer identifies a "children's Chaucer," a paternal poet, purposefully appropriated for domestic use, whose work is refigured as "fables for the home."⁵⁴ If, as Lerer argues, the Prioress's seemingly conduct at table "set a standard for several generations of young eaters"⁵⁵ and the Squire's dexterity with a roast developed into "a near obsession with good carving as the mark of social achievement," then it is little surprise that this domestic audience "missed" the *Legend's* ludic meaning and recast it, for the woman (as opposed to child) reader, as a series of admonitory lessons in female deportment and conduct. The purpose of this essay has been to open doors to interrogation, to think about the *Legend* as a poem with a female audience. The evidence is undoubtedly imperfect, but it is, I think, more than sufficient to stimulate debate.

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1. Earlier versions of this paper were given at the University of Oxford, the 29th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the 1996 New Chaucer Society Congress, Los Angeles. I am grateful to the audiences for their helpful comments. More recently, Mark Ormrod, Felicity Riddy and Craig Taylor have been unstintingly generous with their time and knowledge.

2. Quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. L. D. Benson (Oxford, 1988).

3. Chaucer mentions none of his other literary works "so often, allows it so much significance, or describes it in such detail." A. J. Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford, 1995), 327.

4. The fullest accounts of Chaucer's primary audience are R. F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1980) and P. Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). Articles by Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual" and Green, "Women in Chaucer's Audience" in *ChauR* 18 (1983): 137–45, 146–54, are also relevant.

5. See Jill Mann, *Apologies to Women* (Cambridge, Engl., 1991) for cautionary remarks on the interpretation of authorial apologies.

6. "If his inscribed audiences are to be taken at all seriously as indicators of his intended audiences, one of his most ambitious poems—the *Legend of Good Women*—may be addressed almost exclusively to a socially elevated readership." *Social Chaucer*, 204, fn.14.

7. H. C. Goddard, "Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," *JEGP* 7 (1908):101.

8. R. F. Green, for instance, notes the "mixture of refined sentimentality and sexual licence" in court games like *Le roi qui ne ment* and the *demandes d'amour*, which circulated in France in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and argues that they signal "genuine erotic negotiation:" "Le Roi Qui Ne Ment and Aristocratic Courtship," in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. K. Busby and E. Kooper (Amsterdam, 1990), 222, 220.

9. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 63.

10. See Minnis, 25; F. Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge, Engl., 1998), 299–323; W. A. Quinn, *Chaucer's Rehearsals: The Performability of the Legend of Good Women* (Washington, 1994), 199.

11. D. Wallace, "Anne of Bohemia, Queen of England, and Chaucer's *Emperice*," *Litteraria Pragensia: Studies in Literature and Culture* 5 (1995), 1–16.
12. Minnis, 24–25.
13. M. M. Crow and C. C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966), 67–93.
14. Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (2 vols., Rolls series, 1863–64), 2.156. "Et hii nimirum milites plures erant Veneris quam Bellonae, plus valentes in thalamo quam in campo, plus lingua quam lancea praeumuniti."
15. *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. G. B. Stow (Philadelphia, 1977), 166. "In dandis prodigus, in conuiuiis et indumentis ultra modum splendidus, ad bella contra hostes infortunatus et timidus . . . uigilator maximus, ita ut aliquando dimidiam noctem, non numquam usque mane totam noctem in potacionibus et aliis non dicendis in somp-nem duceret."
16. *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–1394*, ed. L. C. Hector and B. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), 166.
17. Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), 333.
18. The most complete studies of games and entertainment at the late medieval court are J. Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London, 1961) and G. Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300–1660*, vol. 1, 1300–1576 (London, 1959).
19. The incidents in question are John Holland's seduction of Gaunt's daughter Elizabeth and Robert de Vere's seduction of Anne of Bohemia's lady-in-waiting Agnes Lancecrona. See C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360–1413* (New Haven, 1986), 173.
20. See Saul, 93–94, 455–57 and Given-Wilson, 93.
21. James Gillespie's article, "Ladies of the Fraternity of Saint George and of the Society of the Garter," *Albion* 17: 259–78, documents evidence for the sorority; my analysis is indebted to his archival work. P. J. Begent, "Ladies of the Garter," *Coats of Arms*, n.s. 8:145 (1989): 16–22, is also relevant.
22. Gillespie, 268.
23. *The Brut, or The Chronicles of England*, ii, ed. F. W. D. Brie (EETS, OS, 136, 1908), 343.
24. S. Lindenbaum, "The Smithfield Tournament of 1390," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 20 (1990): 10–11.
25. See J. Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270–1350* (Woodbridge, 1982), 42–43.
26. K. Jambeck, "Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England, 1200–ca.1475," *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. J. Hall McCash (Athens, Ga., 1996), 228–65.
27. Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, SATF (Paris, 1878–1903), iv 259–61.
28. For the most recent account, see Percival, 300–301.
29. Guido de Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, ed. N. E. Griffin (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), II.17. The translation is from M. E. Meek, *Historia Destructionis Troiae: Guido delle Colonne* (Bloomington, 1974), 15. "Scimus enim mulieris animum semper virum appetere, sicut appetit materia semper formam. O utinam materia transiens semel in formam posset dici suo contenta formato! Set sicut de forma ad formam procedere materia notum est, sic mulieris concupiscentia dissoluta procedere de viro ad virum, uti esse creditur sine fine, cum sit quedam profunditas sine fundo."
30. Percival, 215.
31. Percival, 215.
32. The editors of the *Riverside Chaucer*, glossing Chantecleer's infamous mistranslation of the phrase, remark, 'a comic definition of woman so widely known that it was almost proverbial'. Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, 939.
33. Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn, eds. *Middle English Dictionary*, i (Ann Arbor, 1956), "brotel" (b) and (c), 1197.
34. Carol Meale's unpublished paper "The Text and the Book: Readings of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* in the late Middle Ages" (delivered at the 1992 New Chaucer Society Congress, Seattle) considers some of the same material, and I would like to thank her for providing me with a copy of the paper.
35. Extant copies of the *Legend of Good Women* are found in the following manuscripts: Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6; Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.4.27;

Cambridge, Magdalene College MS Pepys 2006; Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19; London, British Library MS Additional 9832; London, British Library MS Additional 12524; London, British Library MS Additional 28617; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 638; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C 86; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden B.24; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Tanner 346.

36. Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Bodley 638, Fairfax 16, Arch. Selden B.24, and Tanner 346; Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.4.27 and Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.19

37. British Library MS Additional 9832 breaks off abruptly half way through the text (in the middle of Ariadne's life) and the two other British Library manuscripts lack the poem's beginning: MS Additional 12524 starts at the end of Medea's life, and MS Additional 28617 advances, in fits and starts, from the middle of Thisbe's. Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 2006 is also imperfect and goes only so far as the first lines of the Hypsipyle/Medea legend.

38. Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C 86 and Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6, have just one legend each, "Dido" and "Thisbe" respectively.

39. British Library MS Additional 12524 includes Gilbert Banester's translation and adaptation of Boccaccio's *Guiscardo and Ghismonda* as an additional legend. It is interesting to note that the two other copies of the English *Guiscardo and Ghismonda* are to be found in manuscripts which also contain Chaucer's *Legend* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C 86 and Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19).

40. The manuscript is published in a *Variorum* facsimile, *Manuscript Trinity R.3.19, Trinity College, Cambridge: A Facsimile*, intro. B.Y. Fletcher (Norman, Ok., 1987). Information about its composition as well as the evidence for ownership is also discussed by J. Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1985), 17–19 and *passim*, and J. Boffey and J. J. Thompson, "Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts" in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, eds. J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (Cambridge, 1989) 279–315.

41. Fletcher, "Introduction," xv.

42. See Boffey and Thompson, "Anthologies and Miscellanies" and C. M. Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners: Book Production and Social Status" in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, 201–38.

43. Felicity Riddy argues, "[o]ther books owned by Thorney were certainly in the possession of his widow, Eleanor, after his death in 1515, since they later acquire the signature of her second husband, William Myddelton. There is no reason to suppose that Eleanor did not make use of Thorney's books during his lifetime." Felicity Riddy, "Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text," *Speculum* 71 (1996): 81n.

44. All quotations from "The good wyfe taught hyr dowghtere" are from the manuscript (fols. 211r–213r) and are cited by line number. The Trinity R.3.19 version of the poem is edited, somewhat haphazardly, by Frederick J. Furnivall in *Manners and Meals in Olden Time: The Babees Book, etc.*, EETS OS 32 (1868), 36–47; Furnivall uses London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 853 as his base text and includes an imperfect list of the variant readings from the Trinity manuscript.

45. Riddy, 73.

46. A facsimile of the manuscript is published in the Scholar Medieval Manuscripts in Facsimile series, *The Findern Manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS. Ff.1.6*, ed. Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen (London, 1977). The most detailed description of the manuscript is Kate Harris, "The Origins and Make-up of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8 (1983): 299–333. The manuscript was given its title by Rossell Hope Robbins in the first important study of the volume, "The Findern Anthology," *PMLA* 69 (1954): 610–42.

47. Harris, 307.

48. Harris, 316.

49. Sarah McNamer, "Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript," *Viator* 22 (1991): 279–310. J. Boffey, "Women Authors and Women's Literacy in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England" in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. C. M. Meale (Cambridge, Engl., 1993), 159–82 takes issue with McNamer's conclusions. In terms of my argument here, it does not finally

matter if the women did or did not write the lyrics themselves; the poems still function as remarkably unplayful courtly lyrics suggesting that someone else, if not the women, "missed the meaning."

50. McNamer, 289.

51. McNamer, 287–89.

52. P. Strohm, "Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the 'Chaucer Tradition'," *SAC* 4 (1982): 3–32. D. S. Silvia, "Some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*" in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), 153–63, is also relevant.

53. Strohm, "Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience," 27.

54. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, 1993), 88.

55. Lerer, 89, 90