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Medieval Misogyny

Woman as Riot

IF THE ABOVE TITLE SEEMS redundant, it is because the topic of misogyny, like the mace or chastity belt, participates in a vestigial horror practically synonymous with the term *medieval*, and because one of the assumptions governing our perception of the Middle Ages is the viral presence of antifeminism. The ritual denunciation of women constitutes something on the order of a cultural constant, reaching back to the Old Testament as well as to Ancient Greece and extending through the fifteenth century. Found in Roman tradition, it dominates ecclesiastical writing, letters, sermons, theological tracts, discussions and compilations of canon law; scientific works, as part and parcel of biological, gynecological, and medical knowledge; and philosophy.¹ The discourse of misogyny runs like a rich vein throughout the breadth of medieval literature. Like allegory itself, to which (for reasons we do not have time to explore) it is peculiarly attracted, antifeminism is both a genre and a topos, or, as Paul Zumthor might suggest, a “register”—a discourse visible across a broad spectrum of poetic types.² Excellent examples are to be found in Latin satires like John of Salisbury’s *Polycraticus*, Walter Map’s *De nugis curialium* (especially the Letter of Valerius to Rufinum), Andreas Capellanus’s *Art of Courtly Love* (book 3), as well as in the .XV. *Joies de mariage* and what is perhaps the most virulent antimatrimonial satire in the vernacular tongue, Jehan Le Fèvre’s translation of the *Lamentations de Mathaeolus*. Misogyny is virtually synonymous with the works grouped under the rubric of “les genres du réalisme bourgeois”: the comic tale or fabliaux (including Middle English and Italian versions); the animal fable (*Roman de Renart*); the comic theater or farce; but also certain mixed or unclassifiable forms like the chantefable *Aucassin et Nicolette* or Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de la feuillée*; and, of course, Jean de Meun’s portion of the *Roman de la rose*.

So persistent is the discourse of misogyny—from the earliest church fathers to Chaucer—that the uniformity of its terms furnishes an important link between the Middle Ages and the present and renders the topic compelling because such terms still govern (consciously or not) the ways in which the question of woman is conceived by women as well as by men. Misogyny is not so much a historical subject as one whose very lack of history is so bound in its effects that any attempt merely to trace the history of woman-hating is hopelessly doomed, despite all moral imperative, to naturalize that which it would denounce (more on this later). This is not to imply that there have been no changes in the ways misogyny has

through time been received, understood, assimilated by particular cultures, implemented, or pressed ideologically in the service of repressive social practice. Rather, it suggests that the very tenacity of the topoi of antifeminism is significant in and of itself and, in fact, provides one of the most powerful ways of thinking the phenomenon, since the extreme complexity of defining just what misogyny is remains indissociable from its seeming ubiquity or from the essentializing definitions of woman apparent in the writings of just about anyone who has touched the subject from Tertullian to Nietzsche.

The endurance of many of the earliest formulations of the question of woman means that the question of where to begin to understand the Western current of woman-hating must first respond to the question of why it is possible to begin just about anywhere—which I propose to do with a passage, selected almost at random, from among the many misogynistic tirades of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*:

Ha! se Theofrastes creüsse,
Ja fame espousee n'eüsse.
Il ne tient pas homme por sage
Qui fame prent par mariage,
Soit lede ou bele ou povre ou riche,
Car il dit, et por voir affiche,
En son noble livre *Aureole*,
Qui est bonz a lire en escole,
Qu'il y a vie trop grevainne,
Plene de torment et de painne.

[Ha! If I had only believed Theophraste, I would never have taken a wife. He holds no man to be wise who takes a woman in marriage, whether ugly or beautiful, poor or rich. For he says, and you can take it for truth, in his noble book *Aureole*, which is good to read in school, that there is there a life too full of torment and strife.]³

Though the Theofrastes referred to (identified alternately with the author of the *Characters* and with a pupil of Aristotle) and his “livre *Aureole*” are otherwise unknown, both are cited by almost every misogynist writer of the Middle Ages. Together they constitute an absent *locus classicus* of misogyny “read,” as Jean maintains, “in schools.” Further, the passage at hand is less a true example of misogyny, a denunciation of the essential evil nature of woman, than a subgeneric topos known as the *molestiae nuptiarum* or antimarriage literature: “Il ne tient pas homme por sage / Qui fame prent par mariage.”

Of what, it may be asked, do the pains of marriage consist?:

Qu'il y a vie trop grevainne,
Plene de torment et de painne,
Et de contenz et de riotes
Par les orguelz des femes sotes,

Et de dangiers et de reprouches
 Que font et dient par lor bouches,
 Et de requestes et de plaintes
 Que truevent par ochoisons maintes.
 Si ra grant pene en eus garder
 Par lor fos voloirs retarder.

[That there is there a life too full of torment and strife and arguments and riotousness because of the pride of foolish women—and dangers and reproaches which they do and say with their mouths, and requests and complaints which they invent on many occasions. It takes a great effort to keep them and to hold back their foolish wills; lines 8569–78.]

Women are contentious, prideful, demanding, complaining, and foolish; they are uncontrollable, unstable, and insatiable: “Si ra grant pene en eus garder / Por lor fos voloirs retarder.” To push a little further, one cannot help but notice the extent to which the pains of marriage involve verbal transgression, that the reproach against women is a form of reproach against language itself—“that which is said by the mouth”—to be more precise, *contenz* (contention, garrulousness, bickering, and quarrels), *reprouches* (criticism, reproach), *requestes* (demands), *orguelz* (pride). Woman is depicted as a constant source of anxiety, of dissatisfaction, but of an anxiety expressed—or, as the text suggests, “composed”—within language itself: “Que truevent par ochoisons maintes.” I say this because the reproach against women, addressed to “anyone who marries,” is posited as universal and a priori, but also because there is no position of innocence possible. Woman is conceived as a perpetually overdetermined signifier with respect to which man is always at risk. To wit: if she is poor, one must nourish, clothe, and shoe her: “Et qui vuet povre fame prendre, / A norrir la convient entendre / Et a vestir et a chaucier” (lines 8579–81), but if she is rich, she is uncontrollable:

Et se tant se cuide essaucier
 Qu’il la prengne riche forment,
 A soffrir la ra grant torment,
 Tant la trueve orgueilleuse et fiere
 Outrecuidie et bobanciere.

[And if one thinks he can escape by taking a rich one, he will suffer great torment again—so arrogant and prideful will he find her, so outrageous and full of presumption; lines 8582–86.]

If a woman is beautiful, all desire her (lines 8587–96), and she will in the end be unfaithful; yet if she is ugly, she will need all the more to please and, again, will eventually betray: “Maintes neïs par eus se baillent, / Quant li requerreor defail-lent” (Many will give themselves willingly when suitors lack; lines 8658–59). If she is reasonable, she is subject to seduction: “Penelope neïz prendroit / Qui bien au prendre entenderoit; / Si n’ot il meillor fame en Grece” (One could take Penel-

ope herself, and there was no better woman in Greece; lines 8605–7); yet if she is irrational, she becomes the victim, as in the example of Lucretia, of madness and suicide (lines 8607–10). Nor is such a view restricted to the Romance vernacular. John of Salisbury is just as precise: “A beautiful woman is quick to inspire love; an ugly one’s passions are easily stirred. What many love is hard to protect; what no one desires to have is a humility to possess.”⁴ Chaucer echoes virtually the same motif in the Wife of Bath’s reproach of all such reproaches: “Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief / To wedde a povre womman, for costage; / And if that she be rich, of heigh parage / Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie / To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.”⁵ Woman by definition finds herself in a position of constant determination, movement. She is, as Jean contends, “contenz et riotes,” and, as Jehan Le Fèvre adds, of “tençon rioteuse.”⁶

Woman as riot is a topos in medieval literature and has a special sense in Old French. The word *riote* itself, meaning “chaos” or “upset,” also refers to a kind of poetic discourse belonging to the rich tradition of nonsense poetry—the *fatras*, *fatrasie*, *dervie*, *sotie*, and *farce* as well as to the more specific type known as the *riote del monde*, of which one example is the prose *Dit de l’herberie* and another the fabliau entitled “La Rencontre du roi d’Angleterre et du jongleur d’Ely.” After a series of nonsensical parries capped by the poet’s reminder that “one often hears a fool speak sanely, and the wise man is the one who speaks wisely,”⁷ the crafty jongleur—in anticipation of the fool of Renaissance drama—seeks to teach the king a lesson about language in general:

Et tot vus mostroi par ensample
 Qu’est si large et si aunple
 Et si pleyn de resoun,
 Que um ne dira si bien noun.
 Si vus estez simple et sage houm,
 Vus estes tenuz un feloun. . . .
 Et si vus les femmes amez,
 Et ou eux sovent parlez
 Et lowés ou honorez . . .
 Donques dirra ascun pautener:
 “Veiez cesti mavois holer,
 Come il siet son mestier
 De son affere bien mostrer.”
 Si vus ne les volez regarder
 Ne volenters ou eux parler,
 Si averount mensounge trové
 Que vus estes descoillé!

[And I will show you by examples that are so general and compelling and so full of reason that one cannot fail to agree. If you are a simple and wise man, you are taken for a rogue If you like women and speak often with them, frequent them, and praise and honor them . . .

someone will say: "Look at that evil pimp who knows his work and shows it." If you do not look at them or willingly talk with them, they will find the lie to prove that you are castrated! *Recueil*, 2:249–65.]

The example with which we began, Jean de Meun's vision of women as overdetermined, is complicated by the fabliau's positing of the problem of overdetermination in terms of vision itself. There is, the anonymous poet asserts, no possibility of an objective regard upon the opposite sex and, therefore, no innocent place of speech. The mere fact of speaking to women makes one a pimp; a refusal to speak or even to look is the sign of a castrato.

This changes somewhat our paradigm, since the inadequacy of women to Being, expressed as an ever-present overdetermination, becomes, in the passage cited, indissociable from the inadequacy of words, or, as the anonymous author of *La Ruihote del monde* suggests, of speech:

S'il se taist, il ne set parler;
S'il parole, vés quel anpallier,
Il ne cese onques de plaidier . . .
S'il cante bien c'est un jongleres;
S'il dist biaux dis, c'est uns trouveres.

[If a man is quiet, he is accused of not knowing how to speak; if he speaks, of being a loudmouth who never shuts up. . . . If he sings well, he is taken for a jongleur; and if he uses nice phrases, for a trouvère.]⁸

The riotousness of woman is linked to that of speech and indeed seems to be a condition of poetry itself. And if the reproach against woman is that she is a bundle of verbal abuses (*contenz, riotes, reprouches, requestes, plaintes*), such annoyances make her at least the fellow traveler of the trouvère. Because of the inadequacies of language that she embodies, she is in some fundamental sense always already a deceiver, trickster, jongleur. Here the king's attempt to buy the poet's horse and the image of the horse sale are central:

Vendras tu ton roncyn à moy?
—Sire, plus volenters que ne le dorroy.
—Pur combien le vendras tu?
—Pur taunt com il serra vendu.
—Et pur combien le vendras?
—Pur taunt come tu me dorras.
—Et pur combien le averoi?
—Pur taunt comme je recevroy.

[Will you sell me your horse? —Yes, more willingly than I would give it. —For how much will you sell it? —For as much as it will be sold. —And for how much will you sell it? —For as much as you will give me. —And for how much will I have it? —For as much as I shall receive; *Recueil*, 2.244–51.]

Woman, as deceiver, is like a horse that one cannot inspect before the sale; and, like language, she is, as Jean de Meun implies, pure cover who hides “that she might not displease before being wed.”⁹ Chaucer concurs: “Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,/ They been assayed at diverse stoundes But folk of wyves maken noon assay,/ Til they be wedded” (“Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” lines 285–91). Nor, as Innocent III contends, is it possible to separate the motif of horse trading from that of overdetermination: “There are three things,” Innocent writes, “which keep a man from staying home: smoke, a leaky roof, and a shrewish wife. . . . If she be beautiful, men readily go after her; if she be ugly, she as readily after them. It is hard to keep what many want, and annoying to have what no one cares about. . . . When you buy a horse, an ox, a dog, clothes and a bed, even a cup and a pitcher, you get the chance to look them over. But no one displays a bride, lest she displease before the marriage.”¹⁰

Reading Misogyny

If the above quotations seem repetitious to the point of monotony, it is because misogyny as a discourse is always to some extent avowedly derivative; it is a citational mode whose rhetorical thrust is to displace its own source away from anything that might be construed as personal or confessional and toward the sacred authorities whose own source, as often as not, is the absent (and possibly nonexistent) Theophrastes with which we began. The misogynist speaks of the other in terms that bespeak otherness, and this through the voice of the other. This defining tautology emphasizes the elusiveness of misogyny as well as the pertinence of the question of reading. To be more precise, I think that it can be shown that where antifeminism is concerned the question of reception is crucial, and work like the *Roman de la rose*, for example, may be less important for what it might actually contain than for what surrounds it. Indeed, the history of the reading of Jean’s text not only offers a key to our understanding of misogyny at the end of the Middle Ages; it constitutes the most meaningful sense in which woman-hating can be historicized. The history of misogyny, as a citational mode, resides primarily in the radical difference between that which is said—through time—about such texts, or in the problem of interpretation. Hence the negotiation of the parameters for discussion of the misogynistic work is a map of a certain kind of sexually charged misreading that serves at any given cultural moment to define the permissible limits of gender relations.

It is, first of all, around the question of woman that questions of language and of literature are debated passionately between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The so-called “Querelle de la rose” was not only France’s first literary debate but one that turned specifically around the enmeshed issues of woman and interpretation which strike to the core of the issue at hand. Christine de

Pisan, for instance, poses the delicate questions of authorial intention, voice, and the relation of poetic representation to social base in a sarcastic response to Jehan Johannez a propos of the *Rose*:

Et la laidure qui la est recordere des femmes, dient plusieurs en lui excusant que c'est le Jaloux qui parle, et voirement fait ains comme Dieu parla par la bouche Jeremie. Mais sans faille, quelxque addicions mencongeuses qu'il ait adjoustees, ne peuvent—Dieu mercy!—en rien amenrir ne rendre empirees les conditions des femmes.

[And many say in excusing the ugly things that are said there of women that it is the Jealous Husband who talks, as if truly God were speaking through the mouth of Jeremiah. But without a doubt, whatever untruthful things he has added to the pile cannot—thank God!—either improve or render worse the condition of women.]¹¹

Or, as in the letter of Jean de Montreuil to Gontier Col, the questions of women and of reading are so thoroughly intertwined as to displace the phenomenon of misogyny away from any definable, stable, textual reality toward the reading subject:

Nonetheless our censors curse, hate, scorn, and attack him in a shameful way, having read him, studied, and understood him badly: this is what is intolerable! What arrogance! What rashness! What audacity! These people who admit themselves to only having read superficially, by bits and with no concern for context: here is how they rush in, like drunks arguing at the dinner table, to blame, reproach, and condemn arbitrarily and at their whim such an important work, conceived and edited in so many nights and days, at the price of so much effort and with such constant application, as if such an important text weighed no more in the balance than the song of a jongleur, the work of one day.¹²

Jean de Montreuil's concern is not only merely a rhetorical strategy; it poses what remains a key issue with respect to the study of misogyny: that is, how to recognize it, how to read it—which is not fundamentally different from the problem of how to read medieval literature or, for that matter, any literary text.

Is misogyny a matter of the portrayal of women or a more specific discourse? If a question of how women are portrayed, does one such portrayal suffice? Is it still misogyny if men are also so depicted? Is it misandry? Is there a masculine equivalent of misogyny? Are we still dealing with misogyny if good women are presented alongside of negative examples? Or, as some maintain, does such a balance constitute merely another misogynistic ruse? Is an obsession with women, in other words, misogynistic? Is the designation of misogyny as a topic for academic discourse ultimately a misogynistic gesture?

In attempting to identify misogyny one is to some degree always dealing with a problem of voice, the questions of who speaks and of localizing such speech. If misogyny is a topos, a virtual element, found potentially in almost any work (including those that are overwhelmingly profeminine like *Aucassin et Nicolette*), how ascribable is it to something on the order of individual authorial intention? What does it mean to say that someone like Jean de Meun, about whom relatively

little of a biographical nature is known, is a misogynist? Does it matter who speaks? How are we to read obvious delegations of voice as in the example cited by Christine? How are we to disentangle the assumed “truth of misogyny” from a literary topos that as often as not performs exactly what it ascribes to, projects upon, women—that is, seeks to deceive? Any answer to this question is, as we shall see, even further complicated by the association of women with writing and poetics.

Is misogyny an exclusively male phenomenon or is it part of a larger cultural discourse in which women also participate?¹³ This in turn raises the question of whether or not there is an essential distinction between male and female writing. Is there, for instance, a difference in kind between the *Lais* of Marie de France (about whom little is known except that she was a woman) and the anonymous Breton *lais* written presumably by men, or between the writing of Marie and that of Chrétien de Troyes?

Is misogyny restricted to the domain of literature? What is its status in the other arts? Is the question of misogyny the same as that of woman? If so, we are forced to incorporate conflicting images of woman—Eve and Mary, woman as seducer and redeemer—within the essentially negative field of antifeminism and to deal with a paradox of history: that the periods of greatest misogynistic activity can also be periods of intense woman worship, as in the example of twelfth- and thirteenth-century mariolatry.¹⁴ Then too, the mysticism current in the High Middle Ages would be unimaginable without such figures as Angela of Foligno, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Sienna, Saint Gertrude, Hildegard of Bingen, Juliana of Norwich, who were the equivalents of female prophets. It has been argued that the adoration of women, whether the Holy Virgin, the courtly lady, or the prophetess, is but another form of misogynistic investment. This returns us to the subject of whether or not idolatry is merely another form of misogyny, taking us in turn into complex issues of reading that are not fundamentally different from the interpretation of any text. What is different, and here the present essay departs from all previous discussion, is, as we shall see, the extent to which the practices of medieval hermeneutics and the discourse of misogyny are bound up in each other.

Any study of misogyny must, it seems to me, begin from two fundamental assumptions. The first is a recognition of the very real disenfranchisement of women in the Middle Ages. Such a premise is based upon careful work over the last fifteen years within the realm of social history. Few would dispute, for example, that there were from the fourth through the fourteenth centuries essential differences in men’s and women’s rights to possess, inherit, and alienate property; in their duties to pay homage and taxes; in their qualification for exemptions. To these are added differences in men’s and women’s civil and legal rights: in the rights to bear witness, collect evidence, represent oneself (or others) in judicial causes; to serve as judges or lawyers, as oath helpers; to bring suit or

to stand for election. Legal penalties for the same crime often differed substantially, as, for instance, in the punishments for adultery, for bearing children out of wedlock, for beating one's spouse. Even the mode of execution was in certain cases not the same for women as for men. Social historians in conjunction with demographers have raised radically the question of whether sons were treated better than daughters to the extent of creating a higher infant mortality rate among females. Moreover, the questions remain of whether those who survived participated equally in urban privileges such as membership in guilds and opportunity of employment; whether, when employed, wages were equivalent; whether women were allowed a role in affairs of state and especially in those of the Church, whose ideological commitment to the equality of all Christians notwithstanding, still excluded women from participation in certain offices like preaching or setting Church policy or doctrine.

All of these, and the list of material recrimination is by no means complete, are real and unavoidable issues. But they are not the same as misogyny, and one has to be careful not to move too easily between the domain of institutions and the discourse of antifeminism. For the risk, in neglecting the complicated series of intervening mediations, is entrapment in the movement of the very phenomenon one seeks to expose. The unqualified and unreflective equation of the two is tantamount to a ritual recitation of tort—yet another speaking or citation of the traditional topoi—that serves less to redress historical injustice than to naturalize it in terms of an ineluctable rule of relation between the sexes.¹⁵

Scandalous Excess

And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul. . . .

And the Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself.

And the Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: for whatsoever Adam called a living creature the same is its name.

And Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and all the cattle of the field: but for Adam there was not found a helper like himself.

Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it.

And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam.

And Adam said: "This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."

—Gen. 2.7–23

What often passes unnoticed in the Genesis story is the degree to which the creation of woman is linked to a founding, or original, linguistic act. Adam is said to be the first to speak, the namer of things; woman—or the necessity of

woman, her cause—seems to emanate, in turn, from the imposition of names.¹⁶ The designation of things, or a primal instance of man's exertion of power over them, and the creation of woman are coterminous. Further, in this account of the *ad seriatim* creation of the genders, woman is by definition a derivation of man, who, as the direct creation of God, remains both chronologically antecedent and ontologically prior. This at least is how early commentators on Genesis—Augustine, Jerome, Philo Judaeus—understood things. “It is not good that *any* man should be alone,” writes Philo. “For there are *two* races of men, the one made after the (Divine) Image, and the one moulded out of the earth. . . . With the second man a helper is associated. To begin with, the helper is a created one, for it says ‘Let us make a helper for him’; and in the next place, is subsequent to him who is to be helped, for He had formed the mind before and is about to form its helper.”¹⁷ Thus, woman, created from man, is conceived from the beginning to be secondary, a supplement. Here the act of naming takes on added significance. For the imposition of names and the creation of woman are not only simultaneous but analogous gestures thoroughly implicated in each other. Just as words are the supplements of things, which are supposedly brought nameless to Adam, so woman is the supplement to, the “helper” of, man. She comes into being metonymically as a part of a body more sufficient to itself because created directly by God and to whose wholeness she, as part (and this from the beginning), can only aspire.

Adam's priority implies a whole set of relations that strike to the heart not only of medieval sign theory but to certain questions of ontology that make apparent that the Fall, commonly conceived to be the origin and cause of medieval misogyny, is merely a fulfillment or logical conclusion of that which is implicit to the creation of Eve. Woman, as secondary, derivative, supervenient, and supplemental, assumes all that is inferior, debased, scandalous, and perverse.

Adam, first of all, has what medieval philosophers called substance. His nature is essential; he possesses Being, Existence. “All good is from God,” Augustine affirms, “hence there is no natural existence which is not from God.”¹⁸ Eve, as the byproduct of a part of the essential, partakes from the outset of the accidental, associated with a multiplicity of modes of degradation implicit to her coming into being as becoming.

If Adam exists fully and Eve only partially, it is because he participates in what is conceived to be an original unity of being while she is the offshoot of division and difference. And unity, another word for Being, is the goal of philosophy because it is also synonymous with truth. “Philosophy as a discipline,” writes Augustine in the *De ordine*, “itself already contains this order of knowledge, and it need not discover more than the nature of one, but in a much more profound and divine sense.”¹⁹ The oneness that Adam once enjoyed, the uniqueness of singularity, is indistinguishable from the oneness that is the founding principle, the guarantor, of grammar, geometry, philosophy; and, implicitly, of theology,

since God is defined as the nature of one, that which is universal and eternal. “Christ,” writes Tertullian, “is everything which is once for all.”²⁰

This is another way of saying that Adam possesses form, is the equivalent of an Idea; for that which has unity and existence also has form. “All existing things would cease to be if form were taken from them, the unchangeable form by which all unstable things exist and fulfill their functions,” asserts Augustine in a formula that appears almost everywhere in the discourse of misogyny.²¹ That is, man is form or mind, and woman, degraded image of his second nature, is relegated to the realm of matter. Put in terms more appropriate to the Patristic tradition, man is spirit or soul formed directly by God, partaking of his divinity, while woman partakes of the body in which inheres, again, the principle of division.

Herein lies one possibility of reading misogyny: if man enjoys existence (substance), being, unity, form, and soul, woman is associated with accident, becoming (temporality), difference, body, and matter—and with all they imply by way of a secondariness that summons the more specific recriminations which constitute the discourse of misogyny.

Woman’s supervenient nature is, above all, indistinguishable from that of all signs in relation to the signified and of representation. As Philo Judaeus maintains, her coming into being is synonymous not only with the naming of things but with a loss—within language—of the literal:

“And God brought a trance upon Adam, and he fell asleep; and He took one of his sides” and what follows (Gen. 2.21). These words in their literal sense are of the nature of a myth. For how could anyone admit that a woman, or a human being at all, came into existence out of a man’s side?²²

Since the creation of woman is synonymous with the creation of metaphor, the relation between Adam and Eve is the relation of the proper to the figural, which implies always derivation, deflection, denaturing, a tropological turning away. The perversity of Eve is that of the lateral: as the outgrowth of Adam’s flank, his *latus*, she retains the status of *translatio*, of translation, transfer, metaphor, trope. She is side-issue.

This link between the derivative nature of the female and that of figural representation itself explains why the great misogynistic writers of the first centuries of Christianity—Paul, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Philo, Jerome—were so obsessed by the relation of women to decoration, why they themselves were so fascinated by veils, jewels, makeup, hair style and color—in short, by anything having to do with the cosmetic. Such an obsession is evident even in the titles of the essays of, say, Tertullian: “On the Veiling of Virgins,” “On the Pallium,” “On the Apparel of Women.” For the third-century apologist, woman is a creature who above all else and by nature covets ornamentation:

You are the devil’s gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant

enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunic of skins? Come, now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians sheared sheep, and the Serians spun trees, and the Tyrians dyed, and the Phrygians embroidered with the needle, and the Babylonians with the loom, and pearls gleamed, and onyx stones flashed; if gold itself also had already issued, with the cupidity (which accompanies it), from the ground; if the mirror too, already had licence to lie so largely, Eve, expelled from paradise (Eve) already dead, would also have coveted *these* things, I imagine! No more, then, ought she *now* to crave, or be acquainted with (if she desire to live again), what, when she *was* living, she had neither had nor known. Accordingly, these things are the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state, instituted as if to swell the pomp of her funeral.²³

If man's desire for ornament, or for that which is secondary, is analogous to man's desire for woman, it is because woman is conceived *as* ornament. She is, by her secondary nature, automatically associated with artifice, decoration. The mildest version of such a paradigm is found in the often repeated licence for men to pray with head bare while women are enjoined to be veiled—and in its corollary, that woman is covering or veil: "But if a woman nourish her hair, it is a glory to her," writes Paul, "for her hair is given to her as a covering" (1 Cor. 11.15). Woman naturally decorates herself; and, according to Tertullian, is by nature decoration:

Female habit carries with it a twofold idea—dress and ornament. By "dress" we mean what they call "womanly gracing"; by "ornament," what is suitable should be called "womanly *disgracing*." The former is accounted (to consist) in gold, and silver, and gems, and garments; the latter in care of the skin, and of those parts of the body which attract the eye. Against the one we lay the charge of ambition, against the other prostitution.²⁴

The traditional reading of the above passage equates a certain hostility toward women with a more generalized horror of the flesh. And yet, it is not the flesh that Tertullian denounces. On the contrary, it is the draping of the flesh with "dress and ornament" that is the equivalent of seduction:

The only edifice which they know how to raise is this silly pride of women: because they require slow rubbing that they may shine, and artful underlaying that they may show to advantage, and careful piercing that they may hang; and (because they) render to gold a mutual assistance in meretricious allurements.²⁵

To decorate oneself is to be guilty of "meretricious allurements," since embellishment of the body, a prideful attempt "to show to advantage," recreates an original act of pride that is the source of potential concupiscence. This is why Tertullian is able to move so quickly and naturally from the idea of dress to a whole range of seemingly unapparent associations—e.g., between transvestism and the monstrous; or between the toga and lust, adultery, cannibalism, intemperance, and greed.²⁶ It is as if each and every act of clothing an original nakedness associated with the sanctity of the body, and not the weakness of the flesh, were a corrupting recapitulation of the Fall entailing all other perversions.

If clothes are at once the sign, the effect, and a cause of the Fall, it is because, as artifice, they, like woman, are secondary, collateral, supplemental. Dress is unnatural since, like all artifice, it seeks to add to, to perfect, the body of nature or God's creation:

That which He Himself has not produced is not pleasing to God, unless He was *unable* to order sheep to be born with purple and sky-blue fleeces! If He was *able*, then plainly He was *unwilling*: what God willed not, of course, ought not to be fashioned. Those things, then, are not the best by *nature* which are not from God, the *Author* of nature. Thus they are understood to be from *the devil*, from *the corrupter* of nature: for there is no other whose they *can* be, if they are not God's; because what are not God's must necessarily be His rival's.²⁷

A recreation, the artificial implies a pleasurable surplus that is simply inessential:

Thus (a thing) which, from whatever point you look at it, is in *your* case superfluous, you may justly disdain if you have it not, and neglect it if you have. Let a holy woman, if naturally beautiful, give none so great occasion (for carnal appetite).²⁸

Tertullian does not, of course, seek to determine how something can be "naturally beautiful," much less to wrestle with the supervenient status of his own thought upon the superficial.²⁹ His indictment of the artificial condemns not only what we think of as the realm of the aesthetic, "adulteration with illegitimate colors," but extends to any investment of nature with human intention.³⁰ Thus the constant comparison of iron, the use value par excellence, with gold, which is perverse because its worth is extrinsic.³¹ The affinity between gold, the product of excess labor, "the arts," and women constitutes an economic nexus taken as a given; their natures, by definition inessential and antinatural, attract each other because they partake coevally in a scandalous excess that offends.³²

Here we arrive at an idea that runs deep throughout medieval thought and that indeed can be considered to constitute the essence of a certain theologizing of the aesthetic. To wit, the artificial participates in a supervenient and extraneous rival creation that can only distract man's attention from God's original "plastic skill": "Whatever is *born* is the work of God," Tertullian concludes. "Whatever is *plastered* on is the devil's work. . . . To superinduce on a divine work Satan's ingenuities, how criminal it is!"³³ The decorative not only constitutes, as in the case of gold, an artificial investment of value, with all that such intention implies by way of potential concupiscence, but is a literal adding to the "weight" of creation:

The wonder is, that there is no (open) contending against the Lord's prescripts! It has been pronounced that no one can add to his own stature. *You*, however, *do* add to your *weight* some kind of rolls, or shield-bosses, to be piled upon your necks! . . . Nay, rather banish quite away from your "free" head all this slavery of ornamentation.³⁴

From the always scandalous dressing of the naked body of nature emanates the entire range of perverse terms associated with "meretricious garbs and gar-

ments.” In particular, the church fathers move quickly, by association, from the symbolic—artifice, idolatry—to the erotic—concupiscence, fornication, adultery, as if representation itself were, always and already, an offense. Verbal signs, in particular, stand as a constant reminder of the secondary and supplemental nature of all “the arts.” “With the word the garment entered,” Tertullian asserts, implying that language is a covering that, by definition and from the start, is so wrapped up in the decorative as to be essentially perverse.³⁵

This nexus of ideas suggests that the representation of woman as ornamentation is an integral part of a broader paradigm, or that her perverse secondariness is the secondariness of all symbolic activity. The deep mistrust of the body and of the materiality of signs defined by their accessibility to the senses constitutes, in fact, a commonplace of what we know about the Middle Ages—yea, something that might be considered to constitute a cultural constant alongside of, indeed allied with, that of misogyny. God produced signs, Augustine writes, “in order to signify His presence, and to reveal Himself in them, as He Himself knows it to be fitting, but without appearing in that substance itself by which He is, and which is wholly unchangeable.”³⁶ If, as Tertullian claims, “all things that are not of God are perverse,” and if, as Augustine maintains, God is not in signs, then not only are signs perverse, but words or verbal signs stand as a particularly degraded excess. For where numbers signify permanence, reason, and order, language belies only corruption.³⁷ Words are to images in the mind as the corporeal or sensitive is to the domain of the spirit; they are secondary, derivative, supplemental, rival and potentially confusing semblances that rely upon the fallible function of sound. This is a well-known topos among Patristic writers. Where it becomes interesting for our purpose is in the explicit analogy between woman and the sensible; for, as Philo reminds us, the relation between the mind and the senses is that of man to woman:

To begin with, the helper is a created one, for it says, ‘Let us make a helper for him’; and in the next place, is subsequent to him who is to be helped, for He had formed the mind before and is about to form its helper. In these particulars again, while using terms of outward nature, he is conveying a deeper meaning. For sense and the passions are helpers of the soul and come after the soul.³⁸

The ontological status of woman is, then, analogous to that of the senses within the cognitive realm. Man as mind and woman as sensory perception are, as Philo explains, mutually exclusive: “It is when the mind (Adam) has gone to sleep that perception begins, for conversely when the mind wakes up perception is quenched.”³⁹ Woman, formed of flesh from the rib, remains bound by the corporeal. “‘He built it to be a woman’ (Gen. 2.22),” Philo continues, “proving by this that the most proper and exact name for sense perception is ‘woman.’”⁴⁰ Nor is it even necessary to distinguish between active and passive intellectual faculties.

Woman as sensitive soul is allied with the sensual; to perceive her, John Chrysostom maintains, is no less dangerous to men in general than the faculty of perception is to the soul of every man:

Hence how often do we, from beholding a woman, suffer a thousand evils; returning home, and entertaining an inordinate desire, and experiencing anguish for many days; yet nevertheless, we are not made discreet, but when we have scarcely cured one wound, we again fall into the same mischief, and are caught by the same means; and for the sake of the brief pleasure of a glance, we sustain a kind of lengthened and continual torment. . . . The beauty of a woman is the greatest snare. Or rather, not the beauty of woman, but unchastened gazing!⁴¹

Here we arrive at a series of paradoxes within the discourse of misogyny. To wit, if woman is conceived to be synonymous with the senses or perception, then any look upon a woman's beauty must be the look of a woman upon a woman, for there can be no such thing as a male gaze or desire. This is why any answer to Saint Chrysostom's question "How is it possible to be freed from desire?" must be to be free of perception, or from the feminine altogether.⁴² In this sense misogyny is bound to the desire to escape the senses, perception, the corporeal, or consciousness, which leads to the inevitable conclusion that it contains a desire for the absolute, or for a totality that is the unmistakable symptom of a death wish. Nor does the paradox end there, since the identification of misogyny with the desire for perfection is the site of another contradiction—a conflict between the keenness of the awareness of woman as flaw and the desire for wholeness, expressed in the persistent exhortation to virginity.⁴³

Misogyny as Literature

The relation between vision—the seduction of a gaze—and the erotic lies at the source both of an idealization of women in literary texts and a corresponding antifeminism. For if a look engenders desire, desire, in turn, forecloses all future possibility of seeing. This is true not only for the church fathers but for the classic misogynists of the High Middle Ages as well. Love, for Andreas Capellanus, the architect of courtly and indeed of Western romantic love, represents "a certain inbred suffering caused by sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, causing desire for embrace."⁴⁴ And yet love, identified with woman and the senses, is also synonymous with illusion, which makes it the cornerstone of the discourse of misogyny. As we shall see by way of conclusion, it is the equation of women with the illusory that serves to identify the misogynistic with the literary.

Mathieu, the antiheroic narrator of the *Lamentations*, laments less because he

has married a woman who has been married before (“Le plus chetif de tous clamés/ Pour ce que je suy bigamé” [I am called the most unfortunate because I am bigamous; book 1, lines 1074–75]) than because his intellectual functions have been troubled by a gaze:

Je me plaing, car par la *veüe*
Fu ma science deceüe.
Beauté par ma l’uel mon cuer navra,
Dont jamais jour repos n’avra. . . .
Las! povre moy, quant tant amay,
Que par amours me bigamay.

[I complain, for by vision was my knowledge deceived. Beauty wounded my heart through my eye, and because of which I will never be at peace. . . . Alas! poor me, when I loved so much that by love I became bigamous; book 1, lines 647–58.]

Beauty, however, has turned to its opposite.⁴⁵ The difference between a happy former state and the present state of bigamous torture is a difference produced by the seductions of vision (“Je fuy seduis et afollés/ Par doulx regars, par beau langage” [I was seduced and maddened by sweet looks, by beautiful language; book 1, lines 570–71]) that now has turned to its opposite: “Mon impotence est anoncie” (My impotence is made manifest; book 1, line 1349). It is impossible, in fact, to tell if it is a loss of beauty that has diminished desire or diminished desire that has troubled perception—or rather, whether it was or was not a trouble of perception that produced desire in the first place. For vision is certainly at stake in Mathieu’s seduction:

Mieux me venist mes yeux bander
Au jour que premier l’avisay
Et que sa beauté tant prisay
Et son doulx viaire angelique
Dessous la fame sophistique.

[I would have done better to shield my eyes the day I first saw her and so esteemed her beauty and her sweet angelic face covering sophisticated woman; book 1, lines 626–30.]

Here the connection is established between bigamy, seduction, and sophistication. Woman, feminine or sophisticated beauty, is that which seduces not only because it appeals to the senses but because it corrupts them, one by one:

Mes cinq sens sont mortifiés
Mes yeuls ne peuent regarder . . .
Je ne puis a goust savourer
Ne je ne puis rien odourer,
Si ne sçay taster de mes mains

Tant com je souloie, mais mains,
Et de mes oreilles n'oy goute.

[My five senses are mortified, my eyes cannot see. . . . I cannot taste or smell anything, nor can I feel anything with my hands as I used to be able, but less; and my ears don't hear a thing; book 1, lines 1510–16.]

Thus we encounter a familiar paradox: before marriage the senses are seduced and distorted by desire, yet after marriage they are distorted by abuse, or by the tears of lamentation that distort vision. There is, then, no moment at which woman does not trouble vision, distort and destroy the senses. This is because the seducing sophistication of woman is that of illusion itself; she is by definition not only sophisticated (e.g., dirty, illusory) but is posited as that which exists in distinction to reason. If, as Mathieu admits, “By her sight my knowledge [*science*] was troubled,” it is because woman is conceived as that which escapes logic. Rather, she is portrayed as a kind of false logic, the sophism that vanquishes both grammar and logic: “En ce fu grammaire traïe / Et logique moult esbaïe” (In this was grammar betrayed and logic greatly confounded; book 1, lines 1105–6). Together grammar and logic constitute within the medieval language arts the *trivium*, the sciences of the true, respectively of rectitude of expression and of correct propositions. Woman, however, is posited as the opposite of the truth: “Femme de verité n'a cure” (Woman cares not at all for truth; book 1, line 966). More precisely, she becomes, in the misogynistic thinking of the High Middle Ages, associated with the third element of the *trivium*—rhetoric, the art of persuasion that, by the thirteenth century, was synonymous with poetics. Woman is figured as the sophist, the dissimulator (“Faindre et dissimuler convient” (To feign and trick comes naturally; book 1, line 1024), the seducer with false arguments or subtlety: “Oultre les tençons et les limes / Par cinq manieres de sophismes / La femme meine l'omme a methe” (In addition to arguments and quarrels woman brings man to his end with five kinds of sophism”; book 1, lines 843–45). Here just before ending I would like to stop for a moment on the word *methe*, which from Latin *meta*, *metae* means “a mark or boundary, an end, period, or turning point.” But the resonance of *methodium*, “a witty conceit, jest, or joke,” is also there, as is that of *metus*, “fear.” Moreover, the careful reader, aware of the extent to which medieval vernacular poets loved word play, cannot help but recognize in *methe* a part of the poet's name—Mathieu or Matheolus brought by woman to his end. But why not all four—end, joke, fear, and the name of the poet? After all, if woman is by definition the sign of an always present bigamy, she is also the very figure of ambiguity (“figure d'amphibolie”; book 1, line 1144): the one who through the ruse that is her power works against logic and grammar (*methodice*) to trouble the senses with sophisms: “Avec la langue est la veüe / Par le sophisme deceüe” (book 1, lines 903–4).

Here we have come full circle, since the alliance of women with rhetoric against grammar and logic places her on the side of the poet, whose interference with univocal meaning is equated with noise—noise, furthermore, specifically related to the defining secondariness with which we began:

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

[Why are women more noisy, full of foolish words, and more garrulous than men? Because they are made of bones and our persons are made of clay: bones rattle louder than earth; book 2, lines 241–46.]

More than mere encumbering ambiguity, woman is defined, above all, as embodying the spirit of contradiction: “Je ne sçai de chose passé/ Ne du temps present rien retraire/ Qu'elle ne die le contraire” (I know how to say nothing, past or present, that she does not say the opposite; book 1, lines 1300–1302). As man's copy or image, his double, she doubles perniciously everything he says: “Elle est de trop parler isnelle/ Et en parlant a double ment,/ Pourquoy je peris doublement” (She is too quick to speak; and in speaking she lies twice, by which I perish doubly; book 1, lines 1291–92). Nor is Jehan Le Fèvre's characterization unique. Andreas Capellanus, to cite another prominent example, concurs:

No woman can make you such a firm promise that she will not change her mind about the matter in a few minutes. . . . Woman is by nature a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech . . . a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets. . . . Even for a trifle a woman will swear falsely. . . . Every woman is also loud-mouthed. . . . When she is with other women, no one of them will give the others a chance to speak, but each always tries to be the one to say whatever is to be said and to keep on talking longer than the rest; and neither her tongue nor her spirit ever gets tired out by talking. . . . A woman will boldly contradict everything you say.⁴⁶

Neither the portrayal of woman as endless garrulousness nor as contradiction would be so significant if it were not for the defining rhetorical context of all misogynistic literature, which seeks to dissuade from marriage and to do so precisely by speaking, often at great length. How, it may be asked, does the desire of women to speak differ from that of the writer who, like Walter Map, author of the “Dissuasion of Valerius to Rufinus the Philosopher That He Should Not Take a Wife,” repeats in the space of only two pages: “I am forbidden to speak, and I cannot keep silence. . . . So I am forbidden to speak—I the prophet of truth. . . . I cannot keep silence. . . . I cannot keep silence . . . therefore I cannot keep silence. . . . I am forbidden to speak. . . . Therefore I cannot keep silence. . . . I

am forbidden to speak. . . . You should make allowance for me who, in the impatience of my affection, cannot keep silence."⁴⁷

If a woman is defined as verbal transgression, indiscretion, and contradiction, then Walter Map, indeed any writer, can only be defined as a woman; and the discourse of misogyny then becomes a plaint against the self or against writing itself. For Walter is no less fickle than Andreas accuses all women of being: "No woman ever makes up her mind so firmly on any subject that she will not quickly change it on a little persuading from anyone. A woman is like melting wax, which is always ready to take a new form and to receive the impress of anyone's seal."⁴⁸ And the very works that bemoan the instability of women are attempts to achieve what they denounce; they perform what in their own terms is the otherness of which hatred of the sexual other is the thematic analogue. Put another way, the author seeks to do to his interlocutor—whether the anonymous Walter or Rufinus—precisely that of which he accuses women: to deceive with words, to provoke contradiction, and to seduce with what is defined as the essence of the feminine: the ruses of rhetoric.⁴⁹ The misogynistic writer uses rhetoric as a means of renouncing it, and, by extension, woman; he "cheats," in the phrase of Andreas, "one trick with another" (*Courtly Love*, 205). This, perhaps, is the greatest ruse of all, for the confession of contradiction, which Walter Map equates with "the goodwill of the writer and the honesty of the written page" (*De nugis*, 164), is no less of an aporia than Andreas's concluding advice:

Now this doctrine of ours, which we have put into this little book for you, will if carefully and faithfully examined seem to present two different points of view. In the first part . . . we set down completely, one point after another, the art of love. . . . In the latter part of the book . . . we added something about the rejection of love.⁵⁰

Thus the book is all that it claims to reject: contradiction, deceit, seduction, a source of mischief and of mistrust. "We know that everything a woman says is said with the intention of deceiving, because she always has one thing in her heart and another on her lips," Andreas inveighs in a phrase whose unreadability warns against nothing so much as itself (*Courtly Love*, 204).

This is a way of suggesting, by way of conclusion, that the reader's own strategy can only be one of mistrust of the writer and of the text—which returns us to the problem of reading. How do we distinguish, finally, persuasion from dissuasion? How do we mark the difference, for example, between Andreas's prescription, "If you want to get a woman to do anything, you can get her to do it by ordering her to do the opposite" (*Courtly Love*, 206), and the opening injunction to the reader, "Friend Walter": "Read this little book, then, not as one seeking to take up the life of the lover, but that, invigorated by the theory and trained to excite the minds of women to love, you may, by refraining from so doing, win an eternal recompense" (*Courtly Love*, 187). There is no way of determining with certainty Andreas's intent—whether to urge to convince or desist—and ultimately

whether he wants us to take literally the warning against love or ourselves to be seduced by the letter. He, and any other author for that matter, performs that which he denounces Eve for having done—seduces, in the words of Tertullian, “by mere words,” disobeys his own injunctions. The danger of woman, according to this reading of the phenomenon of misogyny, is that of literature itself.

Notes

1. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York, 1963), part 1, qu. 92; part 3, qu. 32. Innocent III is particularly virulent on the topic of woman. “Menstrual blood,” he writes, “ceases in the female after conception so that the child in her womb will be nourished by it. And this blood is reckoned so detestable and impure that on contact with it fruits will fail to sprout, orchards go dry, herbs wither, the very trees let go their fruit; if a dog eat of it, he goes mad. When a child is conceived, he contacts the defect of the seed, so that lepers and monsters are born of this corruption”; *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, trans. Mary Dietz (New York, 1969), 9. In the misogynistic thinking of the Middle Ages, there can, in fact, be no distinction between the theological and the gynecological. Woman is a limit case of man who remains, as in Platonic thought, bound by the material, by flesh and lust. “Man was formed of dust, slime, and ashes, what is even more vile, of the filthiest seed. He was conceived from the itch of the flesh, in the heat of passion and the stench of lust, and worse yet, with the stain of sin”; *ibid.*, 6.
2. It can be no accident, as Catherine Brown pointed out in my seminar, that the discourse of misogyny, which represents an attempt to speak of the other through the voice of the other, is so closely allied with the literary form or register whose very name implies “speaking otherwise.”
3. *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris, 1974), lines 8561–70.
4. John of Salisbury, *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. J. B. Pike (Minneapolis, 1938), 357.
5. Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Cambridge, 1957), lines 248–52.
6. “Ce n’est pas merveille trop dure / Se le mari nul temps ne dure / Contre sa femme mal pitieuse, / Envers la tençon rioteuse / Que souvent li scet aprestre” (It is no great wonder if the husband doesn’t last very long against his pitiless wife, if he doesn’t hold out against the riotous arguments that she knows how to prepare for him); Jehan Le Fèvre, *Les Lamentations de Matheolus*, ed. A.-G. Van Hamel (Paris, 1872), lines 829–33.
7. “Car um puet oyr sovent / Um fol parler sagement. / Sage est qe parle sagement”; *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, ed. A. de Montaiglon, 6 vols. (Paris, 1872), 2:256.
8. Cited by Victor Le Clerc, “Les Fabliaux,” in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 23 (Paris, 1895), 98.
9.

Et cil qui font les mariages,
Si ont trop merveiloz usages,
Et coustume si despareille
Qu’il me vient a trop grant merveille.
Ne sai d’u vient ceste folie,

Fors de rage et de desverie.
 Je voi que qui cheval achete
 Ja n'iert si fox que rienz y mete,
 Comment que l'en l'ait bien couvert,
 Sil ne le voit a descouvert;
 Par tout le regarde et descueuvre.
 Mes la fame si bien se cueuvre,
 Ne ja n'i sera decouverte,
 Ne por gaaingne ne por perte,
 Ne por solaz ne por mesese,
 Por ce, sans plus, que ne desplese
 Devant qu'elle soit espousee.

[And those who marry have a most unusual and unnerving way of operating that surprises me greatly. I don't know whence this foolishness can come except from madness and rage. For a man who buys a horse would not be so crazy as to put any money down if he had not seen it uncovered first, no matter how well covered it was in the first place. He looks it all over and uncovers it. But woman covers herself so well that she can never be uncovered—neither for gain nor for loss, neither for solace nor for grief; for this, and no more, that she might not displease before being wed; *Roman de la rose*, lines 8661–77.]

10. Innocent III, *Misery*, 20. Chaucer repeats the topos: "Thow seyst that droppying houses, and eek smoke,/ And chiding wyves maken men to flee/ Out of hir owene hous"; "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," lines 278–80.
11. *Le Débat sur le "Roman de la rose": Edition critique, introduction, traductions, notes*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris, 1977), 15.
12. *Ibid.*, 35.
13. Christine, whom no one would consider a misogynist, addresses the Provost of Lille in self-deprecating terms that, despite the possibility of sarcasm, would be taken as evidence of misogyny if from the pen of a man: "Bien est vray que mon petit entendement y considère grant joliveté . . ." (While it is true that my little understanding finds very amusing . . .). Then again, even so important a female figure as Hildegard of Bingen appropriates certain theological presuppositions that serve as the ontological basis of much of the misogynistic thinking of the Middle Ages: "When God saw man he saw that he was very good, for man was made in his image. But in creating woman, God was aided by man. . . . Therefore woman is the creation of man. . . . Man symbolizes the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity. Therefore man presides in the courts of this world since he rules over all creatures, while woman is under his rule and submits to him"; cited in Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London, 1983), 57.
14. This is a historical aporia implicit to psychoanalytic explanations of misogyny in terms of male anger at rejecting mothers as well as to anthropological explanations involving the collective anxiety of males in dealing with the fear of feminine power. The difficulty of the former is that in biologizing misogyny it is at the same time naturalized, since there can be no escape from the basic cultural process expressed in the oedipal imposition of the father between mother and son and the son's concomitant anger. The problem with the latter is of a more logical order. To wit, if misogyny is the symptom of men's fear of the real power of women, then the more misogynistic a culture is, the stronger females can be assumed to be; in this way antifeminism represents not the derogation of women but an expression of their material enfranchise-

- ment. See Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle, 1966); H. R. Hayes, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (New York, 1964).
15. Leaving aside the unknowable affective element of woman-hating, misogyny is a way of speaking about women as distinct from doing something to women, though speaking may be a form of doing and even of social practice, or at least its ideological component. Misogyny is a speech act such that the subject of the sentence is woman and the predicate is a more general term.
 16. See my *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1983), 37–44.
 17. Philo, *On the Creation* (London, 1929), 227.
 18. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. J. H. S. Burleigh (London, 1953), 169.
 19. Augustine, *De ordine*, ed. J. Jolivet (Paris, 1948), 444.
 20. Tertullian, “On Exhortation to Chastity,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 4 (Buffalo, 1885), 54.
 21. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 163. This is also an important concept in the Aristotelian tradition according to which in procreation man supplies the form and woman the matter; see in particular *De la génération des animaux*, ed. P. Louis (Paris, 1961), 3–5, 39–43.
 22. Philo, *On the Creation*, 237.
 23. Tertullian, “On the Apparel of Women,” in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:14.
 24. *Ibid.*, 16. 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Tertullian, “On the Pallium,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:9, 12.
 27. Tertullian, “On the Apparel,” 17. 28. *Ibid.*, 20.
 29. One of the salient ironies of misogynistic discourse is that it often becomes rhetorical or ornamental in direct proportion to the extent to which it denounces woman as ornament.
 30. Tertullian, “On the Apparel,” 17.
 31. “So true is it that it is not intrinsic worth, but rarity, which constitutes the goodness (of those things): the excessive labour, moreover, of working them with arts introduced by means of the sinful angels, who were revealers withal of the material substances themselves, joined with their rarity, excited their costliness, and hence a lust on the part of women to possess (that) costliness”; *ibid.*, 23.
 32. “For they who rub their skin with medicaments, stain their cheeks with rouge, make their eyes prominent with antimony, sin against HIM. To them, I suppose, the plastic skill of God is displeasing! In their own persons, I suppose, they convict, they censure, the Artificer of all things. For censure they do when they amend, when they add to, (His work); taking these, their additions, of course, from the adversary artificer. That adversary artificer is the devil”; *ibid.*, 20–21.
 33. *Ibid.* 34. *Ibid.*
 35. Tertullian, “On the Pallium,” 8.
 36. Augustine, *De trinitate* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 105.
 37. “From that time forth she [Reason] found it hard to believe that the splendor and purity [of numbers] was sullied by the *corporeal matter of words*. And just as what the spirit sees is always present and is held to be immortal and numbers appear such, which sound, being a sensible thing is lost into the past”; Augustine, *De ordine*, 434.
 38. Philo, *On the Creation*, 227. 39. *Ibid.*, 237. 40. *Ibid.*, 249.
 41. Saint Chrysostom, Homily 15, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), 441.
 42. Saint Chrysostom, Homily 17, *ibid.*, 10:116.

43. Virginity as such is obviously a concept crucial to the study of misogyny, one too vast for even superficial treatment within the limits of the present essay. Suffice it to say that virginity, like misogyny itself, is impossible to locate since the ever narrowing definitions given by the church fathers relegate it to the realm of a pure idea. To be more precise, virginity contains a historical reference to Adam and Eve and to a theological state of man, as in Augustine's notion of technical virgins who reproduce in paradise without desire or pleasure; it contains a doctrinal reference to Mary, the Virgin who redeems Eve; and it is associated on an individual level with a lack of personal sexuality. It is here that the concept of virginity becomes more interesting, since the more one seeks to fill the category, the more elusive it becomes; and the Patristics, in their desire for the absolute (which, as absolute, is synonymous with virginity), are not satisfied until the concept of virginity, like woman, is emptied of sense. It is not enough, for example, merely to be chaste; in order to be a virgin it is necessary never to have experienced desire. Nor is the absence of desire sufficient; the stimulation of desire in another impugns one's own chastity; see John Chrysostom, Homily 15, 443. And since desire is engendered by, and can consist in, a look, a virgin, seen, is no longer a virgin. "Every public exposure of an honorable virgin is (to her) a suffering of rape," Tertullian maintains ("On the Veiling of Virgins," 29). Jerome even wonders if it is licit for virgins to bathe since, in seeing their own bodies, there is always the potential for desire: "For myself, however, I wholly disapprove of baths for a virgin of full age. Such an one should blush and feel overcome at the idea of seeing herself undressed"; Letter 107, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 6:194. Thus there are only two possibilities: 1) virginity, as an absolute, a totality or Idea, does not exist; 2) the abstraction that virginity implies is destroyed by its articulation. This is another way of saying that the loss of virginity implied in its exposure is analogous to the loss of universality of an Idea implicit to its expression; or, there is no way of talking about virginity that does not imply a loss since the universal is always veiled by the defiling garment of words. In that case, virginity itself becomes a veil. (Jerome speaks of the "veil of chastity"; *ibid.*, 192). Language becomes the ornament, the veil, that defiles the virgin by exposure, since the senses, equated with the body, have no direct access to an Idea, allied with the soul. "No one," John Chrysostom writes, "has anywhere seen a soul by itself stripped of the body"; "Letters to the Fallen Theodore," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 9:104.

44. Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John J. Parry (New York, 1969), 28.
45.

Las! or ay le cuer trop marri.
Car orendroit est tant ripeuse,
Courbée, boçue et tripeuse,
Desfigurée et contrefaite
Que ce semble estre une contraite.
Rachel est Lya devenue,
Toute grise, toute chenue,
Rude, mal entendant et sourde,
En tous ses fais est vile et lourde;
Le pis a dur et les mamelles,
Qui tant souloient estre belles,
Sont froncies, noires, souillies
Com bourses de bergier mouillies.

[Alas! now my heart is very sad, for she is now so mangy, stooped, hump-backed and pot-bellied, disfigured and undone that she seems to be a deformed person. Rachel has become Leah, all grey, white-haired, rough,

senile, and deaf. In all she does she is heavy and vile; her chest is hard and her breasts that used to be beautiful are wrinkled, black, spotted like the wet bags of a shepherd; *Lamentations*, book 1, lines 672–84.]

46. Capellanus, *Courtly Love*, 201, 204, 207.
47. Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. Montague R. James (London, 1923), 160–61.
48. Capellanus, *Courtly Love*, 204.
49. How, one might ask, can the reader to whom the work is addressed be other than a woman as defined in Andreas's own terms as the one subject to persuasion: "Woman is commonly found to be fickle, too, because no woman ever makes up her mind so firmly on any subject that she will not quickly change it on a little persuading from anyone"; *ibid.*, 204.
50. *Ibid.*, 210.