TEXTUAL FIDELITY AND BETRAYAL:
CHAUCER'S DESERTED WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

In his recent biography of Chaucer, Donald Howard
rehearses a common generalization about the subject matter
of Chaucer's works:

...we know from his works that his great theme
was love, that women fascinated him....All kinds
of women fascinated him--vulnerable women, women
victimized, or untimely dead, or cast on their
own; admirable, heroic women; famous women of
history; enigmatic and complicated women, like
Criseyde and the Wife of Bath; wicked women; and
stereotypical women, too, sluts and frumps and
hussies--all get into his works. But the
vulnerable, lost, and victimized stand out:
everyone remembers and is amused by the sexpot
Alisoun in the Miller's Tale, but it is Criseyde
or Griselda that haunts us.¹

To write about love is to write about women, and the wide
range of female characters in Chaucer's works surely
indicates a theme of great importance. Are there
qualities that these fictional women share--to use
Howard's example, what is there about both Criseyde and
Griselda that fascinated Chaucer and continues to "haunt"
modern audiences? In my dissertation, I will examine one
of the specific female character types that Chaucer uses
throughout his poetic career, that of the "deserted
woman," a type that he was familiar with through his readings in Ovid, Vergil, and other medieval authors.

My definition of the classical deserted woman derives from the characteristics commonly found in Ovidian and Vergilian heroines. This woman is isolated, both physically and socially, has little experience with men, and thus has rather idealistic and misinformed notions about the subject of love. This ignorance leads to a role conflict between the Roman concepts of amor and pietas; the woman ignores pietas and chooses a disastrous love (sometimes consummated) that causes her own destruction (and sometimes the destruction of those she loves). The tone of the Ovidian epistolary genre, in which this character type is usually found, is elegiac, often anti-epic, for the woman’s story is told from a female point of view that is in direct opposition to the male, epic rhetorical stance.

Ovid, whose works were the most popular sourcebooks of classical mythology for the Middle Ages, provided the inspiration for many of Chaucer’s stories and allusions, and perhaps even for his narratorial stance. While there is debate over how much Chaucer relied on the French Ovide Moralisé, there is no question that Chaucer knew well Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Heroides. As early as the 1890s,
and through the 1930s, scholars discovered most of the sources of Chaucer's allusions and borrowings that indicate his acquaintance with Ovid and Vergil. Indeed, most of the scholarship on the legends themselves in the *Legend of Good Women* (a work which relies heavily on the "deserted woman" motif) is concerned with sources, in particular, the relationship of Ovid's *Heroïdes* to Chaucer's versions of the myths.

Source criticism before about 1960, however, was philological in scope and intent, searching (sometimes desperately) for the specific word or phrase that must have been Chaucer's source; sometimes, when Chaucer altered his source, scholars were at odds over the purpose of those alterations. Such scholarship tends, by its very nature, to limit or deny Chaucer's own creative purposes that motivated him to adapt and shape his materials in ways both traditional and unusual for a medieval literary artist. Yet, however limited, these studies laid the groundwork for the interpretive studies done in the last twenty-five years such as Robert O. Payne's *The Key of Remembrance* (1963), Robert Burlin's *Chaucerian Fiction* (1977), and Robert W. Frank's *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (1972). What these three studies (and other recent ones) have in common is an awareness of how Chaucer
used his sources in terms of content, narratorial stance, and narrative structure; they do not limit themselves to merely identifying those sources. Yet no critical study exists that deals with the pervasive Chaucerian motif of the classical "deserted woman."

In part, the reason for this lack may be that thematic studies by classical scholars of Ovid’s and Vergil’s use of this character type are virtually non-existent. Studies such as Howard Jacobson’s *Ovid’s Heroïdes*, Florence Verducci’s *Ovid’s Toyshop of the Heart*, and W. S. Anderson’s "The Heroïdes: The Heroine as Elegiac Figure" begin to fill the gap by discussing the *Heroïdes* as a genre (Ovid did claim to have invented the genre), and Brooks Otis’ *Ovid as an Epic Poet* provides useful material on the women in the *Metamorphoses*. However, none of these works specifically identifies the "deserted woman" as a motif, despite the obvious generic similarities between the female characters of the *Heroïdes* and the heroines of the central portion of the *Metamorphoses* (such as Medea, Scylla, Myrrha, Byblis, Canace). Furthermore, most scholarship on Vergil’s Dido ignores the possibility that she is a type linked thematically to the heroines in Ovid’s works. Many critics have discussed Dido’s letter in the *Heroïdes* as an
anti-epic, anti-Vergilian piece, but they do not place Vergil's Dido in an earlier literary tradition which Ovid might have used to "create" his motif. Although this motif is connected with the epistolary genre, it is not limited to that form. Other classical authors had used this character type, notably Catullus in his "Peleus and Thetis," poem 64, which contains the story of Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne; and Catullus' poem is but one possible source for the motif. Thus, classical scholarship lacks any basic description of the character type or its literary history from which Chaucer scholars could draw on in analyzing Chaucer's female characters.

Recent Chaucerian critics, such as Howard and the scholars discussed below, have commented on the similarities among Chaucer's female characters. In a recent article entitled "Chaucer's Victimized Women," Richard F. Green discusses Dido (in the House of Fame and the Legend of Good Women); Medea, Hypsipyle, Ariadne, and Phyllis of the Legend; Anelida; and Canacee's falcon of the Squire's Tale. Green focuses on Chaucer's relationship to his French sources, in particular chivalric literature, and he finds that, unlike French authors, Chaucer "recogni[z]ed] the double standard by which the sworn word between man and man might be regarded
as absolutely binding, whereas in affairs of the heart it became merely an expedient device to gain one's end."

Indeed, the importance of *trouthe* is found in many different types of literature of the Middle Ages, as J. Douglas Canfield's recent book, *Word as Bond in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Restoration*, has pointed out. Yet Green's conclusions privilege medieval historical concerns over medieval literary representations of *trouthe* in love, despite his references to Ovid's *Heroides*, and his conclusions indicate his conflation of real medieval women and literary characters. While Chaucer's characters--male and female--have been celebrated for their "realism," ultimately they are fictional constructs, the creations of a literary artist who shapes and molds experience (and other literature) into his poetry. Thus, contemporary social, political, and religious views inform an author's work--but so do the thematic conventions of other literature. Examining the literary qualities of a particular character, then, is as important as an examination of the historical scene.

The "deserted woman" especially is a literary figure, the product of several different literary and social cultures. The "meaning" or "value" of the deserted woman character has been recast as each new culture--Greek,
Roman, and Medieval--has invested this character with its own particular views. Every time an author mentions the name of Dido, to cite the most famous example of a deserted woman, he is deliberately calling to the audience's mind a host of feelings and associations based on textual traditions, encompassing both historical and fictional works. Allusions to a previous work constantly remind the readers of the original source and the intertextual relationship between the these texts.

Thus critics who focus on social and political concerns often ignore the literary or intertextual nature of the *deserta femina* characters. For example, Ann McMillan, in the introduction to her translation of the *Legend of Good Women*, sees these characters as products of a male value system wherein feminine chastity is considered the primary virtue: "By accepting what men define as female virtue, Chaucer's 'good woman' attains her only available moral stature--and her only superiority to men." Like Green, she sees these women as victimized by a patriarchal society; unlike Green, she locates the origins of these anti-feminist attitudes within the clerks' catalogue tradition (such as Jerome's and Boccaccio's lists of famous women). McMillan, however, completely ignores the interpretive concerns and the
literary sources that are explicitly mentioned by the narrator in the prologue; the heroines of the legends are, in some measure, texts, characters who can be found in "old stories," and thus they are not merely representations of victims of medieval patriarchal attitudes.

Another recent book, Lawrence Lipking's *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*, has attempted to define and classify the various types of the abandoned women found in literatures as diverse as Russian and Japanese, but his primary focus is on English literature, and, inevitably, such a broad spectrum results in some overlooked subtleties. Lipking calls this character a "figure"—a term he feels will suggest "that abandoned women exist within poetry and also sometimes outside it."* His definition matches mine in some ways: the abandoned woman is "physically deserted by a lover and spiritually outside the law." Yet Lipking claims that desertion by the male automatically places a female outside the law, and he tends to overlook the fact that the woman is to a certain extent responsible for her fate. Furthermore, Lipking makes dangerous assumptions about abandoned women as representations of the poets who write their stories. Such biographical connections are often hard to prove, as
in the case of Catullus, a Roman poet about whom we have few facts, but Lipking reads poem 64 as a personal statement of rejection and despair:

The most plausible reading concludes that the poet himself identifies with Ariadne (perhaps associating Lesbia with Theseus) and contrasts his own unhappiness ironically with the ideal union of the mythical happy pair [of Peleus and Thetis].

While many of Catullus’ poems seem to contain autobiographical information because of the first-person narrator, the problem of how much is real and how much is fictional will not be resolved without direct proof of historical fact. Yet Lipking insists on reading biography into many of the poets he discusses. Ultimately, however, the most important flaw in his book is that Lipking rarely mentions Chaucer or the literature of the Middle Ages, material that would significantly add to and alter his argument.

Thus, despite the recent critical attention paid to either the representations of women in Chaucer or the female characters found in other medieval works, there is a need to study the classical pattern of the deserted woman and how that pattern functions as a narrative element in Chaucer’s works. The deserted woman appears in many ways: in brief allusions and exempla; as a character drawn directly from classical stories (the heroines of the
Legend) or as a character who resembles those classical heroines (Anelida); or as a character for whom the conventions are significantly altered (Constance or Troilus and Criseyde). What all of these instances have in common is that these characters appear in works in which the first-person narrator intrudes on his story in order to discuss literary issues. The Chaucerian narrator is always painfully self-conscious that he is writing, and he makes his audience share this consciousness by calling attention to the fact and process of story-telling. Indeed, as I argue, the deserted woman motif becomes a metanarrative device, a focal point for the discussion of the tensions created by the conflicting demands of "experience" and "authority," terms that Robert Burlin has shown to be important in Chaucer’s works, for all of his works depend structurally on this opposition.¹° This opposition occurs within the narrative and in the narrator’s intrusions. Ultimately, the problem is how much one should trust experience or authority, in whatever form these concepts take shape, and Chaucer always forces us to consider the problem from multiple, often conflicting perspectives. The deserted woman character is one means by which Chaucer can illustrate how authority— in this case, the classical texts which are the sources
for the *deserta femina*—may present differing points of view that are difficult to reconcile into one narrative or one consistent perspective. On the narrative level, the deserted woman must choose between *amor* and *pietas*, a conflict that often mirrors the narrator’s inability to privilege one source or perspective over another. This character also highlights the issue of interpretation, for the deserted woman often has not been able to understand her beloved’s words and actions, much like readers who misinterpret literary works because their devotion to one particular point of view blinds them.

There are four sections in this dissertation. Section 1 is a study of the classical sources of the deserted woman motif in order to show that Ovid and Vergil are the primary sources of the motif as Chaucer knew it. Ovid’s *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* illustrate the basic traits of the pattern, but Ovid was manipulating the conventions of Roman elegiac poetry. Next, I briefly trace the major developments in the literary history of Dido, the best known deserted woman and the one used most extensively by Chaucer. Because Dido appears both in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Ovid’s *Heroides*, we can examine how each author contributed to the medieval (and thus Chaucer’s) conception of this heroine.
Section 2 examines the appearance of the deserted woman motif as it relates to the issue of textual authority. In Book 1 of the *House of Fame*, Chaucer uses two versions of the story of Dido and Aeneas as a vehicle to discuss the problems of conflicting textual authorities: what is a poet to do when different authors each claim to be relating the truth? In the *Legend of Good Women*, the deserted woman pattern appears in the heroines of the individual legends. Here, the focus is on an author's relationship with his audience, for the narrator must choose between being faithful to his textual sources and following the God of Love and Alcestis's orders which result in the distortion of the classical texts. Readers have a certain type of faith in textual authorities, and the narrator of the *Legend* deliberately violates that trust by overtly manipulating his sources in order to show how authors (as readers) can misinterpret texts because of their own biases.

Section 3 focuses on variations in the motif. First, the Man of Law openly challenges "Chaucer" by attacking the types of female characters described in the *Legend*. The Man of Law's Constance, however, is created to undermine Chaucer's classical "good women"; she is a Christian saint who displays the values of an ethical
system that the Man of Law feels is superior to pagan morality--thus the Man of Law hopes he will "outdo" Chaucer's previous work by promoting "proper" moral standards. Chaucer allows the Man of Law to simple-mindedly criticize and compete with the Legend in order to show how narrow-minded and self-interested readers can misread an author's intentions. Another variation on the deserted woman motif is Dorigen of the Franklin's Tale, who mistakenly casts herself in the role of a deserted woman by uttering a lament filled with exempla about such women, all inappropriately applied to herself. In Anelida and Arcite, Anelida's lament, like Dorigen's, provides an opportunity for the narrator to focus on the issues of truth and interpretation.

Finally, Section 4 focuses on Troilus and Criseyde, a story of love and betrayal, a poem which uses the deserted woman motif in complex and highly creative ways. Although Criseyde, in a reversal of the traditional literary male-female roles, does the deserting, both she and Troilus are characterized according to the deserted woman conventions in the first three books. In Book 5, Troilus behaves according to the pattern, thus completing the role reversals hinted at earlier.

Thus Chaucer uses the deserted woman motif, along
with a first-person, intrusive narrator, in order to examine the complexities of experience and authority, of truth and betrayal, of interpretation and reading. The self-conscious Chaucerian narrator can focus on such matters in part because these conflicts are inherent within the *deserta femina* narratives used in Chaucer's works. A reader as well as a writer, Chaucer's narrator makes us aware of the poet's relationship with his textual sources and with his audience who may misinterpret the poet's work. Chaucer suggests that fidelity--to one's lover or to one's text--is as important for the deserted woman as it is for a narrator, and that betrayal is closely associated with misinterpretation.
1. Donald Howard, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1987), p. 36. Although Howard makes this statement in order to support his unproven claim that Chaucer's "fascination" with women is the result of his early experiences with women, the point that Chaucer was indeed fascinated by these character types cannot be disputed.

2. *Amor* is generally translated as "love," although in many stories this love is of a physical, rather than spiritual, nature. *Pietas* is defined as "devotion and duty to one's gods, state, and family"—an important virtue in a patriarchal society.

    Unless otherwise noted, the translations of the Latin quotations cited throughout this dissertation are my own.

3. See Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling* as well as older studies such as Gilbert Highet's *The Classical Tradition*.


9. Lipking, p. 29.

10. Robert Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), p. 7. The complex process by which experience becomes authority begins with an author putting his observations of life into a verbal form, "which by virtue of a reverence accorded the written word, acquires an authenticity or authoritativeness" (p. 5). But the relationship is not one-sided because these authorities
influence the way one perceives experience—a person compares and contrasts his own experiences with what the authorities indicate, and his behavior is directed by reference to those authorities.
SECTION 1: Backgrounds

Chapter I

Inventing the Convention: Ovid's *Heroides*

and *Metamorphoses*

It is a scholarly commonplace to say that Chaucer greatly admired Ovid and that he borrowed more from the classical author than mythological stories and characters. Chaucer, like many other medieval poets, found Ovid's "self-conscious, obtrusive narrator, who refuses to be a clear medium for the poem he recites" an intriguing model. This self-conscious narrator uses a variety of techniques to call attention to issues of narrativity: devices such as ecphrasis (description of an art object within a narrative framework), the use of narrative digressions, allusions to stories from the past, the literary "contest" with previous authors through deliberate allusion, and the opposition of values found both within a story and between genres. Chaucer, however, did not accept without question the literary *auctoritas* of the best known of the classical love poets; whenever
Chaucer uses the conventions he inherited from Ovid, he does so in order to make a point of his own about narratives, narrators, and audiences. While many scholars have studied Chaucer's use of the literary conventions of his day, few have studied how Ovid himself makes use of his literary antecedents to create conventional motifs. One such motif is the character type of the *deserta femina*, the deserted woman, which can be found in the *Heroïdes* and the *Metamorphoseis*.

Ovid's *Heroïdes* is a collection of twenty-one love letters, in elegiac couplets, purportedly written by eighteen female characters from Greek and Roman mythology; in three cases, the male lovers respond. These epistles are supposedly written at the most appropriate and dramatic moment within the woman's love affair, usually after the woman has been deserted by her lover. Ovid claims to have originated this genre: *ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus* ("he created this work, unknown to others"; *Ars Amatoria* 3.346). While there are literary precedents for the genre--most notably Propertius 4.3, a letter from a Roman *matrona* Arethusa to her husband away on military service, and Catullus 64, an epyllion about the wedding of Peleus and Thetis with its inset piece about Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus--Ovid seems to have
been the first to produce a collection of such letters. 3

Classical scholars, however, have traditionally taken
a negative view of the Heroides. For example, L. P.
Wilkinson claims that the "choice of the epistolary form
for what are really tragic soliloquies was not entirely
happy." 4 He complains that the letters are too long, that
they display only a trace of realism, and that "they are a
display of virtuosity designed to entertain" rather than
move the audience. 5 Brooks Otis speaks of their "chief
fault" being "their empty emotionalism: most of the
heroines have really nothing to write about but their
loves, and their loves are after all remarkably similar." 6
More recently (and less harshly than others) Warren
Ginsberg has called the letters

Ovid's most sustained effort at character-
drawing. Despite the varying dispositions of
the women, whose monologues sometimes reveal the
deeper workings of their souls, nothing really
allows Penelope to be more than the picture of
faithfulness.... There is no interaction, no
chance for development or change; each woman is
captured in the same moment of isolation.
Although their reactions differ, the cause for
each remains the same: unable to speak to anyone
but themselves, their characters are static,
limited by the confines of the letter itself.
They are twenty solitary voices, each crying in
her own wilderness. 7

Yet Ginsberg does not recognize that, structurally within
the Heroides, each letter within the collection mirrors
the status of the woman who writes it: both the letter and
the woman are isolated, removed from the others, despite the remarkable similarities within the group as a whole.

Indeed, as Barsby and others have pointed out, there cannot be a genre without a standard language and stock themes, and the *Heroïdes* contains both. The language is artificial and elevated, similar to the diction found in the *suasoriae*, the Latin school exercises that required students to create speeches appropriate to a mythological or historical figure at some particular moment of conflict. While the diction in each letter of the *Heroïdes* is similar, it is through the repetition and variation of stock motifs that this epistolary collection achieves unity. Most of these conventions are derived directly from elegiac poetry, especially from the Greek (such as Sappho), Hellenistic (Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes), and Roman neoteric and Augustan poets (Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid himself). As Brooks Otis has noted, examples of such conventions in elegiac love poetry include

the lover’s all-night vigil before the lady’s closed door; his jealousy of the lady’s husband or present patron and his suffering from the close supervision of her *custos* or guardian slave; his occasional happy fulfillment and his more frequent deprivation; the cynical crone who wants the lady (her protégée) to jilt the poor poet and take up with a self-made soldier or politician; the lady’s absence on a trip overseas or across the mountains or to the
beach; the lorn lover inscribing her name on the
trees or repeating it to the birds; her singed
coiffure, her dangerous attempts at abortion;
her occasional suffering (hair-tearing and face-
scratching) at her jealous lover's hands."

Such plot elements appear in the *Heroides*, often as the
woman's recollections of the lover's past behavior
(designed to show how blissful her life used to be) or in
her description of her own present situation (the distress
caused by separation from the beloved). But in the
*Heroides*, the females, not their male-poet-lovers, speak
(a shift in issues as well as in narratorial perspective),
and their chief complaints involve the males' infidelity
and broken promises. Furthermore, Ovid makes mythological
characters behave in the roles of elegiac lovers, making
them less heroic and more human; in contrast, poets such
as Propertius and Tibullus use examples drawn from
mythology as *exempla* to increase the importance of their
human everyday trials and tribulations."

Such a
deflation in the stature of the gods and heroes can be
found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and is considered one of the
traits of Hellenistic neoteric poetry in general." Thus,
Ovid's combination of amatory elegy and epic/mythology
into the epistolary form is part of his "originality": as
Jacobson points out, "it will be hard to deny that in much
of this [combining of styles and genres] Ovid was giving
new shape and direction to the letter-form, perhaps even new life."" Previously Ovid had found that parodying the conventions of elegiac lovers in his Amores and Ars Amatoria was his means of achieving originality; once again, in the Heroides, he makes the conventions work for an original purpose, adapting them to suit his own needs.

In fact, Ovid often calls attention to the conventions by parodying them in order to show how he differs; for example, in the Amores, Ovid establishes himself as a love-poet in a sophisticated metrical joke:

\begin{quote}
Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam edere, materia conveniente modis. 
par erat inferior versus--risisse Cupido dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.
\end{quote}

["I was preparing to sing forth arms and violent wars in heavy numbers, with material appropriate to the measure. The verse was equal to the one below it--but it is said that Cupid had laughed and had stolen away one foot."], (Amores 1.1-4)

Ovid blames Cupid for making the epic meter (dactylic hexameter) into elegiac verse by "stealing" the last foot of the second line of the couplet, thus forming a pentameter line and the elegiac meter. But more importantly, Ovid renounces epic material (weapons and war) by claiming the god of love as his "muse."

Deliberately echoing the first line of Vergil's Aeneid (arma virumque cano, "I sing of arms and the man"), Ovid connects meter, genre, and subject matter to show how
different he is when compared to Vergil—love is incompatible with war, in genre as in spirit. Ovid cultivates this "anti-epic" tone in his amatory works and in the *Metamorphoses*, striving to mock the Augustan values openly promoted by Vergil.

Because Ovid was dealing with conventions, he made free use of many sources; besides Hellenistic and neoteric poetry, he was influenced by Euripidean tragedy (most notably for his Medea letter), Roman comedy, and the great epics of Homer and Vergil. Many of his sources are no longer extant or exist only in fragmentary form, so it should come as no surprise that most critics interested in source studies eagerly make comparisons between Catullus's Ariadne (in poem 64) and Ovid's Ariadne (*Heroides* 10).

Yet, while most classical scholars see the main critical issue of Catullus' poem to be the structural and thematic unity of the poem—the relationship of the frame tale to the inset piece—those who study the relationship between Catullus's and Ovid's poems and the two different characterizations of Ariadne tend to ignore the fact that Catullus' inset story of Ariadne comments directly on the frame tale of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. The unity of the poem can be found by examining the three epic pairs—Peleus and Thetis, Theseus and Ariadne, Achilles
and Polyxena—and the way passion conflicts with epic ideals. As we shall see later, Ovid exploits both the techniques and motifs of this poem.

Structurally, Catullus' poem moves rapidly from scene to scene, from historical moment to historical moment. The poem opens with the voyage of the Argo, focusing on the novelty of the event (it is the first ship) and the amazement of the Nereids. It is in this magical scene that Peleus, incensus amore ("burning with love"; 64.19), passionately falls in love with Thetis. Jupiter himself blesses their marriage, thereby assuring that the union will be a happy one. Next the human wedding guests arrive, deserting the countryside, neglecting the fields, in order to attend (deseritur Cieros, linguunt Pthiotica Tempe ["Cieros is deserted--they leave behind Pthiotican Tempe"; line 35] and desertis aratrie ["with the plowed fields deserted"; line 42]); this abandonment of everyday work suggests a society that is eager to indulge itself, choosing pleasure and passion over reason and labor. These mortals are entertained at the feast by the description of the embroidery on the quilt of the marriage bed; it depicts the desertion of Ariadne by Theseus, the death of Aegeus, and the arrival of Bacchus and his followers. After this account of epic deeds
(heroum...virtutes, "the virtuous deeds of heroes"; 64.51), the mortals depart and the immortals appear. All of the gods attend except Apollo and Diana, whose absence mars the overall happiness of the event. And the presence of Prometheus with his wounds still showing (64.295) also casts a shadow on the marriage, a union considered by most ancients as the ideal.** Moreover, the description of the quilt, a distressing omen for a marriage bed, is paralleled by the divine entertainment, the song of the Fates. In this wedding hymn, the three sisters foretell the birth of a son who will be highly destructive, a foreboding result of a supposedly happy marriage. Thus, the union of Peleus and Thetis, despite the divine blessing, is not perfect, nor is it blissful.

Certainly the relationship between Ariadne and Theseus is anything but blissful. The technique of describing a work of art in order to embed a narrative that is to be compared and contrasted with the main narrative (a device known as ecphrasis) is common in Hellenistic poetry,*** and Catullus uses this device not to show the direct opposite of the union of Peleus and Thetis, but to provide another example of passion. Ariadne acts out of passion (cupido lumine, line 86) for Theseus, but there is no evidence that Theseus returns her
love in the same measure—similarly Thetis is not described as returning Peleus’s passion until late in the poem, during the song of the Fates. Although we hear only one side of the story, that of Ariadne, we see that both Ariadne and Theseus have character flaws. To be sure, Theseus is a hero (killing the Minotaur is no small feat, even with Ariadne’s help) whatever his negative qualities may be. Yet Theseus’s fault lies in his forgetfulness—immemor is used to describe him four times (lines 58, 123, 135, 248). He is also portrayed as being ferox (73-5, 246-8), which means more than “courageous” or “warlike”—it can apply to people who are arrogant, insensitive, and ruthless. Neither of these traits is completely evil in itself; however, Theseus’ lack of memory leads him to commit an act with potentially disastrous results—deserting Ariadne, alone and defenseless—and to cause indirectly the death of his own father, Aegeus. Theseus initially acted out of pietas, the desire to save Athens from the Cretans, but in order to fulfill his mission he abuses an innocent woman, breaking his promises to her so that he can hurry home. Thus, in Catullus’ poem, Theseus’ heroism and pietas are called into question because of the negative consequences of his having acted in accordance with those epic ideals.
Ariadne's fault lies in her passion, amor, that causes this naive girl to forget her pietas. For love, she allows Theseus to destroy the Minotaur, her half-brother, her home, and her country. Ariadne burns with passion (an elegiac love convention):

quam cuncto concepit corpore flammam funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis.

["Then she received the flame deeply in all her body, and all of her burned within the deepest part of her bone marrow."] (64.92-3)²³

Ariadne was first struck by the physical strength of Theseus: he is ferox as befits a hero and is compared to an indomitus turbo ("an unrestrained whirlwind") that upends sturdy trees. In contrast, Ariadne herself is young, passive, and innocent (e.g., castus, "pure," in line 87), qualities that make her betrayal by Theseus all the more cruel and devastating. The debasing physical nature of her love is further reinforced in her appeal to Theseus: if she cannot be married to him, she would be content to be his slave, to bathe his feet and turn back his bedcovers (64.161-3). As a slave, she can still be close to him, even if he does not reward her for her bravery.

Because she has committed treason, she becomes an outcast and must flee with Theseus, totally dependent on him. Yet when she wakes up on Dia to see his ship sailing
away, she is forced to realize the consequences of her actions. Ariadne, in a futile effort to reach Theseus, stands waist-deep in the sea while she calls after him. Her first reaction is grief, followed immediately by anger. She calls him perfidus (*false* or *dishonest*; 64.132, 133, 174), immemor, and immiteus (*harsh*; 64.138). Furthermore, she questions the genus (*race* or *ancestry*) of Theseus by doubting the humanity of his parents—he must have been born of a rock or the foaming and dangerous waters of Syrtis, Scylla, and Carbdis (64.154-6). Someone who was human would not be so cruel and hard-hearted that he would forsake a lover, especially one he has promised to care for (*blanda promissa...uoce*, "having promised in a flattering voice"; 64.139-40). These hazardous waters are connected to the elegiac sea-love metaphor,*" for Ariadne, like most other deserted women considering the unfaithfulness of their lovers, holds Theseus up as the epitome of the dangers and harshness of love. Her anger culminates in a curse in which she asks for the divine aid of Jupiter and the Eumenides (64.171, 193) to cause Theseus to forget about someone he truly loves, just as he was forgetful of her, to make his punishment fit his crime.

Her prayers are answered; in fact, she is rewarded
for her faithfulness in love by being rescued by Bacchus, thereby raising her stature—she will become immortal. The god, like Peleus and Ariadne, is also a victim of love at first sight, descending on the island incensus amore ("burning with love"; 64.253). Again, there is no mention of passion being returned by the object of that burning love (as was the case with Thetis and Theseus). The description of Bacchus and his followers suggests not a happy marriage, but the wild, passionate rites of the Dionysian cult, the divine inspiration of the Bacchantes that Euripides described in his play. When first deserted, Ariadne had been compared to a marble Bacchant (64.61), and now that simile seems to have been prophetic. Because this rescue scene ends with the arrival of the god, the reader is unsure of the outcome of this union. The uneasiness and tension between heroic values and passionate love that were suggested by the opening frame of Peleus' and Thetis' wedding are reinforced by the scenes on the quilt—surely we are meant to question the nature of Theseus's heroum virtutes that allow him (that even excuse and even encourage him) to treat Ariadne so badly.

The final epic pair of Catullus' poem, Achilles and Polyxena, also displays the tragic results of passion.
Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, is the central figure of the Fates' wedding song, but he too is presented ambivalently. He is *expers terroris* (64.338), which can mean "lacking in fear" or "lacking in the quality that causes fear," and both aspects are displayed in his character. Achilles is a hero, a warrior none will face in the battle lines at Troy, as well as a skillful hunter who is as swift as a deer. Other proofs of Achilles' greatness are the mourning mothers of the Trojans he has slain, the Scamander overflowing with blood and corpses, and the death of Polyxena. Polyxena, the virgin daughter of Priam, was sacrificed (as *victima* suggests) on the grave of Achilles, the *praeda* ("the spoils of war") for the dead hero. Only her death is described, but it is a horrifying description, focusing on the white limbs of the shattered virgin who falls headless on the burial mound. She can be considered the bride of Achilles; certainly she is the object of his passion, passion manifested in the form of violence. Thus the greatest of heroes in the Trojan war is shown to be a brutal slayer of men and women, someone who does not value the lives of others.

All of the men are heroes, displaying masculinity in its most extreme form, and their *magnae virtutes* ("great
strengths") are both listed and implied within the poem. Ariadne and Polyxena, showing virginity and thus an extreme form of femininity, both suffer as a direct result of these deeds, while Thetis' suffering over the death of her son is implied by the song of the Fates. Indeed, Thetis is the only female example of happiness, however slightly tarnished, in the poem. For both Ariadne and Polyxena there is no hope for the domestic/wedded bliss of Thetis: Polyxena's life is completely destroyed and Ariadne is temporarily devastated by her abandonment (remember that Ariadne's wish for a happy home was part of her dream of a life with Theseus).

Thus the inset piece describing the quilt reinforces the poem's focus on the disastrous results of excessive passion. Epic ideals, with the emphasis on male military prowess, clash with the values of elegiac-love poetry: epic heroes stand independent of the females they receive help from in order to complete their missions. Catullus uses the description of the quilt--a work of art--to comment on the nature of passion, whether it be the passion of Peleus, Thetis, and their son Achilles or his own personal experience. The quilt also allows Catullus to treat several "historical" periods at once: the past of Theseus and Ariadne, the present of Peleus and Thetis, and
the future of Achilles, all set within the larger framework of his own present as depicted in the epilogue. Such layering of time suggests that the past can (and should) be used as an example for the present.

In the *Heroides*, the women use the past as proof that the men have betrayed them, that the promise of a man means nothing. They speak of a future alone and outcast from their families and homes. The letters show the women enduring the most tragic moments of their lives—the time when they discover their betrayals. Thus the women must confront their own feelings, possibly even their own guilt, as they curse their lovers for infidelity. Their experience is translated directly into literature, for the letters highlight the women's present isolation even as that isolation is being described; as Jacobson has pointed out, "physical states or activities mirror psychological ones" in these letters.* The letters create the illusion that the beloved is present* at the time when the beloved's absence is most deeply felt. Thus the static quality (that is, the lack of narrative plot/action)—which bothers so many critics—is the result of the separation, isolation, and emotional paralysis felt by the letter-writer. Ovid does not need to tell a story; the mythological characters he uses were well-known to his
audience, allowing him to focus on the emotions of the characters.

For example, Ovid's Ariadne begins with a curse: even wild beasts are more gentle than Theseus (lines 1-2). She speaks of his treachery (male prodidit "he betrayed badly"; 5) and facinus...insidiae "a crime he had plotted for"; 6) before she recounts the moment she discovered Theseus has left her. This Ariadne, like Catullus' heroine, calls into question the ancestry of the hero (131-2) and claims that he is as hard as rock (109-10). She spends very little time remembering how Theseus came to Crete; whereas Catullus' Ariadne emphasizes Theseus' piety that brought him to fight the Minotaur, Ovid's Ariadne plays down any honorable intentions on his part. Ariadne concentrates instead on the brutal slaying of her brother (101-6) in order to emphasize the enormity of her actions for Theseus' sake. For this reason, she has become an exile:

> ut pater et tellus iusto regnata parenti prodita sunt facto, nomina caro, meo.

> ["With the result that my father and the land ruled by a just parent--dear names--have been betrayed by my action"] (69-70)

Her extreme love for Theseus has driven her to commit the worst crime possible: treason against her father and her homeland. Although Jacobson maintains that these lines
are indications of Ariadne’s guilt. Ariadne still uses this ultimate sacrifice for love as proof that Theseus owes her some consideration (ll. 141-4). However, by the end of the letter she has come to terms with her actions and seems to acknowledge her abandonment as punishment for that crime, even as she tries to induce guilt in the man who, by nature, has none.

Ovid’s Ariadne, according to Jacobson, is "both actress and director"—she "plays the abandoned heroine (emphasis his)." He cites the numerous occasions on which Ariadne strikes a dramatic pose in order to increase the pathos of her situation. But she is quite conscious of the need to exaggerate her despair in order to move her audience: Theseus was not moved by her love, so he would not be moved easily by her tears alone. Thus Ariadne repeatedly emphasizes the possibility of her death, caused by either wild animals or strange men; the ultimate cause of her death, however, will be her abandonment by Theseus. Focusing on this most extreme result of an abandonment is an argument used by many women in this situation; indeed, some threaten to take their own lives, and some do so.

Thus, as Leach has pointed out, Catullus’ Ariadne is the "archetypal image of a convention" and Ovid’s "parody...is a caricature of the convention." All of
the letters in the Heroïdes show this conventionalizing of elegiac motifs within a mythological narrative framework. Moreover, Ovid also used this type of language and plot situation in the Metamorphoses; Ovidian scholars have long noted the similarities between this poem and the Heroïdes. Although the ostensible purpose of the work is to tell of mythological changes, the complex arrangement of the stories suggests not one long epic but a series of epyllia. One major block of stories, Books 6 through 11, treats the themes of love and passion; Otis titles this section the "pathos of love." The disastrous loves illustrated by the stories of Philomela and Procne, Medea, Scylla, Byblis, and Myrrha show that love is more properly defined as lust, and this passion causes destruction, usually death or metamorphosis.

The story of Scylla, the shortest of these episodes, is a good example of the way in which the epyllion form mixes with the elegiac tone and with mythological exempla. We first see Scylla, a young girl, playing a childish game of throwing pebbles into a well just to hear the sound they make when they hit (8.17-8). She is totally without guidance; she has no companion of her own age, nor does she have a mother or nurse to counsel her. Physically and socially isolated, Scylla speaks only to herself and,
after she has betrayed her father, to Minos. Thus her love comes totally from within herself, a delusion which she tries to make reality. Scylla falls in love with Minos because he is a noble king, he is strong and handsome, and he has dazzling weaponry; all are external or physical qualities. What she desires most from him is physical: she wishes to be the reins of his horse’s bridle so that she may be held by him (8.36-7). Minos has given her no indication that he even knows of her existence, a fact that emphasizes Scylla’s isolation and delusions. Furthermore, she persuades herself to commit the impiety of cutting off her father’s lock of hair in order to prove her love for Minos, thereby destroying her father and city—and she does so under the cover of night (tenebrisque audacia crevit, "and her boldness grew with the shades"; 8.82), as if still somewhat unconvinced that what she does is right. Otis notes that this "autosuasoria" is much like those found in the 

Thus amor comes in opposition to pietas, defined simply as duty to the gods, country, and family. Because she allows her amor to overcome her pietas, Scylla brings on her own destruction—Minos’ rejection of her. Scylla, when she hands the lock of hair to Minos, mentions all three aspects of pietas:
Suasit amor facinus! proles ego regia Nisi Scylla tibi trad o patrisque meosque penates.

["Love persuades the crime! I, the royal offspring of Nisus, Scylla, hand over to you my fatherland and my household gods."] (8.90-1)

With this act of impiety, Scylla becomes even more isolated; the physical separation from her family and city, as well as from her imagined lover, is now matched by her emotional separation from all three. As Minos sails away, Scylla curses herself, slanders Minos—referring to his wife’s shameful deeds—and jumps in the water to follow him. She asks that her father and her destroyed city punish her. She does not call for any divine help—for the most part, the gods do not play an important role in this section of the Metamorphoses. Scylla does express her anger for Minos: she addresses him as praelatus ("betrayer," twice in 8.109), oblitus ("forgetful," 8.140), immitus ("harsh," 8.110), and ingratus ("ungrateful," 8.119, 135). With these words, she reinforces the difference between her imagined love and the reality of her actions; only in her dreams does Minos reward her.3 Her act of impiety—the fulfillment of her own desires—necessitates the metamorphosis: both Scylla and Nisus become birds, forever enemies.

The story of Scylla illustrates a typically Ovidian role conflict, a conflict between amor and pietas. Otis
notes that the duel between *amor* and *pudor*, begun by Medea in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*, occurs in the stories of Scylla, Byblis, Myrrha, and Atalanta, and it is a tension that Anderson has noted in the *Heroïdes*.

"Pudor, defined broadly as a sense of modesty, decency, and propriety, would be a necessary trait for anyone, male or female, who wished to be pious. Thus, the concept of *pietas* contains within it the concept of *pudor*, and the tension is perhaps greater and the implications more devastating than Otis and Anderson suggest. Lack of *pudor*, however, is not as heinous a crime as a lack of *pietas*, and committing such a crime against the social and religious structure of one's state necessarily involves greater punishment. The women who choose to follow *amor* and neglect *pietas* therefore suffer abandonment—and perhaps death—for having placed themselves beyond that social structure.

Medea’s story also shifts our attention on the *libido* as motivation from a male point of view (illustrated by the Tereus, Philomela, and Procris story in Book 6) to a female point of view: according to Otis, "Ovid prepares the reader for later instances of female *libido* triumphant over all ordinary morality and custom." The story of Scylla is one of those instances. This role conflict is also found in the *Heroïdes*: Otis remarks that the heroines
of the Heroïdes are all "overmastered by love rather than lovers" and that "amor is an external, impersonal force (a kind of disease) that prostrates its victim." Being in love with the concept of love creates an inability to deal with social reality (in the form of the patriarchal concept of pietas) and thus causes destruction for these females in both the Heroïdes and the Metamorphoses.

Thus, Ovid's works provide us with the conventions, the essential characteristics, of what I shall call the deserta femina pattern. The first characteristic is a female point of view, focusing on issues that seem antithetical to epic (and male) matters. Second, the deserted woman is caught in a conflict between amor and pietas; her lust drives her to commit crimes against her family and state. In choosing to do so, she causes her own destruction in the form of abandonment by her lover, becoming even more alone than she was before. Before she falls in love, the deserta femina is isolated, physically, socially, and emotionally, and thus she has had little experience with men. She falls in love with a stranger, or persuades herself that she is in love with him, and thus she loves a man who later does not live up to her expectations of eternal love and happiness. These patterns are not new to Ovid; he "invented" the deserta
femina as a character type only in the sense that he brought together many of the literary conventions of his day. By mixing elegiac love-poetry motifs with mythological narratives in the neoteric tradition--that is, by making those heroines more "human"--and by letting these women speak for themselves in the Heroides, Ovid found another way that his anti-epic spirit, professed in the opening of the Amores, could speak. And the pattern that he helped to formulate greatly influenced the medieval conception and purpose of such an abandoned woman.

2. Propertius 4.3 unfortunately falls outside the scope of this chapter. While critics may argue over the importance of the poem as a literary precedent for the *Heroides*, it is clear that the works of Propertius did not greatly influence medieval literature for several reasons: the earliest manuscript (not a very reliable text) dates from c. 1200, very late compared to the long history of Vergil's texts, and the poems were not used as school texts. Certain features—besides the epistolary form—do place this letter from the Roman matrona to her absent soldier-husband within the elegiac genre exploited by Ovid for the *Heroides*. Arethusa weeps over her letter (lacrimis, "tears"; line 4) and reminds Lycotas of his marriage vows (marita fides; l. 11) with which he conquered her innocence. She desires and achieves physical closeness by kissing the weapons he left behind (l. 30) and by spinning robes for him to wear (ll. 33-4; the text cited is that of E. A. Barber in the Oxford Classical Text series [Oxford, 1960]). W. S. Anderson, who does consider this poem a prototype for Ovid's letters, comments on the tone and the possible role model for this poem in claiming that it expresses "not the stereotyped Euripidean female fury but the softer sentiments of unhappy but still active love" (p. 67; "The *Heroides*: The Heroine as Elegiac Figure" in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. Binns [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973]). Maria Wyke aligns this poem with others in Book 4 which contain the "unresolved conflict between the poetics of Roma and amor" (p. 155; "The Elegiac Woman at Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 213, n.s. 33(1987): 153-78); furthermore, Wyke comments on the "topography of epic"—that is, that men are out on the battlefield while women are inside the city (pp. 158-9) so that domestic concerns clash with military, epic values. Ultimately, Arethusa rejects those values which have separated her from her husband-lover. Obvious differences between this poem and Ovid's *Heroides* include the use of a general, common (not mythological) character of the matrona and the fact that these lovers were actually married.


9. For more information on the history of the classical genre of elegy see Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, 2nd ed., London: Metheun and Co., 1969. The term "neoteric" was coined by Cicero (Att. 7.2.1) as a negative word to describe certain poets who were prominent in the late Republican period: Licinius Calvus (an orator), Helvius Cinna (a minor politician), Furia Bibaculus (a minor poet), and Catullus. With the exception of Catullus, these authors were preserved only in small scraps by the later grammarians. They based their work on the Alexandrian "school" of Callimachus: their poetry strove to be witty and elegant, learned, brief (the epyllion form is an Alexandrian form), and interested in technique for its own sake. Thus, Catullus became known as doctus or "learned," and he wrote several polymetric poems and an epyllion. R. O. A. M. Lyne describes the neoteries as "men of the provincial or Roman upper class who take the profession of poetry with the utmost seriousness" (p. 183; "Augustan Poetry and Society" in *The Roman World*, The Oxford History of the Classical World, eds. Boardman, Griffin, and Murray, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988); Lyne contrasts these poets with the next generation of Augustan poets who, for the most part, had patrons, but the subject matter, genre, and techniques of the neoteries
can be found in Propertius, Tibullus, and to a certain extent in Ovid's amatory poetry. See also Otis, pp. 4-8. For a recent study of the elegies as fiction rather than biography, see Paul Veyne, Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988).

10. Otis 9-10. Also pertinent is Heinze's analysis of the differences between elegy and epic (cited in Otis, pp. 23-4): tone (elegiac emphasis on sentimental emotion vs. epic emphasis on solemnity), subject matter, narratorial stance (elegiac poets use "familiar remarks to the reader," that is, the narrator is often first-person and is always emotionally involved while the epic narrator usually "conceals himself"), and language. As we shall see later in the discussion of the Heroides (in particular Dido's letter), the elegiac heroine is in conflict with male-centered, epic ideals.

11. See Eleanor Winsor Leach's chapter "Myth in Augustan Literary Convention" in her unpublished dissertation "A Study in the Sources of Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women and Ovid’s Heroides" (Yale University 1962); she notes that "Alexandrian [Hellenistic] mythology is thus a component of the poetic imagination, rather than its essential substance, a matter of allusion and authority rather than one of immediate dramatic presence" (p. 216). Propertius and Tibullus, as well as the neoteric Catullus, follow this tradition; these poets use mythological exempla to highlight their own personal situations. Cf. Anderson 65.

12. See, for example, Otis, p. 5; Anderson, p. 65.


14. Ovid responds in a critical fashion to Vergil much in the same way that Chaucer found Dante an opponent; as Fyler has noted, "Ovid and Chaucer invite the contest, not only by historical proximity to their competitors, but by their own insistence on alluding to and counterpointing the Aeneid and the Commedia" (p. 2).
15. Luck, p. 43 (in particular the use of a *lena*, a bawd, or a intermediary between lovers). Catullus is clearly working with literary traditions: in Ariadne's lament, Richard Jenkyns finds echoes of Euripides and Apollonius Rhodius. Furthermore, "both in subject and phrasing [the opening lines] echo the beginning of Ennius' *Medea*, itself closely based on the start of Euripides' play" (p. 100; Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus and Juvenal, London: Duckworth, 1982). Euripides' *Medea* was the best known of all Greek tragedies to Roman audiences, and both Ovid (no longer extant) and Seneca wrote tragedies about her. See also T. B. L. Webster, "The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus," *Greece and Rome* 13 (1966): 22-31. In particular, Webster notes the similarities between Ariadne and Dido: "For Theseus the essential conception [on Greek vase paintings up to 470 B.C.] is that, prompted by Athena, he pursued his heroic career and abandoned Ariadne, as Aeneas abandoned Dido" (p. 26); Theseus was considered a "national" hero of Athens much in the same way that Aeneas becomes the "national" hero of Rome.


18. The absence of Apollo and Diana (64.301) is new to the legend, for both Homer and Pindar say that Apollo was at the wedding. Kenneth Quinn says that this is an allusion to Apollo's responsibility for Achilles's death (in his second edition of *The Poems* [London: St Martin's Press, 1973], p. 337). Prometheus's wounds may allude to the version of the myth in which Zeus punishes Prometheus for refusing to tell who would be the mother of a son greater than the father, or to the fact that *the*
relationship between gods and men has had a stormy history" (Knopp, p. 211).

19. Gordon Williams, *The Nature of Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), p. 50. See also Jenkyns on Catullus' poem as an art object (e.g., *carmine* in lines 116-7) and on the pictorial quality of the poem which contrasts the narrative and the static descriptions (pp. 123, 150).

20. See her first reaction: *Tum Thetis humanos non despevit hymenacos* ("Then Thetis did not despise human wedding ceremonies"; line 20), which is more of a neutral statement. Compare *qualis adest Thetidi, qualis concordia Peleo* ("such harmony is present for Thetis, so it is for Peleus"; l. 336). These are the only two lines in the entire poem that describe how Thetis feels.


22. Theseus is inspired by his duty to his father and to Athens so that he can end the "tax" of young children (amount and genders vary according to the different variants of this myth) to Minos and Crete. Minos had attacked Athens because of his son's death (duty to the dead son taking the form of vengeance through war) -- an escalation of destruction in the name of *pietas*, in a sense. Harmon, among others, points out that Theseus was considered by many the very embodiment of *pietas* ("one who loves [after the gods] pater and patria above all else") and is thus a hero appreciated by the Romans (p. 319).

23. Compare *cupido lumine* ("with passionate eye"; line 86) and *cupideae mentis* ("of passionate mind"; 147). The issues of passion and eroticism in the poem have been noted by several critics; for example, see W. R. Johnson who says in *The Idea of the Lyric* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) that Ariadne is "a story of erotic betrayal and erotic ruin" (p. 156).

24. The sea is sometimes used in elegy to symbolize love - both can be calm and stormy, changing suddenly. Thus, physical separation caused by the sea represents the emotional separation of the lovers. The distance between the lovers also emphasizes their isolation; thus many
deserted women are depicted as standing on the seashore watching their lovers sail away (or they go as far as they possibly can go to be close to the men). The sailing ships cause the women to reevaluate their actions, the opposite thought-process from falling in love.

All three sections of this poem involve a voyage—the journey of the Argo for Peleus, the trip to Naxos (Dia) for Ariadne, and the trip to Troy implied in the story of Achilles. Curran has pointed out the water imagery in the poem that highlights the differences in the three sections (pp. 175-8). The sea is magically serene for Peleus, but barren and hostile for Ariadne, as well as the symbol of her suffering. This imagery carries into the Achilles section with the vivid picture of the Scamander flowing with blood and corpses, and the blood that soaks the burial mound. All of the images have negative connotations, just as the love and passion displayed by these characters is far from perfect.

25. See Euripides' *Hecuba* for Polyxena's story.


27. There are critics who believe that Catullus was reflecting on his relationship with Lesbia in this poem, that he felt betrayed by her. See Putnam, Thomson, and, most recently, Lawrence Lipking. These critics focus on Ariadne (often forgetting about Peleus and Thetis) and assume that such passion in the Ariadne inset piece could only come from a poet personally involved in his subject matter. There is no proof for such biographical speculation.


29. Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), p. 24. Cf. Jane Gurkin Altman, in *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982), who says "given the letter's function as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the bridge" (p. 13). Altman focuses on later examples of the seduction letter, but, for the most part, Ovid's *Heroides* are letters of the seduced. Ovid's "authors" also do not fit any one viewpoint on Altman's scale: Leander's letter to Hero emphasizes the letter as an inferior bridge, Phaedra's letter "deemphasize[s] the gulf in order to span it," and
Paris' letter to Helen facilitates the union (Altman, pp. 13-4). For the most part, however, the letters by abandoned women, such as those by Ariadne, Dido, and Medea, emphasize the distance between the females and the males who betrayed them, and, according to Altman, the letter becomes an emblem of that separation (p. 15).

32. Leach, p. 421. Leach sees Catullus' Ariadne as "an erotic image," in whose story "romance is triumphant" (p. 420). Ovid's tale, by necessity, must leave off the "happy ending and thus his pathos can only become more pathetic" (420). As I said earlier, the ending of Catullus' description of Ariadne's rescue by Bacchus is anything but clearcut.
33. Otis (17) and Jacobson (6) both discuss the Heroïdes as a necessary step in the development of Ovid's art.
34. Although he rejects Otis' thematic categories, Joseph Solodow also notes the presence of the epyllion form within the Metamorphoses; indeed he claims that a central feature of the poem is the comprehensive mixture of literary genres (epic, epyllion, tragedy, hymns, erotic elegy, pastoral, epigram, history, to name a few): "The playfulness, finally, with which Ovid handles the genres also implies that he is extremely self-conscious about them and that the comprehensiveness is not an accident" (The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses [Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988], p. 25).
35. Otis, p. 166. Otis outlines five major stories of amatory pathos: Tereus, Philomela, Procne; Scylla; Byblis; Myrrha; Ceyx and Alcyone. In all five he notes a similarity in content and mood: "all describe extreme instances of erotic passion; all terminate in catastrophe and metamorphosis; all represent the metamorphosis as the solution and natural sequel of the catastrophe" (p. 169). Furthermore, Otis lists four major characteristics: the stories are "essentially tragic"; "the love involved (with the crucial exception of the Ceyx-Alcyone) is pathological or unnatural"; the "metamorphosis is the solution of an otherwise unendurable anguish, the only possible alternative being death by suicide or external violence"; the "metamorphosis itself involves a loss of human
consciousness and is a true reversion to animal existence" (p. 206). Otis also discusses the Euripidean and neoteric influences on these stories (pp. 206-7).


37. Words associated with reward or gift, such as meritum, praemia, munera, and mereo, occur in many stories of abandoned women. Many such words occur in Scylla's episode because she obviously expects some reward for betraying her city: Praemia nullo peto, nisi te! ("I seek no reward, except you"; 8.92). The lock of Nisus' hair can be considered a love token, just as the ball of thread that helps Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth is symbolic of the love that Ariadne feels for him.

38. Otis, p. 173; Anderson, p. 81. Cf. Kauffman's definition: "passion is transgressive, woman is disorder, and discourses of desire are repressed. Their speakers are literally exiled or imprisoned or metaphorically 'shut up'...." She also claims that, "from Ovid forward...discourses of desire pose a radical challenge to traditional concepts of authority and authorship, referentiality and representation" (p. 20). Although I disagree strongly with many of her conclusions, I do agree that the women in the Heroides (and the Metamorphoses) are trapped, isolated, and abandoned as a direct result of their passion which causes them to question and then to act against the social structure in which they are confined.


40. Otis, p. 265.
Chapter II
Dido

Although Catullus' Ariadne is the prototype for the Ovidian deserted woman, for later generations, Dido becomes the standard model for the *deserta femina*. Known from Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides*, the story of Dido and Aeneas became the most popular love narrative of the Middle Ages; in fact, the tragedy of Dido becomes one of the two principal episodes in medieval adaptations of the *Aeneid*, the other being the Italian war.¹ As Augustine points out in his *Confessions*, the tragedy of Dido evoked strong feelings:

> quibus tenere cogebam Aeneae nescio cuius errores oblitus errorum meorum et plorare Didonem mortuum, quia se occidit ab amore, cum interea me ipsum in his a te morientem, deus, uta mea, siccis oculis ferrem miserrimus.

"in these [studies] I was forced to memorize the wanderings of Aeneas, forgetful of my own wanderings, and to lament the death of Dido, because she killed herself for love, when meanwhile, in the midst of these, I myself was dying, separated from you, God, my life, and I, being most miserable, carried myself with dry eyes."

For Augustine, the *Aeneid* was more than a school text; it was somehow symbolic of his own pagan way of life. Yet
the most compelling aspect of the epic for him was the figure of Dido, the Carthaginian queen deserted by Aeneas on his way to found Rome.

Like Catullus' Ariadne, Vergil's Dido falls in love with a stranger, the handsome and noble Aeneas—the first qualities she admires are his courageous deeds and divine birth. Moreover, she is moved to pity by his tale of Troy's fall:

multa uiri virtus animo multisque recursat gentis honos; haerent infixi pectore uultus uerba...

"She rehearsed in her mind the great virtue of the man and the great honor of his ancestry; his facial expression and words remained fixed in her heart" (4.3-5)\(^3\)

Yet we also see a divine conspiracy (Juno, Venus, and Cupid) work to ensure that this union will take place. Once she has been struck by Cupid's arrow and ruled by forces beyond her control, Dido persuades herself, with her sister Anna's help, to "marry" Aeneas, and so she pursues him. Isolated by her social position as the female leader of a new city surrounded by enemies, Dido is first seen near the temple of Juno, dispensing laws and planning for her city (a woman in a man's role). Because of her involvement with Aeneas, Queen Dido allows her amor to overcome her pietas by letting her once thriving city, compared to a bee-hive in 1.430ff., to stagnate (4.86-9),
as well as being unfaithful to her dead husband Sychaeus, in violation of the Roman ideal of univira (a woman who was faithful to only one man).¹ Dido’s passion consumes her days and nights, for she is unable to sleep: nec placidam membris dat cura quietam (”nor does her care give sweet rest to her limbs”; 4.5). Her passion is compared to a fire, a common elegiac metaphor, a comparison that emphasizes the physical nature of her feelings; Book 4 opens with Dido being seized by caeco ioni (”hidden fire”; 4.2), and in the end it is indeed fire that consumes her when she commits suicide on the funeral pyre.²

Dido’s lack of piety is further complicated by her lack of pudor, and she surrenders herself to passion in this manner:

Hic dictis impenso animum flammavit amore spermat de die puellae menti soluitque pudor.

[”With these words, her spirit burned with great love, and gave hope to a doubtful mind, and broke down her sense of shame.”] (4.54-5)

The order of the actions is important: after she convinces herself that she should be unfaithful, her pudor dissolves. The word is given the emphatic position of the last word of the line; without her pudor, Dido lacks the guidance of socially accepted standards of behavior. This lack of concern for her reputation is impius, and it is her impiety that isolates Dido even more than before
(4.320-6) -- Aeneas becomes her only hope for safety and happiness."

But Aeneas leaves to fulfill his destiny as the founder of Rome; before he leaves, however, Dido twice speaks face-to-face with Aeneas and, in vain, seeks to persuade him to stay. Although initially Dido had admired Aeneas' divine parentage (4.12), she now questions his humanity by doubting his genus ("ancestry"): Aeneas must have been born of hard rocks or tigers (4.365-7) or he would not leave her. Clearly, Dido has expected some type of reciprocal feeling from Aeneas; she saved him and his shipwrecked fleet as well as welcomed him into her bedroom (4.373-6). If Aeneas will not stay and marry her, Dido argues that she would be happy with a child, provided that he look like Aeneas (4.327-30). The desire for a physical reminder of his stay indicates the physical nature of her love. Aeneas is grateful for her kindness, but he is not committed to Dido in the same measure as she is to him or he is to his destiny. Dido's admiration and the illusion of love indeed fade rapidly in the face of desertion and reality.

When she realizes that Aeneas has left, she laments while standing on the beach:

Quid loquor? Aut ubi sum? Quae mentem insania mutat?
Infelix Dido, nunc te facta impia tangunt?


Indeed, the adjective infelix is used to describe Dido throughout Books 1 and 4, always in connection with her passion and the consequences of that passion. But Dido soon reverts to her earlier anger, cursing the absent Aeneas and his descendants, predicting that his desertion of her will be the beginning of the long-standing hatred between Carthage and Rome.

Like Ariadne, she calls her betrayer perfidus ("unfaithful"; 4.305, 366), yet Aeneas had never promised marriage as had Theseus (Catullus 64.388-9). This contrast is reinforced when Dido echoes Ariadne’s phrase optatos hymenaeos ("hoped for wedding rites"; 64.141) by claiming inceptos hymenaeos ("the wedding rites that have been started"; 4.316). Dido, however, did have a chance to consummate the "marriage" in the ominous setting of the cave during a storm. It is made clear that this incident is a turning point:

ille dies primus leti primusque malorum causa fuit; neque enim specie famae mouetur nec iam furtium Dido meditatur amorem: coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

["That day was the first cause of death and the first cause of the evils; for neither is she moved by appearance or by reputation, no longer
does Dido hide her secret love: she calls it marriage, and with this name she covered her fault."} (4.169-72)

It is important to remember that Dido has been seduced by the gods and by her own thoughts (much in the same way that Scylla persuaded herself that Minos loved her), not by Aeneas.

Realizing that she has been deceived by a false and destructive passion, Dido commits suicide in her bedroom, falling on the sword that Aeneas had given her; her memories of Aeneas, and the objects that evoke those memories, overpower her and she, in some way, realizes the significance of what has happened. Before she dies, she asks the gods for relief from her suffering and recounts her accomplishments:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{urbem praeclaram statui, mea moenia uidi,} \\
\text{ulta uirum poenas inimico a fratre recepi,} \\
\text{felix, heu nimum felix, si litora tantum} \\
\text{numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae.}
\end{align*}
\]

["I have established a famous city, I have seen my city walls, I have received punishments by the foe of my husband, his unfriendly brother; happy, alas, too happy, if the Dardanians had never touched our shores with their ships."] (4.655-8)

Dido reminds the gods of her position as a queen and leader, what she had been before Aeneas came to Carthage, so that they will remember that she had once been pious and will accept her shade in the underworld.
This episode in the Aeneid illustrates many of the conventions of the deserted woman: there is the amor-pietas role conflict in which a woman persuades herself, wrongly, that passion is the better choice, and the result is a desertion by the male followed by the female’s suicide. Furthermore, the character of Dido can be seen as the product of the same literary traditions used by Catullus and Ovid. A typical evaluation of the dense allusions in the Aeneid is given by Wendell Clausen:

The Aeneid is a literary epic: it refers to a literary tradition and was intended for a literary audience. An ancient reader would hear Virgil’s poetry—for ancient poetry was read aloud—and simultaneously overhear other poetry, Greek and Latin.¹

That the Aeneid is based on Homeric models is obvious, and the influence of the Argonautica by Apollonius of Rhodes has been studied by many classical scholars.¹⁰ But the Argonautica is most important in terms of the characterization of Medea—another famous deserted woman, seduced and betrayed by Jason during his quest for the Golden Fleece.¹¹ In giving aid to the foreigner, Medea commits a crime against her father and the state—she has chosen amor over pietas as do all deserted women. The most obvious connection between Dido and Medea is the controlling metaphor for their loves—fire. Book 4 of the Aeneid opens with the "hidden fire" of love (line 2), an
image borrowed directly from Apollonius 3.280-7, in which Eros has stolen into Aeetes' place and shot Medea with his arrow. Yet there are plenty of differences between these two heroines, not the least important being that Jason promises to marry Medea in return for her help (Aeneas makes no such promise) and in fact marries her with the customary rites (4.1128ff.). Also, the rumor that Jason and Medea have been married is indeed true, while Fama in the Aeneid spreads half-truths. According to Gordon Williams, the effect of all these comparisons and contrasts, the direct allusions to the earlier poet, is the construction of a context for judging the relationship of Aeneas and Dido:

...for though Dido is quite content, indeed, ecstatic, to be a Medea, Aeneas is no Jason. Partly, that is because Dido is really no Medea either and cannot be carried off home by Aeneas. But mainly it is because Aeneas is an Odysseus rather than a Jason: his one thought has to be how to leave his Calypso.  

In this incident, the contrasts between the characters in these two stories are the most important factors in determining the motivations of the lovers in the Aeneid. We are to judge Dido not only in terms of what she says and does in her own story but also in terms of her literary predecessors. Such an extra-textual framework should make understanding easier, but, as we shall see in
Ovid and Chaucer, allusions, a form of textual authority, may cloud the narrative with doubt and hesitation about what is "Truth."

Yet Medea is not the only literary predecessor against whom we can judge Dido. Charles Saylor, for example, has identified in Book 4 many of the conventions of Roman comedy and elegy: that the lover is possessed by "a passionate, overbearing amor" that is called madness (most frequently furor); that the lover falls into "base idleness"; that the lover is no longer concerned with reputation or fama; that the lover wastes the ancestral and paternal resources which he should be increasing.14 Saylor also remarks on the shift in gender roles: "Thus one peculiar feature in Vergil is that the female Dido, rather than the male, is the focus of the characteristics, i.e. the victim of love, and shares certain of the conventions normally assigned to males only."15 While we have seen that his statement is not entirely true in light of the evidence of Apollonius' Medea, the situation of the female as the active pursuer rather than the passive recipient of love is the essential conflict of Book 4; Dido calls it a marriage and Aeneas does not (4.172), and Dido's mistaken perceptions cause her destruction. Within the epic value system, a man is a fighter, not a lover, as
Clausen has pointed out:

But why does Aeneas never tell Dido of his love? Because he cannot; he is inhibited by the tradition in which he has his being. Love, passionate love, on the man’s part may be expressed in comedy, elegy, or pastoral, but not in epic (only the foolish Coroebus, who fell madly in love with Cassandra and came to Troy in those last days, is so described...). A modern reader will be surprised that Virgil reveals so little of Aeneas’ passion, and may even be inclined to doubt its existence; an ancient reader would have been surprised at how much Virgil reveals, for he goes further in this respect than any previous poet."

However much we may want to sympathize with Dido, we must remember that the values inherent in the epic genre dictate that Aeneas leave and that this particular love affair end unhappily--Aeneas cannot simultaneously stay in Carthage and fulfill his destiny as founder of Rome.

The Dido and Aeneas story was the perfect situation for Ovid to exploit in the *Heroides*, a chance for Ovid to parody the most famous epic of his day (as Jacobson puts it "Ovid [was] waging war against Vergil"1). Most critics who examine Dido’s letter in the Ovidian work mistakenly compare it to the *Aeneid* instead of comparing it to the other letters in the *Heroides*; what they conclude is that the Vergilian story, rather than the Ovidian one, is to be admired for its complexity of characterization. Jacobson is typical of this attitude when he complains that "the balance of the Vergilian
tragedy is completely lost" and that "Ovid simply cannot work himself into the tragedy of Aeneas, but sympathizes with Dido's plight." He seems to have forgotten that the whole point of the *Heroïdes* is the limited narratorial perspective—that Ovid consciously chose to present only one side of the story and to present only one moment from a larger narrative framework (the instant of the letter). Thus the individual, rounded character in the *Aeneid* becomes a stereotype, one more famous woman betrayed by a man, within a collection of letters filled with conventions and stereotypes. Anderson, in fact, prefers to discuss the difference between a "heroic" and a "charming" Dido—that the rhetorical framework (logic, diction, and the like) are appropriate for the different contexts.'

Dido's letter, of course, is addressed to the already absent Aeneas whom she knows she cannot hope to move (lines 3-4); her letter is a prayer (*prece*) and her words are unimportant in comparison to what she has already given up for him: *sed merita et famam corpusque animumque pudicurn* / *cum male perdiderim, perdere verba leve est* ("but since I have destroyed badly my good deeds and reputation, and a chaste body and soul, to squander a word is a light matter"); 5-6). Immediately she reminds him of his pledge
to her (fidem in line 7), but the only evidence for such an oath is the night in the cave. She reminds him that he seeks the unknown (facta fugis, facienda petis, "You flee things already accomplished, you seek things that must be done"; 13), and the new land will only give him another chance to play false with another woman (scilicet alter amor tibi restat et altera Dido;/ quamque iterum fallas altera danda fides, "Perhaps another love remains for you and another Dido; whom you will deceive with another pledge given" 17-8). Later, she suggests that Aeneas had abandoned Creusa and that he destroyed his first wife with his faithlessness (83-4). His story should have been a warning to her, instead she was moved by it: haec mihi narraras—sat me monuere ("these things you told me—these things were sufficient to move me"; 85).

Throughout her letter Ovid puts Vergil's words in Dido's mouth; for example, Ovid's Dido also compares Aeneas to rocks, wild beasts, and the sea—all items that are cold and unfeeling—that are used to cast doubt on his parentage (37-40; cf. Aeneid 4.365). Jacobson points out that, in using this detail, "Ovid goes his own way, ready to infuse an erotic element no matter how alien to the tradition."" Although Jacobson's judgment is a bit harsh since Ovid is not writing epic, it is clear that the
Vergilian words in the Ovidian context assume new significance. For example, Dido accuses Aeneas of not thinking of Ascanius, his son, by setting off for Italy in the middle of the winter (77ff.). In the Aeneid, however, Aeneas is thinking of his son and his duty to the future (i.e. fulfilling the gods’ destiny for himself and his son—pietas) when he leaves. The irony in Ovid’s version shows us how desperate and selfish Dido really is: she should know that in obeying the gods Aeneas does the right thing, but she is concerned only with her own happiness (which can only be achieved with Aeneas by her side). The most famous example of word-twisting is the controversy over whether Dido is actually pregnant; Vergil’s Dido had hoped for a "little Aeneas," but Ovid’s Dido gives a more emotional appeal:

> Forsitan et gravidam Dido, scelerate, relinquas, parsque tui latest corpore claua meo.

["And perhaps you leave behind a pregnant Dido, you criminal, and a part of you may lie hidden within my body."] (133-4)

Many scholars—ancient, medieval, and modern—have assumed that Dido actually is pregnant, but ambiguity is created by the forsitan and the two subjunctive verbs. Certainly, as Jacobson points out, Vergil’s Dido is expressing regret over what might have been and Ovid’s Dido is trying to persuade Aeneas to return.
Jacobson, Anderson, and Leach all agree that Ovid's Dido is a supreme rhetorician. Leach says "Of all the letters of the Heroides, Dido's is perhaps the most rhetorical in its structure. Her argument follows an order of composition which suggests the deliberate outline of a declamatory form." Dido constantly questions the logic of Aeneas' hasty departure and counters those reasons with arguments based entirely on emotion, the vague threat of being pregnant being but one example. In all cases, however, she returns to herself--her own feelings, her own reputation, her own interpretations of Aeneas' actions--and this strong egocentrism displayed in her manipulation of words "suggests a supreme self-consciousness, a desire to dramatize her emotions and her desires effectively, perhaps more than to voice them directly." Even her epitaph, the last two lines of the letter, display this rhetorical posturing:

Praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem; Ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu.

["Aeneas offered both the cause of death and the sword; Dido herself fell by the blow of her own hand."] (195-6)

Although she will admit that she killed herself, she maintains that this suicide was the result of Aeneas' actions and thus she is guilty of nothing but having loved the wrong man; the last line of the letter, however, is
about herself.

Thus, Ovid's Dido is a woman who has been betrayed, not a noble queen; she has more in common with the other characters in the *Heroides* than she has with Aeneas (as was the case in the *Aeneid*). Ovid's Dido pours forth her emotions using elegiac conventions that do not recognize the epic *pietas* of Aeneas for, having lost her own *pietas* and *pudor*, she apparently cannot allow those qualities in anyone else. But we must remember that these anti-epic values are the result of the first-person, limited point of view, that Ovid's Dido is a woman addressing a man at a specific moment in time, without the benefit of knowledge of a divine plan or of the grand scheme of history.

The popularity of this love story in late antiquity and the Middle Ages is perhaps more understandable if we consider that Vergil and Ovid were taught in both Roman and Christian schools, that the manuscript traditions of both authors are long and well-established, and that both authors were easily adapted into the exegetical and mythographic readings of the Christians. Commentaries on the *Aeneid* by Fulgentius, Bernard Silvestris, and John of Salisbury characterize Aeneas as the questing human spirit, trapped in a mortal body that is subject to the temptations of the flesh. Dido is seen as the carnal
Venus, libidinous love, earthly temptation, a woman subject to uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) passion. Thus, Aeneas must leave Dido behind in his search for Italy, spiritual peace or human perfection that is found only in harmony with God. This view of Dido is comparable to that of other classical heroines (such as Medea, Eurydice, Phaedra).

In contrast, there are no extant commentaries on Ovid’s works dating from late antiquity; Ovid’s reputation was revived during the twelfth century when many commentaries and accessus were written. In one particular accessus to the Heroides, studied by Ralph Hexter, the commentator has divided the letters into three categories based on the types of love:

\[\text{Intentio sua est legitimum commendare conubium vel amorem, et secundum triplici modo tractat de ipso amore, scilicet de legitimo, de illicito et stulto.}\]

["It is the intention to recommend legitimate marriage or love, and he discusses this love accordingly in a triple method, concerning legitimate love, illicit love, and foolish love."]

Penelope is given as the example of legitimate love, Canace of illicit love, and Phyllis of foolish love. The seventh letter, from Dido to Aeneas, is proceeded in this commentary by a brief summary of events from the Aeneid and the line \text{ex intentione auctoris stultus amans arguitur}
"foolish love is presented according to the intention of the author." Dido is foolish because she writes to someone who will not return, just as Phyllis did in the second letter of the Heroides.

Yet the Dido of the Middle Ages was predominantly the Ovidian Dido, the Dido who loved a man who was destined to betray her. As Alan Gaylord says of Chaucer's "Legend of Dido," "For if Ovid provides the sentiment, Vergil provides the 'story'--a term which for Chaucer would have meant both 'history' and 'the telling of the tale.'" But Chaucer's version in the Legend of Good Women follows an established practice of relying on Ovid's perspective and elegiac tone. There are, for example, two medieval Latin poems, one from the Carmina Burana, that are laments by Dido; both use Vergilian and Ovidian language, but because the poems are presented as being spoken by Dido they have more in common with Ovid's presentation. Dido also appears in the Jean de Meun section of the Roman de la Rose, where she is one of the examples of women who have been betrayed by the false oaths of lovers. The Duenna compares Dido with Phyllis, Oenone, and Medea; although the Duenna's point is that women should trick men in return and not love one man, the emphasis in each of the exempla is the oath that the male took. In Dido's
case, the idea that Aeneas swore an oath of love/fidelity to Dido comes from Ovid, not from Vergil. Furthermore, this betrayal is also seen in terms of a violation of the guest-host relationship (also emphasized by Ovid):

To hold his love she offered him herself, Her wealth, her city; he in turn took oath— Gave promises and firm assurances— That he was hers, as he would always be, And never would desert her..."

Guillaume de Machaut, in his The Judgment of the King of Navarre, also presents Dido as an example of a betrayed lover. 

Perhaps the most famous and clearest example of the Ovidian influence on the Dido story is found in the Roman d’Eneas by an anonymous Norman poet, usually dated c.1150-60. Of the three romances based on classical material, the Eneas falls in the middle: the Roman de Thebes is earlier, and Benoit’s Roman de Troie is slightly later. The Eneas was to have a profound effect on the court poets of the late twelfth century, including Chretien de Troyes and Marie de France. Eric Auerbach maintains that the
importance of this roman lies in its combination of materials:

But the influence in France of the author of the Eneas consists not so much in his imitation of Virgil as in his treatment of the love episodes, modeled not on Virgil but on Ovid. It is here that an important feature of the court epic, the playful, coquettish casuistry of love, deriving from Ovid, makes its first appearance.\textsuperscript{31}

John Yunck has noted that while the Eneas-poet remains relatively faithful to the Vergilian story, there is little exact translation.\textsuperscript{32} The most obvious change from Vergil is the use of ordo naturalis instead of in medias res—the Eneas begins with the destruction of Troy, making the Old French poem seem more like an historical text than a literary creation.\textsuperscript{33} But other changes, such as the addition of lengthy descriptions of clothes, tombs, and exotic places, show the differences in taste between the classical and medieval audiences. In terms of characterization, we see that love, not the heroic urge to fulfill destiny, is the motivation for much of the action. Thus Dido becomes the "wrong" love, acting as a foil to Lavine, who is the "right" love because Aeneas must marry her so that she can give birth to the Roman race.

We first see Dido as an efficient ruler, all the more marvelous because she is a woman in a man’s role: "Lady Dido ruled the country better than any count or marquis
would have ruled it. No domain or realm was ever thereafter better governed by a woman." In Vergil's poem, Dido falls in love because of the combination of the interference of the gods and because of Aeneas' story that arouses the sympathy of the queen; in one of the few instances of direct divine intervention in the Eneid, Dido is kissed by Ascanius, who had been put under a spell by Venus, and instantly inflamed with love ("The lady drank mortal poison"; p. 72). Dido is clearly the aggressor in this relationship, as the Eneid-poet makes plain when Eneas and Dido stay in the cave during the storm:

Here are the two of them together. He does with her what he wishes, nor does he use very much force at all, nor does the queen resist: she consents to him with all her will, for she has long desired him. Now love is made manifest. Never since her lord's death had the lady done anything shameful. They return to Carthage. She feels great joy, nor does she hide it at all, but shows herself most happy and joyous. She says that she will be his wife, and thus covers her misdeed; she cares no longer what anyone says of it (p. 87).

Such openly shameful behavior seems to be more shocking than her falling in love, and the mention of her husband at such a critical point in the love affair serves only to remind us that Dido is guilty. Eneas' departure is hasty, allowing for none of the emotional scenes that appear in the Aeneid. When Dido confronts Eneas about the provisioning of the ships, he simply says he has to go
because the gods do not want him to stay. Dido reacts by comparing Eneas to a thief, just like other Trojans who keep "bad faith." She calmly requests that he wait until spring to depart, but mainly she expresses regret over his betrayal. In fact, little of the passionate wildness exhibited by Vergil’s Dido or the rhetorical self-consciousness displayed by Ovid’s Dido can be found in the Eneas. Even her suicide is marked by a serenity unknown to her classical predecessors; as Raymond Cormier has noted, "In the Old French version, the action becomes much more dramatic, even stereotyped for us disenchanted moderns, in the sense that she stabs herself first, then utters her intimate recitative." Dido speaks of her honor and power which she cast aside, leaving Carthage without an heir; she has lost her name and her glory (p. 97). But before she dies, she pardons Eneas:

He has killed me most wrongly, but I here pardon him my death. In the name of peace and reconciliation I kiss his clothes upon his bed. I pardon you for it, lord Eneas (p. 98).

These lines suggest a deathbed confession and atonement for sins rather than the tragic/heroic suicide of a woman caught between love and duty; Cormier calls her death "christianized." In contrast, Lavine falls in love with Eneas—a plot detail not found in the Aeneid. Several critics have
noticed the similarities between Lavine and Scylla of *Metamorphoses* 8.** Lavine is first presented as a young, innocent girl who must be instructed in the ways of love by her mother (p. 211). During a truce, Lavine has a chance to see Eneas:

Lavine was up in the tower. She looked down from a window and saw Eneas, who was below. She gazed intently at him above all. He seemed most handsome and noble to her. She had heard well how everyone praised him throughout the city both for his prowess and his beauty, and she took good note in her heart. There where she was standing in her chamber, Love struck her with his dart. Before she moved from the window she changed color a hundred times. Now she has fallen into the snare of love: whether she wishes it or not, she must love (p. 215).

Many of the plot details from the Scylla story are here: an innocent girl falls in love with a handsome stranger based on his good looks and reputation--Cupid's arrow seems almost redundant. The sense of inevitability also recalls Dido's falling in love, and indeed both Dido and Lavine faint often, overcome by their passion for the same man. Yet the contrast between these two women is clearly marked by their worldly experience: Dido is a widow and a ruler, and Lavine is naive. Furthermore, Lavine's hesitation and modesty concerning her love stands in contrast to Dido's open and shameless behavior.**

However, as Auerbach points out, what is important about the Lavine episode is the use of Ovidian material:
Almost all of it [the material used in the story] is derived from the casuistry of love: the arrow of love..., its effect (how she sweats and shivers, trembles and faints, weeps and sobs), the long soliloquy with its varied presentation of the problem, the self-reproach, accusations, lamentations, the night made sleepless by the torments of love, and so on. All this is directly or indirectly Ovidian, but treated at such length such matters...suggest the courtesan poetry of Ovid's youth...."\(^4\)

We have seen these qualities in Dido (both Vergilian and Ovidian) as well as in other deserted women of the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* (as we saw in Chapter One).

Whereas these classical heroines were ultimately destroyed by their love and faith in their lovers, ironically in the *Eneas* the same conventions are used to explain and validate the proper kind of love that ultimately will fulfill destiny. Lavine does not have to choose between love and piety/duty and thus is not deserted by Eneas; in fact, Eneas is described as falling in love with Lavine (no such description is given of his feelings for Dido) so that their love is further approved because of the passionate love they both display. Yunck points out that the *Eneas*-poet fails to give any lengthy description of Lavine (or of Dido), so that Eneas "falls in love without the author's providing him with physical motivation."\(^5\)

Yunck explains that this reversal of gender roles is "perhaps... because love in both cases begins with the
woman." But, more importantly, such a shift in roles emphasizes the women's active role in the love affair, a device we have seen in other classical stories of deserted women, but in the *Eneas* Lavine shows us that such mutual passion can result in a happy ending.

These patterns of behavior in the *Eneas* should be seen as part of the gradual shift from classical epic to medieval romance. The medieval authors of the three *romans* based on classical material adapted--rather than translated--narrative patterns and character types in order to appeal to the particular interests of their audiences. Part of this adaptation process involved rewriting "history" by ignoring the social, political, and thematic concerns of the classical past and by using deliberate anachronisms. This process also involved placing classical material within a Christian framework, either by moralizing or by crediting the pagans with Christian behavior (but without knowledge of salvation). Most importantly, the heroic values promoted by epics such as the *Aeneid* are gradually replaced by the values expressed by the chivalric code and "courtly love," as well as a growing interest in the inner life of the individual. Patterson sees the changes from the *Aeneid* to the *Eneas* as indicative of the twelfth century's sense of
The complexities of Virgil's historical vision are thus redefined as complexities in the ethical life of the hero. This is a redefinition, be it noted, that is also a diminution: the broad patterns of the historical life are reduced and internalized into the individual life of Eneas, and what needs to be renewed is not the historical world per se but merely this specific hero. This privatizing of historical value is accomplished by the Eneas poet's boldest act of revision, his grafting of Ovidian eroticism onto the body of Virgilian epic. 

After the Eneas, Ovidian conventions had a place within tales of knightly endeavor—a knight could be a lover as well as a fighter. The fact that the Dido story appears in an epic, an erotic-elegiac epistle, and a romance shows not only its popularity but also its adaptability, as we shall see in Chaucer's works, to different generic modes; the story changes as a result of its different narrative forms and concerns.

And there are other versions of the Dido story that exist independently of the Vergilian and Ovidian models. Dido's story is also told by Justinus in his Trogi Pompei Historiarum Philippicarum Epitoma (18.4-6)—Iarbus, a neighboring king, threatens to destroy Carthage unless Dido marries him. This version appears in three of Boccaccio's scholarly works: Genealogie deorum gentilium, De claribus mulieribus, and De casibus virorum
illustrium." Boccaccio did know of the other version because Dido as an example of a betrayed lover appears in some of the Italian poems and romances, and we know that Boccaccio, like Petrarch, greatly admired the Aeneid. In the scholarly works, Boccaccio rejects the Virgilian Dido because he thought that she was not an historical character; the "historical" queen of Carthage was a chaste widow who died rather than marry again. It is his interest in using literature to teach moral values that prompts Boccaccio to end both the De claribus mulieribus and the De casibus sections on Dido with grand eulogies on the importance of womanly chastity and modesty. Furthermore, Boccaccio tried to integrate the different versions of the Dido story by claiming that Virgil used poetic license and departed from the historical account:

Sed, ut artificio et velamento poetico consequeretur, quod erat suo operi oportunum, composuit fabulam in multis similem Dydonis hystorie...

["But, as a consequence of the artifice and poetic covering, which was the occasion of his work, he composed a false tale in many ways similar to the history of Dido."]

Thus, according to Boccaccio, Dido should be famous for her virtue, that is, for the historical "truth." Clearly, Boccaccio used the version of the Dido story that suited his own purposes.
The purpose of this lengthy discussion of the different appearances of Dido in classical and medieval literature has been to illustrate the variety of material that Chaucer had to work with: the story appears in many genres (each with its own special interests and concerns), with different and often unreconcilable plot details and narrative structures, with every author invoking the name of Dido for a different purpose unique to his work. No poet could mention Dido without reminding his audience of that complex literary and historical tradition. Yet, for the most part, the Middle Ages preferred the Ovidian Dido, the betrayed lover, over the Vergilian Dido, the tragic Carthaginian queen. The Ovidian Dido was a woman capable of great passion and of faithfulness in love; as a literary character, she is intimately tied to the elegiac love conventions that so fascinated the readers of romance. But I would like to argue that Chaucer was intrigued by Dido precisely because her reputation (fame) was at the mercy of the author who told her story—she was the victim of abusive textual authority as well as the victim of an ill-fated love affair. As we shall see in the House of Fame, Chaucer exploited both the Vergilian and Ovidian traditions to make a point about the reliability of fame and history.


4. For an excellent survey of attitudes about Dido’s "fault," see Niall Rudd, "Dido’s Culpa" in *Lines of Inquiry, Studies in Latin Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), pp. 32-53. The idea that Dido is at fault because she is unfaithful to Sychaeus may be traced to Tertullian (p. 42). Rudd himself prefers a fairly neutral translation of *culpa* in 4.19 (when Dido speaks to Anna about giving in to her feelings about Aeneas): Instead of "frailty," "weakness," "lapse," or "sin," Rudd suggests "temptation" even though *culpa* does not usually have this denotation (p. 40). Rudd argues for an understanding of the tragedy of Dido in terms of the Aristotelian idea of error or mistake, rather than a moral flaw (p. 49). In Dido's case, her error is falling in love with Aeneas.

5. Many critics have discussed the importance of the fire image in Book 4 (for example, Rudd, pp. 51-2) and in other sections of the *Aeneid* (the most famous is Bernard Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*" in *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Steele Commager (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), pp. 124-42). The fire of love metaphor as a common elegiac motif will be discussed later in this chapter.

6. Many critics assume that Dido is a trial that Aeneas must undergo in order to show his *pietas*; typical of this attitude is Kenneth McLeish, who says "The oldest, simplest view of Dido seems to be the best: poetry apart, she is in the *Aeneid* principally to emphasize Aeneas' *pietas*" ("Dido, Aeneas, and the Concept of *Pietas*," *Greece and Rome* 19 (1972): 127-35). Or see George Sanderlin, "Point of View in Virgil's Fourth *Aeneid*" (*Classical World* 63 (1960): 81-5), in which article he states: "In the economy of the poem as a whole, Dido is simply another obstacle to Aeneas' completion of his quest" (p. 85). Such a view, however, seems to me a bit reductive, forcing rather flat characterization on complex characters like
Aeneas and Dido.

On the other hand, Vergil is following an epic convention, as E. Christian Kopff points out in his discussion of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*: "Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Arete all function as obstacles to Odysseus' return and Vergil has unified different aspects into one central obstacle to the accomplishment of Aeneas' mission, the founding of Rome in Italy" ("Dido and Penelope," *Philologus* 12 [1977]: 244-8). In other words, all of the female characters of the *Odyssey* are combined into one female obstacle for Aeneas; there are other types of obstacles for Aeneas, not the least of which is Turnus.

Another perspective is presented by Sarah Spence: "[Dido] is thus arguably a negative figure (or at the very least a temptation) in the epic. But this is not the Dido that Vergil offers us....She becomes, instead, a sympathetic character guided by her emotions who is nonetheless not submissive. She is thus an anomaly in the rhetorical system and, more important, a threat to it" (Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Vergil, Augustine, and the Troubadours [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988], pp. 30-1).

Spence argues that Vergil, throughout the epic, challenges the values of the Roman socio-political and rhetorical systems of his own day.

7. Aeneas says, *ego te, quae plurima fando/ enumerare vales, numquam, regina, negabo/ promeritam...* ("I will never deny, queen, that you have deserved many things which you may wish to enumerate in speaking..."); 4.333-5).

Calling attention to the guest-host relationship, Aeneas denies that he made any oath of marriage and insists that their love affair matters little in terms of his greater destiny.

8. See Nicholas Moseley, *Characters and Epithets: A Study in Vergil's Aeneid* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1926), pp. 22-6. Moseley's point is that *infelix* is used to "soften the reader's opinion of Aeneas, first by preparing him for the outcome of Dido's love, and secondly, by suggesting that this outcome was inevitable" (p. 24). Certainly, such constant repetition of this epithet for one character should alert the reader that this quality is important.


Leach is not alone in pointing out the literary nature of Vergil's Dido:

Both the history and character of Vergil's Dido are major literary innovations. Vergil has clearly re-arranged traditional material and slanted it towards the patriotic purposes of his epic. Consequently, as the scholiasts and later Latin commentators would seem to indicate, Vergil defamed Dido's character to serve his own ends (pp. 397-8).

Leach cites as evidence the following commentaries:Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (5.17.4-6) and Ausonius' *Epigramata* (118).


12. "Eros...shot at Medea. And her heart stood still. With a happy laugh Eros sped out of the high-roofed hall on his way back, leaving his shaft deep in the girl's breast, hot as fire. Time and again she darted a bright glance at Jason. All else was forgotten. Her heart, brimful of this new agony, throbbed within her and overflowed with the sweetness of the pain." (Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Voyage of Argo*, trans. E. V. Rieu [New York: Penguin Books, 1959; repr. 1978], pp. 116-7).

13. Williams, p. 86.

15. Saylor, p. 73.


18. Jacobson, p. 91 (for both quotations). In the beginning of his discussion of this letter, Jacobson argues against judging the two poems by comparison—a point he seems to have forgotten towards the end of the chapter. He does say that the "letter is a failure in its own right...certainly one of the least successful" (p. 76).


24. Ralph Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling (Munich: Bei der Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1986), p. 7. An accessus is more like an introduction than a commentary or prologue, and it often begins the commentary so that it may provide the interpretive framework of the commentator.


30. 11. 2095-2132 (pp. 94-7 of R. Barton Palmer's text and facing translation [New York: Garland Publishing, 1988]). Palmer also states that the "most immediate and important source" for Machaut's poem is the Roman de la Rose (p. xxxix).


Furthermore, the addition of Ovidian material in order to highlight romantic love has been discussed in reference to other romans. Both C. David Benson (The History of Troy in Middle English Literature) and Margaret J. Ehrhart (The Judgment of the Trojan Prince Paris in Medieval Literature) have studied Benoît's Roman de Troie to show that the addition of love stories and the focus on romantic love as a replacement for the ideals of the heroic ethic are important features of this medieval adaptation of the Troy story (and that this version of the Trojan story was the most influential source for later authors). The difficulties in distinguishing between the epic and romance genres (and defining them) are often connected to this shift in the attitudes and concerns of the poets and audiences of this time period. W. R. J. Barron, in his English Medieval Romance (New York: Longman, 1987), points out that distinctions between epic
and romance are far from absolute because both genres often utilize the same narrative material from classical sources; however, "if passionate commitment between man and woman, within marriage or outside it, is an essential characteristic of romance, it predates Chretien in the epic context of the Matter of Rome, expressed through a formalized analysis of emotion which the romance is to exploit for similar purposes" (p. 178). Barron also discusses the influence of folk narratives and conventions that may have influenced the romance genre; epic and classical material were not the only sources available.

32. Yunck, p. 7.

33. Such shifting in narrative order is a common feature of the medieval adaptations of Trojan material, according to Hall, p. 149. Cf. Benson’s discussion of Guido delle Colonne’s Historia Destructionis Troiae as "an aristocratic chronicle on a classical theme" (p. 14). The influence of the Historia was largely responsible for keeping the Trojan legends as historical facts—that, while other classical legends of Rome and Thebes were adapted into romances, only Troy had a "history" to authorize its existence (p. 5).

34. Yunck translation, p. 63 (beginning at line 378).

35. As one critic has pointed out, "One man has a history which can be conveyed as a sequence of powerful scenes, the other has only a magical attraction" (Theodore M. Anderson, Early Epic Scenery: Homer, Virgil, and the Medieval Legacy [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976], p. 167).

36. David J. Shirl, in "The Dido Episode in Eneas: The Reshaping of Tragedy and its Stylistic Consequences," Medium Aevum 51 (1982): 3-17, discusses the conflict of Dido in terms of passion for someone dead (Sychaeus) and passion that is death, symbolized by the burning sensation of love. The juxtaposition of amor and mort indicates who is guilty: "by seducing Eneas and deluding herself that she is acting for the best, Dido only succeeds in increasing the grip of death and shows herself as a wanton woman undeserving of sympathy" (p. 10). Shirl perhaps overstates his case in an effort to show that the poet’s originality lies in his creation of plausible justifications and motivations to replace the appearances of the Roman gods and goddesses.
37. Raymond J. Cormier, One Heart, One Mind: The Rebirth of Virgil’s Hero in Medieval French Romance (University, Miss.: Romance Monographs, 1973), p. 87.

38. Cormier, p. 88.


40. Patterson notes that Lavine’s halting confession of Eneas’ name (ll. 8537-64) recalls Myrrha in Metamorphoses 9 (p. 172). Given the incestuous nature of Myrrha’s love for her father, this comparison seems rather odd. Perhaps the Eneas-poet is not worried about direct comparison. Patterson’s explanation is that “in both cases [of Ovidian allusion], the Ovidian subtext functions as a thematic antitype for the love of Lavine and Eneas” (p. 172). For Patterson, such allusions are part of the larger pattern found in the Eneas of the French poet of diminishing and suppressing the historical past articulated by the Aeneid.

41. Auerbach, pp. 214-5. Although Auerbach claims that such descriptions of love are used sparingly in the Metamorphoses, critics such as Otis would strongly disagree. The term “courtesan” for the erotic poetry is a dated term, but Auerbach’s point about the Ovidian influence is not obscured by that usage.

42. Yunck, p. 38. After Lavine sends Eneas a letter declaring her love for him, Eneas acts like a typical lover: “Love for the king’s daughter had very quickly into great confusion” (pp. 232-3). He does not eat and spends a sleepless night tossing and turning.

43. Yunck, p. 37.

44. That medieval audiences believed that the Trojan War was an historical fact, see Benson, Erhardt, and Yunck (p. 38-40).

45. Patterson, p. 177. It should be noted that Patterson’s main interest is the political consequences of such changes (as such political concerns are the focus of New Historical criticism), but the idea that the twelfth century paid greater attention to the individual can be found in scholars of different critical persuasions—the difference is in the use they make of that idea.

47. *Genealogie* 2.721; passage cited in Kallendorf, p. 413.
SECTION 2:
The Deserted Woman and Textual Authority

Chapter III
"O Woeful Dido": Desertion and Authority in
The House of Fame

Recently critics have been suggesting that the House of Fame seems to be Chaucer's Ars Poetica, his statement on what constitutes poetry and the nature of language, a narrative about the issues of narrative.¹ Such readings often seem to coexist comfortably with earlier thematic readings which seek unity between the diverse topics: fame and reputation, love, dreams and textual authority, literary satire, and philosophy have all been suggested as the focus of the poem.² While critics may argue about the relationship between the different topics and sections (and the relative importance of each topic or section), it seems clear that Chaucer considered all of these ideas as relevant to his exploration of the creative process, purposefully creating episodes that would highlight the impossibility of separating these issues. The confusion
of the dreamer-narrator is also felt by readers as they attempt to disentangle the intricate structure of this "planned chaos." Furthermore, all three books of this poem discuss authority and interpretation, without resolution or definitive answers for either "Geoffrey" or his audience.

The poem begins with a discussion of dreams and the impossible task of interpreting those dreams: authorities on dreams cannot and do not agree on the types and causes of these events. The narrator has apparently spent much time examining these issues but is still unable to come to any conclusions:

...But whoso of these miracles
The causes knoweth bet then I,
Devyne he, for I certeinly
Ne kan hem nought, ne never thinke
To besily my wyt to swinke
To knowe of hir signifieance....

The narrator thinks of dreams as texts to be interpreted because "signifieance" can be found in dreams, as well as in texts. In fact, his dream becomes a narrative because the dreamer repeats his experience to an audience. As he journeys from the Temple of Venus to the House of Fame and finally to the House of Rumor, the narrator struggles to understand what he sees and hears. But the narrator disclaims any ability to understand what he has dreamed:

But why the cause is, noght wot I.
Wel worth of this thyng grete clerkys
That trete of this and other werkes,
For I of noon opinion
Nyl as now make mensyon....(52-6)

He presents himself as an authority only in the sense that it is his dream, his own experience, which he recounts.

He begins that endeavor by using the epic device of invoking a muse; here he calls on the God of Sleep, Morpheus, to help him tell his dream correctly ("Prey I that he wol me spede/ My swyne for to telle aryght," 78-9). Such a device suggests that this narrator, like an epic narrator, is undertaking the immense task of writing the epic, just as the epic hero begins his long journey that is the focus of the narrative. But here the dreamer-narrator is both Aeneas and Vergil, both hero and poet, and his quest becomes his search for material for his poetry, as he progresses from the Temple to the Houses of Fame and of Rumor, never quite satisfied with what he finds in each structure as he seeks the "love-tydynges" on which he can base his love poems. In this sense, we see the quest and ordeal narrative patterns, found in both epic and romance, that educate the hero, bringing him to self-knowledge, except that the poem breaks off before a final conclusion, the last example of how Chaucer "repeatedly builds systems [in this poem] only to undermine them."

Because Chaucer parodies epic
trappings such as the invocation and the quest, he questions the "significance" of the dream-quest as well as declaring his independence from such epic material, much in the way that Ovid declared his differences from Vergil in the passage from the *Amores* discussed in chapter 2.  

Furthermore, the dreamer identifies his audience as lovers, asking God to give them joy and protection if they interpret his dream correctly (90-3). If they do not approach the dream in the right frame of mind (if they have the "malicious entencion" of line 93, which is further defined in lines 94-6), the narrator asks that misfortune befall them. Given the narrator's own inability to interpret dreams, this request of (or mock threat to) his audience may seem strange, even contradictory to his earlier refusals to interpret dreams. The narrator, however, does not feel qualified to interpret his own experience, and he feels he must warn us to be careful in judging the nature of that experience—the narrator is deliberately unreliable because he seeks to be unauthoritative, while at the same time he seems to be concerned about how his audience will react. An objective narrator should not be directing his audience to feel a certain way, and in the *House of Fame*, particularly in the Dido and Aeneas story of Book 1, we see the
narrator struggling between objectivity and active involvement in his characters' actions.

The ultimate effect of the entire prologue, however, is to cast doubt on the authenticity of dreams as a means to understand reality in general and this dream in particular. As Jacqueline Miller has pointed out,

the choice of this framing device would indicate on the author's part, and perhaps invoke in his audience, an awareness of the very unsolved, shifting, and unstable nature of dreams, of interpretation, and of authority. And as the traditional supports for his work are undermined, the writer's own position in relation to his text would become a prominent issue.*

Despite these concerns over interpretation, the narrator tells us his dream, beginning with specific details designed to give the illusion that he is an authority: when he falls asleep on December 10, he dreams that he is in a temple of glass, adorned with gold statues. At first he doesn't know where he is (ll.128-9), but then he recognizes the statue of Venus, goddess of love, with her son Cupid and lover Vulcan. He also sees on the wall a brass tablet with the following words:

"I wol now syngle, yf I kan,
The armes and also the man
That first cam, thurgh his destinee,
Fugityf of Troy contree,
In Italye, with ful moche pyne
Unto the strondes of Lavynye."
And tho began the story anon,
As I shal telle yow echon. (143-50)
These lines are, as many scholars have noted, the essence of the opening lines of Vergil's *Aeneid*; the most important difference is the tag phrase "yif I kan." This phrase suggests both the narrator's doubtful ability and authority as well as the possibility that the following story may not be entirely "true" in the historical sense. Certainly the story of Aeneas would be the most obvious choice for a discussion of the reliability of textual authority and "fame"--especially since Aeneas is the son of the goddess honored in the temple. Delany argues that the "story of Dido and Aeneas is useful...precisely because its tradition is dual." However, as I have argued in Chapter 2, this love story is not simply a competition between the Vergilian and Ovidian versions. For the medieval reader, Dido and Aeneas brought to mind multiple and conflicting associations; the narrator of the *House of Fame* would indeed be confused by the images that could be found in various textual authorities. As Russell has noted, "Book One of the *House of Fame* is an exercise in textuality, a revelation of the contingency of history, a deconstruction of the discourse of history." Thus the Dido and Aeneas episode, as an example of the conflicting attitudes within history and love poetry, reinforces the narrator's distress in the prologue regarding the nature
of dreams.

The description of the Temple of Venus is an epiphraea, as Bennett has pointed out, which is "formally and thematically related to the main development of the poem...not unlike that of a digression from the central action in an epyllion." Yet the epic quality of this description serves as a commentary on the action as well as a correlative to the arrival of Aeneas in Carthage in Book 1 of the Aeneid; here again, the dreamer-narrator is both the hero and the poet. In Vergil's story, Aeneas sees on the temple of Juno pictures of the fall of Troy and is comforted by this proof of Troy's renown (fama; 1.4557). He is also amazed--several times forms of the verb miror ("to wonder") are used to describe his reaction (1.421, 456, 494). As Patterson has pointed out, these pictures function as both a representation and an interpretation of the past--"rather than use this representation of the past to understand his future, Aeneas escapes into a trance that avoids understanding altogether."

Described as pictura inani ("empty pictures"; 1.464), these scenes speak only to Aeneas' grief and pain; Aeneas "empties them of their historical force by ignoring their commentary upon his own situation." That is, Aeneas allows himself to be
trapped by the past that he is supposed to have left
behind and thus allows himself to forget his future and
divine mission (as he does by remaining in Carthage for
such a long time). But Dido does not allow the temple
pictures to dictate her judgment of Aeneas, for she asks
him to tell his own story of Troy's fall. Aeneas' story
evokes strong feelings of pity and love in Dido, and she
too is caught by his past. But most importantly, his
narrative comments on and further explicates the visual
representations seen earlier on the temple. Such
emotional involvement in a "famous" narrative, for both
Aeneas and Dido, leads to misperception and, for Dido,
destruction; both become unobjective/biased narrators and
audiences.

In the House of Fame, the narrator describes the
pictures that follow the lines on the brass tablet,
creating a narrative out of what he sees and what he has
apparently remembered from his textual authorities. The
narrator uses the tag phrases "First sawgh I" (151) and
"And next that I sawgh" (162) to alert us to the changes
in scene and episode within the narrative. He begins with
the episode of Sinon's betrayal from Book 2, starting in
ordo naturalis as most medieval versions of the Aeneid
did.15 Such an ominous beginning of "false forswerynge"
(l. 153) should alert us to the possibility of deceit later in this story. Yet the narrator has already alluded to a classical exemplum of deceit and adultery when he mentioned Venus and Vulcan (138-9)—the story of how Vulcan caught Venus in bed with Mars was well-known from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

The narrator begins objectively: his descriptions of events are accurate as defined by Vergil’s text. But the narrator soon begins to interject his own comments on the narrative by adding his own value judgments and by giving words to the static, visual characters. The first example of this narratorial intrusion is in the episode of Creusa, when he tells how the family fled from Troy:

Fleden eke with drery chere,  
That was pitee for to here...  
How Creusa was ylost, alas,  
That ded, not I how, she was...  
That hyt was pitee for to here,  
When hir spirit gan appere,  
The words that she to hym seyde,  
And for to kepe hir bone hym preyde.  
(179-80, 183-4, 189-92)

Twice within this episode the narrator imagines how the sounds of destruction would affect his characters. Moreover, he claims not to understand how Creusa might have gotten lost. In Vergil’s story, her loss is mysterious, but the narrator here seems to cast doubt on the authenticity of the circumstance but using the phrase
"not I how" rather than ascribing this lack of explanation to his literary sources or to the scene depicted on the temple wall." It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between what the narrator sees and what he has added to the figures in order to create his narrative: how much material from his own reading embellishes the "text" on the wall and how much this extra material colors his interpretation of the figures he sees make this narrator-reader subjective and unreliable.

The most obvious example of this biased and intrusive commentary occurs, however, in the section on Dido. The narrator begins by reminding us he is telling a story:

And, shortly of this thyng to pace,
She [Venus] made Eneas so in grace
Of Dido, queene of that countree,
That, shortly for to tellen, she
Becam his love and let him doo
Al that weddynge longeth too.
What shulde I speke more queyte,
Or peyne me my words peynte
To speke of love? Hyt wol not be;
I kan not of that faculte.
And eke to telle the manere
How they akeleynten in fere,
Hyt were a long process to telle,
And over-long for yow to dwelle. (239-52)

The narrator claims that his abilities as a narrator are not equal to the task of describing what he sees and reads. At this point the narrator is somewhat neutral; neither Aeneas or Dido seems to be responsible for the love affair, but the lengthy disclaimer reminds us that he
is leaving out material, more than even Vergil implies, especially regarding the sexual union. The narrator next describes (in three lines) the scene of Aeneas telling his story to Dido, and then he sees Dido as a lover:

And after grave was how shee
Made of hym shortly at oo word
Hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord,
And dide hym al the reverence
And leyde on hym al the dispence
That any woman myghte do,
Weynynge hyt had al be so
As he hir swor; and herby demed
That he was good, for he such seemd. (256-64)

Here, Dido is clearly the active seeker in the love affair, but Aeneas has given his word, making him less passive than he was in Vergil’s version. This situation thus begins to reflect the Ovidian version in which Aeneas is both a false lover and an ungrateful guest.

The narrator then openly breaks into commentary by supplying his own judgments in the form of aphorisms: "Alas! What harm doth apparence,/ Whan hit is fals in existence!" (265-6). That the moral of the narrator’s version of the story is that appearances can be deceiving is later reinforced by the narrator’s insistence that women should not love "hym that is unknown ys" (270) and the proverbial "Hyt is not al gold that glareth" (272). He continues his "lesson" with advice on why women should not love a man for his appearance, charm, or speech
because he will not hold true to his promises once he has what he wanted; for the narrator, the story of Dido and Aeneas is his exemplum for this sentence ("Al this seye I be Eneas/ And Dido, and hir nyce lest,/ That loved to sone a gest"); 286-8). The narrator continues to tell us how Aeneas betrayed Dido, a clear indication that he has left Vergil’s text behind for Ovid’s--at the very moment he says he is returning to Aeneas’ story.17 The refocusing of perspective is fully accomplished when Dido begins her lament: "'Allas,' quod she, 'what me ys woo!'" 300). This Dido frequently reminds Aeneas of his oath and asks him to take pity on her. Yet the narrator insists that he is not following any source here: "As me mette redely--/ Non other auctor alegge I" (313-4). These lines should signal to us that the narrator is adding to his original, essentially Vergilian, narrative, even though we might recognize his source for this shift in perspective.18 When we later learn that the narrator knows of Ovid’s Heroides (379) and is unwilling to reproduce the contents of Dido’s letter, we should suspect that the contents have already been presented within the lament.19 Clearly, Dido’s lament here has taken on new form within the narrator’s dream.20

Perhaps the most important complaint Dido has about
Aeneas is that she was unable to trust his words:

O, have ye men such godlyhede  
In speche, and never a del of trouthe?  
Alas, that ever hadde routhe  
Any woman on any man!  
Now see I wel, and telle kan,  
We wretchched wymmen konne noon art....(330-5)

Dido's inability to deceive Aeneas in thought or deed (329) is in marked contrast to his ability to use speech to deceive her. Her charge points back to the narrator's earlier sentence that appearances can be deceiving, but, more importantly, it points to the fact that people—in particular lovers—can easily misperceive what others say, as the narrator had pointed out in regard to the interpretation of dreams in the poem. Dido has been unable to "interpret" Aeneas' words and deeds (the "texts," so to speak, that she has "read") much in the same way that people misinterpret dreams and other texts; she has seen only what she wants to see (a lover who will be true to her) because she is bound to her own desires. In a sense, Dido's confusion mirrors the bewilderment of the narrator confronted by the multiple and competing versions of the same story. Furthermore, Dido claims that women do not have the "art" of devious speech at the same time that she uses rhetorical figures and terms: to persuade Aeneas to stay. Thus, Dido becomes an "artist," a rhetorician, and a poet in order to deal with Aeneas'
art/text/speech, which she has in fact misinterpreted. Just as the narrator-dreamer hides the boundaries between what he sees in the temple and what he makes of that vision within his dream, Dido fails to distinguish between reality (his devotion to his mission, not to her) and illusion (her self-deluding love) with the result that her own good reputation is lost.

Dido addresses "wike Fame" (349), which has caused her actions to be known far and wide. The end result is that Dido has lost her "fame":

Eke, though I myghte duren ever,  
That I have don rekever I never,  
That I ne shal be seyd, allas,  
Yshamed be thourgh Eneas,  
And that I shal thus juged be  
'Lo, ryght as she hath don, now she  
Wol doo eft-sones, hardly'— (353-9)

She can never change what people think about her, and she will always be known in conjunction with Aeneas and his betrayal—her reputation will always be judged by her behavior as lover, not as a ruler. Dido is concerned that people will forget that she was a good queen, but the last two lines do indicate that Dido is worried that people will call her a whore, a traditional concern of many literary women. Dido is, as Bennett says, a "victim of Fame"—more specifically, a victim of Aeneas' reputation. Russell comments that because Vergil, an
agent of Fame, wrote about her, Dido is "doomed forever to
do again what she did before (each time the Aeneid is
opened and read) and so doomed to ever-renewed ill
Fame." But Dido is a victim in more than one text, and
the different purposes of those texts expose her to
different forms of victimization. In Vergil’s work, Dido
is the victim of the heroic values centered in Aeneas’
divine mission; in Ovid’s version, Dido is the victim of a
false lover. In Chaucer’s dream, Dido is a victim in both
the Vergilian and Ovidian contexts. Yet she is more than
a deserted woman in Chaucer’s vision: she is also the
victim of conflicting textual authorities that remain
unresolved by the dreamer-poet. The dreamer casts doubt
upon the veracity and authority of each version: his
abrupt breaks from and return to the Vergilian narrative
indicate his skepticism, and he places the Ovidian
narrative within the Vergilian frame, suggesting that the
Ovidian version is a minor or digressive episode. Because
he can give neither authority unqualified support, the
narrator (like Dido) is himself confounded by the
authorities that confuse him.

At the end of Dido’s lament, the narrator reminds us
of his sources in an effort to move ahead with his main
narrative:
Rede Virgile in Eneydos
Or the Epistle of Ovyde,
What that she wrot or that she dyde;
And mere hyt to long to endyte,
Be God, I wolde hyt here write. (378-82)

Yet the narrator continues his digression by citing
exempla of untrue males "as men may ofte in bokes rede"
(385); he mentions the stories of Demophon and Phyllis,
Achilles and Briseis, Paris and Oenone, Jason with
Hypsipyle and Medea, Hercules and Deianira, Theseus and
Ariadne.44 The longest digression is the story of Theseus
and Ariadne (lines 405-26), which ends with the claim to
represent truth "in certeyn, as the book us tellis" (426).
The narrator reminds us that textual authority is a
necessary tool in interpreting experience—both Dido’s
experience as a deserted woman and the narrator’s own
dream—because the narrator begins his list of
authoritative exempla with an appeal to both books and
real life ("and al day [we] se hyt yet in dede," 386).
The literary examples serve as a framework with which to
categorize and judge experience; the examples also serve
as reinforcement of the sentence that the narrator placed
on the Dido story regarding false appearances (lines
265ff.). Thus, both the story of Dido and these exempla
serve as warnings for his audience of lovers so that they
will use literary authority to guide their own
experiences.

Dido's lament intrudes in Aeneas' story in a way that mirrors the narrator's intrusions in his temple-text. The narrator's hasty return to the Vergilian narrative indicates how much Dido's story conflicts with that of the primary source: "But to excusen Eneas/ Fullyche of al his gret trespas,/ The book seyth [that Mercury told Aeneas to leave Carthage]" (427-9). After such a lengthy digression filled with narratorial sympathy for Dido, the dreamer's claim that Aeneas acted as a result of divine intervention seems at best a flimsy excuse for the hero's departure, despite the fact that the Vergilian text is indeed the dreamer's authority.

Books 5 through 12 of the *Aeneid* fly by in swift, even hasty, plot summary, because Chaucer's main point has already been made. Frank says "if the Dido story was his business, as it seems to have been, he could have managed his abbreviating much more skillfully." Yet the focus on Dido shows us one way to measure Aeneas' fame; he is both a hero and a false lover. Muscatine also fails to see the relation between these sections:

We might be surer that this [the seven examples of false lovers] was to be the primary significance of the episode were it not that Eneas is then fully excused of his "gret trespas" (428) and the Narrator leads us out of the temple of Venus, into a desert....""
Finally, the dreamer leaves the Temple of Venus in search of someone who can tell him who made the temple or where he is (470-9), and he finds himself in a barren desert, suggestive of his confusion and his inability to find an authority to guide him.

The significance of the Dido and Aeneas episode lies not in the "exemplary value of the tradition itself," nor in the "nature of the two kinds of love and fame" illustrated by their story, nor finally in the oblique introduction of the themes of the "nature of Fame" and the "search for tidings of Love's folk." Its significance lies in the relationship of the narrator to his narrative, in which he questions the objectivity and reliability of the records of the past by questioning textual authority and his own reliability as reader and author.

The introductory material on dream lore and the advice to his audience of lovers should have warned us of the dangers involved in interpretation of the dream-experience by the dreamer-narrator (who has proven his unreliability through his biased intrusions) and of the dream-poem by his audience (whose misunderstanding the narrator tried to guard against in the prologue). The narrator slowly but passionately intrudes into his own narrative, providing us with both the Vergilian narrative
frame and the Ovidian perspective which comments on and interprets in a biased manner the framing narrative, just as the character of Dido comments on and interprets Aeneas' actions and speeches, eventually misunderstanding those signs. Fyler has already pointed out that the narrator of the *House of Fame* is anything but an objective reader and narrator:

> When we read about the distant past, the initial detachment of our response may change to involvement, as interest quickens; and growing involvement changes objectivity to bias. If we must distrust the poets who record history, we must also be suspicious of ourselves as their readers.¹⁰

The narrator can use textual authority to help him interpret his dream, but ultimately that interpretation is subjective because he must choose between conflicting authorities. The dreamer, as the narrator and interpreter of his experience, abandons one authority for another as he moves from the Vergilian to the Ovidian and back to the Vergilian narrative, at the same time that he blurs the distinctions between what he sees or reads and what he adds from his own reading of the authorities.

Thus, the narrator uses the conflicting authoritative characterizations of Dido, the archetypal *deserta femina*, to illustrate, on several levels, the difficulties of interpretation. The dreamer is unable to interpret his
dream-experience without help from textual authorities, yet those authorities are found to be unreliable and untrustworthy. The dreamer-narrator is on a quest for "love-tydynges" so that he can convert that material into love poetry because he claims to be inexperienced in love, yet he creates a poem that shows the unreliability of those "love-tydynges" in the form of historical narratives (as he found in the Temple of Venus), in the form of literary and historical reputations (in the House of Fame), and in the form of gossip and everyday experience (in the House of Rumor). Like the poem on dreamlore and the poem itself, which both end without resolution, the description/narrative of Aeneas and Dido show us that the narrator is unable to distinguish between what he sees on the temple walls and what he is remembering from his prior experiences as a reader of the narratives on which the visual art is based. The narrator becomes a victim of conflicting textual authorities as he is presented with and confused by the differing accounts of Dido’s story, and his own personal bias as the protagonist of his own dream and as a love-poet prevents him from granting complete trust in any authority; he despairs over the fact that his sympathy for Dido cannot be confirmed or denied by the textual "facts" since the conflict between his
sources cannot be resolved. The narrator is thus a version of Dido, who is confronted with the "text" of Aeneas, which is uninterpretable because of Dido's feelings for Aeneas (just as the narrator responds emotionally to the stories he has read). She has literally misinterpreted the decorations on the Temple of Juno (narrative in the form of visual art), the story he tells her of his own travels (an unobjective, first-person, autobiographical narrative), and the events that took place in the cave (her own experience). The narrator is confused by the dream (his own experience) and the decorations on the walls of the Temple of Venus; he does not know how to interpret these experiences on his own so he turns to the historical authorities (specifically Vergil and Ovid) who have very different versions of the same story. The narrator's problem is how to determine which is the "true" version—matters of interpretation. The dreamer-narrator finally cannot trust a narrative or words on which that narrative is based, so that he also might utter Dido's lament: "O men, have ye suche godlyhede/ In speche, and never a dele of truthe?" (330-1).
1. For brief reviews of scholarly approaches to this poem, see Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), pp. 168-70; Robert Jordan, "Lost in the Funhouse of Fame: Chaucer and Postmodernism," *ChR* 18 (1983): 100-15. Both Gellrich and Jordan are among those post-structuralists who read the *House of Fame* as a statement on language and narrative. Jordan distinguishes between thematic readings and post-structuralist readings on the grounds that thematic readings focus on an "objective reality" as the subject, whereas post-structuralists would view the poem as a fiction about fiction ("meta-" or "super-"fiction).


6. I should also note that many scholars have discussed Chaucer's use of Dante in this poem; for example, see Gellrich's book cited above and Robert Burlin's *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), who says it "appears he deliberately set out to produce a 'big work' to imitate, in earnest or in game, the reach of Dante" (p. 45); J. A. W. Bennett's "Chaucer, Dante, and Boccaccio"
and Piero Boitani's "What Dante Meant to Chaucer" in *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, ed. Piero Boitani (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). For the most part, allusions to Dante appear in the second and third books of the *House of Fame* and thus fall beyond the scope of my present chapter.

7. Traversi says that the effect of the "curse" is "to qualify any serious implications" (p. 54) and to promote the comic detachment of the narrator. Certainly the narrator is detached, or trying to remain so, at this point, but the "curse" does have serious implications in terms of the narrator's understanding of his textual authorities and of his own dream.


9. Fyler says that this line "implies in general terms the uncertain ability of art to be true to the facts" (p. 33).

10. Delany, p. 50.

11. J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1988), p. 179. Russell's definition of "deconstruction" is not to be confused with the current critical theory, at his own insistence; he defines it as "the necessary obverse of any culture-as-system, the ubiquitous urge to untangle, untie, unravel, and demythologize any intellectual system that comes to be replaced by its semantic formulations..." (p. 141). Deconstructionists, however, are more interested in the "absence" of meaning created by the use of linguistic signs--not, as Russell is, in the clash of opposing systems. The *House of Fame*, for Russell, represents one discussion in which the old theories of knowing are being tested against new theories. Certainly this notion can be compared to Burlin's "experience and authority" arguments: Burlin calls the *House* an "anti-vision" because of the deliberate inversions of the dream vision conventions (p. 47).

12. Bennett, p. 25. Bennett cites as sources for such a description Ovid's Palace of the Sun (Metamorphoses 2), Vergil's Palace of Juno in Carthage (Aeneid 1), along with similar set pieces in Statius, Claudian, and Alanus de
Insula (p. 9).

The use of ecphrasis is not limited to epic, as Wendy Steiner argues: "Pictures and mirrors abound in romance as symbols of the state of a protagonist's identity (Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988], p. 49). She bases her argument on Northrop Frye's discussions of the genre of romance.

13. Lee Patterson, "'Rapt with Plesaunce': Vision and Narration in the Epic," (ELH 48 [1981]: 455-75), p. 457. Patterson adds that the "gaze implies a nostalgic evasion of understanding, a lowered state of consciousness that is figured by a trance-like stupor that must be broken, both to disarm its dangerous seductions and to unlock the riches its objects contain" (p. 458). In the House of Fame (an example that Patterson does not discuss), the narrator has further complicated the problems of interpretation and understanding by placing his stunned gaze within the dream-vision context.

14. Patterson, p. 457. In his book, Patterson discusses the relationship between the hero and the poet: "Books 2 and 3 record the powerful lure of a past, both historical (for Aeneas) and literary (for Virgil), that must be subject to a continual if necessarily incomplete exorcism....As Aeneas seeks to alienate himself from Troy....so does Virgil rewrite his Greek pre-texts so as to inscribe a redemptive Roman difference" (p. 162). In other words, Virgil, as a poet, must work within the traditional narrative sources in order to be different from them. Such a connection between narrator-poet and his hero-protagonist is vital to Virgil's project, but the connection between narrator and hero in Chaucer's House of Fame is different in that both of these roles appear in the same character; as I mentioned before, the dreamer is both narrator and protagonist.

15. Hall, cited in chpt 2; Albert C. Friend argues that Chaucer followed the arrangement of the Iliads of Simon Aurea Capra, "generally known as a commentary on the Aeneid" ("Chaucer's Version of the Aeneid," Speculum 28 (1953): 317-23). But arrangement of episodes alone is not enough to assume that Chaucer had only one source in front of him as he wrote this section.
16. Russell comments, "the mystery surrounding Creusa’s death demonstrates that history is always subject to gaps and lacunae, which may be silently supplied, like emotional responses or moral judgments, by individual talents in the tradition" (p. 181).

17. Delany, p. 53. I heartily disagree with Delany’s presentation of the Vergilian and Ovidian sources:
It will be remembered that Virgil’s Dido, confronting her lover with his planned departure, indulges in a shrewish, nearly hysterical tirade in which she does not refrain from sarcasm and vindictiveness. Aeneas, though restrained, is said (if not shown) to be fully sympathetic to her distress (4.393-5). In Ovid’s epistle, however, Dido is loving, tender, and pathetic (p. 51).
At the very least, Delany has missed the irony inherent in Ovid’s version that is the result of Ovid using Vergilian material in a different context. Moreover, most critics of Ovid’s Dido would insist that this is the Dido who is shrewish, not loving. Ovid’s Dido is, however, the more pathetic of the two, and I do agree with Delany’s point that "the Ovidian attitude, closer than the epic to medieval courtly sentiment, became usual in vernacular literature...a tradition which permits the Narrator to be overwhelmed with sympathy for Dido" (p. 52).

18. Miller says of line 314, "On one level we can see that this episode in the story, which depicts the unreliability of words that carry with them 'never a del of trouth'—in fact, the potential unreliability of 'trouth' itself—coincides with the narrator’s abandonment of his vows of fidelity to the temple wall; in their place he substitutes his own voice, citing himself as the only source of the story he is telling" (p. 109). I would locate that abandonment earlier, with the Creusa episode, so that line 314 merely reinforces what we have been guessing for over 100 lines—that the narrator is no longer an unbiased observer.

19. Bennett states that lines 300-60 are based on the "distinctive medieval genre" of the complaint d’amour, whose classical precedents include Catullus 64 and the Heroides (p. 37). But perhaps we should not limit ourselves to one particular literary model, especially given the wide range of Chaucer’s reading material and influences.
20. As Boitani states, "Dido’s words and laments resound, not in space, but in the mind, in an absolute physical silence. They echo in thought, which can then digest and extend to famous cases of betrayed heroines..." (p. 10). If Dido is an exemplum, then she is not the only woman deceived by appearances and male rhetoric. Within Book 1 of the dream, her lament is the most striking example of the narrator’s intrusive practice of adding characters’ speeches to the narrative.

21. Delany notes the use of "conclusyon," "determyen," and "diffynen" as terms from scholastic debate (p. 54).


Boitani notes that "war, or heroic enterprises, are not the only ways of achieving the fame that can conquer death. Love, as the medieval tradition in particular emphasizes, is another" (p. 3). In a sense, Dido fits both patterns since she appears both in epic and elegy or romance.


24. All of these stories can be found in Ovid’s Heroides. With the exception of Achilles and Briseis, Chaucer treats these stories in his Legend of Good Women (Phyllis, Hypsipyle, Medea, Ariadne) or mentions them elsewhere (Paris and Gennon in Troilus and Criseyde, Hercules in The Monk’s Tale).

25. Frank, Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women, p. 60.


27. Delany, p. 57.


30. Fyler, p. 32.
Chapter IV

Good Women, False Men, and a Faithful Narrator:

Betrayal in the Legend of Good Women

The prologue of the Legend of Good Women is another work, like the House of Fame, that has received recent critical attention in part because the issues discussed there relate to Chaucer's Ars poetica. As a consequence, the legends themselves have for the most part been neglected. Moreover, critics are divided on the success of the poem as a whole, unable to agree on such issues as the tone and the amount of irony used by the narrator-dreamer of the prologue, or whether or not the narrator is a feminist or an anti-feminist. Furthermore, critics disagree on how, if at all, the legends carry out the prologue's stated project.

The individual legends illustrate Chaucer's most obvious use of the deserted woman motif. In fact, criticism of the legends often echoes scholars' opinions of Ovid's Heroides—that the stories and characters are boring and repetitive, and that the tone is inconsistent and sentimental. Yet the legends are not simply
translations from Ovid; one crucial difference is Chaucer’s intrusive, first-person narrator, who relates the stories of these heroines rather than allowing the women to plead their own cases, as in Ovid’s work. Most importantly, this shift in narratorial perspective allows the narrator to interfere with the narrative logic of the legends by manipulating his sources and by providing morals that highlight his own prescribed project. Other important changes are those that occur within the legends when the narrator must alter the “facts” of his sources in order to suit the God of Love’s criteria; as Donald Rowe has stated, “to read the legends is inevitably to experience their incompatibility with their sources.” Such changes highlight the narrator’s concern about interpretation and translation, about fidelity and betrayal to one’s textual authorities. In order to address these artistic issues, Chaucer uses the deserted woman character because her narrative involves similar issues of truth, betrayal, and interpretation.

Peter Allen is not alone in focusing on reading as a central issue of the Legend, but his arguments concerning the varieties of authority and experience focus on issues highlighted by reader-response criticism. For Allen, the narrator of the Legend is clearly unreliable (and is
characterized as such early in the prologue) and the poem presents a "faulty model of reading" which we must "transcend" by valuing our own experience as readers over the authority of the author.¹ An unreliable narrator cannot be trusted to provide his audience with the truth, so we must learn to judge for ourselves. His first step in reading the poem "successfully" is to "recognize the parallel between ourselves as readers and the martyrs of the legends--to realize that the reader is, at least metaphorically, a woman who has given herself over to a deceitful man (in this case, the unreliable narrator). Thus, fidelity is an important virtue for lovers as well as authors.² Allen, however, does not fully develop this analogy between the readers and the betrayed women, nor does he suggest that the narrator is both betrayer and betrayed and is thus, on some level, analogous to his audience and his characters. These relationships are the focus of this chapter: the narrator betrays his readers by not fulfilling their expectations (in regards to genre and fidelity to his sources), and he himself is betrayed because he is forced to fulfill the God of Love and Alcesté’s requirements. Like his deserted women characters, the narrator has a difficult time choosing between love for his books (or being true to his textual
sources) and obedience to his God of Love—a choice between amor and pietas for the narrator who is a reader and writer of love stories.

The prologue begins with a statement of faith in things unseen but authoritatively reported:

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
That ther ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
And I acoerde wel that it ys so;
But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
That ther his noon dwelllyng in this contree
That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen
But as he hath herd seyd or found it witen;
For by assay ther no man it preve.
But God forbede but men shoulde leve
Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
(F 1-11)  

The narrator immediately presents himself as a man who is willing to believe in the stories of others, even when he cannot test that knowledge with his own experience. Faith in God necessarily entails a faith in the truth of written material; indeed, books are a vital source of information, of "olde approved stories/ Of holynesse, of regnes, of victories,/ Of love, of hate, of other sondry thynges" (F 21-3). It is important, however, to note how quickly the narrator moves from the religious to the secular: the historical events concerning rulers and the personal emotions of people seem to interest the narrator more than the stories of holiness. The narrator also seems to be referring to the major genres of his era: saints' lives,
historical writing, epic, romance, and lyric. Indeed, all of these genres are represented within the *Legend* sources for the prologue include the French *marquerite* poems (lyric), and sources for the legends include a variety of classical material in the form of history, epic, and romance—not to mention the genre suggested by the other title of the poem, "The Seintes Legende of Cupide." The narrator also reminds us that, without these old stories, there would be little to help us remember what has happened:

And yf that olde boke were aweye,
Ylören were of remembrance the keye.
Wel ought us thanne honoure and beleve
These boke, ther we han noon other preve.

(F 25-8)

In other words, we should have as much faith in these books as we do in the writings, inspired by God, which tell us that there is a heaven and a hell. The narrator implies that there is little to distinguish between textual authority of the divine and human variety—history can be filled with events beyond our comprehension just as religious works are. The author of a text must faithfully record the truth of the event, and the reader accepts that the text is true; difficulties arise when the reader finds that he cannot trust the text, either because the narrator records details that contradict another source or because
the narrator contradicts himself within the text. By calling attention to such matters of faith and authority, the narrator establishes the problematic relationship between the author and his audience early in the prologue. Readers are important figures in the prologue: the narrator presents himself as an avid reader and as a man who is trying to interpret his own experiences (including the dream), and the God of Love and Alceste are readers.

Books are so important for the narrator that only the beautiful May day, filled with birds’ songs and new spring flowers, can prompt him to lay aside those books. His devotion to his books is replaced by his worship of the daisy (F 39-43), and his praise of the daisy is couched in courtly love conventions. Furthermore, the daisy becomes the impetus for the narrator’s nighttime dream; his bed is strewn with the flowers (F 207), and, as soon as he falls asleep, the God of Love and a queen, later identified as Alceste, appear. When he describes the God, the narrator notes "And al be that men seyn that blynd ys he,/ Algate me thoghte that he myghte se" (F 237-8)—his own experience is in conflict with the traditional depiction of Cupid as blind. We must wonder about this contradiction for, as readers, we trust the dreamer to relate his dream honestly, even when that dream-experience
departs from accepted convention. He is testing our faith as readers, the same kind of faith that the narrator claims to have in the texts that he reads.

Soon the God of Love notices the dreamer, learns his identity, and declares him an enemy:

And thow my foo, and all my folk werreyest,
And of myn olde servauntes thow myssseyest,
And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
And lettest folk from hire devocioun,
To serve me, and holdest it folye
To serve Love....(F 322-7)\footnote{10}

The narrator's main crime seems to be that his poems or translations are encouraging people not to fall in love, thereby diminishing the number of the God's worshippers. Furthermore, the God continues, the proof is in writing:

...Thou maist yt nat denye,
For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the Romanunce of the Rose,
That is an heresy ayeins my lawe,
And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyte,
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.
(F 327-34)\footnote{11}

Because of these two works, according to the God, men can no longer trust women—despite the fact that the God of Love is male, he seems more concerned with the slander against women illustrated by Creseyde's betrayal. Also implied is the opposition between reason (exemplified by the "wise folk" of line 331) and love, an opposition that we will see in various forms within the legends
themselves. Most importantly, the God of Love has a rather narrow interpretation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* if all he recognizes is Criseyde's betrayal, for the narrator does everything possible to raise our opinions of Criseyde while remaining true to his source. Thus, the God of Love proves himself a narrow-minded reader who has not fully understood the texts he has read."

The main artistic issue, however, is a poet's use of textual authorities. The job of translation can be especially difficult because the poet must be both reader and writer, paying particular attention to the idioms and nuances of both languages in order to render an accurate translation. But accuracy is an elusive quality because a word-for-word translation does not necessarily recreate the sense of the original, just as merely "getting the gist" of something inevitably leaves something out. Thus, as Kiser has pointed out,

> to indict Chaucer for translating someone else's work is not quite fair, however... Translators should not have to be held accountable for the intentions of their authors; their job is merely to be faithful to the matter they have chosen to treat.

The people who should be blamed are the original authors of the *Roman* and Criseyde's story, not the translator. But if we do not have "faith" in the truthfulness of those
sources, we cannot learn from those authorities, and thus translators must somehow recreate the truth presented in the original text.

Since the narrator's "crime" is the translation of texts heretical to the God of Love's law, then it is only fitting that his penance be a series of translations.¹⁴ Alceste, in her efforts to mediate between the dreamer and the God of Love, orders the dreamer to spend his time

In makyng of a glorious legende
Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,
That weren trewe in loyynge al hire lyves;
And telle of false men that hem bytraien,
That al hir lyf ne don nat but assayen
How many women they may doon a shame;
For in youre world that is now holde a game.
(F 483-9)

Alceste has placed rather narrow restrictions on the poet: first, she has dictated the genre, that of saints' lives, and she insists that all the women be good and all the men be false, limiting the types of characters and the types of experiences they will enact. She seems to have forgotten that men can be faithful, just as Troilus remained true to Criseyde; Alceste, like the God of Love, seems to have misunderstood that poem.¹⁵

If we had any doubts about the problems that these restrictions place on the poet, those doubts are erased when we hear the God indicate the specific subjects that the narrator must write about. First, the God asks the
narrator if he has read of Alceste, the traditional example of wifely virtue: "Hastow nat in a book, lyth in thy cheaste,/ The grete goodnesse of the quene Alceste... (F 510-1). The God of Love reminds the narrator that she was not one of the ladies mentioned in the balade (F 249-69), but that those ladies would also be suitable subjects (F 525-58)"—if only the narrator were to return to his books to learn from them." The problem here is that the God of Love wants the narrator to write about classical (pagan) women in a form of literature especially devoted to promoting Christian values; the women in the balade, with the exception of Esther and the two men, Absolon and Jonathas, are all from classical history and myth. The final proof of the difficulty of the narrator's task is the God's request that he begin the legend with Cleopatra, a woman not usually portrayed as "good."" Although speaking in reference to the "Legend of Dido," Kiser's argument pertains to the entire collection:

This legend...brilliantly parodies the unfortunate results of so many medieval retellings of classical stories, especially those that are told to fit a prearranged context or to confirm some a priori system of morality. To be sure, the practice of making saints out of pagan lovers is a greatly exaggerated example of literary falsification, yet it is close enough to medieval practice to be classified as parody."" The limitations imposed by the God of Love thus force the
narrator to manipulate his sources, to create uniformity in characterization and moral tone. By fulfilling his duties, the narrator fails his sources and his readers who expect him to write the truth. Thus Chaucer is "attacking narrative strategies, not saints or classical lovers."

In order to better understand the narrator's assigned task, we must first examine the genre he is being forced to use. The saint's life genre is a narrative form whose "primary social function...is to teach (docere) the truth of the faith through the principle of individual action." The narrative may illustrate either a single episode or a series of events, but the standard by which the saint's behavior was judged is the life of Christ; thus, the predetermined focus of imitatio Christi is the most important common structure in this genre. The standard pattern is then adapted to the facts (whether based on historical records or oral legend) of the specific saint's career. Thomas Heffernan, in his book Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages, discusses four types of gender specific experiences in female saints' lives, patterns that occur early in the tradition of the genre; these common motifs are:

the redefinition of ideas of kinship; freedom from the Pauline notion of sexual
"indebtedness"; the importance of prophetic visions; and the change from virgin, wife, or widow to sponsa Christi."

Thus, the female saint deliberately rejects her family and other social authority (often pagans or men who threaten the saint’s virginity/chastity) in order to serve the Christian God—no law or social convention is important to a woman, isolated by her faith in God. Men are the antagonists in these narratives because positions of legal and social authority were dominated by males; in other words, those authority figures who sought to deny the female saint her status as sponsa Christi were, by and large, men whose misogyny and anti-Christian behavior are their guiding characteristics. Yet the "saintly maiden is shown deceiving, rebuking, outwitting, displaying more courage, and finally triumphing over men." These rather "unfeminine" qualities, however, are seen as virtues because they are the means by which the woman earns her rightful position as a saint—thus a female saint must subvert authority in order to submit to God.

What we see in Chaucer’s legends are similar structural patterns: his pagan ladies are all single-mindedly devoted to Love, and, because of that devotion, their lives become a repeated pattern of falling in love and suffering, even dying, for that love." Pat Overbeck,
in her article, "Chaucer's Good Woman," has pointed out the common characteristics of the women in the legends: most importantly, this "Good Woman" is one "who cannot or will not relate to authority, the consummate woman of experience"--in other words, the "Good Woman" rejects human authority in the pursuit of her beloved.** Overbeck also notes the "wyfhood" motif: "The Good Woman chimerically seeks freedom from masculine dominance, and, at the same time, sanctioned union with the male which implies such dominance."** Certainly, all of the females are judged by patriarchal standards; their reputations depend on how men treat them. Overbeck's definition of the "Good Woman" focuses on the conflicting impulses of these females who continually defy authority, and such women are not exactly similar to the archetypal good wife, Alceste, whose devotion to her husband caused her to die in his place. Thus, these characters may not seem to be the kind of female exempla requested in the prologue, in the sense that it is hard to be exemplary figures while disregarding authority; but, as in Christian female saints' lives, this defiance in the name of God is a necessary part of this genre. The heroines of the Legend are clearly women who choose love over patriarchal authority, despite the disastrous results, and thus they
can be said to serve the God of Love.

In order to show how Chaucer shifted his source material to fit his prescribed task, we will examine three legends. Two of these women--Dido and Ariadne--clearly fit the *deserta femina* pattern as described in Chapters 1 and 2. The third, Philomela, may not at first glance appear to fit this pattern, though her story ultimately does; thus we will see how this pattern can be altered to fit the demands of the narrator's task.

The "Legend of Dido" is the longest of the legends, placed third in the collection. The narrator begins with an epic-like invocation: "Glorye and honour, Virgil Mantoan,/ Be to thy name! and I shal, as I can,/ Folwe thy lanterne, as thou gost byforn...(924-6)--this is the only legend to open with a direct address to a specific author and textual source; other legends may refer to a classical author, but not in the first line. The narrator implies that the he is "following" Vergil's lantern because Vergil is the first author to treat the story of Dido; Ovid's version comes after the *Aeneid*, just as, within the legend, the Vergilian perspective is rapidly replaced by the Ovidian perspective. The narrator promises to be faithful to the "tenor" of Vergil and Ovid (928-9), apparently unaware of the difficulties in reconciling
those points of view. In fact, the narrator ends the legend with a reference to Ovid ("Rede Ovyde," 1367), literally framing the legend with the names of his two conflicting sources. On the whole, the narrator follows the ordo naturalis of the story, as he did in Book 1 of the House of Fame, but he soon focuses his attention on Dido:

> But of his [Aeneas'] aventure in the se
> His nat to purpos for to speke of here,
> For it acordeth nat to my materie.
> But, as I seyde, of hym and of Dido
> Shal be my tale, til that I have do.
> (953-7)

By directing our attention to his assigned task, the narrator warns us that he is not allowed to tell us about Aeneas, just as he is about to spend nearly forty lines describing how Aeneas arrives in Carthage. The disclaimer at the end of this description—"I coude folwe, word for word, Virgile, / But it wolde lasten al to lonege while" (1002-3)—seems somewhat inappropriate given the length of that description of Aeneas' activities. These lines also remind us that to "follow" a text is to read or translate it; we are acutely aware here that Chaucer is manipulating his sources."

Indeed, the narrator constantly reminds us that he is relying on textual authority; for example, when he describes Aeneas' entry into the temple, he mentions that
Venus has made Aeneas invisible, even though he is not sure that is possible—"I can nat seyn if that it be possible...Thus seyth the bok, withouten any les" (1020-2). The narrator intrudes often in order to comment on his story, a common Chaucerian practice, but, in the legends, these intrusions force the God of Love's morals on us just as they were forced on the narrator." The best example of the "good women vs. bad men" philosophy is the narrator's comment after Dido has taken Aeneas as her lover:

O sely wemen, ful of innocence,
Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience,
What maketh yow to men to truste so?
Have ye swych routhe upon hyre feyned wo,
And han swich olde ensamples yow beforne?
Se ye nat alle how they ben forsworn?
(1254-9)

This passage picks up several ideas from the narrative itself: first, the use of "sely" here reminds us that the narrator has just used that word of Dido (1237), and the force of this repetition is to generalize Dido's behavior to include all women, making Dido an exemplum (an idea reinforced by the "ensaamples" of line 1258). The allusion to "pite" and "routhe" reminds us that it was partly Dido's pity and generosity that caused her to fall in love with Aeneas (appropriate for her Ovidian characterization). The narrator also slanders men who
manipulate women with pretense, false stories of suffering--this passage occurs directly after we learn that Aeneas "laughe" because he is "in joye" (1252-3), an addition not found in Chaucer’s sources but one which highlights the man’s insensitivity and wicked behavior. The narrator is indeed carrying out the God’s wishes.

The narrator himself is caught up in Dido’s suffering, refusing to provide us with more of her complaint to Anna: "of which I may nat wyrte, / So gret a routhe I have it for t’endite" (1344-5). Furthermore, the narrator casts doubt upon the evidence of Dido’s final letter to Aeneas just as he begins to translate that letter: "But, as myn auctor seith, yit thus she seyde;/ Or she was hurt, byforen or she deyde..." (1352-3). We only get the first lines (including the dying swan image) before the narrator abruptly directs us to Ovid’s version. Breaking off the story at this juncture clearly indicates that the narrator is following the God of Love’s orders and not following Vergil’s lamp--the point is that the narrator can not be a "good" translator and serve the God of Love at the same time. Divided loyalties cannot be reconciled, in the same way that conflicting sources (in this case, Vergil and Ovid) cannot be reconciled.

"The Legend of Ariadne" also shows a narrator
adjusting his sources, primarily Ovid, in order to fulfill the God of Love’s commands. First of all, the narrator begins with a direct address to the Cretan king Minos, father of Ariadne as well as the person responsible for bringing Theseus to Crete (the result of the feud with Athens). After stating the initial cause of the war (the death of Androgeus), the narrator tells us about the daughter of Nisos—although she is not named here, she is traditionally named Scylla. Scylla, standing on the city’s wall, watches the siege and falls in love with Minos: “she caste hire herte upon Mynos the kyng” (1911). Her love for Minos prompts her to help him win the city; so far, the narrator is faithfully reproducing the story found in the Metamorphoses, but he now insists that he must continue with his story and leaves out the details of Scylla’s betrayal of her father and her city. In fact, the word “betrayal” is conspicuously absent here: the description “she made Mynos wynnen thilke place” (1915) is surprisingly neutral. Our surprise continues when we find that Minos is not grateful: “But wikkedly he quitte hire kyndenesse” (1918). Although Minos spurns Scylla’s love in the Metamorphoses, in Chaucer’s version Minos’ natural abhorrence of a heinous crime against pietas becomes his “wicked” crime against her—an inversion of the moral of
the source in order to satisfy the God of Love's orders that all men in the *Legend* are to be false.

In fact, Theseus is characterized as a villain from the very start; the narrator claims to write this story not only for Minos' sake, "But for to clepe ageyn unto memory/ Of Theseus the grete untrouthe of love" (1889-90). And the narrator refers to this narrative as Theseus' "lyf" (1893), suggesting that the story will focus on the male, not the female. The narrator's direct address to Minos is continued by a direct address to Theseus whom the narrator advises "Be red for shame" (1893). This personal reaction on the part of the narrator continues within the story when he comments on Theseus' predicament in jail:

Wel maystow wepe, O woful Theseus, That art a kynges sone, and dampned thus. Me thynketh this, that thow were depe yholde To whom that savede thee from cares colde! And if now any woman helpe the, Wel oughtestow hire servaunt for to be, And ben hire trewe lovere yer be yerel (1952-8)

We have yet to be introduced to Ariadne and Phaedra, so this passage foreshadows Theseus' rescue by a woman and his pledge of service to Ariadne in return for that aid (2029-49). When we learn that Phaedra is actually the mastermind of the plan--not Ariadne--we should not be that surprised when Theseus abandons Ariadne in favor of
Phaedra. Yet Theseus is portrayed as an ungrateful hero, a man who breaks his promises, comparable to Minos in his rejection of the woman who helps him achieve his goals.

Frank correctly notes the "antiromantic attitude" of the legend: there is too much emphasis on Theseus' rank as opposed to how low a role he is willing to play in order to save himself, and too much emphasis on Ariadne's dreams of marriage to a man with a title for this narrative to be considered seriously. He also maintains that the purpose of this legend is to expose the expectation of reward implicit in so much romance. Love takes on a curiously calculating quality in the conversation between Ariadne and Phaedra, and between Ariadne and Theseus. Though the situation is potentially dramatic and emotional, emotion evaporates and is replaced by reason. Instead of a pledged word, a promise based on intense feeling, a spontaneous, impulsive generosity, we have a bargain struck.

Furthermore, Frank suggests that Ariadne has "read or heard too many romances and is talking and acting as she thinks a romance heroine should." Certainly Ariadne's insistence that she is helping Theseus out of pity (1982) implies that there are standards by which her actions are judged. What the narrator does not mention is that Ariadne and Phaedra, in helping Theseus, are going against their father's orders that Athenian youths are to be sacrificed to the Minotaur—they are guilty of betrayal as
much as Nisus' daughter is.

The narrator reproduces some of the Ovidian letter, just as he did in the "Legend of Dido." But here the reason for this partial treatment is not merely to direct the readers to the source material; in this legend, the narrator implies his personal feelings prevent him from continuing:

What shulde I more telle hire compleynyng?
It is so long, it were a hevy thyng.
In hire Epistel Naso telleth al;
But shortly to the ende I telle shal.
(2218-21)

And four lines later the narrator does give his moral, consistent with the God of Love's instructions and with his initial characterization of Theseus: "But thus this false lover can begyle/ His trewe love, the devel quyte hym his while!" (2226-7). Even though Ariadne has traditionally been portrayed as a deserted woman, Chaucer has manipulated the story to show us a scheming woman as well as a false man.

Another legend whose main source is Ovidian is "The Legend of Philomela," but the material is from the Metamorphoses, not the Heroidees. As in the "Ariadne," the male, Tereus, seems to be the center of attention; one critic estimates that only twenty-nine percent of the story is devoted to Philomela. The narrator begins by
asking the "yevere of the formes" (2228) why he created a man like Tereus, "that is in love so fals and so forswore" (2235). The question seems a bit dramatic, even for a false lover, but the narrator continues with his own highly dramatic personal reaction to reading this story:

And, as to me, so grisely was his dede
That, whan that I his foule storye rede,
Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also.
Yit last the venym of so lange ago,
That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde
The storye of Tereus, of which I tolde.
(2238-43)

Surely this is a warning to the audience that they should continue reading at the risk of being infected themselves; this venom has lost none of its potency with age, and the audience should wonder if this is an appropriate story.

But the narrator continues, not intruding into the story until after the wedding of Tereus and Procne, and later after Tereus has raped and mutilated Philomela--remarkable silence for a narrator who is quick to comment and moralize in the other legends. Perhaps the venom has depleted his strength? He claims that he is "wery of hym for to telle" (2258), but this is rather early in the narrative, prior to any evil deeds. When Tereus has committed the crime, the narrator addresses the victim, not the villain: "O sely Philomene, wo is thyn herte! God wreke thee, and sende the thy bone!" (2339-40). The
narrator also characterizes Procne as "sely" just seven lines later, thereby suggesting a common bond of innocence between the two sisters. Moreover, we have seen this "sely" used of other heroines in the Legend. What these women share is a naive trust in men who are able to manipulate words and beguile the women with false promises. Yet Philomela and Procne are not abandoned by a false lover like Dido by Aeneas or Ariadne by Theseus—they have been abused and manipulated by a man who does not keep his promises. Because he is her husband, Procne believes Tereus when he claims that Philomela is dead. Philomela believes that Tereus will protect her just as he had promised Pandion. Philomela and Procne are deserted in the sense that they have little power within a patriarchal society that allows men to control female lives.

Tereus uses words to get what he desires, much like the heroes of the other legends. Ultimately, however, it is brute force that conquers Philomela: "By force hath this traytour don a dede,/ That he hath reft hire of hire maydenhede,/ Maugre hir hed, by strengthe and by his myght" (2324-6). The narrator's judgment of this event is predictably sympathetic to the woman's predicament: "Lo! here a dede of men, and that a ryght!" (2327). This
"right" is a matter of power, both physical and social—men, according to the narrator, use women for their own ends, as the narrator confirms when he describes Philomela as being locked up for Tereus' "usage and his store" (2337). Only because Philomela is able to read and write (2356), education apparently unusual for a woman of her day, is she able to communicate her story in a tapestry. She combines the "male" use of words with a traditional female art of weaving—a significant change from Ovid's story wherein Philomela's tapestry is filled with pictures.

The narrator ends the legend with the sisters' reunion rather than continuing with their revenge against Tereus; to continue would mean that the women are no longer victims of male oppression and that they are capable of heinous crimes (killing a son and feeding him to his father)—Procne and Philomela would no longer be "Good Women" by the God of Love's standards. Instead, the narrator ends with his by now familiar warnings to his female audience:

Ye may be war of men, if that you liste
For al be it that he wol nat, for shame,
Don as Tereus, to lese his name,
Ne serve yow as a morderour or a knave,
Ful lytel while shal ye trewe hym have—
That wol I seyn, al were he now my brother—
But it so be that he may have non other.

(2387-93)
In other words, most men aren’t killers but they will not be true to one woman for long. Such fickle men appear often in the Legend, but the moral seems inappropriate for a tale of rape, mutilation, and deceit, despite the fact that Tereus, once in love with Procne, does shift his lustful eye to Philomela. Technically speaking, Procne is the wife abandoned for another woman, yet the true suffering is done by Philomela. Furthermore, the narrator apparently feels so strongly about these false men that he won’t speak well of any man even if he were his own brother. Such an exaggerated claim fits nicely with the dramatic introduction to the legend. But, once again, the narrator focuses on himself and his own gender at the expense of the heroines he is supposedly praising.  

Such misdirection in the moral also softens the violence of the story.

In fact, neither sex is unconditionally praised in the Legend. While most of the men are manipulative and carelessly abandon their lovers, there is Pyramus’ devotion to Thisbe as a counterbalance. For the most part, the women are praised for their suffering at the hands of men, in the name of love, yet not even Lucrece escapes the suggestion of blame. Like Philomela, Lucrece is raped, but her insistence on saving her name suggests
that her suicide is not necessary.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, anyone familiar with Augustine’s discussion of Lucretia’s suicide, in his \textit{City of God}, would wonder if she really is a saint.\textsuperscript{11} Instead of love being a binding force, passion (lust or immoderate desire) motivates the behavior of both sexes, and this emotion is perhaps what is really being criticized in the \textit{Legend}. Steven Kruger, in a recent article, maintains that Chaucer "explores how human passions distort social structures, how vital emotions and impulses escape the forms imposed on them."\textsuperscript{12} Both males and females are guilty of allowing passion to rule their lives. As we saw in the first two chapters, the conflicting concepts of \textit{amor} and \textit{pietas} are at the heart of the \textit{deserta femina} characterization. By giving in to \textit{amor} both women and men in the \textit{Legend} forget \textit{pietas} or the social and religious principles that should govern their lives. Thus Tereus’ and Tarquin’s lusts that result in rape are comparable, on some level, to Pyramus’ youthful desire to escape parental control, or to Aeneas’ and Theseus’ desire to save their own lives. The women are not perfect either, for their naive trust and unquestioned devotion to love allow them to become victims. Therefore, relying on "experience" rather than "authority" (the quality that Overbeck admires), the women destroy
themselves and others.

Clearly, trusting in experience and rejecting authority lead to trouble in the legends, and the fact that both genders are guilty of such behavior, despite the narrator's efforts to describe only "good women" and "false men," should alert us to the impossibility of classifying experience into limited categories. The narrator, the voice of authority for the reader, is unreliable because he consciously manipulates his textual authorities in order to fulfill the demands of the God of Love and Alcestes. By obeying Love, the narrator must betray his sources and defy authority; he cannot be a faithful translator because he has altered the truth of the original texts to fit his assigned task. Thus the narrator cannot be trusted because he is catering to the demands of a god who is only concerned with having many worshippers and whose narrow-minded reading of Chaucer's poems forces an undeserved punishment on the dreamer.

The narrator is similar to his "good women" in the sense that he is a victim of conflicting demands. As Fyler has pointed out, "The narrator of the Legend, in contrast [to Ovid], forces passivity on his heroines: he tells, and he controls their narratives." The God of Love controls the narrator, and the narrator controls the
narratives of the legends. But in spite of his attempts to please the God of Love, the narrator refuses to see the characters in black and white terms: not all men are false, and not all women selflessly serve the God of Love. The saint’s life genre cannot be easily adapted to glorify the pagan women of classical mythology because the value systems that each genre promotes are often incompatible. Within the narratives themselves we see that the conflicting demands of amor and pietas cannot be resolved without problem. Most important, however, is the narrator’s relationship with his readers: the unreliable narrator, like the false men of the legends, manipulates language and texts to suit his own purposes, thereby betraying his readers who trust the narrator to accurately record experience and authority both.

Chaucer, as in Book 1 of the House of Fame, shows us that multiple textual authorities are not easily reconciled into one homogenous perspective. And Chaucer has once again used the deserta femina motif to highlight the conflicting demands of experience and authority, as well as the potential differences in the narrator’s intentions in creating and the audience’s role in understanding a poem. Thus, the concluding lines of the "Legend of Phyllis" are true for both women and readers:
Be war, ye wemen, of youre subtyl fo,
Syn yit this day men may ensaumple se;
And trusteth, as in love, no man but me.
(2559-61)

But, by the end of the eighth legend, we have learned that we cannot even trust the narrator.


3. Rowe, p. 137.

4. Peter Allen, "Reading Chaucer's Good Women," *ChauR* 21 (1987): 419-34. His discussion of the process by which we, the readers, come to distrust the narrator is outlined on p. 420.

5. Rowe makes a similar point, that Chaucer "establish[es] parallels between the narrator and his dramatis personae" (p. 53).

6. I have cited from the F prologue though the lines I use also occur in G. Whenever the G version differs, I have cited those differences in the notes.

7. For more information on Chaucer's use of his sources, see Leach's dissertation, the chapters on the individual legends in Frank, Shannon's *Chaucer and the Roman Poets*, and Shaner and Edwards' notes in *The Riverside Chaucer*.

8. On the use of courtly love language for the worship of the rose, see, for example, Rove, who says, "As daughter of the marguerite and granddaughter of the rose [of the Roman de la Rose], Chaucer's daisy is heir to an ancient and rich tradition" (p. 21). Frank also notes that the daisy sequence "uses all the language and postures of courtly love, not for the proper object of love, but for a daisy" (p. 22); Frank sees this material as a parody of
9. Kiser maintains that "the God of Love cannot be very closely identified with the Cupid of the classical world" because Cupid "is always represented as sightless" (p. 63). But I think the point is that the description of the God of Love is the result of the dreamer’s own dream-experience, not the result of reliance on authority.

10. In the G version, the God of Love says "To serven me, and holdest it folye/ To truste on me" (252-3). The change from "serve" to "trust" is important, emphasizing the issue of faith (and its opposite, betrayal) that runs throughout the poem as a whole.

11. In G, it is made clear that the story of Crisseyde has been taken from an earlier authority: "Hast thow nat mad in English ek the bok/ How that Crisseyde Troylus forsok,/ In shewynge how that wemen han don mis? (264-6). The "heresy" of this book is that Crisseyde was untrue in love. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, the narrator of Troilus and Crisseyde presents himself as an historian and a translator who cannot be blamed for what has happened in his original text.


14. See Rowe’s chapter "The Narrator as Translator" (pp. 47-79).

15. If Alcestes has not misread the Troilus, she still has "betrayed" the narrator by forcing the God of Love’s interpretation on him, despite the fact that she is mediating in this dispute.

Cf. Anne Middleton, in "The Physician’s Tale and Love’s Martyrs: ‘Ensamples Mo Than Ten’ as a Method in the Canterbury Tales" (ChauR 8 [1973]: 9-32), who says:

The ‘Chaucer’ of the Legend is a poet imprisoned by his own success. As is perhaps always the case to some degree, his audience has taken delight in what their literary traditions have prepared them to hear, rather than the full range of available meaning, and has, even in the guise of encouragement, held him to
what they hear (p. 30).

16. Payne notes that the God assumes that the matter of poetry is bound to books (authority), so that the problem is which book to select for translation (p. 102).


19. Kiser, p. 131. Cf. Hansen, who says irony is directed at Cupid, narrator, and anti-feminist tradition. Ruth Ames says, in "The Feminist Connections of Chaucer's Legend of Good Women" (Chaucer in the Eighties, eds. Wasserman and Blanch, pp. 57-74), that Chaucer is "mocking the romantic ideas of these 'saints' of Cupid" (p. 58).


21. Altman isolates two types of structure in saints' lives: the diametrical opposition (such as that of good and evil) or passio and the gradational or vita. The vitae become more like romance with its episodic structure (p. 1).

22. Heffernan, p. 185.


24. On the relationship of hagiography, exemplum, and classical mythology as structural patterns in the legends, see Kiser, pp. 95-104. Another view on Chaucer's use of

25. Pat T. Overbeck, "Chaucer's Good Woman," ChauR 2 (1967): 75-94. Although I disagree with some of Overbeck's conclusions (which are strongly colored by her feminist theoretical perspective), I am indebted to her for pointing out the structural and narrative motifs in the Legend, such as the rejection of authority and the aggressive, rash actions of the females. In particular, I argue in this chapter that the "Good Woman" does not value experience as much as she values that which she does not have (the lover who has betrayed her, for example).


27. For more information on Chaucer's use of Vergil and Ovid in this legend, see Shannon (pp. 196-208), Leach (pp. 149-65), and Frank (pp. 57-78). Frank sees this legend as a narrative experiment in "the art of abbreviation and adaptation" opposed to the "improvisation" of the "Legend of Cleopatra" or the "sympathetic translation" of the "Thisbe" (pp. 58-9).

See also Alan T. Gaylord, "Dido at Hunt, Chaucer at Work" for comparisons of to the Roman d'Eneas.

For obvious reasons, comparisons of this legend to the HF abound: see, for example, Leach, Frank, Gaylord, and Kiser (pp. 123-9).

28. Perhaps this passage is a subtle reminder of the opening of the prologue in which the narrator assures us that he believes in the truth of textual reports even if he himself has not seen the actual events on which those reports are based.

It is also worth noting that the narrator does not have any source for what goes on in the cave: "I not, with hem if there went any mo;/ the author maketh of it no mencioun" (1227-8). Yet the narrator reports on the "depe aifeccioun" (1229) and Aeneas' oath to Dido. Such an oath is clearly not Vergilian, and thus the narrator once again proves that he is not true to that textual source.

29. Rowe has noted that the narrator's intrusions "overwhelmingly reinforce the prescribed attitude" (p. 48).
30. Leach locates the beginning of the Ovidian influence at line 1312 (p. 151), but, obviously, I would locate that influence earlier.

31. George Sanderlin, in his "Chaucer's Legend of Dido: A Feminist Exemplum," notes that "Chaucer becomes involved with his heroines who suffer--with a Crisseyde, a Griselda, a Constance. He seems to share their heartbreak..." (p. 337). Despite the claim to a feminist reading of the text that is suggested by the title, Sanderlin's thesis--that the legend "illustrates the lack of equality between the sexes"--is hardly a new observation nor is it the result of a feminist critical perspective.

32. The story of Scylla is from the Met, and the story of Ariadne can be found in the Heroïdes--see Chapter 1.

   It is more than likely that Chaucer did not know Catullus' version. While Shannon says that Chaucer may have known of this classical poet (p. 370), James McPeek disagrees, based on the lack of exact verbal parallels, especially phrases that cannot be found in other sources ("Did Chaucer Know Catullus?" MLN 46 [1931]: 293-301).

   For more information on Chaucer's use of Ovid in this legend, see Shannon (pp. 228-58), Leach (pp. 186-91), and Frank (pp. 111-33).

33. Theseus' pledge of service is appropriate within the courtly love traditions, but perhaps there is some irony in the fact that, in Ovid's Heroïdes (and in Catullus 64), Ariadne offers to serve Theseus as a slave (captiva, 9.89) if only he will save her from the island.

34. Frank, pp. 117, 122, 127.

35. Frank, p. 119.

36. Frank, p. 126.

37. Frank, pp. 134-45. Frank compares the legend to the Philomena in the Ovide Moralisé, usually attributed to Chretien, and to Gower's version (Confessio 5.5551-6047); he judges Chaucer's version "almost pallid" in comparison.

   See also Shannon (pp. 258-83), and Leach (pp. 139-42)--she says that Chaucer followed Ovid and rejected French embellishments.
    Guerin also compares "Philomela" with the Man of Law’s Tale because "both stories derive their main
    features from Greek romance" (p. 98). I think there are comparisons between the stories that go beyond the source
    genre.

39. See E. T. Hansen, "The Feminization of Men in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women" in Seeking the Woman in
    Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism, eds. Sheila Fisher and Janet E.
    This article is an expansion (and to some extent a modification) of her earlier "Irony and the Antifeminist
    Narrator."

40. Cf. Rowe, p. 65. Procris and Philomela also might seem to be blameless, but their excessive desire to see
    each other suggests a concern with love (of the sisterly variety) that overpowers marital and paternal objections.
    Philomela should obey Pandion’s wishes and not go, if she were behaving as a pious daughter.

41. On Lucretia, see McCall, Chaucer Among the Gods, p. 115, Kiser (pp. 104-7) Frank (93-110), Leach (118-30),
    Shannon (220-8), and Rowe (p. 188 n44, 45).

42. Steven Kruger, in his "Passion and Order in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women" (ChaurR 23 (1989): 219-35) defines
    the central conflict of the poem as the opposition of passion and order. He does not, however, discuss the
    possibility that these concepts occur in Chaucer’s sources. Thus I feel that my opposition of the concepts of amor and
    pietas more clearly addresses the issues raised in the sources and in Chaucer’s work.

43. Fyler, p. 109.
SECTION 3
Variations of the Deserta Femina in the Canterbury Tales
and Anelida and Arcite

Chapter V
"He hath told of loveris up and doun":

The Man of Law as Critic of Chaucer's Legend

We have seen a number of the narrative strategies
used by Chaucer as he deliberately contrasts his own
poetic texts with those of his predecessors so that he can
highlight the contrasts inherent in the moral assumptions
of different genres, different versions of the same story,
and different narratorial perspectives. All of these
devices challenge the audience's interpretation of both
the earlier texts and, more importantly, the very
Chaucerian texts that raise these issues. Another
narrative strategy that calls attention to previous texts
is the device of the literary contest, the controlling
fictive premise of the Canterbury Tales. While they are
engaged in the competition for the supper, the pilgrims
"quite" each other as much as they try to amuse and edify
with their tales. Yet two tales in particular appear to
"quite" authors who are not present on the pilgrimage: the

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tales of the Man of Law and the Clerk. The avowed purpose of each of these tales is to criticize an established author by improving on the quality of the predecessor's work, even though the position of the "Clerk's Tale" in the so-called "marriage group" suggests that the Clerk is also responding to the tales of the other pilgrims, the Wife of Bath in particular.

The isolation of the Man of Law's Tale, however, forces us to read the tale in a vacuum; it is only tenuously located in the Canterbury Tales, for although it has a headlink, a prologue, and, in many manuscripts, an epilogue, these narrative links do not unambiguously fit this tale into a particular group of tales (such as that of the Knight, Miller, and Reeve). Some critics believe that the Man of Law's Tale was to be the first in the collection because, in the headlink, a specific date is mentioned, the Host warns against wasting time (as other contemporary poets did at the beginning of ambitious undertakings), and a catalogue of the author's works is given. Even if this headlink does not necessarily indicate an important position within the Canterbury Tales, its length and its narrative detail surely indicate the significance of the tale that is to follow.

The narrative links--the prologues and epilogues to
the tales--are often important as a means of identifying
the character of the pilgrims, especially that of the
teller of the particular tale. Charles Owen summarizes
the position of "dramatic" critics on the importance of
these links:

Through their efforts to create, through their
quarrels and discussions and confessions, we see
not only their intentions, their conscious image
of themselves, but also on occasion the
inadvertent self-revelation that gives depth to
the character.¹

To scholars approaching the *Canterbury Tales* from a
"dramatic" view, these links, then, are as important in
establishing the character of the tale-teller as the
General Prologue portraits and the tales themselves.
Despite the problems in this particular headlink, an
analysis of this introduction to the Man of Law's Tale may
shed light on the character of its narrator.⁴

Indeed, few critics discuss how this headlink
characterizes its teller or how the headlink prepares us
for the tale to follow.

The Man of Law fancies himself a good reader and
literary critic; he deliberately places himself in
competition with Chaucer, as well as with his fellow
pilgrims in the storytelling contest. Alfred David,
William Sullivan, and Chauncey Wood have discussed the Man
of Law as a literary critic, but they have not fully
understood the nature of the Man of Law's interpretation of the *Legend of Good Women*. These critics focus largely on the relationship between Chaucer and Gower; for example, Sullivan comments on the similarity between the *LGW* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and he sees the Man of Law's attack on Gower and Chaucer as humorous: "[The tale's] humor actually lies in the fact that the expansive Man of Law is making a blunder in accusing Chaucer's 'moral Gower' of immorality." David also connects the Man of Law with Gower. Clearly, the Man of Law knows what he likes in his stories, but is he an accurate interpreter of Chaucer and thus a fair-minded critic? At issue is what a poet should write about, and whether life is significantly affected by literature.

What sort of man tells the story of Constance? We first meet this pilgrim in the General Prologue. Muriel Bowden, Jill Mann, and others after them, contend that this portrait of the Sergeant of Law (ll. 309-30) shows a lawyer who is also a shrewd businessman. The Sergeant is "war and wys" (321), and he thinks highly of himself: "Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,/ And yet he semed biserier than he was" (321-2). This sense of self-importance is, as we shall see, also evident in the Man of Law's introduction to his tale. Bowden also illustrates
the way the portrait of this lawyer, in accordance with contemporary homiletic writings, is both ironic and satiric. The Sargeant is highly educated, but he seems to use this knowledge to questionable advantage, having more "fees and robes" than can be legitimately explained. His discretion, in reality, shows his ambition and success in buying land. Bowden concludes that "Chaucer's satire is consistently ironic" since the narrator's praise of the lawyer conflicts with the discernible truth of the situation. The Sargeant of Law, however, becomes the Man of Law in the prologue and tale; such a shift in social status is perhaps an "error" to be revised, further evidence of the "workroom theory." On the other hand, such a change may be intentional: while a sargeant of law is of high social rank, a man of law may not be, and this pilgrim's self-image as an important person may reflect his desire to seem better than he is. The Man of Law is a man of appearances and thus especially concerned that he tell the "right kind" of story.

In the Man of Law's introduction, after the Host asks the Man of Law to tell a tale, the lawyer responds that he always keeps his promises (I. 39-42), but he cannot think of a "thrifty tale" since Chaucer has already told them all. He seems almost jealous as he criticizes Chaucer's
verses:

That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly
On metres and on rymyng craftily,
Hath seyd hem in swich English as he kan
Of old tyme, as knoweth many a man. (47-50)

Furthermore, the Man of Law seems unaware of Chaucer's presence on the trip—if indeed the narrator should be indentified as Chaucer since the narrator does not respond when Harry Bailly asks him who he is (VII.694-5; prologue to Tale of Sir Thopas). Whether or not the Man of Law knows the identity of the narrator-pilgrim is irrelevant: the Man of Law shows his arrogance by criticizing a poet for doing his job "lewedly." But, as we shall see, the lawyer is less concerned with Chaucer's style than with the content of those stories.

Next, the Man of Law says that Chaucer has written more stories about lovers than did Ovid in his Epistles (known today as the Heroïdes), and he lists some of the works in which these classical stories appear to prove his point, citing in particular "Cees and Alcione" (The Book of the Duchess) and "the Seintes Legende of Cupide" (The Legend of Good Women). His appended list of mythological heroines includes those legends in the Low that are extant and those Chaucer presumably would have written." However, Chaucer's interest in faithful and unfaithful lovers is evident throughout his career; Robert Frank, for
example, has outlined what he sees as the theme of the Legend, the heroines or martyrs of love, in Chaucer's other works. Thus, for the Man of Law, Chaucer's reputation rests on the content of the stories he tells--those of good, faithful lovers--and not on the style, meter, or tone of the poetry.

The Man of Law next condescendingly praises Chaucer for not writing tales of incest, such as those involving Canacee and Tyro Appollonius (77-83). The lawyer interjects "Of swiche cursed stories I say ny!" (80) to show his disapproval of this type of narrative. He also promises that his own tale will not have "swiche unkynde abhomynacion" (88). Many critics take these lines as a reference to Gower, who wrote about Canacee, Appollonius, and Constance in his Confessio Amantis. David has suggested that while the Man of Law may speak for Gower, he is not necessarily Gower himself:

The suggestion that the Man of Law speaks for Gower is supported by a number of resemblances between them--the legal training, the sententious manner, and, most important, the didactic aesthetic, which actually fits the Confessio Amantis much more closely than it does Chaucer's love poetry. Moreover, if anyone deserves the reproach of having told all the thrifty stories "in swich Elinsshe as he kan," it is John Gower.

Howard uses the Man of Law's lines to show how different the plans of the Confessio and the CT are; while morality
is central to the plan and structure of Gower’s work, morality in Chaucer’s work is a mixture of good and bad.\textsuperscript{15} Whether or not the Man of Law is speaking of the historical Gower is not as important as the fact that Chaucer seems to be having fun at the expense of a certain type of poet and audience, people who believe that all literature must provide specific moral guidelines. To put such a moral and didactic view of literature in the mouth of the Man of Law is appropriate—and appropriately ironic—for a man who is concerned with appearances surely would want to show how moral and upstanding he is.

As David points out, this accusation—that Chaucer is not a good poet—is also levelled at him by characters in his earlier works, the Eagle in the \textit{House of Fame} and the God of Love and Alceste in the \textit{LGW}.\textsuperscript{14} In both of his earlier works, Chaucer treats such criticism with good-natured humor, and the Man of Law’s prologue continues this pattern. Chaucer’s critics, such as the Eagle and the God of Love, show themselves to be “well-meaning but misinformed, pedantic, and dogmatic,”\textsuperscript{17} so the humor is directed at them rather than at Chaucer the poet. The “condescending praise and gratuitous advice”\textsuperscript{14} given here is similar, we should also note, to that delivered by the Clerk in his remarks on Petrarch: he praises Petrarch for
his "rhethorike sweete" (IV.32) but condemns the long descriptive "prohemye," saying that it does not add to the story. The Clerk exhibits his desire to correct this great poet by saying: "Me thynketh it a thyng impertinent, / Save that he woole convoyen his mateere" (IV.54-5). Perhaps the Clerk and the Man of Law think that "to criticize" means "to find fault," for both seek to improve on a story of a poet with an established reputation by recasting the original to suit their own literary tastes. Furthermore, both the Man of Law and the Clerk tell the same type of tale, for the stories of Constance and Griselda are variants from the same folkloric cycle of accused queens. 

The attack on Chaucer's poor versification is uncomplicatedly humorous, but the other charge, that Chaucer writes about the wrong subject matter, is a more serious matter with far-reaching implications. Like Cupid in the LGW, the Man of Law puts narrowly didactic constraints on the poet's subject matter by saying what should and should not be written about. The Man of Law is an overly literal-minded believer in the Platonic idea (one that Chaucer himself ironically notes through his narrator in the CT) that the "word is cousin to the deed"—that is, that literature imitates life. The danger, for
someone like the Man of Law, is that life may come to imitate literature; he would believe that reading about virtue will encourage people to act virtuously, just as reading about sin will encourage people to act sinfully. Fiction, because it is not real, is a form of lying and is thus a source of concern for many medieval authors worried about their eternal souls; something of this tension can be seen in Chaucer's own retraction. This idea recurs throughout the CT, from the General Prologue (ll. 741-2) to the Manciple's Tale (IX.207-8) and Parson's Tale. The Parson, in particular, has extreme views on the function of poetry and declares these views forcefully in his prologue: he cares not for fiction and art (X.31-6). In addition, the Parson values greatly the didactic function of prose, showing that he is even more concerned with morality than the Man of Law, who, although he says he will speak in prose, does use poetry to embellish his tale. Furthermore, the lawyer's insistence that the stories of Canacee and Tyro Appollonius are "cursed stories" (80), a "wikked ensample" (78), and "so horrible a tale for to rede" (84)—as well as his use of "sermons" to describe Chaucer's tales (87)—show his concern with a reader possibly using these stories as examples of proper behavior. The Man of Law's inability to accept literature
without an overtly serious didactic purpose is symptomatic of his inability to be a discerning literary critic.

Another indication that the Man of Law is a single-minded reader of texts is his misreading of Chaucer's LGW. That the Man of Law has taken these Cupid's saints' lives seriously can be seen by his calling the tales "sermons" and by his failure to see the humor and irony present in those stories. What Chaucer omits from his sources for these narratives is as important as what he kept; the legends of Cleopatra and Medea are the most obvious examples of this kind of ironic "selectivity which...actually succeeds in transforming these ladies of bad reputation into paragons of goodness." All that the Man of Law has seen in the LGW is that these ladies have been devoted followers of the God of Love, saint-like in their martyrdom, sacrificing themselves in the name of love. He has missed the work's larger point, that pagan women cannot and should not be compared to Christian saints. The Man of Law is upset with Chaucer because all he sees is the didacticism in the LGW, and he fears that there are no more "good" stories of lovers that he can now tell. Yet because the Man of Law wishes to compete with Chaucer, he must tell another "secular saint's life" so that he can improve on the LGW--only in
his story the saint is a Christian woman, Constance; as we shall see later in this chapter, however, this blending of hagiography and romance is just as problematic as the combination of genres in LGW. The Man of Law has learned how to choose what he finds useful in his sources: in order to practice his profession he must select the legal precedents most applicable to the case he is arguing, and we know that he has ample legal resources: "In termes hadde he caas and doomes alle/ That from the tyme of Kyng William were yfalle" (GP, I.323-4). For his story of Constance, the Man of Law picks what he feels is most appropriate for his didactic purpose. The lesson or moral is more important to him than the manner in which the point is made.

Indeed, such a hybrid genre is appropriate for the Man of Law if he is competing with Chaucer since Chaucer's stories in the LGW show a similar mix of classical mythology and the saint's legend genre. The Man of Law may be trying to make a romance seem other than what it is by making it appear to be a saint's life. Many critics have demonstrated how the tale is a combination of a romance and a saint's life. Morton Bloomfield finds classical precedents for this tale: "Historically, the MLT seems to be most closely linked with the genre of Greek
romance."\[^{33}\] Michael Paull says "Chaucer selects as his source a romance which teaches moral truths" and incorporates elements of the saint's legend.\[^{34}\] Edvard Block contends that the atmosphere is both romance-fairy tale and saint's legend.\[^{35}\] He has thoroughly outlined all the deviations from Chaucer's immediate source, Nicholas Trivet's Anglo-Norman *Chronicle* and concluded that the additions and deletions "transform the prosaic French original into a romantic legend." He also notes that Chaucer "emphasized the religious elements and heightened the general piety of tone."\[^{36}\] Helen Cooper, on the other hand, says that this tale is not a romance: "it [the tale] belongs at the point where romance shades into saint's life, as a kind of secular hagiography."\[^{37}\] Saul Brody claims that Chaucer's use of the rhyme royal verse is an indication of a more secular interest, the "undermining of the traditional values that informed the saint's life."\[^{38}\] Thus, while critics disagree as to the exact proportion of romance to saint's life, they do agree that both genres are present.

One of the more important changes from Trivet to Chaucer is Chaucer's "obvious desire to avoid sanguinary details."\[^{39}\] This change is also fitting for the Man of Law, for he has already stated his distaste for the
sensationalism of those "cursed stories." Trivet himself altered his sources, one a romance and the other a chronicle; in both of these versions, the heroine flees from her father to avoid an incestuous marriage. Thus, Trivet made, on a much larger scale, the kind of alteration that Chaucer made in adapting Trivet's version of the story for the Man of Law.

In addition to competing with Chaucer, the Man of Law places himself in competition with the other pilgrims by trying to balance the "sentence" and "solaas" of his tale by mixing the two genres of romance and hagiography, and he believes that he has successfully responded to the rules of the Host's storytelling contest: the winner will have told the tale "of best sentence and moost solaas" (GP, I.798). The lawyer hopes to appeal to his judge in terms that he can understand. Indeed, the host praises the lawyer's "thrifty tale" (II.1165).

The Man of Law appears concerned that others might see and disapprove of his intention to outdo Chaucer:

We were looth be likned, douteless,  
To muses that men clepe Pierides—  
Methamorphosios woot what I mene;  
But natheless, I recche noght a bene  
Though I come after hym with hawe bake.  

(II.91-5)

His mention of the Pierides (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 5.294-678) is important in understanding the foolhardiness of
his literary contest with Chaucer. The Pierides, the nine daughters of Pierus, competed in a storytelling contest with the Muses, lost, and were turned into magpies for their audacity. Their first story is about the giants who attempt to overthrow the Olympian gods, giants whose boldness matches the temerity of the Pierides who are attempting to outdo the Muses. This reminder of such a storytelling contest, with such a disastrous outcome for the challengers, should warn us that the Man of Law is about to undertake a similar contest, perhaps with a similar result. Hoffman, like Skeat before him, sees no irony in these lines, reading the passage as the Man of Law saying that he does not want to be compared to the would-be Muses.3 Skeat goes on to say that this simply means "I don't consider myself a poet." But neither critic sees how this comparison is appropriate for the Man of Law. The Man of Law wants to compete with Chaucer, but he does not want to be a loser. By disclaiming all poetic skill, the Man of Law feels that he will "win" the contest between himself and Chaucer and the contest among the pilgrims. Because he is no longer responsible for the manner or style in which he tells his story, the Man of Law focuses attention on the content and the resulting moral, the matters he considers most important. The Man
of Law is relying on the common medieval distinction between the "wheat and chaff" or "shell and kernel" of literature: the shell is the artistic embellishment or rhetorical tropes used to tell the story, and the kernel is the core of truth, the moral of the story. The Man of Law refers to these principles within his tale; after the marriage of Constance to Alla, he states his intention to move on quickly with his story:

Me list nat of the chaf, ne of the stree,
Maken so long a tale as of the corn.
What sholde I tallen of the roialtee
At mariage, or which cours goth biforn;
Who bloweth in a trumpe or in an horn?
The fruyt of every tale is for to seye:
They ete, and drynke, and daunce, and synge, and pleye. (II. 701-7)

This metaphor is used later by the Parson (X.35-6) to justify the type of tale he presents. Furthermore, this idea is related to the terms "sentence" and "solaas" (equivalents of the Horatian *prodesse aut delectare* [Ars Poetica line 333]) that are the rules of the contest. Thus, the Man of Law tries to balance literary/poetic and didactic concerns, but he ends up doing neither well.

The Man of Law's Tale suffers from what Donald Howard calls "misguided moralism," and Howard doubts the sincerity of the Man of Law:

The tales of the Man of Law, the Monk, the Prioress, the Physician, the Clerk, and the Second Nun all sound like solid morality...But
the pilgrims who tell them are by no means all idealized figures, so we are left asking questions about their motives.... The Man of Law offers a prologue on poverty which makes us wonder whether he does not miss the point of his own tale."

The Man of Law's motive seems to be to preserve the appearance of moral standing even though in fact he is not a moral person. In a literary contest with Chaucer, he must do what he thought Chaucer did in the LGW--get rid of the offensive material that did not befit a saintly, faithful lover, but as a result he reveals himself as a flawed reader and interpreter of poetic texts. As David has pointed out, the contradictions in the prologue and tale show most clearly the "real intent of the passage: those who insist most loudly on morality in art are often morally insensitive." The Man of Law must show his pride and self-importance in the introductory headlink since he must declare his aesthetic and literary principles. The Man of Law enters a contest he cannot win because of his self-interest--all he can do is complain that Chaucer has "told of loveris up and doun" so that the Man of Law must "retell" the same kind of story with a new heroine who serves another God of Love.

A brief look at the narrative itself will illustrate the generic similarities and the functional resemblances between the tale of Constance and the stories of deserted
women found in the Legend of Good Women and the story of Dido in House of Fame. Constance, the daughter of the Emperor of Rome, is the most perfect of all women: "a doghter hath that, syn the world bigan, / To rekene as wel hir goodnesse as beautee, / Nas nevere swich another as is shee" (II.157-9). In fact, her reputation is so wonderful that the Sultan falls in love with her and converts to Christianity without even seeing her. [17] His love-sickness is described as if he were a courtly lover of the deserta femina tradition:

...[he] hath caught so greet plesance
To han hir figure in his remembrance,
That al his lust and al his bisy cure
Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure.
(II. 186-9)

Indeed, his love for Constance causes his death because his jealous mother plots secretly to kill all the Christians at a feast. The Sultaness is described as a "serpent under femynynte" (II.360) and likened to Eve, who betrayed all of mankind (II.368). Thus, Constance's moral perfection is seen in direct contrast to her mother-in-law's evil.

Constance's isolation in her many adventures is clear: alone, she goes off to marry the Sultan, escapes from the Sultaness' feast, sails to Britain where she is once again a foreigner without any protection, and becomes
a victim of Donegild's plot. When she escapes and returns to Rome, she is accompanied by her son. But the first time we feel sympathy for her plight is when Constance laments her fate at being given in marriage to the Sultan:

Alias, what wonder is it thogh she wepte,
That shal be sent to strange nacioun
Fro freendes that so tendrely hire kept,
And to be bounden under subjeccioun
Of oon, she knoweth nat his condicioun?
Housbondes been alle goode, and han ben yoore;
That knowen wyves, I dar sey yow na moore.

"Fader," she seyde, "thy wrecched child
Custance,
Thy yonge doghter fostred up so softe,
And ye, my moder, my soverayn plesance
Over alle thyng, out-taken Crist on-lofte
Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte
Unto youre grace.... (II.267-79)

The narrator's intrusin here serves only to reinforce the possibility that the husband will not be a good man as the passage highlights Constance's inability to do anything to change her parents' minds. Constance, in a sense, is a victim of her father's political and religious machinations; her opinion of the marriage treaty was irrelevant to the Emperor. She has no choice and lacks the power to change her lot: "I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!/ Wommen are born to thraldome and penance,/ And to been under mannes goverance" (II.285-7).

Indeed, Constance is at the mercy of many men in her lifetime, despite the more obvious threats of the false
accusations from her two mothers-in-law. The knight who accuses Constance of murder is but one example of a male who tries to use the laws of this world against her, and God conveniently steps in to save her by proving her innocence.

Throughout these challenges, Constance remains perfect in her faith in God; as Sheila Delany has pointed out, the purpose of her suffering is unclear because Constance was morally perfect from the outset, and such perfection suggests that Constance "is to be seen not as woman at all but rather as emblem."* The Man of Law's "moral" for this tale is a prayer:

Now Jhesu Crist, that of his myght may sende
Joye after wo, governe us in his grace,
And kepe us alle that been in this place! Amen
(IV.1160-2)

But surely there is more to be learned from Constance's suffering than the hope that God will send us happiness after sorrow if we live as patiently and obediently as she did; in this sense, her life fulfills the didactic purpose of the saint's life genre. Clearly, the narrative encourages us to view Constance as a Christian role model, yet the narrative also encourages us to respond sympathetically to the suffering of such a saintly character at the hands of evil men and women. As a type or emblem of a suffering woman, Constance bears a striking
resemblance to the deserta femina who endures, often alone, the demands imposed by a patriarchal society.

Like other deserted women, Constance is not completely silent; she laments her fate several times, emphasizing her isolation and distress as well as her compliance with those demands. It is, however, her obedience and acceptance of her fate that most clearly sets her apart from the deserted woman. Constance does not reject the social and religious standards of her youth, nor does she threaten to kill herself when she has been betrayed—thus she remains pious in her duty to her father, state, and God. She serves the Christian God of Love, not the pagan one (such as Cupid of the Legend), and thus she is rewarded by her reunion with her father and husband (and by her son Maurice becoming heir to the Roman throne). After her husband dies, Constance returns to Rome, living out her life in the service of God, doing "almus-dee" (IV.1156)—a life of Christian charity and selflessness that is in direct contrast with the destructive and often self-serving suicides of the deserted woman character type. The concepts of amor and pietas have been curiously fused in this saint's life, for Constance is able to show how devotion to God (spiritual love) and obedience to her husband (physical love properly
situated within the marriage contract) is piety." "Hers is a happy ending, befitting the romance genre, and one that reaffirms the hierarchical values of her (and the Man of Law's) society." "Constance remains within the confines of her patriarchal society, reinforcing its values--she does not choose *amor* over *pietas*, as the *deserta femina* does, for her passion is properly channeled into a perfect spiritual love for and obedience to God, state, and family.

Thus, the Man of Law does indeed tell a story of a lover, for Constance shares many traits of the deserted women of Chaucer's *Legend* who die in the name of the God of Love, but Constance serves the Christian God of Love: the Man of Law's fusion of Christian and pagan concepts of love reinforces the lawyer's inability to distinguish Chaucer's intentions and shows him to be a simple-minded reader. The Man of Law seems not to understand the differences in tone and purpose inherent in the Christian saints' lives and the romance (in particular the courtly love tale) genres. Much like Cupid's narrow literary interests in the prologue to *Legend of Good Women* that result in a strange mixture of classical legend and saint's life, the restrictive moral purpose of the Man of Law results in a fusion of disparate elements as he forces
texts to serve his own ends.

The Man of Law uses the *deserta femina* pattern as part of his literary contest against an "authority"—here, the authority is Chaucer, a poet with an established reputation. By having the Man of Law imitate, inappropriately and unsuccessfully, the narrative patterns of the *Legend*, Chaucer is able to show us a reader who cannot distinguish between life and literature, someone whose loud insistence on morality in art blinds him to irony and humor. In attempting to "quite" Chaucer by improving on the moral quality of a similar type of narrative, the Man of Law betrays his self-interest; he deliberately contrasts his female character with the Chaucerian "good woman," a type I have called the deserted woman. But, as we have seen, Constance is not so much an "anti-type" as she is a variation on a theme.

Moreover, we see that, once again, the *deserta femina* character is found in the context of a discussion of literary concerns. By allowing the Man of Law to critique his *Legend*, Chaucer is able to examine the fundamental issue of the relationship of literature and life. The Man of Law, guided by his desire to appear morally strict, cannot distinguish between art and reality. Thus, whatever the author may have intended in writing, the
reader can--and will--interpret that work in light of his own self-interest. The reader thus controls the text and he can "betray" that text by twisting material to suit his own needs. The Man of Law is manipulating his narrative just as the Emperor is manipulating his daughter Constance, setting her adrift, alone and unaided, in the terrors of this world.
1. Manuscripts vary in their identification of the speaker in line 1179; Eberle, in The Riverside Chaucer, reads the Shipman, while other possibilities include the Squire, the Summoner, or the Wife of Bath.


3. Owen 5. The "dramatic theory" was first espoused by G. L. Kittredge. For opposition to this methodology, see, for example, C. David Benson's Chaucer's Drama of Style, (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986).

4. One problem with this narrative link is the Man of Law's remark "I spake in prose" (II.96). This line is usually taken as proof of what Donald Howard has called the "workroom theory" (The Idea of the Canterbury Tales, [Berkeley: U of California P, 1976], p. 6). See also the explanatory notes by Patricia Eberle in The Riverside Chaucer, p. 854. Warren Ginsberg has noted that the rhyme royal stanza was sometimes considered "prose" in the Middle Ages (The Cast of Character, p. 150). On the use of the rhyme royal verse in the Man of Law's Tale, see Martin Stevens, "The Royal Stanza in Early English Literature," PMLA 94 (1979): 67-76, and Saul N. Brody, "Chaucer's Rhyme Royal Tale and the Secularization of the Saint," Chaur 20 (1985): 113-31.


7. The Man of Law's self-importance and his insistence on controlling the content of a story can even be seen in his many interruptions of the tale of Constance itself. Such narrator intrusions serve "to alienate us from the story and to stylize the action," according to Morton Bloomfield, in his "The Man of Law's Tale: A Tragedy of Victimization and a Christian Comedy," (PMLA 87 [1972]: 384-90), p. 385). The Man of Law refuses to let the exploits of his heroine stand on their own; as a result he
constantly reminds us of his presence.


9. Mann correctly defines the sergeants as "a superior order of barrister" (p. 86). Even though Common Law judges were chosen from this order, this particular pilgrim is not necessarily an important judge (see General Prologue 314-5)—remember that he "seems" busier than he is, and that he may be saying that he is more important than he really is. Cf. Eberle's notes in The Riverside Chaucer, pp. 811-2.

10. David, p. 221. David says later that the "issue is primarily one of good taste" (p. 224).

11. Sullivan uses this list as proof that the lawyer has a bad memory. This list is used in conjunction with the list in the prologue of the LGW to show that Chaucer did not finish that project either; see notes in The Riverside Chaucer. It has also been suggested by Sullivan that the Man of Law has confused Chaucer and Gower because all of the stories listed by the Man of Law can be found in Gower's work.


13. The Clerk also distinguishes between "style" and "content"—see, for example, IV.1148, 1175.


15. Howard, p. 47.

16. David, p. 219. We should also include Harry Bailly's remarks on the Tale of Sir Thopas with other charges against Chaucer's versification (VII.930).

17. David, p. 219. See also C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's Confessio Amantis" (ChauR 19 [1984]: 100-9) on the Man of Law as a poor critic of
Gower's work, one who ignores the larger purposes of that poem.


Other similarities between the Clerk's and Man of Law's prologue include the host asking a specific pilgrim for a tale and that pilgrim agreeing to speak (that is, the host's plan is not interrupted). In the Clerk's case, the host specifies a type of tale--"but precheth nat" (IV.12), he remarks, so that no one will fall asleep; the host also wants "som murie thyng of aventure" (15). The Clerk manages to do both by giving us a tale that has strong connections with the romance genre and by providing a moral for that story--a blend of genres similar to that of the Man of Law, as I shall argue later in this chapter.

20. Structural similarities between the Parson's prologue and the Man of Law's introduction include an astrological calculation of the hour, a call by the Host for a specific pilgrim to tell a tale, and a discussion of poetics (see David, p. 224; Ginsberg, p. 145).


22. David perhaps also underestimates the humor and irony present in the LGW: "The mode is predominantly courtly and didactic," like the Knight's Tale and Troilus (p. 218). The Knight's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde are often cited by various critics as examples of courtly romance, although there are instances of the blending of other distinct genres (such as epic) present in these works as well.

23. This mismanagement of sources has been noted in other aspects of the Man of Law's performance: for example, Chauncey Wood points to the "clumsy handling" of sources such as the De Contemptu Mundi of Pope Innocent III alluded to in the prologue on poverty; Wood sees this as an indication of Chaucer's disdain for the lawyer (p. 182). See also Rodney Delasaleta, "And of Great Reverence: Chaucer's Man of Law," ChauR 5 (1971): 288-310; he analyzes the Man of Law's "literary errors."

25. Bloomfield, p. 387. He continues: "Both [the MLT and Greek romance] are concerned with exile and return, with alienation in space and return to the right place or home. They have wanderings, persecution, monsters, crowds, slavery, shipwrecks, oracles, reunions, lost persons, and divine commands." We should also remember that the story of Apollonius of Tyre (one of the stories that the Man of Law condemns) comes from Greek antecedents.


30. Brody, p. 113. Chaucer also used the rhyme royal verse for the tales of the Clerk, the Prioress, and the Second Nun. Brody sees all four of these tales as part of a larger trend toward a more secular and bourgeois perspective on the saint's life.


possible source for Chaucer's framing device in the CT and tales that suit the teller.

34. Howard, p. 121.

35. Howard, p. 175.

36. David, p. 221.

37. The Clerk also praises Griselda as the fairest of all women, and he emphasizes the fact that Griselda is alone, except for her father (IV.211-32). Her youth and virtue catch the eye of Walter, who is out hunting, and he decides to marry her. He contemplates her (238), much as the lovers of the deserta femina pattern feed their passions with mental images of the beloved. Whatever the social status of his new bride, Walter has promised his council that he will worship his wife as if she were an emperor's daughter (166), an act similar to the extravagant promise of the male lover who later abandons the woman.


38. Perhaps Constance's isolation is also to be seen in terms of one of the conventions of the standard saint's life wherein the saint gives up his or her family in order to become a Christian. As Mary Lefkowitz has pointed out,
using the example of St. Perpetua, "there is a distinctive emphasis in stories of Christian women’s martyrdom on separation from the family and on death as a means to life" (Heroines and Hystericus, London: Duckworth, 1981, p. 54). The life gained, of course, is the eternal life of a martyr. Lefkowitz finds that the open defiance of husbands and fathers and eager abandonment of children are signs that the women are "seeking a new freedom from the traditional patterns of their lives" (p. 55). Of course, true saint’s lives are an influence on the Man of Law’s version of the Constance story, but Constance is not a martyr and thus is not called upon to desert her family in order to serve Christ (her family deserts her, in a sense)—thus the Man of Law’s tale seems to have more in common with the romance genre.

39. Note also that, in the "Clerk’s Tale," the plans for Griselda’s wedding were made without her knowledge; it is not until the day of the wedding that Walter makes known his choice of a bride. Although Walter asks Janicula for his daughter’s hand in marriage—and then asks Griselda for her consent—he sets the terms of the bargain ("demandes," IV.8). Both father and daughter react to Walter’s questions in the same way: they are astonished and fearful (316-8; 358); clearly Walter is in control of the situation and, as peasants, Janicula and Griselda have little choice but to assent. But it is their obedience to their ruler that is being tested, just as later it is Griselda’s obedience to her husband and lord that is tried.


41. Again, a comparison with the "Clerk’s Tale" is appropriate: the Clerk also emphasizes the patient and obedient qualities of Griselda in the face of temptation; Griselda, however, is not so much the victim of Fortune, as is Constance, because Griselda is being tested by Walter. The "moral" of this tale is a bit more complicated than that of the Man of Law’s, perhaps because the Clerk is more directly responding to his fellow pilgrims (not his "authority" Petrarch). The Clerk says, "This storie is seyd nat for that wyves sholde/ Followen Grisilde as in humylitee...But for that everi wight, in his degree,/ Sholde be constant in adversitee" (IV.1142-6)—that is, the moral is not specifically for women, but is more generally applied to every person’s duty and
obedience to God. The Clerk seems concerned that women will not understand his allegorical narrative, for he urges women to remain strong: "Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offense" (1197) -- this charge is reminiscent of the "beware of men" warnings given by Chaucer at the end of the *Troilus* and *Anelida* (both works that more openly use the *deserta femina* characterizations).

42. Delany notes the "topical or historical uses" of an emblem like Constance to reaffirm the social hierarchies that were recently challenged by the 1381 rebellion (p. 45). One does not, however, need to politicize the function of such a submissive female character -- Constance's sufferings all end happily, on earth as in heaven, so that her function as a religious and social pattern for feminine behavior is clearly established.
Chapter VI
The Laments of Anelida and Dorigen:
Desertion and the Plea for Truth

We have seen that the *deserta femina* often questions her betrayer about his truth, or lack of truth, as part of her plea that he take pity on her and return. Such cries are a necessary part of the rhetoric designed to create sympathy for the one who has been deserted by reminding the lover that he has given his word, his oath. This breaking of the male’s pledge indicates a problem in understanding--or a lack of proper interpretation--by the female character. These speeches by the betrayed women are commonly called laments or complaints, a genre based on similarity of their function as the expression of suffering or extreme despair, not on meter or stanza form; laments can occur as poems in themselves or within larger narrative works. In this chapter, we will examine two different complaints, that of Anelida in the unfinished poem *The Compleynt of Feire Anelida and Fals Arcite*, and that of Dorigen in "The Franklin’s Tale," to see how such pleas for truth create sympathy for the deserted woman--
whether or not she is deserving of such sympathy--by forcing the audience to interpret the sincerity of her words in contrast to her betrayer's lack of truth.

One of the sources for the complaint genre is the *planctus*, "the lament of the Virgin for the suffering and death of her Son...[It is] most often a free-standing lyric poem, but it can also be found imbedded in a dramatization or a narrative of the Passion." Thus the creation of pathos in a religious context was the fundamental objective of such a piece. Funerary laments are obviously connected to this verse form, although these may have social, rather than religious, contexts. Alongside the tradition of laments for the dead exists the tradition of love laments, perhaps descended from Ovid's *Heroides* with numerous examples in courtly love poetry and romances. But the rhetorical distinction between laments for the dead and laments for lost loves is sometimes hard to find; for example, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* contains a lament for the lost Blanche, although at first the dreamer-narrator does not understand that she is dead. Moreover, the blurring of distinctions between genres is a common Chaucerian technique:

Indeed, the love lament, by its very nature, shares several features, such as exaggerated gestures and intense emotion, with that used in mourning. It may well have been the ambiguity
which results from the close association of two such similar yet distinctive traditions which attracted the attention of the young Chaucer, for his use of this motif is invariably marked by his exploitation of that ambiguity.\textsuperscript{3}

For the deserted woman, the love lament is in some sense a lament for the dead—her lover has deserted her and is physically absent as if dead, and she threatens to commit suicide (and often carries through on that threat).

W. A. Davenport, in his book \textit{Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative}, has studied the various forms of complaint found in Chaucer’s poems. He finds that "though his complaints vary in form and function, they all show a sufficiently sympathetic response to the pity and error of things to identify a recurrent direction of thought...a mode of expression which he went on finding useful and adaptable to a variety of purposes."\textsuperscript{4} He goes on to say that "the combination of female vulnerability, man’s betrayal and the threat of death continued in \textit{The Canterbury Tales} not merely for a local effect of pathos but to act as a focal point for the morality and feelings in a tale."\textsuperscript{3} In other words, we are meant to judge and interpret those characters by the way in which they make use of the complaint genre.

By Chaucer’s time, the love lament was "a highly imprecise expression of woe, lacking place, time, and
often names." Given Chaucer's interest in the relationship between a first-person narrator and his or her audience, it is not surprising that most of Chaucer's complaints occur within a narrative setting (such as the dream vision frame of the Book of the Duchess or the stories of betrayed women in the Legend of Good Women) rather than as free-standing lyrics. The poem, however, that most clearly reflects Chaucer's desire to place a conventional love complaint within a narrative setting is the Compleynt of Feire Anelida and Fals Arcite. Despite Chaucer's claim to be translating from the Latin (lines 10-11) and the mention of the ancient authorities of Statius and "Corynne" (21), no direct source has been found for this poem. Only the first several stanzas recall Statius' Thebaid, and very little of Boccaccio's Teseida can be found in the narrative frame. James Wimsatt and Madeline Fabin have discussed French poems as possible sources, and Shannon discusses the "Corynne" attribution. Critics do agree, however, on Chaucer's debt to Ovid's Heroides for the theme and tone of the poem.

The invocation places us clearly within an epic setting--the poet calls upon Mars and Bellona--and the narrative opens with stately portraits of Theseus,
Ipolita, and Emelye in the victory procession. Yet the narrator is not interested in the world of Thebes; Thebes is used as the epic context for the romance love story of Anelida and Arcite, much as Chaucer was later to use the Trojan War as the backdrop for the love story of Troilus and Criseyde. We are also aware of the conflicting value systems of epic and romance seen in the *Heroïdes* and other deserted women narratives—love and war are incompatible forces. The narrator shifts abruptly from the stately portraits to the story of Anelida and Arcite: "And founde I wol in shortly for to bring/ The slye way of that I gan to write,/ Of quene Anelida and fals Arcite" (47-9). From the first mention of his name, Arcite is labelled "fals," so there is no doubt as to where the narrator's sympathies lie. Indeed, this epithet is almost always mentioned with his name and his characterization as a false lover is consistent (85-91). Furthermore, such abrupt shifting from topic to topic is characteristic of the narrator of this poem.

It is also not surprising that Anelida is described as a typical *deserta femina*:

> Among al these Anelida, the quene
> Of Ermony, was in that toun dwellynge,
> That fairer was then is the sonne shene.
> Thurg thou the world so gan her name springe
> That her to seen had every wyght likynge,
> For, as of trouthe, is ther noon hir lyche
Of al the women in this worlde riche.

Yong was this quene, of twenty yer of elde,
Of mydel stature, and of suche faireness
That Nature had a joye her to behelde;
And for to spoken of her stidfastnesse,
She passed bothe Penelope and Lucrese;
And shortly, yf she shal be comprehended,
In her ne myghte no thing been amended.  (71-84)

Anelida is a queen with a good reputation; she is young, rich, and beautiful. She is highly worthy of praise if she does indeed surpass the conventional classical exempla of faithful wives. In fact, her "stidfastnesse" (143) is directly contrasted with Arcite's "newfangleenesse" (141), just as her honesty is contrasted with his lack of that quality: he is "double in love and no thing pleyn" (87), and "so pleyn she was" (116). Arcite is the conventional male betrayer who uses words of deceit: "And subtil in that craft over any wyght,/ And with his kunnyng wan this lady bryght" (88-9). Arcite persuades Anelida that he is sick with love for her, and he pleads for her sympathy, which she freely gives—as she is generous with her resources (106-12). Yet his love is "but feyned chere—/
As nedeth not to men such craft to lere" (97-8). These words recall those of Dido in the House of Fame when she asks if any man can speak the truth; the female point of view clearly calls for a negative answer.

Just as Dido wrongly believed that she was married to
Aeneas, Anelida makes a commitment to Arcite that implies a wedding ceremony: "Her herte was to him wedded with a ring" (131). She is totally consumed by her thoughts of him and behaves, as lover, much like Dido:

When she shal ete, on him is so her thought
That wel unnethe of mete tok she kep;
And when that she was to her reste broght,
On him she thoughte alwey til that she slepe;
When he was absent, prevely she wep.
Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene
For fals Arcite, that did hir al this tene.
(134-40)

Loss of appetite and sleep are two common signs of a woman in love, but even his temporary absence causes Anelida pain. Such extensive grieving both foreshadows her grief when Arcite actually does abandon her and suggests that she is excessive in her behavior. We do not doubt her sincerity, but since we know that Arcite will desert her Anelida’s strong passions may seem premature.

When Arcite leaves her for another woman, he literally changes his colors (145-6), indicating with a physical sign his emotional change. At this point in the narrative, the narrator intrudes, at first to express his uncertainty over the exact color that Arcite adopts and, then, to moralize on the situation:

But nevertheless, gret wonder was hit noon
Thogh he were fals, for hit is kynde of man
Sith Lamek was, that is so longe agoon,
To ben in love as fals as evere he can;
He was the firste fader that began
To loven two, and was in bigamye,
And he found tentes first, but yf men lye.

(148-54)

Here, the narrator claims that it is man's nature to betray women and cites the example of Lamech, the first bigamist--surely an inappropriate use of "authority" because Arcite was never formally married to Anelida and because Lamech did not give up one woman for another. The error identifying Lamech as the inventor of tents has been explained as Chaucer's carelessness,11 but the tag phrase "but yf men lye" surely raises the possibility that the narrator was intentionally misattributing, especially since tents have little bearing on Anelida's story. Men (and women) have been wrong before--the narrator implies--and Anelida was definitely mistaken about the true character of Arcite.

Arcite falsely blames Anelida for his departure, claiming that she was the one who was double in love; this accusation forces the narrator to intrude one more time: "Alas, what herte myght enduren hit,/ For routhe or wo, her sorwe for to telle?/ Or what man hath the cunning or the wit?" (162-4). Once again the narrator makes moral judgments and sides with Anelida--there is no excuse for Arcite's behavior. Anelida's subsequent actions show her suffering hell (166-7), the same type of hell endured by
most deserted women: "She wepith, waileth, swovneth
pitously;/ To grounde ded she falleth as a ston" (169-70). Furthermore, she exhibits signs of madness such as
incoherent speech and paleness (172-5). Her previous
excessive behavior is no match for this completely
melodramatic posturing, and soon she will work up enough
energy to write a letter of complaint to Arcite.

But first the narrator directs our attention back to
Arcite, once again showing the pattern of structural
oppositions seen previously in the narrative. Arcite has
little time to worry about Anelida because his new
mistress is cruel and demanding--this unnamed woman
displays the opposite behavior of Anelida’s honesty and
generosity, and she controls Arcite "at her owne wille"
(196). The narrator’s comment on this situation, however,
does not express any satisfaction that Arcite gets what he
deserves, that he accused Anelida of all the behavior that
the new woman is now exhibiting. Instead, he says:

Ensample of this, ye thrifty wymmen alle,
Take her of Anelida and Arcite,
That for her liste him "dere herte" calle
And was so meke, therfore he loved her lyte.
The kynde of mannes herte is to delyte
In thing that straunge is, also God me save!
For what he may not gete, that wolde he have.
(197-203)

Men, the narrator claims in a proverbial statement, love
what they cannot have; Anelida gave too freely of herself
and so Arcite did not value her. The lesson here seems to be that Anelida was wrong to behave as she did, even though the narrator has consistently taken her side and we, as good Christians, would praise her behavior over that of the new mistress. Is this passage meant to be an ironic comment on the drawbacks of the courtly love ethic? It is impossible to say in view of the narrator’s lack of self-characterization—we don’t have the bumbling, humble Geoffre of the *House of Fame* or the prologue to the *Legend*, or even the pilgrim-storytellers of the *Canterbury Tales* that would allow us to judge the narrator’s purposes against what we know of the characters within the narrative itself. Thus we are left with a sense of confusion.

The actual letter of complaint begins in line 211; Anelida’s letter clearly places her in the epistolary tradition of Ovid’s *Heroides* and the courtly language she uses connects her with other literary complaints from the French tradition. She utters what we have seen as the standard complaints of a woman in her situation: she is true, he is not, but she’ll take him back anyway. Arcite is "the harde stounde" (238) or unfeeling male betrayer who laughs at her pain (234). Like other deserted women who form their complaint into a series of questions,
Anelida asks "Alas! Wher is become your gentilesse,/
Youre wordeis ful of plesaunce and humblesse...?" (247-8). She attempts to use logic: "Your manly resoun oghte hit to respite/ To alen your frend" (259-60), yet he kills her who did him no wrong; she continues with this military imagery when she says that his "swerd of sorwe" (270) bites her heart, perhaps suggesting Dido who literally killed herself with Aeneas' sword. Furthermore, she argues, his name will not be enhanced by his fickleness (273). Anelida is sure, however, that her reputation is safe:

But for I, Arcite, shewed yow
Al that men wolde to me write,
And was so besy yow to delaye--
Myn honor save--mekte, kynde, and fre... (264-7)

Anelida, then, is unlike other deserted women who worry about their reputations and how they will be remembered after death. Yet she is like other deserted women in that she contemplates suicide as the alternative to being with him: she is unsure whether to "preve or elles pleyne" (282) in order to make him true to her, but death will take away her pain (290) since nothing she does will change his mind. She would rather die than be the aggressor in this love affair: "And shal I preye, and weyve womanhede?--/ Nay! Rather deth then do so foul a dede!" (299-300). Anelida seems oblivious to the fact
that by writing this letter of complaint she becomes the aggressor, the one who would force her feelings on him. She does, however, seem to realize that Arcite will never be "stidfast" (310):

Almyghty God, of trouthe sovereyn,  
Wher is the trouthe of man? Who hath hit slayn?  
Who that hem loveth, she shal hem fynde as fast  
As in a tempest is a roten mast.  
Is that a tame best that is ay feyn  
To fleeen away when he is lest agast? (311-6)

Note that Anelida returns to the questioning mode at a critical juncture in her complaint: just at the point at which she despairs the most, she turns to God and asks if men can be true. She realizes that she can do no more on her own, and after she finishes her letter she goes to the temple of Mars, perhaps to make a public declaration of her private sorrows (at this point the narrative breaks off and we are left with an unfinished poem). Yet, as she ends her letter she reminds Arcite that she will kill herself in the morning (333-4)--Anelida is another example of a deserted woman who acts out her passion at night--and she reminds him that she will never love again (344-5). Anelida next compares herself to the dying swan: "But as the swan, I have herd seyd ful yore, / Ayeins his deth shal singen in his penaunce" (346-7). Shannon was the first to note the similarity between Anelida and Dido in the Heroides; both women suggest that their laments are
swan songs." Anelida's mention of the swan is certainly an indication we are to think of Dido and other deserted women, as well as a sign that she is doomed.

Anelida begins and ends her complaint with the image of the "sverd of sorowe" with its "poynt of rememhraunce" (211-2; 350), an echo of a Dantean image. The idea of memory is important for the deserted woman: her purpose in writing a letter is to persuade her betrayer to return to his former behavior, to return to her and her love. Thus she must use the past as a weapon and as a goal, but the deserted woman must also interpret the past in the best possible light, a vision often colored by nostalgic longing for something that was not true in the past. Many of us would doubt that Anelida's life with Arcite was perfect—was she truly happy while Arcite claimed to be in love with her? Such misinterpretation of the past is a common feature of the deserted woman's lament, and, in particular, it is the focus of Dido's lament in the House of Fame. The narrator of that poem becomes a Dido-figure who misinterprets the texts of his literary past, but can we say the same of the narrator in the Anelida? Because we are unsure about Chaucer's sources for the Anelida, we cannot be certain that the narrator is "betraying" any of his sources with false readings. There are several
undeveloped hints as to the character of the narrator, such as his misuse of Lamech as an example of a false male lover; the narrator, however, does use correctly the examples of Penelope and Lucretia ("Lucrest" 81) in reference to Anelida's fidelity. The narrator first presents himself as a translator:

For hit ful depe is monken in my mynde,  
With pitous hert in Englyssh to endyte  
This olde storie, in Latyn which I fynde,  
Of quene Anelida and fals Arcite,  
That elde, which al can frete and bite,  
As hit hath freten mony a noble storie,  
Hath nygh devoured out of oure memorie. (8-14)

The narrator claims that the story is deep in his memory, even though others may have forgotten it. But later the narrator attributes the Latin story to "Stace" and "Corynne" (21)---false sources, as far as we know. The rather humorous image of the passage of time as something that voraciously eats memory also suggests that this narrator may have some gaps in his knowledge.4 The narrator, like every epic narrator, invokes a muse to help guide his poetic memory, yet the muse invoked here is "Polymoon" or Polyhymnia (15), the muse associated with sacred songs and choral dances, rather than the standard Clio, associated with history.5 Are we being warned that this poem is not an epic? Are we being warned that this poem is full of different stories, as the etymology of
this muse's name is "many songs"? It is difficult to believe, given other ironic Chaucerian narrators, that the reference to this muse is a straightforward plea for memory, but we lack the evidence to do more than speculate on the narrator's intentions in this poem.

Furthermore, the separation of the narrative from the complaint-letter causes problems; Chaucer has taken the narrative element out of the epistolary form as Ovid had conventionalized it, making the letter even more static than Ovid's pattern which itself has been called overly static (see Chapter 1). As Davenport has noted, this lack of action is appropriate for a story that is a "description of a state of being and of contrasting moralities rather than...a sequence of incidents." The poem is filled with contrasts: the characters of Anelida and Arcite, as well as the new mistress and Anelida, are deliberate oppositions; the private love affairs are conducted under conditions hostile to romance (the romance genre set within an epic framework); and the structural alternation between Anelida's and Arcite's actions shift our focus from one to the other within the narrative section of the poem. Combined with the narratorial intrusions which often misinterpret the preceding material, what little action there is within the narrative
serves to highlight the static quality of the complaint-
letter which is a lengthy description of Anelida's state
of mind, a portrayal of her grief and despair that is only
slightly tainted by her overreactions to Arcite's
temporary departures before the desertion. Ultimately,
the combination of narrative and complaint contrast with
more than complement each other:

The Complaint concentrates on poetic plangency
and a sensitive combination of patterned verse
and delicate expression of feeling, while the
narrative enriches and enlarges the material of
a courtly dit with historical symbolism and with
moral analysis. Narrative and lyric are
interestingly united not just as situation and
emotion but also with a sense of different time-
scales. The span of history is the natural
material of narrative and the exploration of the
experience of the moment that of lyric; Chaucer
partly exploits that interplay here....

These competing values do little to indicate a possible
resolution in the narrative, but perhaps no such
resolution can or would be made since Chaucer is fond of
displaying contradictory voices, as he does in the
Canterbury Tales or the House of Fame, without providing
definitive answers to the questions raised. Certainly
Anelida's questioning of Arcite's truth reflects back on
the narrator's use of his sources: the narrator and
Anelida must use the past in order to gain a future
controlled by their own visions of that past.

Anelida, of course, is not the only Chaucerian female
character whose misinterpretations of her lover's actions cause her to lament about her own actions. Dorigen, in the "Franklin's Tale," misuses the lament form—she is not a deserted woman according to the classical pattern. She utters a lament, filled with classical exempla of praiseworthy women, as a means of venting her frustration and despair, which are the results of her own rash promises and false expectations. While excessive passion can be said to be the cause of her predicament, Dorigen has not been abandoned by Arveragus, her husband. And this tale is not an epic or tragedy—it is a romance, a genre which ensures a happy ending.

The Franklin's prologue contains many familiar elements: the identification of the type of tale about to be told (a Breton lay) and the poetic disclaimer that the teller is not a good public speaker. The Franklin calls himself a "burel man" (V.716) and asks to be excused for his "rude speche" (718). Ironically, the person who is able to produce the highly rhetorical laments of Dorigen also claims not to know much about rhetoric:

I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn.
Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn.
I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso,
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero. (719-22)

The Franklin, like other pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales, is not all that he seems to be, yet most critics agree...
that the Franklin is a rather benign character; the hypocrisy and pretension created by his social ambition is not nearly as problematic or dangerous as that of the Prioress or Pardoner. But we do have a narrator with "sanguine" characteristics whose motives for telling this particular tale seem to place him in the role of peacemaker, the man who responds to the Squire, the Clerk, the Wife of Bath, and the Merchant on the question of sovereignty and marriage. Part of the much-discussed "Marriage Group" of Kittredge, this tale seems to provide the compromise solution; it is, as J. E. Stevens has named it, a "social romance"—"it exists not to describe private and individual experiences but to idealize the qualities of gentilesse and franchyse." Yet Howard correctly points out that the Franklin's solution is inconsistent with the Christian principle of authority, and we shall see that Dorigen's use of the deserted woman's lament reflects on the couple's relationship that subverts the Church's teachings on the husband's authority within marriage.

The tale begins with all the appropriate trappings of romance: a young knight "wins" with his great labors the favors of his lady, "the faireste under [the] sonne" (734). She consents only because of his worthiness and
"meke obeysaunce" (738-9) and because she takes pity on him (740).** Thus the courtly love ideal is fulfilled: the man becomes a servant of the lady in order to win her love. But once the pair is married, the husband will have control over his wife, according to the Church, and as the Franklin points out:

That pryvely she [Dorigen] fil of his accord
To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,
Of swiche lordship as men han over hire wyves.

(741-3)

Dorigen literally has chosen to replace the ideals of the courtly love system with the ideals of Christian marriage, thereby forsaking the position of authority accorded to her as the heroine of romance. Yet Arveragus makes an unusual gesture:

And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves,
Of his free wyly he swoor hire as a knyght
That neveir in all his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne shold upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyly, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyly in al,
As any lover to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree.

(744-52)

Instead of claiming the expected husbandly role as master, Arveragus has freely chosen to remain in their earlier courtly love roles. It is especially important that this agreement is done in private; in public, Arveragus will remain in charge—a sign of his concern for his public
reputation. The Franklin next intrudes on the narrative to indicate his approval of such an arrangement: "Love wol nat been constreyned by maistraye" (764). He reinforces his opinion with a standard appeal to authority: "as thise clerkes seyn" on the matter of patience in love (771-6). Ultimately, the proof that this type of marriage arrangement is successful is the example of Dorigen and Arveragus, who live in wedded bliss for more than a year (803-6). At this point, Arveragus decides to go to England "to seke in armes worship and honour" (811), that is to maintain his public reputation as a worthy knight.³ He is gone for over two years, during which time Dorigen behaves as she thinks a woman in her position should:

For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth;
Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth
That al this wyde world she sette at noght.
(817-21)

Dorigen behaves as a deserted woman who laments and despairs of seeing her lover again. Such posturing here is excessive, especially since it leads to such self-destructive despair. Her friends try to get her mind off her problems by suggesting that she walk by the sea. Now Dorigen really seems to be a deserted woman who stands on the sea shore lamenting the departure of her lover. But
Dorigen is not a deserted woman in the classical pattern: although her husband is gone, we have been told it is only a temporary absence. Dorigen has letters from Arveragus that promise he will come home (838-40), but her behavior clearly indicates that she does not believe these promises. Her first lament on the "rokkes blake" (865-93) shows her inability to read signs; she is unable to justify the rocks' existence in a universe governed by a wise God because the rocks have the potential for destruction.¹⁴ Her desire for her husband's return is matched by her fear that he will die doing so, and her emotions lead her to misunderstand the purpose of the rocks: "I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem lestes, / By argumentz, that al is for the beste, / Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe" (885-7). She cannot accept any explanation for the rocks other than that of their destructive powers—she values the life of her husband over God's power. This lament illustrates her emotional state (the lack of reason defined by the clerk's argumentation) and her inability to submit herself to authority within the context of a Christian marriage.

When her friends see that "it was no disport/ To roman by the see" (895-6), they take Dorigen to a garden, reminiscent of many gardens in romances, a pseudo-Eden, a
"verray paradys" (912) ." In the garden Dorigen's companions sing and dance, but everywhere that Dorigen looks she sees the image of her husband (921-2); she is similar to many deserted women in that she sees a mental picture of her beloved, imagining and fantasizing about him. It is in the garden that the handsome young squire, Aurelius, is emboldened to speak of his love for Dorigen. We learn that he has loved her for "two yeer and moore" (940), but could not speak of this love and thus became lovesick:

He was despeyred; no thyng dorste he seye, 
Save in his songes somewhat wolde he wrye 
His wo, as in a general compleynyg; 
He seyde he lovede and was biloved no thyng. 
Of swich matere made he manye layses, 
Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelays, 
Hov that he dorste nat his sorwe telle, 
But langwissesheth as a furye dooth in helle, 
And dye he moste, he seyde, as dide Ekko 
For Narcissus, that dorste nat telle hir wo. 
(943-52)

That his "sorwe" moves him to compose songs is not unusual in the romance world he exists in, but what seems suspicious is the gender role reversal implied by the allusion to Echo and Narcissus--Aurelius likens himself to the female of this mythological pair."

When first confronted by Aurelius, Dorigen refuses to break her pledge to Arveragus; she will not be an "untrewyf" (983-7). Yet she makes a pledge "in pley" (988)
that, if Aurelius removes the rocks, she will love him "best of any man" (997). Dorigen has once again misjudged the situation, for she does not realize that Aurelius might misread her intent, nor does she know that such an impossibility might actually happen ("For wel I woot that it shal never bityde" [1001]). The problem here is that Dorigen pledges her "trouthe" in an inappropriate situation—she has already pledged herself to Arveragus and should not break that promise even in jest. J. Douglas Canfield, who has studied the importance of the "truth" topos, summarizes Dorigen's predicament:

"Dorigen's problem is that she not only violates her trouthe to Arveragus but she does so precisely because she violates it to God in the very act of plighting it to Aurelius." Yet it is precisely because she has not completely submitted herself to her husband's will—the result of their unusual marriage pledge, which makes her responsible to her own wishes, not to another person—that Dorigen does not understand the irresponsible nature of her vow to Aurelius.

When Aurelius does indeed remove the rocks with the magician's help and reminds Dorigen of her promise, she is "astonied" (1339). She cannot believe that the rocks are gone: "It is agayns the proces of nature" (1345). She
returns to her familiar custom of weeping and wailing "al a day or two" (1348), but now she cannot tell anyone why she is so upset. Her isolation and desperation cause her to despair and lament, just as earlier her separation from her beloved caused her to lament the presence of the black rocks. The two laments, however, are similar in their questioning of the way things are in Dorigen's world; Gerald Morgan argues that "Dorigen's moral dilemma comes about as the result of the subversion of that providential order that ironically she had earlier called into question." But in this second lament, Dorigen resorts to "authority" in order to solve her dilemma, which she has mistakenly seen in terms of only two options: death or dishonor (1358). Her concern for her reputation leads her to cite twenty-two examples of women who have chosen death over dishonor; all of these *exempla* derive from Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* in the section on pagans who honored chastity. She begins her list with a standard appeal to textual authority--"thise stories beren witnesse" (1367)--echoed later by "as the bookes telle" (1378). Yet, even before she begins her list, we wonder how appropriate her examples are going to be because we have seen her misunderstand and misinterpret so much of her own experience already.
Despite the fact that her list consists of unfamiliar (the daughters of Phidon) and the familiar (Lucrece, Alceste, Penelope), Dorigen begins her catalogue with three examples of "maydens" who killed themselves rather than marry--surely inappropriate comparisons for herself, a married woman. She then moves on to examples of "noble" wives, but after listing four more examples, she apparently comes to a decision:

What sholde I mo enamples hereof sayn,
Sith that so manye han hemselfen slayn
Wel rather than they wolde defouled be?
I wol conclude that it is bet for me
To sdeen myself than been defouled thus.
(1419-23)

Again, Dorigen has missed the point of the exempla she cites: Lucrece was raped, the seven maidens of Melesie and Habradate's wife kill themselves to avoid rape as a result of war and conquest. Dorigen has not been raped, nor is her city under attack. Next Dorigen cites fourteen more examples of wifely virtue; all of these women are true to their husbands in ways that Dorigen is not. Despite what she says, Dorigen shows us how much she really does not want to kill herself; she is unable to arrive at any decision because she does not act immediately and laments for "a day or tweye" (1457). Thus, while the act of lamenting one's fortune or predicament is one of the deserta feminæ conventions,
Dorigen has inappropriately cast herself in that role and she further misuses the form by using *exempla* that do not pertain to her situation—she is not a tragic heroine.

Critics have long argued over the purpose of this lament. For example, Morgan and Baker disagree over the rhetorical structure. Morgan maintains that there are three sections, each focusing on a specific virtue: seven *exempla* on chastity, six on fidelity, and nine on honor.22 Baker, on the other hand, sees Dorigen as dividing her lament into two groups of *exempla*: "one of maidens who killed themselves rather than be dishonored (ll. 1367-94), and one of wives who did the same thing (ll. 1395-1408)."23 But Baker contrasts her system of classification with another set of categories (those of Chaucer or the Franklin): "women who committed suicide before being ravished; those who committed suicide after rape; and a third category of women who are simply faithful and exemplary wives and sweethearts."24 Such competing systems highlight Dorigen's lack of rhetorical skills on several levels: first, she is unable to maintain the very order she posits in the beginning of her lament, and, second, she is unable to persuade herself to action. Dorigen is responsible for her choices although she has done everything possible to avoid taking such
responsibility.

Ultimately, Dorigen's indecision becomes her action, for Arveragus suddenly returns, and Dorigen immediately seeks his advice. His response surprises Dorigen and seems somewhat callous: "Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?" (1469). Arveragus reminds Dorigen that she must keep her promise to Aurelius because "trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe" (1479). He lets her choose what to do, and in doing so is true to his wedding promise of allowing her mastery in the marriage. He implies that her promise to Aurelius was made freely, just as her promise to him was her own choice; perhaps he thinks that she has really chosen Aurelius over her husband, a situation that might occur in the romance world. As in his earlier promise, Arveragus asks only that she tell no one of their agreement so that their public reputation will remain spotless.

At this point, the Franklin intrudes on his narrative:

Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
Wol holden hym a lewed man in this,
That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire hire.
She may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
And when that ye han herd the tale, demeth.
(1493-8)

The Franklin is worried that his audience will misjudge
Arveragus and thus he hints that "everything will work out" in the appropriate romance ending. But shouldn't we be more concerned about Dorigen who is about to dishonor her wedding vows, despite our feeling that she has created her own problems? Most importantly, the Franklin reminds us that we should hear all the information before we make any judgments on guilt. The Franklin continues his narrative with Aurelius' gracious release of Dorigen from her promise. In doing so, he makes her an exemplum of how a wife should be careful about what she promises: "But every wyf be war of hire biheeste;/ On Dorigen remembreth atte leeste" (1541-2). Dorigen's experience has now become authority.

After Dorigen tells Arveragus what Aurelius has done, the couple live happily ever after, with no indication that they have learned from this experience: "He cherisseth hire as though she were a queene,/ And she was to hym trewe everemoore" (1554-5). Arveragus seems to be treating Dorigen exactly as he always has since they were married. Their inversion of the accepted values of Christian marriage (the continuation of the courtly love system within that context) caused their predicament, yet they do nothing to change once those values have been tested and found problematic. This violation of the
normal order is consistent with the world of the tale in which the reality of the rocks disappears through the use of magic, and the real problems of Dorigen and Arveragus' marriage are imaginary, created by Dorigen’s false perception of herself as a deserted woman. As Gertrude White has noted, "physical dangers, though more obvious, are not more real threats than moral dangers."

In conclusion, the lament is an important part of the deserti femina motif, a convention that is normally used by the poet to create sympathy for the woman who has been betrayed by a false lover. The woman's plea for truth is a request for a return to their earlier happiness and for an explanation of why the lover has broken his pledge; the woman realizes, too late, that she has misinterpreted the lover's words and actions. The lament is an appeal that utilizes both experience (the lovers' shared past) and authority (the use of exempla). Furthermore, the woman's nostalgic--and often false--ideas about that past become a type of authority; their past affair is used as a rhetorical weapon, a standard by which their future happiness can be measured. This situation is Anelida's story; her letter is written specifically to gain Arcite's return, and she provides us with a complaint that is typical in its use of the conventions. In Dorigen's
situation, however, the classical exempla of women who remained true and pure do not pertain to her situation—she has misused textual authority and thus has betrayed those texts in the process of betraying herself with misguided promises. She is not a victim in the sense that Anelida is a victim, nor is she a deserta femina abandoned by a false lover. Dorigen’s lament shows us the need for proper understanding of text and experience; her inability to interpret what has happened is the trait that she shares with other deserted women. Ultimately, laments about a lover’s lack of truth show us the difficulty in establishing what the truth is, for there will always be multiple and incompatible perspectives of every story—neither Anelida nor Dorigen can claim to know what truth is because each has misread her lover, and neither can reconcile the differences between her own interpretation of events and her beloved’s behavior. The plea for truth is thus a plea for help in understanding and resolving the conflicting “texts” found in experience or in literary authorities.


4. Davenport, p. 3.


7. Dean concludes that placing his complaints within narratives is evidence of Chaucer’s interest in the soliloquy and "self-revealing monologues" of the Wife and Pardoner (pp. 15-6), but Chaucer has used other narrative techniques in his early poetry to suggest that the narrator is subjectively involved in his or her narrative. Cf. Clemen’s evaluation of the Anelida: "But Chaucer takes what had been an abstraction and brings it down to time and place. By making the Complaint spring from a love-story that leads up to it, he turns something general into a specific case" (Chaucer’s Early Poetry, p. 202).


10. Knight claims that the epithet "seems derived more from a lack of imagination than from the formulaic epithets of epic tradition" (p. 13). Knight's view of the poem as a failure (except insofar as it is able to illustrate the complex metrical systems that Chaucer was able to master) is, alas, fairly typical.

11. See Di Marco's notes in The Riverside Chaucer, p. 993. Jabal was the inventor named in Genesis 4.20.

12. Davenport connects this form of questioning with the "standard poetic mode of the 'ubi sunt' question" (p. 30). If so, then the questioning of the deserted woman clearly functions as a device for persuading the lover to return to the past glories of their love affair (even if the affair was an illusion on the woman's part).


14. I heartily disagree with Wimsatt's prediction that this poem would have ended happily, with Arcite returning to Anelida because he was persuaded by her letter and Mars takes pity on her request (p. 6). First of all, Mars is not the god to pray to if one is in love. Secondly, the pattern of the Heroides is disaster, and the complaint strongly evokes the spirit of the Heroides, rather than the parallel of "The Squire's Tale" which Wimsatt suggests (p. 7). The fact that the squire has to interrupt his tale to tell us that there will be a happy ending (654-5) should warn us that he is working against generic expectations and conventions. Finally, how can we firmly predict how Chaucer's poem will end based on a few precedents from the French dite of complaint and comfort? I agree that the French poems are part of Chaucer's inspirations for the Anelida, but they are not the only patterns at work here.

I also wonder at Cherniss' conjecture that the poem "may be the beginning of some sort of dream-vision" ("Chaucer's Anelida and Arcite: Some Conjectures," Chaucer 5 [1970]: 9-21; p. 13), based mostly on the fact that Chaucer was partial to the dream-vision form. His other suggestions, that Chaucer was unsuccessful in his attempts to write a formal complaint, an epic, or a chivalric
romance, may be true, although I'm not sure that failure in experimentation is necessarily the reason that Chaucer did not finish the poem.


16. Cf. the lines about books as the "key of remembrance" in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (F 25-6).

17. Dante invokes Polyhymnia (*Par* 23.55-7) when he compares his awakening to one who struggles to remember a forgotten dream, just as the books of the past, written by Polyhymnia and her sisters, do not aid in finding the truth. Polyhymnia is associated with memory in the mythographic tradition (e.g., Fulgentius), and Chaucer describes her as having a "vois memorial in the shade" (18). See notes, p. 992 in *Riverside*.

18. Davenport, p. 27.


28. Ovid, Metamorphoses 3.407; cf. Shannon who also notes the attribution of Skeat to the Roman de la Rose (p. 322).


30. Gerald Morgan, "A Defence of Dorigen's Complaint," Medium Aevum 46 (1977): 78. Morgan sees this lament as the focus of the "moral conflict that turns upon the issues of chastity, fidelity, and honour--key concepts in the moral order of The Franklin's Tale" (p. 78). Cf. Davenport: Dorigen's lament is a "reaching out from a state of disorder (where the laws of nature have been overturned and the rules of marriage are threatened) for fixed rules and patterns of behaviour" (p. 191).


32. Morgan, p. 94.

35-45; Sledd defends the complaint against charges of disunity and irrelevance to the tale as a whole.


35. White, p. 461.
SECTION 4: Troilus and Criseyde

Chapter VII

Reversing the Roles: Betrayal in Troilus and Criseyde

One of the most important features of Troilus and Criseyde is the intrusive narrator who is as much a character in this story as Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus. This narrator casts himself in various roles: historian, translator, and someone who claims not to be a lover, but who seems to fall in love with one of his characters, Criseyde. The relationships between these four major characters illustrate how betrayal and fidelity function on several levels. In fact, the story begins with a betrayal: Calchas deserts Troy for the Greek camp, leaving his daughter Criseyde behind. Calchas' betrayal casts a shadow over the events that follow, even if we do not remember that the ultimate causes of the Trojan War were Paris' betrayal of Oenone for Helen, and Helen's betrayal of her husband Menelaus for Paris. By the end of the poem, we are fully conscious of the numerous betrayals found in the stories of Troy; the narrator, however, finds
that he wants to rewrite "history" in order to save
Criseyde's reputation. In other words, the narrator's
desire to remain faithful to the auctour Lollius, whose
work he purports to be translating, competes with his
personal feelings for his heroine. Thus, the narrator
becomes entangled by the problems of betrayal and fidelity
that beset his characters. Moreover, the narrator is
"betrayed" by his sources in the sense that he does not
always have adequate information and must speculate on
some topics (such as Criseyde's first marriage). The
narrator must also add to his sources, as in the case of
the "Canticus Troili" in Book 1:

And of his song naught only the sentence,
As wret myn auctour called Lollius,
But pleyenly, save our tongue's difference,
I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus
Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus
As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,
Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here.

(1.393-9)

He is clearly adding to his source's "sentence" by giving
what he maintains is the full text of this song. And the
narrator's pose as a historian and translator is
reinforced by his numerous mentions of those sources, as
in his invocation to Cleo at the beginning of Book 2 that
accompanies his claim to objectivity:

O lady myn, that called art Cleo,
Thow be my speed fro this forth, and my Muse...
Forwhi to every lover I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.
(2.8-9, 12-4)

The narrator is acutely aware of the cultural differences between his land and time and those of his story ("Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,/ In sondry londes, sondry ben usages," 2.27-8). Worrying about the changes in speech is an important part of the translator's job, and the narrator's claim of merely being a translator recalls the narratorial pose of the *Anelida* and the *Legend*, works in which the narrator did not remain objective.

While many critics have studied the specific references to Vergil and Ovid in relationship to the character of Criseyde, few have explored the ways in which the conventions of the *deserta femina* influence our reactions to Troilus, Criseyde, and their ill-fated love. Older scholarship, such as that of E. F. Shannon, tended to focus on story and language. For example, Shannon maintained that Helen of Ovid's *Heroides*, "a familiar and approved" source, was the basis of Chaucer's characterization of Criseyde. While Helen is married, Criseyde is a widow. Both initially resist the advances of the males, but the women are unable to resist, despite their concern for their reputations. Helen's letter illustrates her uncertainty as she debates with herself
whether to yield to Paris; Criseyde's mental debate also highlights her indecision. Ultimately, Helen is untrue to her marriage vow to Menelaus and Criseyde to her pledge to Troilus. Shannon summarizes thus: "Certainly nowhere else than in the *Heroïdes* could Chaucer have found so complete an analysis of feminine emotions, and nowhere except in the Helen Epistles a psychological study of a heroine so similar to his own." He ignores, however, the possibility that Criseyde's characterization may owe as much to a more general borrowing from the *Heroïdes*, borrowing that is not limited to verbal parallels alone.

Recent scholarship, on the other hand, tends to focus on the thematic and structural parallels between Chaucer and his classical sources; books by Winthrop Wetherbee (*Chaucer and the Poets*), John Fyler (*Chaucer and Ovid*), and Lisa Kiser (*Telling Classical Tales*) discuss Chaucer's wide-ranging and often ironic use of those sources. Wetherbee, for example, discusses two of the narrator's allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that comment on Criseyde's role in this love story. The first allusion is to Scylla, Nisus' daughter; Wetherbee comments: "The theme of betrayal and the importance of the love offering are enough to suggest a parallel with the behavior of Criseyde." This Ovidian allusion also has the effect of
emphasizing Troilus as "the helpless victim of Criseyde’s betrayal." Next Wetherbee discusses an allusion to Myrrha as an illustration of the recurrent theme of victimization—both Troilus and Myrrha are victims of a situation beyond their control. Yet, rather than illustrate the role of Criseyde, these allusions draw our attention to Troilus’ situation, and Criseyde seems a peripheral concern for Wetherbee. Wetherbee does not, however, entertain the possibility that Scylla and Myrrha share certain characteristics and functions within the Metamorphoses or that these Ovidian heroines might have something in common with the heroines of the Heroides.

Warren Ginsberg, in his book The Cast of Character, notes the similarity between Boccaccio’s Criseida and Vergil’s Dido: both are widows "who thought [they] disdained love." The parallel with Dido, Ginsberg argues, suggests that Criseida will change her mind and be consumed by passion. It also calls to mind the ideas of desertion and suicide, but, in both Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s stories, it is the female who betrays her lover.

All of these critics point to the literary quality of Criseyde, who has many qualities that link her to other well-known deserted women. As Wetherbee has pointed out, reference to a particular character, event, or image in another poem is often an invitation to
the reader to set Chaucer's text side by side with its source for a time and consider the thematic, structural and imagistic similarities between entire episodes."

This intertextuality or layering of texts--placing the original or originals against Chaucer's version--is apparent in many of Chaucer's allusions; examples can be seen in references to Dante which can also refer to Vergil and other classical sources. Chaucer invites his readers to compare stories, such as the Dido and Aeneas narrative, in which different versions and perspectives exist and perhaps contradict each other, as I have argued in my second and third chapters. Chaucer, of course, did not derive the *deserta femina* pattern from one particular source; he found classical and contemporary authorities for such a character. As Wetherbee has noted, Troilus' "experience is presented again and again in terms of a sequence of roles borrowed from other poems." Troilus responds to poetic tradition within the poem, and we, the readers, should respond to Troilus as part of that tradition. We should also be aware of the poetic traditions that Crisseyde and Pandarus respond to within this story. For Crisseyde, the conventions of the *deserta femina* are part of the poetic traditions according to which we must judge her actions.

Because the *Troilus* is the story of a man abandoned
by his beloved, and because Boccaccio’s Il Filostrato
(rather than the work of the classical poets) is Chaucer’s
primary source, it might seem that Chaucer did not use
these conventions. All scholars who have studied the
notable differences in tone and intention between the
Troilus and the Filostrato indicate that Chaucer did not
slavishly copy from his sources. One example of the
many alterations is the difference in the warning to
lovers at the end of each work, presented as the moral of
the story. Boccaccio ends his narrative with a warning to
young men to love cautiously because women are inconstant.
The female, not the male, has deserted her lover and is
thus to be blamed for leaving—the opposite of the
classical conventions. Chaucer’s narrator, however,
addresses women in his conclusion:

N’ye I sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
But moost for wommen that bitraised be
Through false folk—God yeve hem sorwe, amen!—
That with hire gret wit and subtilte
Bytraise yow. And this commeveth me
To speke, and in effect yow alle I praye,
Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!  
(5.1779-85) 

The narrator reminds us that the traditional conventions
are that the woman is betrayed, even though in this story
(and Boccaccio’s) it is the man who is betrayed. We are
forced to think of the deserted woman conventions,
especially since Chaucer calls attention to some of his
classical authorities in the very next stanza:

But litel bok, no makyng thow n’envie,
But subgit be to alle poesye,
And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

(5.1789-92)

Chaucer clearly wants to remind us that the *Troilus* is part of a literary tradition.

The change in roles from a male to a female betrayer, in both Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s versions of the story, can be seen in other aspects of the *Troilus*. For example, the alterations of male-female roles have been noted by R. E. Kaske in his essay "The Aube in Chaucer’s *Troilus*."

The aube, or dawn poem, was a medieval lyric type, especially popular on the continent, in which one or both lovers express their grief at having to part after a secret night meeting. According to Kaske, Chaucer bestowed on Troilus several speeches usually assigned to the lady in an aube, and on Criseyde certain speeches usually assigned to the lover, thus enriching a theme sometimes detected in other parts of the poem: the reversal of the roles of man and woman as they are popularly or romantically conceived.¹

These alterations thus give the human shortcomings of Troilus and Criseyde additional comic and pathetic dimensions, and they show once again how freely Chaucer adapted his material to suit his own purposes.

In particular, Chaucer adapts the conventions of the
deserta femina pattern to reinforce the role reversals in 
*Troilus and Criseyde*. Criseyde does resemble the
Chaucerian "Good Woman" as defined by Pat Overbeck, and
the classical deserted woman." She is both similar to
Dido, in that they are both widows, and dissimilar in that
she does not worry about her deceased husband. Because
she has been abandoned by her father (and her mother, who
is barely mentioned"), she is alone, unable to receive
trustworthy advice, and must make her own decisions.
Despite her association with her young nieces, Criseyde is
shown only listening to them read the "romaunce" of Thebes
(2.100) and the song of Antigone (2.827-82). Even
Pandarus’ trick involving Deiphobus and the supposed
threat of Polyphete hinges on Criseyde’s lonely and
tenuous position in Troy. Thus Criseyde’s isolation from
social and familial ties aids Pandarus in his arguments
that she should fall in love with Troilus.

Troilus also displays characteristics of the deserted
woman. For example, it is he, the male, not the female of
classical convention, who falls in love at first sight:
Troilus sees Criseyde at the temple, apparently for the
first time, and immediately feels the fire of love ("Yet
with a look his herte wax a-fere," 1.229). Although this
pattern can be found in other medieval romances (the Roman
d’Eneas, for example—see Chapter Two) and in the *Filostrato,* Chaucer also shows Criseyde falling in love with Troilus when he rides by her window where she sits alone (2.610-44). According to the classical conventions, the woman falls in love because of the stranger’s good looks and because she is moved to pity by his tale of woe. Criseyde has already been persuaded by Pandarus that Troilus is near death, and seeing him reinforces both her compassion and her sense of his nobility. Similarly, Troilus is taken by Criseyde’s charms, and he is tricked by Pandarus into believing that Criseyde is threatened by Polyphete.

Furthermore, both Troilus and Criseyde nourish their love with images and memories, just as many classical deserted women, such as Scylla and Dido, imagine and create loves that may not have basis in actual fact. Troilus recalls Criseyde’s face (1.361-4), and Criseyde thinks about Troilus a great deal ("So she in hire thought argue/ in this mater of which I have yow told," 2.694-5). By the time Troilus and Criseyde actually meet, they are in love with a mental image and a concept reinforced by Pandarus’ manipulations.

Many critics, including Fyler and Wetherbee, have remarked on Pandarus’ function as guide, artificer, and
artist, and his manipulation is vital to this love story. Pandarus has also been compared to the narrator, for both are older men who claim not to be lovers themselves and both are go-betweens (the narrator mediates between his source text and his audience). Pandarus plays the nurse-confidant role (such as Dido's sister Anna in the Aeneid), but he does so for both Troilus and Criseyde by persuading them to fall in love.

It is partly because of their youthful naivete that Pandarus can talk Troilus and Criseyde into doing something they are at first reluctant to do. Surely Troilus, who scorns the God of Love in Book 1, has not loved before. Criseyde, although she had been married before, says little about her dead husband, nor does the narrator provide any information. Yet Pandarus, by advising both youths, cannot be relied on for sound advice for either one because his loyalties are divided. Pandarus' dual allegiance suggests that the conventions of the betrayed lover have been applied to both male and female—but he, unlike other nurse-confidants, cannot be faithful to both lovers because his loyalties are divided.

Even the lovers' first meeting reminds the audience of the classical sources. In Book 3, Troilus and Criseyde spend their first night together during a storm that is so
fierce "that every maner womman that was there/ Hadde of the smoky reyn a verray feere" (3.627-8). The rain has already been noted by Crisseyde (3.562) and is mentioned again by the narrator (3.67709). At this point, Pandarus maneuvers Troilus and Crisseyde into a small room so that they can talk. This situation is reminiscent of Dido and Aeneas' meeting in the cave into which they had been forced by the storm while they were out hunting, a detail that Chaucer mentions in Dido's Legend (LGW 1218-31). A small dark room in the interior of a Trojan house is clearly analogous to Vergil's cave." Other classical deserted women, such as Scylla, contemplate their dilemmas at night, and some, such as Myrrha, act on their decisions in the dark. In all of these situations, night and storm emphasize the secretive and impious nature of what these women are doing; darkness also functions as an ominous warning that the women do not heed. The difference between Troilus and Crisseyde and the classical pattern is that Chaucer's lovers both have been tricked into consumating their love, rather than the common classical narrative device of one of the lovers being unaware of the truth of the situation. Thus, both are innocent, since they were manipulated, and both are guilty, since they have succumbed to their passions."
The main reversal in the conventional roles comes when Criseyde leaves Troy. Now it is Troilus who watches his beloved depart and curses the gods, asking for death. He paces the walls of Troy, anxiously awaiting Criseyde's return, just as many Ovidian heroines wait on the shore for their lovers. The beach and the city walls are the furthest limits for them, indicating the physical separation and isolation of the lovers. Troilus utters the standard deserted woman's lament; he accuses Criseyde of unfaithfulness and infidelity: "Where is youre feith, and where is youre biheste?/ Where is youre love? Where is youre trouthe?" (5.1675-6). Such accusations are typical of the deserted woman who is actively seeking to return to her earlier happiness (compare, for example, Dido, Anelida, and Dorigen).

Troilus' madness ("woodnesse," 4.238), first caused by the news that Criseyde will depart from Troy, continues to guide his actions in the first part of Book 5, recalling the many classical deserted women who act irrationally after learning of their lovers' departure. Dido, for example is compared to a Bacchante when she learns that Aeneas' fleet is preparing to go (Aeneid 4.300-3); this image reinforces our perception of her as a woman totally consumed by her passion. Furthermore,
Troilus' torment is increased by his dreams:

Anon bygynne he sholde for to grone
And dremen of the dreadfulleste thyngs
That myghte ben; as mete he were allone
In place horrible makyng ay his mone,
Or meten that he was amonges alle
His enemys, and in hire hondes falle.

(5.247-52)

These dreams are foreboding, and when, at the end of the book, Troilus dies at the hands of his enemies, the prophecy of the dream is fulfilled. Troilus' situation is similar to Dido's: once it is clear that Aeneas is leaving, she prays for death, and numerous signs that she will die occur, such as the owl who calls out at night. In Book 5, Troilus hears such an owl (5.319-20), and while Shannon attributes this detail to Boccaccio's Teseide and dismisses Wise's claim that it derives from Statius' Thebiad 3.510 or the Aeneid 4.462, because neither mentions Ascalaphus, he suggests a parallel to the Metamorphoses (5.543ff.) in which Ascalaphus is turned into an owl.² Yet the detail of the owl as an omen of death was traditional and in particular associated with the Dido story. Shannon argues from the narrower perspective of verbal similarity, but the detail does not have to have one single source and can easily allude to several narratives.

The exchange of numerous letters would suggest the
Heroides, not only for the plot device of sending such letters, as three sets of letters in Ovid’s work are between lovers, but also for the conventions of the deserted woman type. In Book 1, Pandarus alludes to a letter from Oenone to Paris (1.625ff.), giving the substance of Heroides 5. Furthermore, the love letters sent in Book 2 foreshadow the letters of Book 5 by suggesting that Troilus and Criseyde know about this genre. Troilus writes first to Criseyde, reaffirming his love for her, reminding her of her oath, and asking when she will return (5.1317-1422), just as many classical lovers recall their betrawers’ promises in order to get the men to return. While we are given the "text" of his letter, the narrator merely mentions that Criseyde responds by promising to return (her answer is given "in effect," 5.1423-4). Troilus continues to write letters to Criseyde (5.1583), to which apparently she does not respond until she is moved by pity ("for routhe," 5.1587). The narrator gives all of this letter (5.1590-1631); this letter puzzles Troilus, convincing him that she will not return. Until he sees the brooch on Diomede, Troilus, in order to avoid despair, relies on the memory of Criseyde and her oath, just as he had cherished a mental image of her before he was able to admit his love
for her. Now this memory serves only to torment and isolate him from other human endeavors, thereby causing him to rush to his death in battle.

Troilus' isolation is complete once he refuses to listen to Pandarus and Cassandra; he has rejected authority just as the deserta femina rejects authority. His isolation and separation are reinforced at his death, when his soul rises to the eighth sphere and he is able to laugh at worldly vanity (5.1814ff.). He has sacrificed himself on the battlefield just as Dido had sacrificed herself on a funeral pyre (Aeneid 4.645ff.). Troilus does, in fact, actually mention pyres at 5.302-8, when he asks Pandarus to care for his funeral and offerings to the gods after his death. Dido pretends that she is building a pyre in order to sacrifice to Pluto but instead sacrifices herself by killing herself with Aeneas' sword. Dido curses Aeneas as she dies, and Troilus curses Criseyde before he goes to his last battle. While the details are not exactly parallel, the situation is the same: both Dido and Troilus, having admitted to themselves that their lovers have betrayed them, become self-destructive. Troilus' sacrifice, however, may be an act of pietas, for on one level he dies in the service of his country, whatever his motive for doing so.
Crisseyde, however, is only in some respects similar to the male betrayer of the classical pattern. Her promise to return as soon as possible makes her seem like such a character, and her failure to return seems to bear out the charges of perfidia and infidelitas leveled at the typical male deserter. She is as isolated at the Greek camp as she was in Troy (5.688), and she again places her trust in male confidants. Overbeck has pointed out that Crisseyde submits herself to all sorts of male authority: Hector, Pandarus, Troilus, Calchas, and Diomede. In other words, Crisseyde remains pious.\footnote{She survives, even if labelled as unfaithful and deceitful, so she is in contrast to the "good woman" type; she is not free to destroy herself by means of an all-consuming passion as was Dido. By going to the Greek camp to join her father, she chose pietas over amor, even if she feels she has no choice. Ironically, by going to her father to save her reputation, she loses her good name. In order to avoid one scandal, she creates another.}

Indeed, the narrator seems to go out of his way to make Crisseyde a sympathetic and hence tragic figure. For example, the narrator says:

\begin{verbatim}
Ne ne me list this sely wooman chyde
Forther than the storye wol devyse.
Hire name, alias, is publysshed so wide
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
\end{verbatim}
And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.  
(5.1093-9)

The adjective *sely*, here used about Crisneyde, has twice been used to describe Troilus, once when he first confesses his love for Crisneyde to Pandarus (1.871), and again after Crisneyde sees him ride by her window (2.683). *Sely* is also used to describe Dido in the *Legend*: "ther gan to breden swich a fyr/ That sely Dido hath now swich desire" (1156-7). All these uses of the word suggest the foolishness of being in love, especially a love that is ultimately destructive; Dido was unfortunate in love and so were Troilus and Crisneyde.

The narrator frequently reminds his audience that he does not blame Crisneyde and that her guilt is part of other stories, not his own invention, and he compares Crisneyde to other classical heroines, suggesting that he knew the classical patterns of false and true lovers:

> Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe  
And every gentil womman, what she be,  
That al that Crisneyde was untrewe,  
That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.  
Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se;  
And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,  
Penelopees trouthe and goode Alceste.  
(5.1772-8)

Here, Chaucer once again calls attention to his classical sources, placing Crisneyde squarely within a literary
tradition. Criseyde is not like Penelope and Alcestis, for both mythological ladies remained faithful to their husbands. As Wetherbee has pointed out (in reference to the allusion to Alcestis at 5.1527-33), "the example of Alcestis illustrates a triumph of pietas, a submission to fate which is at the same time a willed, virtuous act." We are reminded that, although Criseyde also acted piously by following the orders of the Trojan council that she join her father in the Greek camp, the result of that action was not considered virtuous in Criseyde's case. Thus, this allusion to faithful lovers directs the readers' attentions to the classical stories and to the differences in the patterns.

Understanding such allusions is vital to our understanding of Chaucer's borrowings and alterations from his sources. Chaucer built on his audience's expectations in Troilus and Criseyde by using the conventions of the deserted female character type—we expect the characters to behave in certain ways, according to the classical traditions. By splitting and reversing the characteristics of the deserta femina pattern and giving those traits to both Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer gives us both points of view in order to gain sympathy for these unfortunate and tragic lovers. We know that this is
Troilus' story of "double sorwe" (1.1), but we must also consider Criseyde's perspective, and the narrator asks us not to judge Criseyde too harshly. Thus, Chaucer found in Vergil's and Ovid's heroines the character type of betrayed lovers, and he used the pattern as one means of linking, as well as contrasting, his story with literary tradition and the classical authorities.

A useful summary of scholarship on the *Troylus* is Alice Kaminsky, Chaucer’s *Troylus and Criseyde* and the Critics (Athens: Ohio UP, 1980).

2. For examples of the narrator’s promises to be faithful to his source, see 2.18, 49.


Henrik Specht notes that Criseyde is "at the end of a long line of literary predecessors, including Ovid’s afflicted heroines" ("Ethopoëia or Impersonation: A Neglected Species of Medieval Characterization," *ChauR* 21 [1986]: 11.


6. Wetherbee, p. 97. The allusion to Scylla occurs at Troilus and Criseyde 5.1107-10. The story of Scylla is in Ovid's Metamorphoses 8.1-151; I discussed this character in Chapter 1.


8. TC 4.1138-41; Met. 10.298ff.; Wetherbee 98-100.


10. Wetherbee, p. 89.


15. Criseyde curses her birthday and mother Argyve in 4.761-3. Yet we do not see her mother as taking an active role in her daughter's life, nor do we know where she is now. Susan Schibanoff, in her article "Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's Troilus (Speculum 51 [1976]: 647-58), attempts to explain the etymological significance of the mother's name by connecting it to argos or prudentia, so that her name serves as an "ironic reminder of her daughter's self-admitted improvidence" (p. 650). Most of Schibanoff's explanation hinges on some rather erudite mythological


   Connected with the issue of Criseyde's first marriage is the issue of Criseyde's age which is, in effect, a "red herring" in the description of physical and moral attributes (5.826). The narrator mentions her age as one example of the information not mentioned in his sources, information which he feels would be of interest to his audience. By calling attention to this "historical lacuna," the narrator reminds us that he is translating and reporting as accurately as he can (cf. *Anelida* and *House of Fame*).

   Derek Brewer ("The Ages of Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus," *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer* [London: Macmillan, 1982], pp. 80-8) speculates that Troilus is about nineteen years old and that Criseyde is perhaps several years older—but we should remember that women in that time married young and that, in wartime, wives could become widows very soon after marriage. The narrator does little more than speculate so that we, like the narrator, cannot provide any definitive answers.

20. For an alternative view, that Troilus and Criseyde are consummating a real marriage, see John Maguire, "The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde," *Chaucer* 8 (1974): 262-78.


22. E. T. Donaldson notes, in his essay "The Ending of Troilus," that Troilus is "an Aeneas in Dido's pathetic plight" (*Speaking of Chaucer* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1970], p. 93). Donaldson, however, does not elaborate on this gender role reversal.


24. Wetherbee, p. 142.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the deserted woman appears in many of Chaucer's works as a metanarrative device, the focal point for discussing the problems of reading and interpretation, translation, and fidelity to textual authority. The narratives of Dido, in Book 1 of the House of Fame and the Legend of Good Women, show the problems faced by a writer when there are multiple and conflicting authorities. The narrator of the Legend also must choose between being faithful to his sources and being faithful to the God he serves, the God of Love. Readers, such as the God of Love in the Legend and the Man of Law in the Canterbury Tales, can misinterpret a work if they are guided by their own self-interests. Dorigen, in the "Franklin's Tale," acts as if she were a deserted woman because she has misunderstood the lessons of the exempla she cites. Authors always become involved in the story they tell because they are readers and have their own particular views that affect their interpretations.

Most importantly, the first-person, intrusive narrator is presented as a reader and a writer; he self-
consciously worries about his sources (in his role as reader) and his audiences (in his role as poet). For Chaucer, these two roles are inseparable; often the Chaucerian narrator becomes as much a part of his story as his characters, as he does in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Likewise, the ways in which one learns—"experience" and "authority"—are intertwined, not part of an opposition. These two methods exist in a circular relationship: experience becomes authority in the form of written texts, and those authorities become the framework for experience. Neither can exist without the other, and both are subject to interpretation and misperception. The deserted woman pattern allows Chaucer to explore the issues of fidelity and betrayal within a narrative and in the narrator’s concerns which encircle that narrative. The classic pattern of the deserted woman, however, is not the only character-type through which Chaucer displays these concerns.

The well-known opening lines of the Wife of Bath’s Prologue illustrate the tensions created by the opposition of "experience" and "authority"; in her case, the Wife has learned from her own experience everything there is to know about marriage:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynough for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage;
For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age,
Thanke be God that is eterne on lyve,
Housbondeis at chirche dore I have had fyve...

(III.1-6)

Indeed, her experience with men is the quality that sets
her apart from the classical deserted woman, whose naivety
and inexperience lead her to misinterpret the behavior of
the man who is the object of her affections. Yet the Wife
also confesses to her confusion about men's behavior--she
fails to understand why her husbands treat her the way
they do, and she is confounded by the way that
authorities, represented by Jankyn's "Book of Wikked
Wyves," depict women. She is well aware of the
differences caused by point of view as she cries,

By God, if wommen hadde written stories,
As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
Thy wolde han written of men moore wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.

(III.693-6)

Because male authority does not correspond with female
experience, the Wife uses herself as an exemplum, making
herself into an authority, so that she can teach her
primarily male audience how the patriarchal system does
not serve all of its members. More than once the Wife
refers to her life as her "tale," and, in investing
herself with authority, she questions and subverts male
authority. The Wife feels betrayed by men and the male-
authored texts, so she desires to replace this system with one of her own fashioning, one in which the women have control (as she suggests in her tale when the ladies control the fate of the knight).

More than one critic has discussed how the antifeminist traditions shape and control the Wife's behavior. She is the jealous, manipulative, gossiping female who causes the destruction of man (and mankind) as described in the clerical tracts, but we see that the Wife has learned how to control men in the only way she can within a society that places men in positions of power over women. The Wife's honesty and openness surprise and mystify audiences; given a chance to speak in a society that rarely affords females the opportunity to do so, the Wife communicates in a fashion that is totally unlike the rest of the pilgrims, male and female, who have been taught by "authority." The Wife knows, as others do not, that "experience" can teach. But, in defending her position, she disregards the authorities while failing to see how they shape her experience--in other words, the Wife opts for an extreme, not a medium. She is, then, related to the deserted woman who chooses one extreme over another. The Wife is as much the participant in and victim of love (amor) at the hands of the patriarchy that
rules her life (*pietas*); five husbands have painfully taught her about love, marriage, and control. Ultimately, the Wife's life-tale is a complaint similar to those of the deserted women, for all of these females experience betrayal at the hands of men and male values.

I suspect, then, that the deserted woman character extends beyond the bounds of the type found in classical authors, the type presented in this dissertation, although we have seen the many ways in which Chaucer makes use of these conventions. This character is the means by which Chaucer can examine the poetic issues that most concerned him as a reader and a writer: the issues of textual fidelity and betrayal. Chaucer suggests it is only in examining multiple perspectives that we can arrive at some type of truth, for one authority's or one person's truth may disagree with someone else's view. Fidelity and betrayal, for the writer and for the lover, are matters of interpretation; the truth is complex, never found by studying only one perspective or one source. Chaucer's narrators are always concerned with the issues of textual fidelity and betrayal, for these issues are of primary concern for the literary artist.
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