

It is also possible, by emending *naes* to *naefne*, to take the lines as a continuation of the previous sentence: "... whatever man might rifle that hoard would be ... tormented with plagues, unless God's grace had already looked favourably upon him who was eager for gold (*gold-hwæte*)."¹⁴

The grace of God would thus save Beowulf not from a curse but from the penalties entailed by contamination with heathen offerings that had received a solemn ritual dedication. E. G. Stanley¹⁵ and Kemp Malone¹⁶ have argued that *agend* does not mean "God" in this context, but as with *benemdon*, the customary meaning of the word should be accepted, and the concordance to Old English poetry clearly shows that, at least in poetry, *agend* is most often used in the sense of "God."¹⁷ Similarly, *est* usually means "grace" (*Concordance*, p. 285), and it is difficult to believe that *agendes est* would not be understood in the same sense as the more frequent *metodes est* (six examples), particularly after the indisputable intervention of God in 3054-3056.

It is difficult to understand the unanimity not only of translators but of eminent scholars and critics in interpreting the poet's words, by one means or another, as a statement that the dragon's hoard carried a curse.¹⁸ If the assumption is not made necessary by the text itself, it must arise elsewhere, and perhaps there is a clue to the origins of the assumption in the circumstance that both W. W. Lawrence and G. V. Smithers have used analogy with other tales in arguing that the original story underlying *Beowulf* must have concerned a curse.¹⁹ Analogy does operate powerfully on the human mind, and it has been explored deliberately and effectively in illuminating many motifs of the poem. Nevertheless, the story as we have it is the poet's own creation, and the test of whether the dragon's hoard is cursed must rest only on meticulous translation of the text of the poem.

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¹⁴*Beowulf and its Analogues*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁵"Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*," in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. Stanley B. Greenfield (Eugene, Ore., 1963), pp. 145-146.

¹⁶"Notes on *Beowulf*," *Anglia*, 54 (1930), 7.

¹⁷J. B. Bessinger, ed., *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978), p. 42. It must be admitted that *agend* is usually compounded when it means "God" in the poetry.

¹⁸See, for example, Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf*, p. 82, and C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London, 1967), p. 118. Both refer to the curse without question or argument about its existence.

¹⁹William Witherle Lawrence, *Beowulf and Epic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 215, and G. V. Smithers, *The Making of Beowulf* (Durham, 1961), pp. 15-17.

ANTI-FEMINISM IN THOMAS HOCCELEVE'S TRANSLATION OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN'S *EPISTRE AU DIEU D'AMOURS*

In the *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, written about 1399, Christine de Pizan criticized clerical anti-feminism and disrespectful attitudes toward women. She argued against these attitudes in a clever, reasonable way, refusing to take an extreme position herself and presenting an image of woman as neither a sinful Eve nor a saintly Mary, but a human being capable of goodness and loyalty in relationships.¹ She was particularly critical of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, which presented women as objects of pleasure or at best servants of the species. Her criticism of Jean de Meun involved her in the famous Quarrel of the Rose, in which she was attacked by Jean de Montreuil and Gonthier Col, secretaries to Charles VI of France, but supported by Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris.²

Christine's spirited defense of women also attracted the attention of Thomas Hoccleve, who translated the work as the *Letter of Cupid* about 1402. The editors of Hoccleve's poem, such as Skeat and Furnivall, have realized that it was a shortened paraphrase rather than a precise translation.³ But it has usually been assumed that Hoccleve remained true to the spirit of Christine's work. In his biographical and literary study of Hoccleve, Jerome Mitchell states that the *Letter of Cupid* "is at least as feminist in outlook as its French source."⁴ John Fleming believes that the *Letter* captures and preserves the tone of the original.⁵ The only critic who has perceived a discrepancy in tone between the two works is Derek Pearsall. In his study of "The English Chaucerians," Pearsall remarks that "*The Letter of Cupid*, a translation of Christine de Pizan's defence of women against detraction, shows that Hoccleve could laugh at women as well as himself."⁶ Pearsall says nothing more, however, and does not show how Hoccleve managed to laugh at women in an ostensibly pro-feminist work. In this essay, I wish to show how Hoccleve subtly introduced an anti-

¹Martha S. Waller, "Christine de Pizan's *Epistle of the God of Love* and the Medieval Image of Woman," *Christianity and Literature*, 27 (1978), 49.

²Marie-José Pinet, *Christine de Pisan, 1364-1430: étude biographique et littéraire* (Paris, 1927), pp. 64-87. Charles F. Ward, ed., *The Epistles on the Romance of the Rose and Other Documents in the Debate* (Chicago, 1911).

³Frederick J. Furnivall, *Hoccleve's Works* (London, 1892), p. xliv.

⁴Jerome Mitchell, *Thomas Hoccleve: A Study in Early Fifteenth Century Poetic* (Urbana, Ill., 1968), p. 53.

⁵John V. Fleming, "Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid* and the Quarrel over the *Roman de la Rose*," *Medium Aevum*, 40 (1971), 23.

⁶Derek Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, ed. D. S. Brewer (University, Ala., 1966), p. 225.

detract: diminish the worth or value of

feminist tone into the *Epistre au dieu d'amours* by changing the content and style.

The *Epistre au dieu d'amours* was Christine de Pizan's first written defense of women as well as her first written criticism of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*.⁷ In the poem, she develops all the reasons why one should honor women, acting as an arbitrator between detractors and those who admire them in an exaggerated way. Since her purpose is serious, she makes Cupid a moral god and a dignified magistrate who presents a balanced case. Criticism of deceitful men is balanced with praise of virtuous men, such as Hutin de Vermeilles, chamberlain of the king, and Othe de Grançon, knight and poet. Many lines are devoted to the discussion of proper courtly behavior.

Although Hoccleve followed the general argument of the *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, he modified its serious tone. He omitted examples of virtuous French knights who supported women, condensed descriptions of proper courtly behavior, and omitted arguments in favor of women. Furthermore, he changed the character of Cupid to that of a jester whose exaggerated defense of women is not very trustworthy.

Hoccleve's undermining technique is apparent in his handling of the issue of betrayal. Christine claims that women are betrayed because of their innocence. Hoccleve repeats this reason but also ironically blames their great pity for men:

By process wommen meeved of pitee,
weenyng al thyng were as that tho men seye,
Granten hem grace of hir benignitee,
For they nat sholden for hir sake deye.⁸

Christine never says a word about excess pity. Hoccleve's statement seems to echo the Merchant's Tale of January and May, where a similar phrase is used to rationalize May's adultery: "Lo, pitee renneth soone in gentil herte."⁹ His irony is more apparent in lines 76 and 77: "And unto here thank perpetuel / That in a neede helpe can so wel" (p. 22).

Christine's poem has the tone of the French court, whereas Hoccleve's version has the tone of the English tavern. This change in tone is accompanied by changes in technique. Hoccleve substitutes brief proverbial expressions and passages of direct discourse for many of

⁷Lula M. Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1929), p. 12.

⁸Thomas Hoccleve, *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. Israel Gollancz (London, 1925), p. 21. All quotes are from this volume.

⁹Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 122.

Christine's detailed descriptions. For example, she portrays the behavior of deceitful lovers in lines 51-59:

Parmi rues leurs chevaux esperonnent
Gay et mignos a cliquetes qui sonnent;
Moult font semblant d'en estre embesoigneiz:
Mules, chevaulz ne sont pas espargniez.
Diligens sone de bailler leurs requestes:
Moult enquierent ou sont nopces et festes
La vont plusieurs jolis, mignos et cointes,
Si font semblant de sentir de noz pointes
Si qu'a peine les peuvent endurer.¹⁰

[Through the streets they spur their horses,
Gay and gallant, to the sound of ringing bells,
Often pretending to be charged with cares.
Their horses are not spared.
They diligently tell their tales.
Then they seek weddings and parties
And go there appearing handsome, gallant, and graceful.
These men pretend to suffer so much
That they scarcely can endure.]

After falsely claiming to be suffering, these fashionable young men ride through the city looking for parties. Hoccleve omits the description and sums up the behavior of the men in a proverbial expression: they are "cropped and rooted of gyle."

Hoccleve uses direct discourse more frequently than Christine. Although both poets describe the "faulx semblans" of scheming lovers, Hoccleve supplements the description with a speech of a lover to his lady. He expands scenes in which women appear to be foolish. He uses direct discourse on three occasions for a total of twenty-eight lines, whereas Christine uses it only once for a total of four lines in which she reports one side of a conversation to show how men defame women when they gossip:

Je scay bien de tes fais
Telle est t'amie et tu le jolis fais
Pour sienne amour, mais plusieurs y ont part,
Tu es receu quant un autre s'en part.

(p. 5)

[I know all about it.
That is how your lady is,
And you are made a fool for her love.
But others share it.
You are received when another departs.]

¹⁰Christine de Pizan, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. Maurice Roy (Paris, 1891), II, 3. All quotes are from this volume. The translations are my own.

Deceitful lovers:
Christine long
description
Hoccleve omits
and sums in proverb

Direct
discourse
Speech
of lover
women
foolish

Cupid moral
god
deceitful men
virtuous men

Hoccleve
modified tone

Cupid as
jester

Betrayal

Blames women's
pity

French court
English tavern

Change technique

Hoccleve's
proverbial expressions
direct discourse

Men claim that others are enjoying the favors of their friend's lady without having any sort of evidence. Hoccleve expands this speech, making it much more colloquial and much more insulting to the lady:

Thou fisshist faire, shee that hath thee fyrid
Is fals and inconstant & hath no feith;
Shee for the rode of folk is so desyrid,
And as an hors fro day to day is hyrid,
That whan thou twynnest from hir compaignie,
An othir comth and blerid is thyn ye.

(p. 23)

Hoccleve thus calls the woman a whore and continues the insults for another stanza. The rhetorical game of insulting women, an important aspect of anti-feminism, seems to have appealed to Hoccleve.

In accordance with her serious purpose, Christine follows her description of gossip sessions with a lecture to men on proper behavior. They should not malign women just for the sake of amusement; and when criticism is justified, they should not be so sweeping in their generalizations. Hoccleve omits the lecture and replaces it with an amusing colloquial expression: "A foul vice is of tonge to be light / For who so mochil clappith gabbith ofte" (p. 24).

In addition to shortening the poem, Hoccleve changes the order of subjects. In view of the evidence that has been presented by H. C. Schulz, it can be assumed that Hoccleve was his own scribe, and this was the order he intended.¹¹ Both authors argue that men should honor women because they are the sons of women, and a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Hoccleve places this subject toward the beginning of the poem and makes his presentation more amusing and colloquial by adding another proverb:

An old proverbe seid is in englissh:
Men seyn that brid or foul is deshonest,
What so it be and holden ful cherliish,
That wont is to deffoule his owne nest.

(p. 25)

Hoccleve's focus is more on proverbial wisdom than on the value of women. Christine's use of the proverb occurs toward the end of the poem, together with a statement about the services that women render to men as mother, sister, and lover. Her reference to the proverb seems more serious than that of Hoccleve. She does not rely on proverbial wisdom but provides concrete evidence for the value of women. Her use of the proverb is a rhetorical device that concludes and summarizes a reasoned argument:

¹¹H. C. Schulz, "Thomas Hoccleve, Scribe," *Speculum*, 12 (1937), 71-81.

Car se bonté et valeur a en femme
Honte n'est pas a homme ne diffame,
Car il est ne et fait d'autel merrien;
Se mauvaie est il né puet valoir rien,
Car nul bon fruit de mal arbre ne vient,
Telle qu'elle est ressembler lui convient,
Et se bonne est il en doit valoir mieulz,
Car aux meres bien ressemblent les fieulz.
(p. 24)

[Thus if women are good and worthy,
It is no shame or dishonor to men,
For they are born and made of the same material.
If woman is bad, man is also worthless
Since no good fruit can come from a bad tree.
Whatever she is, he resembles,
And if she is good, it adds to his value,
For sons resemble their mothers.]

Christine's praise of women is much more extended than that of Hoccleve, and her claims are more audacious. After praising the gentle nature of women and comparing it unfavorably with the aggressive nature of men, she concludes that God gave women a better disposition:

Dont dire puis, ce n'est pas heresie,
Que moult leur fist le hault Dieu courtoisie
D'elles fourmer sanz les condicions
Qui mettent gent a griefs perditions.
(pp. 22-23)

[Thus to say this is not heresy,
That the exalted Lord was most courteous to women
To create them without the conditions
That bring people to grievous perdition.]

Although Hoccleve says that "wommanes herte to no creweltee enclyned is," he does not claim that women have a better disposition than men. Besides speaking of women's virtues, Christine discusses the services that they perform for men:

Qui tant a fait et fait de services,
Et de qui tant les oeuvres sont propices
A corps d'omme souevement nourrir;
A son naistre, au vivre, et au morir,
Lui sont femmes aidans et secourables,
Et piteuses, douces et serviables.

[Women perform so many services for men
And their deeds are so helpful
In gently nourishing the body of man
At his birth, during his life, and at his death,
Women are helpful, supportive,
Merciful, sweet, and serviceable to him.]

Hoccleve doesn't
translate.
Perhaps vision of
dependence
Eve detracts
praise
Hoccleve omits
Biblical
arguments,
good knights,
and insulting
passages to men

Hoccleve does not translate these lines, perhaps because they called up a vision of dependence that was damaging to his masculine ego. Although he does speak of the good qualities of women, he slyly follows his praise with a defense of Eve, a strategic juxtaposition that detracts from the praise. On the other hand, Christine's defense of Eve follows two Biblical arguments in defense of women that are omitted by Hoccleve.

Hoccleve's omissions are even more significant than his changes in order of subjects. He omits sections that instruct men on proper behavior, sections that discuss good knights and admirable lovers, and passages that are particularly insulting to men. Although Biblical argument was usually employed against women, Christine shows that it can be a double-edged sword. She argues that God gave woman a more noble form since He made her from a rib, whereas He made man from the dust:

Si lui donna fourme moult noblement,
Et fut faite de moult noble matiere,
Car ne fu pas du lymon de la terre
Mais seulement de la coste de l'omme.
(pp. 19-20)

[He gave her a more noble form
And made her of more noble matter,
For she was not made from the dust of the earth,
But from the rib of man.]

In addition, she claims that old stories of the Bible tell us that woman was formed in Paradise, whereas man was not. It is not surprising that Hoccleve omits both of these arguments.

In some cases, Hoccleve follows Christine's argument but makes it less forceful and less damaging to men. Although he includes her criticism of clerks, he shortens it and makes it less vehement. She calls Ovid's *Remedy of Love* a "livre d'art de grant decevance" (a book of the art of great deception), a remark omitted by Hoccleve. When she discusses the misfortunes of clerks in love, she blames their own evil intentions and bad taste:

Que, quant uns homs en tell vilté se boute,
Il ne va pas querant les vaillans dames
Ne les bonnes prisiées preudes femmes,
Ne les cognoist, ne il n'en a que faire:
Fors ceulz ne veult qui sont de son affaire;
De filletes se pare et de pietaille.

(p. 11)

[For when a man acts vilely and tries to seduce women,
He does not seek worthy women
Or honorable women of good reputation.]

Shortens about
clerks.
Ovid as art
of deception,
Hoccleve omits

Women's creation

culprit: person responsible for a crime or other misdeed.
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He does not know them or have anything to do with them,
For those women will not have him.
He seeks loose women and tramps.]

Hoccleve says nothing about the poor taste of clerks in pursuing loose women. In his poem, Cupid is the culprit who makes clerks fall in love with worthless women:

Swich is the force of oure impressioun
That sodeynly We felle can hir boost,
An al hir wrong ymaginacioun
It shal nat been in hire elleccioun
The foulest slutte in al a town refuse
If that us list for al that they can muse.

(p. 27)

Hoccleve doesn't
mention clerks
poor taste

In the same section, Christine says that if women had written the books that were written by clerks, those books would have contained very different things (a claim made by Chaucer's Wife of Bath). Hoccleve also omits this remark. His behavior as a translator suggests that Christine was right.

Although most of Hoccleve's changes were omissions or changes in tone, he made some additions to the poem which reflect his own attitudes and interests. Christine uses the stories of Medea, Dido, and Penelope to illustrate the loyalty of women. Although Hoccleve follows his source in discussing Medea and Dido, he leaves out Penelope and inserts the following lines:

In our Legende of Martirs may men fynde,
who-so that lykith ther-in for to rede,
That ooth noon ne byheeste may men bynde.

(p. 29)

leaves out
Penelope

This allusion to the *Legend of Good Women* by Chaucer, Hoccleve's idol and mentor, was not in his source. He was more interested in alluding to Chaucer than in giving another example of a good woman. Hoccleve altered Christine's presentation of the Virgin Mary. Christine stresses her role as a natural woman and as the mother of Jesus:

Quant femme est assise en si hault trone
Coste son filz, a la destre du Pere,
C'est grant honneur a femmenine mere.

(p. 19)

[When a woman is seated on so high a throne,
Beside her son, on the right of the Father,
It is a great honor to a mother.]

Hoccleve emphasizes the Virgin Mary's role as a saintly intercessor between man and God:

Virgin as
intercessor

Hoccleve omits about women writers
Additions

Prefers to
praise
Chaucer

And of mercy hath every wight swich neede
That cerryng it farwel the joie of man!
Of hir power it is to taken heede;
Shee mercy may, wole, & purchace can.

(p. 32)

After his discussion of the Virgin Mary, Hoccleve refers to St. Margaret, the virgin martyr. When Hoccleve praises women, it is as saints and martyrs rather than as human beings in natural relationships with men.

By a subtle manipulation of style and content, Hoccleve undermined the purpose of the *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, which was meant to be a defense of feminine virtue and an attack against anti-feminist slander. His additions gave him an opportunity to indulge in rhetorical anti-feminist games. The exaggerated defense that Cupid offers in support of women, the proverbial language used to comment on their behavior, the omission of actual and literary examples of the good deeds of women, and the omission or softening of Christine's criticism of disrespectful men and anti-feminist clerks all combine to undermine Christine's argument and make the work more of a parody of feminism rather than a judicious, courtly defense of women. Hoccleve indeed managed to laugh at women while ostensibly defending them.

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CAXTON'S READING PUBLIC

During the last quarter of the fifteenth century, William Caxton printed the reading staples of late medieval English society: service books and saints' lives, school texts, romances, manuals of chivalry and war, and guides to good manners. The public to which these works were directed is difficult to define. There is little evidence of the number of copies pulled at each printing and the extent of literacy, hence of circulation, is uncertain. On the basis of such external evidence, the size and nature of Caxton's audience must therefore remain conjectural.¹

¹J. W. Adamson, "The Extent of Literacy in England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The Library* (fourth series) 10 (1930), 163-193; Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 155-160; Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York, 1966), p. 30. Also H. S. Bennett, "Caxton and his Reading Public," *Review of English Studies* 19 (1943), 113-119; Strickland Gibson, "Printed Books, the Book Trade and Libraries," in *Medieval England*, ed. Austin Poole, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1958), II, 559-570.

However, a certain amount of textual evidence regarding this public is available in the prologues and epilogues that Caxton appended to the works he published.² An examination of the dedications contained in these commentaries gives some indication of the readers who patronized Caxton's press: their social standing, their literary tastes and moral values.

A first reading of Caxton's prologues and epilogues leaves the impression that his press catered exclusively to a courtly audience. The prologue to his first publication, a translation entitled the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* and printed while he was still at Bruges, gives an account of the patronage of Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy.

... sche . . . comanded me straytli to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated, whos dredefull comandement y durste in no wyse disobey because y am a seruaut vnto her sayde grace and ressieue of her yerly ffee and other many goode and great benefetes . . .³

Caxton also received an annual gift of "a bucke in sommer / & a doo in wynter" from Lord Arundel, to encourage him to complete the *Golden Legende*. Other prologues include dedications to the Duke of Clarence, Edward Prince of Wales, Edward IV, Richard III, and Arthur Prince of Wales.⁴ Caxton also acted on specific requests from Sir John Fastolfe, Lord Berkeley, the Earl of Oxford, and the mother and wife of Henry VII. Caxton entered into an even closer collaboration with Anthony Earl Rivers, who ordered printings of his own translations of the *Cordiale* and the *Dictes or Sayengs of the Philosophres*.⁵

However, it is a misrepresentation to imagine Caxton, in his capacity as a printer, to be in the "service" of these nobles, to imagine him associated with the court in the same way as Chaucer and Froissart were a century before. After seven years of successful operation, half the span of his career as a printer, Caxton still described himself as a "cytezeyn & coniuerye of [London] & of the fraternyte & felaship of the mercery." This civic and mercantile attachment was more than

²These are collected in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W. J. B. Crotch, EETS (OS) 176 (London, 1928).

³Caxton, prologue to *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, in *Prologues and Epilogues*, ed. Crotch, pp. 4-5. Cf. N. F. Blake, *Caxton and his World* (London, 1969), pp. 46-55.

⁴*The Game and Playe of the Chesse* is dedicated to the Duke of Clarence, Jason to Edward Prince of Wales, *Godeffroy of Boloyne* to Edward IV, *The Ordre of Chyualry* to Richard III, and *Eneydos* to Arthur Prince of Wales: see *Prologues and Epilogues*, ed. Crotch, pp. 10, 34, 48, 84, 110. It is worth noting that these dedications indicate Caxton's commercial success in spite of the factional intrigue and open warfare of the Wars of the Roses.

⁵*Prologues and Epilogues*, ed. Crotch, pp. 18-30, 41, 67, 70, 104-106, 111. See also N. F. Blake, "Investigations into the Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton," *John Rylands Library Bulletin* 49 (1966), 17-46.

Hoccleve praises women as saints and martyrs, not human beings.

Rhetorical anti-feminist games.

Undermines Christine's argument makes work parody of feminism

ENGLISH LANGUAGE NOTES
Volume XIX
1981-1982

University of Colorado
Boulder, Colorado
Supplement to Volume XIX, Number 4, June 1982