not only does she not know they exist, but even when she
does learn of it she is not in the least concerned with
the question of who is to win her. In fact, she prays
that they go away and leave her to her maiden life of
hunting and walking in the woods. Then too, while the
Knight points out her tenderheartedness, he makes fun of
her weeping and wailing at every time:

Shrighte Emelye, and howleth Palamon,
And Theseus his suster took anon
Swoonynge, and baer hire fro the corps away.
What helpeth it to tarien forth the day
To tellen how she weep bothe eve and morwe?
For in swich cas women have swich sorwe,
When that hir housbondes ben from hir ago,
That for the moore part they sorwen so,
Or ellis fallen in swich maladye,
That at the laste certeinly they dye.
(I, 2317-2526)

And although the Knight shows her "gentle herte" when
she asks that Diana send peace and love between the lovers
and quench their woe, the Knight also points out that her
"gentile herte" arises from purely selfish motives:

"Now help me, lady, sith ye may and kan,
For tho thre formes that thou hast in thee.
And Palamon, that hath swich love to me,
And eek Arcite, that loveth me so soore,
(This grace I preye thee withoute moore)
As sende love and pees bitwixe hem two,
And fro me turne away hir hertes so
That al hire hoote love and hir desir,
And al hir bisy torment, and hir fir
Be queynt, or turned in another place."
(I, 2312-2321)
CLASS ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN
IN CHAUCER'S CANTERBURY TALES

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

By
JUDITH ANN HARRIS, B.A.

The Ohio State University
1958

Approved by:

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of English
DEDICATION

To Francis Lee Utley, adviser and teacher, whose studies in this area have saved me from many a pitfall, this is most gratefully dedicated.
PREFACE

In order to understand medieval literature thoroughly, the scholar sometime must come to grips with the theories about women which prevailed during the Middle Ages, for these theories found expression in every literary genre of the day -- romance, allegory, lyric, fabliau and exemplum -- to mention only a few. The general purpose of this thesis, then, is to attempt to better understand medieval literature through an exploration of medieval attitudes toward women. Its specific purpose, however, is to attempt to better understand Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, which is literally a potpourri of opinions about the worth of women, through an examination of the basic views of the fair sex presented in it.

A close examination of the Canterbury Tales reveals that there are three basic attitudes toward women operating in it, and each of these attitudes is peculiar to a particular class in feudal society. For this reason, I have organized this thesis so as to distinguish between the theories about women held by each class of society represented in the Canterbury Tales. Thus, I have explored three tales, each of which seems to me to best express one of these three feudal attitudes. I might have discussed
a fourth attitude, that of the lower class Miller and Reeve, but since the lower class view of women was not substantially different from that of the middle class, I have not dealt separately with it.

The first chapter deals with the Church's view of the subjection of women as revealed in the "Parson's Tale." The second chapter examines the Aristocracy's worship of women as reflected in the "Knight's Tale." The third chapter attempts to show the Bourgeoisie's peculiar assimilation of these two views as seen in the "Merchant's Tale." The Conclusion briefly surveys the operation of these three attitudes toward women in the remainder of the tales dealing with the feminine question.

In the chapters, I have explored each particular class attitude toward women in all its ramifications, especially in its theory and practice. But although the ideas presented in the thesis are based on fact, the application of those ideas to the three tales is based on my own interpretation of the tales and therefore is subject to possible controversy.

If in any way this thesis helps to delineate and clarify the medieval attitudes toward women and thereby helps others to better understand the Canterbury Tales in particular and medieval literature in general, it has fulfilled its purpose.
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CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH

A good man was ther of religioun
And was a povre Persoun of a Toun,
But riche he was of hooly thought and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche
His parisshens devoutly wolde he teche. 1
(I, 477-482)

Since the Church was the most powerful and influential
force in England in the Middle Ages, 2 it undoubtedly played
an extremely important role in helping to determine medieval
attitudes toward women, although just what that role was is
the subject of some controversy. Miss Power has gone so far
as to assert: "The characteristic medieval theory about
women, thus laid down and debated, was the creation of two

1Citations from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in my text
are to The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Fred N. Robinson

2 The medieval Church wielded not only spiritual but
temporal power as well. In England there was but one Church,
and all Christians who refused to conform to its doctrines
incurred severe punishments. Furthermore, the Church guided
political trends; not only were the clergy predominant in the
House of Lords, but they possessed two taxing and legislative
assemblies of their own in which they voted their supplies for
the king. Then too, the Church had an elaborate system of
ecclesiastical courts which dealt with offences of the laity
as well as those of the clergy. Marriage was governed, not
by Common Law, but by Canon Law. See A. Abram, English Life
and Manners in the Later Middle Ages (New York: E. P.
forces, the Church and the Aristocracy. . . ."³ Owst, arguing along the same lines, states that the satire on women in the comic fabliau of the middle and lower classes "springs direct from the preachers."⁴ Miss Gist believes that all satire on women in the Middle Ages stemmed for the most part from the writings of such early Church fathers as St. Jerome, who, in their campaign for celibacy on the part of the clergy, represented marriage as a difficult and troublesome relationship and woman as an evil temptress bent on man's destruction.⁵ Professor Utley, on the other hand, asserts that too much emphasis has been placed on the Church's idea of asceticism and otherworldliness as the force which produced medieval satire on women:

If clerical celibacy is the major source of satire on women, we must explain why England, notably unfriendly to the Hildebrandian reforms, could yet produce its full share of satires. Matheolus is evidence that a single poem might owe its genesis to a local manifestation of celibate zeal; but to attribute the whole twelfth-century rejuvenation of satire to Hildebrand is to make too much of one particular. The same century is the beginning of


artistic expression for many attitudes toward women besides the satirical: the sensual lyric of the Goliards and the troubadours, the medieval romance, the study of the psychology of lover and lady, the codification of courtly love.\(^6\)

He further points out that just as the Middle Ages did not give rise to the quarrel about woman's worth, for it had raged since the world began, monasticism neither created the medieval attitudes toward women nor was solely responsible for the satiric portraits of women in the literature of the era.\(^7\)

If, then, we accept Professor Utley's thesis that the Church played only one of the many parts played in the creation of the medieval attitudes toward women, just what influence did it have on the feminine controversy such as that which raged around Jean de Meun's section of the *Roman de la Rose* and Alan Chartier's poem *La Belle Dame sans Merci*? The answer seems to be that the Church's influence lay in its adding great impetus to the medieval version of an age-old controversy by the very fact that the Church took an active part in the debate. For by bringing the random thoughts of many centuries together for the laity to absorb, the Church not only gave the world its own views on the subject, but it also influenced lay writers to give theirs.


\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 10-13.
Through the medium of the pulpit, the one oracle of learning and refinement for the majority of society, the Church gave the non-aristocratic classes a realistic and lively picture of womanhood that could not help but influence the lay mind. This portrait ultimately found its way into some of the secular literature of the day. Moreover, through the medium of treatises originally intended for monastic reading, the Church somewhat unintentionally influenced the laity and eventually the non-religious literature. For these treatises reached lay hands who employed them to carry on the debate.

An excellent illustration of this practice is afforded by the work which the "jolly clerk Jankyn" had in his possession, with the reading of which he was wont to taunt his wife. Jankin's book seems to have been both commonplace and popular during the Middle Ages. In the Wife of Bath's list of the

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8Owst, op. cit., p. 377.

9Bede Jarret, in his Social Theories of the Middle Ages (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1926), p. 69, observes, "It would be grossly unscientific to take these monastic writers in their monastic treatises as representative of medieval thought of womanhood, for they are not intending to write primarily on women as women, their greatness or littleness, but solely on women as dangers to monastic observance."

10Robert A. Pratt, in his "A Memoir of Karl Young," pp. 52-53, reports that Karl Young told a gathering of the English Graduate Union at Columbia University about a particular volume which represented a number of manuscripts which Chaucer must have known. Similar in content to Jankin's prized possession, it is a compilation of Latin anti-matrimonial pamphlets, including those by Valerius, Theophrastus and Jerome; Sister Mary Reynelda Makarewicz, The Patristic Influence on Chaucer (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), pp. 7-8 n. Professor Pratt is now word editing this or a similar manuscript for the Chaucer group.
contents of Jankin's book, the work of St. Jerome, undoubtedly intended for monastic readers, is listed with the "Parables of Salomon" and "Ovides Art" and other works not religious in nature (III, 669-681). Perhaps, then, it is fairly safe to assume that Chaucer too had such a handbook of anti-feminism in his possession and made great use of it in his satiric characterization of the Wife of Bath.

The Church, then, added impetus to the controversy by having a great deal to say about the worth of women and by having its ideas adopted and expounded upon by the laity. Now let us turn from a consideration of the role of the Church played in determining the medieval attitudes toward women to an examination of the Church's own attitude toward the sex.

Of all the worthy ecclesiastics in the Canterbury Tales -- the Friar, Summoner, Prioress, Pardoner, Monk, Nun's Priest and Parson -- no one is better qualified to act as the spokesman for the medieval Church's attitude toward women than is the ideal Parson, that good man of religion, for he has a university education, diligently looks after the spiritual matters of his parish and truly preaches Christ's gospel. Not only is the Parson well acquainted with scripture and theological doctrine, as is evidenced by his sermon, but he understands the minds of ordinary men and women and is therefore able to give everyday applications of the doctrine which he preaches.

The purpose of the Parson's "merry tale in prose," as he
jocularily calls it in his "Prologue," is to bring the Canterbury pilgrimage to an appropriate end by showing the pilgrims the way of that perfect, glorious pilgrimage which is called heavenly Jerusalem:

And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial.

(X, 48-51)

In his long sermon on penitence and the seven deadly sins, the Parson solves such problems as those raised by the Wife of Bath in the perspective of that ideal order at the heart of medieval Christianity. Since the Parson views women in relation to this ideal scheme, it seems necessary to examine the concept of "Jerusalem celestial" before we turn to an investigation of the position of women in it.

The ideal order in medieval theology was derived for the most part from the writings of St. Augustine. According to Augustinian doctrine, Jerusalem, the City of God, implies virtue and spiritual peace and the Church of the faithful, on the earthly plane, and everlasting life, the Celestial City, on the heavenly plane. Jerusalem has its counterpart in Babylon, the City of Self, which implies the opposites of these things. The two cities spring from two loves, charity and cupidity. In this world in which all Christians are strangers and pilgrims, man directs his journey to either Jerusalem or Babylon, depending on the kind of love that moves
his will. If charity, which is the love of God above all creatures and earthly pleasures, is the motivating force, the peace of Jerusalem inhabits the mind and society and brings man ultimately to the Celestial City of everlasting life. On the other hand, if cupidty, which is the love of self, earthly creatures and pleasures above God, is the motivating force, Babylon inhabits the mind and society and brings man ultimately to the Babylon of eternal damnation. The way of Jerusalem, then, is the way of peace of mind and salvation through love of God. The way of Babylon, however, is the way of sin and damnation through love of self and the transitory joys of the world. Man's pilgrimage through life should be one of contempt for the world and its pleasures.

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11 The Parson catches the essence of this idea:
...love God in swiche manere that al that ever he dooth is in the love of God, and for the love of God, verrailly, for he brenneth in the love of God....

(X, 383)

12 The Parson's concept of sin is based on the doctrine of cupidty, and for this reason he quotes St. Augustine: "Deedly synne," as seith Seint Augustyn, "is when a man turneth his herte fro God, which that is verray sovereyn bountee, that may nat chaunge, and yeveth his herte to thyng that may chaunge and flitte."

(X, 368)

What, then, is the position of woman in this ideal order? According to Church doctrine, which the Parson extols, that position is one of submission, obedience and constant attention to man, for God created woman to be man's helpmate on his journey to Jerusalem. Man might love woman provided he loves her less than he loves God. This idea of the position of woman is derived ultimately from the Church's interpretation of the scriptural account of the Creation.

The Parson clearly brings out this interpretation in his sermon. In regard to the meaning of the Creation, the Parson expounds upon the subjection of woman to man in terms of the relationship between husband and wife, for the most important relationship in which medieval woman was engaged was marriage. By extension, however, the Church believed that just as the wife was to be subject to her husband, the daughter was to be subject to her father and the sister subject to her brother.  

According to Church doctrine, as the Parson explains it, God did not want woman to have "maistrie," or He would have created her from the head of Adam: 

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15 Sister Mariella, "The Parson's Tale and the Marriage Group," MLN, LIII (1938), pp. 255-56 contends that since this formula on the Creation was not in Peraldus, Chaucer added it to make the Parson participate in the Marriage Group debate. For a particularly rich discussion of the history of this formula, which begins in misogyny and ends in sentimental defense of women, see Francis Lee Utley, "Abraham Lincoln's 'When Adam was Created,'" Indiana University Studies in Folklore (1957), pp. 187-212.
For he ne made hire nat of the baved of Adam, for she sholde nat clayme to greet lordships. For ther as the womman hath the maistrie, she maketh to muche desray. Ther neden none ensamples of this; the experience of day by day oghte suffise.

(X, 926-927)

Obviously the Wife of Bath is a perfect example that a woman with "maistrie...maketh to muche desray." Nor, the Parson adds, did God deem woman to be a thrall, or He would have created her from the foot of Adam:

Also, certes, God ne made nat womman of the foot of Adam, for she ne sholde nat been holden to lowe; for she kan nat paciently suffre.

(X, 928)

According to the implications of the Parson's remarks, Walter's treatment of patient Griselda, then, is no more sanctioned by God than is the Wife of Bath's treatment of her husbands. Instead, the Parson continues, God created woman from the rib of Adam so that she might be a helpmate to man:

But God made womman of the ryb of Adam, For Womman shoulde be felawe unto man.

(X, 928)

The medieval theologians all attributed great significance to this particular method of creation. Although their interpretations of it varied slightly, they were generally agreed that woman was created from man and for man; therefore, she was deemed by God to be subject to her husband and to obey and serve him. St. Ambrose, in his
De Paradiso, stressed the role of woman's companionship and maintained that this particular divine creation indicates woman's natural equality to man in order that there might be a single source of future generation. \(^{16}\) St. Augustine, commenting on this fact in his De Genesi ad Litteram, concluded that woman's help is restricted to the work of procreation, as another man's might serve in all capacities, save that of generation. \(^{17}\)

St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, maintained that woman was created to be subject to man but not to be his servant. St. Thomas explained the difference:

But subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his own benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection, which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit or good; and this kind of subjection existed before sin. For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally (i.e. by nature) subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates. \(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) Makarewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 61.

From an examination of the Creation, St. Thomas concluded that, although in a primary sense the image of God is found in both man and woman, in a secondary sense it is found in man and not in woman, "for man is the beginning and end of every woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature. So when the Apostle had said that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man (I Cor. xi, 7), he adds his reason for saying this; For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man." 19

According to medieval theology, then, although woman was not created to be a thrall, for she was created not from the foot of Adam but from the rib, she was created from man and for man; therefore, God meant her to be subject to her husband and to obey and serve him.

The Parson elaborates this idea in his sermon. According to the Parson, woman must be obedient to her husband:

Now how that a womman sholde be subget to hire husbonde, that telleth Seint Peter. First, in obedience. (X, 930)

Woman has no authority except that granted to her by her husband:

And eek, as seith the decree, a womman that is wyf, as longe as she is a wyf, she hath noon auctoritee to swere ne to bere witnesse withoute leve of hir husbonde, that is hire lord; algate, he sholde be so by resoun. (X, 931)

19Ibid., I, 1, q. 93, a. 2.
Furthermore, woman must serve and please her husband in all matters save elaborate dress:

She sholde eek serven hym in all honestee, and been attemptee of hire array. I woot wel that they sholde setten hire entente to plesen hir housbondes, but nat by hire queyn-tise of array.

(X, 932)

For to the mind of the medieval theologian, a woman who dresses herself in precious array notifies the world of her lecherousness and commits the deadly sin of pride (X, 430-431). As the Parson indicates, the theologians were quite explicit about the matter:

Seint Jerome seith that "wyves that been apparailled in silk and in precious purpre ne mowe nat clothen hem in Jhesu Crist." Loke what seith Seint John eek in thys materere? Seint Gregorie eek seith that "no wight seketh precious array but oonly for veyne glorie, to been honoured the moore biforn the peple."/ It is a gret rolye, a womman to have a fair array outward and in hirself be foul inward./

(X, 933-935)

Then too, woman must hold her tongue. Chiding, according to the Church, is one of the most heinous offences of womanhood and a form of wifely disobedience:

And therefore seith Salomon, "An hous that is uncovered and droppyne, and a chidyng wif, been lyke."/ A man that is in a droppyne hous in manye places, though he eshews the droppyne in o place, it droppeth on hym in another place. So fareth it by a chidyng wif; but she chide hym in o place, she wol chide hym in another./ And therefore, "bette is a morsel of breed with joye than an hous ful of delices with chidyng," seith Salomon./ Seint Paul seith: "O ye wommen, be ye subgetes to youre housbondes as bhoveth in God, and ye men loveth youre wyves."

(X, 631-634)
Not only did the medieval Church counsel woman to obey and serve her husband by dressing moderately and speaking discreetly, but it insisted that she be prudent in all other matters:

A wyf sholde eek be measurable in lookynge and in berynge and in lawghynge, and discreet in alle hire wordes and hire dedes.

(X, 936)

The interpretation of the Creation, then, was the basis for the medieval Church's attitude toward women. To the mind of the medieval theologian, God ordained woman to be subject to man and to be his helpmate on their journey to Jerusalem. Woman is to obey, serve and attend man. She is to love her husband more than all worldly things but not more than God:

And aboven alle worldly thyng she sholde loven hire housbonde with al hire herte....

(X, 937)

Man in return is to love his wife patiently and reverently (X, 925), in faith and truth:

Man sholde bare hym to his wife in faith, in trouth, and inlove, as seith Seint Paul, that a man sholde loven his wife as Crist loved hooly Chirche, that loved it so well that he deyde for it. So sholde a man for his wyf, if it were nede.

(X, 929)

But man is not to love his wife more than he loves God:

Certes, be it wyf, be it child, or any worldly thyng that he loveth biforn God, it is his mawmet, and he is an ydolastre.

(X, 860)
As long as man and woman regard each other in accordance with this divine order, they are on their way to Jerusalem.

Closely allied with this doctrine of an ideal order, ordained by God, in which woman is submissive, obedient and constantly attentive to man was another doctrine which the medieval theologians utilized to justify this order.

According to this doctrine, man is divided into three parts: reason, senses and body. God ordained that reason should be subject to Him, for through man's reason He makes known His will. In the same manner, the senses, "sensual-ity," the desire for worldly satisfactions, should be subject to reason, and the body, the partaker of temporal satisfaction, should be subject to the senses:

For it is sooth that God, and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of thise foure thynges sholde have lordship over that oother;/ as thus; God sholde have lordship over resoun, and resoun over sensualitiee, and sensualitee over the body of man.

(X, 261-262)

Sin results when this order is turned upside down. For when the body is tempted and rules the senses by causing them to desire the object of temptation, and the senses in turn cause the reason to give into the temptation, man turns from the will of God:

For sensualitie rebelleth thanne agayns resoun, and by that way leseth resoun the lordshiphe over sensualitiee and over the body./
For right as resoun is rebel to God, right so is bothe sensualitiee rebel to resoun and the body also.

(X, 265)
Relating this doctrine to that of the proper order of
woman's subjection to man, the Parson speaks of the Fall of
man and equates the body and senses to Eve and the reason
to Adam. The implications of this story were well known in
the Middle Ages and were explained at length in St. August-
tine's De Trinitate (Lib. XII, Cap. 12), in Peter Lombard's
Sententiae (Lib. II, Dist. XXIV, Cap 6 ff.) and in many
subsequent works. According to this interpretation of
the Fall, deadly sin implies the fiend, the flesh and a
corruption of reason:

There may ye seen that deedly synne hath, first,
suggestion of the feend, as sheweth here by
the naddre; and afterward, the delit
of the flessh, as sheweth heere by Eve;
and after that, the consentynge of reasoun,
as sheweth heere by Adam.

(X, 331)

Just as the serpent tempted the flesh, Eve, and the
senses delighted in the temptation, so the flesh and the
senses tempted the reason, Adam. When the reason consented
to the temptation, original sin resulted:

For trust wel, though so were that the feend
tempted Eve, that is to seyn, the flessh,
and the flessh hadde delit in the beautee
of the fruyt defended, yet certes, til that
resoun, that is to seyn, Adam, consented to

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20 See O. Lottin, "La doctrine morale des movements de
l'appetit sensitif aux XIIe et. XIIIe siecles," Archives
d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age, VI (1931),
49-173; see especially pp. 51-53. I am indebted to D. W.
Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, XIX (1952), p. 10,
for these references.
the etynge of the fruyte, yet stood he in th'estaat of innocence./ Of thilke Adam tooke we thilke synne original; for of hym flesshly descended be we alle, and engendred of vile and corrupt materere.  

(X, 332-333)

By extension of this interpretation of the Fall, the medieval theologians believed that just as God ordained reason to govern the senses and the body, so He ordained man to govern woman. When man and woman turn this order upside down, as Eve did when she tempted Adam to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and Adam did when he consented, they are on their way to Babylon.

As we have seen in the case of Eve, to the mind of the medieval theologian "woman" and "flesh" are synonymous and a possible deterrent to man's salvation. If man chooses to love woman, the flesh, for its own sake, he then becomes a thrall to the flesh and to sin:

And the same Seneca also seith: "I am born to gretuer thynges than to be a thral to my body, or than to maken of my body a thral." Ne a fouler thral may no man ne womman maken of his body than for to yeven his body to synne./ Al were it the fouleste cherl or the fouleste womman that lyveth, and leest of value, yet is he thanne moore foul and moore in servitude.  

(X, 145-147)

For this reason, the Church had an elaborate doctrine dealing with matters of the flesh, the sexual act.

According to the Parson and the Church, the act itself is to be avoided. Chastity is considered the highest life
possible and a virgin is said to be the wife of Christ:

The thridde manere of chastitee is virginitee, and it bihoveth that she be hooly in herte and clene of body. Thanne is she spouse of Jhesu Crist, and she is the lyf of angeles.\/
She is the preisynge of this world, and she is as thise martirs in egalitee; she hath in hire that tonge may nat telle ne herte thynke.\/ Virginitee baar oure lord Jhesu Crist, and virgine was hymselfe.

(X, 948-950)

Any man who deprives a maiden of her virginity casts that maiden out of this high degree:

Another synne of Leccherie is to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede; for he that so dooth, certes, he casteth a mayden out of the hyeste degree that is in this present lif,/ and bireveth hire thilke precious fruyt, that the book clepeth the hundred fruyt. 21

(X, 868-869)

Indeed, although such a maiden may have God's mercy if she does penitence, she will always be corrupt:

For certes, namoore may maydenhede be restored than an arm that is smyten fro the body may retorn agayn to weexe./ She may have mercy, this woot I wel, if she do penitence; but nevere shal it be that she has corrupt.

(X, 871-872)

Moreover, said the Church, chastity and continence are the remedies against lechery, and those who resist the temp- tation of the flesh deserve very great merit:

21 Fred N. Robinson, in his notes to his edition of Chaucer's Works, op. cit., p. 771, writes that the states of virginity, widowhood and matrimony were likened, respec- tively, to the bringing forth of fruit a hundredfold, sixty- fold and thirtyfold. See Matt., xiii, 8.
Now comth the remedie agayns Leccherie, and that is generally chastitee and continence, that restreyneth all the desordeyne moevynges that comen of fleschly talentes./ And euer the greater merite shal he han, that moost restreyneth the wikked eschawfyngs of the ardour of this synne. (X, 915-916)

Indeed, the sexual act even in the ordered estate of marriage is deemed at best a venial sin: 22

And it (marriage) chaungeth deedly synne into venial synne bitwixe hem that been ywedded. ...

(X, 920)

Moreover, the Church believed a widow to be in a state of reclaimed chastity, and it generally discouraged second and subsequent marriages: 23

The seconde manere of chastitee is for to been a clene wydewe, and eschue the em-bracynges of man, and desire the embracynge of Jhesu Crist./ Thise been tho that han

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22 The Parson defines venial and deadly sin as follows:

And therfore, the love of every thyng that is nat biset in God, ne doon principally for Goddes sake, al-though that a man love it lasse than God, yet is it venial synne;/ and deedly synne whan the love of any thyng weyeth in the herte of man as muchel as the love of God, or moore.

(X, 365-366)

Venial sin, then, is an aspect of charity and deadly sin an aspect of cupidite.

23 The theologians of the Middle Ages, however, do differ in their teachings concerning second and subsequent mar-riages. For a full treatment of the subject see Makarewixa, op. cit., pp. 46-51.
been wyves and han forgoon hire housbondes, an eek wommen that han doon leccherie and been releved by penitence.  

(X, 944-945)

And certainly, a wife, who, like St. Cecilia, obtains the permission of her husband to remain chaste and thereby keeps him from sinning, is thought to do a very great deed:

And certes, if that a wyf koude keppe hire al chaast by licence of hir housbonde, so that she yeve nevere noon occassion that he agilte, it were to hire a greet merite.  

(X, 945)

Thus, the Church believed that woman, the flesh, is to be avoided. Chastity is the highest life possible on this pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the Church did believe that marriage, when ordered, is itself a form of chastity (X, 916), for it is a sacrament:

Now shaltow understonde that matrimoyne is leefful assemblynge of man and of womman that receyven by vertu of the sacrement the boond thurgh which they may nat be departed in all hir lyf, that is to seyn, whil that they lyven bothe./ This, as seith the book, is a ful greet sacrament.  

(X, 917-918)

According to the Church, God established marriage in Paradise, and Christ himself was born in wedlock. Furthermore, Christ hallowed marriage when He attended the wedding at

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\[24\] Even a cursory reading of the writings of the Church fathers such as St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose and St. Thomas Aquinas reveals that they interpret virginity as a very precious act of homage to God.
Cana:

God made it (marriage) as I have said,
in paradys, and wolde hymself be born
in mariage./ And for to halwen marriage he
was at a weddyng, where he turned water
into wyn; which was the firste miracle
that he wroghte in erthe biforn his disciples.
(X, 918-919)

Although the Church fathers thought of marriage as a
sacrament symbolizing the sacred union between Church and
Christ, some theologians such as Abelard did in his Epitome
Theologiae, denied that marriage, like other sacraments, is
a source of grace. They saw marriage merely as a safeguard
against sin, an indulgence granted to those who cannot live
the higher life of continence. 25

As might be suspected, since the Church viewed the
sexual act in marriage with distrust, the medieval theologians
thought that the act is ordered only when husband and wife
indulge in it for one of three reasons: first, to conceive
children, which is the real purpose of matrimony; second,
to yield to each other the debt of their bodies, for neither
of them has power over his own body; third, to avoid lechery,
which is a deadly sin:

Thanne shall men understande that for thre
thynges a man and his wyf fleshly mowen
assemble. The firste is in entente of
engendrure of children to the service of

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25 Cf. Hugh of St. Victor, Sacramentis; Makarewicz,
op. cit., p. 66.
God; for certes that is the cause final
of matrimonyne./ Another cause is to yelden
everich of hem to oother the dette of hire
bodies; for neither of hem hath power of his
owene body. The thridde is for to eschewe
lecchereye and vileynyne. The ferthe is
for sothe deedly synne.
(X, 939-940)

But even when the act is ordered and indulged in for one of
these reasons, it is still considered a venial sin:

...scarsly may ther any of thise be withoute
venial synne, for the corrupcion and for
the delit.
(X, 942)

Moreover, if a husband and wife have no spiritual regard for
their marriage but only use it as an excuse for lawful sexual
indulgence, then they are guilty of a form of adultery and
are considered to be in the devil's service:

The thridde spece of avowtrie is somtyme
bitwixe a man and his wyf, and that is
when they take no reward in hire assemblynge
but only to hire flesshly delit, as seith
Seint Jerome./ and ne rekken of nothyng but
that they been assembled; by cause that they
been married, al is good ynoough, as thynketh
them./ But in swich folk hath the devel
power, as seyde the aungel Raphael to
Thobie, for in hire assemblynge they putten
Jhesu Crist out of hire herte, and yeven
hemsely to all ordure.
(X, 904-906)

Since the Church's attitude toward polygamy, fornication
and adultery was little different than ours today, it
seems unnecessary to go into it in great detail. It is
interesting to note, however, the reasons which the Church
gave for condemning polygamy and illicit sexual acts, for
the reasons were based on the doctrine of charity and cupid-
ity and thus serve to show how deeply the idea of heavenly
Jerusalem was imbedded in the medieval mind.

In regard to polygamy, the Parson believes that God, who established marriage when he created Adam and Eve, ordained

...that o man sholde have but o womman,
and o womman but o man, as seith Seint
Augustyn, by manye resouns. /

(X, 921)

The first reason the Parson gives, as might be suspected, is that marriage is symbolic of the union between Christ and the Church (X, 922), implying that since Christ only had one Church, man should have only one wife and woman only one husband. The second reason the Parson gives, however, was based on that aspect of the ideal order of heavenly Jerusalem which taught the subordination of woman to man:

And that oother is for a man is heved of
a womman; algate, by ordnaunce it sholde be
so. / For if a womman hadde mo men than oon,
thanne sholde she have moo hevedes than oon,
and that were an horrible thyng biforn God;
and eek a womman ne myghte nat plese to many
folk at cones. And also ther ne sholde nevere
be pees ne reste amonges hem; for everich
wolde axen his owene thyng.

(X, 922-923)

Thus, to the Parson, polygamy is a form of cupidity because it does not conform to the ideal order ordained by God.

Fornication, too, is considered a form of cupidity and a deadly sin because man and woman indulge in it not for
love of God but for temporal delight. To the medieval theologian, fornication has five aspects, that, like five fingers of the devil, grip man and fling him into hell: "fool lookyng," "vileyns touchyng," "foule wordes," "kiss-ynge" and "the stynking dede" (X, 852-862).

The medieval theologian, then, considered the desire to sin as great as the sin itself:

Lo, what seith Seint Mathew in the gospel, that "whoso seeth a womman to coveitise of his lust, he hath doon lecherie with hire in his herte." Heere may ye seen that nat only the dede of this synne is forbiden, but eek the desir to doon that synne.

(X, 845-846)

Adultery too is considered a form of cupidity and a deadly sin, for when a woman steals her body from her husband and gives it to another, she steals her soul from Christ and gives it to the devil:

Certes, this is the foulest thefte that may be, when a womman steleth hir body from hir husbonde and yeveth it to hire harlour to defoulen hire; and steleth hir soule fro Crist, and yeveth it to the devel.

(X, 878)

It is interesting to note that the Parson lists four species of adultery: first, the adultery which occurs when a man or wife gives his or her body to another (X, 873-903); second, that which results when those entered into religious orders break their vows of chastity (X, 891-904); third, the adultery which occurs when a husband and wife recognize
their fleshly bond but not their spiritual one (X, 904-905); and fourth, that which results when human beings indulge in sexual relations with their relatives or godsires (X, 906-909). The Parson adds that there is a fifth form of adultery, but he deems it so horrible that he refuses to speak of it (X, 909-912).

For the Parson and other medieval theologians, then, the position of medieval woman was governed exclusively by her purpose in the mind of the Creator as the Bible had expressed it. The Pauline injunction, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord,"\(^26\) was taken quite literally. Thus, the Church counselled woman on how to dress, speak and act in order to perform her role properly. Moreover, this injunction was strengthened by the Apostle's stated conviction, "And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."\(^27\) So, the temptation and the Fall of Man came to symbolize what could happen when the ideal order was turned upside down. One Eve's shoulders was laid the burden of responsibility for the moral shortcomings of the race. Because she symbolized the "flesh,"


\(^{27}\)St. Paul, I Timothy, i, 14.
she and all her sisters threatened to stand between man and salvation. The Church, therefore, adapted an elaborate doctrine to regulate and order man's fleshly involvement with her.

This was essentially the orthodox attitude of the Church toward woman. It would probably have been a disquieting thought to St. Paul had he realized that his doctrine served as a connecting link between the pagan Aristotle and the Christian Boccaccio. 28 For St. Paul said for the Churchman what Aristotle had said for the ancient Athenian; woman is an imperfect animal, and what Boccaccio echoed again for the dawning Renaissance; "La femmina e animale imperfetto, passionate da mille passioni spiacevoli, e abbonimevole." 29 All three attitudes toward women were essentially identical; all continued the occidental tradition which asserted the superiority of the male sex.

While the Parson defines quite adequately the Church's basic attitude toward women, we shall have to look outside the Parson's tale to see the peculiar translation other Churchmen gave to St. Paul's dicta in order to understand their full implications.

Despite the Church's doctrine of subjection, the Church was consistently the champion of marriage and advocated the sanctity of family ties. In its effort to impose a rule of

28 Dow, op. cit., p. 49.
29 Ibid.
celibacy on the clergy, however, it gave rise to religious
misogynic satire on women and marriage originally intended
to disuade the clergy from entering into the great sacrament.
Thus, the Pauline injunctions were translated by later Church-
men into the pious conviction that the counselled obedience
was correctly based on the innate incapacity, the moral in-
feriority of the sex to which it was addressed. 30

The most important of these translators was St. Jerome.
His Contra Jovinianum certainly belonged to that class of
satire directed to the clergy, for it was written to refute
a heretic, Jovinian, who held that the states of virginity
and marriage were equal in the eyes of God. 31 To do this,
St. Jerome collected proofs, arguments and discussions from
every available source in the Christian and Pagan world.
One of the most useful things that he found was a selection
from a lost treatise on marriage by Theophrastus, entitled
De Nuptiis. By incorporating excerpts from this diatribe into
his Contra Jovinianum, St. Jerome gave St. Paul's submission
motif a new and fiercer aspect, for he created the definite
dogma that woman is not only an inferior but an evil being,
cursed with all the faults of nature, perverse, ill-tempered,
vain, obstinate and faithless. As St. Jerome conceived it,
marrried life is truely a purgatory to be eschewed. 32 Echoes

30 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
31 Makarewicz, op. cit., p. 12.
32 For the essence of St. Jerome's thesis, see the
Wife of Bath's "Prologue" (III, 235-378).
of that section of the work of Theophrastus preserved by
St. Jerome's treatise can be found in both the religious
and the secular literature of the Middle Ages, for this
translation of St. Paul's dicta had great influence on other
writers. Innocent the Third quoted St. Jerome in his De
Contemptu Mundi. Abelard in a letter to a friend quoted
Heloise's objections to marriage which sound very much like
those found in the treatise of St. Jerome. Among others
who showed familiarity with this work are John of Salisbury,
Boccaccio, Walter Mapes, Dechamps and, of course, Chaucer.33

The spread of St. Jerome's translation of the Pauline
dicta also arose out of the Church's campaign for celibacy
on the part of its clergy. In 1205 the Synod of Lateran
issued its decree forbidding the marriage of its clerics.
Immediately the clericis vagi, or Goliardi, wandering students
going from university to university, caught up the subject
of clerical celibacy for jest and set it into the frame of
their rollicking songs. Neither clerics nor laymen, but
something between the two, they turned their "deft and
delicate manipulations of Latin" to the ridicule of both
the churchman's sanctimonious conceptions of his calling

33 Arthur K. Moore, in his Studies in a Mediaeval Preju-
dice: Antifeminism (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press,
1945), p. 5, observes that in the later treatises the
strictures against women and marriage simply repeat the mat-
ter found in Juvenal and St. Jerome.
and its implied abnegations and the layman's prosaic acceptance of marriage and its irksome responsibilities.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, despite the great theologians such as St. Bonaventura and St. Thomas Aquinas who rose up in the thirteenth century to instruct and exalt the faithful on the Christian view of marriage, its unity and indissolubility, the mockery of women and marriage by St. Jerome and his followers remained firmly intrenched in the ecclesiastical mind.

The medieval preachers carried the mockery into their sermons. Ultimately the Pauline dictum that instructed wives to obey their husbands was turned into such a typical rant as the following one from the thirteenth century author of \textit{Speculum Laicorum}:\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{quote}
Woman, as saith Secundus the Philosopher, is the confusion of Man, an insatiable beast, a continuous anxiety, an incessant warfare, a daily ruin, a house of tempest, a hindrance to devotion.
\end{quote}

In the same manner, the Pauline dictum that had placed the transgression on Eve was translated by Jacque de Vitry (d. 1240) as follows:\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{quote}
Between Adam and God in Paradise there was but one woman; yet she had no rest until she had succeeded in banishing her husband from the garden of delights and in condemning Christ to the torment of the cross.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34}Dow, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{35}Cited by Owst, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 378-379.

\textsuperscript{36}Cited by Power, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 402.
In effect, then, there was certainly a discrepancy between Church doctrine and the operation of that doctrine in real life, but that discrepancy was not in matter but in emphasis. Starting with the assumption of the inferiority of women, the individual ecclesiastics went in all directions damning woman not only as an inferior but as an evil being, teaching the sanctity of marriage, on the one hand, and warning prospective husbands not to marry on the other. Let us turn briefly to an examination of these discrepancies between Church doctrine and the operation of that doctrine in real life.

If theoretically woman is deemed to be subject to man, realistically the Church damned her because she refuses to submit. John Bromyard, in his chapter on matrimony in Summa Predicantium, observed that there is common among the fair sex a certain unnatural condition of contrariety, or wilfulness, which is one of the risks which every intending husband must be prepared to face.\(^{37}\) Moreover, if St. Thomas distinguished between slavery and subjection and listed woman's position as one of subjection, the Church ignored the distinction. A theological dictionary of the fourteenth century expressed the ordinary view of the ecclesiastics regarding woman's subjection.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\) Cited by Owest, op. cit., p. 389.

\(^{38}\) Cited by Coulton, op. cit., p. 214.
Moreover, a man may chastise his wife and beat her by way of correction, for she forms part of his household, so that he, the master, may chastise that which is his, as it is written in the Gloss (to Canon Law).

There was a discrepancy, then, between the doctrine of submission as taught by the theologians and that put in practice by the medieval preachers.

The theologians recognized marriage as a sacrament, but the clergymen pictured it as a life-long curbing of desire, interrupted at intervals by a solemn dedication to the burdensome task of replenishing the race and filled with discomforts, anxieties, worries and perils. Husbands, said John Bromyard in his "Matrimonium," may lose wealth, strength or comeliness and become displeasing to their spouse. The wives, by their fecundity or sterility, their beauty or ugliness, may render the marriage irksome and dangerous. If the wives are fair, then they are vain and extravagant in adornment, clamorous and wearisome unless they have the money for the adornment they desire. In general, said this preacher, "daily experience suffices to show that those who wed for beauty, for sensual pleasure or for riches swiftly lose peace of heart and rest of body, and are changed into the states of the greatest hatreds, discords, blows and adulteries." 39

If theoretically the Church's marriage laws were strict,

39 Cited by Ovst, op. cit., p. 379.
the laws were often overlooked by their maker, provided their maker received a small fee. Moreover, the Church was often responsible for the abuses of the law, even when no money was involved.

One such abuse was the child marriage, which was the rule rather than the exception. The Church did refuse to recognize the bond of marriage if contracted before both parties had turned seven, and it did forbid the making of such contract until the age of twelve for the girl and fifteen for the boy, but more often than not it did not impugn the validity of an illegally contracted child marriage. A stock case was quoted at length in the contemporary "Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln" and fully corroborated by official documents. A wretched child who had just turned four was taken to wife by a great noble who believed her to be an heiress. He died two years later, and she was at once snapped up by a second noble. After his death, when she was apparently still only eleven, she was bought for 300 marks by a third bridegroom. The Bishop, who did excommunicate the first husband and rebuke the priest who had openly married him, still made no attempt to declare the third marriage null. The third husband was still enjoying her estate twenty years after his wedding day.  

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40 Cited by Coulton, op. cit., p. 206.
In addition to the scandalous child marriages, the Church's determination to keep the marriage law in its own hands coupled with its readiness to sell dispensations from its own regulations resulted in an incredible state of things. Church law stated that a marriage was nullified by cousin-ship to the fourth degree and even by the fact of the contracting parties ever having stood as sponsors to the same child. This law not only theoretically nullified half of the peasants' marriages, for nearly everyone was related in a small village, but it gave rise to all sorts of tricks for obtaining a divorce. After a few years of marriage, a husband who had grown tired of his wife could suddenly discover that they were related and thus obtain a divorce. In the first quarter of the fourteenth century, a Pope granted the King and Queen of France a separation because they had once been godparents to the same child. Yet at the same time the Church sold a dispensation to a rich citizen who had twice contracted the same godparent relationship with a lady whom he now wished to marry. On the basis of this law, then, the Church courts were ready to divorce or marry parties for money.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., pp. 205-206.
The Church, then, in spite of deeming marriage a sacrament, used the pulpit to warn men of its horrible pitifuls. Furthermore, the Church stood by and did nothing while women were beaten like slaves, small girls sold like chattels and wives divorced at their husbands' wills.

While the Church fathers counselled women to dress moderately, the medieval preachers furiously called down these painted lovers of finery. "Everyone knows," said the monk Robert Rypon, "how a sow rolls its nostrils in the foulest dirt. Thus do women roll their beauty in the foulest dirt of lust....With them it is as with the worms that glow resplendent at night, but in the daytime appear most vile."\(^{42}\) Nor could John Broomeyard resist commenting on the subject.\(^{43}\)

In the woman wantonly adorned to capture souls, the garland upon her head is as a single coal or firebrand of Hell to kindle men with that fire; so too the horns of another, so the bare neck, so the brooch upon the breast, so with all the curious finery of the whole of their body. What else does it seem or could be said of it save that each is a spark breathing out hell-fire, which this wretched incendiary of the Devil breathes so effectually... that, in a single day, by her dancing or her perambulation through the town, she inflames with the fire of lust--it may be--twenty of those who behold her, damming the souls whom God has created and redeemed at such as cost for their salvation....They (women) are the Devil's nets, with which he fishes in God's fish pond, seeking to transfer His fish to the lake of Hell....

\(^{42}\)Cited by Owst, op. cit., p. 392.

\(^{43}\)Cited by Owst, ibid., p. 395.
Theoretically, the Church counselled women to speak discreetly, and realistically it indicted her for her gar- rulity and love of gossip. The bitter wife who always quarrels with her spouse was a favorite subject for pulpit complaint. It is generally the "woymen" who, according to the preachers, are wont to "rowne togedyr" in church during sermon time, while "the fiende sate on her schuldyrs, wrytyn on a long roll als fast as he myght." And it is of such that Broomyard spoke, when he referred to the quarrelsome habits of the scold, "who wrangles with her neighbour and recites all his faults...."

Yet, the preachers' rantings and ravings on the fair sex and the Church's abuses of the marriage laws, odious as they were, did not tell the entire story of the Church's attitude toward women. Coincident with the rising tide of ecclesiastical satire against women was a growing emphasis upon the cult of the Virgin which bore a close relationship to the Lives of Saints. With no apparent sense of incongruity, the Church, which taught the subjection of women, developed a counter-doctrine of the superiority of women, that adoration which gathered around that person

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44Ibid., p. 389.
45Cited by Owst, ibid., p. 387.
46Cited by Owst, ibid.
47Dow, op. cit., p. 51.
of the Virgin in heaven and, to some extent, the lady on earth. The essence of this counter-doctrine was expressed in a manuscript in the university of Cambridge: 48

Woman is to be preferred to man, to wit; in material, because Adam was made from clay and Eve from the side of Adam; in place, because Adam was made outside Paradise and Eve within; in conception because a woman conceived God, which a man could not do; in apparition, because Christ appeared to a woman after the Resurrection, to wit, the Magdalen; in exaltation, because a woman is exalted above the choirs of angels, to wit, the Blessed Mary.

It was this idea of woman which handed down to the modern world the idea of chivalry. For the cult of the Virgin and the cult of chivalry grew together and continually reacted on one another. 49 "They were both," writes Miss Power, "perhaps, the expression of the same deep-rooted instinct, that craving for romance which rises to the surface again and again in the history of mankind; and just as in the nineteenth century the romantic movement followed upon the age of common sense, so in the Middle Ages the turmoil and pessimism of the Dark Ages were followed by age of chivalry and of the Virgin." 50

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
The cult of the Virgin was definitely a characteristic flower of medieval religion, and it spread with rapidity and assumed wide dimensions. The Virgin was supreme by the eleventh century, and she remained so until the end of the Middle Ages. Magnificent shrines and cathedrals were built in her honor; her miracles were on every lip.

The cult of the lady was the counterpart of the cult of the Virgin, and it was for the most part the invention of the Aristocracy. We shall have a great deal more to say about this cult in the next chapter, so we need to do little more here than once again emphasize that the cult of the Virgin and the cult of the lady rose together to sing the adoration of women.

Now perhaps we are ready to attempt to define the Church's attitude toward women, at least in general terms. To the mind of the medieval ecclesiastic, woman is an inferior being and a possible obstacle to man's salvation. Thus, the Church created an elaborate doctrine which taught woman to submit herself to man to obey and serve him. Man, said the Church, can love woman provided he loves her less than he loves God, and provided he embraces her physically, and even then prudently, within the bonds of matrimony. Yet, despite this doctrine, which all ecclesiastics accepted, the medieval preachers, influenced by St. Jerome and his followers, damned the fair sex and marriage on every possible account. So, on the one hand, the ecclesiastics viewed woman with misogynic scorn. Yet, on the
other hand, they sang the praises of the Virgin and woman-kind. There is little doubt but what these two conflicting attitudes toward women grew up simultaneously, reacting on and against one another, adding impetus to one another. Within the Church ranks itself, however, misogynic scorn of women certainly was the more popular view of women, or at least the view that found the most expression.

Complex as it is, this was essentially the medieval Church's attitude toward women. In the course of this study we shall have occasion to see the influence of this attitude upon two other classes of medieval society, the Aristocracy and the Bourgeoisie.
CHAPTER II

THE ARISTOCRACY

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, frendom and curteisie.

................
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.

................
He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.

(I, 43-73)

Second only to the Church in power and influence, the Aristocracy too played an extremely important role in helping to determine medieval attitudes toward women. Yet, we cannot agree with Miss Eileen Power, who asserts that the medieval theory about women was the creation of two forces, the Church and the Aristocracy. ¹ For the theory was the creation of many forces; to single out the Church and the Aristocracy as the determining influences is to make too much of too few particulars. ²


²For a comprehensive and illuminating discussion of these many factors see Francis Lee Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1944), pp. 3-32.
Professor Utley, on the other hand, recognizes the complexity of the problem and makes what seems to date the clearest statement of the Aristocracy's influence on medieval attitudes toward women:

I have long been anticipating our final factor, courtly love, lest it now appear too much a paradox to say that this is one of the most powerful reasons for the flourishing of medieval satire on women. I do not mean that satire is a bourgeois or "monkish" reaction to courtly love. An individual poem may parody the system...; a didactic treatise may be so far removed from the world as to turn its face from earthly love entirely.... But in its highest form satire is itself as codified as courtly love and merges with it. It is a clear recognition of the torments of the flesh, and must be reckoned with when love is formalized. True Tristan or true Troilus are those rare lovers who sustain the tragic malady; but many an accepted lover writes his renunciation and many a forsaken lover his rebellion....Scattered and unassimilated satire on women is eternal, but formalized satire is coeval with formalized love, for both seek to put order into the irrational. 3

If we accept Professor Utley's thesis, then, because the Aristocracy's view of women was at complete loggerheads with that of the Church, courtly love not only added impetus to non-Aristocratic satire on women, as we shall have occasion to witness in the next chapter, but it gave rise to satire within its own code. For the courtly lover had to "acknowledge the canker in the Rose."

3Ibid., pp. 30-31.
Moreover, as Professor Utley points out, the code itself contains a paradox because of its elevation of women to the level of goddesses.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 31-32.} For woman as a goddess is a worthy to be worshipped, but as a goddess she is also often merciless or unattainable. This courtly paradox becomes clear when we examine Chretien de Troyes' \textit{Lancelot}. After Lancelot, in his search for Guinevere, has humiliated himself by riding in a cart reserved for criminals and by suffering the agony of the journey across the sword-bridge, Guinevere rewards him by refusing a kind word, since he had paused for a moment before entering the cart.\footnote{Ibid., p. 32.} Guinevere in this case is certainly a prototype of Chartier's \textit{La Belle Dame sans Mercy} that two centuries later aroused a storm of protest on the grounds that it reviled womankind.\footnote{Ibid.}

But if the Aristocracy's code of love was one of the most important reasons for the flourishing of medieval satire on women, that satire was one of the most powerful reasons for the flourishing of courtly love. As C. S.
Lewis points out, the factor which prevented men of that age from connecting their ideal of romantic and passionate love with marriage was the medieval theory of matrimony—the "sexology" of the Church. As we have seen, the medieval theologians taught that all passionate love was more or less wicked, and ecclesiastical misogynists used this concept as a basis for satirizing woman, the evil temptress who stood between man and salvation. This factor combining with another factor, the actual marriage practices of feudal society in which all matches were matches of interest and often between irresponsible children, produced in the poets a certain willfulness, a readiness to blazon the antagonism between their amatory and religious ideals:

Thus if the Church tells them that the ardent lover even of his own wife is in mortal sin, they presently reply with the rule that true love is impossible in marriage. If the Church says that the sexual act can be "excused" only by the desire for offspring, then it becomes the mark of a true lover, like Chauntecleer, that he served Venus

More for delyt than world to multiply. (VII, 3345)

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8Ibid., pp. 17-18.
Satire, then, helped to produce courtly love, or at least its fleshly aspect, and courtly love in turn helped to produce satire. With this as a background, let us turn briefly to a consideration of the rise and nature of courtly love, the codification of the Aristocracy's attitude toward women.

At the end of the eleventh century, an essentially novel theory of love suddenly appeared in Languedoc in southern France. There the ideas of courtly love found expression in the lyric poetry of the troubadours. The origins of this poetry have been the subject of endless controversy, and it is beyond the scope here to deal with them in any detail. The scholars seem to have established, however, that long before the appearance of the troubadours there were wandering minstrels who used the same verse forms as their successors. But where the troubadours got their ideas we can do little more than guess. Of the three important schools of thought on the question, one holds that the troubadours' ideas about love grew spontaneously out of the feudal environment; a second contends that the origin of these ideas are to be found in the Arabic lyric poetry of Moslem Spain; and a third attempts to trace the whole thing to Ovid. 9

At any rate, professional entertainers in southern France began to write poems glorifying ladies and describing the benefits to be derived from adoring them. The idea appealed to the feudal prince of the region, William IX, duke of Aquitaine, first of the troubadours, and soon the lyrics became fashionable.  

The ideas contained in them spread to Northern France by way of Eleanor, duchess of Aquitaine and granddaughter of William IX. Eleanor's first husband was King Louis VII of France. After he had their marriage annulled, Eleanor married Henry, duke of Normandy and count of Anjou, who was soon to become Henry II of England. Eleanor patronized all sorts of men of letters but particularly troubadours, one of the greatest of whom was Bernard de Ventadour, who served her for many years. Thus, through Eleanor the ideas of courtly love spread throughout France and to England.

But more important in the development of courtly love was Eleanor's daughter by Louis VII, Marie, who married the most powerful and richest feudal prince of

\footnote{\textit{For a comprehensive history of the rise of courtly love see Painter, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 110-124.}}
France, Henry the Liberal, count of Champagne. With plenty of money at her disposal, she made her court the center for composers of works of courtly love. At her court, the ideas of the troubadours were codified. Marie's favorite writer, Chretien de Troyes, translated Ovid's *Art of Love* and wrote romances of courtly love. Another attaché, Andreas Capellanas, wrote a treatise on love to guide his contemporaries.

If we cannot yet explain the origins of the ideas codified at Marie's court, we can at least explain the nature of them. Essentially there are four marks of courtly love: humility, courtesy, adultery and the religion of love.\textsuperscript{11}

To account for humility and courtesy, we need only glance at the feudal system. Before the coming of courtly love, the relation of humble vassal and his feudal superiors, the lord and lady of the castle, was warm and intense. With the advent of romantic passion it was entirely natural that the vassal lover remain humble before his feudal superior, the beloved lady. Courtesy resulted from the same conditions. The lady,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-22.
\end{flushright}
already an arbitress of manners by means of her social and feudal position, simply retains her position after she is loved.

The association of love with adultery has been accounted for already in connection with the influences on courtly love. As we have pointed out, two factors prevented men of that age from connecting their ideal of romantic and passionate love with marriage: the "sexology" of the Church and the business nature of feudal marriages. One of the major tenets of courtly love, then, is that since love cannot be found in marriage, it must be found outside of it.¹²

The fourth mark of courtly love is its love religion of the god Amor. This is partly an inheritance from Ovid, partly a transference of the vassal's emotional relation to his feudal superior and partly a parody or rival of the real Christian religion.¹³

¹² Andrea Capellanus, in the seventh dialogue of his Art of Courtly Love, trans. John J. Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), writes: "But I am greatly surprised that you wish to misapply the term "love" to that marital affection which husband and wife are expected to feel for each other after marriage, since everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife."

In place of the Christian God is the god Amor, and the lover worships his lady somewhat as he might the Blessed Virgin or God. The whole system is marked by religious images; the moment of passionate abandonment becomes the lover's "heaven;" the ten commandments become the code of the system; and the lover prays, sins, repents, and is admitted to bliss.

From this brief account of the origins and nature of courtly love it is obvious that the Aristocracy's attitude toward women, was exactly, at least in theory, the opposite of that of the Church. According to the Aristocracy's view, no longer is woman's position one of subjection, obedience and service to man; no longer is she a temptress, an evil malign being wandering about the earth largely for the purpose of bringing man to ruin. Instead, woman is an angel-like creature from whom a worshipping lover drives all that is good.

Of the two Aristocratic members of the Canterbury pilgrimage -- the Knight and the Squire -- it is the Knight who tells the most courtly tale of love, and for this reason he best expresses the Aristocracy's view of women. But because

\[\text{Marie Neville, in her "The Function of the 'Squire's Tale' in the Canterbury Scheme," JEGP, L (1951), pp. 167-179, presents a good case for considering the "Squire's Tale" as a tale of courtly love. But J. R. Hulbert, in his "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the 'Knight's Tale?" SP, XLV (1943), p. 575, writes: "...to this elderly, crusading Knight is assigned a tale of young love in a Grecian setting. Certainly this story would have suited the Esquire much better."} \]
the Knight is wise and prudent, and because he has lived long and seen a great deal, he tempers the Aristocratic code with his own personal views on the subject. For this reason, several scholars have seen the tale as a satire on, or at least a reaction against courtly love. That the Knight does accept the tenets of courtly love, with some modifications, and that he therefore does express the Aristocracy's attitude toward women, we shall attempt to see as we turn to the tale.

15 Agnes K. Getty, in her "Chaucer's Changing Conceptions of the Humble Lover," PMLA, XLIV (1929), p. 210, writes: "The 'Knyghtes Tale,' which by reason both of subject and of letter one would expect to conform to the chivalric code, indicates, on the contrary, strong revolt to the chivalric code." J. R. Hulbert, op. cit., p. 385, n. 20, notes: "Perhaps Chaucer in the 'Knight's Tale' was becoming somewhat tired of courtly love," after he (Hulbert) has spent ten pages proving that Chaucer's aim in the tale was to tell a tale of courtly love through the device of the love problem. Sister Mary Raynelda Makarewicz, The Patristic Influence on Chaucer (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), pp. 103-104, views the tale as a "deviation" from the courtly tradition showing that allegiance to the code was not the core of existence but merely a popular pose.

16 Since I simply cannot see a differentiation between the lovers, I can only view the philosophical implications of the tale as irrelevant here. For the most successful attempt made so far to connect the love story with the philosophical implications of the poem see R. M. Lumiansky, Of Sordry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), pp. 29-49. For an extremely good summary of the critical work that has been done on the poem see Edward B. Ham, "Knight's Tale 38," ELH, XVII (1950), pp. 252-261.
In order to understand the Knight's attitude toward courtly love and ultimately toward women, we are going to have to view that attitude in its complexity, for it is the complexity of the Knight's vision, I think, that has baffled scholars and caused them to make so many conflicting interpretations of the courtly love theme of the poem. A close examination of the poem, however, readily reveals that complexity and shows that the Knight seems to hold simultaneously four different and conflicting attitudes toward courtly love. First, the Knight assumes a rather serious attitude toward courtly love and uses as a basis for his narrative a love problem in which two lovers of equal worth and almost equal claim battle for the same lady. The Knight views the lovers' passion as genuine and makes it their sole motivating force. Second, at the same time the Knight takes a serious view of the matter he is discussing, he also thinks of it as verging on the ridiculous, for he is definitely amused by the antics of the two gamecocks who literally fight to the death for a lady who does not even know they exist. Third, still at the same time, the Knight is somewhat disturbed at the power of love which knows no bounds, not even the bonds of friendship. And fourth, in spite of all, the Knight sympathizes with the lovers and looks kindly at them and their situation, although he himself feels above it. Let us view each of these four attitudes
individually before we attempt finally to evaluate the Knight's over-all view.

If we strip the tale of all its persiflage, we find that the Knight sets up a courtly love problem in his story. In other words, the Knight states a basic love problem and then proceeds to solve it in accord with the code of courtly love. The problem, as the Knight presents it, is that two sworn brothers, Theban Knights, fall in love with the same lady. Given the factor that they are of equal worth, the Knight in effect asks, "Who shall win the lady?" The Knight then proceeds to present a series of problems which accentuate the essential equality of the two knights' claims to the lady.

The first of these minor questions is presented early in Part One: Stated simply, the Knight asks whether "affeccioun of hoolynesse" or "love as to a creature" should have precedence. Does the lover who sees the lady first but loves her as a goddess have more right to her than a lover who sees her later but loves her as a woman? The second of these problems occurs in the same scene. Again stated simply, is a lover bound by other chivalric obligations or can he rightfully overthrows his compacts for love? The third minor problem results from Arcite's being given his freedom, and the Knight specifically asks:
Yow loveres axe I now this questioun:
Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?
That oon may seen his lady day by day,
But in a prison he moot dwelle alway:
That oother wher hym list may ride or go,
But seen his lady shal he nevere mo.
(I, 1347-1352)

The fourth minor problem and the most important one, for it ultimately directs their fates, is presented in Part Three when the lovers pray to the gods for assistance. Who shall win the lady, the lover who asks help directly from Venus, the goddess of love, or the one who seeks help indirectly from Mars, the god of war? Since the courtly thing to do is to pray for help in matters of love directly from the goddess of love, Palamon wins the lady.

To us today the problems and their solution may seem ludicrous. But to an audience familiar with the doctrines of courtly love, it must have seemed proper and fitting that the lover who first sees the lady, reveres her for the goddess like the creature she is, and then prays directly to Venus for help ultimately wins the lady.

As further proof that the Knight takes his subject seriously, let us look for a moment at the sincerity with which he deals with the lovers' passions. No where does the Knight ever suggest that the lovers are not honest in their love for Emily and in their vicious rivalry and jealously. They are true courtly lovers in every sense of the word: they sigh, weep, turn pale, acquire
"loveris maladye of Hereos," swear to love and serve Emily forever and even risk their lives to be near her. The Knight, like Theseus, is perfectly aware of the power of love:

"The god of love, a, benedicite! How myghty and how greet a lord is he! Ayeyns his myght ther gayneth none obstacles."  
(I, 1785-1787)

But while the Knight does reveal a serious attitude toward courtly love, he also shows that he thinks the antics the lovers go through rather humorous. For this reason, the Knight discontinues talking about Arcite's "loveris maladye of Hereos," as though the symptoms were so common that everyone would automatically know about them:

What sholde I al day of his wo endite?  
(I, 1380)

And indeed, it would take him all day. Nor could anything be more humorous than the knight's description of the changing moods of lovers;

When that Arcite hadde romed al his fille,  
And songen al the roundel lustily,  
Into a studie he fil sodeynly,  
As doon thise loveres in hir queynte geres,  
Now in the crope, now doun in the breres,  
Now up, now doun, as boket in a welle,  
Right as the Friday, soothly for to telle,  
Now it shyneth, now it reyneth faste,  
Right so kan geery Venus overcaste  
The hertes of hir folk; right as hir day  
Is gereful, right so chaungeth she array  
Selde is the Friday al the wowke ylike.  
(I, 1528-1539)

When the Knight begins to describe Palamon and Arcite's battle in the grove, he unconventionally leave them
fighting ankle deep in blood, while he turns to more important philosophical matters (I, 1659-1662). Moreover, when Theseus and the ladies come upon the lovers, the Knight says the Ladies weep because they see that "no thyng but for love was this debast (I, 1754)." Theseus very nicely points out the Knight's joke:

"Now looketh is nat that an heigh follye?  
Who may been a fool, but if he love?

But this is yet the beste game of alle,  
That she for whom they han this jolitee  
Kan hem therfore as muche thank as me.  
She woot namoore of al this hoote fare,  
By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare!"

(I, 1798-1810)

Thus, the Knight can view courtly love seriously and still laugh at the courtly antics of the lovers.

Yet, the Knight is old enough and wise enough to see the tragedy in the situation. For the Knight recognizes that love is so powerful that it can destroy chivalric ties.

"O Cupide, out of all charitee!  
O regne, that wolt no felawe have with thee!  
Ful sooth is served that love ne lordshipe  
Wol noght his thankes, have no felaweshipes."

(I, 1623-1626)

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17W. G. Dodd, in his Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Studies in English, 1913), p. 234, writes: "Nowhere may a better expression of the courtly idea of the god of Love be found than in the words of Theseus."
Indeed, love can breed hate and death:

"He may be be cleped a god for his myracles,
For he kan maken, at his owene gyse;
Of everich herte as that hym list divyse.
Lo here this Arcite and this Palamoun,
That quitly were out of my prisoun,
And myghte han lyved in Thebes roially,

........................................
And yet hath love, maugree hir eyen two,
Broght hem hyder bothe for to dye.

........................................
Bihoold, for Goddes sake that sit above,
Se how they blede! be they noght wel arrayed?
Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed
Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!"
(I, 1788-1803)

And when we look at the tale objectively, we too assume this attitude. For love makes enemies of friends, sufferers of the worthy and ultimately brings destruction and death in its wake. We must remember, however, that to the fourteenth century Knight, battle makes men more worthy. So, we must not be too concerned with the unrest evident in the poem.

This takes us to the Knight's fourth attitude toward courtly love, for even though he simultaneously can view it seriously, laugh at the ritual the lovers go through and stand bewildered at the power and destructiveness of love, he can also sympathize with the courtly lovers, for presumably, like Theseus, the Knight can remember when he too was young and fell into the trap of love:
For in my tyme a servant was I oon.
And therefore, syn I knowe of loves peyne,
And woot hou score it kan a man distreyne,
As he that ben caught ofte in his lass,
I yow foryeve al hooly this trespass.
(I, 1814-1878)

Now perhaps we are ready to evaluate the Knight's attitude toward courtly love. It is obvious that the Knight accepts the basic courtly premise that love is irresistible. And although he is amused by the lovers, the Knight realizes that they are sincere, and he judges them kindly. Is not the Knight actually affirming the basic tenets of courtly love by admitting that, silly as they are, they arise out of a kind of necessity? In addition, the Knight has no quarrel with the lovers' worship of Emily or with their humility and courtesy before her. In fact, the only way in which the Knight actually deviates from the code is by laughing at it and by rejecting its illicit and adulterous aspects. For Palamon and Arcite seek Emily, not for a paramour, but for a wife. The Knight, in the guise of Theseus, makes it quite clear that the question of who shall win the lady must be settled once and for all, for the lovers can not both have her (I, 1836-1839). Yet, under the code one of them could have married her while the other took her as his beloved. But these two deviations do not mean that the Knight rejects the code, for
the human being is always able to laugh at what he believes
in, and many courtly love tales end in marriage.

Granted that the Knight does accept courtly love,
with some modifications, we now shall have to examine how
this acceptance reflects upon his attitude toward women.
Here again we shall have to deal Knight's complex vision,
for, as we have seen, the Knight is able to penetrate to
the very root of things and see them in all their manifes-
tations.

Because of his power, the Knight is able to under-
stand the paradox in the courtly code and to deliberately
point it out. This is the major reason, I believe, that
we are not quite sure how we feel about Emily. On the
one hand, she is a lovely virtuous creature whose tender
heartedness makes her weep at seeing the lovers in bat-
tle and go into deep mourning for Arcite. On the other
hand, she is a rather distant and changable shadowy
figure who is completely unconcerned as to which Knight
wins her. Let us examine these two paradoxical views of
Emily.

That Emily is a goddess figure worthy to be wor-
shipped the Knight makes clear when he introduces her
as she walks in the garden on that fateful day when
Palamon and Arcite spy her. The Knight's description of
her is rapturous; he is charmed by her:
There passed yeer by yeer and day by day,
Til it fil ones, in a morwe of May,
That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the lylie upon his stalte grene,
And fressher than the May with flouras nowe--
For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
I noot which was the fyner of him two--
Er it were day, as was hir won to do,
She was arisen and al redy dight;

And in the gardyn, at the soone upriste,
She walketh up and doun, and as hire liste
She gadereth flouras, party white and rede,
To make a subtil gerl and for hire hede;
And as an angel hevenysshly she soong.

(I, 1033-1055)

And when Arcite swears that he shall die since he must return to Thebes and see his beloved Emily no more, the Knight shows that he almost does die. Indeed, Arcite is so transformed by his melancholy that he can return to Athens unrecognized. The Knight, though he can laugh at Arcite, never challenges the fact that love for a woman can do this to a man.

Moreover, the Knight portrays Emily as a tender-hearted figure. When Theseus condemns the lovers to die after he has found them in the grove, it is the Queen and Emily who take pity on them and save them. Just before the lists, when Emily goes to pray at Diana's alter, the Knight again speaks kindly of her "herte debonaire," for not only does she pray that she may remain a maiden, but she asks Venus to send love and peace to the two friends and to quench their torment and desire (I, 2314-2320). Furthermore, upon Arcite's death Emily weeps and
has to be carried away. At the funeral, Emily again cries out and has to be led homeward. Finally, as the Knight ends his story, he implies that perhaps all the trouble the lovers have gone through for Emily has been worth it, for Emily makes Palamon a good wife:

And thus with alle blisse and melodye
Hath Palamon ywedded Emelye,
And God, that al this wyde world hath wroght,
Sende him his love that hath it deere aboght;
For now is Palamon in alle wele,
Lyvyng in blisse, in richesse, and in heele,
And Emelye hym loveth so tendrely,
And he hire serveth al so gentilly,
That nevire was ther no word him bitwene
Of jealosie or any oother teene.
(I, 3097-3106)

Thus, the Knight seems to be as enthralled with Emily's beauty and sensitivity as are the two lovers. Moreover, the Knight implies that Palamon and Arcite's love for Emily makes them more worthy, for instead of languishing in prison in passivity, they find means of being near her and are literally ready to fight to the death for her. On the one hand, then, the Knight views Emily sympathetically and revers her as a chivalric gentleman ought.

On a closer examination, however, we find that in almost every instance that the Knight glorifies Emily according to the chivalric code which places women on a pedestal, he does something to point out the paradox in code. For example, while the Knight portrays Emily as a goddess figure worthy to be worshipped, he emphasizes the fact that the lovers are foolish for worshipping her, for
not only does she not know they exist, but even when she
does learn of it she is not in the least concerned with
the question of who is to win her. In fact, she prays
that they go away and leave her to her maiden life of
hunting and walking in the woods. Then too, while the
Knight points out her tenderheartedness, he makes fun of
her weeping and wailing at every time:

                     Shrighte Emelye, and howleth Palamon,
                   And Theseus his suster took anon
                     Swonwynge, and baer hire fro the corps away.
                   What helpeth it to tarien forth the day
                     To tellen how she weep bothe eve and morwe?
                   For in swich cas wommen have swich sorwe,
                     Whan that hir houbondes ben from hem ago,
                   That for the moore part they sorwen so,
                     Or ellis fallen in swich maladye,
                   That at the laste certeiny they dye.
                        (I, 2817-2826)

And although the Knight shows her "gentle herte" when
she asks that Diana send peace and love between the lovers
and quench their woe, the Knight also points out that her
"gentile herte" arises from purely selfish motives:

        "Now help me, lady, sith ye may and kan,
       For tho thre formes that thou hast in thee.
        And Palamon, that hath swich love to me,
       And eek Arcite, that loveth me so soore,
          (This grace I preye thee withoute moore)
        As sende love and pees bitwix hem two,
       And fro me turne away hir hertes so
        That al hire hoote love and hir desir,
       And al hir bisy torment, and hir fir
        Be quynt, or turned in another place."
                        (I, 2312-2321)
Moreover, while the Knight consciously makes us admire Emily's determination to remain a maiden, he also shows us that Emily is as changable as Fortune herself. Thus, immediate upon Diana's telling her she'll have to marry, Emily in effect just shrugs her shoulders, says, "Oh, all right," and goes home to bed. And even though Emily is unconcerned as to who wins her, the moment that she sees Arcite is winning the list, she smiles at him, for as the Knight says:

(... wommen, as to spoken in comune,  
Thel folwen alle the favour of Fortune.)  
(I, 2681-2682)

Now perhaps we are prepared to evaluate the Knight's attitude toward women. Because the Knight is a member of the Aristocracy, he accepts the tenets of courtly love. For this reason he views man's love for a woman as an irresistible force which, while it brings the lover to the depths of despair, also makes him more worthy by increasing his ambition to perform deeds of arms. In this sense, then, the Knight places woman on a pedestal; she is to be worshipped humbly, obeyed and served. But because the Knight is old and wise and because he is a devout Christian, he laughs at the courtly lovers, gently satirizes Emily and throws out the code's mark of adultery. In this sense, then, he brings woman down from her pedestal and places her on an equal footing with man. The Knight, then, accepts the code of courtly love, but he does not take it
very seriously:

When we turn from the Aristocracy's ideal view of women as expressed in the code to a consideration of that attitude as expressed in life, we find that like the Knight, the men of the Aristocracy did not take the code as seriously as the ladies perhaps would have liked them to.

The attitude of the nobleman toward the doctrine of courtly love was expressed most fully in a manual of deportment for girls composed in the second half of the fourteenth century by Geoffrey de la Tour Landry.¹⁸ Concerning the courtly worship of women, the good knight was convinced that woman's place was one of subjection to her husband. To illustrate this he told of a woman who opposed her husband in public:

And he, that was angry of her governaunce, smote her with his fist down to the earth; And then with his foot he struck her in the visage and brake her nose, And all her life after she had her nose crooked, the which shent and disfigured her visage after, that she might not for shame show her visage, it was so foul blemished. And this she had for her evil and great language, that she was wont to say to her husband. And therefore the wife ought to suffer and let the husband have the words and to be master....¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 33-34.
Thus, the Aristocracy ideally may have held women up to worship, but realistically they subjected her just as the Church did:

...all good women owe to be humble, courteous, and serviceable unto their husbands.20

On the subject of adultery the knight was even more explicit. Accepting fully the ecclesiastical attitude toward adultery, la Tour Landry spent most of his book condemning women who had slipped from the paths of strict virtue. In fact, the good knight bemoaned the fact that the custom of burying illicit lovers alive had fallen into disuse.

Although the more extreme doctrines of courtly love seem to have had little influence on feudal society, those ideas less decidedly in conflict with traditional mores gained fairly wide acceptance.21 Marshal Boucicaut's biographer was convinced that love increases a man's ambition to perform deeds of arms and removes fear from his heart. Good habits, joy and courage are products of love. He further asserted that Boucicaut, moved by these considerations, found a lovely and worthy lady whom he enter-

20Ibid., p. 141.
21Painter, op. cit., p. 141.
tained by dancing, singing, and composing songs in her honor. Her inspiration made him shine in many jousts and tourneys. Even Froissart, the chief chronicler of fourteenth century chivalry, took the beneficial effect of love as a matter of course. In describing the thoughts of King Edward II about the countess of Salisbury, Froissart wrote:

"And also if he should be amorous it would be entirely good for him, for his realm, and for all his knights and esquires, for he would be more content, more gay, and more martial; and he would hold more jousts, more tourneys, more feasts, and more revels than he had before; and he would be more able and more vigorous in his wars, more amiable and more trusting toward his friends and harsher toward his foes."

Thus, the Aristocracy did not take courtly love too seriously. The knights were unwilling to accept those marks of the code, such as the worship of women and adultery, which came into direct conflict with the traditional prejudices of the feudal male. But the knights were willing to accept the desire to honor a lady as a plausible and honorable motive for fighting and to admit that love could improve a man's prowess. They could even be persuaded to believe that a knight should devote some attention to pleasing a woman and should treat her with comparative courtesy. The propaganda of courtly love was at least partially successful, and women had edged

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23Cited by Painter, ibid.
her way into the mind of the feudal male and had elevated and enlarged her place in society as he recognized it.  

In actual practice the women of the feudal caste spent most of their time in spinning, weaving, sewing and in general supervision of the household. The feudal woman was always in the custody of some male; first her father, then her husband, and even a widow was in the custody of her lord or her eldest son. Although a woman could inherit a fief, she could rule it only through her husband, for the function of the feudal class was to fight and a woman could not do this. Furthermore, she had no rights whatever against her husband. Nevertheless, though a feudal wife was a very inferior partner, who was her husband's partner and after him the mistress of his castle and his fief. In the lord's absence vassals, officials, and servants obeyed her. In short, although she was without rights toward her husband, she shared his status toward all others.  

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24 Ibid., pp. 142-143

In theory and in practice, then, there was as much of a discrepancy in the Aristocracy's attitude toward women as there was in that of the Church. So far had the Pauline epistles counseling wives to submit themselves to their husbands as unto the Lord penetrated society that even the code of courtly love could not counteract it.
CHAPTER III

THE BOURGEOISIE

A Marchant was ther with a forked berd,
In mottelee, and hye on a horse he sat;
Upon his heed a Flaundrysh bever hat,
His bootes clasped faire and fetisly.
His resons he spak ful solemnely
Sownynge alwey the 'encrees of his wynnyng.
(I, 270-275)

About the beginning of the thirteenth century, a new
class began to assert itself -- the Bourgeoisie. In some
respects the middle class added a new attitude toward women
to the medieval scene, for it alone showed something of a
recognition of the practical equality of men and women.\(^1\)
Borough law took into account the woman trader, and in many
towns "customs" existed for the treatment of married women
carrying on trades of their own. Although these laws were
intended to protect the husband, they also effectively im-
proved the status of the wife. In general, however, since
the Bourgeoisie rose to importance in a world in which opin-
ion and law had hardened into well defined molds, it readily
assimilated those ideas about women and marriage which it

\(^1\)Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," Legacy of the
Middle Ages, ed. C. G. Crumpt and E. F. Jacob (Oxford:
found in existence.\textsuperscript{2}

As has been indicated earlier,\textsuperscript{3} the Bourgeoisie, who looked to the Pulpit as its one oracle of learning and refinement, was greatly influenced by the picture of womanhood which the medieval preachers painted. It is no wonder, then, that we find the Church's attitude toward women deeply imbedded in the Bourgeoisie mind. Indeed, the Bourgeoisie note in literature, which first made itself felt in the comic \textit{faliaux}, was perhaps more hostile to women than the ecclesiastical note. While the men of the middle class accepted whole heartily the Church's doctrine of the subjection of women,\textsuperscript{4} they often scoffed at the Church for being so naive as to even portray, as the Parson does, an ordered relationship wherein husband and wife could live harmoniously in accord with God's divine ordinances. As the Bourgeoisie saw the issue, what was the sense in even talking about Griselda when, like the Clerk, it could only find in "al a toun Grisildis thre or two (IV, 1165)."

On the other hand, the Bourgeoisie found little of value in the Aristocratic attitude toward women, for while the middle class, for the most part, did not move in courtly circles and therefore did not understand the intricacies of courtly love, it did recognize the fundamental sensuality and

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3}See p. 4 above.
\textsuperscript{4}Power, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 403.
triviality beneath the Aristocracy's superficial worship of women. To the Bourgeoisie mind, courtly love was just what it in reality was -- a glorified code advocating adultery.

The fabliaux, then, show both the positive influence of the Church's view of women and the negative influence of the Aristocracy's attitude toward the fair sex. The woman of this middle class literary genre is more often than not an odious sister to the Wife of Bath, who after overthrowing her subjection, henpecks her husband and then by devious but sometimes courtly means deceives him. Obviously she suspiciously resembles the foolish diabolical creature portrayed in the more misogynic medieval sermons.

Of the several Bourgeois pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, perhaps no one is better qualified to reveal the middle class attitude toward women than is the Merchant, for he certainly is a typical member of this rising class. Fashionably adorned with a forked beard and a Flemish beaver hat, the Merchant sits "hye on horse" and gives his opinions "ful solemnly." Like a good many of his Bourgeoisie brothers, this business man is not above illegally selling French gold coins in "eschaunge" and engaging in "chevyssaunce."

In addition to the Merchant's being a typical member of his class, he has another qualification for voicing the middle class view of women. For he himself has suffered conjugal misfortunes and is quite willing to voice his opinions on
women and marriage.

In his "Prologue" the Merchant reveals his basic attitude toward women. His idea of an ideal wife is a patient Griselda, but he himself is married to a Wife of Bath. So, all he can do is complain:

"Wepyng and waylyng, care and oother sorwe
I knowe ynoth, on even and a-morwe,"
Quod the Marchant, "and so doon other mo
That wedded been. I trowe that it be so,
For wel I woot it fareth so with me.
I have a wyf, the worste that may be;
For thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,
She wolde hym overmacche, I dar wel swere.
What sholde I yow reheerce in special Hir hye malice? She is a shreweat al.
Ther is a long and large difference Bitwix Grisildis grete pacience
And of my wyf the passyng crueltee."

(IV, 1214-1225)

Indeed, married but two months he curses the state of matrimony in sermon-like fashion:

"We wedded men lyven in sorwe and care.
Assaye whosoe wol, and he schal fynde
That I seye sooth, by Seint Thomas of Ynde,
As for the moore part, I sey nat alle.
God shilde that it sholde so bifalle!"

(IV, 1228-1242)

When Harry Bailly, who also has married a shrew, prevails upon the Merchant to tell a tale about "that art" of "wyves cursednesse," the Merchant replies that he will gladly tell such a tale, but he will tell no more of his own sorrow. Thus, the Merchant sets out to tell a story which will illustrate the wretchedness which most husbands experience as a result of the "passyng crueltee" of wives.
In his story of January and May, the Merchant carries out his plan by showing May's treachery. Women, the Merchant in effect says, are the same everywhere, whether in this world or the other; like May and Proserpine, they are wilful, faithless, deceiving shrews. But while the Merchant certainly condemns May's actions, he attaches greater blame to January on three accounts: for hiding behind the skirts of matrimony to indulge in sensual pleasures, for thinking marriage could possible be a happy state and for remaining blind even when he has seen May and Damian embracing in the pear tree. To the Merchant, the moral of the tale is threefold: First, any man who uses marriage as an excuse for practicing lechery is spiritually blind and apt to lead a wretched married life; second, men, especially lecherous old fools, are ridiculous to even think that marriage will turn out well; and third, no matter what a man does or does not do, few marriages are likely to work because women are diabolical creatures who cannot keep their wedding vows. The irony in the whole situation is that the Merchant unconsciously sheds a great deal of light on the reason for his own marital difficulties. For through his disgust with January's words and actions, the Merchant unwittingly implies that, like January, he too has allowed his lust to lead him to choosing a wife indiscriminately.

From even a general survey of the "Prologue" and tale then, we are able to see the essence of the Merchant's
Bourgeois attitude toward women. But in order to understand the intricacies of his attitude we must turn to the tale proper. In it the Merchant reveals his attitude toward women in essentially two ways: indirectly and directly. Indirectly he tells us his own view of women through his ascertainment and judgment of that held by the male characters in the poem, January and Damian. Directly he reveals his own attitude though his condemnation of the women in the tale, May in particular, Prosperine incidentally. To understand the Merchant's view, then, we shall have to examine it in the same manner that he reveals it. So, let us first turn to an ascertainment of January and Damian's attitude toward women and the Merchant's judgment of it and then look at the Merchant's direct view of May and Prosperpine. While we do this it seems profitable to looke for the factors which have influenced the Bourgeois Merchant's view of women.

In the very beginning of the tale the Merchant tells us the essence of January's view and condemns it. As the Merchant reveals it, an old knight named January, who for sixty years has "followed ay his bodily deylyt"
in Andreas' wet garden, now desires to marry, "to lyve under that hooly boond,\ With which that first God man and woman bond (IV, 1261-1262);" whether his wishes arise from "hoolynesse" or "dottage," the Merchant says he can not tell. Yet, in the very same line the Merchant hints that he really does know:

...but swich a greet corage
Hadde this knyght to been a wedded man,
(IV, 1254-1255)

For "corage" not only refers to religious piety, but it connates sexual potency. To make it perfectly evident that January's fervent desires arise from anything but "holynes," the Merchant allows January to speak for himself:

"Noon other lyf," seyde he, "is worth a bene;
For wedlok is so ese and so clene,
That in this world it is a paradys."
Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so wys.
(IV, 1263-1268)

5Andreas Capellanus, in his fifth dialogue of The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John J. Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), describes a Garden to show the fates of lovers of various types. The Garden is divided into three sections. The central part is covered by the branches of a tall tree bearing fruit of all kinds. Women there give their fruits freely but with restrictions necessary to true love. The second of the sections is soggy and damp with waters of the fountain unbearably cold, but the sun pours down mercilessly. Women there give their love too freely to anyone who asks for it. The third section of the garden is dry and baked, and the sun burns terribly; the ladies sit on bundles of thorns. Women there refuse the knights of the god of Love.

6See the Host's jesting words to the Nun's Priest: "For if thou have corage as thou has might,/ Thee were nede of hennes (VII, 3452-3455);" R. M. Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the "Canterbury Tales" (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), p. 159.
January, then, wants to legalize his lust in wedlock and have his paradise, not in heaven, but on earth. From the Merchant's ironic remark on January's intentions, it is clear that the Merchant not only realizes that January is perverting Church doctrine, but he condemns the old knight for it. Yet, as if he were not satisfied, the Merchant spends the next one hundred and thirty one lines (IV, 1267-1398) developing his theme with extraordinary complexity. In the lines, which the Merchant presents as his own musings, four distinct voices fuse into a voice that is both multiple and one.\footnote{G. G. Sedgewick, "The Structure of 'The Merchant's Tale,'" University of Toronto Quarterly, XVII (1948), p. 341.}

First, barring the first six verses and a caustic comment here and there, the Merchant is singing a prothalamion, using the Church's orthodox view of Christian marriage as a basis. Bachelors have pain and woe in illicit love affairs, but a wedded man lives a blissful and ordered life within the bonds of marriage (IV, 1278-1285). No one can be so obedient or true as a wife, for she will love and serve her husband in sickness and in health (IV, 1286-1293). Indeed, marriage is a sacrament (IV, 1319). God created woman to be man's helpmate (IV, 1328-1329); therefore, man must love his wife as Christ loved his Church (IV, 1384-1388). Thus, in the first voice, that of the Merchant's prothalamion, the Merchant
seems to be singing a hymn to the Church’s view of Christian marriage.

In the second voice the Merchant recounts the stream of consciousness rationalizing of old January. It is this voice that the perversions of Church doctrine creep in. For the Merchant continues to make it perfectly clear that January wants to marry for two main reasons, both of which are contrary to Church teachings: first, he wants to continue his lecherous activities, and he rationalizes himself into thinking that it is no sin to do so in marriage; and second, he wants to have his paradise on earth here and now, and he thinks that marriage is that paradise. Thus, the Merchant emphasizes January’s concern with the fleshly rather than the spiritual aspects of marriage:

O flessh they been, an o fleesh, as I gesse,
Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.

(IV, 1335-1336)

In his musings on marriage, January continually dwells on wordly descriptive terms such as "joye," "blisful" "murye." To January, the story of Adam and Eve proves only that a wife is man’s help and comfort. The Merchant nicely sums up January’s twofold perversion of doctrine in one line. A wife, thinks January, is man’s "paradys terrestre, and his disport (IV, 1332)." But January is not through perverting Church doctrine. He has talked himself into believing that while other things of the world such as lands and rents are gifts of Fortune and will "passen as a shadow
upon a wall (IV, 1315)," a wife is God's gift and will last (IV, 1311-1318). Yet, as we learned from the Parson's sermon, according to the Church all things of this world, including wives, are subject to Fortune's fluctuations; the only way man can transcend Fortune's wheel is for him to be motivated by charity, by love of God. January, however, is so motivated by concupiscence, so determined to turn from love of God to love of a worldly creature, that he is willing to turn God's divine order upside down and submit himself to his wife:

He may nat be deseyved, as I gesse,  
So that he werke after his wyves reed.  
Thanne may he boldely beren up his heed,  
They been so trewe, and therwithin so wyse;  
For which, if thou wolt werken as the wyse,  
Do alwey so as a wommen wol thee rede.

(IV, 1356-1361)

In the second voice, then, the Merchant presents January's "inwith" perversion of Church doctrine to suit his own lecherous ends.

In the third voice, the Merchant ironically uses his own fine words about marriage for one purpose: to expose the lusty January as a lecherous and naive old fool. In his condemnation of January's view of marriage, the Merchant reveals his own attitude toward it. What the Merchant is actually doing in this voice is laying the ground work for pointing out the discrepancy between marriage as it should be, as St. Thomas Aquinas and the
Parson have defined it, and as it in reality is. It should be pointed out here, however, that the Merchant basically accepts the Church's doctrine just as the medieval preachers did. Like the preachers, however, the Merchant curses marriage simply because it fails to live up to what Church doctrine said it should be. Thus, throughout this section the Merchant adds a sour note here and there to expose his prothalamion for what it is -- a curse on January's view of marriage. The Merchant speaks of the marriage bond as a "yok (IV, 1285)." When January thinks that a wife is God's gift and will last, the Merchant adds:

Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure. (IV, 1318)

Commenting on January's willingness to submit himself to his wife's counsel, the Merchant uses four examples of what in one sense were wise but in another sense disastrous counsels of women. Thus, as the Merchant says, Rebekah gave wise counsel to her son Jacob, for she helped him obtain the patriarchal blessing. But in so doing Rebekah deceived her husband, alienated her older son Esau and caused Jacob to be driven out of his home a hunted fugitive. The Merchant, then, really uses this example to point out how foolish January is. For the Merchant realizes that no one will remember Rebekah's counsel without realizing its deceitfulness and its disastrous results. The Merchant also compacts the essence of the "Clerk's
Tale," and glancing through a mask at the Wife of Bath, he mocks at the very idea that a wife will be obedient:

A wyf! a Seinte Marie, benedicite!
How myghte a man han any adversitee
That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.
The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye
There may no tonge telle, or herte thynke.
If he be povre, she helpeth hym to swyne;
She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a deel;
Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;
She seith nat ones "nay," whan he seith "ye."
"Do this," seith he; "Al redy, sire," seith she.

(IV, 1337-1345)

A little later he again plays upon this theme:

Suffre thy wyves tonge, as Catoun bit;
She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it,
And yet she wolde obeye of curteisye.
A wyf is kepere of thyn housbondrye;
Wel may the sike man biwaille and wepe,
Ther as ther nys no wyf the hous to kepe.

(IV, 1377-1382)

Moreover, when January reminds himself that a man and his wife are so closely united that no harm can come to either of them, the Merchant's dry comment is:

And namely upon the wyves syde.

(IV, 1392)

The most obvious means by which the Merchant punctures his prothalamion is by his introduction of Theofrustus' views on marriage. Of course, Theofrustus' comments forshadow exactly the point of view and conduct which May will illustrate:

"Ne take no wyf," quod he, "for housbondrye,
As for to spare in houshold thy dispence.
A trewe servant dooth moore diligence
Thy good to kepe, than thyn owene wyf,
For she wol clayme half part al hir lyf."
And if that thou by syk, so God me save,
Thy verray freendes, or a trewe knave,
Wol kepe thee bet than she that waiteth ay
After thy good and hath doon many a day.
And if thou take a wyf unto thyn hoold,
Ful lightly maystow been a cokewold."

(IV, 1296-1306)

Thus, in the third voice the Merchant condemns January's view of marriage and shows conclusively that January's decision to marry is not the result of "holynesse" but of "dotage."

In the fourth voice, the Merchant's bitter tone, the irony of the whole situation becomes clear. The Merchant too has allowed his lust to blind him to the true concept of Christian marriage and to the discrepancy between that concept in Church doctrine and the operation of that concept in life. But now his eyes are open, and he is bitter.

In this opening section, then, the Merchant clearly reveals January's attitude toward women and paves the way for the working out of that attitude in the story to follow. As we have seen in this first section, marriage for January promises to combine the self-indulgence he has practiced all his life with help for his physical weakness and salvation for his soul.

In his first consultation with Placebo and Justinus, January's lust for pleasure and his desire for salvation combine to blind him to the danger inherent in taking a young wife. The only danger he can forsee, after he has
chosen young May on the basis of her physical attractiveness, is that so much felicity in marriage might ruin his chance of a blissful after life.

Just as he could only see in the story of Adam and Eve that a wife is man's earthly paradise, so he can only see in marriage the paradise of his wife's arms. As he could only see in the Adam story what he wanted to see and therefore was blinded to the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, the forbidden fruit, he sees in his lust for his wife only what he wishes to see and therefore is blinded to the sin he is committing. For in the story January commits the gravest of all sins; he elevates his wife, particularly her flesh, to the throne of superiority that should be occupied by God. January is guilty of the sin of concupiscence. This, then, is January's attitude toward women.

But it is definitely not the Merchant's, although it might have been his two months earlier. January may rationalize:

"A man may do no synne with his wyf,
Ne hurtethe hymselfen with his owene knyf."

(IV, 1839-1840)

But the Merchant agrees with the Parson:

And for that many man weneth that he may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wif, certes, that opinion is fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with his owene knyf, and maken hymselfe dronken of his owene tonne.

(X, 859)
Throughout the story the Merchant condemns January's attitude. He wards off any possible sympathy for the lecherous old knight by showing that January knows exactly what he is doing, no matter how much he rationalizes:

"I dote nat, I woot the cause why
Men sholde wedde, and forthermore woot I,
Ther speketh many a man of mariage
That woot namoore of it than woot my page,
For whiche causes man sholde take a wyf.
If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,
Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,
By cause of leveful procreacioun
Of children, to th' honour of God above,
And nat oonly for paramour or love;
And for they sholde lecherye eschue,
And yelde hir dette whan that it is due;
Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother;
And lyve in chastitee ful holily.
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I."

(IV, 1441-1456)

And nothing could be more odious than the Merchant's pictures of January taking drugs to "encreessen his corage" and of his rubbing his old beard across his young bride's face.

To show the extreme foolishness to which January's desire has led him, the Merchant puts the Song of Solomon in his mouth. For the doting knight, May represents what the lady in Canticles represents to the faithful; she is his Holy Church, his Blessed Virgin, his refuge from the transitory world. 8

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To make his point clearer, the Merchant sets up the garden that January builds as a symbol of his sin walled in willful concealment. The god of the garden, Priapus, is an obvious symbol of the painful frustration of cupidity which began in the garden of evil. Pluto and Proserpine, king and queen of Hell, which the Merchant euphemistically calls "Fayre," roam through it. The tree that January helps May climb is not a sycamore, which is the tree of life, but a pear tree, which is associated with the tree of original sin. January's physical blindness is merely a manifestation of his spiritual blindness, and as long as he walks in the garden of sin his eyes are forever closed.

In the Merchant's condemnation of January's concupiscence, the Merchant reveals that his own attitude toward women is based on the doctrine of the Church: man is to love his wife prudently; he is not to place her on a throne and worship her flesh.

These are essentially the grounds on which the Merchant condemns Damian's attitude toward May. What the Merchant is actually doing in his condemnation of Damian is blasting the whole code of courtly love which also placed woman on a throne of superiority. As Margaret Schlauch points out, the social milieu

\[9\text{Ibid.}\]
in the Merchant's story is precisely that of the conventional romances; the characters are the types omnipresent in them. The egregiously foolish January is a knight; the humble, puppet-like Damian is a squire presumably training for knighthood; the sensuous May is a courtly lady. If we give a very simplified statement of the situation it sounds like a perfectly serious thirteenth century French romance; a young squire serving his feudal lady at a table is suddenly smitten with love for her; he is covered with confusion, develops lovesickness, takes to his bed and remains there until he is able to convey his entreaties to her by letter and win a show of kindness from her, despite the vigilance of her guardian (here, her husband).

But this is not the way the situation appears in the story, for the Merchant treats it quite unconventionally. Damian is struck with love for May not by the god of love who is irresistible, but by a joyous Venus who accidentally just happens to brush him with "hire brond" as she dances gaily before the wedding feast. Immediately Damian takes to his bed just as much from the burn he acquired from Venus' torch as from his burning love for May. When May visits him, the only thing Damian can think of when he

gives her his letter is that he may get caught. And what does May do with the letter after she has read it? She throws it in the "pryvee." After Damian learns that May will grant him her "grace," he jumps out of his bed, and instead of increasing in manliness as every courtly lover does, he is just "pleasant unto every man (IV, 2015)."

And the picture of Damian making sign language to May and later crouching down in the bushes in the garden are not the conventional pictures of the courtly lover, by any means. When we last see Damian, he is not on the eighth sphere like Troilus; rather he is squatting in a tree.

Thus, the Merchant ridicules Damian's love for and worship of May though his satire on the system and the conventions of courtly love. Furthermore, the Merchant explicitly states his opinion of Damian's attitude toward May:

O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!  
O familier foo, that his servyce bedeth!  
O servant traytoure, false hoomly hewe,  
Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewes,  
God shilde us alle from youre akeyntaunce!  
O Januarie, dronken in plesaunce  
In mariage, se how thy Damyan,  
Thyn owane squier and thy borne man,  
Entendeth for to do thee vilenye,  
God graunte thee thyn hoomly fo t'espye!  
For in this world nys worse pestilence  
Than hoomly foo al day in thy presence.  

(IV, 1783-1794)

Thus, through his condemnation of Damian, the Bourgeois
Merchant again reveals his attitude toward women to be that of the Church. To the Church and to the Merchant, any man who elevates a woman to the place of God and robs his master of his wife is an adulterer, no matter how courtly he is.

If the Merchant reveals his attitude toward women indirectly through his condemnation of January and Damian's view, he reveals it directly through his condemnation of May. The very first time we meet May we infer that she is mercenary, for she has somehow managed to gain possession of some of January's land (IV, 1669). Furthermore, she is dressed in the rich clothing that to the Middle Ages was a sign of wantonness. At the wedding the Merchant ironically has the priest bid her to be like Sarah or Rebakah, both famous for making their husbands miserable. By inference, May is hypocritical enough to be a reasonably good actress, and she sits with "So benynge a chiere," meeker than Queen Esther (IV, 1744). All possibility for any glamour in her relationship with Damian is destroyed when she needlessly selects the privy for reading her lover's letter. After this, unlike a courtly lady, the Merchant points out that she immediately decides to grant Damian her favor. The line

Lo, pitee renneth soon in gentil herte! (IV, 1986)

sounds a bitterly discordant note. Nor can the Merchant
help commenting ironically on this line:

Heere may ye se how excellent franchise
In womman is, whan they hem narwe avyse.
Som tyrant is, as ther be many oon,
That hath an herte as hard as any stoon,
Which wolde han lat hym sterven in the place
Wel rather than han graunted hym hire grace;
And hem rejoysen in hire cruel pryde,
And rekke nat to been an homycide.

(IV, 1987-1994)

It is May who makes signs to Damian and steals the "clyket."
It is she who plans the pear tree union. The first time she
speaks, she professes her fidelity to January, adds a few
tears for effect and then the very next instant makes signs
to Damian to climb the tree. She next plays her part by
appealing to the not wholly infirm January's belated desire
for an heir by the silly pretense that her longing for
the little green pears is the longing of her pregnancy.
Ironically she uses January as a stepping block for climbing
the tree to her lover. Of course, the crowning blow of her
hypocrisy is that she can make January believe that she
only struggled with a man in a tree to restore January's
sight. As far as May is concerned, the Host expresses the
Merchant's moral in the "Epilogue:"

"Lo, which sleightes and subtilitees
In wommen been! for ay as bisy as bees
Been they, us sely men for to decyve,
And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;
By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weal."

(IV, 2421-2425)

The Merchant adds Proserpine to the story to give
universal application to May's villainy. Proserpine, a
shrew of the highest order, closely resembles the Wife of Bath. When Pluto says he will restore January's sight, she retorts she will give May and all women thereafter the right answer to get them out of their difficulties:

Now by my moodres sires soule I swere
That I shal yeven hire suffisant answer,
And alle wommen after, for hir sake;
That, though they be in any gilt ytake,
With face boold they shulle hemself excuse,
And bere hem doun that wolden hem accuse.
For lak of answere noon of hem shal dyen.
(IV, 2265-2271)

Finally, as all husbands must, Pluto breaks down under her scolding.

Now, then, we are ready to ascertain the Merchant's Bourgeois attitude toward women. The attitude has certainly been influenced by the Church. He accepts the doctrine of woman's submission, obedience and service, for his ideal wife is patient Griselda. Yet, like the medieval preachers, he condemns women because they fail to live up to the obligations they incur when they marry. So, like the medieval preachers, the Merchant accepts the misogynic translation of Pauline epistles given by St. Jerome and his followers.

Both in theory and in practice the Bourgeoisie accepted Church doctrine on the position of women. But we are not to suppose that in real life medieval women as a result lead the life of Griselda, for the records show otherwise. Nor did medieval husbands generally look on their wives as deceitful shrews. Instead, in daily life
the position actually occupied by women was neither one of inferiority, nor one of superiority, but one of a kind of rough-and-ready equality. Let us look for a moment at a typical Bourgeois housewife and we shall see this equality in operation.

A good portrait of a town housewife belonging to the haute Bourgeoisie is found in a book which an elderly citizen, the Menagier de Paris, wrote about 1392-1394 for the instruction of his child wife.\textsuperscript{11} Its tone is tender, and the nature of its information is extremely practical. The Menagier explains to his young wife that he has undertaken the work in response to her request that he would teach her and because she would marry again after his death, in which case it would reflect on him if she were not wise in the care of house and husband. In the first section, the Menagier deals with his wife's moral and religious duties, department and duty to her husband, "because these two things, to wit the salvation of your soul and the comfort of your husband are the two things most chiefly necessary, therefore they are placed first." In the second and most interesting section, the Menagier deals with household management, the choice and treatment of servants, the best methods of airing,

mending, and cleaning dresses and furs, the best recipes for catching fleas and other "familiar beasts to man" and for keeping bedrooms free of mosquitoes and barns of rats, the art of gardening, and the choice and preparation of menus suitable for every sort of meal. The book closes with a third section, planned but not finished, which deals with the lady's amusements.

Thus, we see that the Bourgeoisie housewife's major concern was running her house and managing her servants. She was not suppressed and made a slave of, as is Griselda, but instead she was mistress of her home just as her husband was master of the business.

But the work of the Bourgeois housewife was by no means confined to running her house, for she had to be ready to take her husband's place if necessary. Thus, she commonly knew a great deal about his business. 12 Almost all guild regulations forbidding the employment of women made exception for the craftsman's wife and daughter, who were expected to help in the workshop and needed no formal apprenticeship. The training acquired enabled a widow to carry on her husband's trade.

The lower the social scale, however, the more laborious was the Bourgeois housewife's life, because she would commonly be obliged to help with her husband's craft

or to carry on some industry of her own, as well as to care for house and children. Few housewives below the ranks of the gentry and the richer Bourgeoisie were able to concern themselves solely with their homes, which were frequently supported by the earnings of the wife.\textsuperscript{13}

All things considered, the theory and the practice, the Merchant's attitude toward women is a highly exaggerated but not totally false reflection of the Bourgeois view of the fair sex. For despite the practical equality, the dogma of the subjection of women was imbedded in common law and in the marriage law, and woman was not legally a "free and lawful person." She had no lot or share in public rights and the higher levels of education were closed to her.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 407.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 432-433.
CONCLUSION

When Chauntecleer, that proud cock in Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale," crowed "Mulier: est hominis confusio," he expressed the basic assumption upon which all medieval theories about women rested. Yet, each class in feudal society had its own particular translation of Chauntecleer's remark; added together their translations did much to determine the actual position of women in the middle ages.

While the Church theologians translated the phrase somewhat euphemistically as "Woman may be man's ruin," the preaching ecclesiastics translated it literally. The theologians, basing their theories on the scriptural accounts of the Creation and the Fall, believed that since woman was created from man and for man, her position is properly one of subjection, obedience and service to man. Man in return is to love her as Christ loved his Church, but he is to love her prudently, as he might a sister. Woman, said the theologians, becomes man's ruin when this ideal order is turned upside down. And they then proceeded to point to the time honored example of Eve. Trying to save man from the ruin of woman, the flesh, the Church fathers counselled women on dress, speech and action and set up an elaborate doctrine which made sexual relations at best a venial sin. The Church's preachers, however,
taking their cue from St. Jerome and his followers, were not so euphemistic, and they not only pointed to women as inferior beings that must be led by the hand down the paths of righteousness, but they damned her as an untameable, perverse, malign creature wandering about the earth largely for the purpose of bringing man to ruin. Yet, despite these translations, the ecclesiastics worshipped the Virgin and, to a lesser extent, female saints patterned after her.

Both the euphemistic and literal translations of Chauntecleer's remarks find expression among the ecclesiastics in the Canterbury Tales. The ideal Parson, as we have seen, translates the phrase euphemistically as the Church theologians did. The Nun's Priest, on the other hand, laughingly gives the phrase an ambiguous but most likely literal interpretation, for whether he means he can find no harm in women in general or just in women divine, he tells a tale in which he indicates that it is really Pertelote who is responsible for bringing Chauntecleer into the clutches of the fox. For the proud cock is so enamored with his wife, and she allows him to be, that he defies "both sweven and dreem (VII, 3171)."

The Nun's Priest's moral seems to be that woman is man's ruin when man thinks she is his "joye and al his blis (VII, 3166)." The Monk, too, cleverly translates the phrase literally by showing examples of men who have been brought to ruin by women. First he tells of Adam's fall, attri-
buting it to Adam's "misgovernaunce" but expecting everyone to realize that it was really Eve's miscounselling of Adam that led to his fall. The monk then proceeds to make his point clear by relating the story of Sampson's ruination at the hands of Delilah. Even the Clerk, who is not strictly speaking an ecclesiastic, translates the phrase literally, for after he tells the tale of the ideal wife, patient Griselda, he adds that there are not many Griseldas around. Indeed, according to the Clerk's ironical comments, Chichevache, a cow which feeds on patient wives, is getting very little to eat. Thus, both the Church's euphemistic and literal translations of "Mulier est hominis confusio" finds expression in the Canterbury Tales. And it seems proper that the one ecclesiastical expression of the adoration of a saintly woman, the Virgin wife, St. Cecilia, comes not from a man but from a woman, the Second Nun.

Theoretically, the Aristocracy translated the phrase just as the courtly Chaunticleer did: "Woman is man's joy and all his bliss." To the Aristocracy, woman is a god-like creature to be worshipped, for from her comes all that is noble and good. But as the Knight indicates in his tale, the Aristocracy really only accepted its doctrine of courtly love in part. The men of the Aristocracy were willing to admit that women might inspire man to perform deeds of arms and even that she might be entertained with poems singing her praises, but the noblemen
were unwilling to submit themselves to their wives or have them having courtly affairs with other knights.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, the Squire reveals that like the Knight, he too has a chivalrous regard for women, for he sympathizes with the bird who has been deserted by her courtly falcon and portrays Canace as a lovely courtly lady. The pilgrim Chaucer, who, although a member of the Bourgeoisie, did associate with members of the court, also shows something of the influence of the chivalric conception of women, for he holds Dame Prudence and her wise counselling of her husband up for praise. The Franklin, another member of the Bourgeoisie who by his position moves in Aristocratic circles, reconciles the doctrines of the Church and the tenets of courtly love by telling a tale of the courtly marriage of Dorigen and Averagus. In the *Canterbury Tales*, then, courtly love finds its realistic rather than its idealistic expression, for all the pilgrims influenced by courtly love treat women sympathetically but not as a goddess, and all reject adultery.

The Bourgeoisie translated Chauntecleer's phrase literally and possibly even more vehemently than did the ecclesiastical preachers. The Bourgeoisie was positively influenced by Church doctrine and staunchly believed that all wives should be as submissive, humble, obedient and serviceable as Griselda. But when, not without poetic justice, men of the Bourgeoisie, like the Merchant, found themselves married to the Wife of Bath, they called in
courtly love to help them damn women as perverse, deceiving shrews.

The positive influence of Church doctrine and the negative influence of courtly love on the Bourgeoisie is everywhere evident among the middle class pilgrims. The Miller's alisoun is typical of the Bourgeoisie's deceiving courtly shrews. The Reeve portrays the Miller's wife and daughter as ignorant fools either easily deceived or inviting deception. According to the Man of Law, Constance, who as a woman is born to thraldom and penance, must put a little of her holiness aside in order to conceive a child (II, 708-714). And of course the Wife of Bath unwittingly-reveals herself to be the very creature about whom the preachers ranted and the Bourgeoisie complained. Like January, she hides behind the skirts of matrimony to commit lechery. She pushes other women aside so that she can get to the altar first, parades in finery, chides and scolds, and worst of all, makes her husbands submit themselves to her. The Physician too has been influenced by the Church, for his ideal is Virginia who chooses to die rather than to give up her maidenhood. The Shipman has been particularly influenced by the preachers who complained about women's love of adornment, for he portrays a woman who is so anxious for finery that she will gladly give her body to a Monk in exchange for money with which to buy clothes. And the Manciple, in his tale of the noble Phebus, whose wife takes a commoner for a
lover, makes the clearest expression of the Bourgeoisie's attitude toward deceiving wives:

Ther nys no difference, trewely, 
Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree, 
If of hir body dishonest she bee, 
And a povere wenche, oother than this—
If it so be they werke bothe amys—
But that the gentile, in estaat above,
She shal be cleped his lady, as in love;
And for that oother is a povere womman,
She shal be cleped his wenche or his lemman.
And, God it woot, myn owene deere brother.
Men leyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother.
(IX, 212-223)

In general, then, all classes of feudal society, despite their particular attitudes toward women, really accepted Church doctrine that outlined woman's position as one of subjection, obedience and constant attention to man. In real life, however, even though medieval woman was not a free being, she did not lead the life of Griselda. She may in theory have been subject to man, but in real life she managed to place herself practically on almost an equal footing with him.
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