

Hoccleve's Attitude towards Women

"I shoop me do my peyne and diligence To wynne hir loue by obedience."

Anna Torti

A notable feature of the writings of both Thomas Hoccleve and Christine de Pisan is the joining of public and private matters, the universal alongside the particular. It appeared that Christine's humanistic education went no further than the natural influence of a family of intellectuals and an enlightened king: but, when left an unprotected widow with children and relatives to support,¹ the spur of economic necessity made her turn her hand to writing. Hoccleve, a professional scribe, used "creative" writing as a means to achieve economic security by social advancement, as well as to enhance his reputation and ingratiate himself with the king.² Unlike Christine, however, he only once wrote a "courtly" work, and this was a translation of Christine's *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, which he published under the title *Letter of Cupid* in 1402.

The question of Hoccleve's omissions and additions has been debated by Fleming and Bornstein, each with equally well-founded arguments.³

¹ For a biography of Christine de Pisan, see Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pisan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), where her personal experience and social background are carefully analysed. A portrait of Christine as woman and writer is found in Sheila Delany, "A city, a room: the scene of writing in Christine de Pisan and Virginia Woolf," in her *Writing Woman. Women Writers and Women in Literature, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 181-97. See also J. C. Laidlaw, "Christine de Pisan — A Publisher's Progress," *MLR*, 82 (1987), 35-75, and M. Quilligan, "Allegory and the Textual Body: Female Authority in Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*," *RR*, 79 (1988), 222-48.

² On the poets and the Court, see R. F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (UTorontoP, 1980). On the poet as petitioner, see J. A. Burrow, "The Poet as Petitioner," *SAC*, 3 (1981), 61-75, and also his "Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve," *PBA*, 68 (OUP, 1982), 389-412, especially 407-12.

³ John Fleming in his influential essay, "Hoccleve's 'Letter of Cupid' and the 'Quarrel' over the *Roman de la Rose*," *M&E*, 40 (1971), 21-40, maintains that the questions raised by the Quarrel were concerned with literary principles rather than social issues (36). He also states that on the whole Hoccleve preserves the tone of Christine's *Epistre*. Diane Bornstein ("Anti-Feminism in Thomas Hoccleve's Translation of Christine de Pisan's *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*," *ELN*, 19 (1981), 7-14) is convinced that, by manipulating style and content, Hoccleve transforms Christine's defence of women into a parody of feminism.

It is clear from the *Letter*, however, that the text that started the "Quarrel of the Rose"⁴ is in the nature of a literary exercise, that is, a basically light poem with no real bite to it. There is the usual recourse to mythological episodes, such as the stories of Jason and Medea, and of Dido and Aeneas, which represented a common heritage for medieval writers who reworked these stories following traditional models such as Guido delle Colonne's *Historia*.⁵

In the *Letter* the exaltation of women's outstanding constancy and faithfulness inevitably recalls the opposite motif of their inconstancy and deceitfulness, faults which Criseyde exemplified:⁶

Al be it þat men fynde/o womman nyce,
Inconstant/rechelees/or variable,
Deynous/or prowde, fulfilled of malice,
Withoute feith or loue/& deceyuable,
Sly,/qweynte & fals/in al vnthrift coupable,
Wikkid and feers/& ful of crueltee,
It folwith nat/swiche alle wommen be. (*Epistre*, 148-54)⁷

The long sequence of adjectives Hoccleve puts in men's mouths to denigrate women shows how a defence can be changed into an accusation. It is not so much that the poet's choice of episodes and his reworking of Christine's poem show him up as antifeminist, as that the conventional nature of the themes lends itself to ironic treatment. The frame fiction contains a pompous Cupid who addresses himself

To alle tho/þat to our deitee
Been sogettes/greetynges senden we. (*Epistre*, 6-7)

At the end he decrees that detractors of womankind be banished from his court:

þat of tho men vntreewe/our rebel foon,
Yee do punisshement/and þat anon;

⁴ The literature on the "Quarrel of the Rose" is vast. See, among others, E. Hicks, ed., *Le débat sur le Roman de la rose* (Paris: Champion, 1977), and K. Brownlee, "Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pisan and the Rose," *RR*, 79 (1988), 199-221. On Hoccleve's involvement in the Quarrel as translator and adaptor of the *Epistre*, cf. J. Mitchell, *Thomas Hoccleve. A Study in Early Fifteenth-Century English Poetic* (Urbana, Ill.: UillinoisP, 1968), 77-84.

⁵ On Lydgate's attitude towards women in the *Troy Book*, see Anna Torti, "From 'History' to Tragedy: The Story of Troilus and Criseyde in Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Henryson's *Tesliment of Cresseid*," in Piero Boitani, ed., *The European Tragedy of Troilus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 171-97.

⁶ On the evolution of the myth of Criseyde's untruthfulness, see G. Mieszkowski, "The Reputation of Criseyde 1155-1500," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 43 (1971), 71-153, and Boitani, *The European Tragedy of Troilus*.

⁷ The edition used is F. J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz, eds., *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, EETS, e.s. 61 and 73, 1892 and 1925, revised and reprinted as one volume by J. Mitchell and A. I. Doyle (London, 1970). Quotations of the *Letter of Cupid* are from the Ashburnham version. *The Regement of Princes* is edited by F. J. Furnivall (London, 1897, EETS, e.s. 72).

Voide hem our Court/& banisshe hem for euere,
So þat ther-ynne/they ne come neuere. (*Epistre*, 466–69)

This reveals in its manifest irony the extent to which the traditional courtly ideals had been disregarded by Hoccleve and perhaps even by Christine. We need look no further than the invocation to Health in the *Male Regle*, or the *incipit* to the *Regement* and the *Series*, where we become involved with Thomas's everyday problems, to realize that the rhetorical-stylistic exercise of the *Letter* is no longer sufficient. It appears that his translation of Christine's poem is a valid source from which to establish Hoccleve's attitude to women, and it may be more revealing to focus our attention on the *Series*.

The *Series*, which was written in rhyme royal for Duke Humphrey in 1421–22, is made up of five parts: a *Complaint* and a *Dialogue with a Friend*, which are the presumably autobiographical basis on to which the two tales from the *Gesta Romanorum*⁸ and the translation of the *Learn to Die* are fitted. The *Complaint* gives vent to the suffering of the poet who, though recovered from mental breakdown, sees his friends hurry to leave whenever he appears because they are convinced that he is still ill.⁹ The *Dialogue* grows out of the *Complaint*, which the poet's friend advises him not to make public. As in the *Regement*, here too personal and public are mingled, with the emphasis on the didactic uses of illness — as a sign of God's mercy to the sinner Thomas and as an example to all men.¹⁰

The transition from autobiographical experience to its public expression is marked by reference to writing and the effort involved in the act of writing. His friend's advice to Thomas that he give up the studies that made him ill is met with a vehement defence of their value. This defence comes immediately after a violent attack on "false coiners" (*Dialogue*, 99–196), and thus recalls Hoccleve's conception of poetry as a means of economic advancement. The repeatedly-made connection between writing and money is also fundamental to the *Regement*.¹¹ When his friend is

⁸ In the *Regement of Princes* Hoccleve had made use of three other sources: the *Secretum Aegidius Romanus' De regimine principum*, and Jacobus de Cessolis' *Liber de Ludo Scaccorum*. Hoccleve's handling of sources is discussed in Mitchell, *Hoccleve*, 75–96.

⁹ An analysis of Hoccleve's illness is found in Stephen Medcalf, ed., *The Later Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1981), 124–40. The historical evidence for Hoccleve's breakdown is produced by A. L. Brown, "The Privy Seal Clerks in the Early Fifteenth Century," in D. A. Bullough and R. L. Storey, eds., *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in Honour of Kathleen Major* (OUP, 1971), 260–81, 271.

¹⁰ Cf. P. B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven, Conn.: YaleUP, 1974) for a discussion of conventional elements in Hoccleve's poems (208–31). The influence of the penitential lyric is stressed by E. M. Thornley, "The Middle English Penitential Lyric and Hoccleve's Autobiographical Poetry," *NM*, 68 (1967), 295–321.

¹¹ The relationship between material well-being and writing in the *Regement* is analysed

finally convinced of Thomas's recovery, and encourages him to write, it is to Humphrey of Gloucester, his patron, that he thinks of dedicating his future poetic efforts. The urge to communicate his own experience of suffering, combined with economic need, induces the poet to write — to give himself relief, to afford an example, and to make ends meet. His friend's words are a spur to Thomas — it being Lent — to confess such sins as his abuse of women and to make amends by writing in honour of them.

This part of the *Dialogue* (736–826) sums up Hoccleve's awareness of poetry as fiction, and of the difficult relationship between poetry and reader. While his work grows out of an autobiographical experience¹² — and how can we consider other than as autobiographical the poet's detailed recollection of the devastating effects of madness? — the autobiography itself is fiction. When the friend asks about Hoccleve's relationship with his wife he receives the uncompromising reply:

"Wel, wel, quod I/what list yow ther-of heere?
My wyf mighte haue hokir & greet desdeyn
If I sholde in swich cas/pleye a soleyn." (*Dialogue*, 740–42)

What he says about women and the stories he recounts belong to fiction because they are expressed, and because they "serve" didactic and/or economic ends: private life is above and beyond the public sphere. Fiction lends itself to various levels of reading and interpretation, as the accusation of abuse of women shows: Hoccleve, knowing the difficulty of communication, reprimands his friend for not having read the *Letter* carefully to the very end:

"Wel trowe I, in fay;
ffor had yec red it fully to the ende,
yee wolde seyn/it is nat as yee wende." (*Dialogue*, 782–84)

The insistence on careful reading may indicate that Hoccleve preferred a single and didactic voice to Chaucerian multiple-voice narration.¹³ But the "domestic" references and the often heated exchanges with his friend should make us wary of the generalizations concerning the idea that Hoc-

in Anna Torti, "Mirroring in Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*," *Poetica* (Tokyo), 24 (1986), 39–57.

¹² The influence of Hoccleve's life experience on his works is shown by J. A. Burrow in "Autobiographical Poetry," 389–412 and also in his "Hoccleve's *Series*: Experience and Books," in R. F. Yeager, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1984), 259–73.

¹³ On the preference for a single authoritative voice in the late Middle Ages, see Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (U TorontoP, 1982), and A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London: Scolar, 1984). See also Paul Strohm, "Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Writers as Readers of Chaucer," in P. Boitani and A. Torti, eds., *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature: From the Fourteenth to the Fifteenth Century* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 90–104.

cleve has toned down the Chaucerian model. Of the *Letter* Hoccleve holds that

was I noon Auctour;
I nas in þat cas/but a reportour
Of folkes tales/as they seide/I wroot. (*Dialogue*, 760–62)

In these words he makes the usual 15th-century poets' disclaimer of authorship, although, as we have seen, he encourages a "correct" reading of the text. This twofold attitude of denial and affirmation of his own *auctoritas* is one of the many signs of his desire to arrive at a "personal voice," taking full heed of the teachings of the present time, without renouncing tradition. The ideal link with the *Letter* is suggested by the use of the verb "translate" (*Dialogue*, 825)¹⁴ to describe what he will write in honour of women.

The *Series* is characterized by continual linking of the inner structure of the tales with the outer structure that encompasses them. The *Letter of Cupid* is the primary cause of the composition immediately following the *Dialogue*, which is the *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife*. This is the story of a woman as the supreme example of constancy, and it is followed by a *moralisatio* prompted by the poet's friend. The *Learn to Die* comes next and should have brought the book to a close. Instead Hoccleve returns to the outer frame where his friend urges him to tell a tale of the deceitfulness of women, which he does in the *Tale of Jonathas*. There follows the usual moralizing and the dedication to the Countess of Westmorland. The alternation of conventional and autobiographical is even more sophisticated here than in the *Regement*, in that references to everyday matters, from discussions with his friend to allusions to his own "dullness," occur within the stories taken from the *Gesta*.

Thus we have two tales, one exalting virtue and the other concerning vice, with the addition of an allegorical interpretation. Yet a careful reading—which is what Hoccleve himself recommends—raises a series of questions about the formal arrangement of the texts and the themes treated. The choice of the *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* may be explained by the poet's intention of honouring women, but the introduction to the *Tale of Jonathas* is hard to justify, and Hoccleve himself raised objections to his friend's request for a story of the deceitfulness of women. Even the dedication to Lady Westmorland is placed after the moralization of a tale which is unfavourable to women. What is needed is an understanding of the right meaning of the metalinguistic reflections of the poet on his own role and on the function of poetry.

¹⁴ On the concept of translation in the Middle Ages, see R. Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator. The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989).

Since two female figures representing the extremes of good and evil are contrasted, any possible reading that tends too much in favour of women is to be excluded. The *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* is analogous with *MLT*, with the difference that the conventional emphasis on sickness as an effect of sin, and on confession and repentance as its cure, allows Hoccleve to draw a comparison with his own condition.¹⁵ When Jereslaus leaves his Empress to govern in his stead, she is insulted and defamed first by her brother-in-law, then by a knight, a thief and a shipman. She flees her denigrators and enters a convent, where she becomes famous as a healer. The traitors fall ill of leprosy, palsy and gout, they go blind, and are driven mad. They go to the Empress and are cured by her, but only after they have made full confession. In the end she reveals her true identity and returns to live happily with the Emperor. Hoccleve introduces digressions that allow him to make his own comments and which heighten the pathos of the most moving scenes. The transitional expressions further the reader's involvement in the narrative and increase his interest,¹⁶ while the actual digressions allude to Hoccleve's two sources of inspiration: books, and the experience of his own life.

When the Emperor departs, his wife's sufferings are such as "the book nat can telle or expresse;/Wherfore/of þat haue I no knowlechyng" (59–60). In contrast when faced with the sorrowing Countess's anger at the loss of her son, the poet—in an allusion to his own happily married life—declares that he understands the love of children and husbands: "where-of/witnesse/We weddid men may bere/if þat vs lyke" (397–98). Not even this outstanding example of unshakable faithfulness and great mercy satisfies the poet's friend, who asks what the moral of the tale is. The fiction of the dialogue with the friend is taken up again at the end of the tale—but is placed before the allegorical conclusion—where it serves as a motif for the explanation. Here he gives the credit for the inclusion of the allegorical reading to his friend, thus contrasting what he had said about the *Letter*. In the *Letter* it was the reader who had failed to understand the meaning, while in the *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* it is the poet who has failed to get the story straight. The device of the friend who goes home certain of finding the *moralitas* in his copy and who then shows it to Hoccleve in triumph is an expedient used to lessen the high moral tension of the tale just told; but it probably also allows Hoccleve to deny responsibility for an allegorical reading which, he feels, is no longer in keeping with his mode of writing.

After the lively narrative in rhyme royal, "hoomly and pleyn" (25) prose is the ideal vehicle for the didactic passage in the tale and to in-

¹⁵ Doob, 213.

¹⁶ Mitchell, 86–91.

roduce the *Learn to Die*. This is where the wheel should come full circle: Hoccleve has paid his tribute to women and to the *auctores* of the past. As a humble rewriter of their works, he has always stressed his own lack of wit and he even dubbed himself "fool" in the *Learn to Die* (921).¹⁷ But his friend makes another urgent request, this time for the story of a false woman. He knows that such a tale is to be found "Nat fer the tale fro/which thow maad haast/Of themperice" (Prologue to *Jonathas*, 29–30). He expresses the wish that this story be translated into English as an example for all young men, but above all for his fifteen year-old son, who is "Sauage/And wylde ... and likly to foleye" (26–27). It would also serve as a condemnation of the lasciviousness of women and "Eeke to miroure wommen vertuous:/What ende takith swich lyf vicious" (76–77). The realistic inset of a father's worries about his unruly son is there to highlight the contemporary relevance of the exemplification and to confirm the relationship of the universal *exemplum* with the here and now. Even if the story is about a wicked woman, the lesson is to help a youth to avoid future pitfalls of a kind he has already encountered. The *Tale of Jonathas* arouses Hoccleve's legitimate disquiet in that, after first praising women, he is to end up blaming them. Only after his friend assures him that virtuous women will not raise any objections—considering the subject of no concern to them—does Hoccleve agree to take on another translation.

In the beginning, the dialogue with the friend once more points out the interest Hoccleve has in his source books and in the book developing, as he writes it, before his own and the readers' eyes.¹⁸ At the end of the *Learn to Die* in "This booke thus to han endid had y thought" (Prologue to *Jonathas*, 1), the strong deictic "This" refers to the poet's book, which he intends to conclude with a meditation on death. But once more his friend urges him to continue writing and affords him the occasion to do so. The source of the new tale is, in fact, in a book owned by Hoccleve's friend. This copy is made available to the poet who says "thus y wroot as yee may heere see" (84). The presence of the deictic "heere" marks the transition from the external reference, the source, to the internal one, his book. In Hoccleve's case the paternity is twofold, since he is also the scribe.

The *Tale of Jonathas* is similar in its structure to the tale which precedes, with the basic difference that here it is the woman, Fellicula, who is wicked and betrays Jonathas. Her sins of lust cause her to fall ill

¹⁷ For a reading of 15th-century English writing as a culture and for a discussion of the significance of "dullness," see the important essay by David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," *ELH*, 54 (1987), 761–99, where Hoccleve's public role is also analysed.

¹⁸ On reflexivity in the *Series*, see J. A. Burrow, "The Poet and the Book," in P. Boitani and A. Torti, eds., *Genres, Themes and Images*, 230–45, especially 241–45.

of leprosy, which she is cured of by healing water and a miraculous fruit. Jonathas cures many people, including Fellicula, who confesses her faults but not out of true repentance but merely so that she might be healed. Jonathas thus gives her the fruit of leprosy and the water of undoing, and Fellicula dies in terrible agony. The analogy with the first tale lies in the fact that here too it is the betrayed who triumphs and the betrayer who is punished. The digressions are less numerous than in the *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* and often in the form of apostrophe, as in stanza 91, where the poet expounds on the etymology of the name Fellicula, the mirror of all evil.

The two *personae*, poet and friend, have given their justification for introducing the tale, but the reader nonetheless remains unsatisfied and disappointed at the conclusion of the dry *moralitas*: the notion that women may be good or bad, and go to extremes of virtue or vice, was something he already knew. Yet Hoccleve's innovative artistry, which takes as its starting-point such well-known and respected *auctores* as Isidore, Christine, Suso, and the author of the *Gesta*,¹⁹ lies in his emphasis on the distance, and the profound difference, between the *exempla* and real life. If the allusions to personal experience were not enough to sustain this claim, we could point to stanza 21 (*Jonathas*, 141–47) in which the poet refers to his knowledge of the woes of widows, particularly of those wise widows who learn how to bear grief and to find comfort in the end. By virtue of the intrusive "I," the basic theme of the *Series* makes its reappearance. This theme is the poet's suffering, not only the torments of the madness from which he now seems to have recovered, but also his anxiety about the pains of composition and the possible misinterpretations of his work. This worry is emphasized by the fact that the book in progress is the fruit of his double contribution as intellectual and scribe.²⁰ Any obscurity would depend not on the scribe's copying but on the poet himself.

While on the one hand Hoccleve is a simple "reportour," on the other hand his insistence on correct reading and on his efforts to satisfy his friend's request for a translation reveal the limits of the poet's innocence. No narrative is a "neutral" fiction, and Hoccleve is well aware of this, so much so that to the defence of his work as a mere translator in the *Complaint* he adds the hope that he will be carefully understood. The frame of the discussions with his friend serves then as an expedient to

¹⁹ On Hoccleve's sources, see Mitchell, 75–96, A. G. Rigg, "Hoccleve's Complaint and Isidore of Seville," *Speculum*, 45 (1970), 365–74, and B. P. Kurtz, "The Source of Hoccleve's *Lerne to Dye*," *MLN*, 38 (1923), 337–40 and "The Relation of Hoccleve's *Lerne to Dye* to its Source," *PMLA*, 40 (1925), 252–75.

²⁰ On Hoccleve as scribe, see H. C. Schulz, "Thomas Hoccleve, Scribe," *Speculum*, 12 (1937), 71–81, and A. Compton Reeves, "Thomas Hoccleve, Bureaucrat," *M&H*, 5 (1974), 201–14.

connect the various stories, to emphasize the impact of real experience on the literary work, and finally to keep his relationship with his own book constant.²¹

The original reason for the compilation, which was to find favour with his female audience, loses its point, and Hoccleve *can* rewrite a story which contrasts with the first tale because the interest no longer lies exclusively in the theme but also, and above all, in the frame. It is true that the poet does not always succeed in reconciling the requirements of the structure with those of the story—as we can note in the last part of the *Series*. The first *moralisatio* is attributed to pressure from the friend, while the moral explanation of *Jonathas* follows the tale without a hint of transition. What is more, there are few references in this tale to the writing process, and the emphasis is not only on Fellicula's wickedness, but also on the weakness of *Jonathas* and his lack of mercy. In the first tale it is God who inflicts the ills on the traitors, and it is the Empress who heals them; in the second *Jonathas* sins and suffers and—assuming God's mantle—even makes of his medicine a means, however justified this means may be, of death. The stories belong to the *Gesta* and are thus ready to hand, but the choice among the various tales offered and their arrangement are the poet's.

The beginning of the *Series*, then, was based on personal experience and frequent connections were made between the personal and the conventional. The conclusion, however, is almost entirely devoid of personal references and is centred on the tale and the moral that is drawn from it. In the first tale there is considerable conventionality—in the Manichean distinction between good and bad characters and in the foregone conclusion of mercy—set against the autobiographical nature of the outer frame. In the second tale, even though the autobiographical exchanges almost disappear, an increasing ambiguity in the definition of good and evil is introduced, and the morality upheld is rather that of man's relationship to Eternity than to his own conscience. As he nears the end of the work Hoccleve abandons the frame: by eliminating all reference to the book, he seems to want to signal his distance from it. At the same time, however, he transfers the "transgression" previously carried by the frame to the ambiguity of the tale.

The final envoy to Lady Westmorland in the Durham ms. restores the focus to Hoccleve's book, the *Series* which has just ended with repentant man being assured of his place in the Kingdom of Heaven:

Go, smal book/to the noble excellence
Of my lady/of Westmerland/and seye,

²¹ On the significance of the framing fiction, see Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well, Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry* (Rutherford: Fairleigh DickinsonUP, 1988).

Hir humble seruant/with al reuerence
Him recommandith vn-to hir nobleye;
And byseeche hire/on my behalue, & preye,
Thee to receyue/for hire owne right;
And looke thow/in al manere weye
To plesse hir wommanhede/do thy might.

By entrusting his book to Lady Westmorland the poet has made a first move to ensure that the object of his creativity will come to the notice of the contemporary reader and thus to the knowledge of future generations.²² Hoccleve's exhortation to his book "to plesse hir wommanhede" is a further sign of his awareness of the difficulties regarding the way his work might be received, especially after a tale which is not very complimentary to women.

Let us return to our starting-point then: Hoccleve's attitude to women. His is a more open and more varied position than some of his contemporaries—Lydgate's, for example. The various portrayals of women that we can piece together from the *Series* range from conventional *exempla* to domestic snippets that give us the idea of Hoccleve as a happily-married man. The tales themselves, and especially the *Tale of Jonathas*, may offer us a conventional, extreme view of women's capacity for good or for evil, but it is the allusions to Hoccleve's wife, to the woes of widows, and to the wisdom of most women, that remain in the reader's mind. Some antifeminist overtones were inevitable, but the general impression is that by Hoccleve's time women had begun to play an active role in everyday life and that he could not avoid paying tribute to the status women had won for themselves.

It is no coincidence that Hoccleve begins and ends the *Series* with homage to women. After an emotional description of his illness in the prologue to the *Complaint* he explains that the purpose of the book is

for to preve/I cam of a woman,

I brast oute on the morowe/and thus began, (34-35)

and at the end he dedicates it to Lady Westmorland and "hir wommanhede." The narrative is, therefore, enclosed by references to two women: the poet's mother and the book's godmother. In his allusion to the emotional ties to women there is Hoccleve's strong sense of his paternity (maternity?) of the book—as he has frequently reminded us (and reminds us). "The substaunce of ... memory" (50), which he lost as a result of his

²² I would suggest that Hoccleve, despite his denial of authorship, is in effect deeply concerned with writing "this book," his own book. See Miller's convincing analysis of a similar situation in Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*, where the absence of authority becomes the material of the poem: Jacqueline T. Miller, *Poetic License. Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts* (OUP, 1986), 735. Hoccleve does not reject the authorities, as the various translations bear witness, but tries to combine authority and experience.

terrible illness, returns ("my wyt and I have bene of suche accorde" — 59) to allow him to write the book, *his* book, which was to remain in the memory of the reader of his day and of the years to come.

The Wife of Bath, the Franklin, and the Rhetoric of St. Jerome

James I. Wimsatt

If St. Jerome had made a return visit to Europe in the 14th century, he might well have been surprised and miffed to find himself ranked among antifeminist writers, even the ringleader of antifeminists. After all, his best and most enduring friends without question were women whom he praised for their great dignity and considerable intellectual attainment; and he responded with respect and deference to the women who from far and near were constantly turning to him for spiritual counsel.¹ Yet we cannot attribute it to hypersensitivity on the Wife of Bath's part that we find his treatise against Jovinian occupying a dominant position in *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*. The manuscript codex that the Wife describes is not a figment of her imagination, but an assemblage of materials that is very credible; the most prominent texts that she mentions were often associated in medieval manuscripts.² The works belong to a distinct genre that by the 14th century had become quite popular among clerical satirists. In general, it might most accurately be identified as antimatrimonial, but implicit criticism of women is characteristically so manifest that no great injustice is done by the common labelling of the works as antifeminist tracts. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*—at least a significant part of it—is not out of place among them, even though it is professedly not even antimatrimonial, just pro-ascetic.

Jerome is betrayed into an antifeminist stance, it seems, by circumstance rather than by conviction. He composed the *Adversus Jovinianum* in response to an appeal by Roman partisans of the ascetic life who had become worried about the influence of the monk Jovinian. Jovinian's open renunciation of key tenets of asceticism—including the efficacy of virginity and fasting—was winning adherents in Rome, and a need was felt for the influential statement of Jerome, whose Epistle (no. XXII) to Julia Eustochium had made him the foremost spokesman for the virgin's life. The satiric bite of the Epistle, produced by a contrasting of the ascetic life of virginity with the way of Sodom common in Rome, at the same

¹ For Jerome's friendships with women, see esp. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York: Mellen, 1979), 35–106.

² See Robert A. Pratt, "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Antimatrimonial Propaganda in the Universities," *AnM*, 3 (1962), 5–27.

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*Essays in Honour of
Paule Mertens-Fonck*

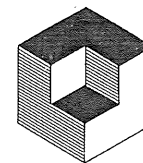
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