BODY POLITICS: OTHERNESS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF BODIES IN LATE MEDIEVAL WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT
This thesis examines the use and function of the human body as a surface that is inscribed with a number of socially significant meanings and how these inscriptions operate in the specific late medieval cultural production. Drawing on Jauss's notion of the social and political significance of medieval narrative, I seek to determine how specific texts contribute to a regulatory practice by thematizing bodies that are perceived as "other," that resist or defy an imagined social norm or stereotype.

Each of the dissertation's four chapters treats a different set of notions about the human body. The first one examines Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale and The King of Tars as representations of ethnographic difference. I argue that the late Middle Ages did not have the notion of "race" as a signifier of ethnic difference: instead there is a highly unstable system of positions that place an individual in relation to Christian Salvation History. Robert Henryson's Testament of Cresseid is at the centre of chapter two that examines the moral issues surrounding leprosy as a stigmatized disease. Reading the text as a piece of medical historiography, I argue that one of the purposes of the narrative is to establish the link between Cresseid's sexual behaviour and her disease. A discussion of the homosocial underpinnings of late medieval feudal society, particularly in light of Duby's notion of "les jeuness," forms the basis of the final two chapters. Chapter three discusses Chaucer's Legend
of Lucrece and the narrative function of rape as a pedagogical instrument with the aim to ensure the availability of untouched female bodies for a "traffic in women" between noblemen. Chapter four examines transgressive sexual acts as the objects of jokes in fabliaux, such as Chaucer's Miller's Tale. By using shame and ridicule as their main strategy, these texts, I argue, fulfil an exemplary function and act as a warning to young noblemen to maintain an erotic discipline as future heads of feudal houses and as an upcoming political elite.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

CONTENTS

PART 1. INTRODUCTION 1

PART 2. 'AL PIS WORLD BITWIX HEM DELT': OTHER BODIES 13

1. Ethnography and Otherness: Some Introductory Remarks 13
2. The Story of Noah’s Sons 18
2.1. Biblical Exegesis and Scholiated Bible Histories, or Historienbibeln 21
2.1.2. Peter Comestor: Historia Scholastica 28
2.1.3. The Middle English Genesis, the Cursor Mundi, and Trevisa’s Translation of De proprietaribus rerum 35
2.1.4. The Historienbibel 39
2.2. The Chronicle: Rudolf von Ems Weltchronik 43
2.3. The World of The Book of John Mandeville 49
3. Infidels, Pagans, and Wild Women:
   Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale and The King of Tars 60

PART 3. WICKIT LANGAGE: LEPROSY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLAME 94

1.1. The Social and Historical Significance of Leprosy 94
1.2. The Institutionalization of Leprosy in Historical Context 98
2. Leprosy and Its Social Function 103
2.1. The Cultural Context: Unclean, Unclean! 103
2.2. Interpreting Disease 111
2.3. Leprosy and its Diagnosis 115
2.4. The Diagnosis as Text 118

3. The Narrative of Leprosy 121

3.1. Robert Henryson's The Testament of Cresseid and the Question of Guilt 121

3.2. Cresseid's Case History: A Medical Narrative 140

3.3. The Other Story: Cures, Or the Cause Determines the Outcome 156

3.4. 'Thow Suffer sail, and as ane beggar die'

The Disease and its Social Consequences 168

PART 4. NOT A PRETTY PICTURE: THE BODY VIOLATED BY RAPE 183

1.1. The Legal Background 184

1.2. Social Concerns 188

2.0. Lucretia's Two Bodies 192

2.1. The Body as res publica 192

3.0. The Medieval Context 204

3.1. You Have Been Warned: Rules of Conduct For Young Women 204

3.2. 'Thy faire body, lat yt nat appere, ... Lucrese of Rome toun':

Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece and the Pedagogy of Fear 214

3.2.1. 'Of clene maydens' and Other Good Women:

The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women 217

3.2.2. 'The verray trewe Lucrese' 228

Part 5. 'OF WHICH THAT NO MAN UNNETHE OGHTE SPEKE NE WRITE':

SEXUALLY DEVIANT BODIES IN MORAL TREATISES AND FABLIAUX 248

1.1. Unmentionable Vices 248

1.2. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell:" Chaucer's Parson and Sins Against Nature 251

1.3. The Prohibition of the Word and Its Consequences:

Hans Folz's Die Mißverständliche Beichte 257

2. Mentioning the Unmentionable: The Sexual Politics of the Fabliaux 265
2.1. Normative Subversion: The Authority of Laughter 265
2.2. Historical Observations 269
3.1. Dietrich von der Glezze: Der Borte 276
3.2. The Narrative as Discipline: Chaucer's Miller's Tale 287

PART 6. CONCLUSION 313

WORKS CITED 318
"It is a remarkable piece of apparatus."¹ With these words the officer in Franz Kafka's narrative *In the Penal Colony* introduces an insidious piece of machinery. Its purpose, as the officer reveals to his visitor, is to execute legal sentences on prisoners. When pressed for more information the officer explains how the machine is used: "Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body."² The machine communicates the sentence so efficiently that any form of human communication becomes gratuitous. A formal accusation, a trial and a verdict all become superfluous, and the suspect does not even know that he has been charged: "'He doesn't know the sentence that has been passed on him?' 'No', said the officer again, pausing a moment as if to let the explorer elaborate his question, and then said; 'There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body'.”³

What makes Kafka's tale so harrowing is that by taking the idea to its literal extreme it draws awareness to the fact that human bodies are constantly being used as surfaces for inscriptions. *In the Penal Colony* the notion of the human body as a social construct that can be inscribed with a number of norms, practices and values becomes a factual reality: the human skin becomes a *vellum*, and the social inscription of the prisoner's sentence becomes a text. The ingeniousness of Kafka's apparatus lies less in its mechanical perfection, for we

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²Kafka, "Colony," 144.

³Kafka, "Colony," 145.
learn that the machine is somewhat worn out and requires constant attention to run smoothly, than in its purpose to render any interpretation unnecessary. The message's text is clear enough: "This prisoner, for instance -- the officer indicated the man -- 'will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!'" By the time the prisoner has deciphered the writing's meaning "with his wounds" he is close to death and the machine's purpose is fulfilled. The body is discarded, and an interpretation of the text is unnecessary: the writing on the prisoner's body collapses the signifier into the sign, the sentence's execution becomes synonymous with its meaning.

The idea that bodies can be written on is, however, not Kafka's invention. While Kafka can be credited with inventing an ingenious piece of technology to perform this horrible task, the notion of human bodies as inscribed surfaces is, in fact, much older. More than one thousand years ago the martyrologist Prudentius wrote a story to which Kafka's In the Penal Colony bears more than a passing resemblance. Prudentius's account of the martyrdom of St. Cassian (fourth century C.E.) marks the starting point for a long tradition of narratives that describe how the grammaticus Cassian is punished by the pagan authorities for his Christian faith. The actual punishment is meted out by his students who use their styles -- with which they exercise their writing on wax tablets -- to write on their teacher's body:

So he is stripped of his garments and his hands are tied behind his back, and all the band are there, armed with their sharp styles . . . . "We like making

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4Kafka, "Colony," 144.

pricks, twining scratch with scratch and linking curved strokes together. You may examine and correct our lines in long array, in case an erring hand has made any mistake. Use your authority; you have power to punish a fault, if any of your pupils has written carelessly on you." Such sport the boys had on their master's body.  

In Prudentius's account, the discipline of studying the correct use of the language as practised in late antiquity, and the students' resulting fear of their teacher's methods, are turned in on themselves and take the form of the fantasy of a student rebellion: the violence in the classroom is redirected and the students punish the teacher with his own teaching methods. However, despite the fact that violence in this saint's life is motivated differently and ultimately serves to vindicate the martyr, the specific kind of violence that the text resorts to is startlingly similar to the institutionalized act of punishment depicted by Kafka: it is again the body of the victim that is inscribed with his sentence in a very literal sense. The crucial difference is, of course, that in the life of St. Cassian the writing is performed by the executioners themselves, which gives the act a kind of immediacy that in Kafka's narrative is, at least partly, obscured by the officer's use of technology.  

Despite an historical gap of well over a thousand years both texts make a compelling statement that human bodies have been perceived as more than simple mortal shells, as more than mere containers of an immortal soul. The power with which the surface of the human body is and has been invested becomes clear if one reads these two narratives side by side.  

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Despite some historical discontinuities, the prevailing notion is that the human body *can* be inscribed with a socially determined message. The sheer literal-mindedness of the extraordinary scribal savagery described by both narratives points to a deeper, more subtle and more pervasive understanding of the human body as an inscriptive surface: the body can be understood as the creation of sign systems that are expressed as texts and narratives. These texts then point to the signifying power with which human bodies are invested. What is foreclosed by the literal-minded inscriptions in both of the above-mentioned narratives is precisely the interpretative act which is usually necessary in order to "read" the body as a meaningful sign: in contrast to these two examples, the vast majority of texts dealing with the human body demand a particular interpretation to make such inscriptions visible.

The objective of my work is to lay open some of these interpretative processes in late medieval texts as they shape, control and discipline bodies. Interpretations of this kind are not arbitrary processes, but reflect the social forces that have a vested interest in controlling individual human bodies so that they can form part of a larger social body, the body politic. Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* draws attention to the political investment of the individual body, which he perceives as part of a "political anatomy," that belongs to the 'body politic', as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes, and supports for the power and knowledge regulations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by

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turning them into objects of knowledge.⁸

Thus, the focus on the various techniques employed to situate bodies in specific social constructs is indicative of the political investments in the texts' production of cultural norms. Following Kate Millet, I use the term politics to refer not only "to the exclusive world of meetings, chairmen and parties," but to all kinds of "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another."⁹

The nexus of power and control that underlies these interpretations of human bodies becomes clear if one perceives these interpretations in their functions as evaluations that pass judgment and determine which bodies are considered desirable and which undesirable because they do not conform to a social norm. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, these decisions are conscious choices from a seemingly endless number of possibilities:

There is no "natural" norm; there are only cultural forms of body, which do or do not conform to social norms. The problem is not the conformity to cultural patterns, models, or even stereotypes, but which particular ones are used and with what effects.¹⁰

Drawing on Grosz's notion of the conscious selection of models and stereotypes of socially acceptable bodies, I want to claim that specific narratives are instrumental to achieving this normalizing effect. In my understanding, narrative and its uses are not restricted to a specific


⁹Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 23.

¹⁰Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 143.
medium, nor to a particular historical period: narrative is found in everything from orally transmitted poems to electronically re/produced audio-visual images. What does historically change, however, are the parameters, defined by the specific societal and historical needs, that determine the selection of appropriate and inappropriate bodies, and thus in turn influence the selection of narrative themes that deal with these bodies. This process of regulating human bodies by interpreting and judging them in relation to certain cultural norms is pervasive and seems inconspicuous enough when the individual body in question conforms to the common expectations. However, when bodies start to resist or defy these norms, when they make trouble, these regulating processes become visible. Exceptional or unruly bodies then become the subjects of specific narratives themselves, which attempt to deal with these bodies as deviations from a social norm, thus providing one with the chance to unpack the narrative's social and political constraints.

Since "other" bodies -- bodies that in some way defy cultural norms or stereotypes -- make this inconspicuous process of inscribing socially determined messages on bodies visible, I have chosen to focus my attention on these exceptions to the norm. My goal is to explore first how narratives depict and define these different bodies, and, secondly, and more importantly, which rhetorical strategies the various texts use to place such bodies in relation to the culturally enforced grid of regulation, control, and "normality." To achieve these ends I have chosen to present readings of several late medieval texts, each of them dealing with a separate aspect of human Otherness. A crucial aspect of my reading is that I perceive these

11My understanding of Otherness is indebted to the anthropological use of the concept. See for instance Jean Paul Dumont, "Prologue to Ethnography or Prolegomena to Anthropography," *Ethos* 14 (1986): 344-67, Clifford Geertz, "History and Anthropology,"
texts in their political dimension: each narrative will be read in its function of inscribing a version of the attempt to contain abnormal, disturbing, and deviant or pleasurable bodies. In my approach I want to be a "resisting reader" in Judith Fetterley's sense: the objective of my analysis is to question some of the notions and assumptions which have informed the texts' depictions of their "Others" with the aim of representing a reality different from that which has been propagated by the narratives:

Such questioning and exposure can, of course, be carried on only by a consciousness radically different from the one that informs the literature. Such a closed system cannot be opened from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the literature wishes to keep hidden.12

The works analyzed in this study have been selected because they variously treat different sets of notions about the human body. Although the separate parts of this project can be read on their own, without reference to the other parts, they are all connected in the sense that they reflect on each other by presenting a specific cross-section of notions and assumptions that determine late medieval perceptions of the human body. In a manner not unlike modern-day medical-photographic techniques that enable physicians to "slice" visually

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through a biological body and examine its layers of skin, organs, bones, etc., I want to present in this study cross-sections through the body, albeit not in its material sense, but understood as an intellectual construct. Although distinct from every other cross-cut, each "slice" can be fully understood only in relation to its corresponding sections, as a part of the whole body. In keeping with the metaphor from the medical photography I, too, start from the outside: the various parts of this project progress in descending order in terms of their visibility. Visibility in this context not only denotes the actual surface of the body, such as its dark complexion or its skin marked by leprosy, but it can also be understood as the position of an individual in relation to various spatial systems. Ranging from the outsider "without," the ethnic Other, who inhabits foreign countries, to social outsiders, such as the leper, who is part of the community and is yet excluded from it, to the outsider "within," such as Lucrece whose violation takes place in the domestic space of her house, to outsiders whose difference is restricted to one of the most private spaces, that of the bedroom, where unmentionable vices and pleasures are being committed.

'Racial' signifiers are, perhaps, some of the most easily identifiable traits that mark a body as different. As the starting point of my investigation I examine in part 2 some medieval receptions of the biblical tale of Noah's sons as one of the master narratives of ethnographic diversity in the Middle Ages. The purpose of this first section is to lay the foundation for an interpretation of the following two literary texts: Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and the anonymous romance *King of Tars*. Against the background of the various interpretations of

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13 For approaches that perceive the body in terms of a literal, material construct see Carolyn Walker Bynum's studies, especially her *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995).
the biblical text I want to claim that the concept of "race" as it is used today did not exist in the Middle Ages. Instead I want to propose that ethnographic difference is a highly unstable signifier of Otherness: Complexion, cultural habits, and religious practices in medieval representations, can, unlike in modern understanding be changed to mark, for instance, an individual's relative position within the framework of Christian Salvation History. Thus, these various traits represent a continuum of difference rather than an essentialist notion of a racial "identity."

Moving the focus from ethnographic difference to the leprous body, I explore in part 3 some of the perceptions of the diseased body. The visible marks on the leper's skin are a clear indication of his or her altered physical condition. Leprosy, however, is not only a physical condition that it is visibly inscribed on the patient's body; it is also a social condition, as the long history of the stigmatization of lepers shows, a practice that can still be witnessed in third-world countries today. Taking Robert Henryson's Testament of Cresseid as the focal point of this part of my project, I examine the specifically late-medieval significance of leprosy. By drawing on a number of literary and non-literary sources I attempt to lay open the connection between the physical nature of leprosy and its specific moral interpretation in its medieval understanding. Reading the Testament of Cresseid as a literary piece of medical historiography allows me to uncover the sexual nature of Cresseid's offence as a primarily moral -- but not necessarily physical -- cause for her disease. The propagation of this causality, the use of what Henryson himself terms "wickit langage," is the narrative way of producing and reproducing the disease. The infectious nature of "wickit langage" inscribes the leper's deformed material body with another set of notions that mark it not only as
diseased, but also as morally corrupt and perverse.

Moving then to less visible forms of "other" bodies, I examine in part 4 the violated body by concentrating on two versions of the tale of Lucretia. By comparing Livy's version of the tale as a narrative of political resistance with Chaucer's adaptation in the Legend of Good Women, I explore the medieval use of the raped body as an exemplum, warning young women to seek the protection of "good men," so as to avoid having the same fate as Chaucer's Lucrece. Cautionary tales, such as the Legend of Lucrece are examples of a pedagogy of fear that plays on the social weakness of its young female readers -- or listeners -- in order to make them complicit with the wish of their male relatives to remain under their control. Despite the Legend's focus on the female raped body, I see male relatives as the beneficiaries of the discipline since they are dependent on the availability of these untouched female bodies for the "traffic in women" that enables them to form homosocial bonds with other men. The actual rape of a woman signals the breakdown of this homosocial system, but the conceptualized acts of rape in these narratives are a pedagogic instrument that can be used to prevent precisely this breakdown and to ensure the smooth operating of this system of homosocial bonds.

In part 5, my last section, I focus on bodies that are invisible in their Otherness: sexually deviant bodies. Their invisibility is due not only to the fact that sexual acts can be kept secret from society, but also to society's refusal to deal with -- and thus thematize -- transgressive sexualities. This unwillingness to conceptualize deviant sexual acts is the focus of the first part of this chapter. By examining Chaucer's Parson's Tale and its discussion of the sin of luxuria I want to uncover this process of silencing, and draw attention to its
inherent paradox: the Parson makes a great effort to monitor and restrict the discourse on unorthodox sexual practices, and yet this practice led to its exact opposite, namely a proliferation of injunctions not to talk about an uncomfortable topic and thus the Parson defies and defeats his own objective. Hans Folz's fabliau-like story *The Ambiguous Confession (Die Missverständliche Beichte)* gives a practical demonstration of this paradox to speak and not to speak about deviant sexual acts: due to a complete breakdown in communication a certain confessor suspects his parishioner of a number of deviant sexual acts, such as incest and bestiality. The "sinner's" revealing of the true and quite harmless nature of his "offences," exposes the confessor to ridicule since it is only due to his runaway imagination that he overinterpreted the suggestive, but still ambiguous words of his parishioner's confession. Ridicule, moral condemnation, and blackmail are key strategies used in the first of two fabliaux I present in the second section, Dietrich von der Gleizzie's Middle High German *märe, The Belt (Der Borte)*. Drawing on Georges Duby's notion of "les jeunes," I see young knights in particular as the primary audience of this fabliau. I read the condemnation of the protagonist's consideration to commit an act of sodomy with another man as part of an erotic discipline to keep these young knights in line. The consequences of sexual misbehaviour will be examined in my last example, Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. In my reading of this tale I perceive all three male characters as deficient, as not fulfilling their expected roles as men. The cruel punishment each character experiences on his own body is part of this erotic discipline: it not merely ensures that each character will stay in line and fulfill his proper gender role in the future, but the punishment also serves to mark their bodies as deficient or perverse so that they act as a warning example to the tale's readers.
My primary concern in this enterprise, then, is with visibility. Bodies, it turns out, are never what they seem. In contrast to those in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* and Prudentius's *Life of St. Cassian*, most inscriptions on bodies demand a careful reading in order to reveal the social constraints that govern these bodies. Making bodies and their messages visible is essentially a political process. As a critical reader of medieval texts I see an important part of my task in this aspect, in the effort to make visible the effaced pleasure and suffering inscribed on bodies.
PART 2

"AL PIS WORLD BITWIXE HEM DELT": 'OTHER' BODIES

He wolde, of his benigne curteisye,
Make hem good chiere, and bisily espye
Tidynges of sondry regnes, for to leere
The wondres that they myghte seen or heere.

(The Man of Law's Tale, CT, II, 179-82)

1. Ethnography and Otherness: Some Introductory Remarks

"Ethnography," as Peter Mason argues in his Deconstructing America, "is an experience of the confrontation with the Other set down in writing, an act by which that Other is deprived of its specificity." As a reader of ethnographic texts one always has to be aware of this transformation of the foreign culture from an external, worldly reality into an internal, discursive representation. Consequently, what one reads is a production of a reality, a creation of a foreign culture. This construction may well be of an imagined world beyond our experience. As such, this imaginary creation follows primarily the dictates of its creator, its auctor, rather than those of its human objects. As the product of its author's imagination the representation of the foreign culture is subject to a number of cultural, social, and political as well as personal constraints and influences, including those of the circumstances that

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motivated the author to write about his object in the first place. One common motivation is
the search for one's own "identity," a psycho-social place of one's own, so to speak. A
familiar practice in this search is the establishing of one's position by placing oneself in
opposition to an Other, or, as in the case of the texts examined in this part, in opposition to a
different culture. The practice of setting up a dichotomy between one's own culture and an
imaginary Other has proved especially persistent. No doubt, historical developments, such as
the European colonization of non-European territories, and the significant effects these often
violent actions had on the colonized as well as the colonizers, could be conveniently
expressed and even legitimized in this fashion.

Despite the persistence of this binary view of the world, it is not the only way to
explain and represent cultural differences and critics who assume that European writers
themselves always assumed an inherent dichotomy between European and non-European
cultures do not take into account the fact that different historical periods sometimes dealt in
different -- and even contradictory -- ways with cultural difference. One of the best known
proponents of the binary view of European views of the non-European world is Edward Said,
whose notion of "Orientalism" claims that "European culture gained its strength and identity
by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."2
According to Said this dichotomy was the defining factor in an emerging European Christian
"identity," by setting up the the Islamic world of the Orient as its competitor and hence as its
enemy. Said's assumption is that the cultural difference of the Orient -- which is primarily
based on its non-Christian religion, its economic, political, and military strength -- served an

important purpose in uniting a deeply divided Christendom. Whether or not Said's views on
the construction of cultural difference are valid when applied to later historical periods, his
notion of the universal, transhistorical nature of this dichotomy as the only way to describe
and interpret cultural Otherness hardly works well for the medieval period, since it in effect
imposes a relatively modern concept on the more distant past.3

The aim of this chapter is to examine the specific ways in which a range of medieval
texts treated the various phenomena of cultural Otherness, and thus ultimately to contribute to
an archeology of ethnographic writing by laying open some of the pre-modern mentalities
which are reflected in the texts selected for this investigation.

Before I begin, however, I want to outline two assumptions which have informed my
reading. The first one, to which I have already briefly alluded, is of a more theoretical nature
that I read texts dealing with ethnographic difference as specifically literary products which
make use of certain rhetorical and discursive means and strategies. To perceive ethnographic
texts as primarily literary creations allows me to concentrate on the specific modes in which
their authors present their subject, in this case foreign cultures. The objective behind this
approach is to redirect the critical focus away from the subject matter as such and towards its
representation. My concern here is not so much to find out "how it was," but rather "how and
possibly why it was done." Applied to ethnographic and other writings this shift in

3 Other examples of this kind of anachronism are studies that seek to establish a link
between the racism of later periods and the "Judeo-Christian tradition." See for instance St Clair
Drake, Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in Anthropology, vol.2 (Los Angeles: Center for
Afro-American Studies, 1990), and Anthony Gerard Barthelmy, Black Face, Maligned Race: The
Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne (Baton Rouge and
perspective entails investigating the specific literary strategies that underlie the various representations of other cultures in order to unpack some of the assumptions of their medieval authors. Consequently, while this approach tells us very little about the veracity of the representations of the texts' subjects, its cultural Others, it should reveal more than a little about the cultural mentalities that shaped these medieval perceptions of Otherness.

I am here adopting a methodology that is currently being used by those anthropologists who have come to examine the discursive nature of both their own writings and those of their predecessors:

An interest in the discursive aspects of cultural representation draws attention not to the interpretation of cultural "texts" but to their relations of production.

... It is enough to mention here the general trend toward a specification of discourses in ethnography: who speaks? who writes? when and where? with whom or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints.4

The question about the specific modes of the production of an ethnographic text is a particularly salient one, as it helps us to understand how a medieval ethnographic text (any medieval text, in fact) might have been read, how it reached its audience, and what the ramifications of these conditions are for the representation of its subject matter.

My second assumption rests on the fundamental Otherness of medieval texts: the historically specific ways of producing texts in a manuscript culture result in a veritable diversity of witnesses, itself the consequence of the texts' constant rewriting as part of their

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dissemination. For this reason it is helpful to historicize medieval ethnographic writings. The inherent instability of medieval texts as a result of both their material condition (i.e., their individual production by scribes) and their being an intellectual product that was freely available for other authors to use (i.e., the writers' freedom to alter their sources and rewrite previously written texts) finds its expression in the multiplicity of views that characterize medieval discourses on ethnic diversity: a diversity that is radically different from the binary view of cultural difference that is known from writings of later historical periods.

In order to make the specific medieval mode of textual production and reproduction visible, I have selected one key-text in the medieval understanding of ethnic diversity, the biblical tale of Noah's sons, which I present in a selection of writings working from this source. My aim is to demonstrate that medieval writers were led by a set of assumptions quite different from that of their successors in later times. Thus their writings reflect a way of depicting different cultures that is not merely dependent on establishing binary oppositions, but is also indebted to an alternative, but little known medieval system of thought that allows for a gradual view of the world, called "gradualism." Gradualism denotes a medieval philosophical concept of order that is complementary to the well-known medieval notion of "dualism." Based on a concept articulated by Thomas Aquinas, the Middle Ages perceived the entire creation as standing in relation to God.\(^5\) The cosmos is seen as an infinite number of concentric circles that have God at their centre. The unity of this construct is grounded in the assumption that all parts of divine creation are united by their desire to imitate God, the

\(^5\) Summa Theologiae 1, 47.2. On this concept see G. Müller, "Gradualismus," Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte 2 (1924): 681-720.
imitatio dei. Thus, the individual grades of this model reflect the relative distances the various individuals stand away from God, with the Saints, of course, being already very close to the centre, and non-Christians on the margins. The important feature of this model is that it allows for a considerable number of positions and these in turn allow for a more differentiated picture of the world than does a simple dualism.

The multitude of positions described by this theological model finds its practical expression in the considerable leeway individual authors had when they worked with their sources. Thus, a comparison of texts using the same motif will reveal that as a result of precisely this highly differentiated theological perspective of the world and the authors' latitude in the use of their sources, the notion of a fixed category of an ethnic Other is gratuitous: as the multiple interpretations of the same basic text will show, ethnic diversity can be utilized to explain a host of different and seemingly unrelated social phenomena, which can range from the social diversification of medieval society to the legitimation of a particular royal house. In particular, I want to claim that these often contradictory arguments are all part of a theological view of the world as an infinite number of loci, all of them differentiated from one another by their relative position to the perfect imitation of God.

2. The Story of Noah's Sons

One of the key narratives used by medieval authors to explain ethnic diversity is the biblical tale of Noah's sons. Genesis 9: 22-26 relates the story of Noah's drunkenness in which he inadvertently reveals his nakedness when he falls asleep. On waking up he curses Ham, his youngest son, for ridiculing him and extends this curse to the future generations of Ham's
line, as related in the Bible:

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done
unto him. And he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant shall he be unto his
brethren'. And he said 'Blessed be the lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be
his servant'.

Read in connection with the genealogical list in Genesis 10, this text was used to place the
different human races on the then three known continents: the descendants of Shem are
located in Asia, those of Japhet in Europe, and Ham's descendants in Africa. This relatively
simple division of the Earth into three parts and its association with the various descendants
of Noah finds its pictorial expression in the so-called "Noachid mappae mundi," which add
the names of Noah's sons to the respective continents. Most adaptations of the source are,
however, more complex than this simple example. In the course of the text's reception two
things occurred: first,

the geographical positions of the non-European descendants of Noah, Shem and Ham, have
proved quite unstable and have been changed by a number of texts. And secondly, the tale of
Noah itself has been spliced with another biblical narrative, namely the Cain story:

I want to take these two observations as the starting point in my discussion of
medieval notions of ethnic diversity. With regard to the first observation I want to argue that
the seeming instability of the texts is an indicator that ethnic properties and geographical
location are not necessarily connected in the medieval world picture. I want to posit further

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For maps representing the distribution of Noah's sons on the three continents see J. B.
Harley and David Woodward, *The History of Carthography*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of
that the term "race," as it is familiar from its use in a postcolonial context, is a concept that was not known as such to medieval authors and their audience. Instead, the medieval sources list a number of individual properties, such as language, religion, cultural habits, appearance, and geographical location, to name just a few, which are, however, not necessarily connected to form a specific ethnic "identity." Each of these properties is, in fact, interpreted quite differently from our current understanding, which rests on the static notion of a racial identity. In contrast, I interpret the medieval understanding of all these individual properties against the background of the concept of gradualism, as outlined above, which in the case of the tale of Noah's sons can be specified as referring directly to an individual's relative position within Christian Salvation History. In contrast to the concept of secular history, a place within Salvation History indicates a particular spot on a scale of time which is determined by an individual's closeness to or remoteness from the final reign of God. When ethnic and cultural signifiers are placed on this scale they reflect relative rather than absolute positions in regard to the final salvation of humankind. Thus, the medieval understanding of cultural difference can be defined in terms of a continuum that allows for a much greater degree of interpretative freedom. Consequently, seemingly fixed categories, such as complexion, for example, which in the modern understanding is a primary racial signifier,

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8See also Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethno-Geographical Identity in the Medieval and Modern Periods," William and Mary Quarterly (forthcoming).
can be regarded as a temporal condition in its medieval sense, denoting an individual's position on the scale of Christian History. Certain events, such as the individual's conversion, for instance, can "move him on in time" and bring him closer to the position of the Christians, thus in some cases calling for an "altered" appearance of the same character to signify his new status.

For medieval authors this radically different perception of ethnic diversity makes it possible to utilize its representations in order to express a host of other social phenomena which may have very little to do with what is nowadays perceived as ethnic Otherness, but which in the grand scheme of Christian Salvation History are nevertheless important events that justify the use of key narratives, such as the tale of Noah's sons, to define their relevance in this philosophical construct. As I demonstrate in my reading of the individual texts, these notions can range from the justification of the Israelites' appropriation of the land of the Canaanites, as in Genesis, to the explanation of the social inequality of medieval society, as in the Wiener Genesis, to the idea of a great Christian empire in Cathay, as put forward by the author of The Book of John Mandeville.

2.1. Biblical Exegesis and Scholiated Bible Histories, or Historienbibeln

The literary place where the reception of anthropological knowledge from earlier times, including the Noah-story, has found its most immediate reflection is in medieval biblical paraphrases, in exegesis, and in the later versions, the historical bibles, or scholiated bible-histories.
2.1.1. Biblical Paraphrase: The Wiener Genesis

One of the earliest forms of the post-Carolingian biblical paraphrase can be found in the early Middle High German text known as the Wiener Genesis, the manuscript of which can be dated around the end of the 11th century. The account of the German Genesis is based on the biblical model, but often supplemented with details, commentaries, and embellishments. In contrast to the Vulgate versions of the Bible, the vernacular version saw lay people as its primary audience. Since the biblical stories are told to those who did not have access to the Latin Vulgate, dogmatic and theological questions are of less importance than the historia, the narratives related in the book of Genesis. The German Genesis offers a particularly interesting example of the reception of older ethnographic knowledge, which is provided in the addition to the story of Cain. The cultural appropriation of the biblical material becomes particularly obvious in passages where European geographical and climatic conditions replace those of their model, and cattle breeding as well as regional agricultural products reflect the everyday life of the medieval European peasant, rather than that of his biblical counterpart.

A particularly intriguing aspect of the German Genesis is its combination of biblical matter with antique knowledge: directly indebted to the Plinian account is the description of some of the descendants of Cain (1292-1306), who have the heads of dogs, large ears, which

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they can use as blankets, have their mouths in their chests, and possess one large foot, which enables them to outpace even wild animals, or simply walk on all fours, "like cattle" (1306). Friedman points out that this passage alludes to St. Augustine's *City of God* (Book 16, 8), where he discusses the monstrous races; he ultimately subsumes them under God's creation and thus, if their status as human beings has been ascertained, are to be regarded as part of his divine will:

But if we assume that the subjects of those remarkable accounts are in fact men, it may be suggested that God decided to create some races in this way, so that we should not suppose that the wisdom with which he fashions the physical being of men has gone astray in the case of the monsters . . . for that would be to regard the works of God's wisdom as the product of an imperfectly skilled craftsman.

However, the list of marvellous races goes on and the author of the *Wiener Genesis* suddenly changes his tone when he makes a significant alteration to the citation of conventional ethnographic knowledge and he adds the black races to these descendants of Cain. In contrast to Friedman, I would claim that in this instance the *Genesis* does not follow the spirit of St. Augustine's writings, but clearly draws a connection between the Ethiopians' outer appearance and the moral deficiencies of the race of Cain, which moves them into the realm of the non-human and infernal, a tradition which anti-Islamic texts, such as the *Chanson de*

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Roland also draw on:

Svmelîche flurn pegâre we
ir scônen uarwe,
si wurten suarz unt egelîch:
den ist nehein liut gelîch
def o[u]gen in scînent,
die zeni glîzent. (1307-12)\(^{14}\)

[A good number of them completely lost their beautiful complexion: they became black and ugly. Nobody is like them: their eyes shine, and their teeth glisten.]

Read against the above-mentioned account the "Plinian" descendants of Cain these few lines can almost surprise in their seeming factual nature.

Without doubt, to a medieval audience the mere mention of the monstrous races probably had its own potential to shock or to entertain, and yet it is at the moment when the black races are being discussed that the text makes an explicit judgement by calling them "black and ugly." Not surprisingly, this judgment is qualified in the following lines, which provide one of the most revealing insights into medieval interpretations of ethnographic difference:

swenne si si [die zeni] läzen plecchen,
sò mahten si io[u]ch den tiufel screchen.

\(^{13}\)Friedman, *Monstrous*, 64-66.

\(^{14}\)All quotations are from Katryn Smits, *Die Frühmittelhochdeutsche Wiener Genesis* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1972).
When they showed [their teeth] they even scared the devil. The descendants displayed the punishment that had been inflicted upon their ancestors. As they were within, so they became on the outside.

The explicit reference to the devil in connection with the appearance of these black descendants of Cain illuminates the larger moral issue that governs the ethnographic account in the Wiener Genesis. As the text explains, their inner qualities then become visible as their outer appearance. This appearance then becomes a mirror that reflects their position within the Christian moral discourse. Their black skin is only the ultimate sign of their forefathers' sins and thus their own questionable moral status, which then justifies their association with the descendants of Cain.

It seems that the Middle High German Genesis in a way preempted the hermeneutic problem of anthropological difference by subsuming the black races under the myth of the descendants of Cain, a move which poses a logical problem: to place the racial differentiation at such an early point in Christian ethnography means that these black descendants of Cain would, together with many others, not have survived the Great Flood. I see this seeming incongruity as one indicator that Salvation History, and not human history, is the frame of reference in which one has to interpret this combination of the
two texts. Equally important is that at the time of the composition of the *Genesis* racial otherness obviously did not have the significance it would have later at the time of the crusades. To support this claim I want to draw attention to the Noah story as related in the *Genesis*.

Contrary to the examples quoted above, this version is *not* primarily concerned with ethnic differentiation. As the text makes clear, the social stratification of medieval German society around 1060-1080 seems to have been the pressing issue. Otherness was primarily experienced in terms of social, not “racial” difference. Hence, the story of Noah is utilized by the text’s compiler/author to explain precisely the phenomenon of social differentiation. As in the biblical model, one of the sons of Noah, Cham, is marked as seditious since he ridiculed his father’s nakedness. The consequence of this disrespectful misbehaviour is that the descendants of Cham are marked as the future servants of the other tribes. While the German *Genesis* essentially follows the general outline of the Noah story, this event is not interpreted in ethnographic terms, but is exclusively quoted to explain and, probably more importantly, to justify the social differentiation of medieval society into nobles and serfs. From a socio-historical perspective this mention is significant since it represents to-date the earliest occurrence ever found in a German text of this type of argument justifying the social inequality of medieval European:¹⁵

Do noë erwachete
und uil rehte urēscete,
wie cham hēte getān

¹⁵Dieter Kartschoke: *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 288.
When Noah woke up, he was quite enraged about what Cham had done when he saw him naked; I know that he cursed him with all his descendants.

The text then goes on to note that the only kind of people known before this incident were free, and in an invocation of the Edenic garden and fruit trees ("garten unde obezpûme," 1527), states that the earth yielded enough for everyone, horses and cattle included. The specific reference to cattlebreeding and fruit trees provides a localized, German version of the Garden of Eden. The social differentiation of the peoples is now described as being a direct consequence of Noah's curse; while the descendants of Shem and Japhet are described as free, those of Cham are clearly designated as their servants:

Von châmes sculde
wurden aller êrist scalche.
ê wâren si alle
ebenburi unde edele.
châmes hûhes unde spottes
uile manige inkulten des. (1533-38)

[Thus, from Cham's guilt resulted the first serfs. Before, everyone was equal and free. Cham's pride and insult had to be paid for many times over.]

The Genesis follows this account with another exemplum of human pride and presumption, namely the building of the Tower of Babel. Apart from the obvious erasure of the issue of
ethnic diversity in the biblical account, the *Genesis* here rewrites the text to address a more immediate and pressing problem, that of social inequality. Despite this move, however, the text's basic strategy has been retained: in both cases a form of inequality is being addressed, and, more importantly, justified.

2.1.2. Petrus Comestor: *Historia Scholastica*

Another type of the historical continuations of the biblical paraphrase is the *Historienbibel*, or scholiated Bible history, examples of which were most widely disseminated in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, before they were superseded by the increasingly uniform text of the printed Bible. The German name was coined in the middle of the nineteenth century, whereas the medieval designation usually was "bibel," or "wibel," which gives an indication, not only of their reception as biblical writings, but also of their intended place as companions to, or even replacements of, the *Vulgate*, rather than as worldly writings, such as for instance the chronicle, discussed below in section 2.2. The modern nomenclature attempts to reflect the nature of the genre, in which the biblical stories are augmented by historical material most typically found in "historical" writings. Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (second half of the twelfth century) was one of the most commonly used sources for both genres, the *Historienbibel*, as well as the chronicle. Since (secular) history was commonly perceived in

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the larger context of Salvation History, the generic differences between both kinds of writings are more a question of emphasis than of their individual reception and interpretation.

The text printed in 1473 by Günther Zaimer relates the following version of the tale of Noah:

Sed cum chayn patris verenda vidisset nudata irridens nunciauit hec fratribus. sed illi pallium imponentes in humeris. & euntes retrorsum. ne viderent. operuerunt patris verenda . . . Evigilans Noe. cum didicissem que [quid?] fecerat ei filius suus minor ait: maledictus Chanan puer. servus erit fratribus suis. Si quereitur quomodo Chayn dicitus minor filius. cum esset medius natu. Potest dici minor i.e. indignior vel forte minor statura. . . . Maledixit autem non filio sed filio. sed filio filii, quia sciebat in spiritu filium ipsum non serviturum fratribus suis. sed semen eius. nec omnis de semine eius. sed eos qui de chanaan peccata quidem patrum sepe vindicantur in filios temporaliter. . . . prophecia est: quia previdit in filiis sem. cultum & nome[n] unius dei permansurum.18

[But when Cham (Chayn) saw his father's private parts, he laughed at his nakedness, and announced it to his brothers. But those placed a coat over his limbs and went behind him so as not to see their father's uncovered nakedness.

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18Peter Comestor, Historia Scholastica, (Augsburg: Günther Zaimer, 1473; University of Uppsala Copy, Coll. jn no. 1180, microfilm version), f. 11r. The following marginalium is added to the passage where the "pallium" used to cover Noah's nakedness is mentioned: "Semiramis fuit mulier qui primo inuenit bracas. & vsus earum" [Semiramis was the woman who first invented trousers and their use], probably in an attempt to show off the voracious reader's knowledge about the history of dress.
Upon his awakening Noah learned what his youngest son had done, and said: 'the cursed boy Chanaan will be a servant to his brothers'. If one asks why Cham (Chayn) is called the youngest son, even though he is born in the middle, it can be said that he is called the youngest because he is inferior in strength, and more so in height . . . . He not only cursed the son, but his son's sons, since he knew that not only his son, but also his son's offspring would be servants. But not all his offspring, only those who were from Chanaan. Often the sins of the fathers are punished in their sons . . . . The prophecy is: for this reason in the sons of Shem is shown the belief and the name of the one and eternal God.

This part of the Noah story follows the tradition which sees in Cham's trespass the reason why he and his offspring were cursed. In his interpretation of the passage Peter makes explicit reference to the inhabitants of Canaan, who are singled out from the other descendants (whether of Noah or of Cham is not clear). Peter next attempts to clear up some inconsistencies, such as the description of Cham as Noah's youngest son, and goes on to explain how Noah's curse of Cham lives on in his offspring, a fact which he points out as a quite common occurrence. The account closes with the prophecy of Shem's descendants as the future nation of the coming God, who not only gives his belief, but also his name to the future religion.

This is, however, not the only time Peter touches upon the topic of Noah's descendants. In the following chapter, "De dispersione filiorum noe," he discusses the various regions which are inhabited by the sons of Noah and their descendants. Following Alcuin he
places each genealogical line on one of the three continents:

Hii tres disseminatu sunt in tribus partis orbis. secundum alquinum. Sem
arsiam [sic] Cham africam. Iaphet Europium sortius est.¹⁹

[These three are dispersed in the three parts of the earth. According to Alquin:
Shem is placed in Asia, Cham in Africa, and Japhet in Europe.]

Immediately after this Noachid division of the earth, however, Peter upsets his own neatly
established ethnographic boundaries and cites a second authority:

Vel expressius dicitur secundum Josephum: Filii Japhet tenerunt
septentronalem regionem, a Tauro & a monomontibus cicilie & syrie. vsque
ad fluuium. chanaim in europa uero usque ad gadira. ffilii vero Cham a
provincia siria et amano & libano montibus cunctas terras obtinuerunt . . . Filii
uero Semusque ad oceanum . . . habitant Asiam, ab euphrate facientes init . . .
Chus dicitur filius Cham filius Chus Nemrod, qui coepit primus potens est
terra.

[Or another opinion, according to Josephus: The sons of Japhet took the
northern regions from the Alps to the mountains of Sicily and Syria unto the
river of Chanaan. In Europe as far as to Gadira [?]. The sons of Cham hold the
province of Syria and all the land of the hills of Lebanon. And the sons of Sem
inhabit Asia to the ocean, . . . they inhabit Asia from the boundary of
Euphrates . . . Chus is said to be the son of Cham; the Son of Chus is Nemrod,
who reigned supreme on earth.]

¹⁹Comestor, Historia, f. 11 r.
This rather muddled passage introduces a far less clear division of the earth; conventional ethnic and geographical boundaries, based on a simple tripartite division of the earth, are obviously dissolved, as, for instance, in the example of the "Europeans," who inhabit a stretch of land, ranging from the central European alpine regions to the island of Sicily, and even stretching into Syria, geographically considered part of Asia. By offering this competing viewpoint, perhaps influenced by crusading ideology, to supplement his previously stated observation, Peter not only demonstrates that the conventional geographical division was of little consequence for the ethnographic perception of his medieval readers, but moreover that ethnographic properties as such are far from the fixed signifiers of Otherness they were later to become. Ethnographic difference, one can conclude from this example, was obviously seen as independent from firmly associated geographical positions.

Part of the instability of these ethnographic positions is also due to the transmission of Josephus Flavius's complicated genealogies, which found their way into works of Jerome's Questions on Genesis, and Isidore of Seville's (560?-636) Etymologies. For example, in

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20See Josephus: Complete Works, tr. William Whiston (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1960), 30-31, who discusses the line of Ham, Chus and Nemrod, and also includes the Ethiopians in this line: "Now that it was Nimrod who excited them to such affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah . . . . But Nimrod, the son of Chus, stayed and tyrannised at Babylon." And: " . . . time has not hurt at all the name of Chus; for the Ethiopians, over whom he reigned, are even at this day, both by themselves and by all men in Asia, called Cusites."

21See for instance, Isidore of Seville. Ethymologiarum sive originum, ed. W.M. Lindsay, vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, 7: 6, which gives the usual explanation for Channan's condemnation due to Cham's deed. Isidore then lists the genealogies of the sons, particularly the descendants of Chus, who are linked to the Aethiopians, a line from which the tyrant of Nimrod is descended: "Chus Hebraice Aethiops interpretatur; a posteritate sui generis nomen sortius. Ab ipso enim sunt progeniti Aethiopes. Nembroth interpretatur tyrannus." [Chus is translated into Hebrew 'Aethiops'; in posterity his kind will be found under this name. From the same are
Ethymologies, liber XIV, cap. 1, titled de terra and de orbe, Isidore discusses the significance of the earth and its parts, and explicitly refers to the unstable boundaries of the continents, as well as to the disproportionate size of Asia, which is described as being twice the size of Europe and Africa:

[Orbis] divisus est est autem trifarie: e quibus una pars Asia, altera Europa, tertia Africa nuncupatur. Quas tres partes orbis veteres non aequaliter diviserunt. Nam Asia a meridie per orientem usque ad septentrionem pervenit; Europa vero a septentrione usque ad occidentem; atque inde Africa ab occidente usque ad meridiem. Vnde evidentem orbem dimidum duae tenent, Europa et Africa, alium vero dimidum sola Asia . . . Quapropter si in duas partes orientis et occidentis orbem dividias, Asia erit in una, in altera vero Europa et Africa.

[The earth is divided into three parts: of these one part is called Asia, the other Europe, the third Africa. These three parts our elders have divided in unequal parts. For Asia stretches from the south and the east to the north; Europe from the north to the west; and Africa from the west to the south. From this it is clear that the earth has two parts, Europe and Africa, the other half Asia alone . . . For this reason, if you divide it into two parts, orient and occident, Asia would be in one part, Europe and Africa in the other. ]

Essentially this division of the earth reflects the tripartite mappamundi, but in Isidore's description the remarkable fact is not so much the precise definition of the three continents in specific geographical terms, but their relative position to each other, as well as their relative descended the Aethiopians. Nemroth means tyrant.]
sizes. In addition, this description, in a way competing with the ethnographic account based on the descendants of Noah, does not mention any inhabitants of the continents at all. The textual separation of the two topics (the continents are described in book XIV, while the peoples of the earth are mentioned in book VII), reflects, in my opinion, very neatly the etymologist's intellectual division of the two issues. While geography seems to be particularly a question of arithmetic, ethnography is once more subsumed under Christian History. This division may be hard to accept for a modern reader, but these two issues do not necessarily have much to do with each other.

The notion of the division of the world into the three continents, coupled with the neatly assigned three ethnic groups, is probably due to Alcuin (735-804), who provides a simplified version of the account, as offered in his Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesim. According to Braude, Alcuin in turn probably drew on a simplified version of the works of Jerome and Isidore, which he cites as further proof that the actual geographical distribution of the descendants of Noah was not considered an important issue.\(^\text{22}\) Having first answered the question about Cham's being cursed Alcuin asks:

\begin{quote}
Quomodo divisus est orbis a filiis ei nepotibus Noe? Resp. Sem, ut aestimatur, Asiam. Cham Africam, [et] Japhet Europam sortitus est.\(^\text{23}\)
\end{quote}

[In which way is the earth divided between the sons and nephews of Noah? The answer is: "Shem, as is thought, gets Asia, Cham Africa, and Japhet Europe.]

\(^{22}\)Braude, "Sons," 10-11.

\(^{23}\)Migne, PL 100: col. 532.
However, this simple division of the earth is then supplemented by a more elaborate discussion of the various genealogical lines, including, of course, the notorious Nimrod. Again one can observe here the relative value of the citing of geographical locations in relation to their inhabitants.

2.1.3. The Middle English Genesis, the Cursor Mundi, and Trevisa's Translation of De proprietaribus rerum

This fact is borne out by the Middle English Genesis (ca. 1250), which is based on Comestor’s Historia Scholastica and completely dispenses with the geographical locations and simply makes a wholesale statement about the descendants of Noah’s three sons inhabiting the earth:

O[if] noe siðen an is ðre sunen
Ben boren alle ðe in werlde wunnen,
And or he was on werlde led
His kinde was wel wide spred. (647-50)²⁴

Of the genealogy, only Nimrod is mentioned here because of his particular capability to construct a tower out of brick and tar due to his fear of water (659-62). The single reference to human diversity is the text’s mention of the linguistic chaos that resulted from the construction of the tower:

Al was on speche ðor-bi-foren:

Do worn sundri specches boren.

... Sexti lond-specches and .xii. mo
Weren delt ðane in werlde ðo. (665-66, 669-70)

In contrast, the Middle English encyclopaedic work, the *Cursor Mundi* (ca. 1300), provides more information and follows the standard description by Alcuin. It differs, however, in the explanation of the consequences of Ham's curse, which draws the connection between Ham (Cam) and Cain, but does not identify Ham with the inhabitants of Canaan. As such the passage in the *Cursor Mundi* conflates the social emphasis, as for instance expressed in the *Wiener Genesis*, with the Cain story:

Noe wip þis mantel awoke
His sones scoren he vndirtoke
His malisoun on hym he leyde
And sip to him þenne he seide
Cam wipouten any doute
Vndir þi breðeren þou shalt loute
Vndir hem to be as þral
Þou and þyn ospring al

... To cam he seide foule feloun
Þou hast þe kynde of þat natioun
Of caym curside moost of opere
In this genealogy the crime of Cain becomes the determining focus; everything is seen from this perspective, even though this requires projecting the trespass of Cam backwards and drawing a connection to the biblical Cain. More interesting, however, is the categorization of Ham and his precursors and descendants as a "natioun," obviously an ethnographic designation of sorts. In this case, though, neither geography nor language is the determinant of this group, but the crimes of two of its most prominent members. One can see here that this term is not primarily defined by a geographical location, but rather by the "natioun's" position on the scale of Christian Salvation History, which in turn determines this ethnic group's Otherness.

In the following passage, where the continental distribution is discussed, no more mention is made of this distinction and the three brothers, hence the three ethnic groups are once more presented as equal. In this passage the *Cursor* clearly follows Isidore's comparison of the relative sizes of all three continents. The curse of Cam's nation is irrelevant, and the ethnic groups are only distinguished by their relative position to each other, as well as the size of land the descendants of each son inhabit:

His sones þat I beforne of melt
Al þis world bitwixe hem delt
To seem asye. to cam aufryke
To iapheth europe þat wilful wyk

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Alle þese [þre] were ful ryche
But seem part was noon ðere lyche
For þe world was as we here
Dalt in þre partyes sere
In þre partyes pryncipal
But þei were not paringal
For asye is wiþouten hope
As myche as aufryk & europe. (2087-98)

This passage is followed by a description of the marvels of Asia and an enumeration of the countries which are found on the Asian continent. Once again, one can observe in this section, as well as in the following account of Asia with its brief mention of the "holy londe" and "paradys," the absence of any ethnographic information concerning the inhabitants of these countries.

John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's encyclopaedic compilation *De proprietaribus rerum* offers only a condensed account of the geographical information, discussed by Isidore in book XIV (book XV in Trevisa's numbering), locating the continents in relation to each other, and quoting their relative sizes. The brevity of Trevisa's account, however, makes it also its most remarkable feature: while the distribution of the continents, and the location of the various countries were obviously thought to be worth mentioning, the ethnographic information is dealt with in the most perfunctory way:

And so Noes sonys departid and deled þe worlde aftir þe floode among hem.

Sem with his ofspring hadde Asiam, Iaphet Europam, Cam Affricam, as þe
2.1.4. The Historienbibel

Not surprisingly, then, the Historienbibel uses the Noah-Stoff in a way quite similar to the biblical paraphrase. The Historienbibel I \(^{27}\) relates the incident of the youngest son seeing Noah's nakedness, and, like the Wiener Genesis, interprets the incident in its social consequences:

Dð nun Noe erwachet do erkant er von dem willen gotz das Cham der junger sun sin
gespott hett. Dð was im zorn. Dð sprach er: "verflücht seyst du Cham min sun. Er
wird ain Knecht siner brüder." \(^{28}\)

[When Noah woke up, he realized by the will of God that Cham his young son had
ridiculed him. Then Noah became angry. Then he said: 'cursed be you, Cham my son.
He will become a servant to his brothers'.]

In the second major recension, the Historienbibel II, this account is linked to the story of Cain and Abel, the phonetic closeness between "Chaim" and "Cain" probably providing the link between both accounts, with Noah's youngest son becoming "Kayn." In addition, this recension also makes a projection into the future, explaining that this Kayn will have a son


\(^{27}\)Theodor J. F. L. Merzdorf, Die deutschen Historienbibeln des Mittelalters (Stuttgart: Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins, 1870), differentiates between several textual families, according to the incipits of the MSS.

\(^{28}\)Merzdorf, Historienbibeln, 131.
called Chanaan, himself the founder of the nation of the Canaanites. Although the text establishes the descent of the original non-Israelite population of Canaan by linking the Noah story with the Cain story, it does not exploit the moral issue behind this link by exposing the curse of the Canaanites: the Historienbibel II does not mention the inferior status of the Canaanites, as, for instance Josephus does. The text merely starts with the remark that the Canaanites are a well-known people on whom much has been written. Not very much later, however, in connection with the Noah-story the significance of this construction becomes apparent.

In contrast to the Historienbibel I, this version begins the episode with a commentary on how the story is to be read, and explains its consequences for human history:

Nu wil ich in dem namen gottes anevohen und in der lere siner heilgen gebotten zü sagende von der ander welt, wie die wart uffgepflanzet also uns die geschript düt bekant, und wie die lant wurdent zü dienste broht und alle müsten zinsen dem riche und wer die waren dem got den hohen gewalt gap und die herschaft.²⁹

[Now I shall begin in the name of God and according to the teachings of his holy commandments and speak about the other world [after the paradise], which was cultivated as the scripture makes known, and how the lands had been pressed into service, and [how] all had to pay tribute to the empire, and who those were whom God gave might and supreme power.]

In this synopsis the redactor not merely gives a brief account of the events that follow the

²⁹Merzdorf, Historienbibeln, 605.
expulsion from paradise, but also provides an interpretative framework of sorts. Again, it is the topic of social differentiation which finds its way into the text; this time, however, the fact is given a much wider significance. Not merely content to base social differentiation on a single incident, as does the *Wiener Genesis*, the *Historienbibel II* invokes the course of history as the context in which it places the singular incident so as to give it the appropriate significance, and, one might add, not only to reaffirm the social injustice as the consequence of God's will, but also to stress it as unchangeable. This logical connection is exposed once more when the redactor of the *Historienbibel II* steps in front of his audience and announces the continuation of his story:

Daz wil ich kürzlich sagen von Noe wie sin Kayn spottet ... Wie es ime [Kayn] donoch ging daz werdent ir wol hernoch hören.\(^{30}\)

[Shortly I shall talk about how Cain ridicules Noah . . . How Cain then fared you shall hear now.]

The account of Noah's drunkenness then follows the established pattern:

Do segnete Noe die andern alle und sunderlich Sem and Japhet und sprach uch muss e gottes segen bi sin.\(^{31}\)

[Then Noah blessed all the others, in particular Sem and Japhet and said: 'May God's blessing be with you.']

The redactor of this version, however, does not leave the matter alone with this statement; once more he takes on a position of authority and addresses his audience:

\(^{30}\)Merzdorf, *Historienbibeln*, 605.

\(^{31}\)Merzdorf, *Historienbibeln*, 606.
This text makes a fine distinction between the account in Genesis and its interpretation through the gloss. However, as the redactor assures his audience, this gloss relates the truth. In itself, this statement follows the usual line of argument, ending with an explanation of the social differences between the various descendants of Noah.

In the following paragraph, however, the redactor reads the whole account in the light of Christian History: he attempts an explanation of how Christendom came from Jerusalem. With a considerable amount of logical "juggling" this text claims that all nations descended from Japhet, and that Christ's descent from Shem can thus be traced back to Japheth. This argument, which goes against everything the text tried to establish before, shows the extent to which various authors could use this passage to make political claims. Faced with the problem that Christianity has its origin in the descendants of Shem, the author here struggles to persuade his audience that despite Christianity's roots in the centre of the Jewish world, it has always been associated with the European nations. Although hardly convincing, this argument echoes Josephus's use of his source by establishing the fiction of a religion's origin. The motivation of the redactor for this manipulation will probably never be fully known; a

32 Merzdorf, Historienbibeln, 605.
virulent anti-Jewishness, after all, cannot be found in his matter-of-fact account about the
diversity of human languages, following the construction of the Tower of Babel, which again
represents the world picture of the Noachid *mappamundi*:

Sem kam mit sinen xvii geslechten in das lant Asia gensite des meres by der sonnenuffgang. Dð für Kaym in Affrica das ist gegen der sunnen mittentage. Do für Japhet mit xxiii geslechten in das lant Europa darynne ist nu die cristenheit.33

[Shem came with his 17 descendants into the country of Asia, opposite the sea where the sun rises. Then Cham went to Africa, which is where the sun is at noon. Then Japhet went with his 23 descendants into the country of Europe, where Christendom now is.]

Apart from his observation about the geographical location of Christendom, this account lacks all attempts at Christian propaganda, and gives only a sober description of the tripartite world picture. One can only assume that the redactor of this version of the *Historienbibel* felt the need to put the account of Noah’s sons into a decidedly Christian perspective, although, as evident from the discussion of the various peoples on Earth, one can not assume any overt propagandistic intention.

2.2. The Chronicle: Rudolfs von Ems *Weltchronik*

As already noted above, a genre very closely related to the *Historienbibel* is that of the chronicle, which was also a version of Salvation History. The author’s task was to document

33 Merzdorf, *Historienbibeln*, 611.
and interpret the workings of God throughout human history. Its difference from the
*Historienbibel* is that the material is drawn from secular history, rather than from scripture.

One other significant difference between the biblical adaptations and Rudolph's chronicle is, however, that the latter has also a second and very worldly aim, namely to establish a genealogy which traces the lineage of a particular noble house to some divine incident, usually the creation of Adam and Eve. For this purpose Rudolf attempts to document the divine origin of the house of Hohenstauffen, and in particular to justify the claim of Konrad IV to the throne. In his perception of history Rudolf follows the dichotomy of *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*, divine and profane communities, a concept made popular by St. Augustine's notion of the community of God and the community of the world, which in turn found its way into Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*.\(^3^4\)

Of specific interest for Rudolf's use of the Noah story is the Augustinian concept of the succession of Empires, which combines the biblical genealogy (essentially a genealogy of Christ) with a worldly genealogy, including such worthies as Aristotle and Alexander the Great. Konrad IV, who commissioned the chronicle, is introduced together with his Stauffish ancestors, representing the fifth Augustinian age. As part of Christian Salvation History these German-Sicilian emperors are then traced directly back to Noah:

\[\ldots\text{dú mere her sint komen,}\]
\[\text{darnach als ir si hapt vrnomen}\]
\[\text{zem ersten von Adame,}\]

---

\(^3^4\)On the specific perception of history in Rudolf's *Weltchronik* as well as its foundation see Ingrid von Tippelskirch, *Die Weltchronik des Rudolf von Ems: Studien zur Geschichtsauffassung und politischen Intention* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1979), 79-130.
Noe und Abrahame

bei der iegilichem geschach

ein dinc des man für núwe jach.  (21532-37)

[. . . the knowledge has come down to us as you have heard, first from Adam, Noah, and Abraham; with each of them something occurred which one considered novel.]

A little further on, Rudolf’s patron is introduced, and his specific wishes on how the chronicle was to be made offer a glimpse into the ideological underpinnings of the Weltchronik. The emperor insisted on a universal history, which was to immortalize him together with his imagined precursors, and thus was to expose him as one of the best worldly rulers:

Das ist der künig Chûrat,
des keisirs kint, der mir bat

durh in dú mere tihte,
von anegenge berichte
wie Got nah ir werde
geschûf himil und erde,
und darzû von der hohin kraft
irdinischer herschaft.  (21663-64, 21667-72)

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35Rudolf von Ems, Weltchronik, ed. Gustav Ehrismann (1915; rpt. Dublin and Zürich: Weidmann, 1967); all further quotations of the Weltchronik are from this edition.
[It was King Konrad, the son of an emperor who asked me . . . to compose for him the story/history from the beginning of the world, how God created after their worth heaven and earth, and of the supreme power of worldly dominion.]

This passage not merely serves to introduce Rudolf's task of presenting Konrad as part of the succession of worldly and religious precursors, but also, and in an almost underhanded way, makes it clear that an *apologia* for worldly power is also required of the chronicler.

\[\text{bat er mih allis bringen} \]

\[\text{in tútsche getichte . . .} \]

\[\ldots\]

\[\text{swa man von im dú mere} \]

\[\text{verneme unde horte lesin,} \]

\[\text{das si im ñemir müsten wesin} \]

\[\text{ein ewiclich memorial} \]

\[\ldots\]

\[\text{wie dú dinc in dien landen} \]

\[\text{sint an úns her gestanden} \]

\[\text{mit maneges wundirs undirscheit,} \]

\[\text{des keiserlicher werdekeit. (21686-87, 21694-97, 21701-06)} \]

[He asked me to write everything in a German poem . . . so that whenever one heard or listened to his story being read, it became an eternal monument to him . . . how the things in these lands have come to pass with many miracles of his imperial dignity.]
The legitimation of Konrad's rule is thus one of the objectives for the list of genealogies, spiritual and worldly.

To return to Rudolf's use of the Noah story it is significant that precisely at this point where the succession of empires begins, not only the social, but also the political consequences of Cham's sin against his father become the focus of the chronicle. At the outset the account is conventional enough, following the Vulgate and Peter Comestor (957-966), but Rudolf is not content merely to record the extent of the biblical story; he adds an interpretation to the account, here introduced as the "gloss," which he credits with the same veracity as the Vulgate itself:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{als mit gelicher warheit} \\
\text{dú glose der tůtunge seit,} \\
\text{mit der dú mere bescheidin sint:} \\
\text{dú lant dú Israhelis kint} \\
\text{besazen sit, dú waren} \\
\text{davor in allin jaren} \\
\text{Canaanes kindin undertan.}
\end{align*}
\]

[As with the same truth the gloss of the interpretation that relates the account says: the land which the children of Israel have since held had been subject in the years before the children of Canaan.]

The gloss here referred to by Rudolf can be easily identified as Josephus Flavius's politically intended interpretation of the passage, which explains the claim the Israelites lay to the land
of the indigenous Cananites, or more likely a commentator following Flavius's story.

Again, the reason why Rudolf chose to interpret the Noah story in political terms is not immediately clear; it seems likely that the intention of the chronicle is to legitimize and celebrate a certain ruler might have influenced the author to adopt this perspective for its interpretation. However, these claims cannot be substantiated in the immediate environment of the passage. In the same way as the redactor of the Historienbibel II, Rudolf goes on to describe the distribution of peoples after the Tower of Babel had been attempted and in a far less confused version clearly asserts the descent of Christ from Shem as well as Japhet as the ancestor of those nations, who are later identified with the Christian nations:

Sem was, als ih gelesin han,

vater des kunnes von der art

... von dem Israhel den stam

mit geburt und urhap nam,

... darnach Got únsir herre Krist

wart sidir nach der menschheit

geborn . . .

von Japhete, als ich han vrnomin,

---

Rudolph seems to use Josephus's list of the progenitors of the three sons of Noah, as becomes apparent in his citing Nimrod as the son of Chus. For a discussion of the extent to which Rudolf followed Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica and Josephus Flavius's Antiquities of the Jews, see Tippelskirch, Welchronik, 38-48.
sint al die diet der lúte komin
von der die kristenheit erst kam. (982-83, 985-86, 988-90, 993-95)

[Shem was, as I have read, the father of the people from whom Israel took its
birth and its origins, afterwards God our lord Christ, was born to humanity.
From Japhet, as I have heard, have since originated the kind of people where
Christendom first came.]

This brief ethnographic account is the standard one and differs in no significant way from the
other texts which make use of this passage. It also sheds no light on the question why Rudolf
followed Josephus and not for instance Peter Comestor, whose work was available to him. As
hinted before, one could venture here that the overtly imperialistic nature of Josephus's
"tutunge" might have appealed to his colleague, who was equally concerned to document and
justify a specific ruler's dominion over large parts of a foreign country, in this case the
Stauffish empire, reaching from Germany to Sicily.

2.3. The World of *The Book of John Mandeville*

In the *Book of John Mandeville* the reader is invited to join the author on his imaginary
journey around the world, visiting many known, but also unknown and truly remarkable
places. Being an accomplished armchair-traveller and a voracious reader, the *Mandeville*
author can offer many stories which are certain to please his audience, craving a truly 'exotic'
reading matter. Some of the stories can of course, be found elsewhere, and thus it might come
as a small surprise that the German chronicler Rudolf's account of "indén lant" makes another
appearance in the *Mandeville* account of "Ynde." The *Mandeville* author's thorough reading
becomes particularly obvious in his own rather ingenious use of the Noah story, which reveals not merely his knowledge of the Stoff, but more importantly his awareness of the tale as an ideological tool that can be utilized to prove any number of claims. In this case the thing to be documented is the Great Khan's place in the Book's ethnographic scheme, and, more precisely, the Khan and his people's relationship to Christendom.37 In contrast to Odoric's Relatio, one of his main sources, the Mandeville author seems particularly concerned to 'fit' the Khan and his people into Salvation History so as to "conjure up the dream of a vastly expanded Christendom."38 To assert his credibility the English knight assures his readers that he himself has spent some time at the Khan's court and thus is an eyewitness. Giving credit to the audience's scepticism, the text insists on the veracity of the marvels to be seen at the foreign court, here quoted in the English translation known as the Cotton Version:

For I wot wel 3if ony man hath ben in þo contrees be3onde, bough he haue not ben in the place where the grete Chane duelleth, . . . he schall not trowe it lightly; And treuly no more did I myself til I saugh it. And þo þat han ben in þo contrees & in the gret Canes houshold knowen wel þat I seye soth.39

The question of credibility is of particular importance in this instance since the vision


38Higgins, Writing, 160.

of a great Christian empire must have held considerable attractiveness to his contemporaries. As the discussion will show, the Mandeville-author uses not one, but two narratives to construct this connection between the Great Khan and the notion of a great Christian empire. Instead of using the story to explain the sort of phenomena already discussed, he employs it to authenticate the name of the great Khan according to phonetic similarities, a technique which he may have learned from his sources, emphasizing a connection between C/ham and Cain.40

40On the conflation of "Khan," "Cham" and "Cain" in the French mss. see also Friedman, Monstrous, 103.
In order to accomplish this, however, the Mandeville author has to do some clever re-arranging of the parts of the earth to Noah's sons, changing the respective positions of Ham and Shem. The consequence of this rewriting of the biblical source and most of its commentaries is that Ham becomes the forefather of the Asian peoples and Shem of the Africans:

Noe had iii. sones Sem, Cham & Iapheth. This Cam was he þat saugh his fadres prewy membres naked whan he slepte & scorned hem & schewed hem with his finger to his brethren in scornynge wise & þerfore he was cursed to god, . . . and this Cham for his crueltie toke the the gretter & the beste partie toward the est, þat is clept Asye And Sem toke Affryk And Iapheth toke Europe.\(^{41}\)

This switching of the positions of Cham and Shem has caused modern as well as medieval editors of this passage some considerable uneasiness since, as Braude shows, a number of them "corrected" this inconsistency.\(^{42}\)

One such example is the Egerton Version of the text where Shem in his position as Noah's oldest son and not as the cruellest is rewarded with Asia, the largest and richest continent. It should be noted here that the unique manuscript itself reflects this inconsistency

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\(^{41}\) *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. P. Hamelius, 145. For the Paris text see, *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Malcolm Letts, vol. 2 (London: the Hakluyt Society, 1953), 354: "Si vous diray premieryement pour quoy on lappelle Grant Cham . . . . Ce Cham fu celui qui vit le membre naturel de son pere entreux quil dormoit descouuert, et se moquoit de lui et le monstroit au doy; et pour ce fu li maudit. ... Ycelui Cham pour sa grande cruaute prist la plus grant partie chumenciel, qui est appelée Asye; Sem si prist Affrique; et Iapheth si prist Europe."

\(^{42}\) Braude, "Sons," 16-17.
as the names of "Seem" and "Cham" have been written over erasures in order to place them according to the orthodox view." Thus this passage reads: "Seem, by cause he was þe eldest broþer, chose þe best party and þe grettest, whilk es toward þe este, and it es called Asy. Cham tuke Affryk." The logical conclusion of this passage is presented further on in the text: "And for this Cham this Emperour clepeth him Cham & souereyn of all the world." The Mandeville author continues his attempt to trace the lineage of the Great Khan by splicing the genealogical exposition which usually follows the Noah story together with his own version of the geographical diversification of the sons' descendants. Cham's descendants are then presented, starting with Chus as his son and the powerful Nimrod, builder of the Tower of Babel:

\[
\text{Cham was the grettest & the most myghty & of him camen mo generaciouns \hspace{1cm} pan of the opere And of his sone Chuse was engendred Membroyh the geaunt \hspace{1cm} pat was the firste kyng pat euer was in the world & he began the fundacioun of}
\]

43 Higgins, Writing, 172.

44 Ibid. For an example of how this interference has made its way into the present see the translation of this passage by Moseley, 145: "Shem, because he was the eldest, chose the best and largest part, which is towards the East, and is called Asia. Ham took Africa, and Japhet took Europe."

45 Mandeville's Travels, ed. Hamelius, 146. The attempt of the texts' editors to correct the source reflects, in my opinion, the very same assumption of a stable relationship between geography and genealogy which led to the misconception of medieval ethnography in some of the works of the African historians quoted above. The consequence of this "correction" is that the explanation of the name of the Great Khan which the Mandeville author puts forward, becomes nonsensical, since Moseley places his carefully transcribed "Cham [Ham]" in Africa, and not the Khan's Asia, just to conclude a few sentences further on: "And therefore some men say that the Emperor of Tartary had himself called Ham [Khan], for he is considered the most excellent lord in the world and occupies the same land that Ham was lord of."
the tour of Babylone.\textsuperscript{46}

Having followed the conventional Noah story up to this point, the Mandeville-author immediately afterwards disappoints a knowledgeable reader's expectation once more in order to make a truly bold claim:

\begin{quote}
And at that time the devils of hell came many times and lay with the women of his generation and begot divers folk as monsters and folk disfigured, some without heads, some with great ears, some with one eye, some geant, some with horse feet and many other of divers shap against kind. And of that generation of Cham have come the punishments and divers folk that be in yles of the see be all ynde.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Instead of citing the multitude of languages resulted from Nimrod's building the Tower of Babel, the Mandeville author breaks with tradition\textsuperscript{48} and claims that the multitude of peoples in this part of the earth are Hell's progeny. To a reader used to the Book's relative tolerance (except, that is for its rampant anti-Jewishness), this rather crude mode of explaining ethnic difference must come as a shock: according to this passage, then, human diversity on earth is due to intercourse \textit{contra naturam}, or "a\textsuperscript{3}enst kynde," as it is explicitly called in the Cotton Version.

The Mandeville author, of course, was not the first to put forward this notion; but the novel way in which he uses this is startling. As an attempt to explain this stance I would

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Mandeville's Travels}, ed. Hamelius, 145-46.

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Mandeville's Travels}, ed. Hamelius, 146.

\textsuperscript{48}Higgins, \textit{Writing}, 162-63, stresses the uniqueness of this claim.
claim here that the Mandeville author drew on a long tradition of injunctions that attempted to regulate human sexual desire by declaring that all sexual acts outside the bonds of marriage and not for the purpose of procreation were acts against nature, and thus mortal sins. This claim then would make all eastern races the product of a common denominator: unnatural and abnormal procreative practices. Clearly, this charge would have had serious implications for the perception of ethnographic difference, and in particular for the status of the inhabitants of "Ynde," whose negative portrait here is only matched by that of the Jews. This semi-theological argument, however, is not followed any further, and the text soon returns to the usual distribution of the races, taking the changed position of Ham and Shem into account.

The question of what prompted the Mandeville author to insert this passage, which could have been lifted straight from a typical anti-Islamic propagandistic text such as the King of Tars (discussed below), is difficult to answer. The immediate context, in fact, does not justify reading this passage as a simple piece of religious propaganda since the Mandeville author's final purpose is to portray the Tartars as part of a potential great Christian Empire, reaching from "Denmark to India," to quote the Wife of Bath's summary of the world's extent. I would claim that the obvious intolerance shown in this passage is not so much directed against human diversity per se as against the diversity of human desire. The creatures which are "against nature" represent a mixture of existing races and cultures, as well as more fantastic beings. Since there is no binding logical connection between a specific

49On this see Jeffrey Richards, Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 22-41.
ethnic group and its geographical location and linguistic properties, I would claim that the Mandeville author inserted an obscure piece of instruction on unorthodox modes of procreation, a discussion which is disjunct from the races ethnographic properties.

"But I found it operwise" says Sir John, baffling his audience, immediately after he has made this bold claim that the Asian peoples are Hell's progeny. He then offers a competing version of the Chan/Cham story that is just as fantastic as the previously discredited one, although he introduces it with the declaration "the sothe is this." In this version it is the dream of Chaanguys (Genghis Khan) which serves as an explanation: as an old man he dreams about a white knight, a kind of prophet who declares that it is God's will that Chaanngys be the leader of the seven Tartar tribes:

This man [Chaanguys] layy vpon a night in his bed & he sawgh in avisioun þat þere cam before him a knyght Armed all in white & he satt vpon a white hors & seyde to him: Can, slepest þou? the Inmortall god hath sent me to þe & it is in his wille þat þou go to the vii. lynages & seye to hem þat þou schalt bene here Emperour. For þou schalt conquere the londes & the contrees þat ben abouten.

This form of prophecy, which has decidedly Christian overtones, is then, as a second strategy to establish the veracity of his claim, added to the Mandeville author's very own and unique version of the Noah story. In this passage there is even a genealogy of sorts, which is reminiscent of the list of the descendants of Nimrod. By quoting this dream vision Sir John

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sets up the ruler of the vast Asian Empire as a proto-Christian and, in fact, the Tartars as a form of early or potential Christians, not unlike the Jews of the Old Testament.

This rhetorical move becomes most obvious from his use of several elements of the Christian tradition, which surface in various parts of the account. The foremost example is, of course, the Khan's institution of monotheism:

The firste statute was þat þei scholde beleuen & obeyen in god Inmortall þat is allmyghty, þat wolde casten hem out of seruage & at all tymes clepe to him for help in tyme of nede. 52

Further examples are the Khan's demand that his nobles behead their first-born sons as a sign of allegiance, a submissive gesture which shows a strong parallel with Abraham's sacrifice of his son. The most obvious parallel comes in the part relating the Khan's passage past Mount Belyan, a passage which sounds suspiciously like the Israelites' passage through the Dead Sea:

And for þou scalt fynde no gode passage for to go toward þat contree, go [to] the mount Belyan þat is vpon the see & knele þere .ix. tymes toward the est in the worschipe of god Inmortall & he schal schewe þe weye to passe by, And the Chane dide so. And anon the see þat touched & was fast to the mount began to withdrawe him & schewed fair weye of .ix. fote brede large & so he passed with his folk & wan the lond of Cathay þat is the grettest kyngdom of

52 Mandeville's Travels, ed. Hamelius, 147.
the world.\textsuperscript{53}

A further example of the Khan's resemblance to a Christian monarch are the Latin inscriptions on his seals, such as "Chan filius dei," as well as the assertion that despite their lack of baptism, the Khan and his people embrace some of the most important tenets of the Christian faith: "And all be it þat þei be not cristned, 3it natheles the Emperour & all the Tartareyenes beleue in god Inmortall."\textsuperscript{54}

The likeliest explanation for the Mandeville author's attempts to erase as many traces as possible of the Tartars' Otherness is that he wants to set them up as future targets for an Asian mission. Time and again the text makes more than a passing reference to the Khan's general tolerance towards Christians; one such example is the mention of the number of physicians he has in his household, with the Christians the preferred ones:

\begin{quote}
And of leches & Phisicyens cristene he hath .cc. & .x. And of leches & Phisicyens þat ben sarrazines .xx. But he trusteth more in the cristene leches þan in the Sarazines.
\end{quote}

In addition to these "professionals," there are already a number of converted Christians living there in relative peace, an indication that a mission to Cathay would be a relatively easy and probably successful undertaking:

\begin{quote}
And he hath in his Court many Barouns as Seruytoures þat ben cristene & converted to gode feyth be the prechinge of Religiose cristenmen þat dwellen
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Mandeville's Travels}, ed. Hamelius, 149. Compare also the account in Exodus 15: 16: "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Mandeville's Travels}, ed. Hamelius, 151-52.
with him; But þere ben manye mo þat wil not þat men knowen þat þei ben cristene.\(^{55}\)

The final hint for anyone who still has doubts is dropped towards the end of the account of the Khan and his household; the emperor's greatness is once more asserted; in fact, it is said that he surpasses all other potentates, including the Sultan of Babylon, and Prester John:

All þeise ne ben not in comparisoun to the grete Chane nouþer of myght ne of noblesse ne of ryaltee ne of ricchesse. For in all þeise he passeth all erthely princes Wherfore it is gret harm þat he belueueth not feithfully in god. And natheless he will gladly here speke of god And he suffreth wel þat cristene men dwell in his lordschippe & þat men of his feith ben made cristene men, 3if þei wile, þorghout all his contree, For he defendeth noman to holde no lawe other þan him lyketh.\(^{56}\)

It seems all that is needed is someone willing and able to make the journey to Cathay, and the Khan's conversion would be as good as made.\(^{57}\) The prospect of a vast, rich, and powerful empire, and thus a Christian ally at the other end of the world, must have been an alluring vision for the English Knight's contemporaries. Not only did they see their own countries waging war against each other, and observed the Holy Land in the hands of Islam, but also


\(^{56}\)Mandeville's Travels, ed. Hamelius, 162.

\(^{57}\)Higgins, Writing, 172, points out that the Egerton version adds the last sentence to the Khan's portrait for maximum effect, "an invitation to missionary activity, if there ever was one."
they were well aware of the threat of the well-organized and successful Muslims who were slowly pushing closer and closer to the boundaries of Christendom.

The Mandeville author followed in his ethnography an established model; as I have attempted to demonstrate in my discussion of the various adaptations of the story of Noah's sons, ethnographic difference was perceived in the Middle Ages in far less dogmatic terms than in later times. The medieval perception of the Self and its Other is far less indebted to an exclusive view of Self and Other; in the medieval understanding these two categories can become mutually inclusive. It is quite possible to move between these opposites, a fact which reveals them as entirely arbitrary. Geographical location, language, religion, and appearance were all perceived as signs which had their own frames of reference and which could signify any number of meanings, often contradictory ones. Black skin may have been taken as the colour of the devil, but this seemingly unalterable trait could also be changed into a completely different 'identity', as I want to demonstrate in the following discussion of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *The King of Tars*.

3. Infidels, Pagans, and Wild Women: Otherness in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* and *The King of Tars*

"A thrifty tale for the nones (CT, II, 1165)"[^58] This is how Harry Bailly, the *Canterbury Tales* first critic, and host to the other pilgrims, judges Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. In contrast, few later critics have found the tale as rewarding or even as worthy of their attention. "The

religious tales infuriate some, puzzle many others, and are tactfully ignored by most" - such is C. David Benson's assessment of the scant critical attention which the whole group of religious tales, and in particular the *Man of Law's Tale*, has received.\(^5\) The tale indeed reveals a number of problems, ranging from an ill fitting narrative frame and the rather idiosyncratic literary tastes of its teller to problems of genre and the somewhat unconnected moral preamble.\(^6\) As a consequence the tale itself has often been overlooked in favour of its teller or its frame.\(^7\) In the actual tale, a version of the tale of Constance,\(^8\) it is the highly problematic message which makes it hard for most readers to agree with the host's positive assessment. A major reason for this difficulty lies in the extreme polarizations which provide much of the tale's structure and momentum: binary oppositions based on gender and culture characterize much of the plot.\(^9\)


\(^6\)For a survey of the scholarship on these topics, see A.S.G. Edwards, "Critical Approaches to the Man of Law’s Tale," in *Chaucer’s Religious Tales*, ed. Benson and Robertson, 85-94.

\(^7\)Edwards, "Approaches," 90.

\(^8\)For an overview of versions of the tale of Constance, see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer’s Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: New York University Press, 1927), 62-78.

In the following pages I want to explore the issue of Otherness in the *Man of Law's Tale* mainly in the light of these two basic oppositions: the confrontation between Christians and non-Christians and between male and female characters. These dichotomies are inscribed in the text by its narrator, who describes Constance's "mission" as the "destruccioun of mawmettrie, / And . . . [the] encrees of Cristes lawe deere" (II, 236-37), as well as by the privileging of the voices of Christian characters over those belonging to the "Barbre nacioun" (II, 281). In contrast to most approaches to the *Man of Law's Tale*, which are generally centred on the main character, I want to investigate some of the problematic notions expressed in the tale by focusing my attention on the minor and marginal characters. At the centre of this approach is the question of the way in which Otherness is conceptualized in the *Man of Law's Tale* and the investigation of the mentalities which speak through these representations.

As mentioned above, one of the underlying principles of the *Man of Law's Tale* is that it creates identities by establishing culturally accepted binary oppositions. I define this term not as the parallel existence of two independent categories of thought, but as a system of power relations, where the dominant part always defines itself through the absence of its desired qualities in the opposite. The opposite is subsequently perceived in its supposed "deficit" in respect to this dominant part.\(^6^4\) By applying the concept of Otherness to the *Man of Law's Tale*, I want to examine how this dichotomy works in the tale and in particular how

\(^6^4\)This concept has found its application in gender criticism; see for instance Nancy Jay, "Gender and Dichotomy," in *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, ed. Sneja Gunew (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 89-106.
the minor characters provide a viewpoint different from that of the protagonist and her message. By including these minor characters in the discussion and in effect giving them a voice, I plan to show that the tale of Constance can be retold both so as to counter the privileging of the protagonist's view and in order to open up a space for an exploration of the world of the non-Christian Others in the tale.

Chaucer, of course, did not write an explicitly ethnographic text, yet his treatment of the tale of Constance offers evidence of one way in which medieval authors constructed representations of their Others. Chaucer puts himself into a tradition of writers who help shape perceptions of the culturally different. The political implications, as outlined by Johannes Fabian, indicate power-relations, the power being exerted by the describing culture over the described culture:

Othering, in my view, is cut short when awareness of the political dimension of writing remains limited to insights about the political character of aesthetic standards and rhetorical devices. In such critical discourse, anthropology's Other is said to be dominated by ethnography. But to be a victim the Other must be written at (as in "shot at") with literacy serving as a weapon of subjugation and discipline.65

As in the previous examples discussed already Otherness in the Man of Law's Tale is not a fixed category, but rather a variable in the mathematical sense, something which can take on different values according to the "equation" in which it appears. By "equation" I mean here systems of differing narrative or political requirements, which demand different

65Fabian, "Presence," 760.
representations of Otherness, depending on whether a particular character is to be portrayed as "positive" or "negative."

Among the predominant markers of Otherness in the Man of Law's Tale are complexion, religion, and customs; these are markers which signify difference. Depending on the political - and thus contextual - requirements of the tale two diametrically opposed rhetorical strategies are employed in the representation of Otherness. Differences in what are perceived as positive characters tend to be minimized, whereas those regarded as negative are enhanced. The Sultan of Damascus and his merchants are among those infidels who have a positive function in the tale, a fact which consequently has a bearing on their representation.

The Man of Law's Tale does not begin with a description of the protagonist, Constance, or her family, but instead with the "chapmen" from Syria, who are doing business in Rome. Unlike the opening of the tale in Nicholas Trevet's Anglo-Norman Chronicles or John Gower's Confessio Amantis (II, 587 ff), for example, Chaucer's beginning immediately refers to a world beyond the familiar space of Rome. The Orient is evoked here by the description of the Arabic merchants and in particular through the brief catalogue of their goods: "spicerye, / clothes of gold, and satyns riche of hewe" (II, 136-37). Apart from the name of their country, expensive cloths and spices are the actual markers of the merchants' different origin. Other possibilities, such as customs, clothing, language, or appearance, are

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not mentioned. The merchants themselves are described as "riche, and therto sadde and trewe" (II, 135). A reason for this obvious endorsement might be that Chaucer wanted to portray them as sober and reliable witnesses whose accounts of Constance reflect their seriousness in business and who also point to the positive characteristics of the Sultan.68 Similarities with their Christian counterparts, like the merchant of St. Denys in the Shipman's Tale are obvious; in the way he does business and in his general conduct the merchant of St. Denys is no different from his Arabic counterparts: "Now gooth this marchant faste and bisily / Aboute his nede, and byeth and creanceth. / He neither pleyeth at the dees ne daunceth ..." (VII, 302-04). It is particularly the objects of the Syrian merchants' trade which define their Otherness; spices and foreign cloths represent expensive and highly desirable status objects which are difficult to obtain.

The domestic space of Rome, the home of Constance, is enlarged and desire is awakened by showing the availability of otherwise unavailable goods. These merchants, on their return to Syria, become an important source of information for the Sultan, who -- with his interest in both the commercial aspects and the marvels and wonders of the foreign country -- is presented as a medieval collector of ethnographic details. His questions reflect the type of unplanned, unprogrammatic inquisitiveness that is quite different from the purposeful interest of later explorers.69

68 I disagree with Robert B. Dawson, "Custance in Context: Rethinking the Protagonist of the 'Man of Law's Tale'," Chaucer Review 26 (1992): 305, who claims that the description of the Syrian merchants is made in the same ironic tone as Chaucer's statement on husbands (II, 272-73) or the description of Constance's wedding-night (II, 704-14).

He wolde, of his benigne curteisye ,
Make hem good chiere, and bisily espye
Tidynges of sondry regnes, for to leere
The wondres that they myghte seen or heere. (II,179-82)

To the Sultan, these merchants also represent a bridge to another culture, and not the goods they trade, but their reports awaken his desire; his interests are, at least in this passage, focused primarily on the Christian woman, Constance. The Other and the implied Self in this first passage of the Man of Law's Tale are represented not so much in terms of different appearance as through different agents of interest. The European desire for exotic goods is contrasted with an imagined desire of the Other for a human representative of the foreign culture. According to Dinshaw these similarities suggest that Constance becomes an object of exchange, not much different from the exotic goods traded by the merchants: "the parallel narration of loading their ships with merchandise and loading their eyes with Constance underscores her position as a thing -- a tale, a commodity -- that the merchants trade". 70

Although there are similarities between the treatment of Constance and the merchants' goods as representatives of a foreign culture, the narrative does not reduce the position of Constance to the level of a mere commodity. The complex issue of an intermarriage between a Christian and a Moslem, discussed below, is evidence for the political nature and the far-reaching consequences of this union, which gives it rather more significance than the mere exchange

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70 Dinshaw, 124-25. Dinshaw's approach is based on Lévi-Strauss' sanalysis of kinship systems; see for example Structural Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 61: "The mediating factor, in this case [between kinship groups], should be the women of the group, who are circulated between clans, lineages, or families, in place of the words of the group, which are circulated between individuals ..." (Lévis-Strauss' emphasis).
of exotic goods.

The Sultan falls in love with Constance because he has listened to the merchants' reports about her high moral perfection and her beauty. The Muslim ruler is described here as the typical medieval lover pining for the lady he has never set his eyes upon, a lover familiar from courtly love poetry in the tradition of the *amour-de-long*. If it were not known that he was a Sultan from Syria, there would be no difference between from him and a Christian courtly lover:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thise marchantz han hym toold of dame Custance} \\
\text{So greet noblesse in ernest, ceriously,} \\
\text{That this Sowdan hath caught so greet plesance} \\
\text{To han hir figure in his remembrance,} \\
\text{That al his lust and al his bisy cure} \\
\text{Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure.} \quad (\text{II, 184-89})
\end{align*}
\]

*Amour-de-long* was frequently employed in vernacular courtly love poetry and symbolizes love in its highest perfection since the emphasis is usually on moral standards rather than physical beauty as the basis of emotional attachment.\(^7\)

The protagonist of the Middle High German epic poem *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, for example, has an experience which closely resembles that of the Sultan:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{diu süeze minneclîche}
\end{align*}
\]

Chaucer's use of a rhetorical device which was well known from the Continental tradition of courtly love, but was rarely used outside this context, makes the significance of this relationship obvious. Without doubt, the intention is to portray Constance as a paragon of moral perfection, but the Sultan's moral standing is equally important in this picture.

By portraying both characters in an equally positive light, Chaucer, of course, faces a dilemma: while his heroine is the model of a Christian princess, her prospective husband is a powerful Muslim ruler. Taking into account the proliferation of propagandist writings against Muslims, such as for instance the Charlemagne romances, the negative implications of this choice are obvious. Chaucer's way out of this dilemma is, as already implied above, to make the heathen no different from the Christian, except in name. Difference in this instance is created mainly by denoting a particular character as Other by assigning him a specific name or title or geographical location. These designations serve as markers and merely operate on a superficial level, as is apparent in the case of the Sultan and his merchants. In their

72 Reinfried von Braunschweig, lines 281-84, cited in Schnell, Causa Amoris, 276, my translation.

73 Schnell, Ibid.

74 Chaucer's positively portrayed Saracen ruler who marries a Christian and is willing to convert, seems to be based on a widely-used motif as, for instance, the eleventh-century
Otherness they mirror the Christians to the point of being copies of them; the Muslim merchants might as well be represented by the Christian merchant of St. Denys, the Sultan himself by a Christian courtly lover, such as Reinfried von Braunschweig. Chaucer defused this potential conflict by stripping these representatives of the Other of everything that would set them apart from the Christians. Notably absent are any descriptions of religious or cultural practices, as well as any physical traits that would denote the Sultan as Other. It was in this instance obviously unsuitable to portray a positive representative of another culture and at the same time emphasize cultural difference. The prevailing strategy is to erase the features of difference, everything that might be unfamiliar and replace them with familiar ones, namely those known from the describing culture. Thus, othering in this context means inscribing similarities into those that are dissimilar.

The most visible instance of this reduction of difference is the Muslims’ conversion, which signifies the end of their Otherness. Since these characters were already very similar to their Christian counterparts, the conversion here is merely changing of labels. As the absence

Byzantine epic *Digenes Akrites*, shows. The powerful emir, who falls in love with a Christian princess readily agrees to his conversion to Christianity as he assures her brothers:

If you deign have me as your sister’s husband,
For the sweet beauty of your own dear sister
I will become a Christian in Romania.


75 Compare the description of the emir in *Digenes Akrites* (Mavrogordato, 5):

Was an Emir of breed, exceeding rich,
Of wisdom seized and bravery to top,
Not black as Aethiopians are, but fair and lovely,
Already bloomed with comely curly beard (Bk.1, 30-33).
of ethnographic differences shows, the real conversion has begun much earlier. The figures of the Sultan and the merchants are now, according to the internal logic of the tale, positive characters and as such become reproductions of the Self, thus being hardly distinguishable from typical lovers or merchants in the medieval Christian context. Furthermore, the liaison between the Syrian ruler and the Roman princess is portrayed as an orderly, political process, "a legitimate and celebrated betrothal, spanning East and West and absorbing barbarians into the fold." This process is furthermore described as a complex and lengthy one, involving diplomatic and legal efforts: "tretys and embassadrie" and the "popes mediacioun" (II,233-34).

The canon law of disparitas cultus, the disparity of worship, distinguishes between the baptized and the unbaptized, a fact which is of importance for the validity of a marriage between two partners of different faith. This law draws a distinction between Christians on

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76 Dinshaw, "Man," 130. Dinshaw's use of the term "barbarian" in this context is a misnomer since one is dealing here with a highly developed culture, heavily competing with western Christianity. A more appropriate term would be "infidel" if one wants to avoid following Constance's pattern of thought by designating everything outside Christianity as "barbre nacioun."

77 It is interesting to note in this context that Chaucer actually shortened the description of this diplomatic process as compared to Trevet's or Gower's versions; see for instance Edward A. Block, "Originality, Controlling Purpose, and Craftmanship in Chaucers's Man of Law's Tale," PMLA 68 (1953): 576. There is less need for Chaucer to represent the diplomatic exchanges since right from the beginning of the tale he emphasizes the Sultan's similarity with conventional Christian courtly lovers, as opposed to Gower and Trevet, who see the Sultan and his merchants as the typical infidels. Against this background Chaucer could well reduce the legalistic procedures to a minimum.

78 Paul Beichner, C.S.C., "Chaucer's Man of Law and Disparitas Cultus," Speculum 23 (1948): 72n: "During the 12th century marriages with anyone (heretics included) outside of the church came to be regarded as invalid. Thereafter a distinction was made on the basis of the presence or absence of baptism, and the term disparitas cultus was frequently qualified. In its
the one side and Jews and pagans on the other, whereby the non-Christian is defined primarily by the absence of certain rituals. This problem is recognized by the Sultan's counsellors when the preliminaries to the wedding are discussed:

By cause that there was swich diversitee
Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn
They trowe that no "Cristen prince wolde fayn
Wedden his child under oure lawe sweete
That us was taught by Mahoun, oure prophete." (II, 220-24)

This discussion reflects the basic tenets of canon law; a marriage outside this legal framework is not possible, hence the only solution is the conversion of one of the partners. The question concerning which of the partners is to renounce his or her religion gives a clear indication of the power relations depicted in the text. In *The King of Tars*, for instance, the reverse of the situation in the *Man of Law's Tale* is described: a Muslim ruler forces the daughter of a Christian king to marry him and to convert to Islam:

Þou most bileue opon mi lay
& knele now here adoun;
& forsake þi fals lay
Pat þou hast leued on mani a day,
& anour seyn Mahoun.

strict sense *disparitas cultus* was a direct impediment invalidating the attempted marriage of a member of the Church to a pagan, or a Jew, or an infidel, or a Mohammedan."

Beichner, "Disparitas," 73.
& certes, bot þou wilt anon

Þi fader y schal wiþ wer slon. (470-76)\textsuperscript{80}

The "false lay" in this case is Christianity and the Sultan in this romance has power over the Christian woman by threatening to kill her father and is thus in a position to force her to convert to Islam. In essence, the practice described in the \textit{King of Tars} mirrors the Sultan's conversion to Christianity in the \textit{Man of Law's Tale}; in both instances a mutual acceptance of the Other's faith is not possible and the question of who has to convert is solved on the basis of who has power over whom.

Even though both texts depict the same process the assumptions behind each conversion scene are radically different: conversions to Christianity are interpreted as a victory over false beliefs, while conversions to other religions are by necessity seen as acts of violence, betraying the inhumanity of the other faith, as the example in the \textit{King of Tars} shows. Even though the legal basis is the same, the conversion to Islam represents everything the conversion to Christianity does not: submission, violence, and destruction. A further characteristic of the converted, both Christian and infidel, is that they lose their voices and give themselves up to their fate; Chaucer's Sultan, stricken by love-sickness, admits that he has no other choice: "Rather than I lese / Custance, I wole be cristned, doutelees" (II, 225-26); when the King of Tars' daughter is in a similar situation, unable to resist the pressure exerted on her, she says:

Sir, y nil þe nouȝt greue.

\textsuperscript{80}The \textit{King of Tars: Edited From the Auchinleck MS, Advocates 19.2.1}, ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980), 86. All further citations are from this edition.
Unlike Chaucer's Sultan, the king's daughter does not give up her faith and exercising her religion becomes an act of conspiracy: "For when sche was bi herselue on / To Ihesu sche made hir mon" (514-15). Even though she still practices her faith, in public she has to follow the new religion and is mute; in this respect she is no different from the Sultan after his voluntary conversion.

A different rhetorical strategy is used when negative examples of Otherness are described; if the positive representation of the Other requires a minimization of differences between the describer and the described, the reverse is the case when primarily negative traits of the Other are inscribed. In the case of those who do not convert or are not to be in opposition to the Christian Self, representations are anchored on an amplification of perceived differences between Christians and non-Christians. These differences are not based on ostensibly clear-cut categories, such as religion, culture or "race," but rather on a cross-section through all these categories. An example of this strategy is found in the description of the Sultan of Damascus in the *King of Tars*. Everything about this character -- his behaviour, his religious practices, and his complexion -- denotes his Otherness. The construction of this character relies on such features as violent behaviour ("soudan fers," 74; "tirant," 63), his closeness to or even identification with animals ("heben hounde," 93; "lyoun," or "wyld lyon" (Vernon and Simeon MSS), 105) and the dark colour of his skin ("blac", "so blak" (V, S MSS.), 799). These turn him into a character radically different from the Sultan, whose
portrayal as a courtly lover we have seen in the *Man of Law's Tale*. A close comparison with Chaucer's Sultan reveals that the Sultan of Damascus' Otherness is primarily interpreted in the text as a set of deficits. The courtly lover is replaced by an unfeeling tyrant, the humane character by a beast-like creature, the "fairness" of the Self gives way to the "blackness" of the Other. Instead of being a firm category, Otherness, inscribed in this mode, can be read as a variable in the mathematical sense, a symbol which takes its value according to the religious position of its object.

Before the beginning of the seventeenth century, the fundamental understanding of the order of knowledge, according to Michel Foucault, was based on similitude and resemblance, rather than on difference and comparison: "Resemblance, which had for long been the fundamental category of knowledge -- both the form and the content of what we know - became dissociated in an analysis based on terms of identity and difference."  

Foucault describes the pre-Enlightenment world as one of a "complex of kinships, resemblances, and affinities, and in which language and things were endlessly interwoven."  

If one accepts Foucault's thesis that resemblance is the key concept behind the medieval organization of knowledge, then the seemingly contradictory representations of what are essentially two very similar figures can be explained by the fact that they represent two essentially different concepts. Chaucer's Sultan is portrayed as a positive character and hence he resembles a Christian courtly lover like Reinfried von Braunschweig, whereas the Sultan

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82Foucault, *Order*, 54.
in the *King of Tars* is perceived as a negative character resembling a typical infidel and having as few similarities as possible to a Christian of the same rank. By regarding Otherness as a variable, medieval writers had the means to react to the requirements of different and changing resemblances, which Foucault perceives as endless: "the interplay of similitudes was . . . infinite: it was always possible to discover new ones, and the only limitation came from the fundamental ordering of things, from the finitude of a world firmly between the macrocosm and the microcosm." In contrast to later modes of classifications with their relatively firm boundaries between various categories, this process of organizing knowledge on the basis of similarities and resemblances is inherently fluid and unstable, and it is this nature that consequently accounts for radical changes even within one and the same category.

In the case of the Sultan of Damascus in the *King of Tars* his eventual conversion to Christianity demands that a new set of ethnographic signs make his conversion visible:  

His hide, þat blæc & lopely was  

Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras  

& clere wipouten blame. (928-30)  

As these examples indicate, the category of the Other, in terms of ethnographic descriptions based on complexion and religious customs, is essentially an open category which can be interpreted according to its perceived or desired proximity to the Self. 

"Ethnographic" interest is predominantly defined by an imaginary position, which places the...

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83 Foucault, *Order*, 55.

84 Friedman, *Monstrous*, 65, traces the *motif* of the change of complexion to Fulgentius of Ruspe who "spoke of baptizing an Ethiopian whom he saw as 'one not yet whitened by the grace of Christ shining on him'."
Other in perspective to the Self. The seemingly contradictory descriptions of the Muslims in both texts illustrate the extent to which political and contextual considerations can influence the construction of a character and how a different evaluation of such a character requires a different ethnographic identity, thus establishing the desired similarity. This discontinuity lays bare how these texts construct their Other according to their own particular ideological requirements; since these requirements can vary -- the narrative logic in the Man of Law's Tale calls for a positive character for instance, whereas the King of Tars demands the opposite -- the subsequent representations reflect these narrative constraints.

A further aspect of the relationship between Self and Other can be seen in the case of Constance and her two female opponents, the Sultan's mother and Donegild. In their resistance to Constance these two characters represent the oppositional forces to Christianity; the fact that they are both female shows that in this text cultural opposition and female gender are closely linked. Stephen Manning has commented on the opposition between Constance and her two main antagonists and suggests a dependence between these female characters:

Of the three significant women in the tale, two hate her and attempt to dispose of her (although the means they use is indirect: do they instinctively recognize an aspect of themselves in her and realize they cannot really destroy her and what she represents?), and they are both slain.\(^8^5\)

Manning poses a crucial question about the recognition of certain traits by the mothers-in-law in the figure of Constance; reversing this question, one may ask whether these two

"significant women" represent characteristics which were incompatible with a patiently suffering, passive Christian heroine. Being diametrically opposed to Constance they are constructed out of what were perceived as negative traits, thus providing a definition of the heroine by the mere absence of such traits in her.\(^{86}\)

In the council scene the Sultanness refuses to accept her son's conversion and asserts her own identity:

"Lordes," quod she, "ye knowen everichon,
How that my sone in point is for to lete
The hooly lawes of our Alkaron,
Yeven by Goddes message Makomete.
But oon avow to grete God I heete,
The lyf shal rather out of my body sterte
Or makometes lawe out of myn herte!" (II, 330-36)

In her resistance and assertiveness, the Sultanness is the counter-image of her son.\(^{87}\) In contrast to her son, the mother represents the Other as negative presence, rather than as positive absence. She insists on her autonomy and actively seeks and defends her power.\(^{88}\)

\(^{86}\)Delany, "Womanliness," 67.

\(^{87}\)Elaine Tuttle 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, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 51-70, argues that male characters are frequently prone to "feminization" when they fall in love with a female character, a fact which also applies to the Sultan who stands powerless between Constance and his mother.

\(^{88}\)Delany, "Womanliness," 67.
Her identity as a person is mainly inscribed in terms denoting a different religion. The implicit pairing of opposite terms "Alkoran" - "Bible", "Makomete" - "Christ" is apparent enough and, as in the case of the male characters, does not show any real ethnographic knowledge of the Other. The Sultanness values her independence and identity in the same absolute terms as her son desires Constance. In contrast to her future daughter-in-law, she insists on using her voice and her power. This voice not only expresses her dissent but also assures her activity by demanding a "verbal act of fealty from her followers." The key issue is that a refusal of the "newe lawe," of conversion, saves her from spiritual and physical submission:

What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe
But thraldom to oure bodies and penance,
And afterward in helle to be drawe,
For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance? (II, 337-40)

The Sultanness denies what Constance proclaims to be woman's fate, repeating her earlier words:

Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
And to been under mannes governance. (II, 286-87)

Submission and suffering are seen as the essential characteristics of a medieval Christian wife. This "newe lawe," which is rejected by the Sultanness, translates as the acceptance of submission and suffering by Christian women. By becoming a Christian, the Sultanness would have had to consent to the reduction of her status as well as give up her own personal

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89Dinshaw, "Man," 132.
freedom. In the council scene she reacts to this threat posed by her son's marriage. I see the primary motivation for her actions in her concern for her own physical safety and her assertion of her right to practice her religion: "I shal make us sauf for everemoore" (II, 343) is her concluding remark in her speech to her followers. Her opposition to Constance's declaration of "thraldom" and "penance" under the domination of men, in short, her attempt to remain an autonomous Other and not be brought within the fold of Christianity, voices a legitimate concern.

The Sultanness's words are also to be understood as a reaction against the violent changes proposed by her son's marriage, which would result in the overthrow of established social relations and the end of her self-determination. After the announcement of her son's conversion and marriage, the Sultanness does not accept the fate of: "thraldom and penance"; instead, she reacts in the only way open to her; she has to recognize that she has no other choice than to counter violence with violence herself. Even though the degree of violence she resorts to is excessive, one still has to bear in mind that she does not initiate this cycle of violence but rather that her deed is a reaction against the violation of her status. Her plan to have all the guests at the wedding killed is the only answer she can give, short of passively accepting her fate, and not a malicious act motivated primarily by her "selfishness."

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90 Gower emphasizes the aspect of economic independence when the Sultanness comments on the consequences of the marriage: "If it so is / Mi Sone him wedde in this manere, / Than have I lost my joies hiere, / For myn astat schal so be lasses" (II, 646-49).

91 I disagree with Manning and Clasby who both echo the medieval position which fails to see the violence done to the victims in the first place. Manning, "Constance," 18, in his interpretation of the mothers-in-laws' resistance to their sons' plans perceives these figures as the
By killing her own son she makes a horrifying and powerful statement; in its final consequence this murder shows the inhumanity of Christian thinking as it is propagated in the tale. Dinshaw remarks on the number of dead bodies which mark Constance's way and which are the direct result of this ideology: the idea of the Christian *communitas*, as expressed by Constance, does not permit the possibility of an extra communal existence. The Sultanness's killing of her son is the ultimate means for the mother to assert herself. She reacts to her son's conversion and proposed marriage in the same way in which she duplicated her son's council scene. In essence, she reverses the Christian meaning of baptism and gives her own interpretation of the significance of the *ritus* to those who do not accept it and its significance:

*Coold water shal nat greve us but a lite!*

...  

*For thogh his wyf be cristned never so white,*  

*She shal have nede to wasshe awey the rede,*  

*Thogh she a font-ful water with hire lede.* (II, 352, 355-57)

Apart from the Sultanness's rejection of the sacrament, her comment highlights the negative side of baptism, which as a ritual of acceptance into the Christian community is also constructed as an instrument of exclusion against those who seek an existence outside the disruptive elements, the "destructive side of the Feminine," which is primarily motivated by a "connection of egotism and selfishness to uncontrolled instinct." Clasby, 224, takes up Constance's position and interprets the Sultanness as the aggressor and Constance as the victim: "when exiled from Syria, she does not express submission to the will of her tormentor, the Sultaness."

92Dinshaw, "Man," 139.
Christian faith. Provided with no other choice, the Sultanness demonstrates how the water of the font can turn into blood. The acceptance of Christianity is an absolute process; an acceptance of the Other is not possible in this particular mode of thinking. Non-acceptance, as the tale shows, results in the Other's physical annihilation.  

The attributes which Chaucer bestows upon the Sultanness are common enough in the antifeminist tradition and place her outside the community of her gender as well as outside the human community altogether. The tale's various definitions of her -- as "virago" and "semyrame the secounde" (II, 359), "serpent under femynynytee" (II, 360), instrument of Satan, "scorpioun" and "wikked goost" (II, 404) -- denote various forms of Otherness by removing her from the community of women, and assigning her to the realm of the non-human, the world of animals, and the sphere of the non-divine, of demons and the Antichrist. It is particularly the Sultanness's association with the devil which points to this dark side of Christianity. This side serves as a collective *locus* for all those who do not conform to the

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93The dichotomous relationship between life and death, signifying the essence of baptism, can be read literally in the tale. See for instance V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 320: "The sacrament is a rite of birth and initiation -- the birth of the 'new man,' the spiritual man -- but it is also a ritual of struggle and death: the death of the 'old man,' the carnal nature in which we descend from Adam."

94Delany, "Womanliness," 68.

95Delany, *The Naked Text*, 177, draws attention to the tradition of Semiramis, who "formerly a much-honored military leader, becomes a prototype of feminine erotic evil: usurping man's prerogative to rule, murdering her husband to do so, committing incest with her son, and, in some texts, inventing trousers as female attire." (On this last claim see also above on the marginalium in Comestor's *Historia Scolastica*, 15n). Dinshaw, 135, interprets the Sultanness' removal from womanhood and humanity as such to mean that "femynynytee' itself is thus kept free of evil, free, in fact, of independent desire or action."
Christian ideal. Her rejection of baptism and her open declaration that she does not intend to give up her faith are reasons to remove the Sultanness from society and place her in the realm of the infernal. Otherness, in one of the most drastic of Christian images, is made the negation and final annihilation of the Other's existence. This is made clear later on when the Roman emperor sends his troops

On Surryens to taken heigh vengeance.

They brennen, sleen, and brynge hem to meschance

Ful many a day. (II, 963-65)

Ultimately, the Other is defined as absence. In the case of the Sultanness this process can be traced as a movement, beginning after her exclusion from society (the absence of baptism), passing through her degradation (the status of the sub-human), and arriving at the position of absence and negation (personified in the ghost and Satan) and her final killing.

Constance's second opponent, Donegild, is also placed outside the Christian pale. One important distinction between her and the Sultanness is that there is not the same ethnic difference between Constance and the pagan inhabitants of Northumberland as there was between Constance and the Saracens. This is exemplified in Constance's first encounter on Northumbrian soil when she meets the constable of a local castle and their different languages indicate their cultural difference, a difference which, however, is easily overcome since they find a language in common: "A maner Latyn corrupt was hir speche, / But algates

\footnote{For the connection between the demonization of Muslims, Jews, and other members of non-Christian religions see Jeffrey Burton-Russell, \textit{Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 83-84.}
therby was she understonde" (II, 519-20).

Donegild, like her Muslim counterpart, opposes her son's marriage. Despite many parallels with the Sultanness, Donegild's primary motivation does not seem to be based on religious grounds, but rather on a question of gender, which certainly also played a role in the representation of the Sultanness, but not, I would argue, as exclusively as in Donegild's case. Like the issue of cultural identity, the question of gender is also a question of power: "Gender," according to Joan W. Scott, "is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and ... is a primary way of signifying relationships of power." For the *Man of Law's Tale* this means that Donegild knows that Alla's marriage will deprive her of her status and power as queen and subsequently relegate her to the status of mother-in-law, while her former position would be taken over by Constance, a change which she resists -- and an action described by Chaucer as "tirannye" (II, 696).

In contrast to the Sultanness, who uses her political power in order to gather forces to fight the Christian intruders, Donegild uses the only means available to her, her writing. Making use of what Chaucer terms a forgery, Donegild in fact rewrites the story of her son's marriage and thus gives herself a voice:

And stolen were his lettres pryvely

...  

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97 J. Burrow, "A Maner Latyn Corrupt," *Medium Aevum* 30 (1961): 36-37, traces this expression back to Isidore of Seville's classification, which defines it as a late stage of Latin, "a *lingua franca* current in mercantile and maritime districts" with the advantage of being "understood by foreigners in strange lands."

And countrefeted was ful subtilly

Another letter, wroght ful synfully,

Unto the kyng direct of this mateere. (II, 744, 746-48)

For Donegild the marriage of Alla and Constance and the birth of the son mean the end of her status as the highest ranking female in her son's court. Donegild is repeatedly described as the "kynges mooder" (II, 696, 730, 786), and is clearly placed in rank beneath Constance, who is referred to as "queene" (II, 693). The previous balance of power between Alla and Donegild has been upset by the arrival of Constance and the birth of the son further relegates the king's mother to a secondary position. Donegild perceives both Constance and Mauricius as representatives of the supernatural and the demonic; she describes Constance as "an elf" (II, 754) and the child as a "feendly creature" (II, 751). Both are perceived as intruders into her own sphere and Donegild's denial of their human existence reflects their threatening nature as well as her inability to accept them as her kin. This is the first step in Donegild's strategy to have both "intruders" removed from her realm. The measures Donegild takes to rid herself of the intruders are far less drastic than those employed by the Sultanness; in order to regain her independence it is enough for her to have Constance and Maurice removed from her court.

In her rebellion, Donegild makes "gender trouble," to borrow Judith Butler's phrase.99 Donegild's behaviour is criticised since she falls out of her assigned female role of mother and mother-in-law, a fact obvious from Chaucer's commentary:

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O Donegild, I ne have noon English digne
Unto thy malice and thy tirannye!
And therfore to the feend I thee resigne;
Lat hym enditen of thy traitorie!
Fy, mannysh, fy! -- o nay, by God, I lye --
Fy, feendlych spirit, for I dar wel telle,
Thogh thou heere walke, thy spirit is in helle! (II, 778-84)

Donegild's activity as well as her aggressiveness seem incompatible with the gender role
assigned to her. Chaucer uses the term "mannysh" to indicate that she has transgressed a
boundary set by the accepted gender expectations:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires
that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" -- that is, those in which gender does
not follow from sex and in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either
sex or gender.\(^{100}\)

Donegild's rejection of her subordinate role and her destructive actions violate the
constructed gender identity of women as it is depicted in the text; Chaucer attempts a
possible explanation, namely that of a male gender identity, which is obviously at odds with
the character's sexual identity. Donegild epitomizes the aggressive and active woman, an
image which troubles Chaucer, a fact which he clearly states when he refers in his full
description of her to the fiend. In Butler's terms she represents a gender identity which was
not permitted to exist; hence the poet's refusal to conceptualize her in his writing.

\(^{100}\)Butler, Trouble, 17.
An idea of what was considered appropriate and inappropriate female behaviour is outlined by the Knight of La Tour-Landry in his book of instructions, devoted to his daughters, "to the extent that thei might lerne and see bothe good and euelle." Chapter 103 makes use of the exemplum of the women who wept for Jesus in order to formulate a definition of a permissible female gender identity and its counterpart: "And, therfor, it is saide, a woman that is not humble and pitous she is mannisshe and not womanly, which is a vice in womanhode to be rude or of hautigne courage." Pity and humbleness denote a desired female gender identity, whereas rough, wild and courageous behaviour, which is considered male behaviour, is not sanctioned. This crossing of gender boundaries is not only described as contrary to the accepted norm of female behaviour in the Christian Middle Ages, but it is also marked as a vice and hence it is related to punishment and Hell, as expressed in the exchanging of the term "mannysh" for "feendlich." In this particular instance the vice is specifically bound to the female gender, and is disciplined by its exclusion from the Christian community. By assuming traits reserved for males, the female character oversteps a boundary, trespasses on male territory, and is consequently termed "mannysshe;" not only is she denied her own gender identity, but the classification of her behaviour as a vice also assigns her to the abnormal. In the Man of Law's Tale this crossing of gender boundaries is expressed in the poet's inability to conceptualize Donegild in his own words and the

\[101\] The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry, Compiled For the Instruction of His Daughters, ed. Thomas Wright, EETS 33 (London: Trübner, 1868), 3.

\[102\] Knight, 136.

\[103\] The MED offers translations, such as "lacking in refinement," or "barbarous, uncivilized."
subsequent denial that she has a soul. Butler's description of the gender identities which
"cannot exist" is taken literally in the tale; the spiritual death of Donegild is followed later on
by her physical death. As in the case of the Sultanness, the Other has no place and its
destruction is the only answer the Self has to this challenge.

A radical change in Chaucer's attitude towards Otherness can be observed in his
description of the Anglo-Saxon pagans inhabiting Northumberland. In contrast to the
Muslims, nothing specific is known about their religious or cultural habits, other than that they are "payens"; the country, we learn, had once been inhabited by Christians but they had been driven south, to Wales. Very much as the explorers of the "New World" in the sixteenth
century viewed the indigenous peoples, Chaucer regards the earlier, pagan state of his own
culture as a "blank canvas" on which the image of Christianity could be painted.104 These Anglo-Saxon pagans are depicted right from the outset as potential Christians, and are in
effect no different from the Christians they are later going to be; they are not "in possession
of a competing reality."105 The pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons exist in a kind of limbo, in a
"neutral space of potentiality, having no possible 'religion' of their own."106 This idea of the
"blank canvas" is usually applied to the way in which the Europeans encountered exotic,
previously unknown people, as mentioned above in the case of the discovery of the

104See Bernard McGrane, Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 15. As pointed out earlier, this observation also holds true to a certain degree for the Saracens, since the text constructs them according to its own requirements. In the case of the Anglo-Saxons, however, this fact is much more pronounced.

105McGrane, Anthropology, 15.

106Mc Grane, Anthropology, 16.
Americas: "the exotic is always empty, it is characterized by lack, and this incompleteness calls forth and justifies attempts to fill in this gap in iconographical, textual, sexual and military terms."\(^{107}\)

As I pointed out in the representation of the pagan stage of the Anglo-Saxons, their identity is also non-existent. To modify Mason's thesis one could posit that it is not the previous state of the Other which is pivotal in its treatment as a non-entity but rather that the decisive factor here is the projection of the wish to make the Other the Same. The pagan Anglo-Saxons are certainly not perceived as exotic in the sense in which the peoples of the Americas have been, and yet their treatment is similar. Despite these differences, however, both have in common that from the viewpoint of the European Christians they are suitable for conversion. Like the narrator in the *Man of Law's Tale*, the missionaries were primarily interested in spreading their own faith rather than in understanding the indigenous culture of the peoples they encountered: "The religious were not interested in studying native society for its own sake, but only as a means of incorporating it as quickly and as completely as possible into what Oviedo called 'the Christian Republic.'"\(^{108}\)

The earlier, pagan stage of the Northumbrians exists mainly through the absence of Christianity, denoted by their description as "payens" (II, 534, 542), as opposed to the "Cristene Britons" (II, 547). The few Christians who live there serve later on as a bridge to lead the pagan population to Christianity. Even though the pagans in Northumberland are as


much outside the Christian *communitas* as the Syrians, there seems to be an underlying notion which associates them with the Christian Self even before their conversion. Specific signs of this proximity are the three Christians who live in the vicinity of Hermengild's castle and, more importantly, the trial scene of Constance before King Alla, which eventually leads to the conversion of the whole population:

And for this miracle, in conclusioun,

And by Custances mediacioun,

The kyng -- and many another in that place --

Converted was .... (II, 683-86)

This anticipation of the Anglo-Saxons' conversion is mirrored in the trial of Constance; even though Alla and his people are still pagans when they start the trial, the procedures of this trial are already described as those of a later Christian, Anglo-Saxon, or Anglo-Norman culture,¹⁰⁹ a fact which contradicts the time-sequence of the events. This sequence of events is significant here; the references to Christian Celts, who formerly inhabited the region, the remaining pockets of Christians, the "Britoun book, written with Evaungiles" (II, 666) and the trial scene itself not only anticipate the conversion, but also help to create a link between the Anglo-Saxons' phase of paganism and their conversion to Christianity. Their Otherness is

¹⁰⁹Marie P. Hamilton, "The Dramatic Suitability of the 'Man of Law's Tale',' in *Studies in Language and Literature in Honor of Margaret Schlauch*, ed. Mieczysław Brahmer, Stanisław Helsztynski and Julian Krzyżanowski (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1966), 158, remarks on this fact, but omits to mention the sequence of events: "In developing the judgment scene, therefore, Chaucer had in mind the only judicial procedure that was consonant with his plot, or historically appropriate to the setting of the episode, in a household which included Christian converts in the Anglo-Saxon domain of Alla." Joseph Allen Hornsby, *Chaucer and the Law* (Norman, Ok.: Pilgrim Books, 1988), 147-48, claims details of the judicial procedure reveal that the trial scene does not represent Anglo-Saxon law, but is the much later Anglo-Norman law.
presented as merely a phase they have to pass through and is at no point an issue.

The consequence of this portrayal of the Anglo-Saxons' past as a blank page is that their conversion is irreversible; unlike the Muslims described at the beginning of the tale, the Anglo-Saxons do not have the possibility of returning to their former Self, since it never existed. As a result, cultural or religious differences are hardly mentioned and the narrative centres on Constance's miracles. The strategy in this case is to stress the accomplishment of the transition to Christianity rather than to create binary oppositions between the old and the new religion. The miracles (the healing of the blind and Constance's defence in court) act as catalysts to bring about the conversion first of Hermengyld and the constable and later of King Alla himself. In contrast to the Syrians, these European pagans can be described as "proto-Christians," who almost seem to have been waiting for an appropriate signal to convert. Even though those Syrians who consented to their conversion become in effect almost identical with the Christians, as pointed out above, there is still an underlying difference which distinguishes them from the pagan Anglo-Saxons. The law of *disparitas cultus*, mentioned in connection with Constance's first marriage, emphasizes only a disparity of religion and does not stress ethnic difference. Consequently, discussion of such differences, or at least its mention, would have been as appropriate in the second instance as it was in the first. The wedding with King Alla, and the resulting conversion, however, are treated only in a cursory way. Chaucer, who in the first case gave some space to explaining the marriage partners' "diversitee" in faith and the efforts to overcome this difficulty, hardly comments on the formal aspect of Constance's marriage with Alla. He even stresses the normality of the union by refusing to give a fuller account of it:
Me list nat of the chaf, ne of the stree,
Maken so long a tale as of the corn.
What sholde I tellen of the roialtee
At mariage . . .

(II, 701-04)

Chaucer’s reluctance to tell more about Constance’s marriage with Alla is symptomatic of the mentalité according to which the European Other is represented in the tale. With his refusal to relate any particular details of the marriage’s formal aspects, Chaucer creates an image of the normal and the usual; according to him it is just another, typical marriage of the aristocracy: cultural difference is a non-topic in this context. If one contrasts this description with that of the Syrians, where complex legal and diplomatic efforts are necessary in order to make the marriage possible, the topic of the Anglo-Saxons’ Otherness exists merely in the text’s silence. The moment Alla and his people convert to Christianity the last trace of their previous difference disappears; they have become an integral part of the Self and are henceforth no longer distinguishable from their former opponents.

The two different mentalities displayed in connection with two radically different ethnic groups become most apparent if one compares the reaction of the Christians when finally confronted with their former opponents. A new structure of binary opposition is created; the old dichotomy of Christian - non-Christian has been superseded by the opposition between assimilation and independence.110 As already mentioned, the Syrians

\[110\] I disagree with Kolve, *Imagery*, 321-24, who explains the different treatment of the former Syrian Christians and the Anglo-Saxon Christians by pointing to the Syrians' inappropriate motivation: they have a personal reason for the conversion (the Sultan's love for Constance) as opposed to Alla, who is moved by the miracle. Since *amour-de-long* was considered one of the highest forms of the expression of love it would not likely have been used
become victims of a punitive expedition by the Christians; no difference is made between those who converted and those who kept their old faith. The Sultaness's killing is answered by even greater bloodshed. Alla's killing of his mother, Donegild, however, results in an enthusiastic welcome in Rome, "as to doon any kyng a reverence" (II, 1001). The Pope absolves him of his responsibility for his mother's death and after the recognition of his wife and his son he is firmly integrated into a genealogy of European rulers. The Sultaness and her followers are killed by the Romans, whereas Alla's son is made a Christian emperor. The most visible symbol of the extension of the Self is the integration of Maurice, Constance's and Alla's son, into the succession of Christian, European rulers:

   This child Maurice was sithen Emperour
   Maad by the Pope, and lyved cristenly;
   To Cristes chirche he dide greet honour. (II, 1121-23)

The inclusion of Maurice into the succession of Christian emperors transcends the eventual death of the Self, symbolized in Constance and Alla. It ensures that the Self is extended beyond the physical limits of its agents. In direct contrast stands the conclusion of the tale, where the dichotomy between the Self and the Other is represented in its ultimate terms; the independent Other is relegated to the realm of the non-being. To the mentality displayed in the tale a continuous existence of the Other outside the control of the Self is not tolerable.

In Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* two strategies of its elimination are apparent. One possibility is to associate the Other with the infernal, the negative side of Christianity. From in order to describe a morally inferior motivation as suggested by Kolve. What is interesting in Kolve's argument is that he, like his medieval precursors, turns the question of Otherness into an issue of morality, or rather the lack of it.
there the exclusion of the Other is taken further and the negation of the soul is extended to the body. The tale translates spiritual death in the Christian sense into physical death; on this dark side of Christianity the water of the font turns into blood. The second way to deal with the Other is exemplified in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Like the merchants and the Sultan in the beginning of the tale, the Anglo-Saxons are absorbed into Christianity. In the case of the Northumbrians the transformation is total: a "lapse" into the other culture is not possible since by their very construction any part of their identity before their conversion is suppressed.

Despite the variety of Christian and non-Christian Others appearing in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, the strategies used in their literary constructions are remarkably similar. One over-riding principle is that Otherness, be it based on religion, gender, or culture, is not permitted to exist next to the Christian Self. In every instance the Other is purged from the text, although again the specific textual strategies for doing so vary. Those who are "unrelenting" and unwilling to be subdued face physical extinction, while in other cases all former traits of Otherness are virtually erased and are replaced by those of the Christian culture.
PART 3

"Wickit Langage": Leprosy And The Social Construction of Blame

Concepts are not spontaneously created but are determined by their "ancestors."

Ludwik Fleck, 1935.

He hat ys yn dedly synne / Gostely he ys a mesyl with-ynne.

Robert Mannyng of Brunne, Handlyng Synne.

Lepra comep of diuers causes.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De proprietaribus rerum.

And the leper in whom the plague is his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.

Leviticus 14, 45.

1.1. The Social and Historical Significance of Leprosy

In his Madness and Civilization Michel Foucault comments on the social space the lepers inhabited in late medieval society, and the lasting impact this social position had long after the waning of the actual disease:
What doubtless remained longer than leprosy, and would persist when the lazur houses had been empty for years, were the values and images attached to the figure of the leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure which was not driven off without first being inscribed within a sacred circle.¹

Foucault's work is, of course, not primarily concerned with the medieval leper but it could not be achieved without him. The figure of the medieval leper does not merely stand for a sick person, it also embodies a whole range of notions and reactions to this particular kind of a diseased body. Unlike other diseases, however, leprosy represents more than just another sickness: the strict rules of segregation and stigmatization, which can be traced back to the injunctions in Leviticus, assign the leper a special place in relation to the rest of society. The unanimous and strong reaction of society towards lepers cannot be satisfactorily explained by the seemingly logical reason of protecting the healthy from the diseased. One might ask here what exactly is it that the rest of society is so afraid of that great pains are taken to segregate those unfortunates? Why are the rules regulating contact between lepers and the rest of society almost identical in geographically highly diverse areas? Considering all the attempts to contain lepers, a logical question is, what kind of power do these sick bodies have in order to provoke such adverse reactions?

Foucault notes that there are certain societal reactions which can be delineated from the time of the Middle Ages and which for centuries to come regulate the way in which

society dealt, and to some extent still deals, with its misfits:

Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds" would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well. With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain -- essentially that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration.²

Using Foucault's analysis as a point of departure in my examination of the phenomenon of leprosy, I want to redirect the critical focus primarily onto the medieval period and examine several particular issues, such as the inscription of the disease on the human body, the social strategies of stigmatization and, most importantly, the textual strategies of the construction of blame. The underlying assumption of my argument is that there is a co-dependence between the lepers and the rest of society, albeit an uneasy one, since even those who are stigmatized and largely excluded from society are yet very much a part of the social makeup. One of Foucault's observations that is productive in this context is his drawing attention to the double-bind that exists between the leper and society: on the one hand, every imaginable attempt is made to exclude the lepers from a shared physical space, whereas on the other hand there seems to exist an equally strong need within society for some

²Foucault, Madness, 7.
perception of an outsider, who, despite all attempts of exclusion, is nevertheless included in the social and discursive space shared by both society and outcast. In my argument here I am building on the assumption of the socio-hygienic role of the leper, which allows for a discursive identification of a particular group of outsiders, whose visible Otherness sets them apart from the mainstream of society. One consequence of this position, apart from their forming a distinct social group, is that lepers can be used to explain, condemn, or regulate certain social phenomena which do not necessarily have to do with the primary cause of their difference, namely their disease. In this position the leper represents a social locus for certain traits which are seen as standing in opposition to social norms and values, and the leper thus fulfills the function of supplying a negative foil or more precisely of a scapegoat against or through which certain values of the dominant late medieval culture can be defined.

In this part of the dissertation I want to explore two aspects of the phenomenon of medieval leprosy. The first is the discussion of the disease from a transhistorical perspective: certain notions and anxieties which surrounded the medieval discourse of leprosy have proved astonishingly long-lived and are clear indications that some diseases are not purely medical phenomena, neatly contained in and by scientific discourse, but are also social phenomena that shape and define social behaviour. The second aspect concerns the rhetorical strategies employed by medieval narratives which mirror the social implications of leprosy, the most important of them being the ascription of blame. As part of this investigation I want to conduct an experiment and read the literary representations of leprosy as medical case histories since both genres, the narrative text as well as the medical texts are accounts that offer some form of description of the disease's etiology and both attempt to explain the
reasons that have led up to the patient's condition. The reason for this enterprise is that I see texts of both genres essentially as narratives, which can be interpreted as fictions and as specific literary creations since both rely on a number of shared rhetorical strategies.

Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* is the centre of my investigation, and is supplemented with examples drawn from Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*, as well as Konrad von Würzburg's *Engelhard*, the latter two highlighting certain issues which are not or only briefly discussed by Henryson. Before taking up this investigation, though, I want to sketch briefly the history of leprosy and its institution from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.

1.2. The Institutionalization of Leprosy in Historical Context

By the eleventh century documented cases of leprosy become more frequent and it is possible to distinguish a pattern of social reactions to the disease, the most remarkable of which is the creation of hospitals and lazar houses in western Europe. The fact of an increasing number of foundations of leper hospitals is, however, as Peter Richards remarks, not directly indicative of a rise in the number of cases of leprosy. Richards sees motives other than acts of pure charity in this significant increase:

> The mushrooming of leper hospitals in the early Middle Ages indicates that the disease was widespread, but it does not prove that leprosy was either common or increasing. Before inferring an explosive outburst of the disease it would be wise to ask why the hospitals were founded. Were they established to combat an epidemic or was there another reason? If these hospitals were primarily dedicated to the public health, why were the resources so curiously
dedicated: St. Giles' leper hospital at Norwich, to take an extreme case, had an establishment of a master, 8 chaplains, 2 clerks-in-holy-orders, 7 choristers, 2 sisters, and 8 lepers; why not a master, a chaplain, 2 sisters, and many poor lepers?³

Richard's comment on the apparently rather more self-serving than charitable nature of many of these foundations permits the (probably conservative) conclusion that leper hospitals served the society which created them as much as those for whose benefit they were claimed to exist. Several benefactors make no secret of their intentions when founding leper hospitals, as for instance in the case of Robert de Roos, who in 1225 founded a house in Bolton "for the health of my soul and for all my predecessors and successors." In a similar way the foundation of the hospital at Cardiff during the reign of Richard II was motivated "for the good state of the King, the Earl of Gloucester, and the burgesses and commonality, and for their souls after death, and to maintain 24 beds in the hospital for leprous, poor and feeble persons ... ."⁴ These examples illustrate that concern for the public, or even for the lepers themselves, was not necessarily a primary motivation to make large endowments to leper hospitals; it was rather the founders' own interests that were put first and foremost, or in Richard's words, "in short, medieval leper hospitals were essentially the expression of charity engendered by a heavenly bandwagon, not a spirited defence of the national health."⁵


⁵Richards, *Medieval Leper*, 12.
Apart from the rather selfish motivation to donate money for a good cause, what these examples demonstrate is the almost mutual dependence of the lepers on society to create the necessary institutions and thus spaces for them, but also the need of society for some group of outcasts on whom these works of charity could be performed. In this sense, the double bind between leper and society goes beyond the previously mentioned scapegoat function and even enables members of society with money to raise their social status by making an endowment, as well as ensuring the spiritual care of their souls, a fact that is not to be underestimated. I take this ambivalent relationship between society and its outcasts as symptomatic of this mutual dependence, a relationship which goes beyond the more materialistic or directly spiritual concerns outlined in the quotes above.

A further factor, which I think is unique for the way in which medieval society dealt with the phenomenon of leprosy, is the universality with which it was recognized throughout medieval Europe. R. I. Moore stresses the uniqueness of the phenomenon as "one which represents a remarkable effort of organization and expenditure."\(^6\) Despite a high degree of decentralization and a strong emphasis on local structures, the establishment of institutions devoted to lepers occurred at roughly the same time and was to be observed almost universally all over western Europe.\(^7\) Significant in this context is that this development in its somewhat anomalous uniformity points to a common perception of the threat posed by


\(^7\) See the table by Moore, *Formation*, 52, which traces the development of *leprosaria* in England/Wales, the Pas de Calais region, and Paris between 1075 and 1300.
leprosy, or more precisely, by the lepers themselves. Although charitable motives certainly played a significant role in the foundations of these institutions, it cannot be overlooked that all this happened in an increasingly hostile environment for lepers. Moore makes the point that the threat of exclusion from a leper house as a sanction of a repeated breaking of the house's rules does not necessarily mean that the prime purpose of these houses was not the lepers' segregation, but merely means that life outside was even worse:

In other words, the anxiety of the leper to be admitted to the lazaret house, or not to be expelled from it, and the degree of charitable achievement which its foundation and maintenance represented, must be very largely a measure both of the rigour with which segregation was being insisted on and the horrors which attended it.

In accordance with this observation is John Boswell’s thesis, which claims that from the second half of the twelfth century on a dramatically rising intolerance affected a number of disadvantaged, but highly heterogenous social groups, such as Jews, homosexuals, "and lepers all over France [who were] imprisoned and prosecuted on charges of poisoning wells and being in league with Jews and witches." While part of a general movement towards the persecution of minorities, the almost uniform attempts to single out lepers and to segregate

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8 Peter Richards, *Medieval Leper*, 5: "Attitudes towards lepers in medieval Europe shared a uniformity imposed by one Church. Only by understanding the reason behind these attitudes can the full impact of the disease upon those who suffered from it be uncovered."


them make this group distinct from, say, the Jews, who, although universally persecuted had to suffer more from localized incidents. These were often triggered by a specific event, such as for example the discovery of a boy's body in a well at Lincoln in 1255, an event that achieved a sad notoriety in the tale of "Little Hugh of Lincoln," and had gruesome consequences for the Jewish community; nineteen Jews were hanged and a further ninety barely escaped the same fate.11

A specific paradox, which is characteristic of the ambiguous relation society had to the lepers, was that they were frequently made responsible for their own suffering, and in the sense outlined by Boswell, also accused of other crimes, a fact which seems to stand at odds with the immense fear of contagion. Theological and medical opinions frequently agree that moral transgressions are the reason for the outbreak of the disease. The Middle Ages did not solve this paradox, but at least it spared the lepers the universal condemnation of other marginal groups, as described by Belker:

> While scripture had nothing to say to "exonerate" Jews, "witches," and sodomites, the lepers could at least be respected as having a future of a residence in heaven, as the successors of patient Iob and could be included into the canon of Christian works of charity.12

This ambiguous status of the leper is another indication of the mutual dependence of lepers and society outlined above: while the lepers needed society to survive, society in turn needed


its lepers not only as "God's poor people" on whom works of charity could be performed, but also as agents of sickness, deformity, and uncleanness against which society could define its own notions of selfhood, and purity, and thus establish a paradigm of 'normality.'

2. Leprosy and its Social Functions

2.1. The Cultural Context: "Unclean, unclean!"

The difference between the leper and the healthy person is more than simply one which separates the sick from the healthy person; the measures taken to identify, as well as to contain, lepers suggest that this dialectic entails a signification process which points to a social mechanism that affects society at large and not merely those afflicted by the disease. It is not so much the presence of the disease, but rather the deviation from a certain norm which accounts for the presence of the social 'dis-ease.' Although diseases have without doubt serious consequences for the lives of the individual patient and can entail a great deal of very real pain and individual suffering, the presence of a disease is nevertheless also a social condition, which can be subject to change as society's attitudes change. Diseases do not exist, and have never existed, in a social vacuum. Human bodies, it follows, are never the private entity one assumes or wishes they were, but are always part of a public and political system, a body politic in the true sense of the word. In a state of health this relationship

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13 Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality, and Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1991), 104, explains the rejection of homosexuality from the list of clinical conditions in 1973: "The decision of the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 to withdraw homosexuality from its list of diseases was not a result of careful scientific reassessment. It was transparently a result of careful lobbying and mobilisation, which reflected a new willingness on the part of homosexual people to break with hostile categorisation."
between the private body and the social system is hardly noticeable, since the former functions and looks in accordance with the expectations of the latter. It is only when this 'contract of normality' is disrupted that these constraints become visible:

Any given human body may be a discrete physical object, but conceptually the human body participates in the collective architecture of a larger social body. This larger body cannot be cordonned off from ideological forces. It cannot be understood to be apolitical or to stand outside the vicissitudes of historical social systems and beliefs. Hence, efforts to understand and to control any given human body in its interactions with other bodies -- the task of public -- health policy, for example - participate as well in the inevitably political nature of bodies.¹⁴

Epstein explains the nature of the phenomenon of disease as a threat to a culturally constructed normality which only indirectly takes into account the consequences for the patient. One consequence of this violation of normality and normativity by the patient is that it sets a process in motion which seeks to identify a guilty party, be it of a particular heresy, a deadly sin, a specific virus, or a deemed risk-behaviour. The violation of social norms is seldom without consequences, and in the case of diseased bodies one important consequence is the blaming of something or someone for the state of abnormality. This double-bind becomes particularly obvious in the case of highly emotional discussions of diseases, as for instance, in the case of HIV/AIDS since the early 1980s:

AIDS also represents a threat to the human body, but this threat derives from

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deviations from the norm in the social expectations it has spawned, rather than in resulting in such deviations. In all these cases ... one crucial issue concerns the ascription of blame.\textsuperscript{15}

The case of HIV/AIDS is by no means singular in history; it merely represents the latest manifestation of a number of clinical conditions which have elicited rather violent reactions from society. This violence becomes particularly visible in the rhetoric that surrounds certain stigmatized diseases and their transmission, for which culprits have to be found. In this sense, despite all the achievements made in today's medicine, certain mechanisms of constructing blame can be traced back to a long tradition of judging outsider groups of a particular society or to certain behaviours, considered deviant:

AIDS is by no means the first disease to elicit a rhetoric of blame, pollution, and stigma, or the first epidemic that has infringed on human and civil rights. Jews were accused of spreading bubonic plague in Rome, just as African-Americans were held responsible for syphilis in the United States in the 1930s. . . . We could find the same doling out of blame to the disenfranchised in other outbreaks of these and other diseases -- leprosy, yellow fever, typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis, influenza.\textsuperscript{16}

In the Middle Ages, the connection between diseases and social groups was rather more obvious, but many of the strategies, such as the naming of culprits, and the shifting of blame onto outsider groups, are social reactions to the disease which are by no means

\textsuperscript{15}Epstein, \textit{Conditions},21.

\textsuperscript{16}Epstein, \textit{Conditions},169.
singular events, as the instance of the plague shows:

At the psychological and cultural level European reactions were obvious and varied. . . . In time, rituals arose to discharge anxiety in socially acceptable ways; but in the fourteenth century itself, local panic often provoked bizarre behavior. The first important effort at ritualizing responses to the plague took extreme and ugly forms. In Germany and some adjacent parts of Europe companies of Flagellants aimed at propitiating God's wrath by beating each other bloody and attacking Jews, who were commonly accused of spreading pestilence. 17

These two examples have been selected to reveal an historical continuity which points to an underlying concept of disease, and which shows surprising similarities no matter if the diseases occur in today's Europe and North America or in fourteenth-century Europe. One fundamental observation is that disease has never existed in a vacuum, and, hence that societal evaluation plays an important role in how diseases are perceived. This evaluation also influences discussions about their supposed causes, and ultimately about the nature of conditions, which are considered diseases to begin with.

A particularly forceful association is that of the disease with the perception of the unclean, which in turn permits us to explore some of the social mechanisms employed to construct positions of normality, as well as the intricate ways societies have of laying blame on particular groups and individuals. Mary Douglas in her study Purity and Danger

emphasizes the social significance of "dirt" for definitions of defilement and purity. As a cultural signifier, dirt represents resistance to some kind of order. This violation of order can be expressed in the jargon of our contemporary science of hygiene, or that of other systems of ritual pollution:

If we abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order.

Dirt is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system.\(^\text{18}\)

The shouts "unclean, unclean!" uttered by the priest in Leviticus after having examined a person suspected of having contracted leprosy echo this system of ritual division of cleanness and defilement. The priest's diagnosis can be interpreted as the awareness that a system of (ritual) purity has been violated. His words are the beginning of an attempted reconstruction of order by pointing out those individuals who are considered polluted, and thus as standing in opposition to the system. The reaction of the priest is to single out inappropriate elements, which might have the potential to disrupt this system: "In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications."\(^\text{19}\)

The body of the leper represents precisely this threat to a society which can not accept\(^\text{18}\)Mary Douglas,\emph{ Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo}\ (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 35. I want to add here that I interpret 'dirt' not as a moral category, but rather as a discursive signifier, which can take on any number of culturally defined meanings. "This idea of dirt takes us into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity" (ibid).

\(^\text{19}\)Douglas,\emph{ Purity}, 36.
its deformed surface. As Douglas puts it, "the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious." The leprous body is at once defying the boundaries set up by the community of the 'healthy,' and at the same time delineating the boundaries of this very community. Douglas further argues that the reason bodily margins and surfaces are so invested with power and danger is that they symbolize vulnerable areas, 'points-of-entry' into the body, so to speak. Although different cultures interpret these dangers in radically different ways, they all have in common some preconception of intrusiveness, which could alter the body's state. Clearly, the presence of the leper violates these carefully guarded bodily boundaries, and thus creates a great deal of anxiety: the disease and its disfigurements on the leper's skin defy any system of carefully guarded entrances, while the inflamed skin and its lesions make the leper's body 'fluid', that is boundaries between the body's surface and the environment become hard to define. As a consequence intrusions in both directions are possible: the "leaking bodies" are difficult to contain in the sense that the lesion's discharge can contaminate areas outside the infected body, as well as matter from the outside world can enter the sick body via these infected areas. Douglas locates one of the bodily danger zones at the very margins of the body, since at this point bodies can alter their shape and appearance.

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21 Douglas, *Purity*, 121-26. Douglas highlights the arbitrariness of this system by referring to the Hindu caste system, where women who have sexual intercourse with a man of a lower caste are brutally punished, but those who commit adultery with a man from a higher caste are introduced into his lineage.
and can be transformed into unfamiliar, altered bodies. Furthermore, any bodily discharge emanating from these openings is treated as highly suspicious substances:

Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body.

If bodily fluids, which are the sign of a healthy, normally functioning body, can cause a great deal of anxiety, how much more powerful must be the discharge of the diseased body, one might ask at this point. Douglas concludes her discussion of the significance of the body's margins with the observation that its investment with power is dependent on the specific culture and its shared beliefs: "Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring."

The situation which is present in the leprous body is that of a state of sickness, that of a malfunctioning body. One of the most crucial measures taken to differentiate between the healthy and the sick is that of a diagnosis, however crude and simple it may be. This could mean nothing more than simply to find out if an item or a person for that matter violates

22 A contemporary example would be the practice of body piercing, which is frequently found among young people in their late teens and twenties. This practise creates clearly visible symbols on the body that express their wearers' belonging to a specific group; in addition it also serves to differentiate them from older, more established members of society. There is, of course, also the "shock value," since the practise alters the appearance of the body by penetrating its surface in parts which are expected to be closed to the environment and unadorned.

23 Douglas, Purity, 121.

24 Douglas, Purity, 121.
'cherished institutions' by being 'out of place.' A very simple model of a diagnosis would be Douglas's example of such seemingly trivial incidents, such as shoes being put on the dining table, or cooking implements in the bedroom, to illustrate violations of order. To determine, however, that shoes do not belong on the dining table, we first have to make the observation that they are out of place, thus to diagnose their inappropriately location in order to pronounce an irregularity and remedy the situation by putting the shoes where they belong.

In a similar way the medical diagnosis seeks to establish certainty about the health of a particular individual; for this purpose referring to pre-existing case histories is instrumental in establishing an etiology. These case histories can then be perceived as a form of "clinical storytelling," which lends itself to methods of interpretations no different from those of other literary genres:

The process of producing differential diagnosis, therefore, comes to mimic in a variety of ways the process of interpreting other kinds of narrative stories. In other words, clinicians seeking to locate the causes of particular disruptions to the body bring to their task a set of intellectual operations conceptually similar to those used by literary critics, philosophers, ethnographers, and others whose job it is to interpret nonmedical narratives.

The basic purpose of these 'clinical narratives' is to establish whether a specific condition of order has been violated, that is, whether the body can be designated as sick or healthy.

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2.2. Interpreting Disease

One of the underlying notions of diseases as expressions of a disturbed social order is that they signify conditions of living bodies, which defy an ordering principle, namely that of the healthy, and in a clinical sense, largely 'invisible' body. The 'visibility' of the body means that in a state of health it does not draw any undue attention to its functioning. This clinical visibility is mainly determined by the nature and severity which vary according to the disease, but which alter a body's "natural" state. A diagnosis, consequently is an Erkenntnisvorgang, a process of recognition, which in this context involves the 'reading' and interpretation of certain symptoms in order to determine whether a body is to be classified as violating a system of order (commonly referred to as 'a state of health') or whether these symptoms are to be disregarded.

Ludwik Fleck, who in 1935 published the account of his investigation of the development of the modern understanding of concept of syphilis as a venereal disease,\(^{28}\) can in my opinion be credited as one of the first theoreticians of science to acknowledge the importance of the various perceptions and explanations of the disease-entity throughout their history, as well as their influence on its present etiology. One of the valuable tools devised by Fleck is his separation of the disease as a discursive entity from the 'causes' attributed to it during the course of its history. Characteristic of Fleck's work is the importance which he

then attaches to the social forces that shape the discourses on disease:

Furthermore, whether we like it or not, we can never sever our links with the past, complete with all its errors. It survives in accepted concepts, in the preservation of problems, in the syllabus of formal education, in everyday life, as well as in language and institutions.\footnote{Fleck, Genesis, 20.}

For the epistemology of a particular concept of what is commonly referred to as a 'disease', Fleck advocates the inclusion of its history, since current concepts are not simply spontaneous creations, existing in an ahistorical vacuum, but are always determined by their historical predecessors, as unlikely and 'unscientific' as these predecessors may appear if viewed from a later period. Fleck exemplifies this by referring to the concept of syphilis, which is not to be formulated as 'the disease caused by Spirochaeta pallida.' On the contrary, 

\begin{itemize}
  \item Spirochaeta pallida
\end{itemize}

must be designated 'the microorganism related to syphilis.' Any other definition of this microbe is hopeless, and further, because of the question of germ carriers, cannot serve to define the disease unambiguously.\footnote{Fleck, Genesis, 21.}

For an appropriate understanding of the disease and all its ramifications Fleck devises the concept of what he terms a "thought collective," or "Denkkollektiv," which "provides the special 'carrier' for the historical development of any field of thought, as well as for the given
stock of knowledge and level of culture."\textsuperscript{31} The practical application of the role of the thought collective and the dependence on it of any scientific inquiry into the disease's historical predecessors, is readily apparent from Fleck's brief sketch of syphilology:

Disease as a punishment for fornication is the collective notion of a society that is religious. Disease caused by the influence of the stars is a view characteristic of the astrological fraternity. Speculations of medical practitioners about therapy with metals spawned the mercury idea. The blood idea was derived by medical theoreticians from the vox populi, 'Blood is a humor with distinctive virtues'.\textsuperscript{32}

This brief outline of various historical responses to the phenomenon of syphilis, as well as the attempts to explain the disease's origins and to find cures do not merely illustrate the nature of the disease as a \textit{social} construct, but as a consequence are also indicative of the disease as a \textit{discursive} concept. Expanding on the wider category of thought, Fleck emphasizes the nature of the community, which shares certain mental concepts:

Cognition is the most socially-conditioned activity of man, and knowledge is the paramount social creation [\textit{Gebilde}]. The very structure of language presents a compelling philosophy characteristic of that community, and even a single word can represent a complex theory. To whom do these philosophies and theories belong?\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31}Fleck, \textit{Genesis}, 39.

\textsuperscript{32}Fleck, \textit{Genesis}, 41.

\textsuperscript{33}Fleck, \textit{Genesis}, 42.
Fleck's question about the property of ideas and notions is crucial in the discussion of the significance of the historically unstable place of concepts such as diseases. To take up this thought I want to add another and yet I think related question, which will guide my own inquiry into the nature of the late medieval phenomenon of leprosy, namely the question, to whom does the disease belong?

The easy part of the answer to this question is that it very rarely 'belongs' to the patients themselves, as will be relatively clear to anyone who is aware of the objectification of the patient in modern clinical discourses. Rather more complex is the second part of the answer, which touches upon the relationship between those governing the discourses of disease (today's medical, scientific, and political professionals) and those who are the objects of the discourse, the *patientes*. The thought collective, as indicated in Fleck's brief historical overview, can also account for the intrinsic power relations in this kind of discourse. As in all situations where power is distributed unevenly, the question is whom do these discourses serve? Who stands to gain from the injunctions, recommendations, regulations, sanctions, segregations ...?

To illustrate this with a brief and by no means meant to be exhaustive example, I want to invoke the situation of the sick as well as the healthy body in today's society as embattled *loci*, claimed by the medical establishment, rather aptly called in German *Schulmedizin*, that

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34 A rare and courageous example of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of the modern discourse of institutionalized psychiatry is, in my opinion, Hanna Green's narrative *Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). The fact that the author had to resort to using a pseudonym is a sad testimony to the inherent violence of clinical system and particular its mental institutions, which in itself negate the possibility of a 'cure' and its complicity with the social stigmatization associated with particular kinds of diseases, such as schizophrenia.
is trying to assert its own legitimacy in a sphere of economic and political power. The political system, which grants the medical profession its financial as well as its social prestige, in turn receives at least some its legitimation from this profession, as do the pharmaceutical companies which are first and foremost responsible to their shareholders. In addition, a not-to-be underestimated power is exerted by the media which shape the perceptions and opinions of the public. For the Middle Ages I want to argue that the sick body presents an equally embattled space, but one claimed, this time, by the prime moral institution of the church and its civil authorities.

2.3. Leprosy and its Diagnosis

To enforce this system of control over sick and healthy bodies the authorities have to rely upon the readiness of members of the community to denounce the suspect. No different from the morally justifiable handing over of a criminal, the first stage of the diagnosis of the leper is usually as Brody states, the sick person being suspected of being a disease carrier and his denunciation, typically by neighbours; following the denunciation is the examination:

The initiation of a victim into his hell was usually undertaken in an atmosphere of castigation. The law often required the leper to report himself to those entrusted with diagnosing leprosy, but voluntary admission of the disease must have been infrequent,

For an example of the interdependence between the medical profession and political forces, see Epstein, Conditions, 158-59, and her explanation of the effect of the double-bind on the body of the HIV positive person: "In addition to being jammed with what Stephen S. Morse calls 'viral traffic', the body infected by HIV has also been penetrated by a set of politically and socially hostile notions of contagion, pollution, and threatening communicability."
and usually the separation of the leper began with public accusation by neighbors.\textsuperscript{36}

The oldest evidence of this practice and the ensuing examination is found in \textit{Leviticus} 13: 2, 42-45. The aim of the procedure, which, as outlined in the passage, is to arrive at a diagnosis, is incidentally also the most obvious link between religion and disease:

When a man shall have the skin of his flesh rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy; then shall he be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests: \ldots And if there be in the bald head, or bald forehead, a white reddish sore; it is a leprosy sprung up in his bald head, or his bald forehead. Then the priest shall look upon it: and behold, if the rising of the sore be white reddish in his bald head \ldots as the leprosy appeareth in the skin of the flesh; he is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head.

This diagnosis is a straightforward narrative process, which verifies certain physical symptoms, in this case inflamed lesions of the skin, and pronounces the verdict "clean" or "unclean."

Depending on the diagnosis, the patient is then either released or segregated from the community. For the duration of the disease the leper is removed from the community and is forced to reside outside its boundaries, as outlined in the following verse: "All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." Only the priest then can decide whether someone once diagnosed is considered 'cured' and allowed to re-enter the society of the healthy. As

\textsuperscript{36}Brody, \textit{Disease}, 61, and Ricards, \textit{Sex, Dissidence}, 151.
already discussed above, the verdict "unclean" denotes more than simply the presence of unclean objects: it rather signifies in this context that the system of social order, which regulates the early Jewish community, has been upset by one of its members. For the Middle Ages the examination of the leper, the *examen leprosorum*, or *Leprachau*, was the basis for the social exclusion of the diseased. The suspected leper is thoroughly examined, and depending on the outcome, the sick person is then asked to leave the community as a living dead, to take up residence beyond the boundaries of the town or settlement, most likely in a lazar house.\(^{37}\)

Of particular importance in this context is that the early Jewish community perceived leprosy as a punishment for sins:

Hebrew commentators on *Leviticus* give a variety of causes for leprosy: idol worship, gross unchastity, bloodshed, profanity, blasphemy, robbing the public, illegally usurping a dignity, overweening pride, evil speech, the evil eye. . . . The Hebrew tradition carried over into Christianity and when the Bible was translated into Greek and Latin, the words for 'unclean' - *akathartos* and *immundus* - did have moral connotations.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\)Belker, "Feind," 207 also remarks on the social mechanisms of the lepers' exclusion from society: "The theoretically emphasized moments of labelling, segregation, and ghettoization, which in the case of other marginal groups can often only be documented in their most rudimentary shape, are to be observed in the case of the lepers almost in their purest form. (My translation.)

\(^{38}\)Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 159.
2.4. The Diagnosis as Text

Medical texts give an outline of a multitude of symptoms and attempt to provide a catalogue of the various manifestations of the disease.\textsuperscript{39} To illustrate the medieval thought community's ways of 'writing leprosy', I have selected John Trevisa's Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's encyclopedia \textit{De proprietaribus rerum}. Chapter 64 of book VII deals with leprosy and lists four principal forms of the disease: "In foure maner wise \textit{lepra} is diuers, as \textit{he} foure humours be\textit{p} passingliche and diuersliche imedeled."\textsuperscript{40} Bartholomy's text here shows its indebtedness to the theory of humours as an explanation for the etiology of the disease. Based on the teachings of Hippocrates, the theory was most notably propagated by Galen and applied to explain numerous medical conditions: a balanced distribution of humours signifies good health, whereas an excess or deficiency is a sign of sickness.\textsuperscript{41} According to this theory, there are four common types of leprosy as the chapter in Trevisa shows: \textit{lepra elephancia}, \textit{lepra tiria} or \textit{serpentina}, \textit{lepra vulpina}, and \textit{lepra leonina}, each

\textsuperscript{39}Saul Nathaniel Brody, \textit{The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 21, notes the remarkable similarity between literary descriptions of leprosy and its representations in contemporary medical texts, and the equally striking dissimilarity between medieval and contemporary manifestations of the disease. He offers the plausible explanation that "the disease has probably altered its form since the Middle Ages, and [that] medieval doctors could not always distinguish leprosy from other skin diseases; at the same time, there is evidence that medieval authors were describing not what they saw but what they ought to see and what their readers expected them to see."


primarily depending on the excess of a particular humour, as for instance in the case of *lepra vulpina*:

> Pe þridde maner *lepra* comeþ of melancolye infectinge of blood, and hatte *alopicia* and *vulpina* 'foxissh'; *alopos* in grewe, *vulpes* in latyn, 'fox' in englissh. Þe fox ḣaþ a propirte þat his here fallip in þe somer for hete of blood in þe ly[uour], so ofte his here ḣat ḣaþ þis euel falleþ of browes and of òpir place. (424)

This passage explains the particular stages of reasoning used in the late medieval thought community to construct this particular variant of the disease. The primary reason for the affliction is the patient's infection of his blood with melancholy, a symbol of the earth and associated with black bile, which in turn has the qualities of cold and dry matter, and which then leads to the loss of hair, one of the symptoms of the disease. The complexity of this thought system becomes apparent from its linguistic as well as its allegorical extension to animal qualities: the reference to the fox and its properties invokes a causality which goes beyond the mere explanation of symptoms and offers, in my understanding, a second, competing explication of the disease, which is on a moral level. Medieval bestiaries, most notably the *Physiologus*, have little good to say about the fox. Drawing on a rich tradition from antiquity, the fox is variously described as sly, harmful, and generally an ally of the devil with a particular propensity to fornication, manslaughter, and avarice and whoredom. By giving one particular manifestation of leprosy the name of the fox, the thought community almost automatically sets an associative interpretive process in motion, which in its multiple layers provides an etiology of the disease and at the same time a possible explanation of its
causes. An important part of my interpretation of leprosy in literary texts rests on this combination of outer, or 'environmental' causes, and the moral statement the particular text explicitly or implicitly makes. Trevisa's relatively unemotional enumeration of the possible ways of contracting leprosy are witnesses of this conflation of causes:

Lepra comeþ of diuers causes, ouþir of þe forseid humours, as of dwellynge and wonyngge and companye and ofte ta[l]kynge wiþ leprous men; for þe yuel is contagious and infectip ouþir men. Also it comeþ of fleischly lygyngge by a woman sone aftir þat a leprous man hap ilaye by here. And som[ty]me it comeþ [of] fadir and modir, and so þis contagioun passip into þe childe as it were by lawe of heritage . . . whanne a child is concuyued in menstruel tyme . . . an som[tyme] it comeþ of outward cause . . . (426)

These diverse causes contain any number of possibilities of contagion, ranging from the 'outward' causes, such as bad air or bad meat, the prolonged use of pepper and garlic, the bite of a poisonous worm, to more complex ways of infection by another human, as outlined above. Of particular interest in this list of causes is, again, the mention of some morally highly sensitive issues, such as the disease's sexual transmission. While the list devotes equal space to environmental causes and the consequences of sexual intercourse, it is nevertheless that sexual activity forms one of the subtexts to the discourse of the disease. Richards, for instance, quotes a decree issued by King Edward III in 1346 in order to expel lepers from London, which specifically stresses the danger of sexual contagion posed to the healthy population:

many persons being smitten with the blemish of leprosy . . . endeavouring to
contaminate others with that abominable blemish ... by carnal intercourse
with women in stews and other secret places, detestably frequenting the same,
do so taint persons who are sound, both male and female ...  

The point I want to stress here is that the very etiology of the disease conveys a notion of
corrupt morality and sexual licence, often hidden among lists of 'harmless' causes, which
right from the moment of diagnosis relegate the disease to the field of moral transgressions.
The admittedly somewhat provocative question, asked earlier, to whom the disease belongs,
can, at least partially, be answered by saying that it belongs to those who have an interest in
the control of human sexuality. The notion of uncleanness, already present in the examples in
Leviticus and commented on by Jewish writers, seems to have lived on in the European
Middle Ages. As the discussion of Mary Douglas's notions of purity and danger shows, the
assumptions behind the leper's threat and the assumed contagiousness of the disease have
their foundation in the leper's violation of the community's system of order, not least of its
moral framework; in addition Epstein's analysis of medical narratives in revealing the social
constructedness of these accounts and suggesting their generic relationship to narrative texts,
justifies reading literary accounts in the same manner as the scientific.

3. The Narrative of Leprosy

3.1. Robert Henryson's The Testament of Cresseid and the Question of Guilt

In my reading of Henryson's Testament of Cresseid I want to ask of it some of the questions
discussed above. Of particular relevance in this investigation is what I perceive as the text's

42 Richards, Sex, Dissidence, 158.
conceptualization of the leprous body in order to make a moral judgment. Its aim is to use Cresseid's transformed body as a negative exemplum in order to warn the text's female readers not to follow her example of having more than one sexual partner. One of the underlying strategies the text uses to achieve this end, I would claim, is the construction of blame: Cresseid has failed, and thus there are certain modes of behaviour which bring about her fate. To make Henryson's manner of construction clear I want to contrast the Testament of Cresseid with several other narratives thematizing leprosy: Konrad von Würzburg's Middle High German Engelhard, Beroul's Old French Roman de Tristan, and the Middle English version of the tale of Amis and Amilyoun. The principal difference between Henryson's text and the latter texts is, of course, that they all describe a cure for the disease. This cure stands in sharp contrast to 'scientific' views of the disease, which clearly governed the descriptions of its etiology. The point I want to make here is that the availability of a cure to certain characters, and its unavailability others, like Henryson's Cresseid, signifies one of the clearest literary instances of moral reasoning and its subsequent construction of blame. I want to posit here that it is the overtly sexual nature of Cresseid's trespass which precludes her recovery, and which is the reason for the harsh condemnation of her character, while the disease (even with almost identical symptoms) is treated in a rather less condemning way in at least two of the other texts. The disease may be the physical manifestation of the character's changed state of health, but the reason for this change is found before the disease's onset; the perceived degree of 'guilt' of the individual determines the societal judgement of this individual, and
thus ultimately of the disease itself.⁴³

In my reading of *The Testament of Cresseid* I want to attempt to delineate these two aspects of cure and moral judgment and demonstrate their interdependence. While the reader is confronted with a whole set of medical notions about leprosy and its symptoms, he is also at the same time provided with an interpretative tool, which suggests a reading of the disease in its moral dimension and thus supplements the medical case-history with a socio-moral narrative. Using the interpretative approach suggested by the text, one can see that Cresseid's 'real' disease started much earlier than the outbreak of its symptoms; in the eyes of society, Cresseid has been diseased long before.

Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* opens with the usual invocation of nature, but in this case with spring, described as a "doolie sessoun," in contrast to the usual happy picture of the April's "shoures soote," as one finds in Chaucer's *General Prologue*. Henryson's framing imagery offers a symbolic analogue to his poet-persona's troubles, which are caused by old age.⁴⁴ The poet-persona is unable to fall asleep and takes solace in "ane quair," which is, of course, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Of consequence for my reading

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⁴³Epstein, *Conditions*, 17, for instance investigates the social consequences of HIV/AIDS and unpacks the notion of this interdependence between what she calls 'moralization' and 'medicalization': "Social fears about HIV transmission, indeed, have constructed a powerful story that delegates people with AIDS to a premorbid status as abnormal. Unless you can prove that you are an 'innocent victim', something must have been wrong with you from the start for you to have contracted this disease."

⁴⁴Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leyden: Brill, 1979), 165, interprets this passage as reflecting on the narrator-persona, as well as foreshadowing the events to unfold in the poem: "Perhaps some of its contrasts here are mysterious premonitions of what is to come. The reader may pause later in the poem to reflect that the contrast of temperatures presages the heat and cold of love and of lovers, in the persons both, of the narrator and of Cresseid."
of Henryson's poem, and especially in view of Henryson's narrative use of the disease, is the poet's own, personal situation, briefly mentioned at the beginning. The speaker is obviously not a young man anymore and he makes it clear that he has experienced both the youthful fire of love and its dying in old age, as well as the means to remedy it:

Thoht lufe be hait, yit in ane man of age
It kendillis noht sa sone as in youthheid,
Of whome the blude is flowing in ane rage;
And in the auld the curage doif and deid,
Of whild the fire outward is best remeid:
To helpe pe phisike whair that nature faillit,
I am expert, for baith I have assailit.45

Henryson, here in the persona of the poet-narrator, sets himself up as an authority on the issue of love; and his advanced age, as well as his experience in this matter, doubtless qualifies him in the eyes of his late medieval readers. His invocation of the goddess Venus, whose servant he once has been, to renew his ability to love once more ("my faidid hart of lufe sho wald mak grene," 24) shows his personal involvement in the subject matter. Although his position as the seasoned "hand" of the goddess of love suggests some detachment, it is nevertheless clear that he is by no means a disinterested party. His reference to his own physical shortcomings, due to old age and necessitating the aid of "physike," puts the poet in a curious relationship with his subject: in contrast to the young lovers whose blood is thin and liable to

45 The Testament of Cresseid, in The Poems of Robert Henryson, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 111-131, lines 29-35. All further quotations are from this edition; line numbers will be given directly following the citation.
boil up easily, he himself suffers from an excess of cold and dry humours, which hamper his sexual power and make him unfit for love. Perhaps as a self-ironic aside, the poet recommends "the fyre outward" to remedy this condition, which at best can only give some comfort, but cannot restore the powers of love. Despite this obvious irony, the poet's own diagnosis of his inner coldness stands in sharp contrast to Cresseid's condition, described later. In addition, Henryson deliberately sets himself up as an authority in cases like these since he knows the phenomenon of love from both angles, as an active participant and as the distanced spectator. The poet's self declared position as "expert," here justifying his position as a moral authority, is crucial to my understanding of the way in which the narrative of Cresseid's leprous body is inscribed as a moral lesson, and the manner in which it is used for his didactic purpose to blame her for her own fate.

Henryson's reference to his two sources, the one "written be worthy Chaucer glorious, / Of fair Cresseid and lusty Troilus" (41-42), as well as the fictitious "vther quair" (61) indicate that the Scottish poet, specifically to tidy up the unfinished business of Chaucer's version, sets out in his continuation of Chaucer's poem to attempt a re-reading of the *Troilus and Criseyde* story, as homage and critique at once. The question of authority is important to Henryson and in order to validate his continuation he questions Chaucer's own authority on this matter: "Wha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?" (64). By calling into question the truth of his English predecessor's version, Henryson manages, at least to a certain degree, to validate his own account:

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46Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson*, 168-69, emphasizes the comic potential of this scene and sees it as indicative of the whole poem.
Nor I wait noht gif this narratioun
Be authoreist, or feynit of the new
Be sum poeit, throu his inventioun. (65-67)

His position as a moral authority becomes obvious when he shows sympathy for Troilus's sorrows and, indeed, takes his side. Henryson's remark that Cresseid "was his [Troylus's] only paramour" (53) is a hint at his own coming evaluation of the female figure, as it is clear, particularly against the background of Chaucer's poem, that Cresseid stands for fickleness in love. In his assessment of Troilus, Henryson refers the reader to Chaucer, who "in gudlie termis and in ioly veirs, / Compylit her his cairis quha will luik" (59-60). What is missing is obviously Cresseid's ultimate fate, and it is in the fictitional "vther quair" (61) where her fate is to be found.

This reference to Chaucer's *Troilus* warrants some closer examination; since Henryson's account is to supplement Chaucer's, a comparison of both texts can shed some light on how the continuation deals with the problem of morality and guilt. "It is also," as Fox remarks, "about Chaucer's poem: it offers, by implication, a remarkably accurate and penetrating analysis of *Troilus*. But as well, . . . it is also a serious moral poem in its own right, and one which takes up some of the questions that Chaucer deals with."47 At the conclusion of Chaucer's story, Troilus, whose feeling of betrayal has led him to become a fierce avenger, is finally killed by Achilles and surveys the dealings of the humans from his celestial sphere and gives his own evaluation of what has happened:

And in hymself he logh right at the wo

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47Fox, *Henryson*, lxxxiii.
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And damned al oure werk that folweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste. (V, 1821-25)

Troilus here clearly transcends mere earthly concerns and admonishes those still among the living to concentrate on life's spiritual dimension. In his criticism of worldly affairs Troilus is rather unspecific in the ascription of blame and merit, and instead points out that the world is governed by instability:

\[
\text{and fully gan despise}
\]

This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above. . . . (V, 1816-19)

The religious significance of this passage becomes obvious if compared with a similar sounding commentary on Isaiah 40, found in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, the English translation of Frère Lorens's *Somme le roi*:

the soul is ravesshed up to hevene, sche loketh agen to the erthe from feer. . . .

and seeth it so lite as to regard to that gret fairnesse ... than despiseth al the world litel . . . .

To return to Henryson, it becomes clear from this comparison that he is more concerned with the characters' fate on earth. This attitude also corresponds with his elaboration of Troilus's

sorrows after Cresseid's departure. In contrast to Chaucer, who problematizes the question of individual guilt rather than accepting it as a given, I would argue that Henryson tries to take a decidedly moral stand and for this purpose adds to the poem his own didactic ending, directed to those who still very much live on this earth.\textsuperscript{49} In his comparison of both narratorial positions, Gray attributes to Henryson's poet-persona a more personal investment in the issue of love and faithfulness than Chaucer's: "He has certainly a good deal in common with the narrator of \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, though perhaps since he admits to having once served Venus, we should not expect the quite 'detached' view which Chaucer sometimes affects,"\textsuperscript{50} while Kindrick attributes a more central role to the narrator: "Yet Henryson's narrator differs remarkably from Chaucer's. He is a more central character and is more important in setting the tone and foreshadowing events in the major part of the poem."\textsuperscript{51} One of the text's first critics, Kynaston, remarks on this lack of moral judgment in Chaucer's text, which he sees remedied by his Scottish colleague:

This Mr. Henderson [sic] wittily observing, that Chaucer in his 5th booke had related the death of Troilus, but made no mention what became of Creseid, he learnedly takes uppon him in fine poetically way to express the punishment and end due to a false unconstant whore, which commonly terminates in extreme

\textsuperscript{49}J.A.W. Bennett, "Henryson's \textit{Testament}: A Flawed Masterpiece," \textit{Scottish Literary Journal} 1 (1974): 5-16, goes even further and claims that Henryson has misread Chaucer.

\textsuperscript{50}Gray, \textit{Robert Henryson}, 169.

\textsuperscript{51}Robert L. Kindrick, \textit{Robert Henryson} (Boston: Twayne, 1979), 123.
misery.\textsuperscript{52}

This view, however crudely expressed, not only is characteristic of the lack of sympathy on the part of the early readers of the \textit{Cresseida} story, but it also asserts the necessity of a moral framework for the tale.\textsuperscript{53}

After this setting up of the narrator as a moral authority, Henryson goes on to give a brief summary of the quair he has unearthed; his intention is to:

\textbf{\ldots report the lamentatioun}

And wofull end of this lustie Creisseid,

And quhat distres sho thoillit, and quhat deid. (68-70)

This brief synopsis can be seen as programmatic for the whole poem; it is particularly the juxtaposition of the terms "wofull end" and "lustie Creisseid" which brackets/charts the moral space the text intends to cover. The adjective "lustie," is glossed by Kurath and Kuhn as denoting, among other more neutral meanings, sexual lust, which would give some indication of the causality of Cresseid's end as a leper. As a direct result of the end of her relationship with her other lover "Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte, / And mair, fullilit of this fair ladie" (71-72) she treads on dubious moral grounds: she might have had several sexual partners after him but as the poet says, this is not certain: "Than desolait scho walkit vp and doun, / And sum men sayis, into the court, commoun" (76-77). The expression, "into the

\textsuperscript{52}Quoted by Kindrick, \textit{Robert Henryson}, 163.

court commoun" denotes, as has been commented on, Cresseid's supposed promiscuity or
can even be interpreted as a more or less veiled allusion to prostitution. In contrast to our
contemporary understanding of prostitution, which is centred exclusively on commercial sex,
the medieval meaning of the term is far less clear cut and can equally refer to promiscuous
behaviour, as Ruth Mazo Karras argues:

The recognition of the existence of commercial prostitutes, whose sin,
however, was formally defined as their promiscuity rather than their selling of
their bodies, allowed the conflation of all deviant feminine sexuality with
venality and the assimilation of all disorderly women with prostitutes.55

To underscore this point and to put the poem's terminology into context, a brief look at the
fifth book of John Gower's Confessio Amantis,56 will be useful. In a passage concerned with
the beliefs of various pre-Christian cultures John Gower discusses and comments on the
customs of the Greeks, in particular on their concepts of love. As a negative example, which
is indicative of the Greeks' beliefs, he cites the regiment of Venus:

Se nou the foule mescreance
Of Grekis in thilke time tho,
There was no cause under the mone

54See for instance Fox, Poems of Robert Henryson, 345.


That thei ne token in that cas
A god to helpe or a goddesse. (V, 1444-47, 1450-51)

To give a particularly drastic example, Gower mentions the association of the goddess Venus with loose sexual behaviour:

Sche made comoun that desport,
And sette a lawe of such a port,
That every woman mihte take
What man hire liste, and noght forsake
To ben als comun also sche wolde.
Sche was the ferste also which tolde
That wommen scholde here bodi selle. (V, 1425-31)

From this passage it becomes obvious that Gower's disapproving of Venus as being "comoun" does not primarily refer to her activity as a commercial prostitute, but rather to the visibility of her sexual licentiousness, which then in turn sets a bad example for other women to engage in commercial sex. Against the background of Gower's condemnation of the type of sexual behaviour openly displayed by Venus, Henryson's reference to Criseyde's walking "into the court commoun" is a clear indication of the poet's disapproval of the sort of demeanour that is likened to scandalous conduct: "Any woman who made her sexuality public by making a public scandal of herself could also be considered under the category of 'prostitute', and was classified with the venal women who sold their bodies." Thus, the

57 Karras, "Prostitution," 211.
allusion to prostitution can be read as another instance of "wickit langage" since Cresseid's trespass is twofold: not only has she left Troilus for Diomeid, but her changing sides from the Trojans to the Greeks almost by necessity makes this change in her partners common knowledge.

The nature of this scandal leads the poet to dissociate himself from this type of knowledge since he does not want to go as far as to warrant for the precise nature of her moral trespass: he rather reports what he claims to have heard from other, unspecified sources, merely acknowledged as "sum men sayis." What Henryson does here is in itself morally somewhat questionable, since he relates the scandal as a slanderous rumour, as an unsubstantiated piece of information for the veracity of which he denies any responsibility. What further discredits his intention is that he neither acknowledges his source (it can't be Chaucer, after all), nor that he actually sticks to his accusation. A few lines later he more or less retracts his condemnation and declares that Cresseid is, in fact, not responsible for what has happened to her:

3it neuertheless, quhat euer men deme or say
In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes,
I sail excuse als far furth as I may ... (85-87)

Again, the poet distances himself again from his sources, and states that whatever "men" say, he will excuse her, a move, which, to give him credit, is intended to remove blame from the victim. Henryson tries in this passage to do two things at the same time: on the one hand, he does not want to join in the universal condemnation of Cresseid; on the other hand, however, it seems justifiable to read his own excuse as another rhetorical strategy to question his
protagonist's moral character.

This said, however, the problem is that the damage has been done, and retracting the accusation cannot undo its possible effects. In addition, the poet's attempt to excuse Cresseid reveals that he still has the same moral authority he already had when he condemned the woman in the first place. This strategy amounts to blaming the victim for her fate merely in order to exonerate her immediately on the grounds that she was not responsible for her acts. Henryson's explanation is that a force outside and more powerful than Criseyde, namely Fortune, is chiefly responsible for her distress:

\begin{quote}
Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairness, 
The quik fortoun hes put to sic distress 
As hir plesit, and nathing throw the gilt 
Of the -- throw wickit langage to be spilt! 
\end{quote} 
(88-90)

In excusing Cresseid, Henryson follows Chaucer's tactic by blaming the inherently fickle deity of Fortune; in his explanation that "wickit langage," or slander, is the chief instigator of his heroine's violation, one has to ask whether the poet himself is not complicit with this act of verbal violence, since he himself takes part in spreading the rumour. The question is, indeed, whether he is not now part of those "men" who propagate her story by retelling the

\footnote{E. Duncan Aswell, "The Role of Fortune in The Testament of Cresseid," \textit{Philological Quarterly} 46 (1967): 472, argues that a change of perspective takes place from fortune as the party responsible for the protagonist's suffering, to the character herself whose choice of destiny is expressed in active verbs, like "go among the Greikis" and "takand foull plesance."}
negative preconception of his protagonist. By alluding to the leper’s intrinsic moral guilt as the cause of the disease, Henryson stands in a particular motif-tradition of identifying leprosy with sexual deviance. In particular one can observe a number of moral treatises, such as Robert of Brunne’s Middle English translation *Handlyng Synne*, which draw a direct connection between prostitution or loose sexual behaviour and leprosy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pe predde ys } & \text{ pe werstë wem;}
\text{Meseles, men seye, vsem hem;}
\text{And, who takep hem yn } & \text{ that hete,}
\text{clennesse of body he may sone lete.}
\text{Moche wo } & \text{ tan, ys swyche to take,}
\text{For } & \text{ hesë pre lakkës sake;}
\text{And moche may be } & \text{ that wommans mone,}
\text{For she schal answere for hem echone}
\text{Pat haue ydo any synne wyp hyre,}
\end{align*}
\]

59 For a different view see Gray, *Robert Henryson*, 172-73, who claims that the image of Cresseid’s fate invokes in the poet a mixture of emotions, “a struggle between knowledge and love, between horror and compassion.” For a general discussion of leprosy as divine punishment for a sinful life see Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 107-46. In particular Richard of St. Victor’s commentary on Chirst’s healing of the leper, Matthew 8: 1-4, quoted by Brody, 127, illustrates this causality and the emphasis on sexual misbehaviour: “fornicators, concubines, the incestuous, the avaricious, usurers, . . . those likewise who say to a brother, fool, and who look upon a woman concupiscently (who though not evil in deed are nonetheless evil in inclination): all, I say, such as these, who through guilt are cut off from God, all are judged to be leprous by the priests . . . .”

60 Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 62, points to this close connection between leprosy and sexual misconduct, which often led to its confusions with sexually transmitted diseases.
At domes day, bye day of Iri. (7437-56)

Like Henryson, Robert of Brunne is very careful when it comes to drawing the connection between sexual behaviour and leprosy. Again, first-hand knowledge is denied: instead, a rumour, "men seye," is quoted to make the point.

Although Henryson is very careful in his argumentation, his insinuations provide justification enough to place The Testament in close proximity to texts, such as Handlyng Synne, which more explicitly condemn the insatiable sexual cravings of the lepers. Although one could argue that these unnaturally violent sexual desires are the result of leprosy instead of its cause, I would still maintain that consequence and reason are part and parcel of the same thought construct, which in the sense of Fleck's epistemology provides a moral framework to the entire issue.

To substantiate this claim I want to examine the fate of another infamous female companion of Cresseid: the Yseut of Béroul's French version of The Romance of Tristran, who shares this selfsame reputation for sexual licentiousness. In contrast to Henryson, Béroul is far more explicit in his condemnation of uncontrolled sexuality; he exposes the moral dimension of the disease, which he interprets as a punishment for sexual licentiousness.

In his Tristran, Béroul makes this interdependence of disease and punishment brutally clear when King Mark is in search of an appropriate way of punishing Yseut for her infidelity, and is prepared to reward the proponent with the most cruel suggestion. In reply to

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Mark's demand, a leper with the name of Yvain, who is present with his people at the scene, makes a terrible suggestion:

Un malade out en Lanci'en,
Par non fu apelé Yvain;
A mervelle par fu desfait.

... 

Yvain respon: "Si con je pens
Je te dirai, asez briment.
Veez, j'ai ci compaignons cent:
Yseut nos done, s'ert commune.
Paior fin dame n'ot mais une:
Sire, en nos a si grant ardor!
Soz ciel n'a dame qui un jor
Peüst soufrir nostre convers.  

[There was a leper in Lantyan; his name was Yvain, and he was horribly deformed... Yvain answered: "I will tell you briefly what I think. You see that I have a hundred companions here; give us Iseut to be our common property. No lady ever had a worse fate: Sir, our lust is so strong! No lady in the world could tolerate a single day of relations with us!]

The text's strategy of selecting leprosy as the worst possible punishment for inappropriate

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behaviour, sexual misbehaviour, that is, allows the conclusion that the sufferer of the disease himself must be guilty of some kind of offence, and secondly, this selection spells out the acute danger the medieval thought collective associated with the contact with infected individuals. These individuals, here the group of Yvain's lepers, represent something akin to the twentieth-century 'risk groups' whose members can threaten those who come too close to them: by delineating the outsider group, or 'risk group', King Mark in Béroul's text plays on similar fears of contamination by this social group and its associated infected status. As historically removed from each other as these two exemplary reactions to a serious disease might seem, the culturally defined delimitations between the members of both groups are founded on the evocation of fear. If one visualizes the two groups facing each other, king Mark's court on the one side, and the courtly society's deformed counter image, here represented by Yvain's band of lepers, on the other, this contrast becomes more than apparent. Beroul gives a very precise idea of the disgust, fear, and threat evoked by their disfigured, leaking bodies:

Bien out o lui cent compaignons
O lor puioz, o lor bastons:
Ainz ne veistes tant si lait
Ne si boçu ne si desfait;
Chacun tenoit sa tartarie. (1159-63)

[With him were a good hundred of his companions, with their crutches and their staffs: Never have you seen people so ugly, tumourous, and deformed! Each one carried his clapper.]
These outcasts are perceived as the appropriate company for an obvious misfit, such as Yseut, an observation which is here put into the mouth of Yvain, the lepers' leader:

Por cel seignor qui maint lasus,
Quant or verra la nostre cort,
Adonc verra si desconfort.

Donc voudroit mieux morir que vivre;
Donc savra bien Yseut la givre
Que malement avra ovré;

Mex voudroit estre arse en un ré. (1210-16)

[And this man who was a leper [said]: 'When she sees our "court" and all its discomforts, she will rather be dead than alive. Then that viper Iseut will know that she has sinned, and she will wish she had been burned to death.']

This verdict, uttered in the characteristically shrill voice of the leper, makes obvious the connection between sexual behaviour that runs afoul of social conventions and the disease as its punishment. This statement is of particular importance since it outlines the social mechanism of (re)producing the disease for society's own maintenance of its particular perception of normality and order: Yvain's group of lepers offer a convenient social space to which misfits and undesirables can be banished, thus keeping the community uncontaminated, in a physical as well as a moral sense, and thus in a condition of health. Sick bodies have no place in the courtly society of King Mark's court, and neither has the sinful body of Ysuet, hence both are removed to a group of outsiders which keep the others uncontaminated.
The threat to expose Yseut to the lepers' sexual desire gives an additional insight into the question about the disease's origin. There seems to me a strong argument that Yseut's disease as in Cresseid's case, has been present long before the actual -- or in this case threatened -- onset of its symptoms, even prior to her contracting it: "there must have been something wrong with her all along," to echo Epstein's words. The question about where the disease 'comes from' is gratuitous in this context since the disease's (re)production occurs more or less itself by its mere presence in the sick persons; in addition, however, there also seems to exist a culturally defined notion which designates those who disturb the social order as 'sick,' although the individual may not (yet) show any physical symptoms. The onset of these symptoms is essentially a confirmation of the patient's true state, a fact that has to 'leak out' at some point, be it from the body of the diseased or through her narrative. To clarify this somewhat opaque thought process, I want to quote Paul Morrison's discussion of Choderlos de Laclos's 1784 novel Les liaisons dangereuses\(^6\) where Madame Merteuil contracts smallpox, which is described by the novelist as "the disease [that] has turned her inside out," with the result that "now the soul is visible on her face." Morrison explains the significance of this event as the becoming visible of something that has been present within the protagonist all along: "One's past, one's 'case history', finds its teleological fulfilment in the somatic outing . . . that renders exogenous the secrets of the perverse soul."\(^6\)

This is a point I also want to make in the case-history of Henryson's Cresseid. The


onset of the symptoms outs her as the misfit she really is: her promiscuous sexual life, her previously hidden 'dark secret' is revealed the moment the marks of the disease appear on her body. Her subsequent presence in a 'risk-group,' only further underscores the fact that she is unfit to be among the society of the healthy. The disease is not the prime reason for her status as an outcast; it only serves to make her visible as one.

3.2. Cresseid's Case History: A Medical Narrative

The doubts raised above about the true motives behind Cresseid's moral condemnation can be substantiated if one reads as a "case History" the stanza in which Henryson gives a synopsis of the 'patient's' earlier history. The medical case history lists events which have led up to the patient's present condition and thus describes a process starting with a healthy body and ending with a sick body:

O fair Creisseid, the flour and A per se
Of Troy and Grece, how was thow fortunait
To change in filth all thy feminite,
And be with fleschlie lust sa maculait,
And go amang the Greikis air and lait,
Sa gigotlike tankand thy foull plesance!
I haue pietie thow suld fall sic mischance! (78-84)

In this stanza Henryson unfolds a scenario which is supposed to explain Cresseid's crisis. Her former status as a paragon of beauty is contrasted with her condition as a sick person, with the sickness destroying her former identity, her very femininity. Apart from the poet's moral
disapproval, he builds up a very clear picture of causality: her "fleschlie lust," her behaviour as a wanton woman, described as "gigotlike," and her "foull plesance" are all cited as causes for her changed state of health.  

Significantly, Henryson resorts to metaphors of dirt and contamination in order to inscribe the sickness as a violation of order, a fulfilment of the process as discussed by Mary Douglas. If one compares Henryson's stanza with other narratives on disease, the closeness to the case history becomes obvious. Epstein cites a particular case history from the twentieth century which has been deemed a good example of good medical historiography in order to demonstrate the kind of information conveyed by these narratives. Among the medical data, there is also usually some information about the patient's biography, as well as certain circumstances, such as his/her lifestyle, which might have influenced the history of his/her pattern of sickness. "But a patient's case history is a social document in addition to being a record-keeping device embedded in the development of medicolegal institutions." Read as a medical case history, the previously quoted stanza relates the following information: An unmarried woman, previously of good health led a life of promiscuity, and subsequently

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65 On the interpretation of leprosy as a venereal disease see Bériac, Les Lépreux, 51-56. Much of the historical evidence seems anecdotal, such as the story related by Bernard de Gourdon in his Lilium medicine: "A leprous countess came to Montpellier, and she was entrusted to my care. A medical student waited on her, slept with her, impregnated her, and became instantly leprous himself." (My translation).

66 See for instance the example quoted by Epstein, Conditions, 27: "Mr. Jones is a 47-yr-old white, Catholic, Irish-born, alcoholic, unemployed lense grinder with diabetes since the age of 12, married, with two teen-age daughters, but separated from his wife and family and living alone on welfare."

67 Epstein, Conditions, 27.
contracted leprosy. The crucial information which is related in a case history like this are certain facts which locate the patient together with his medical history in his social context.68

In Cresseid's example Henryson has supplied some of the facts which a modern case history would also cite. In making this point I am essentially reversing a procedure commonly used by the medical profession; the establishment of a patient's case-history is an attempt to extrapolate some relevant information about of the narrative of a person's life and then to transform it into an ahistorical collection of data, which in all likelihood have contributed to the patient's condition. What is often forgotten about medical case histories is that in the attempt to present the personal narrative as an objective collection of facts, much of the very subjectivity of the patient's narrative remains as a 'residue' at the bottom of the scientific account. In her critique of the process of clinical judgment Eugenie Gatens-Robinson addresses this imbalance and the propensity of the medical professionals to suppress the very fact that what they base their judgment on is, in fact, an act of interpretation:

This personal residue is both morally and cognitively troubling because the result, refusing the status of pure "fact," requires us to recognize a kind of moral ownership. Thus, a genuine tension exists between the received view of scientific rationality and those activities . . . that seem to require imaginative freedom and interpretative ownership . . . . We tend to refer to such activities

as art and to deny their cognitive authority.\textsuperscript{69}

Turning this process upside down, and doing what Gatens-Robinson proposes, one can read Cresseid's narrative as a case-history and interpret the literary account against the background of the medieval interpretation of the diseased body. In its account of causality the brief report on Cresseid's health quite clearly cites parts of her life as explanations for the change in her condition. While the example quoted from the twentieth century attempts to give an impartial view, as far as this is possible in the circumstances described, Henryson quite candidly gives his statement a moral slant, and thus offers an interpretation of what befell his protagonist from his own contemporary perspective.

Of course, the \textit{Testament of Cresseid} is more than a terse account of a few facts of a sick person's life, and yet for the purpose of my argument, I want to place this particular passage in the tradition of case histories as narratives. The purpose of this enterprise is to highlight some of the strategies used by the medieval poet who, not unlike the writer of a medical report, establishes causalities between an altered bodily condition and his search for possible explanations or certain factors which caused this very condition to change, or to recall Fleck's term, the thought construct which is behind this description. This brings the literary account in close proximity to the prose of the medical report:

In its broadest sense, then, medical case histories engage the conventional features of historical and literary writing, that is, of narrative. As a consequence, a case report's success or failure as an authoritative account of the etiology and progress of disease

constitutes a general paradigm for narratives of the human body.\textsuperscript{70}

Instrumental to my argument about the connection between moral reasoning and the
description of the disease is the tenuous relationship of both literary genres, the medical case
history and the literary text, each rooted in its own historical period, but in a way united by
their shared "locus in life,"\textsuperscript{71} since texts of both genres tell their readers about the historical
understanding of the causes and consequences of the disease. In this respect Henryson's
retraction is symptomatic of this tangential connection between disease and blame: instead of
shifting blame away from the patient and attributing it to a force of beyond human control, as
the poet probably intended, his retraction does, in fact, reveal the very mechanism through
which the social construction of blame operates. The consequence of naming the guilty party
is exactly as outlined: she suffers not merely from the physical symptoms of the disease, but
also from its verbal manifestation, which, as in the case of the HIV infected person
mentioned above, enters her body though "wickit langage."

In order to describe the actual onset of Cresseid's disease Henryson uses the device of
the court of gods\textsuperscript{72} who sit in judgment on the culprit. The whole scene is triggered off by
Cresseid's lament to the gods when she is in her father's "secrreit orature:"

\begin{quote}
Vpon Venus and Cupide angerly
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70}Epstein, Conditions, 31.

\textsuperscript{71}I am following here H.R. Jauss's structural and functional definition of literary
genres. See in particular "The Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," Toward an

\textsuperscript{72}On this see for instance Priscilla Bawcutt, The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas
Scho cryt out, and said on this same wyse,
'Allace, that euer I maid 3ow sacrifice!
3e gaue me anis ane deuine responsaill
That I suld be the flour of luif in Troy;
Now am I maid ane vnworthie outwaill,
And all in cair translatit is my ioy. (124-130)

Cresseid's lament reflects in a rather accurate way the accusations the poet himself has
levelled against her. The most prominent part of this lament is Cresseid's anger that the gods
have destroyed her future prospects as a model of love and instead reduced her to the status
of an unworthy outcast. Again one has to bear in mind that she makes this complaint before
the outbreak of the disease, and reflects her social, but not her physical condition. The term
"outwaill" is here clearly indicative of the effects of her public shaming by the 'wicked
langage', as described above. The consequences of this loss of Cresseid's reputation is that
she is now considered polluted, and untouchable, which becomes clear from her question:
"Sen I fra Diomeid and nobill Troylus / Am clene excludit, as abject odious?" (132-33).
There seems little hope that her damaged reputation can ever be put right again, and that
loneliness is the consequence of her failure: "Quha sall me gyde? Quha sall me now conuoy .
. . ?" (131).

These considerations of her loss and disappointment then lead to Cresseid's angry
reproach of Venus and Cupid:

O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow
And thy mother, of lufe tha blind goddes!
In the following lines she compares her past expectations as a popular and desired woman to her present solitary state and attempts to shift the blame onto those gods, whom she thinks responsible for not holding up their end of the bargain, so to speak. In her opinion, these gods have given her the right to expect a perfect life and subsequently failed on their promise:

3e causit me always vnderstand and trow
The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,
And ay grew grene throw 3our supplie and grace.
But now, allace, that seid with froist is slane,
And I fra luifferis left, and all forlane. (136-40)

The way Cresseid blames the gods echoes the causality established by Henryson in the beginning of the poem: the reference to Fortune, as well as her cursing of Venus and Cupid as the chief source of Cresseid's suffering, essentially points to the same external authority which governs the human fate. This act of blasphemy has frequently been identified as the true cause of Cresseid's leprosy, which, against the background of previous allegations of her misconduct seems to offer only a part of the explanation. It is rather that the blaspheming against the gods is a cypher which indicates her misbehaviour in her previous life. At this point it seems as if the poet, so careful to distance himself from slander, found a somewhat more uncompromising linguistic medium through which to construct blame. A significant

73Kindrick, Robert Henryson, 127, for instance states that "her tone is disrespectful and presumptious" and that "her complaint is unfounded and her accusations are unjust." E. M. W. Tillyard, "The Testament of Cresseid 1470?," Five Poems 1470-1870, ed. E. M. W. Tillyard (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), 16-17, establishes a taxonomy of her sins, as unfaithfulness, pride, and anger. Gray, Robert Henryson, 178-79, emphasizes her self-pity, but also stresses the ambiguous aspect of ascribing guilt in this context: "yet there is a genuine sense of betrayal and hopelessness."
detail in this context is the poem's reference to love's seed growing in the protagonist's face, here still meant to denote Cresseid's extraordinary beauty, but which in light of the immediate onset of the symptoms is a clear foreshadowing of the kind of punishment that is being meted out to the sinner. The destruction of her beautiful face by Saturn, as discussed below, echoes Cresseid's own complaint to the gods. This indictment is probably the clearest, and in a way the most honest, representation of guilt, trespass and recrimination.

By using the planetary gods, Henryson gains access to a complex terminology which allows him to incorporate at the same time a convenient medical terminology and moral evaluation, and thus provides a hint to the thought community's specific interpretation of medical case-histories.\(^74\) Immediately after her accusation Cresseid falls into a swoon: nemesis takes the shape of the court of planet-gods who exercise their moral judgment. Henryson introduces his court of gods with short portraits of each deity, which give an idea of their symbolic qualities.\(^75\) Of particular interest in this connection are Saturn and Cynthia since by their associated cold and moist qualities they quite clearly point to a combination of humours, which are opportunistic of leprosy.\(^76\) In contrast, Jupiter and Phoebus are described as harmless; Jupiter as a handsome male deity presents the absolute opposite to his father, the malevolent Saturn:


\(^75\)Gray, Robert Henryson, 181.

\(^76\)On this see especially Johnstone Parr, "Cresseid's Leprosy Again," MLN 60 (1945): 487-91, who points out that the description of Cresseid's leprosy almost follows a text-book discussion of the disease.
His voice was cleir, as cristall wer his ene

As goldin wyre sa glitterand was his hair

His garmond and his gyte full of gay grene

With goldin listis on euerie gair. (176-79)

This description of flourishing health, down to the particular details of his physical appearance, provides an almost perfect foil against which the etiology of Cresseid's leprosy can be studied; this connection becomes even more significant since as Saturn's son he exhibits all those outward qualities his father set out to destroy in Cresseid. In a similar vein is the depiction of Phoebus, the "tender nureis, and banisher of nicht" (199), the other benevolent planet-god. Significantly for the poem, however, neither have much to say in the trial scene.

Different are the vengeful deities described: first, Saturn, "quhilk gaue Cupide litill reuerence bot as ane busteous churle on his maneir/ . . . with auer luik and cheir' (152-54). His introduction presents him in a rather unfavourable light, and his main outward characteristics denote someone permanently cold: his face, as grey as lead, the chattereing teeth, runny nose, blue lips and icicles hanging down from his hair, could all be counted as symptoms of cold and essentially dry conditions, which are the typical etiology of conditions, such as an excess of melancholy, itself equated with hard and firm conditions, and which ultimately triggers off conditions, such as leprosy. The other, hostile deity, Cynthia, the moon, with her main characteristics of darkness ("for all hir licht scho borrowis at hir brother Titan" (258-59)), and again, with a complexion the colour of lead, as well as a general absence of bright colours, can also be associated in the cosmology with the qualities of the
earth and the conditions of cold and dryness.

The two planetary gods are associated with the metals lead and silver respectively. This connection becomes clear in Gower's discussion of Alchemy: "The mone of Selver hath his part, / ... The Led after Satorne groweth" (V, 2470-72). Gower is particularly explicit on the properties of the planet Saturn and in book VII of the Confessio he gives an outline of his character, which he links to specific 'national' characteristics among humans:

The hyeste and aboven alle
Stant that planete which men calle
Saturnus, whos complexion
Is cold, and his condicion
Causeth malice and cruelte
To him the whos nativite
Is set under his governance
And enemy to mannes hele,
In what degre that he shal dele
His climat is in Orient,
Wher that he is most violent. (Bk, VII, 935-46)

These characteristics are quite similar to those reported by Henryson, and reflect the thought community's multi-layered model of explaining the causes and effects, which can range from very general observations of human behaviour, to specific causes of diseases. In the verdict of the gods as related by Henryson, these same qualities are cited and form the interpretative background against which the disease is understood and its causes outlined.
The first to raise their voices in this tribunal are Cupid and Venus, who make the case that Cresseid's blaspheming cannot go unpunished. Their accusation, however, is almost immediately followed by a second statement which exonerates the gods and puts the blame entirely on the accused: "Thus hir leuing vnclene and lecherous / Sho wald retorte in me and my mother" (285-86). According to Cupid's arguments, Cresseid's crime lies in her refusal to accept the responsibility for her own decisions and their consequences and her subsequent attempt to shift this responsibility onto the gods. The question of moral guilt and its ensuing blame are discussed much more candidly by this tribunal than by Henryson's poet-persona.

The gods, appearing in the dream scene outside the course of events can easily disregard sensibilities, such as the reprehensible use of 'wickit langage', and exercise their judgment as appropriate to autonomous bodies who are not affected by the judgment of humans.

Following the accusation by Cupid, Mercurius, the gods' arbiter, decides that Saturn and Cynthia, the highest and lowest of the deities, are to pronounce the sentence on the culprit. After some deliberation both come to the conclusion to punish Cresseid according to the nature of her trespass: "And torment sair with seiknes incurabill, / And to all louers be abhominabill" (307-08). The actual transmission of the disease, in modern terminology its contagion, is here described as the act of Saturn, imposing it in its literal sense on Cresseid:

And on hir heid he laid ane frostie wand;
Than lawfullie on this wyse can he say,
"Thy greit fairnes and all thy bewtie gay,
Thy wantoun blude, and eik thy goldin hair,
Heir I exclude fra the for euermair. (311-15)
The "frostie wand" waved over Cresseid's head is in the medical theory of the humours an expression for the excess of coldness and dryness, which replaces the moisture of her face. These qualities cause her to experience an excess of black bile, which in turn is responsible for her "melancholy," here clearly denoting a mental composition:

I change thy mirth into melancholy,

Quhilk is the mother of all pensiuenes;

Thy moisture and thy heit in cald and dry. (316-18)

In his description of the disturbed balance of humours, Henryson follows the standard medical practice, and as outlined by Bartholomaeus, also provides its reason:

E>erfore Constantinus seip ṭat lepra is coole euel, and drye, and comep of blake colera. . . And it comep of foure rotid humours ṭat were strong, and bep corrupt and chaungid into blake colera, as he seip ibidem. Humours wip ṭe whiche melancholia is imedled may nou3t rote at ṭe fulle in ṭe veynes, and ṭat for melancolye is coolde and drye and so contrarye to rotinge. And so ṭe humours imedled perwip may nou3t roten fully ar ṭe malencholy be incorporat and haue abidinge in ṭe membres in ṭe whiche is ful rotynge, and of ṭat rotinge comep lepra 'meselrye'.

Lanfranc's Middle English manual for physicians, his Science of Chirurgie, gives a very vivid

77 Kindrick, Robert Henryson, 135.


description of the excess production of black bile and the ways it 'leaks out' through the skin:

For whanne malancolie multipliep, & a mannes guttis ben not strong for to putte it out, & þe weies bitwixe þe splene ben stoppid & þe poris of þe skin closid, þan malancolious blood wole rote wibinne, & rotip complexiouns of þe lymes . . . whanne þe mater is fulfild it is malancolie corrupt.  

Complementary to Saturn's punishment of Creseid, Cynthia adds some further manifestations of the disease that correspond to her own appearance:

Thy cristall ene mingit with blude I mak
Thy voice sa cleir vnplesand hoir and hace
Thy lustie lyre ouirsped with spottis blak,
And lumpis haw appeirand in thy face. (337-40)

These last symptoms constitute some of the definite signs, as for instance described by Bartholomy. Among these symptoms common, for all four types of leprosy, he lists a general corruption of the flesh, accompanied by lesions of the skin of various types:

Universalliche þis iuel haþ soche tokens and signes: in hem þe fleisch [is] notabliche corrupt, þe shap is ichaunged, þanne þe i3en ben rounde, þe i3eliddes ben reueleþ, þe si3t sprangleþ, þe voys is hoos . . . swellinges growip in þe body. Also in þe body beþ diuers speckes, now red, now blak, now wanne, now pale.  

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81 Lanfranc, Chirurgie, 424.
Apart from these general symptoms, Bartholomy also quotes a number of specific symptoms that allow the diagnosis of a particular manifestation of leprosy. The emphasis on the infection of the eyes, as well as the general swellings of the skin, points to lepra allopucia, or leprosy of the fox:

In hem pat hauep pe lepra pat hatte allopucia al pe here of pe i3eliddes and of pe browis fallep, and pe i3en swellep hugeliche and bep ful rede. In pe face rede pymeles and whelkes, out of pe which ofte rennep blode and quyttir.\(^82\)

This manifestation of the disease can be classified in modern terminology as "lepromatus leprosy," with one of its earliest symptoms being the appearance of macules of the skin; "they tend to be scattered symmetrically over the body, are smooth, shiny, small, and numerous, lack clear borders between the normal and abnormal skin, and do not differ in texture from normal skin."\(^83\) Brody's summary confirms the likely presence of lepra allopecia in the case of Cresseid, as signalled by the blood-shot eyes, and the way her "goldin hair" is affected: "Ulceration of the nodules may follow, lesions of the nose and eyes (possibly leading to disfigurement and blindness) tend to develop, and more or less complete loss of hair - the disfigurement known as allopecia - may occur."\(^84\)

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\(^82\)Bartholomaeus, *On the Properties of Things*, 425. See also *Lanfranc's Chirurgie*, 197, for a similar description: " Also in summe pe face wexip reed & swellep & is sumwhat ledi . . . Also her vois is row3 ouper sumtyme it is wonderli scharp, & pe whit of her i3en bicomep al derk, & pe heeris goon awei of her browis." On the symptoms of lepra allopecia see also the thirteenth century *Compendium medicinae* by Arnaud de Villennuve, bk. II, chap. 46, quoted in Bériaq, *Des lépreux*, 36-37.

\(^83\)Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 27.

\(^84\)Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 27.
Cynthia confirms Saturn's verdict and claims that she too wants to reduce the moisture in Cresseid's body, and thus to contribute to the disease:

Fra heit of bodie here I the depryue,
And to thy seiknes sall be na recure
Bot in dolour thy dayis to indure. (334-36)

The most significant piece of information conveyed in Cynthia's sentence is the irreversible nature of the disease, which corresponds to the above description of the course of the disease.

Although Lanfranc in his *Science of Chirurgie* makes reference to certain methods of treating leprosy "þat ben profitable for a cirurgian to kunne, & also curis þat comeþ ofte to a cirurgian handis," ¹⁸⁵ he is nevertheless rather pessimistic about their possibility to effect a cure as such. Towards the end of the treatise on leprosy, however, Lanfranc at least goes so far as to admit that he cannot prescribe a definite cure for leprosy apart from those treatments which are mainly administered to stabilize the patient's condition. Due to the severity of the disease, Lanfranc admits, it is usually very difficult to find any kind of remedy. The surgeon is also cautioned about the appropriate dosage and the specific kind of remedy to be administered, since strong ones are likely to put the patient's life in danger, and weak ones fail due to their lack of purging powers:

De cure of lepre is not sett in þis book, for þis book is of cirurgie, saf þer ben in þis solempne medicynis & apreued for to kepe a man, þat þei schulen not wexe, & for to make it priuy, & cauterijs þerfore / For alle þese þingis fallþ for a cirurgian / Þis þou schalt knowe: if þe siknes be strong, it is hard for to

do any medicyn þerto; fforwi, if þe sijknes be strong, ðanne he muste haue strong medicyns, & þat were greet perel, & also þe medicyn muste be ofte rehersid. Saue þou schalt chese a liȝt medicyn pat wolde falle for to purge þe humour liȝtli.\textsuperscript{86}

As warned by Lanfranc, the remedies described in his treatise, such as the administering of goat whey, or blood letting, or simply the feeding of nourishing meals, all aim to stabilize the patient's condition, or at least to strengthen him, but a definite cure, such as would be effected by the feeding of a preparation made from the flesh of a black adder, seems rather doubtful. The author himself recommends repeating the treatment until it shows the desired effect, which in fact could be for an indefinite period.

For the majority of medieval lepers, however, the social reality of the disease meant that they in all likelihood never experienced the kind, and above all sensible and compassionate care recommended by a socially conscientious physician.\textsuperscript{87} Brody cites the testimonies of Jean Bodel and Baude Fastoul, a pair of French lepers, who in their Congés write about their lives as lepers from first-hand experience and express the hopelessness of their situation; Bodel comments on the impossibility of finding a cure, even among the best of physicians of Salerno: "All the physicians of Salerno / Cannot find relief for this

\textsuperscript{86}Lanfranc, \textit{Chirurgie}, 197-98.

\textsuperscript{87}Lanfranc's sensitive approach to his patients, and social conscience are apparent in his guidelines for the professional conduct of surgeons, outlined in his preface, 9: "ne chide [he] not wip þe sike man ne wip noon of hise meyne, but curteisli speke to þe sijk man, and in almaner sijknes bihote him hele, þou3 þou be of him dispeirid; but neuer þe lattre seie to hise frendis þe caas as it stant/ . . . Pore men helpe he bi his myȝt, and of þe riche men axe he good reward."
suffering."\textsuperscript{88} Fastoul comments similarly on the disease, "of which everyone says that nobody gets cured."

The next step in the progress of the disease is the actual diagnosis of Cresseid's condition, here performed by her father Calchas, who takes the position of a physician.\textsuperscript{89} Henryson's use of a priest may evoke older practices, harking as far back as the precepts in Leviticus. The \textit{examen leprosorum} in the \textit{Testament of Cresseid} is rather brief, and mainly serves to confirm the finality of the gods' punishment:

\begin{quote}
He luikit on hir vglye lipper face \\
The quhylk befor was quhite as lillie flour; \\
Wringand his handis, oftymes said allace \\
That he knew weill that was na succour \\
To hir seiknes, and that dowblit his pane \hfill (372-76)
\end{quote}

This relatively brief scene merely confirms Cresseid's status as a leper; all that is necessary is one look at her disfigured face and Calchas knows the hopelessness of her condition.

3.3. The Other Story: Cures, Or the Cause Determines the Outcome

The \textit{Gesta Romanorum}, a popular medieval exempla collection, relates a shocking tale about the brother of the emperor Manalaus, who tried to abuse a position of trust and forced the emperor's wife to commit adultery with him; when she refused he vented his frustration by

\textsuperscript{88}Quoted in Brody, \textit{Disease of the Soul}, 88: "tuit li mire de Salerne / N'abaisseroient cheste lime," and "Dont cascuns dist que nus ne same."

\textsuperscript{89}On the use of a medical jury to determine cases of leprosy see for instance Bériaic, \textit{Des lépreux}, 58-65.
grabbing her by the hair and hanging her from a tree in a nearby forest:

His brothir wex prout, and depressid riche and poor, And 3it stirid the
Emperesse to synne; but she, as a goode woman shulde do, seide þat she
wolde not by no way assent to synne, as long as hire husbond livid . . . .
Thenne saide he, 'forsoth and but þou assent to me, I shall hong þe by the heir
vp on a tre here in þe forest, ... and so þou shalt haue a fowle ende.\(^90\)

After she has lived through a number of adventures, the empress is confronted with her
husband's brother once more:

And thenne þe Emperour saide to hire, 'faire lady, can ye heele my brothir of
lepr? . . . The Empresse lokid abowte hire, and she perceyvid that þe brothir of
þe Emperour stood þer a foul lepr, and wormys spronge out at þe visage on
ech syde; And for þe Emperour was þer with his sike brothir, all syke peple
that was þer abowte com thedir to be heelid.\(^91\)

Rather surprisingly, in face of the brother's serious condition, the Empress agrees to help him,
and claims that she can heal him, provided he confesses his deeds: "Then cryde the
Emperesse with an hye vois, and saide, '3e ben all cleene confessid, and þerfore I woll nowe
medecynis put to you.' And so she heelid hem all.\(^92\) Despite the leper's hopeless condition
and his grave offence, there seems to be a possibility for him to obtain a cure for his disease.

\(^90\)The Gesta Romanorum, ed. Sidney Hertrage, EETS ES 33 (London, Kegan Paul,
Trench, and Trübner, 1898), 312-13.

\(^91\)Gesta, 318.

\(^92\)Gesta, 319.
One may ask at this point, what makes this leper different from Cresseid and all those others who live with no hope of ever being healed? I want to venture the thesis that an examination of the nature of the individual patient's offence can provide the answer to this question. The major difference between the emperour Manalaus' brother and Cresseid is that the former, although of lecherous intent, did not in fact commit adultery, and thus was spared the end met by Henryson's protagonist. The key issue here seems to be that his offence is not of an overtly sexual nature; he can solve his problem by confessing his sins and is thus able to resume his former life.

To substantiate this claim, and to give a contrastive perspective of how leprosy can be conceptualized to signify a different causality, which in turn represents a different literary use of the *motif*, I want to draw attention to several narratives which outline the possibility of a cure for leprosy, and explore the circumstances under which a cure is deemed possible. In this context I want to refer to the tradition of tales and *exempla* which use the disease to emphasize the exceptional nature of friendship.\(^93\) Perhaps surprisingly, in the examples following this tradition, the symptoms of the disease match those given in the cases considered incurable in other accounts. One of the most precise depictions of the complete symptoms of leprosy are found in Konrad von Würzburg's Middle High German *Engelhard*, which in one episode relates the fate of the previously successful duke Dietrich, who for some unspecified reason contracts the disease. One day the sickness descends upon him:

im wurden hår unde bart

\(^{93}\)The most well-known version of this tale of *Amis and Amiloun*. For its various versions see *Amis and Amiloun*, ed. MacEdward Leach, EETS 203 (London: Humphrey Milford, 1937), xiv-xxxii.
His hair and beard became thin and [looked] strange. His eyes, I think, turned yellow, and his brows shed their hair, as if they were being consumed by mites. His complexion, which previously was praiseworthy and friendly and good, became redder than blood and started to shine in a strange way. His sweet voice became immeasurably hoarse.⁹⁴

This list of symptoms is almost identical with those presented by Henryson, if one takes the different complexion into account. This remarkable similarity in symptoms shows not only the authors' familiarity with the disease, but also makes obvious the universality of the disease as a discursive construction when it is used to explain causalities. While it served

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⁹⁴Konrad von Würzburg, Engelhard, ed. Ingo Reiffenstein (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982), 5150-61. (My translation.)
to signify Cresseid's trespass in a moral-sexual sphere, exactly the same disease can be used in Dietrich's case to test the extraordinary friendship between himself and Engelhard. Apart from a change in circumstances, the most significant difference in both instances is, in my opinion, that in the latter case leprosy does indeed have a cure, a fact vehemently denied in the example of Cresseid. As already mentioned, on the discursive level of the narrative the disease is used to highlight the extraordinary nature of the friendship between the two men since Engelhard is prepared to go so far as to sacrifice his infant children for the cure of his friend's leprosy:

   mich vuorte an sînen zûrmen
   Unheil unmâzen starke,
   so ich ze Tenemarke
   in dem sinne kûrte
   daz Engelhart verrûrte
   durch mich sîner kinde bluot
   daz er mit sînes libes fruht
   mich lëse von der miselsuht. (5502-10)

   [This overwhelming misery led me by the bridle to Denmark with the intention that Engelhard with his children's blood, would relieve me from leprosy, [a deed] which nobody else on earth would do.]

In the 'romantic' versions of the tale,⁹⁵ leprosy is used as a means of testing the patient's faith,

⁹⁵I am following here Leach's distinction between "romantic" and "hagiographic" versions of the tales belonging to this group. (See also note 93, above).
and as in the case of Dietrich his trust in the friendship of Engelhard. Apart from the consequences for the relationship between the friends, the significant aspect of the disease in this text is that it is seemingly unmotivated; all we know is that Dietrich's fortune changed after a long period of success:

\[
dô der getriuwe Dietrich
kam von dem stríte wider heim
und im der sèlden honicseim
nach wünsche lange zuo geflôz,
dô wart in ungemüete grôz
verkêret al sin wunne gar.\textsuperscript{96}
\]

[Now listen well how Dietrich returned home from the fight, and the honey-like sweetness of success, which came to him as he wished was turned into bad luck and entirely changed his fortune.]

There is no ascription of blame in this context, and the outbreak of leprosy is interpreted as a misfortune, which can neither be explained, nor avoided. (This, of course, harks back to Henryson's own attempt to exonerate himself from the claim that he blamed his protagonist.) The more relevant issue about the narrative function of the disease, however, lets the whole question of guilt and blame appear in a new light: evidently, no causality between human behaviour and the disease is established; it is an act of God in the true sense of the word. Consequently, the sick person can be presented as a victim, who bears none of the blame. Highly significant in this context I would claim, that to those who show no (or forgivable)

\textsuperscript{96}Engelhard, 5135-41.
failures as humans, a cure is available, albeit at a cost. Not surprisingly, however, there is usually someone -- in most cases the good friend -- who is willing to pay this price, and this ultimately effects a cure.

Compared to Konrad's Engelhard, a slightly different scenario is unfolded in the Middle English version of Amis and Amiloun. Amiloun, one of the two friends, passes as his friend Amis in a judicial combat, since the latter has (somewhat against his will) dishonoured Belisaunt, his duke's daughter. When the duke's steward betrays Amis, he challenges him, and the parties agree on a judicial combat. In fact, however, Amis is guilty of dishonouring his duke's daughter, and thus calls upon his friend Amiloun, who looks exactly identical, to fight the combat in his stead. In a legal sense the combat works out to the friend's satisfaction since the one who entered the combat did not commit the offence. At this moment, however, God intervenes and threatens Amiloun with leprosy for his deception.  

As he com prikand out of toun,
Com a voice fram heuen adoun,
Dat noman her bot he,
& sayd, "Thou kni3t, sir Amiloun,
God, that suffred passioun,
Sent þe bode bi me;
3if þou þis bataile vnderfong,

97I am following here the argument of Brody, Disease of the Soul, 165-66, who states that the reason for Amiloun's punishment is his deception: "The clear implication is that Amiloun will become leprous if he poses as Amis at the trial combat; the fact that there may be no other character in medieval literature who is punished for practicing deception at a judicial ordeal does not alter the fact that Amiloun is punished for his deception."
The connection between Amiloun's deception and the divine interference is obvious from God's warning to him. However, the situation Amiloun finds himself in is a difficult one: on the one hand he has been clearly warned not to pass as his friend and thus to incur God's revenge, but on the other hand he also feels his obligation to Amis:

He nist what him was best to don,
To flen, oþer to fiþting gon;
In hert him liked ille.

He þouȝt, 'þif y beknowe mi name,
Þan schal mi broþer go to shame,
Wip sorwe þai schul him spille.
Certes,' he seyd, 'for drede of care
To hold mi treuþe schal y nouȝt spare,
Lete god don alle his wille.' (1276-84)

Amiloun is the one who has to make a choice, and decides to take the risk of contracting leprosy as a punishment for helping his friend. Although his decision to help his friend and the ensuing deception at the judicial combat is certainly morally somewhat problematic, one could argue here that Amiloun's transgression, essentially an act of
unselfishness, is less severe, and is thus certain to incur the audience's sympathy, and hence his punishment lacks some of the severity of Cresseid's trespass. As in the case of Konrad von Würzburg's *Engelhard*, the text directs the audience's compassion in such a way that the protagonist's healing can easily be interpreted as 'poetic justice'. The leper in these texts, after all, acted in the best of intentions, and cannot help that special circumstances sometimes put the individual in a dilemma which allows for no ethically clear solution. In *Amis and Amylioun*, the disease itself is only briefly described, and seems to follow the usual course, as outlined above:

... Sir Amiloun,

*Wiþ* sorwe & care was driuen adoun,

*Pat* ere was hende & fre;

As so *þat* angel hadde him told,

*Fouler* messel *þar* nas non hold

In world *þan* was he. (1540-45)

Fortunately for Amyloun, this state is not permanent, and a cure can restore him to health, and more importantly, remove the mark of shame and make the disease only a passing stage of his life, instead of his final destination, as in Cresseid's case. Amis is ready to help, kills his children, proceeds with the treatment and bathes his friend in their blood:

*He took þat* blode, *þat* was so *briȝt,*

*þe* alied *þat* gentil kniȝt,*

*Pat* er was hend in hale,*

*þe* sêppen in bed him diȝt
& wrei3e him wel warm, apli3t,
Wip cloþes riche & fale.

This treatment has, of course, ritualistic overtones, with those outlined in the discussion of Mary Douglas's treatment of magic and miracle. Since the leprous body is in a state of contamination, it is subjected to a magic ritual, which she would interpret as enacting a reversal to a former state that is more in accordance with the law of order than the present one. One of the characteristics of the ritual is that it has a framing function, which shapes and changes the ways events and objects are perceived: "it enlivens the memory and links the present with the relevant past."98 Douglas uses the example of incest to demonstrate this cultural mechanism:

The object of the ritual is not to deceive God but to reformulate past experience. By ritual and speech what has passed is restated so that what ought to have been prevails over what was, permanent good intention prevails over temporary aberration.99

The healing of the Amyloun represents a ritual cleansing, which essentially consists of bathing in the blood of innocent children and has strong reminiscences of baptism, thus echoing the notion of rebirth. In the text this rebirth is signified by the almost instantaneous removal of the marks of shame: the lesions, boils, and wounds disappear from the leprous body and signal that the 'aberration' is rendered only temporary, and the body restored to its former healthy state. The healing process itself is only briefly mentioned and mainly consists

98 Douglas, Purity, 64.
in restoring his former physical power, and his appearance:

\[
\ldots \text{sir Amylioun was hool \& fere} \\
\text{And wax was strong of powere} \\
\text{Bo\|p to goo and ryde} \ldots
\]

Amyloun thus has the chance to shed his identity as a leper, and to emerge from this process as a healthy person and once more to fit into the order of society.

Cures, even though they seem to be possible in some instances, are, however, not available to everyone; a similar scenario, albeit with a rather different moral 'slant' is described in the Occitan romance of *Jaufre*. Here the *motif* of the lepers' cure is taken up once more, but presents the lepers' quest for health as a crime, and hence as ultimately unsuccessful and, in contrast to the above cited examples, as deeply reprehensible. This text is remarkable in that it reveals the direct connection between the lepers' sexual deviance and the resulting impossibility of healing the disease. Needless to say this text builds on all the usual negative stereotypes associated with lepers and lacks the sympathetic portrait of the former examples. Exactly for these reasons it presents the chance to uncover some of the most widely held assumptions about the lepers' sexual depravity and the resulting inability to find an effective cure.

In one episode of the romance, Jaufre, a young knight on his quest for adventure encounters a mother, who pleads for his help since her child has been abducted: "She came straight to Jaufre: 'My lord, by Almighty God, mercy! Help me! Bring me back my child alive
-- the leper carried him off from my very door." The reason for the leper's abduction of the child is not revealed, however, until the end of the episode; it turns out that the abductor acted on behalf of his master, a more powerful leper, who ordered him to steal several children to obtain their blood for his own cure. "There he found the leper, with a huge knife in his hand; he had already killed eight children. There were twenty-five or thirty more of them there, big and small, and they were all wailing and crying." Under the threat of death he admits his complicity in the crime: "I was being forced to kill these eight children and all the others, in sadness and despair. My master made me do it, completely against my will, to collect their blood. By the faith I owe to God, I am not lying! He was going to bathe in it to cure his leprosy."

For this leper, however, there is no cure, and in the course of a fight he is killed by Jaufre for his crimes. By resorting to this violent end the text effectively forecloses any discussion of whether the bathing in children's blood would really have had the desired effect. One could venture here, however, that the killing of the leper signals that the cure is not available to him, and thus that its effectiveness is not an issue. In this connection it is significant to note that Jaufre actually prevents this leper from raping a young woman, a fact, which makes the inherent combination of leprosy and unrestrained sexuality quite obvious:

Another leper was there, wild and strange, lying in bed with a maiden -- I don't believe there is one more beautiful in all the world . . . her dress was ripped to

---


101 Jaufre, 51.

102 Jaufre, 51.
below her breasts, which were whiter than flour. She was wailing and
lamenting in great despair, and both her eyes were much larger than normal
from crying.\textsuperscript{103}

Jaufre's leper shows the same unrestrained desire which was apparent in Béroul's Yvain when
he asked Mark to give Yseut to his band of lepers as her appropriate punishment.\textsuperscript{104} Even
Lanfranc the surgeon in his sober account lists the lepers' propensity for frequent sexual
intercourse as one of the symptoms of the disease: "Also þei wilneþ myche to com<u>ne with wommen."\textsuperscript{105}

Like the lecherous leper depicted in the \textit{Roman de Jaufre}, Cresseid has no chance
even to be considered for a cure; she has no chance to rid herself of the symptoms, and thus
of the disease. Henryson obviously felt that the serious nature of her trespass could not
warrant a return to a former innocent state, thus leaving her with a corrupt soul. Having lost
this chance forever, her diseased inner self remains, to use de Laclos's words, "turned inside
out."

3.4. "Thow suffer sail, and as ane beggar die": The Disease and its Social Consequences
To bear testimony to the infectious power of "wickit langage," the first step in the description
of Cresseid is not the outbreak of the actual physical symptoms of leprosy; the onset of the

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Jaufre}, 45.

\textsuperscript{104} Brody, \textit{Disease of the Soul}, 182.

\textsuperscript{105} Lanfranc, \textit{Chirurgie}, 197.
social symptoms that pre-empt the actual disease. One can suppose that rumours about Cresseid's life would be enough to trigger a whole register of reactions of public shunning and shaming, which are the reason for her attempt to hide from the public gaze. The most obvious expression of Cresseid's shame is signified by her trying to 'pass' as someone else when she secretly slips out of town to get to Calchas's house:

This fair lady, in this wyse destitute
Of all comfort and consolatioun,
Richt priuelie, but fellowship or refute,
Disagysit passit far out of the toun . . . (92-95)

That Cresseid has to hide from the public can be attributed to her trying to avoid public shame since the notorious facts about her life, related earlier, seem to be common knowledge. It is, however, also possible to see this brief scene as a foreshadowing of her later trip to the leper house, which is described in quite similar terms. Again, shame is her overwhelming emotion when she asks for the last act of kindness her father can do for her:

. . . 'Father, I weld not be kend;
Thairfoir in secreit wyse 3e let me gang
To 3one hospitall at the tounis end.' (380-82)

106 The textual situation concerning the term "Disagysit" is unclear; Fox in his commentary, 347, cites another witness which reads "Dissheuelde". Despite the lexical differences both readings give a clear indication of Cresseid's attempts to remain unrecognized, "since Cresseid is both secretive and distraught." For my own reading I prefer the term "disagysit" since it denotes Cresseid's conscious attempt to remain anonymous, whereas the second term "dissheuelde" could merely relate her distraught state. However, both manuscript versions in a way relate Cresseid's attempt to draw attention away from her person, the first by hiding her body behind some disguise, the second by hiding her beauty behind an unkempt appearance.
This desperate attempt to conceal herself from the community of the healthy is further illustrated by her disguise with coat and beaver hat, as well as the cup and rattle, signs of her new status as a social outcast:

\[\text{Than in ane mantill and ane bawer hat,} \]
\[\text{With cop and clapper, wonder priuely,} \]
\[\text{He opnit ane secreit set and out thair at} \]
\[\text{Conuoyit hir, that na man suld espy. (386-89)} \]

Although her clothing and rattle make her immediately recognizable as a leper, Cresseid seems to prefer this disguise since at least it draws attention away from her as an individual by assigning her to a group, thus erasing her individuality.

The frequent use of terms denoting secrecy is a clear indication of the way shame is not only experienced and related in the text, but also of the mode of its production. The emotionally charged parting scene between Cresseid and her father stands in sharp contrast to society’s disapproval of the sick person; the difference between both scenes is, of course, that by the time Cresseid leaves her father’s temple she shows visible symptoms of the disease; she desperately tries to dissociate herself from her person, and yet she acts in almost the same way when she makes her first trip since there is no necessity to hide herself. This parallel construction of both situations can be cited as further proof that the text operates on an implicit logical connection between the protagonist’s (sexual) behaviour and the disease as its

\[107\text{See Fox, } \textit{Henryson}, \text{ 369, on the somewhat baffling presence of an expensive piece of clothing in these circumstances.} \]

\[108\text{On the discussion of stigmatization through signs, see below, 168-71.} \]
necessary consequence. Despite these rather clear accusations, the interesting aspect of this scene is Cresseid's father, who in his compassion for his daughter resists the urge to sit in judgment on the patient. This brief glimpse of sympathy can be read as an insight into the patient's own situation, as it is related in Jean Bodel's previously quoted congé where he reports his words of departure to his friends and relatives:

A Dieu vous vœul tous commander
Ensemble, sans chacun nommer
car n'i a nul dont je me plaigne
Ains m'en lo molt et doi loer
De vous me convient eschiver
Comment que le cuers m'en destraigne.¹⁰⁹

[To God you want to commend all together, without naming a single one, because there is nothing I complain about. In this way I am highly praised and have to be content with separating myself from you: however this pulls at my heart.]

From now on the leper is dead to the world, and his friends and family can no longer be of any help to him. Although Cresseid's father promises to send her his alms, there is little else he can do for her.

One of the most immediate social consequences of the disease is the loss of the individual's status, as well as his framework of social relationships, a fact which becomes apparent from the speech of the avenging Saturn:

I change thy mirth into melancholy,

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Bériac, *Des lépreux*, 213.
Thyne insolence; thy play and wantones
To greit diseis; thy pomp and thy riches
In mortall neid; and greit penuritie
Thow suffer sall, and as ane beggar die. (316, 319-22)

This condemnation clearly outlines the physical, as well as the social and economic implications of his punishment. Cresseid's presumption to consider herself beyond the judgment of the gods, as well as her economic status, which previously allowed her some degree of independence and respect from society, are all cited as part of the reason why the disease came over her, and why these privileges are subsequently lost. The reduction to the state of the beggar is the usual, although not universal fate of the afflicted. Brody cites various legislative rulings, concerning the lepers' right to property, but nevertheless Cresseid's fate of ending up as a beggar is perceived as a very real possibility.110 The second part of Cynthia's judgment serves to highlight this social aspect, which incidentally has nothing to do with the physical consequences of the disease, and yet is so much a part of leprosy that it cannot be imagined without this effect of stigmatization:

Quhair thow cummis, ilk man sail fie the place.

This sail thow go begging fra hous to hous

With cop and clapper lyke ane lazarous. (341-43)

---
110Brody, Disease of the Soul, 86: "In brief, the law could place a person outside of society by depriving him of his rights to marry or to stay married, and to own and transmit property. It could simply and effectively deprive the leper of the right to have a home, and that being so, it could compel him to depend upon the very society which, out of loathing and fear, wrote those laws."
In this brief passage Cynthia addresses two significant issues, which are complementary to the social ramifications of the disease; these are society's exclusion of the lepers and the loss of their economic basis, as well as their stigmatization, most commonly symbolized by the cup and rattle. Brody refers to the sense of moral punishment, as well as to society's fear of contagion which are at the bottom of this social mechanism:

The demand that the leper abase himself is the expression of a moral judgment, of a need to exclude the leper, of fear. The leper was a threat to society, the carrier of contagion, and society did what it could to protect itself.

. . . [The leper] could not easily practice a trade, for few would deal with him. . .

. What often happened was that he became a beggar totally reliant upon the care and goodwill of other men.\^111

The complaint of Cresseid, which follows the scene of her admission to the leprosarium, is the literary expression of the loss of social and economic position the leper experiences with his disease. Following the *ubi sunt* tradition, Cresseid's lament contrasts her former happy life with her present hopeless situation. To express this sense of loss the poet draws up two lists of items: one of them consisting of what she has lost, and another, admittedly brief, of its replacements. The literary function of the *ubi sunt* formula is to redirect the reader's attention away from worldly gains, such as social status or possessions, to a religious and spiritual dimension in life and ultimately to make him renounce worldly ambition. The use of this tradition also enables Henryson to "conventionalize" Cresseid's punishment, who can thus rely on an established

\[111\] Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 79.
literary tradition to relate this emotional scene.

After the introductory stanza, the first two of the following stanzas thematize the loss of specific amenities she took for granted before her disease. Most notable is the radical change in her material possessions and the creature comforts which they afforded her: her bower, richly decorated, good food and drink, her expensive clothing, and a garden for herself to entertain the company of other ladies (417-33). The subsequent two stanzas treat Cresseid's fall from fortune, and the impact the disease has on her personal situation. Again, her loss of material goods and of her comfortable life are the most obvious outward symbols of the social consequences of the disease:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thy hie estait is turnit in darknes dour;} \\
\text{This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour,} \\
\text{And for thy bed tak now ane bunch of stro,} \\
\text{Tak mowlit breid, perrie and ceder sour;} \\
\text{Bot cop and clapper now is all ago. } \quad (437-42)
\end{align*}
\]

The following stanza relates those consequences which have a much more immediate impact on her, and which are essentially the physical manifestations of leprosy, as discussed above. In this passage these are repeated once more and put into direct contrast to Cresseid's former state of health:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{My cleir voice and courtlie carrolling,} \\
\text{Quhair I was wont with ladyis for to sing,} \\
\text{Is rawk as ruik, full hideous, hoir and hace;} \\
\text{My plesand port, all vtheris precelling,}
\end{align*}
\]
Of lustines I was hald maist conding. (443-47)

The effect of her marked face is that everybody is repelled by its deformity and flees her presence, with the result that the other lepers become her only company:

Now deformit is the figor of my face;
To luik on it na leid now lyking hes.
Sowpit in syte, I say with sair sicing,
Ludegit amang the lipper leid, "Allace!" (448-51)

This enumeration of the disease's consequences for Cresseid shows the close connection between its physical symptoms and the social effects: while deformity and pain are inevitable, the loss of social standing, and the patient's economic basis are the socially determined results of leprosy.

A further, although less obvious, aspect of Cresseid's suffering is, of course, her grief about the loss of her former, happy life. Her complaint could also be read as an account of her attempt to confront the psychological implications of her loss and her efforts to find a way either to rebel or to accept her new situation.\(^2\) Her sighing "allace" is indicative of a somewhat resigned attitude, which changes with moments of despair and hopelessness, such as the scene described after her complaint:

\[\text{\^{112}I do not want to stress this point since a medieval author can not be expected to have the insight into the psychological makeup of his protagonist, as for instance a contemporary author does. And yet the similarity with modern accounts of severe losses is remarkable. Compare for instance the account in T. Keitlen's Farewell to Fear (New York: Avon, 1962), 37-38, where a newly blind girl is confronted with life in an institution for the blind: "I was expected to join this world. To give up my profession and to earn my living making mops. The Lighthouse would be happy to teach me to make mops. I was to spend the rest of my life making mops with other blind people . . . I became nauseated with fear, as the picture grew in my mind. Never had I come upon such destructive segregation."}\]
Thus chyeland with hir dreirie destenye,
Weiping sche woik the nicht fra end to end;
Bot all in vane; hir dule, hir cairful cry,
Micht not remeid, nor 3it hir murning mend.

To make Cresseid's changed condition obvious, she is given certain objects which are not
only functional devices to facilitate her life, but also universally understood symbols,
signifying the wearer's Otherness. Medieval pictorial as well as literary sources are
unusually unanimous in their representations of the outward signs which distinguish the
leper from the rest of society: apart from certain physical deformities, these are his clothing,
his rattle or bell, and his cup, and thus testify to the accuracy of Henryson's description.

This need to attach some mark of recognition to the leprous body in order to warn the
healthy is also documented in legal precepts, regulating almost all of the lepers' movements
and their contact with society. The following edict, issued in 1368 by the council at Lavour in
the south of France, illustrates the legal aspect of segregation by making the lepers visible
through universally recognizable symbols:

because this illness is contagious, wishing to prevent danger, we command
that lepers be sequestered from the rest of the faithful; . . . that their clothing
be uniform, their beards and hair shaved; . . . and [that they] shall always carry

113 For medieval illustrations of lepers see for instance Brody, Disease of the Soul, following page 64, and Richards, The Medieval Leper, 52, 55, 103.

114 For local variations of these outward signs see Brody, Disease of the Soul, 67-68, and Bériac Des lépreux, 186-88.
a signal by which one can recognize them.\textsuperscript{115} Stigmatization means first and foremost a process of labelling, which serves to affirm the otherness of a certain group, with the aim of distinguishing its members from the rest of society.\textsuperscript{116} For the medieval leper this means that the legal precepts regulating his new status also demand that he be instantly recognizable as a member of this social outsider group. The most obvious purpose of this legislative measure is, of course, as already mentioned, to make the leper highly visible in order to warn the healthy of his presence, and thus to minimize their risk of infection. Richards points out that the imposition of a 'dress code' on the lepers brings them "into line with Jews, prostitutes, and reformed heretics." Richards then draws the conclusion that measures such as these serve to symbolize "the leper as a member of a distinctive minority group, a person apart."\textsuperscript{117} The universality of these symbols, as well as their relatively strict enforcement, however, suggests that there might be a reason for this practice which lies beyond its merely symbolic function to make these groups visible. As a universally understood sign, warning of an approaching unclean body, the rattle, or bell, of course, is directed towards the community of the healthy, warning them of someone who is different, deformed, and thus poses a threat to them. While acknowledging the

\textsuperscript{115} Brody, \textit{Disease of the Soul}, 65.

\textsuperscript{116} Erving Goffman, \textit{Stigma: Notes On the Management of Spoiled Identity} (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), 2-3, provides the following explanation of the social concept of stigma: "While a stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others . . . and of a less desirable kind . . . He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive."

\textsuperscript{117} Richards, \textit{Sex, Dissidence and Damnation}, 155,
validity of all these issues, I would, however, also claim that these signs exercise a second
kind of power, which is directed against their wearer, since as tokens of shame they invoke
feelings of lack of value and as a consequence lead to self-loathing within the labelled
individual. While they deny the stigmatized individual the chance to 'pass' unrecognized, I
would also claim that by their own potential to create shame, they make the victim complicit
with society's attempt to control and curtail his freedom. In this sense I interpret the lepers'
rattles and bells as symbols of oppression, which are merely the visible signifiers of the
various discursive, that is, legal and religious, medical, or ritualistic tools to ascertain that the
outsiders are continuously reminded of their place in, or for that matter, on the margins of
society. By making their detection obvious, the lepers thus have little opportunity to intrude
into forbidden spaces, and by internalizing these injunctions, at the same time internalize a
part of the societal policing function. I would venture here that the leper's clapper serves as
much to alert the healthy of his presence, as well as to constantly remind the leper himself of
his own place. This process of mutual abjection is also visible in the legal discourse, defining
the leper's position in relationship to the rest of society, such as the rules of conduct
promulgated in 1146 and revised in 1344 for the leper house of St. Julian near St. Albans;
among the general rules of conduct is the following proscription:

118 Among the most notorious practices in the twentieth century is, of course, the
German Nazi Government's use of yellow stars, pink, red, and black, etc., triangles to label
various groups, considered detrimental to the health of the 'national body'.

119 Goffman, Stigma, 7, describes the disparity between what is expected of an
individual and his own perceived shortcomings as one of the reasons for shame and self-
hatred: "Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one
of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one can readily see himself as
not possessing."
Since amongst all infirmities the disease of leprosy is held in contempt, those who are struck down with such a disease ought to show themselves only at special times and places, and in their manner and dress more contemptible and humble than other men.\textsuperscript{120}

Although the leper has very little power in this process of stigmatization, one can still argue that the victim's enforced complicity is an instrumental factor in the smooth running of this mechanism of control. Being thought of little or no value in comparison to the rest of society, being held in contempt and disrespect, are societal strategies which for their effectiveness also in part depend on the victim's cooperation and willingness to play this very role.

To return to Cresseid's case, her exhortation to the women of Troy and Greece echoes this notion of abjection and resignation. By interpreting her fate in an exemplary way she perpetuates the socially sanctioned perception of her disease as punishment for her sexual behaviour. When, as in this case, the victim condemns herself, "wickit langage" has achieved its ultimate goal by making the victim concur with the accusation:

\begin{quote}
O ladyis fair of Troy and Greece, attend \\
My miserye, quhilk nane may comprehend, \\
My friuoll fortoun, my infelicitie, \\
My greit mischief, quhilk na man can amend. \\
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{(452-55)}

By exposing herself and her disease as an example of the consequences of sexual licentiousness, Cresseid in her own way furthers the linguistic conception of the disease and its causes, as well as its consequences. Her disease is clearly interpreted in Christian moral

\textsuperscript{120}Quoted from Richards, \textit{The Medieval Leper}, 131.
terms, as one of the tribulations faced by the sinful humans while they are on earth. In its understanding as an *exemplum* Cresseid's case serves to prevent others from committing the same offences. In addition, Cresseid's *exemplum* can also be read as a prescriptive text on how to prevent the disease:

Be war in tyme, approchis neir the end,

And in 3our mynd ane mirrour mak of me:

As I am now, peradventure that 3e

For all 3our micht may cum to that same end,

Or ellis war, gif ony war may be. (456-60)

By referring to the tradition of the "mirrour" or *speculum*, Cresseid places her complaint in the tradition of the *exemplum* and morally didactic texts which recommend or proscribe a certain behaviour, or as in Cresseid's case warn the audience not to follow her example.

Having provided this negative example, Henryson then goes on to outline an alternative way of behaviour, which is considered appropriate in this situation. In the so-called recognition scene between the sick Cresseid and Troilus, a different paradigm of behaviour is demonstrated, and, needless to say, is presented as the sanctioned alternative to

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121 See for instance Henryson's poem *Ane Prayer for the Pest*, ed. Fox, 167-69, which takes up the *motif* of the sinfulness of humankind, and consequently blames one's life for being visited by the deadly disease:

Sen for our vice, that iustice mon correct;
O king most he, now pacifie thy feid;
Our sin is huge, refuge we nocht suspect;
And thow be iuge, dislug ws of this steid. (81-84)

Cresseid's own morally reprehensible way of acting. Troilus's magnanimity, symbolized by his donation of precious articles and a sum of money, stands in sharp contrast to Cresseid's self-absorption. Henryson emphasizes this opposition by making his protagonist repeat the line "O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus!" (546, 553), and end with the final declaration "Fy, fal Cresseid; O trew knicht Troylus!" (560). Henryson then employs a very effective technique of making Cresseid pronounce the admission of her guilt, and thus on the narrative level prove the validity of the text's moralitas. By addressing Cresseid's final words to all lovers, Henryson turns the specific case into a statement of universal truth:

Traisting in uther als greit unfaithfulnes,

Als unconstant, and als untrew of fay --

Thoht sum be trew, I wait riht few ar thay;

Wha findis treuth, lat him his lady ruse. (570-73)

This explanation is then deflected back onto Cresseid herself and her failure to forsake the true love of Troilus for Diomeid. Cresseid's last words reflect the insight that everything was her fault, and the protagonist has nothing more to say than to repeat the verdict that has been pronounced long ago: "Nane but myself as now I will accuse" (570).

After this pronouncement Cresseid then draws up her testament and prepares to leave her possessions after her death to the community of lepers. Her body is left to return to the earth and in the contemptus mundi tradition she invokes images of physical decay and corruption which ultimately write her leprous body out of the text, leaving only her material objects which she bequeaths to the lepers and her soul which she leaves to Diana, the goddess of the woods.
The news of Cresseid's death is then related to Troilus, who merely repeats the verdict she herself has pronounced before: "I can no moir; / She was untrew, and wo is me thairfoir" (601-02). The writing on her headstone summarizes in a few terse words the causality between her behaviour and her disease which Henryson has established throughout the poem:

Lo, fair ladyis, Cresseid of Troyes town,
Sumtime countit the flour of womanheid,
Under this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid. (607-09)

Equally important in this inscription is, however, its function and its intended audience. The "lo" at the beginning of the sentence is an indication that the following statement is an exhortation that demands attention since its purpose on the headstone is not merely to remember the deceased, but to admonish its living readers. The carving on the stone is a metonymic representation of what has been inscribed into the text, namely its moral and didactic intention. The audience, the women of Troy and of Henryson's time are to learn from Cresseid's fate. The pedagogic means that is being used here is the invocation of fear. By portraying Cresseid's case-history as an expected, and above all 'natural', sequence of cause and effect, the carved words put the narrative into perspective: this is what can be expected to happen if a woman does not play according to the rules. In this causality the established religious, moral, social, and medical thought constructs are instrumental in fulfilling this didactic function. Their establishment is a necessary prerequisite to create a credible causality between a specific form of behaviour and its consequences. In this sense, the narrative becomes an instance of discipline itself.
NOT A PRETTY PICTURE: THE BODY VIOLATED BY RAPE

A female definition of rape can be contained in a single sentence. If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape.

Susan Brownmiller

Rape itself should not be regarded as a transhistorical mechanism of women's oppression but one that acquires specific political or economic meanings at different moments in history.

Hazel Carby

This part of my project focuses on the violated body. Violations of the body can occur for all sorts of reasons, ranging from unfortunate accidents to deliberate acts of assault. I have chosen to examine the raped body for this section since it proves to be one of the most

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consistently recorded violations of the human body and spirit in Western history. From an historical and legal perspective, rape and abduction are two closely related crimes against women that occur in a surprising number of medieval narratives and thus provide one of the most consistent instances to examine the Otherness of bodies harmed in this particular way.

As one might expect from this consistency, rape is no 'ordinary' crime, in so far as any crime can be called ordinary. The specific features of rape are the extreme power imbalance between assailant and victim, and the terrible damage done to the victim's bodily and mental integrity. It is certainly this horrifying combination of traits which has made the crime of rape a singularly memorable occurrence in classical and medieval history. Society's response to this crime can shed light on the specific ways in which it attempts to ensure the individual's right to an unharmed body (and also by implication the proper uses of this body) as well as the mechanisms that ensure that this body remains available to society in its unharmed form.

Among these early European narratives the rape of Lucretia stands out since it is one of the founding narratives, or Grundungslegenden, of the classical Roman state. The narrative, no doubt because of its significant historical function became one of the most popular motifs in medieval literature. The aim of this project is to explore some of the social

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4The restriction of this discussion to the female body as the subject of rape does not imply that rapes of males did not occur. Since representations of male-male rapes exist, however, mainly in propagandistic texts, dealing with Muslims, Jews, or heretics, their inclusion in this chapter would not do justice to this difficult and frequently avoided issue. On narratives of sexual violence committed against men by heretics and infidels see John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 277-82. On the specific use of male-male rape as an instrument of defamation in the Old Norse tradition see Kari Ellen Gade, "Homosexuality and Rape of Males in Old Norse Law and Literature," Scandinavian Studies 58 (1986): 124-41.
reactions to the crime of rape and, more importantly, the 'place' the raped and violated body has in the text and thus by implications in society.

1.1. The Legal Background

In medieval society the legal issue of rape was regulated by Canon Law, which itself draws heavily on Roman law. In the course of its history, the medieval understanding of the legal term \textit{raptus mulieris} is subject to a number of changes. In Roman law \textit{raptus} denoted primarily the abduction of a woman, not necessarily her sexual violation:

The specific malice of the offense consisted not in the sexual ravishment of the woman, but in stealing her away from her parents, guardian, or husband. \textit{Raptus} might also be used to describe theft of property as well as of a person, so long as violence was employed in the act. In the ancient law, moreover, \textit{raptus} was not a public crime; rather, it was a wrong against the man who had legal power over the woman or property violently seized.\textsuperscript{5}

Despite the gradually changing emphasis in medieval Canon law, from abduction to forced intercourse, the later legal discourse still remains relatively unanimous in the treatment of the victim. Her status is defined as that of a man's or her family's property. For the legal understanding of rape in the classical, as well as for part of its medieval interpretation, the definition of the woman's status is crucial: the violation, be it abduction or forced intercourse, is not primarily done to the woman since in a legal sense she is not considered a person but

\textsuperscript{5}James A. Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law," \textit{Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church} (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), 141-42.
rather an object, belonging to a third party. Since women are regarded men's property this understanding of the law places the relationship between men and women on the level of material possessions. Thus, a violation of a woman is treated in a way similar to a crime against property. Like an animal or an inanimate object the woman can not be the victim of crime: it is rather the object's owner who is the victim in the legal sense. Thus the law interprets the harm done to a woman as a crime committed against a man. This legal interpretation of rape was first challenged by Justinian's (527-565) revision of the law, who defined *raptus* "as a sexual crime against unmarried women, widows, or nuns,"\(^6\) thus giving women the standing of persons, but with the notable exception of married women. According to this definition rape was no longer a crime against property but a crime against a person. In the course of the Germanic invasions of Rome the more primitive notions of Germanic law were reinstated and continued to influence the legal discourse until Gratian in his mid-thirteenth-century *Decretum* attempted a systematic codification of the legal issues of *raptus*. The most important aspect of Gratian's understanding is that he views the crime as inclusive, committed against both the woman and her family. Canonists then further refined this definition and worked out four elements which are constitutive of the crime: "Rape must involve the use of violence, it must involve abduction, it must involve coitus, and it must be accomplished without the free consent of one partner."\(^7\) In contrast to the preceding notions of *raptus* as a crime against property in this argumentation the crime becomes one against persons, since the question of consent gained a prominent position: although acknowledging

\(^6\)Brundage, "Rape," 142.

\(^7\)Brundage, "Rape," 143.
the problem of forced consent, the law does not distinguish between the rights of the violated woman and her family since both are equally instrumental in giving their consent to have intercourse with the victim. Technically speaking, this could mean that a woman's refusal to consent could be overridden by her family's consent. The motivation behind this stipulation might have been the importance placed on the family's right to marry off their daughters. A further narrowing of the legal understanding of raptus is its restriction to women of a certain class and matrimonial status: married women could not refuse to have intercourse with their spouses. Equally important, since it represents a clear indication of the limitation of the notion of consent, the commentators state "the victim of rape must be an 'honest' woman, that is she must be of good legal standing. One could not rape a harlot."

While these attempts at regulating the legal interpretation of rape provide a firm basis on which individual cases can be argued, thus providing a modicum of legal security for at least some women, the main point I want to raise here is that a law in this form shows two major weaknesses which no doubt rendered it largely ineffective in many cases. The legal move endows the woman with some degree of legal autonomy since it regards her as a person instead of part of her husband's or family's property. Despite this recognition of a woman's standing as a person this law has historically proved to have the opposite effect of what one would commonly expect, namely that it became actually more lenient in regard of the

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8Brundage, "Rape," 144. See also Jeffrey Richards, Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 128-29, and his discussion of the legal standing of prostitutes: "As with lepers, the Church sought to deprive prostitutes of their civil rights. Canon law debarred prostitutes from accusing others of crimes except simony and from appearing in court. They were incapable of being victims of rape. Sex with a prostitute against her will, therefore was not punishable by canon law."
offender, thus further reducing the rights of the victim as compared to the early medieval type of legislation. Kathryn Gravdahl in her feminist analysis points to the surprising effect that despite a better codification of rape law in the medieval period, particularly as a consequence of Gratian's efforts, the penalties actually imposed were much more lenient than the draconian measures imposed in the earlier period, which saw castration and the death sentence as fit forms of punishment:

But the church, preaching Christian love abhorred death and mutilation in principle.

In the mid-twelfth century, . . . Gratian and other canonists established a variety of penalties for rape: excommunication, pillory, imprisonment, whipping, monetary fines, or marriage to the victims as penance. The new leniency was to the advantage of the accused rapist and scarcely protected the rights of women.9

Gravdahl's seemingly polemical statement about the medieval Church's leniency has to be read in light of her examination of legal sources in northern France, which reveals two things: crimes other than rape, such as property crimes, even obviously trivial ones, were punished with utmost brutality,10 whereas rapists often experienced the leniency of the canon law, and, secondly, that a law biased against women of lower classes could hardly be effective against a crime based on gender difference.11


10See for instance Gravdal, "Poetics," 215-16 where she cites several cases of women being buried alive for stealing pieces of clothing.

For my own investigation two aspects of the legal discourse are of importance: I want to draw attention to the ambiguous legal status of the raped woman, which makes it possible to perceive her female body as either her husband's or her family's property, or to view her as a person, as an almost autonomous legal body who can refuse to give her consent. The implication of this legal "muddle" is that the woman often experiences the negative consequences of both legal interpretations: First, she has no say in what has happened to her since as the property of someone else she could not consent or withhold her consent, thus making the crime committed against herself the concern of others, namely of other men. Secondly, given that she is granted some degree of legal autonomy and thus the power to consent, the woman is put in the position that she has to prove that she did not consent to the sexual act, thus the onus is once more placed on her to prove her 'innocence.' And thirdly, in addition to the problem of having to 'prove' her innocence the woman also has to make sure that the law applies to her at all, that she is an 'honest' woman, as outlined above. In my interpretation I will focus on the continuities and discontinuities of this legal situation, first by providing a reading of Livy's account of the Lucretia story, and then by examining Chaucer's adaptation of the motiv in his Legend of Good Women against the background of exemplary narratives for young women, such as the ones found in Book of the Knight of the Tower.

1.2. Social Concerns

While rape violates the body, this crime arguably has its most serious impact on the victim's mind. This mental impact was recognized long before modern psychology, as becomes
obvious from Chaucer's comments on Tereus:

And, as to me, so grisely was his dede

That, whan that I his foule storye rede,

Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also. (F, 2238-40)

What causes Chaucer pain when he reads the *Legend of Philomela*, which he then included in his *Legend of Good Women*, is the violence and the suffering inflicted on the protagonist by Tereus. The pain related in the tale translates into the pain experienced by Chaucer, who as a reader of the tale himself subsequently shares it with his audience. The story of Philomela, transmitted from the Greek and adapted into the vernacular in the Middle Ages, shows a most disturbing pattern of sexual violence. Throughout history this form of violence has retained its virulence, the result of which is that it poisons the relationship between the genders and shapes gendered identities. Chaucer in his opening lines to the *Legend of Philomela* explicitly refers to this virulence of the act of rape, which has lost nothing of its terror over the course of history:

Yit last the venym of so long ago,

That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde

The storye of Tereus, . . . (F, 2241-43)

Chaucer remarks here in his own words on the universality of the extreme abuse of power which characterizes sexual violence. No matter in which historical period the crime occurs, in all cases significant patterns become obvious:

Not the least of these is an obsessive inscription - and an obsessive erasure - of sexual violence against women (and against those placed in the position of
"woman"). The striking repetition of inscription and erasure raises questions not only of why this trope but even more, of what it means and who it benefits.¹²

The issues raised here, the silencing, the obsessive inscription, and the obsessive erasure of the harm done to the body, and most importantly, the issue of agency (who inflicts and profits from this violence), are all features, which determine the act of rape. In this investigation these issues shall act as the underlying notions which have influenced the perspective from which I want to investigate literary representations of bodies violated by rape. I read these texts primarily as literary documents, utilizing certain rhetorical techniques which in turn were shaped by their historical, legal, and social environments. Although rape has been a reality for a very long time in our history, I think the phenomenon benefits from historicising so as to explore the cultural mentalities that shaped the social perceptions of the crime, its perpetrators and victims.

At the centre of this investigation is the body as the object of sexual violation and its function as a cultural signifier, both a site of the condemnation of this violence, but also as the site which makes rape "thinkable" as Higgins and Silver phrase it,¹³ in this context meaning the specific legal and political ramifications of the crime. Susan Brownmiller in what has become a "classic text" on rape establishes a simple and yet effective paradigm, which highlights the historical significance of rape and its dependence on a cultural

¹²Lynne A. Higgins and Brenda Silver, "Introduction: Rereading Rape," Rape and Representation, 2.

environment, according to which rape is "read":

The human sex act accomplishes its historic purpose of generation of the species and it also affords some intimacy and pleasure . . . But nonetheless, we cannot work around the fact that in terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape. When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it. Later, much later, under certain circumstances they even came to consider rape a crime.¹⁴

One of the most crucial axioms of the representation of rape is that it inscribes an extreme imbalance of power: on the one hand, the masculine perspective of an aggressively outspoken appropriation and domination of female sexuality, with the female body (or bodies of those in positions of little or no power) the object of male desire (much in the same way as the spoils of war) and, on the other hand, the victims' violated bodies whose voices are, as in the case of Philomela, literally silenced, or, as in Lucrece's case, "voluntarily" silenced by shame and suicide. Teresa de Lauretis draws the connection between politics and poetics, with the text as a site of violence itself, which she perceives as characteristic of modern western society, but which reflects a development, that draws on a long history of representing or not representing rape: " . . . the development of sophisticated technologies of the individual and its Others . . . have turned the violence of representation into [an] ubiquitous form of

power." Drawing on this notion of the politically charged nature of the representation of sexual violations, I want to examine the texts representing bodies violated by rape from two perspectives: first, as to their assumptions shared by society about violators and victims, where bodies reflect their social position as men or women, and secondly, focussing on the aspects of speaking and silencing, which I perceive again on two levels. First, I want to focus on the distribution of voice, on who speaks, and who is silent or silenced; and secondly I want to focus my attention on the textual politics, which deal with the topic of rape and violence in a specific cultural and historical context and how this relates to a wider discourse of patriarchal institutions, which in turn are often dependant on a decidedly unequal distribution of power and voice.

2.0. Lucretia's Two Bodies

2.1. The Body as res publica

Chaucer's Legend of Good Women contains the story of Lucrece, which tells the foundation myth of the Roman Republic and constitutes one of the urtexts of western civilization. As recorded in Livy's history (3. 44-50, 56-58) and Ovid's Fasti (2. 721- 852), the tale of Lucretia enjoyed a wide currency in the Middles Ages, most notably as an exemplum, with versions appearing in the Roman de la Rose (5589-658), Boccaccio's De claris mulieribus,

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16To differentiate between Livy's and Chaucer's versions of the tale I use the names "Lucretia" and "Lucrece" when referring to the respective texts.
and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (7, 5131-306).

For the classical Roman version of this story I want to posit that Lucretia's body acts as a signifier of two fundamentally different spheres, namely the public and the private, whereas in the medieval versions of the tale, the body of Lucrece has been stripped of its overtly public and political function, and is reduced to its private sphere as an *exemplum* of the virtue of chastity. Stephanie Jed in her examination of the impact of the narrative of Lucretia on the Renaissance construction of a classical past remarks on the dependence of this particular narrative of freedom on rape, a phenomenon which she perceives in Renaissance humanism, as well as in present day liberal humanism:

Just as the Florentines nostalgically constructed the descent of their own liberty from the liberty of Republican Rome, so modern humanists tend to reconstruct fifteenth-century Florence as a place uncontaminated by present-day corruption of free thought. In both cases, however, the nostalgia for past freedoms is dependent upon the representation of rape.¹⁷

As an interpretative tool for her approach Jed has created the term "chaste thinking," which she applies to both the narrative and its reception.¹⁸ Regarding the tradition of the narrative of Lucretia, Jed posits that its transmission "has produced discriminations in interpretative

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¹⁸*Chaste Thinking*, 8:"As a metacritical expression, chaste thinking refers not only to the rhetorical mechanisms by which the meaning of the rape of Lucretia is construed, but also to the material means by which her legend is transmitted and circulates in culture. Finally, the figure of chaste thinking is nowhere explicitly articulated in humanistic texts, because, as I will argue, humanism itself is an effect of chaste thinking."
practice from the codification of this legend in Livy's *Early History of Rome* to the jury selection process in United States Superior Courts."\textsuperscript{19}

In my own reading of narratives, both concerned with the rape of Lucretia, I want to attempt to fill the historical gap, as it is left by Jed, who moves straight from Livy's account to the Florentine Humanists, thereby surpassing the medieval reception of the narrative. By contrasting in particular Chaucer's treatments of the Lucretia motif I want to address some of its medieval uses, which I perceive as rather different from classical and Renaissance narratives of liberation.

One of the major paradigm shifts from classical/humanist to the medieval, exemplary treatments of the motif is that of its political interpretation: the Roman reading of the Lucretia story emphasizes its importance for the state politics of the Roman republic -- Lucretia's body becomes the site of power politics, which overshadow her personal tragedy -- whereas the medieval versions emphasize the aspect of sexual politics by using Lucrece's body as an *exemplum* of chastity. The classical version of the Lucretia story, as related by Livy, becomes a trajectory for the legitimation of political power; Lucretia's body, her violation and her subsequent death represent the touchstone for the legitimacy of two competing political systems: the institution of the Roman monarchy as opposed to the concept of the *res publica*, the idea of the state as the concern of all Roman citizens, with the exclusion, of course, of all those whose citizenship and gender marks them as non-Roman *cives*. Coppélia Kahn remarks on the public, political nature of Lucrece's body and its implications for the legitimation of political authority: "Rape authorizes revenge; revenge comprises revolution; revolution

\textsuperscript{19}Chaste Thinking, 14.
establishes legitimate government. In Lucrece's story, the personal is surely the political."²⁰ In the case of Livy's version, the body of Lucretia becomes a highly contested sphere: in fact, it becomes a site on which various battles are fought. Incidentally, these battles have nothing to do with Lucretia herself, but everything with the power-positions of the males surrounding her. The first of these incidents is sparked by a drunken bet among certain young knights, who wager whose wife is the most faithful. In this most typical scene of homosocial male bonding²¹ the bodies of the young knights' wives become the currency in the economy of their bets; the most virtuous one determining the leader's position in this group of young male rivals:

It chanced, as they were drinking . . . that the subject of wives came up. Every man fell to praising his own wife with enthusiasm, and as the rivalry grew hot, Collatinus said that there was no need to talk about it, for it was in their power to know in a few hours' time, how far the rest were excelled by his own Lucretia.²²

The situation of the convivium, an occasion where the young men are among themselves, provokes a contest, mainly in order to establish the position of a leader within this particular group, but it is also an expression of their community. The women are effectively barred

²⁰Coppélia Kahn, "Lucrece: The Sexual Politics of Subjectivity," Rape and Representation, 141.

²¹I am referring here to the concept of homosociality as developed by Eve Kosowski Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-27.

²²Titus Livius, Ab urbe condita, tr. B. O. Foster, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Heinemann, 1976), 1: 57, 199. All further quotations from Livy will be indicated by page number in the text.
from this all-male community: their absence indicates their identification with the other men in the group, as well as their desire for other women, hinted at by the bet, which has the wives' potential unfaithfulness as a subtext. The men's own desire for someone else's wife becomes the content of the bet and thus potential female unfaithfulness replaces the male desire for extramarital sexual "conquests" as a measure of their standing among their fellows. The question of virtue and leadership is displaced from the male bodies and transferred onto the bodies of the females, as becomes apparent from the husband's words, who, in keeping with the Roman tradition of the paterfamilias, sees his wife as an extension of himself, evident by his use of the expression "Lucretia sua," his Lucretia.

As subsequently related by Livy, the winner of the contest is Collatinus since his wife Lucretia, unlike the other women, is found at home, engaging in some innocent domestic activity when the young knights make their surprise visit:

\[
\ldots \text{Lucretia, though it was late at night, was busily engaged upon her wool, while her maidens toiled about her in the lamplight as she sat in the hall of her house. The prize of this contest of womanly virtues fell to Lucretia (199).}
\]

Apart from her physical beauty, it is of course precisely this scene of domestic innocence, with Lucretia and her maidens working under the light of the oil lamp, which sparks Tarquin's desire: "Sextus Tarquinius was seized with a wicked desire to debauch Lucretia by force; not only her beauty, but her proved chastity as well provoked him" (201). Livy uses the term "forma" to indicate Lucretia's physical beauty, a term, which can denote both beauty,

\[23\text{See also: Eve Kosowski Segwick, The Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 60-62.}\]
and the body itself. In this scene, her body becomes the place where her beauty and her virtue are situated, both qualities which Tarquin obviously cannot accept in a woman. The ensuing rape scene then gives a very clear indication that Tarquin not only subconsciously reacts to these qualities, but also plays with them in order to have his way with his victim. Female beauty and virtue are translated into a mixture of male violence and pleading. Livy's candid depiction of the act oscillates between these two positions:

Holding the woman down with his left hand on her breast, he said, 'Be still, Lucretia! I am Sextus Tarquinius. My sword is in my hand. Utter a sound and you die!' In affright the woman started out of her sleep. No help was in sight, but only imminent death. Then Tarquinius began to plead, to mingle threats with prayers, to bring every resource to bear upon the woman's heart. When he found her obdurate and not not to be moved even by fear of death, he went farther and threatened her with disgrace, saying that when she was dead he would kill his slave and lay him naked by her side, that she might be said to have been put to death in adultery with a man of base condition. At this dreadful prospect her resolute modesty was overcome, as if with force, by his victorious lust; and Tarquinius departed, exulting in his conquest of a woman's honour (201).

Lucrece's body becomes the battlefield on which Tarquin wants to inscribe his own Self over that of the female Other: he attempts to destroy her virtue, which is essentially what her body stands for, and defiles it by inscribing his own, sexually violent behaviour on it. After the failure of his pleading/threatening strategy, he very consciously uses Lucretia's virtue and her fear of losing it to intimidate her. Lucretia's fear of death translates into her
fear of losing her virtue and dignity, an interpretation, which, I think, is justified by the outcome of the account. Of particular importance in this context is Tarquin's 'framing' of Lucretia by staging her adultery with his slave. That the victim's body and her virtue are synonymous becomes clear from the fact that Tarquin's second plan is effective and force and violence are no longer needed: the strategy of intimidating the victim proves to be successful and she submits to him, "as if with force." For Lucretia, there is no way out of this dilemma, which could be described as a precursor to the so-called 'Catch 22 situation': if she resists, she will be 'framed' and killed, if she submits, she loses her one quality, which unlike any other embodies her Self. I want to take this expression literally here and describe Tarquin's deed as a 'dis-embodying' of his victim. The framing, or its threat, is done by means of a narrative, which constructs Lucretia as worse than all the other women, mentioned in the beginning of the contest. Tarquin's rape is primarily an act of narrative violence, which displaces the truth about Lucretia's chaste body and replaces it with his own narrative of unbridled, violent desire. This narrative displacement then destroys Lucretia's body together with her reputation and results in her 'disembodiment' in the sense that her physical existence ends with her violation, albeit at her own hands. Tarquin's violation of the sanctity of unity between body and spirit, effectively obliterates Lucretia's Self, and superimposes his own Self over that of his victim; the narrative of virtue is replaced by the narrative of violence, which is expressed in her defeat, much like that of an opponent in a military battle. Livy uses the term "expugnare," borrowed from the sphere of military campaigns, to describe Tarquin's 'conquest' of Lucretia and to denote the violence of the verbal violence done to her.

Lucretia's own view of the crime indicates that she dissociates her animus, her mind,
translated here as "heart" from what has been done to her body: "Yet, my body has been violated; my heart is guiltless, as death shall be my witness" (203). The result of Tarquin's crime is this dissociation of body and mind, which in her view of the events makes her a guilty party in the same way as her rapist. The men, trying to console her, actually reinforce this dissociation:

"They tell her it is the mind that sins, not the body; and that where purpose has been wanting, there is no guilt" (203). The violation is followed by Lucretia's suicide, which she explains as the punishment for a crime she did not commit: "... for my own part, though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; not in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia" (203). Her body, now a public symbol, bears the mark of sin, the *peccatum*, which makes it impossible for her to live with. The agency of the sin has become unimportant, Lucretia's body has taken on an entirely new character: it has ceased to be her own, private body, and instead has been transformed by the crime into a public body. Lucretia's suicide terminates the private existence of her body which is then put on display and shared by everyone in the *forum*:

They carried out Lucretia's corpse from the house and bore it to the marketplace, where men crowded about them, attracted, as they were bound to be, by the amazing character of the strange event and its heinousness. Every man had his own complaint to make of the prince's crime and violence. (205)

The woman's violated body becomes the focus of the attention of all the other men, it becomes a public affair and now it is the men who make the appropriate accusations against Tarquin; after the twofold violation of her body, first by Tarquin's crime and then by her
suicide it is transformed into a *res publica*.

To explain the public and private nature of Lucrece's body, I want to invoke Marie Axton's model of the Queen's two bodies, which she applies to representations of the persona of Elizabeth Tudor. A particularly salient point in this model is that both its private and public functions are inextricably linked in the natural, physical body of the Queen:

... it was found necessary by 1561 to endow the Queen with two bodies: a body natural and a body politic. (This body politic should not be confused with the old metaphor of the realm as a great body composed of many with the king as a head. The ideas are related but distinct.) The body politic was supposed to be contained within the natural body of the queen.²⁴

The logical consequence of Tarquin's rape of Lucrece is that he has not only harmed the physical body of Lucrece, but also at the same time attacked the state, the whole of the Roman *civitas*. As such Tarquin has become a public menace, and the rebellion against the *rex* is justified by the common aim of preserving the state from further violation. The consequences of this line of argument are that the significance of Lucrece's public body is given priority over that of her private body. Her body is read as synecdoche, a logical continuation of the things that are wrong in the Roman monarchy.

To follow Axton's argument, however, one has to bear in mind that the public body is always enclosed in the private. The question now, of course, is the relationship in which Lucretia's physical, private body stands to her political, public body. And, furthermore, what

is the significance of her death? In her placement as the king's object of desire it is her personal body which is subjected to Tarquin's lust, and it is this self-same body which he violates, which feels the pain and suffers the humiliation. This body, however, is taken out of the currency of the public dialogue and the importance of the political body takes over that of her private one. Although on a surface level, the private body as synecdoche points to the political, it is yet on a deeper level that Tarquin's crime against Lucretia's body is duplicated in the act of appropriating her for the benefit of the state. The refusal to see her two bodies as one perpetuates the actual act of rape in the violence of the metaphor, which appropriates Lucrece's body for the purposes of the state in a similar way as its appropriation through Tarquin. First, the battlefield of Tarquin's desire and her resistance, now her body becomes the battlefield of the forces of Roman citizens against their monarch. In Lucretia's own words this transformation becomes obvious when she equates the violation of her body with its pollution: "Yet my body only has been violated; my heart is guiltless, as death shall be my witness" (203). This statement draws attention to the division between Lucretia's animus and her actual body; this private body ceases to exist and it is merely her spirit, which comes to stand for her private Self, whereas her physical body becomes public property and thus part of the political scene: "They tell her it is the mind that sins, not the body" (203). The significant observation about this division of Lucretia's body is that the question of guilt and agency seems to become of secondary importance: the private body becomes the site of pollution and sin and thus is tarnished, and although it is acknowledged that she has no guilt, her body becomes subject to punishment. It is impossible for Lucrece to further inhabit this violated body and thus it is beyond her power to state her case: "It is for you to determine ...
what is due to him; for my own part I though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment . . ." (203). By handing over her body to the (male) world of Roman politics Lucretia at the same time relinquishes her right to seek justice and demand the punishment of the rapist.

This loss of action is accompanied by the loss of her voice: together with her private body she also hands over the decision regarding the fate of Tarquin. Her subsequent suicide becomes the manifestation of both, the final division of her body, as well as the silencing of her voice. It is Brutus's performative which announces the proper course of justice and Lucretia's concern becomes subsumed under his notion of justice as well as his political aims:

By this blood, most chaste until a prince wronged it, I swear, and I take you, gods, to witness, that I will pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and children, with sword, with fire ... and that I will suffer neither them nor any other king in Rome. (205)

One should note the irony in Brutus's call for resistance: the violence of the revolutionaries is not only to be directed against the body of the hated rex but also against his wife and children who are as innocent as his wife Lucretia. However, viewed from the perspective of the institution of monarchy as the controlled genealogical succession of a ruling family Brutus's call can be understood as an attempt to make sure that this succession is once and forever terminated.

The most visible instance of Lucrece's body becoming public property occurs when after her suicide her dead body is carried through the streets of Rome, thus having completely ceased being Lucretia's private body and instead becoming a symbol for the state of Rome.
and a site of political resistance. With her death the personal violation of Lucretia's body ceases to be of any importance and together with her corpse becomes a public affair, where everyone gives voice to his anger, save the silenced woman:

They carried out Lucretia's corpse from the house and bore it to the marketplace, where men crowded about them, attracted, as they were bound to be, by the amazing character of the strange event and its heinousness. Every man had his own complaint to make of the prince's crime and his violence. (205)

The rape of Lucretia, as related by Livy, demonstrates to the ultimate degree the violation of the sanctity of a person's private Self, here exemplified by a female body. The first act of violence perpetrated by Tarquin is duplicated by the Roman society who appropriates Lucretia's public body with little regard for her private body. Even though her body becomes the prime site of resistance against the rex, it nevertheless also becomes the tool of patriarchy, which comprises both the king and the republican rebels. Susan Brownmiller draws attention to the fact that rape and laws against it are both results of a developing patriarchal society:

It seems eminently sensible to hypothesize that man's violent capture and rape of the female led first to the establishment of a rudimentary mate-protectorate and then sometime later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy. As the first permanent acquisition of man, his first piece of real property, woman was, in fact, the original building block, the cornerstone, of the "house of the father." Man's forcible extension of his boundaries to his mate and later to their offspring was the beginning of his concept of
The struggle, which is finally credited with historical significance, is that between a group of Roman *viri* against their king and the establishment of a new form of government, enshrining in its laws the right of every Roman man the right to have a word in the affairs of state, and equally, the sanctity of his *domus*, his household with all its contents, animate and inanimate.

3.0. The Medieval Context

3.1. You Have Been Warned: Rules Of Conduct For Young Women

In the medieval context the story of rape ceases to be a primarily public, political issue and instead becomes one of domestic concern. This does not mean, however, that the issue of rape or its threat can ever be depoliticised; rather it means that the social sphere is that of the home, as opposed to the *forum*. Politics in this sense denotes a much more private issue, namely the regulation of personal behaviour. Although having an entirely different focus, the medieval adaptations of the classical rape story of Lucretia which I will analyse are still very much part of a political discourse. Focusing on the personal instead of the public they are still eminently political in their message.

It is certainly not without coincidence that after 1200 didactic texts for women became increasingly popular. Two relatively well known texts, the *Ménagier de Paris* and *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* offer advice to women on a number of issues. An important part of these writings are the rules governing the kind of relationships the wife can have with other men:

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In the *Ménagier’s* 'Quint article' (fifth article) we discover a hierarchy of intimacy, a series of concentric circles centred on the husband: "You should be very loving and private with your husband, . . . moderately loving and private with your good and close blood relatives, very distantly private from other men, and completely distant from presumptuous and idle young men." The *Ménagier’s* proscriptions are a clear indication of the social anxieties surrounding the position of women in late medieval society. The taxonomy of threatening men can be read as the reflection of those social groups who posed the most serious threat to marriage, and thus to the social and property alliances based on marriage. A specific warning is issued against "presumptuous and idle young men," in short unmarried young noblemen. As Georges Duby in his seminal essay on "les 'jeunes'," explains, the phenomenon of the rise of a new social group, precisely of these unmarried, landless "young" knights made the availability of young, unmarried heiresses a precious commodity on the marriage market. In addition the wives married to established noblemen were another prime target if they wanted to challenge the seigneur's privileged position. The rise of this social group of landless young men is reflected

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in a number of writings, as diverse as courtly love poems and fabliaux, all of which started in the twelfth century and are testimony to their aggressive behaviour:

Always on the lookout for adventure from which 'honour' and 'reward' could be gained and aiming, if possible, 'to come back rich', they were mobile and ready for action with their emotions at a pitch of warlike frenzy. What distinguishes this specific group from knights in earlier times is their highly aggressive and violent behaviour, the reason for which Duby locates in the strengthening of individual noble houses, at the expense of the central figure of the monarch.

One of the most significant consequences of this shift in political power is that the head of each noble house became an important political figure, dominating with other seigneurs the politics of the country. This development had two important consequences for the social stratification of feudal society from the twelfth century on: marriage was to become an important means to consolidate political power by creating alliances between several ruling families, and secondly, the rising importance of primogeniture, which had its reason in the succession of the eldest son as the head of the household. The "youths," whom Duby described are younger brothers to a seigneur's successor, usually landless knights who had ample opportunity to make their fortune in the world, but preciously little to expect at home.

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28 For a discussion of fabliaux as texts regulating the sexual practices of young males see below.

29 Duby, "Youth", 115.

As a means of compensation these young knights turned to dangerous pursuits in order to gain enough money to buy themselves back into their fathers' rank and thus to gain a wife, an heiress, in order to establish their future position as heads of households themselves. For women this situation meant that marriage to a nobleman was more than merely a private affair: it became one of the key elements of politics. Thus it was of utmost importance to ensure that the daughters of noble families were given to an appropriate and carefully selected party since bands of young knights tried to "win" brides on their own terms. For the fathers the primary aim was to safeguard their daughters and to facilitate their marriage to an appropriate man. For this reason it was of crucial importance that the daughters remained under the close control of their families, and thus safe from attacks of other men, who could otherwise abduct a woman and even negotiate the terms of a marriage her parents had not intended. In the worst case for whatever reasons, a "dishonoured" daughter would be impossible to place on the marriage market or would have to be married off to a man well below her own social rank. The reason for the woman's loss of her honour was of little consequence; to maintain it was the prime issue.

I want to claim that this development prompted the writing of a number of instructional texts for women, mentioned above. Women are warned of the dangers in this climate of an aggressive competition for wives and status. The advice given in these texts was certainly motivated in part by the families' concern for their daughters' safety. In addition, however, they also achieved that by keeping their daughters away from potentially dangerous situations, they had their daughters were available for politically advantageous liaisons. One such example is the advice that Knight of the Tower gives to his daughters,
which is among other things to ensure that they not only make good women, but also good
daughters. In the preface to Caxton's English translation the Knight of the Tower draws
explicitly on his own experiences as a member of a band of roving young noblemen and
mentions the dangers they posed for young women. He uses this experience to provide good
and bad examples of female behaviour to ensure that his daughters, the imagined readers of
his book, are kept from evil:

I remembryd me of the tyme when I was yong and roode with my felauship
and companyes in poytou / and in other places / And I remembre me moche
wel of the fayttes and sayenges / that they told of suche thynges / as they fond
with the ladyes and damoyselles / that they requyred and prayd of loue / And
yf one wold not entende to theyr prayer / yet another wold requyre withoute
abydyng / And though so were that they had good or euyll answers / of al that
they rought not / For they had neyther drede ne shame /.

The Knight's warning to his daughters, and by implication, of course, to other young women
reading his collection of exempla, is that the world is a dangerous place, peopled with men
trying to gain their sexual favours, either by means of seduction or if necessary by violence.

The position of the Knight himself is a curiously ambiguous one since he has
knowledge of both sides, that of the concerned father, but also that of a member of a band of
youths, probably quite similar to those described by Duby. The Book, however, is clearly
written from the perspective of one of the seniores, who wants to see his estate in the hands

31The Book of the Knight of the Tower, trans. William Caxton, ed. M. Y. Offord EETS Supplementary Series 2 (London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971), 12. All further citations from The Book of the Knight of the Tower will be indicated by page numbers of this.
of an appropriate successor, and thus has to make sure that his daughters are available on the marriage market as "undamaged goods." What transpires from his advice, however, is the Knight's own homosocial desire, the first indication of which is his membership in a group of young knights, sharing their verbal exploits concerning women, which finds its logical continuation in his own wish to become the member of another group, namely that of fathers and husbands. Instead of sharing stories about women, this time he shares his daughters with his male peers. Read from this perspective, the Knight's desire to protect his daughters from falling victim to some undesirable men is then at least partially motivated by his own desire to find himself in a worthy succession of men, and thus by his own care about his position within the group of his fellow knights. To achieve and secure this position he has to make sure that his daughters, his only currency in this homosocial exchange have their highest possible value on the marriage market. Thus, his advice to his daughters also serves to safeguard his own position as a nobleman, since the honour and status of his own good name are largely dependent on the honour and reputation of his daughters as desirable future wives. The Knight's fear of his daughters being raped is inseparable from his own fear of being the victim of another man's crime, since rape can also be in effect a crime committed by one man against another man.

Drawing on the importance of the exchange of women for the proper transmission of power within feudal society, I want to claim that specific narratives are used to regulate this patriarchal exchange ensuing, so that it might run as smoothly as possible. The underlying (and unquestioned) notion behind this assumption is that rape seems omnipresent, much in the way of a natural disaster (the Knight's recollection is a testimony of his fellows'
"determination"), and that it seems easier to place the responsibility for the crime on the (potential) victim than to change the behaviour of the men.\textsuperscript{32} In order to achieve this goal, exempla and other narratives, such as Chaucer's \textit{Legend of Lucrece}, operate on the pedagogical principle of instilling fear in their readers. The intention is, of course, to ensure that women's behaviour does not expose them to any "unnecessary" risk, and thus to make clear that if something happens the woman shares at least some of the blame for not having heeded the advice given to her. The conceptualization of the threat of rape is an ever present and seemingly convenient tool to ensure the appropriate behaviour of "good women."

Although the occurrence of rape signals the breakdown of the system of homosocial bonds, the narrative tactics of invoking fear and putting part of the blame on the victim are all part of a strategy to avoid precisely this sort of breakdown. In addition, the focus on women serves at least partly to obscure men's anxieties surrounding the uncontrolled sexual power of other

\textsuperscript{32}On this notion see also Ingrid Bennewitz, "Lukretia, oder: Über die literarische Projektion von der Macht der Männer und der Ohnmacht der Frauen. Darstellung und Bewertung von Vergewaltigung in der Kaiserchronik und im Ritter vom Thurn, in \textit{Der frawen buoch: Versuche zu einer feministischen Mediävistik}, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1989), 123. In her examination of the tale of Lucretia in Marquardt von Stein's Middle High German translation of the Book of Geoffrey de la Tour Landry Bennewitz comes to the conclusion that the book's primary indebtedness to preserve the status quo precludes any true concern about the fate of women since this would demand social change: "Der Gedanke, daß Frauen sich selbst . . . gegen die Männer erfolgreich zur Wehr setzen könnten, ist ebenso undenkbar wie eine Veränderung der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung, d.h. des Grundsatzes, daß Männer vergewaltigen, wenn sie dazu auch nur die kleinste Chance erblicken. Wer sich daher zu ändern und unter ständiger Selbstdisziplin zu leben hat, um erst gar keine Gelegenheit zu derartigen Übergriffen zu bieten, sind die Frauen."

[The idea that women successfully resist men is equally deemed impossible as is the notion of changing the social order, i.e. of the maxim that men rape if they have only the slightest chance. It is the women who have to change and live under constant self-discipline in order to make sure that this possibility does not arise in the first place.]
men. Elizabeth Robertson's seemingly provocative question whether "rape [was] not as aberrant, but rather as fundamental to the smooth operations of patriarchy" seems to point exactly in this direction. While I would still argue that the rape of a (noble) woman is essentially an accident that threatens the system of social relations in feudal society, the discipline that is achieved by these cautionary tales can be utilized to keep all women firmly under the control of "their" men.

To give an example of how this rhetorical process works in practice I want to examine chapter seven of The Book of the Knight of the Tower where the Knight introduces the topic of fasting as a means of self-control for young women: "How good doughters ought to fast / till they be maryed." Again, the concern of this chapter is to ensure that young women are urged to "clean living" in order to enter their marriages in a state of virtue. The remarkable fact about this piece of advice is that the danger of corruption is located within the female body and is seen as no different from the danger in the outside world posed by reckless young men. This chapter recommends regular fasting "thre or foure dayes in the weke" and first states the usual religious reasons to support this claim. In addition, however, the Knight also brings up the argument that regular fasting fortifies the body against all manner of temptations:

And also my faire doughters / it is moche good to faste the saterday / in thoghte of oure lady and of her hooly vyrgnynte / to thende that she gete grace for yow for to kepe clene youre vyrgnynte and youre chastyte in grace of god.

and in the loue of youre frendes / that none euyll temptacions ouer maystrye yow not / And hit is a gret vyctory ageynst the flesshe / and a moche hooly thyng /

This passage is very clear about the dangers surrounding the uncontrolled female body, and thus recommends a regimen of discipline to keep these potentially unruly bodies under control until they can be turned over to the control of their husbands. Obviously this passage does not mention rape, but rather its opposite, so to speak. And yet I would claim, what one is looking at is the same issue, albeit from a different perspective: no matter what the reason, unrestrained bodies mean trouble, and the outcome of such trouble, whether caused by rape or by "temptaciouns," means that the woman will not be available to a desirable future husband: "Clene liuing" is a metaphor for keeping bodies untouched, to make sure that the woman retains her value as an object of exchange on the marriage market.

To put his theory into practice the Knight recounts in Chapter 61 the exemplum of Tamar and Amnon. This text is quite explicit and demonstrates how easily a woman's virginity can be lost if she has the opportunity to be around men. The really astonishing aspect of the Knight's adaptation of this exemplum, however, is not that he should have chosen an incest story, but that he does not mention the fact of Amnon's rape in the exemplum. Whether intended or not, this transformation of his source is indicative that the act of rape is obviously of little importance: what counts is that the woman has lost her virginity and thus her honour. In contrast to his biblical source, the Knight obviously does not consider the circumstances worth noting. The account in 2 Samuel 13 clearly records Amnon's rape of his sister as well as her resistance:
Amnon . . . . took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister.
And she answered him, Nay, nay brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou such folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? . . . . Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

In contrast, in the account in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* the actual rape is replaced by an act of incest when Amnon takes his sister's virginity:

> He euer loked on her of a waunton and fals regard / and kyssed and embraced her / And so moche he made lytell and lytell that he chaffed hym so that he depuceled her / That is to say / he tooke her maydenhede fro her /. (87)

The issue here is neither rape, nor incest, but the loss of Thamar's virginity. In fact, Absalom's killing of his incestuous brother can be interpreted as resulting from his outrage at Amnon's 'deceiving' of his sister.

However, of greater significance to the Knight is the position of Tamar: had she not been unobserved and alone with Amon the whole unfortunate incident would not have occurred at all:

> And therfore here is a faire Ensample / For euery woman that clenly wylle kepe honoure and worship ought not to abyde alone with a man alone withoute it be with her lord / with her fader or with her sone / and not ony other / For many euyls & temptacions ben therof come / . . . . / For the deuylle is to subtyll to tempte the fleshe / whiche is yong and lusity. (87)

The Knight's *moralitas* presents the account of Tamar in a completely new light: it is not
Amnon's crime which is at the centre of his narrative, but his victim's carelessness in being alone with her rapist. The Knight shifts the blame for the crime from the perpetrator to the victim. In the end it is down to Tamar's lack of supervision that has caused her misfortune. Notwithstanding the fact that Amnon is also a member of her own family, the control of fathers, brothers, or other males is deemed an appropriate precaution to avoid similar incidents. Significantly, the danger is not seen as inherent in the uncontrolled aggression of the male attacker, but in the propensity of female bodies to yield to temptation if not under the constant control of male authority.

Although the Knight does not treat the fact of Thamar's rape in his exemplum, the topic enters his text by way of his moral 'agenda,' which is to define and to preserve the position of the father and his place in a society of male bonds between "lord," "fader," and "sone." The very act of the Knight's denial of the rape shows that rape (in its different shapes) is a fundamental threat to his society. And yet it is also, in its discursive form, a very convenient means to control these troublesome female bodies so as to ensure that they retain their proper value as objects of exchange, and thus contribute to the smooth functioning of feudal society.

3.2. "Thy faire body, lat yt nat appere,... Lucresse of Rome toun:" Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece and The Pedagogy of Fear

Chaucer starts his legend of Lucrece with a disclaimer: it is not because of its nature as a narrative of freedom that he plans to include it in his Legend of Good Women, but rather as a praise for his protagonist's steadfastness and her virtuous behaviour:
Now mot I seyn the exilynge of kynges
Of Rome, for here laste doinges
And of the laste kyng Tarquinius,
As seyth Ovyde and Titus Lyvius.
But for that cause telle I nat this storye,
But for to preyse and drawe to memore
The verray wif, the verray trewe Lucrese,
That for hyre wifhod and hire stedefastnesse
Nat only that these payens hire comende,
But he that cleped is in oure legende
The grete Austyn ...

Chaucer's introduction to the *Legend of Lucrece* takes the narrative out of its political context and thus redirects the focus to the person of Lucrece. Even though Chaucer praises her primarily for her love of "clennesse," later violated by Tarquin and the reason for her suicide, in contrast to his classical predecessor he yet grants Lucrece the use of her own body, however destructive. Her shame and her revulsion are essentially treated as private feelings and her suicide is represented as essentially a private act, an expression against the violation of her person. This assessment, however, does not mean that there is not a political dimension to Chaucer's adaptation and yet, in contrast to classical and Renaissance treatments, I want to posit that it is the unity of Lucrece's private and public Self, which distinguishes Chaucer's use of the narrative. As an essentially private person, Lucrece is taken out of the economy of a male-dominated society, one that is based on political and
This different interpretative focus becomes obvious in Chaucer’s privileging of Augustine’s version of the Lucretia legend over that of his classical, pagan predecessors, Livy and Ovid. Together with his distancing from the topic of political rebellion, this move indicates Chaucer’s emphasis on questions of virtue and morality. I shall argue that by placing the Legend of Lucrece in a specific literary context, Chaucer uses Lucrece, and in particular her body, in a didactic, exemplary function, which stands in the tradition of manuals of behaviour such as The Book of the Knight of the Tower. Lucrece’s chaste body becomes the most important signifier in the text and in this function ultimately an instrument of instruction and even discipline. By her very nature as a positive example of a good woman, Lucrece becomes the touchstone for all other females, who by virtue of Lucrece’s extreme reaction to the violence done to her must find it well nigh impossible to emulate her. In fact, if one wanted to take an extreme position in this argument, one might go so far as to say that the very fact that other women are alive (and perhaps even experience their bodies not as the antithesis to their souls) is enough to induce feelings of inadequacy, or even guilt, if they have to stand in comparison with Lucrece.\(^3^4\)

Drawing on this assumption I want to emphasize in my reading of Chaucer’s Legend of Lucrece in particular two issues: first, I read Lucrece’s body, previously inscribed as the

\(^{34}\)In contrast to my interpretation Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Irony and the Antifeminist Narrator in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women," JEGP 82 (1983), 12-13, reads the Legend in an ironic way and argues differently by attributing the direction of the antifeminist attitude against the God of Love or the narrator of the poem, rather than against the audience: "we are ultimately led to see not the limitations of the female nature itself, but the limitations of the attitudes toward female virtue and the idealization of women in which Cupid and the narrator conspire."
"res publica," in this text as a metaphorical replacement for her husband's status as a man. His masculinity is dependent on his control of Lucrece's body: chastity in this case denotes the masculine will and at the same time its legitimation, in a way quite similar to the text's claim to the wisdom of authorities, in this case that of the great "Austyn," as I shall discuss below. In this sense the woman ceases to be a person in her own right; her biological sex makes her a signifier of male presence, hence putting her own (fe)male presence into question. In the end Lucrece becomes a mere shell, echoing the words of the men dominating her, virtually disappearing behind the masculine authority. Her biological sex, so important (she is a woman after all), in a curious way ceases to make any difference: she merges with the name of authority, and her almost obsessive care for her husband's good name illustrates, as I will argue, that she can almost be replaced by him. The Otherness of her female body, the metaphor of her husband's status, merges into a metonymic extension of his masculine Self.

3.2.1. Of "clene maydens" and other Good Women: The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women.

In his prologue to the Legend of Good Women, Chaucer states his reasons for composing the Legend and thus supplies the ideological as well as the generic framework which underlies his composition. In the prohemium Chaucer, the dreamer-persona, is severely criticised for his treatment of female characters in his previous writings:

Why noldest thow as wel [han] seyd goodnesse

Of wemen, as thow hast seyd wikednesse? (Text G, 268-69)

This statement, of course, brings up the issue of defining female "wickednesse," which is
exemplified here by "Crisseyde [that] Troylus forsok" (G, 265). In this instance the
"wickednesse" of Criseyde finds its expression in female independence; in her decision to
leave Troilus and decide on her own fate, Criseyde displays traits of female independence,
which, according to the God of Love, are clearly incompatible with the image of "clene
maydens" and "trewe wyves" (G, 282). This admonition by the God of Love, as well as his
judgment on what are proper examples of female virtue, form the interpretative framework
that Chaucer provides for his Legend. Sheila Delany in her analysis of the preface to the
Legend stresses the literal-mindedness of the God of Love and his limited understanding of
literary texts, such as Troilus:

The God of Love is no frivolous reader, we see: he takes literature as ethically
exemplary. . . . Although he grossly overestimates the powers of art,

nonetheless Eros understands Troilus very well . . . . Eros is not exactly wrong,
then, but his reading is a narrow one.35

In contrast to Delany, who attributes this interpretative technique predominantly to the
God of Love, I would go so far as to see it as characteristic of the whole Legend itself since
the preface not only provides a narrative, but also an ideological framework for the entire
text. I base my argument on the examples cited from other texts and subsequently presented
as 'model interpretations,'36 which serve here as the paradigms for the individual legends. As

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35Sheila Delany, The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women (Berkeley:

36Despite her different approach to the text I am following here Hansen's argument in
"Irony," 14, which stresses the importance of other works of literature for the understanding
of the individual legends: "...Cupid's frame of reference for an understanding of women is
explicitly and exclusively literary: he does not accuse the dreamer of failing to serve or
a main characteristic of this narrative strategy I see its roots in the tradition of the exemplum. By proposing to use the exemplum as an interpretative paradigm I follow, at least in part, Carol Meale’s observation about the significance of exemplars for the understanding of medieval texts, but at the same time want to challenge her on her own terms to remain in the interpretative framework of the exemplum, without trying to "save" Chaucer from accusations of producing simplistic and misogynous texts:

What might here, to a late-twentieth-century audience, look to be a demonstration of Cupid’s lack of critical sensitivity, may be more accurately characterised as a desire to approach texts as though they were exemplars -- stories where meaning is constituted by a simple morality, good versus bad... But such an apparent simple-minded reduction of the complexities of Troilus and Criseyde... ill accords with what we know to have been Chaucer’s methods of adapting his largely misogynistic sources.37

As I hope to show, the genre of the exemplum is far from a simplistic reduction of a text to a one-dimensional moralitas. On the contrary, the play with a text that was originally not intended to this form of overwriting produces some quite astounding results.

As already elaborated, the common denominator of all the individual legends is that they all talk about "clene maydens" and "trewe wives." In this sense the actual legends follow an established pattern: part of the penance is to thematize 'good women' hence I assume that honour some real woman, but repeatedly asks him why we could not find 'in alle thy bokes' (G, 271), in 'sixty bokes olde and newe' (G,273) some stories of good women."

Chaucer's principal system of order can also be carried over and applied to the individual legends and their reading. What Chaucer wants to exemplify by retelling the *Legend of Lucrece* is the precise opposite of what Livy used it for: instead of being the initiator of political unrest, Lucrece's body now becomes the site of sexual politics, a living exemplum for female loyalty and chastity. The key referent in this case is Chaucer's mentioning of Augustine's reading, which he establishes as authoritative over those of his classical predecessors.

By the "grete Austyn" Chaucer, of course, refers to St. Augustine's treatment of the exemplum of Lucretia in book I of his *City of God*. The actual account of Lucretia's suicide is preceded by Augustine's discussion of the legitimacy of suicide in the case of an innocent person suffering from disgrace at the hands of an offender. In chapter seventeen, Augustine strongly argues against the logic that self-destruction in the case of an innocent person is a viable and justified reaction to the injustice suffered; in fact, he argues all this does is to add another crime to the one already committed, since after all the innocent person would then commit a grave sin (27). In the following chapter, Augustine refines his position and argues against the notion that the victim of rape is polluted by the offender's lust. Instead, he posits a radical separation between body and mind, with the soul being privileged over the mind. Using the analogy of the clumsy medical examination of a virgin, resulting in the loss of her virginity, he concludes that no one could possibly accuse the virgin of unchaste behaviour since she never had any intention of losing her virginity:

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Therefore while the mind's resolve endures, which gives the body its claim to chastity, the violence of another's lust cannot take away the chastity, which is preserved by unwavering self-control. . . . We must rather draw the inference that just as bodily chastity is lost when mental chastity has been violated, so bodily chastity is not lost, even when the body has been ravished, while the mind's chastity endures. (28)

For Augustine the question of chastity becomes essentially one of volition; this move, however, is only possible by establishing a body-mind dichotomy. The advantage of this way of arguing is that chastity becomes essentially a question of responsibility. While Augustine acknowledges that the rape-victim has absolutely no say in what is happening to her, he, on the other hand, gives scant importance to the victim's body, which has to endure the ordeal. In this discussion, the violated body enters only the discourse ex negativo: in his discussion of the example of Lucretia Augustine refers to the hypothetical situation that she might have secretly desired Tarquin and thus in a way have given her consent to the act:

For suppose (a thing which only she herself could know) that, although the young man attacked her violently, she was enticed by her own desire that she consented to the act and that when she came to punish herself she was so grieved that she thought death the only expiation. (29-30)

Augustine is unclear here about the location of the origin of desire, but I would argue that he indirectly refers to the human body since it experiences sexual pleasure. To sum up his argument, it seems that while he focuses on the mind as the faculty that makes the decision to remain chaste, he attaches very little importance to the victim's body, and if he does give it
any importance then he does so only in the negative way as the potential locus of desire. In conclusion, Augustine states that Christian women, in contrast to their pagan Roman ancestors, only have their conscience to obey and thus have God as the final moral instance to decide over their chastity. As in his previous argument, Augustine places the onus to remain chaste on the individual, whereas he gives no right of decision-making to the victim and her violated body. Once the crime has occurred, only God's law applies, which effectively prevents the victim from taking any steps to avenge the wrong done to her since this is left entirely to God's justice:

They have the glory of chastity within them, the testimony of their conscience. They have this in the sight of God and they ask for nothing more. In fact there is nothing else for them to do that is right for them to do. For they will not deviate from the authority of God's law by taking unlawful steps to avoid the suspicions of men. (30-31)

In this passage Augustine directs the vision of the Christian woman in a telescope-like fashion onto the supreme authority, God. God has virtually replaced the husband as the immediate authority-figure. Even though God becomes the transcendent institution of authority, in his absence there still persists the worldly authority of a male (a father, husband, elder brother) directly within the woman's perception of herself. The power of the masculine will of God is thus enshrined in the woman's body, governing her behaviour, so as not to go against the dictate of the men who have real, physical power over her.

Chaucer, while following Augustine in depoliticising the exemplum of Lucretia, seems to place her in a more immediate context of desire and the duty to resist it. A strong
argument for this view is Chaucer's silence on the topic of suicide. Questions of divine authority are less pressing for him on his quest for examples of 'good' womanly behaviour. To Chaucer it is of importance, however, to come to terms with the God of Love's accusation that he misrepresented women as intrinsically bad, while, according to his observation the 'bad' examples are outnumbered by the 'good' ones, one hundred to one: "And evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde" (G, 277). To back up his argument the God of Love quotes a number of literary works, which, unlike Chaucer's own writings, are supposed to demonstrate that the topos of the 'good' woman is frequently represented in literature. However, the examples cited by the God of Love are in themselves somewhat problematic as examples of positive treatments of women:

What seith Valerye, Titus, or Claudyan?
What seith Jerome agayns Jovynyan?
How clene maydenes and how trewe wyves,
How stedefaste widewes durynge alle here lyves,
Telleth Jerome, and that nat of a fewe. (G, 280-84)

The writing mentioned, possibly the Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum, contained in the works of Jerome, but ascribed to Walter Map, is essentially antifeminist in nature, with the exception of the praise of Penelope, Lucretia, and the Sabine women. Titus, of course refers to Livy's work on Roman history, and thus one of the authorities on the Lucretia story. Claudian, the author of De raptu Prosperinae, relates the story of two gods, Pluto and Prosperina, commonly regarded as counterparts of May or January, representing Satan, avarice, lust, idolatry, materialism, or sterility, sometimes read as the result of an unhappy, bitter marriage.
The last work mentioned in this brief list is Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, a work noted for its antifeminism, and immortalized in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* where she tells how she flung her fifth husband's copy into the fire since it offended her so much. Despite this rather unpleasant notion, Jerome's work has praise for some women, namely the paragons of chastity, such as Lucretia. Among others, it is the exemplum of Lucretia from which Chaucer quotes Jerome in *The Franklin's Tale*:

Hath nat Lucresse yslayn hirself, alas,
At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquyn, for hire thoughte it was a shame
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name? (V, 1405-08)

Glenda McLeod in her investigation of lists and catalogues of women sees Jerome's two lists, (one of good and one of bad women) as didactic tools, not primarily to praise the pagan heroines, but to educate inadequate Christians. McLeod characterizes women's physical nature as the main focus of the lists in *Adversum Jovinianum*:

At the bottom of the order, Jerome and his successors place the antipode of virtue -- unchastity, a label that applies to widows who remarry as well as unfaithful or abusive wives. In all groups, women are considered evocations of the physical, and women's virtue depends on the successful restraint of their nature.39

The thrust of Jerome's argument is against female independence, which he deeply mistrusts.

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Since by their very nature women are prone to unchastity, the only way to keep this vice in check is to exercise control, either in the form of self-control, or through the control of others, such as fathers and husbands:

Thus virtue for a woman becomes a matter of denying what she is, a process of rejecting rather than realizing her inner self. In fact, Jerome asserts that chastity is woman's crowning virtue, equal with eloquence, military glory, and political achievements in man.  

Jerome here reflects the differentiation between male and female virtue, as developed by Aristotle in his Politics which views male virtue in activity and command, whereas the same quality in females is seen in passivity, obedience and silence (Politics, 1.13).

To return to Chaucer's list of good women, the question is, of course, how can these literary predecessors, whom one can hardly see as very friendly towards women, be integrated with the God of Love's demands. Apart from their obvious antifeminism, these works, however, also have one other feature in common, namely that they praise certain women like Lucrece, who exercise an extreme measure of self-control and who depend so much on their reputation that it transcends issues such as the question of guilt, perpetration of violence, and, finally the will to stay alive. What these works then offer in terms of 'positive' examples is nothing short of an obliteration of all those female figures who do not submit to this régime, with Criseyde as the most notable example, mentioned in the introduction to the Legend of Good Women. Criseyde stands for the precise opposite of those women who are praised in the introduction to the Legend, as well as in the works quoted.

— McLeod, Virtue, 45.
To put the *Legend of Lucrece* into its literary context, it fulfills all the requirements for the new work, as established by the God of Love. His demand could be translated to mean that Chaucer should find *exempla* of women who accept obedient, silent and passive roles as outlined by Aristotle. Delany argues correctly that the God of Love's injunction to write about "trewe women" merely reformulates the problem:

This resolution is as shortsighted as Eros's original accusation, for it only reverses the terms of the offence. Instead of treacherous woman and suffering man, we have treacherous men and suffering women. . . . Indeed its effect is blatantly misogynistic, for once we introduce "false" men into the structure of goodness, the "good" woman will almost inevitably be an abused woman, faithful despite the atrocities done to her. Clearly it is not mainly happy women Alceste has in mind but suffering ones who wind up affirming the model of masculine power and feminine weakness all over again. Their suffering -- indeed their death -- is precisely the index of their truth . . . .^{41}

The *Legend of Lucrece* then advocates, to take up Delany's verdict, male control over women and in particular over the use of their own bodies. This is summed up very succinctly at the end of the list of the other textual authorities, and emerges as the common denominator of their exemplary nature:

> For alle kepeth they here maydenhede,

> Or elles wedlok, or here widewehede.

> And this thing was nat kept for holynesse,

---

^{41}Delany, *Naked Text*, 108.
But al for verray vertu and clennesse. (G, 294-97)

As becomes obvious from this passage, the issues of Chaucer's sexual politics are focused on the state of the female bodies: the only relevant criterion is the issue of female chastity. No further consideration is given as to why the ideal of chastity could not be upheld. In this sense all these women are reduced to their bodies, or more precisely, to their untouched bodies. By reducing all these female characters to their chastity, Chaucer argues for the control of female bodies by husbands, fathers, and other males under whose authority they stand. From this perspective the preservation or loss of chastity decides over public honour or shame, as expressed in the opposition between Lucrece and Criseyde. The loss of chastity is reduced to an accident, with relatively little consideration given to its causes, be they the result of an autonomous decision or an act of violence. All that remains for the woman is to try and 'repair' her reputation.

Citing the pagan examples, Chaucer explicitly mentions "clennesse" and "chastite" as the main motivations for these women to resist. Chaucer then goes on to explain in detail the significance of these two terms, thereby uncovering some of their ideological foundations: since the women in the classical texts are all "hethene," Chaucer goes to some length to describe that their motivations are not based on any religious conviction, but rather on their own, high moral standards. The most interesting point in this argument is that the motivations for these women's high moral standards are not internal, or personal, but rather external; the fear of losing their reputation:

And yit they were hethene, al the pak,
That were so sore adrad of alle shame.
These olde wemen kepte so here name
That in this world I trowe men shal nat fynde
A man that coude be so trewe and kynde
As was the leste woman in that tyde. (G, 299-304)

Their fear of the loss of their reputation, and, more importantly, of tarnishing their names are cited as their reasons for embracing this strict code of morality. To highlight the qualities of these women Chaucer states that even the least of them is far better than any man. Read in conjunction with the previous statement, what is one to make of this 'exclamation of excellence'? The first observation is that while men obviously can get away with being less concerned about their reputation, it seems that to women much higher and more rigorous standards apply. And secondly, I think it is legitimate to conclude from this praise that fear seems ultimately to play a larger role in the life of these women than those of men. Caution and fear seem to be advisable, since the relations between the genders are perceived as a constant battle where the men only want to "assayen / How manye wemen they may don a shame; / For in youre world that is now holden game" (G, 478-78), whereas women have to prove "that [they] were trewe in lovynge al here lyves" (G, 475), as it is put very succinctly in the orderes given by the God of Love for the dreamer's penance.

3.2.2. "The verray trewe Lucresse"

For my reading of the Legend of Lucrece these different perceptions of men's and women's responsibilities imply that the narrative's primary function as an exemplum of chastity is based on advocating control over female bodies, and that the most effective way of doing this
is by inducing fear. The world is perceived as a dangerous place and it is up to the individual woman to make provisions for her own safety. Again, as in Livy's example, it is immaterial who commits the crime; the issue here is that it is woman's duty to guard her chastity and her reputation. Female bodies in this text become a currency, the value in which is grounded the female's own value and also that of her male relatives; one wrong decision, as it is implied in the preface, is enough to render this currency completely worthless, and in the terms of the narrative, tarnish the victim's reputation, which in its last consequence renders her body polluted. One has the concede here that this obviously problematic didactic strategy has merit in a grossly unjust society, which offers virtually no protection to its rape-victims. However, what seems to emerge behind this piece of advice, with its roots in the 'real world,' is the notion that human bodies are generally not to be trusted. Men, as already pointed out, are ultimately seen as predators, whereas women are in a twofold predicament, first they are seen as the predestined victims, and secondly, they are virtually barred from experiencing their own bodies in a positive, or even self-determined way, due to the overemphasis on the preservation of their chastity and good name, as the negative example of Criseyde shows.

The opening scene of the Legend of Lucrece exemplifies this kind of thinking by advocating the ideal to keep the female body under control: while the Romans are idle during a siege, the young Tarquin invokes a comparison between their wives and themselves:

... Tarquinius the yonge
Gan for to jape, for he was lyght of tonge
And swyde that it was an ydel lyf;
No man dide there more than his wif. (F, 1697-1701)
Among the noble Romans, activity is perceived as a typically male trait, whereas idleness is the normal state of existence of their wives. What started as a "jape" soon becomes a serious consideration when Tarquin leads over to the subject of wives and challenges the assembled men to name the best of wives. The connection between idleness and moral concerns is a key issue here: idleness represents a temporary state for the Roman men -- it is merely the effect of a long drawn-out siege which involves a lot of waiting -- whereas for their wives it is a permanent state. Due to the particular circumstances of this military operation, the men become aware of this fact, and conclude, probably from their own behaviour, that idleness leads to moral corruption. The question is, of course, whose wife can resist the temptations posed by having a considerable amount of free time on her hands without being under her husband's supervision. Since the wives' situation is a generic one, Tarquin's "jape" suggests that women (and in particular wives) are not only prone to moral failure, but that it is almost to be expected from them. (The question seems not to be whether one of the wives will succumb to the temptations of idleness, but who will be the first). After all to wager a bet with little hope of proving one's point would hardly make sense.

Despite being disguised as an enjoyable game to pass the time, the game soon becomes very serious when the moral superiority of one of the Romans' wives is to be determined:

And lat us speke of wyves, that is best;
Presse every man his owene as hym lest,
And with oure speche lat us ese oure herte. (F, 1702-04)

The challenge is accepted by Colatyn, who in return names the criteria according to which
the Romans want to determine the most virtuous woman:

... Nay, sire, it is no nede

To trowen on the word, but on the dede.

I have a wif, " quod he, "that, as I trowe,

Is holden good of alle that evere hire knowe.

Go we to-nyght to Rome, and we shal se. (F, 1706-10)

The situation of the absent husbands creates an almost ideal situation for a test of the wives' virtue: a surprise visit to the Romans' homes will reveal the truth. The criterion according to which the men want to assess their wives' moral rectitude is by the "dede," and not the "word." Telling stories is easy; solid evidence becomes the touchstone for the contestants' credibility. Of more importance in this context, however, is the question, what kind of deeds are deemed to reflect a virtuous woman, and which not: To prove their point the Romans enter Colatyn's house as quietly as possible to make sure Lucrece has no previous knowledge of their plans. By making the men approach Colatyn's house secretly Chaucer deviates from Livy as well as from Ovid, possibly with the intention of stressing his heroine's innocence.42 Lucrece as expected passes the test with flying colours: the surprise visit reveals nothing that would dishonour her, nor, equally important, her husband. When the party of men arrives, Lucrece is found busily spinning some wool:

This noble wif sat by hire beddes side

Dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte;

---

And softe wolle oure bok seyth that she wroughte
To kepen hire from slouthe and idelnesse;
And bade hire servaunts don hire besynesse; (F, 1719-23)

This gazing into her private space ("by hire beddes side") reveals Lucrece with her hair "dischevele," here glossed as "unbound, or hanging loose," which is perceived as a sign of her intent not to seek company and to stay alone for the night, the alternative, which is obviously referred to by the term "malyce."

In contrast to other versions where Lucrece is dressed up and entertaining, Chaucer adds the description of her solitary state to emphasize her moral perfection; not even her husband's and his friends' unexpected spying can detect anything reprehensible. In her solitariness, however, she is not idle: she is busily working on some wool, having asked her servants to give her something to do, "to kepen her from slothe." For a woman, idleness is obviously something dangerous, a state which has to be avoided at all costs; in contrast to the men, who experience essentially the same thing, the relatively neutral term "half idel" is used, whereas in Lucrece's instance the deadly sin of "slothe" is alluded to. In addition, the men can easily admit their state of idleness; it is even stated that they "lytel wroughten," whereas of Lucrece it is said in Ovid, "our book," that "she wroughte softe wolle." While the term "werken" is used in a generic way when referring to the men's activity, or lack thereof, it is used in the specific meaning of spinning, or working with wool, as glossed by Shaner and Edwards. In this case it clearly denotes a typical female activity, one of the limited range of occupations thought appropriate for a woman. This passage is significant in its gender-specific treatment of the sin of sloth. One of the reasons for Chaucer's addition of it might be
the common perception that women are particularly prone to succumb to temptations when idle, thus posing a serious threat to their chastity:

These daughters of temperance, carefully controlling dress, gestures, and food, are powerless against idleness, another insidious enemy of chastity. Idleness threatened the whole of humanity because it was considered to be at the root of many other sins; but women were in particular danger. In idle moments their "natural" inconstancy and infirmity, compounded by the repetitive rhythms of a retired and restrained life, gave rise to evil, illicit thoughts and desires.\(^{43}\)

The only means to counter the dangers associated with idleness is to engage in some sort of activity, appropriate for women, which is typically related to needlework. This sort of activity has frequently been recommended in instructions for daughters:

Francesco of Barberino [in his *Regimento*] commented that it would do no harm if even daughters of knights, judges, and doctors learned to spin and sew in order to be prepared for any change in their destiny. Even though their status did not force them to work to earn their keep, he added, the incessant activity of needle and spindle would help them in their more melancholy moments and keep them out of sloth's way.\(^{44}\)

Lucrece's initial reaction when she sees the unexpected visitors is not outrage (despite


\(^{44}\)Casagrande, "Protected Woman," 97.
the fact that they appear unannounced at her bedroom door), but to voice her concern about her husband's well-being during the siege. Instead of using the time when she is not under Colatyn's supervision to engage in those activities which most of the warriors suspected, she longs for her husband's return and her anxiety causes her a specific pain, which is described in terms surprisingly similar to those used of her untimely end, later on:

Myn husbonde is to longe out of this toun,

For which the drede doth me so to smerte

That with a swerd it stingeth to myn herte.  (F, 1727-30)

The feelings shown by this exemplary woman are those which every medieval husband could only wish for: while not under spousal control, Lucrece does not take advantage of her freedom, but rather on the contrary, wishes for the return of her husband, thus of someone to control her life. The implicit message which Lucrece conveys here is that she herself cannot trust her own body, since temptation is omnipresent. Her tears and her grief over Colatyn's absence are seen as affirming her role as the dutiful wife: "And eek hire teres, ful of honeste, / Embelished hire wifly chastite " (F, 1736-37). Read as an exemplum, the Legend of Lucrece conveys a very clear message to other women: do not trust yourself, but seek to submit yourself to someone else's control in order to be safe from temptation. The absence of her husband is a cause of uncertainty to Lucrece; not being able to trust herself, she experiences an extreme form of pain, which can be read as a form of (self)punishment of her body, perhaps as a prophylactic against experiencing her own body in a pleasurable way.

Even more significant is the violent metaphor used to describe the pain endured by Lucrece: "... the drede doth so me smerte / That with a swerd it stingeth to myn herte" (1728-
Apart from the intensity of the physically perceived pain, the metaphor echoes a scene of actual violence, namely Lucrece's end by her own hand: "But pryvely she kaughte forth a knyf, / And therewithal she rafte hirself hir lyf" (F, 1854-55). The connection between the two incidents is more than obvious: Lucrece's fear of being alone and without guidance becomes bitter reality when she is faced with the result of this lack of supervision. But to return to the living Lucrece, her feeling of being alone causes her to experience a number of unpleasant emotions, manifest in the tears which she sheds:

And therwithal ful tenderly she wep,
And of hire werk she tok no more kep
And mekely she let hyre eyen falle;
And thilke semblaunt sat hire wel withalle.
And eek hire teeres, ful of honeste,
Embelished hire wifly chastite;
Hyre contenance is to hire herte dynge,
For they acorde both bothe in dede and sygne. (F, 1732-39)

Lucrece's averted eyes, commonly regarded as a sign of modesty, become one of her main features, a fact which in the medieval context contributes considerably to her attractiveness. This feature is then supplemented by her tears, which emphasize her "honeste." In this description Lucrece's face becomes a mental landscape, dominated by expressions of pain.

45 It should be noted here that Edwards and Shaner remark on Skeat's observation that line 1729 could be the result of a misconstrued line from Ovid: "sed enim temerarius ille / Est meus et stricto quolibet ense ruit" (2.7521-22). Notwithstanding this observation, I would still argue that it is legitimate to read Chaucer's text in the way it has been transmitted.
and grief; but contrary to what one could expect, these emotions all seem to enhance her attractiveness. In fact, they are an integral part of her person, with the bodily surface, her "contenance," displaying the truth of her heart in a perfect reflection.

What the reader learns from this exemplary treatment of wifely chastity is that the supreme virtue for a wife is to wish for the control of her husband over her; the reason for this wish is, as stated above, that the combination of leisure and the absence of this control make the woman prone to temptations. Fortunately, however, Lucrece seems to be content with her fate and the joy she shows when her husband returns is real, and to emphasize the exemplary nature of Lucrece Chaucer adds that she acts quite in accordance with the expected role of wives: "And she anon up ros with blysful chere / And kiste hym, as of wives is the wone" (F, 1743-44). The exemplary character of Lucrece, of course, extends beyond the narrative and Chaucer's piece of advice can also be applied to the text's audience, a lesson in what should be normal and natural to any wife.

One could argue at this point that if this were an ideal exemplum, the lesson taught so far could only mean that the woman, being a model of chastity, should encounter no further problems and be rewarded with a peaceful existence. As one knows, however, the Legend of Lucrece takes an entirely different turn. The question is now, of course, what precisely does the exemplum want to teach its readers, and, more to the point, whether this interpretation does not work against itself.

The answer to these questions can, I think, be found again in the description of Lucrece's body, this time related as seen through the eyes of Tarquin, the man who is going to rape her:
Tarquinius, this proude kynges sone,
Conceived hath hire beaute and hyre cheere,
Hire yelwe her, hire shap, and hire manere,
Hire hew, hire wordes, that she hath compleyned
(And by no craft hire beaute nas nat feyned). (F, 1745-49)

The description of Lucrece's body, which follows that of the traditional *effictio*, best known from the courtly tradition, evokes most of the elements of conventional beauty and reflects Tarquin's perception of Lucrece. An important factor for Tarquin is that all these qualities are genuine and not "feyned." Keeping the initial situation in mind (together, with Colatyn and Tarquin, the readers are still directing their gaze at Lucrece during the surprise visit), the contradictory nature of the image presented becomes clear: originally Lucrece's modesty and chastity are praised and the only danger seems to be in the absence of her husband's control over her. Now however, although exactly the same situation is described, it is seen through male eyes and puts it into an entirely new perspective. To Tarquin it is particularly Lucrece's beauty, combined with her moral integrity, which catches his attention, and which is of an overtly sexual nature:

And [he] caughte to this lady swich desyr
That in his herte brende as any fyr,
So wodly that his wit was al forgeten.
For wel thoughte he she wolde nat ben geten;

---

And ay the more that he was in dispayr,

The more he coveyteth and thoughte hire fayr.

His blynde lust was al his coveytynge. (F, 1750-56)

Tarquin's reaction, his "desyr" and "blynde lust" are precisely what the exemplum warns its (female) readers of: even though Lucrece is not dressed to receive company, her natural beauty, ("nat feyned") is enough to incite the man. The stages Tarquin goes through in this process, from his first glimpse of her to his full-blown lusting, are almost identical to descriptions of contemporary theories of love, but with the important difference that this feeling does not normally lead to the woman's rape. Chaucer makes this mental process obvious and gives a very detailed description of what is going on in this rapist's mind:

Thus lay hire her, and thus fresh was hyre hewe;

Thus sat, thus spak, thus span; this was hire chere;

Thus fayr she was, and this was hire manere. (F, 1761-63)

The images which torture Tarquin's imagination are those of Lucrece in her physical appearance; again echoing the tradition of the effictio, who creates a mental picture, which invokes specific properties, belonging to Lucrece. This citation of Lucrece's features clearly outlines the danger inherent in a pleasant appearance. Through no active participation of her own Lucrece becomes the chief instigator of the crime, as well as its victim. Despite all her attempts to shun the vice of unchastity, her body compromises all her efforts and opens up a possibility to the self-same vice she tried so hard to prevent. Little difference does it make in this context that what is going to happen is not of her own volition. From this one could conclude that the lesson of the exemplum is that women's bodies are unpredictable things,
which can be the cause of all kinds of problems. And problems Tarquin has with the pretty picture of this woman's body:

\[\text{Al this conseit hys herte hath newe ytake.}\]
\[\text{And as the se, with tempest al toshake,}\]
\[\text{That after, whan the storm is al ago,}\]
\[\text{Yit wol the water quappe a day or two,}\]
\[\text{Ryght so, thogh that hire forme were absent,}\]
\[\text{The plesaunce of hire forme was present; (F, 1764-69)}\]

Lucrece the person becomes supplanted by Lucrece's pretty picture, which is indelibly etched into Tarquin's mind. The power of this image in Tarquin's mind takes over his rational faculties ('That his wit was al forgotten" (F, 1752)) and from then on governs all his activities. It is further demonstrated how he loses the capacity for moral reasoning and resorts to exercise his superior physical strength to attain his goal: "'For maugre hyre, she shal my leman be! / Hath helpeth hardy man alday,' quod he" (F, 1772-73).

After the considerable length of this view into the mind of the rapist, the act of violence is described in a few lines:

'I am the kynges sone, Tarquinius,'

Quod he, 'but, and to crye or noyse make,'

This swerd thorghout thyn herte shal I ryve.'

And therwithal unto hire throte he sterte,

And sette the poynt al sharp upon hire herte. (F, 1789-90, 1792-95)
Tarquin has not only physical power over Lucrece, but also verbal power. During the entire time, only his voice is heard as he is giving directions, much in the same way as a film director might be. The absence of Lucrece's voice is conspicuous; she becomes reduced to the pretty picture that Tarquin has in his mind. Emotions and a voice of her own are not part of this image. Her exclusion from the act is reflected by the absence of her voice in the narrative:

No word she spak, she hath no myght therto.
What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago.
Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lamb alone,
To whom shal she compleyne or make mone? (F, 1796-99)

Lucrece's silencing through Tarquin's violence, and the one exercised by the text, reflects her lack of power, not only for the obvious reason that Tarquin is physically stronger than she is, but also in the sense that the unimaginable has happened: her body, the core of her person is being violated; this is not only a personal tragedy, it has also serious ramifications for her status as a model of virtue. After all, by their very nature, female bodies imply trouble, even if its reason is secondary. To Lucrece, it appears, Tarquin's deed seems more like an act of God than a premeditated crime, which would explain her feeling like the lamb facing the wolf's fangs.

Clearly the question of guilt is secondary here. The idea of the natural disaster, of the inevitable, entails a notion of coincidence. One never knows when disaster will strike; all one can do is to be prepared. If one examines the circumstances of Lucrece's rape, this seems to be the crucial point: the rapist knows exactly when to assault his victim, he knows that her
husband has returned to the scene of the siege and is safely out of the way, so that he can easily make his way back to Rome and commit his crime:

And [he] girte hym with his swerd and gan to go,
And forth he rit til he to Rome is come,
And al alone his wey than hath he nome
Unto the hous of Colatyn ful ryght. (F, 1775-78)

The crucial point here is not so much Lucrece's part in the crime, but rather that her husband's absence enables Tarquin to approach his victim. Once more Lucrece is reduced to the attraction of her alluring body. She becomes a piece of property which can be taken by everyone, provided its guardian is not present to prevent such a thing. Susan Brownmiller's brief description of rape and the motivation she observes behind its legal codification in ancient societies offers a relatively precise mirror image of what happens here:

The ancient patriarchs who came together to write their early covenants had used the rape of women to forge their own male power -- how then could they see rape as a crime of man against woman? Women were wholly owned subsidiaries and not independent beings. Rape could not be envisioned as a matter of female consent or refusal; nor could a definition acceptable to males be based on a male-female understanding of a female's right to her bodily integrity. Rape entered the law through the back door, as it were, as a property crime of man against man.47

Brownmiller's last statement is critical in this context; rape as it is presented in the Tale of

47 Brownmiller, Against, 8.
Lucrece is understood as one man's crime against another man, rather than a man's crime against a woman. Tarquin's violation of Lucrece is first and foremost a violation of the homosocial bond, shared by him with Colatyn. By taking what is by right another man's property, the deed of Tarquin threatens and questions the entire patriarchal system, which, as I argued above, has one of its foundations in the exchange of women. This position of women as property is expressed in Lucrece's prime fear, which in turn gives Tarquin the opportunity to blackmail her into offering no resistance, namely by threatening to tarnish her good name. By threatening to put her murdered "knave" into her bed, Tarquin has the power to wreck her reputation, the cruelty of which becomes obvious by the double-entendre which he plays on her name:

'. . . And thus thow shalt be ded and also lese
Thy name, for thow shalt non other chese.'

These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name
At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame . . . (F, 1810-14)

The name, which is so important to Lucrece is of, course, that of her husband. The name of the father or husband has been interpreted by Eve K. Sedgwick as the graphic representation of woman's subordination. Again, Lucrece's concern becomes obvious when she considers the question of guilt and comes to the conclusion that it is of no importance, since "hir

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49Sedgwick, Epistemology, 32.
husbonde shulde nat have the foule name" (F, 1845).

It is, however, not only Colatyn's name which has been sullied by the rape; Tarquinius is acknowledged as the main instigator of crime. Chaucer gives a brief explanation of the wrong done by the king's son:

Tarquinius, that art a kynges eyr,
And scholdest, as by lynage and by ryght,
Don as a lord and as a verray knyght,
Whi hastow don dispit to chivalrye?
Whi hastow don this lady vilanye? (F, 1819-23)

Tarquin's crime is twofold: the first is the crime committed against Lucrece, but his second offence is the one he committed against Colatyn, and thus also against the fellowship of the other knights. His behaviour which is at odds with his status presents a threat to the system of male allegiances; placed first on this list of accusations, his "dispit to chivalrye" is an equally severe crime that Tarquin is guilty of. This disruption of male bonds, the result of his assaulting some other nobleman's wife, has the potential to destabilize the whole regime. The consequence of this crime affects not only Lucrece as the direct victim, but also Colatyn, her husband, whose position within the assembly of his fellow knights suddenly has become questioned by the attack on his wife.

This dilemma seems to be immediately understood by Lucrece. The importance of her own violation becomes secondary to the harm done to Colatyn. Although the victim of a hideous assault, Lucrece remains the model of female virtue and wifely devotion: her first care is not so much about her own well-being, as about her husband's reputation:
Hir herte was so wyfly and so trewe.
She sayde that, for hir gylt ne for hir blame,
Hir husbonde shulde nat have a foule name. (F, 1843-45)

The sudden turn in the argumentation is obvious: the focus is shifted from the perpetrator to his victim, and in her self-accusation Lucrece assumes the role of the perpetrator for herself. Lucrece’s admission of her “gylt” and “blame” are the visible signals that the whole complex of guilt and suffering has suddenly been turned upside down. The fact of her rape is now discussed as a moral issue before even the chance of an interpretation of the crime in its legal sense could take place. It is of further significance that this is the only opportunity Lucrece is given to speak about her concerns; and even then she voices the interests of somebody else. In a sense Lucrece’s own concerns are secondary to the needs of men, be they as unjustifiable as Tarquin’s wish to possess her body, or as contextually understandable as Colatyn’s implied need to have an untarnished name.

The crime, as elaborated by Lucrece herself, has become one that has been primarily committed against her husband. Lucrece’s own words betray this seemingly illogical conclusion: guilt and shame are her consequences of the crime, whereas Colatyn’s reputation emerges as its true victim. In this situation the discussion of guilt and forgiveness is gratuitous; in her speech Lucrece denies the mere relevance of these issues:

... they forgave yt hyr, for yt was ryght;
It was no gilt, it lay not in hir myght;
And seyden hir ensamples many oon.

...
'Be as be may,' quod she, 'of forgyvyng,' I wol not have noo forgyft for nothyng.' (F, 1848-50, 1852-53) These last words of the victim are an indication that the legal issues of the crime, as discussed above, are irrelevant in this context. As a moral issue, however, the question of who is responsible returns to the matter of unsupervised women, which set off the whole incident. Lucrece's dilemma is that she has been caught unawares, the attraction of her female body triggering something in Tarquin which sets a process in motion that is beyond her control. In her own words this complete lack of control extends well beyond the actual physical violence done to her and even suppresses any attempts to lay the blame on Tarquin. Especially debilitating is the rhetorical strategy of making the victim acknowledge her own guilt and pronounce her own judgement, a means which justifies the reading of this legend as an exemplary piece of writing: one woman is speaking to other women and giving good advice learned from a painful lesson. Quite similar to the advice offered by the Knight of the Tower to his daughters, Lucrece's advice thus warns her audience of the dangers surrounding female bodies and of the obligation to keep these bodies out of harm's way. Once the harm has been done Lucrece sees no other choice but to kill herself. Her own violated body has become unacceptable. Her suicide is her only way to restore the "clenessse and eke trouthe" (F, 1860) which are integral to her person. This reaction, however, is not merely the inner, private expression of a deeply hurt individual. To read Lucrece's rape and subsequent suicide in context one must not forget that the 'heroine' of this narrative is never an autonomous body: her existence as a woman and a wife is always dependent on and defined by her husband. The only thing that she can do to
erase the shame and guilt from her husband's name is to remove herself from the society of her peers. Her suicide is the visible symbol that her troublesome body is now safely out of reach and thus no longer a source of shame to her husband and his friends. In his concluding words to the *Legend* Chaucer admits as much when he stresses the importance of good women for the community of men:

I telle hyt for she was of love so trewe,
And for the stable herte, sadde and kynde,
That in these wyommen men may alday fynde.  

(F, 1874-77)

In comparison to women like Lucrece the behaviour of most men is less than impressive. In an almost ingenious twist, however, this type of behaviour is presented as something that cannot be changed, something that seems to be part of the nature of men. Much in the way of a force of nature, male violence against females can, and often does occur:

And as of men, loke ye with which tirannye
They doon alday; assay hem whoso lyste,
The trewest ys ful brotel for to triste.  

(F, 1883-85)

In these concluding lines to *The Legend of Lucrece*, then, Chaucer finally returns to the issue of whom the narrative benefits: the husbands, fathers, brothers of women who have to fear for the safety of the females entrusted to their care. Echoing the Knight of the Tower's own experiences as a member of a band of roving young knights, Chaucer confirms the essentially predatory nature of men. No woman is safe from predators and the care of her guardians is to avoid precisely such a situation as the one portrayed in the text. Read as a cautionary tale for other women, the fate of Lucrece serves as an exemplum by presenting a scenario where
precisely this dreaded incident has happened. As the Knight of the Tower implied, men do not need to be especially made aware of this danger; it is, however, a clever move to instill this fear into women, the preordained victims of other men's sexual aggression. Female bodies are the possessions that have to be protected here; since male aggression cannot be so easily controlled it is still possible to instill this fear into women: it can happen to any one at any time.

The problem thus has been shifted from the aggressive male bodies to the constantly endangered female bodies. To achieve this shift in the argumentation the narrative invokes the notion that female bodies *per se* invite trouble, and are thus best kept under constant supervision. In this chain of argument the threat of rape is a useful means to justify male control over female bodies. Even though rape does not occur *all* the time, it seems a good argument to restrict the independence of *all* females as much as possible. In this sense, then, the seemingly paradoxical question asked by Elizabeth Robertson about the function of rape as a means to ensure the smooth operating of patriarchal society can be answered positively. As long as a society bases a large number of its social ties on the exchange of women, the danger of the disruption of these ties by raping and abducting women is a very real one. In telling stories about rape as cautionary tales the potential rape-victim's own collaboration ensures that the social relations retain their stability. By playing on each woman's fear for her own life and safety, rape narratives of the kind discussed above manage to pass off male anxieties surrounding the possession of women. Instead, part of the responsibility is shifted onto the women themselves in order to ensure that they are always under their supervision, always available to them to forge and maintain bonds with other men.
"Of which that no man unnethe oghte speke ne write": Sexually Deviant Bodies in Moral Treatises and Fabliaux

For thow that hast doon the synne, thou shalt have the shame therfore.

Chaucer, CT, The Parson's Tale (X, 1020)

1.1. Unmentionable Vices

D.A. Miller in his *The Novel and the Police* examines the social phenomenon of secrecy and argues that its function is "not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge."¹ Of particular interest in this context is Miller's discussion of the open secret, something that everyone knows but does not dare to talk about. An open secret describes a paradox in that it denotes the existence of knowledge, but at the same time denies its very existence. The reasons why a particular piece of information is considered "off limits" to public discussion is obviously motivated by the desire to control knowledge. However, the very attempt to police and repress knowledge means that an injunction has to be articulated not to talk about a certain issue, thus bringing the forbidden topic once more into the marketplace of communication.

As a communicative situation the open secret is an indicator of two things: the first is the paradox that most attempts to control the dissemination of information create a "meta-

discourse" that consists of regulations and injunctions to withhold information, thereby achieving precisely the opposite, namely that of drawing attention to this very knowledge. A second observation is that the situation of the open secret is also an indicator of various power positions: it shows that someone is in a certain position of authority that allows him to control the dissemination of knowledge as opposed to those who are not trusted with the knowledge, who have to be controlled by the regulations and injunctions which govern the public discussion. The first factor determining the nature of the open secret, the paradox of simultaneously repressing and expressing information, can be used as a strategy to undermine its second characteristic, namely the attempt to control access to the information by those who are in an inferior position of power. The injunctions and prohibitions not to talk about a topic deemed unacceptable can be read as a subtext which conceptualizes precisely what it attempts to censor.

In my discussion of the representation of sexually deviant bodies I want to draw on this notion of secrecy in its function to control or withhold information from the public. In particular I want to examine in the first section of this part specific late medieval practices of controlling and suppressing discourses on transgressive sexualities.\footnote{I use the term "sexuality" to denote a valence of sexual desire and not to define an essential sexual identity. Although David Halperin, in \textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love} (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15-40, argues that the use of modern terms such as "heterosexuality" is anachronistic when talking about pre-modern societies, I am following here the examples set by medievalists such as Carolyn Dinshaw, "A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'," \textit{diacritics} 24 (1994): 206, who adopts a "middle ground" between essentialist and social constructivist notions of sexuality. For a useful and lucid introduction into the history of classifying sexual categories see Jonathan Ned Katz, "Before Heterosexuality," in \textit{The Invention of Heterosexuality} (New York and London: Penguin/Dutton, 1995), 33-55.}
Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* as an example of the paradoxical situation outlined above: on the one hand, the Parson wants his audience to abstain from certain sexual practices and tries to achieve this goal by forbidding them to talk about these very acts. On the other hand, however, his very attempt to discourage any communication on the issue of transgressive sexual practices undermines his own objective: the Parson's concern to prevent his flock from talking about this topic makes it necessary that he has to mention precisely what he wants to censor.

In the first example of the second section of this chapter I want to discuss a text that makes two things obvious: first, it reveals the fallacy of the Parson who believes that the repression of knowledge automatically means the negation of this knowledge. And secondly, I want to demonstrate that two genres that seem to have very little in common with each other, namely the moral treatise and the fabliau, can be read in a complementary fashion when one examines late medieval perceptions of deviant sexual behaviour. In particular I want to claim that due to its ideological tethering the moral treatise is often silent when it conceptualizes deviant sexualities: deviant bodies become silent and invisible bodies since their sins are unmentionable and cannot be talked about; they are *stumme Sünden*, literally "mute sins," in medieval German terminology. The fabliaux, on the other hand, provide a literary genre that enables their authors to disregard most notions of propriety and they thus offer themselves as a literary space that allows their authors to talk about issues that are deemed indecent in other contexts. This freedom to talk about unacceptable topics, however, does not mean that transgressive sexualities are presented in a more or less neutral way, as merely another aspect of the fabliaux' upside-down world. On the contrary, I want to argue
that beneath the seemingly chaotic and amoral surface depicted in the fabliaux there is a very clear message that non-orthodox sexual behaviour is considered deviant and thus unacceptable. The difference, as compared to the moral treatise, is not the fabliaux' ideological stance, but rather that these texts discuss more openly the topic of transgressive sexual behaviour than those that officially profess to guide their readers in all aspects of their lives.

1.2. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell:" Chaucer's Parson and Sins Against Nature

The catch-phrase "don't ask, don't tell" is the popular rendition of US President Clinton's 1993 policy ruling on the issue of sexual orientation in the US Military. This policy formulates the right of a member of the US armed forces not to disclose his/her sexual orientation unless he/she draws attention to it. Implemented as a means to protect the soldiers' personal integrity the essence of President Clinton's ruling rests on a peculiar notion of secrecy, namely the soldier's duty not to disclose his sexual orientation: while a soldier's sexual orientation may well be known, he/she must not talk about it. Notwithstanding this fact, however, in case of an accusation of committing sexual acts, a soldier must disclose the truth about him/herself, which is an attempt to separate a person's private life from his public persona as a member of the armed forces.

This particular policy highlights the contemporary use of secrecy as a political means.

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I borrowed this analogy between modern politics and medieval notions of secrecy from Karma Lochrie, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Murderous Plots and Medieval Secrets," in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Frecchero (New York: Routledge, 1996), 137-140.
What is remarkable is that significant political institutions, such as the Pentagon, still rely on the "medieval" notion of secrecy in an age that prides itself on being the "age of information."

I have also quoted this example to show the inherent paradox in this policy: on the one hand, it bars the individual from divulging a certain piece of information; on the other hand, however, the individual is obliged to disclose the same information if asked by a higher authority. It is in particular the paradox of secrets, which by definition can never be total secrets, that one also finds reflected in some medieval moral treatises. While the Pentagon Policy and the medieval treatise each have to be read in their historical significance, this continuity nevertheless points to an inherent power structure particular in the institutional use of secrets. Treatises on the seven deadly sins, such as The Parson's Tale, are also set in a specific institutional frame: they are either written to guide an individual in his search for spiritual salvation, or to assist a priest in taking confession from his parishioners.\(^4\) In both cases the treatise compels the individual to bare his soul and to make secrets known, to "tell" them to God or to his confessor. While this relatively simple paradigm of question and disclosure works in almost all aspects of worldly and religious life, it is the area of non-orthodox sexual acts that frequently defies this well established pattern: most moral treatises offer detailed accounts of a wide number of transgressions, and yet they are silent or only

come up with a few perfunctory words when they deal with transgressive sexual acts.\(^5\) Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* is one such example. In part two of the treatise the Parson discusses the sin of lechery and, following Peraldus, provides a thorough discussion of *luxuria* with all its branches: “fornicatioun, that is bitwixe a man and womman that been nat maried” (X, 864), "to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede" (X, 868), "avowterie in Latyn is for to seyn approchynge of oother mannes bed" (X, 873), “the fourthe spece is the assemblee of hem that been of hire kynrede” (X, 906). In typical encyclopedic fashion all other categories receive ample discussion, as the issue of fornication demonstrates. The sin of fornication covers, among other things, the taking of another man’s wife, prostitution, living off the avails of prostitution, and cases where one of the partners is in holy orders.

But this thorough and detailed account stands in sharp contrast to the few terse words the Parson has for his last category of sinners:

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The fifthe spece is thilke abhomynable synne, of which that no man unnethe oghte speke ne write; natheless it is openly reherced in holy write. / This cursednesse doon men and wommen in diverse entente and in diverse manere; but though that hooly writ speke of horrible synne, certes hooly writ may nat
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\(^5\)Notable examples are of course writings such as Burchard von Worms’ (d.1025) *Decretum* which gives specific penances for a number of sexual misbehaviours and St. Peter Damian’s *Liber Gomorrhianus*, written between 1048 and 1054, which exclusively addresses the issue of sodomy. Alain de Lille’s *De planctu natureae*, although belonging to a different genre, is of course, another influential work dealing with forbidden sexual acts. I consciously include this work among the treatises since its central figure of Genius assumes a voice quite similar to that of the official doctrine of the Church. On this see also Larry Scanlon, "Unspeakable Pleasures: Alain de Lille, Sexual Regulation and the Priesthood of Genius," *Romanic Review* 86:2 (1995): 214: "Genius’s pastoral functions involve mainly encouraging or forbidding various types of erotic behaviour, . . . he carries out this function by employing discursive practices of the church: excommunication, preaching, or confession."
been defouled, namoore than the sonne that shyneth on the mixne. (X, 910-11).

Most obvious at first sight is the extreme brevity of this passage if compared to the other sections dealing with specific aspects of lechery. In addition the Parson makes a considerable effort to avoid having to name a vice that was considered unmentionable. More striking, however, is the Parson's rhetorical handling of this moral infraction: while he indicates his knowledge about these acts that are committed by both men and women, he refuses to talk about them. In his unwillingness to mention deviant sexual acts, the Parson attempts to censor a kind of knowledge that he considers too dangerous or too tempting for his audience. His strategy is not to deny the existence of transgressive sexualities, but rather to make sure that this topic is not being talked about, and thus taken out of the marketplace of ideas. The Parson may well think that the suppression of knowledge will eventually be successful and that the knowledge about certain sexual practices will somehow cease to exist, which would then render these practices themselves unreal, in order to foreclose them as possible expressions of affection.6

The question is, however, whether the Parson's strategy can really be successful. Although the passage's brevity as well as the Parson's avoiding of having to name anything in concrete terms, may serve to obscure the discussion, this tactic cannot but draw attention to

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6My reading of medieval discourses on deviant sexualities and the practice of silencing has been informed by Judith Butler "Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification," in Constructing Masculinity, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27 and her theoretical discussion of the "foreclosure" of modern forms of sexual desire.: "For if we accept the notion that the prohibition on homosexuality operates throughout a largely heterosexual culture as one of its defining operations, then it appears that the loss of homosexual objects and aims . . . will be foreclosed from the start."
those issues the Parson wants to censor. The crux in the Parson's argument becomes most
obvious when he acknowledges that the Bible mentions unorthodox sexual behaviour and yet
he insists on labelling the practice indecent, an argument that makes little sense. In order to
come to terms with this obvious contradiction he moves the Bible beyond the judgment of
human beings: any mention of these practices by humans only serves to defile the truth of
Holy Scripture. In one sentence the argument has been moved from an intellectual level to
emotional grounds. The topic's nature to offend certain sensibilities serves to justify the
Parson's demand of censorship and relieves him from finding any rational reasons to suppress
it.

Coming back to the issue of censorship, one cannot help but notice that the Parson, so
preoccupied with giving reasons and warnings not to talk about certain sexual practices, has
done precisely that: he has created a discursive context that evokes the issue he is so eager to
censor. This double bind between repression and expression not only makes the fallacy of the
Parson's reasoning obvious, it also indicates the social anxieties surrounding this particular
topic. The Parson obviously felt that any mention of unorthodox sexual behaviour would be
enough to encourage his flock to engage in this particular vice. The reason for this anxiety is
probably the inability of the medieval moral authorities to comprehend the diversity of
human desire, as indicated by the extremely narrow definition of permitted sexuality. While
any type of sexual activity outside the bonds of matrimony, and not serving the purpose of
procreation, was considered sinful, the whole range of non-heterosexual valences of desire
often seemed to have been beyond the scope of moral treatises. A strong indication of this
division is that vices, such as fornication fall under the category of deadly sins; although
grave offenses in themselves, they give the sinners a chance to confess and atone for their sins. Unorthodox sexual behaviour, such as sodomy for instance, was frequently seen outside the moral construct of the seven deadly sins and classified as a heresy. Those convicted of it could be dealt with in the same way as the proponents of other, non-sexual heresies and could well face the death penalty for their trespasses.

An additional practical problem arises if one takes the Parson's injunction not to talk or write about unorthodox sexualities literally. The way this injunction hinders any form of communication would be especially apparent in confession: a confessor would be unable to formulate questions regarding his parishioner's sexual mores; instead of receiving clear answers he would have to rely on a veiled version of these incidents, surmise what has happened and then hazard an idea about the appropriate penance. The consequence of such a practice might easily lead to unsubstantiated assumptions and wild guesses and thus turn the confession into a farce.

7 The censoring of the topic of transgressive sexual practices is by no means limited to Chaucer's Parsons's Tale. Judging from the number of recommendations to cloak the issue in silence, Chaucer has obviously drawn on an established literary and social practice. For a particularly strident example see a Middle High German sermon by Berthold von Regensburg, titled by the editor "Von ruofenden Sünden" [Of Crying Sins], where he explicitly admonishes the parishioners not to bring up the subject, and the confessor not to ask about it. Berthold von Regensburg, Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Predigten mit Anmerkungen, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1965), 92-93: "Wie, bruoder Bertolt, wie sol ich mich vor der sünde behüeten? Des helfe mir der almehtige got, daz du min nimmer verstêst: aber ein schalkhaftez herze verstêt mich vil wol. Ich verbiute dir halt bë gote, daz dû niemer dar nâch gefrâgest! Und ir priester, ir sult niemer dar nâch gefrâgen in der bïhte, noch nieman den andern umb einigez wort." ["How, brother Berthold, how shall I protect myself against this sin? God help me that you will never understand me; but a malicious heart understands me well. In the name of God I forbid you that you ever ask me about it! And you priests, you shall never ask for it in confession, nor one [of you ask] another a single word about it."]
1.3. The Prohibition of the Word and its Consequences: Hans Folz's *Die Mißverständliche Beichte*

The consequences of the linguistic practice advocated by Chaucer's Parson can be observed in Hans Folz's *Die Mißverständliche Beichte* (*The Ambiguous Confession*). This fabliau-like text plays with the social convention which demands the silencing of all accounts of what have been deemed unnatural sexual practices and the resulting inability to deal with the issue as such by depicting precisely the situation the Parson so anxiously tries to control: a member of the parish comes to his priest to confess a number of sins, the nature of which make the good confessor's blood curdle. The confession is overheard by the narrator persona, the barber "Hans Folcz," who subsequently relates the whole incident from his own viewpoint. This narrative technique, the first person narrative, is remarkable for the genre, and can also be found in his other writings. While it adds to the individuality of the narratives, the use of this technique also creates some fictitious veracity that what the narrator persona has overheard is actually true; it also puts the audience in the same position as the narrator; in a way the audience is also eavesdropping. This last fact is all the more important since the confession is not for the fainthearted.

The unnamed sinner confronts his confessor with a bold opening statement: "mein herr, hapt mein gedult, / Ich hap mich gar größlich verschult / Mit unczal sünden, groß und
[my lord, have patience with me, / I have committed grave offenses / Through many great and heavy sins.] With his opening passage Folz not merely sets the stage for what is to follow, but he also whets his audience's appetite: after all, he appeals to the audience's own vice of curiositas by announcing that his readers or listeners are about to overhear another's confession, a privilege granted only to the priest. As expected, Folz does not disappoint his audience since what is to be revealed are offences of a particularly delicate nature, seemingly involving bestiality, incest, and rape. Among other things the following acts are confessed:

Die erst: ich nam eim hund sein er / Und hab verunreint sweines fleisch /.../
Und unkeüscht mit eim esel vert, /.../ Mein muter schwengert ich ein nacht
/ Und hab tragend mein meit gemacht, / Mein schwester selber genotzert, /
Mein dochter irs meitums erwert (6-7, 13, 17-20).

[The first: I took a dog's honour from it, and defiled a pig's flesh... And was lecherous with a donkey... And impregnated my mother one night, I have got my servant girl with child, I have raped my own sister, and fought over my daughter's maidenhood.]

Although the sinner concedes that the graveness of his offenses causes him considerable pain, the confessor's reaction is that of shock and incomprehension. He (at least temporarily) forgets his duty, and his inability to deal with the nature of the sinner's vices leads him into an attack on the person himself. This reaction reveals two strategies which are

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reminiscent of the advice given by Chaucer's Parson: the first is to censor the topic by not dealing with the issue as such, and thus by denying the possibility of the acts mentioned, and the second is to transfer the uneasiness felt about the topic to the individual concerned by discrediting him. This second tactic often borders on a form of linguistic violence, since images of filth and decay are employed to describe the utter worthlessness of the individual, who is deemed fit to suffer the horrors of physical torture:

Der herr sprach: "du hekzerischer schalck, / Besser wer, der dir deinen balck / Mit glüenden zangen zuriß, / Dan das sich einr an dir peschiß. / Darumb heb dich neur hin gen Ram, / Doselbst vorm babst du dich versham."

[Then the lord said: "You heretical wretch, it would be better if your body were torn apart with red-hot pincers than if someone soiled himself with you. Therefore immediately go to Rome and in front of the Pope himself admit your shame.]

The confessor's response is a practical demonstration of the discursive practise advocated by the Parson; the topic of the specific sexual transgressions is bracketed by the shift of the emphasis onto the deviant body of the perpetrator. The inability to deal with the acts is compensated for by identifying the sinner's physical body with the sin, and by using his body as a metaphor for the acts he seemingly committed. The ultimate *remedium* against the sin would be the erasure of the sinful body, though not without making sure that before its demise it first experiences its fair share of suffering. The graphic description of the torture of the deviant body can be read as an attempt not merely to do away with the sinner and restore order, but also as an underlying violent fantasy of subjugating those who do not conform to
socially sanctioned modes of behaviour, and thus to make them pay for transgressing boundaries which others dare not approach. In this case, violence and defilement are the answers to a challenging of norms, which in turn have to justify their very existence by negating any alternatives and possibilities beyond their boundaries.

The second, and more important part of the confessor's malediction of his sinner, refers to the standard practice of exposing the guilty party to ridicule by making public his inappropriate behaviour, and thus turning him into an object of shame. (One must not forget that one is listening in on a confession, which is a confidential and sacramental act where information can be shared without fear of exposure and public condemnation.) The threat to expose the sinner to shame is, of course, rather inefficient since the priest's own linguistic restrictions will not allow him to breach the topic. For this reason he tries to escape his responsibility by referring the sinner to the Pope, the highest Church authority.

However, despite the severe rebuke by his confessor, the sinner remains singularly unimpressed. In fact, he turns the shame into laughter and exposes to ridicule the priest's own inability to understand him properly:

Anhub dieser und lacht von herczen / Und sprach: 'mein herr, was sol das scherczen? / Zicht selbst gen Rom, sei es euch eben, / Die sünd mügt ir mir leicht vergeben.' (31-34)

Then he laughed heartily, and said: 'Lord, why are you making jokes? Go yourself to Rome, if you like; the sins you can easily forgive me'.] The sinner's attempt to explain the true nature of the confession is seen as a mere affront; it only serves further to enrage the priest who becomes more adamant when faced with the
sinner’s seeming obstinacy:

Der her sprach: 'wilt du mich dan dörn? / Ich mag dich nit sehen noch hörn. / 
Des heb dich nur von mir hindan. / Du pist im aller höchsten pan, / Kein heilg 
noch teüfel dich enpint.' (41-45)

[The lord said: 'do you want to make a fool of me? I want neither to see nor to 
hear you. Therefore, get away from me. You are doomed, neither saint nor 
devil will save you'.]

Perhaps more than his initial reaction, this verdict illustrates the priest’s inability to deal with 
what the sinner has told him, or, to be more precise, what he assumes the sinner has told him. 
In any case, this difference is immaterial to the priest; his inability to grasp what has been 
said in the confession is expressed by his simultaneous inability to locate it within his 
repertoire of vices and their remedia. His denial that there is any hope at all for the sinner is 
an indication more that the confessor is at a loss for what to say and do than of the sinner's 
hopeless spiritual state.

The breakdown of the communication between the two is largely due to the injunction 
not to talk about the issue of sexual deviance rather than the nature of the sins per se. This 
point is addressed by the sinner who makes a second attempt to clarify the matter: "Diser 
sprach: 'her, ir seit zü gswint. / Lot euch mein sach legen an dag. / Darnoch so dut, was eüich 
pehag'" [Then he said: "Lord, you are too rash. Let me explain the matter. Then you can do 
what you want." ] This breakdown in communication is then addressed in Folz’s fabliau and 
provides the narrative’s pointe. As expected, the joke is on the confessor and not the sinner 
since it turns out that the sinner deliberately used the priest’s linguistic inability to deal with
the issue and turned it into an example of his inability to perform his office. Then the sinner starts to explain what has really happened:

Dan das ich nam eim hunt sein er: / Den spert ich in die küchín mein. / Um ein stück fleischs musst er pfant sein, / Das ich selbs auß dem hafen raupt, / wan man darnoch warlichen glaupt, / Das er der selbig fleischdiep wer./ Allso pracht ich in um seine er. (50-55)

[That I took a dog's honour from it happened as follows: I locked him into my kitchen; he had to be the pawn for a piece of meat which I stole myself out of the saucepan, while everybody thought that he was the thief. Thus I took away his honour.]

Equally trivial (if all the more interesting as a piece of domestic history) is the soiling of the pig:

Darnoch auff meim prifet ich scheiß, / Darunter ein saw der kirßkern peiß. / Secht, die verunreint ich so gar, / Das sie freilich nit anders war / Mit dreck peklent. (57-61)

[Then I shat in my privy, and underneath a pig munched the cherrystones. See, this way I soiled the pig so that it was entirely covered with dirt.]

In a similar vein the impregnating of the mother is explained; the sinner points out that this happened when she was pregnant with him (95-102). One day he found his sister having sex with a scribe and he literally pulled her away, which clears up the term "notzerren" (102-07), here in the meaning of raptus as abduction and not rape. In the case of his daughter, the sinner has nothing to do with the act at all: "Von meiner dochter nempt pescheit: Secht, die pegapt sich mit eim man, / Dadurch wart sie irs meitum an" (108-10). [About my daughter take
heed: See, she was with a man, and by this was without her maidenhood.]

These simple explanations not merely serve to exonerate the sinner, but are also
evidence of the priest's overactive imagination. Clearly, the injunction not to talk about an
uncomfortable topic produces an imagination all the richer. However, the confessor does not
see his initial shortcoming, his inability to deal with the topic, but blames the sinner for not
having told him beforehand about the true and venial nature of his trespasses. The sinner then
assumes a curious double role of joker and moralist and explains to the priest that he
deliberately chose to use this ambiguous confession. His intention was to demonstrate to the
priest that his premature condemnation is in the end rather ineffective since it keeps his flock
from confessing really serious offences: "Darmit macht ir die lewt zu' nam, / Desgleich gancz
forchtig und erschrocken, / Das mancher die recht groben procken / Nit halber dar gesagen"
(136-39). [By doing this you make fools of the people. Since many of them are quite
intimidated, they will not tell half about their really grave sins.] The end of the sinner's
monologue then turns into a moral exhortation to listen to all confessions and to recommend
a suitable penance. The verse narrative finishes with an attack on priests who are more
concerned about their wealth than their parishoner's spiritual care: "Hie werden bilichen
geschweigt, / Die mer zu schanckung sint geneigt / Dan grob sünder zu unterweisen, / On gob
mit süsser ler sie speisen" (219-22) [Here are those made silent who are more interested in
gifts than in teaching great sinners and give them sweet knowledge.]

Although Folz is quite candid in his criticism of certain pastoral practices the question
is whether he has really addressed his topic. Although he strongly recommends listening to
all manner of confessions, he still bypasses his own problem in a way. His exposure of the
sinner's vices as venial, or even as mere jokes, means that he does not have to deal with the specific problems addressed in the confession as such. The humorous ending is also the end of Folz's discussion of unorthodox sexual acts. The moralizing conclusion to the narrative is then more concerned with the priest's role as confessor than with the specific trespasses confessed. What Folz criticizes, however, is indeed the practice of the secret that featured prominently in the confessional practices advocated by Chaucer's Parson and his German colleague, Berthold. The novel idea expressed by Folz is that these practices only serve to obscure what should come out during confession: "Dan sprech im aber gültlich zu, / Das er sein peicht förderlich thu. / Do kan er hart veln, er wirt enzünt, / Das er vort alles das ergrunt, / Was er ye wider got gedet" (185-89). [Then talk to him encouragingly so that he make his confession properly. Then he can hardly go amiss when he is all aflame and he will get to the bottom of everything that he ever did against God.] Despite the elegant way that Folz has found out the potentially dangerous area of discussing sexual practices, he deserves credit for exposing the absurdity of the thematic restrictions advocated by the authorities of the Church. Open secrets, after all, still have a minimal protective power: while they leave the individual and his secret vulnerable to random exposure, they at least temporarily ensure that the onus to break the silence is on those having control over the individual. If speaking about specific sins becomes an impossibility, confession as an act of making secrets known is by necessity deemed a failure. One cannot, after all, confess to something that does not exist.
2. Mentioning the Unmentionable: The Sexual Politics of the Fabliaux

2.1. Normative Subversion: The Authority of Laughter

The literary genre that is predominantly concerned with sexual activity is that of the fabliau, or short comic narrative. Much more, than the genre of the treatise, the catechetic manual, or the penitential discussed above, does the fabliau deal with sexual activity. The topsy-turvy world commonly depicted in the fabliaux is populated by an almost endless number of silly husbands, wily wives, cunning students, churlish peasants, and lecherous priests, who are all plotting to have sex with someone they are not supposed to, or to think up counterstrategies to foil such attempts. These contribute to the genre's main characteristics, namely their humorous nature. It is precisely at this juncture of humour and sexual practice where I situate one of the fabliaux' functions as narratives for controlling human sexual behaviour: by marking certain sexual activities as unorthodox and undesirable, and by making them the object of humour, these texts pursue a didactic aim: "to reserve and enforce a status quo." To clarify my terms here, in contrast to the notion of the liberating or subversive nature of certain forms of laughter, I perceive humour or laughter in this context as a strategy

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employed to pass judgment on violations of social norms or on forms of behaviour perceived
as abnormal.\textsuperscript{13} In the fabliau and other comic tales, laughter and humour, I shall argue, often
become instruments of social control. The fear of becoming the butt of a joke can act as a
very potent means to control certain social norms and ensure their observance.\textsuperscript{14} The key
strategy this intimidation by ridicule builds on is the formation of shame, which can be
interpreted as an internalized mechanism of social control that perpetuates society's
disapproval within an individual's self-perception. According to Eve K. Sedgwick, shame is
"a bad feeling that does not attach to what one does, but what one is."\textsuperscript{15}

Cloudesley Brereton and Frank Rotherwell (London: Macmillan, 1913), 19-20, sees one of
the reasons for laughter in the countering of eccentricity, defined by him "as an activity with
separatist tendencies, that inclines to swerve from the common centre to which society
gravitates." He argues that laughter then becomes a "social gesture" which draws its strength
from "the fear which it inspires" and which "restrains eccentricity."

\textsuperscript{14}Howard R. Bloch, \textit{The Scandal of the Fabliaux} (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 1986), 120, speaks in this context of the "socially recuperative thrust of the comic tale
[which] works not . . . only to subvert the social, but to reinforce it as well." Derek Brewer,
"The Couple in Chaucer's Fabliaux," in \textit{The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of
Short-Form Narratives}, ed. Michel Olsen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991), 130,
argues similarly and sees in the "apparent subversiveness a channel for resentment . . .
[which] may support the established order." I find both of these notions somewhat
problematic since the conservative impulse of the fabliau outweighs by far its subversive
nature if one examines the areas of transgression. On this notion see also Joachim Suchomski,
'Delectatio' und 'Utilitas': Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis mittelalterlicher komischer Literatur
(Bern and Munich: Francke, 1975), 162, 202, who remarks on the didactic nature of the joke:
"Daß aber gerade die Betonung des Lächerlichen und der Witz als Mittel benutzt werden, die
Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers auf das Fehler- und Lasterhafte hinzulenken und damit indirekt
die Lehre zu erteilen, sollte nicht übersehen werden." [One should not overlook the fact that
the focus on the ridiculous and on the joke can be used as a means to draw the readers'
attention to the morally corrupt and the sinful in order to indirectly teach a lesson.] I do,
however, want to take issue with Suchomski's notion that transgressive sexualities are not
thematized in the genre, and are thus not the objects of humour.

\textsuperscript{15}Eve K. Sedgwick, \textit{Epistemology}, 12.
The discursive practice of telling jokes is thus part of a tactic which affirms cultural norms and values at the cost of those who are not represented by or who stand in opposition to these norms. By virtue of its dialectic structure, operating on a principle of inclusion and exclusion, the joke deprives those whom it disparages of their own voice, and reduces them to the status of the passive objects of the discourse. In this sense the medieval comic tale is part of a long tradition of disciplining narratives, functioning in a didactic way by silencing those who stand in opposition to certain social norms. Fabliaux and related comic texts can be historicized as normative discourses on sexual behaviour, and the texts belonging to this genre can be read specifically from an ideological vantage point as trajectories of ideology, rather than as purely artistic creations, situated in a moral and political vacuum. I am following here in particular Hans Robert Jauss's concept of a text's "locus in life," which determines its ideological position:

16 See for instance William H. Martineau, "A Model of the Social Functions of Humour," in The Psychology of Humour: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York and London: Academic Press, 1972), 118-19, and his structural analysis of the disparaging joke where he identifies an "ingroup," telling the joke, and an "outgroup" against which the joke is directed. This basic pattern entails a double function of discriminatory jokes: "when humor is judged as disparaging an outgroup, it may function as follows: 1) to increase morale and solidify the ingroup. 2) To introduce or foster a hostile disposition toward that outgroup."

17 On which see for instance Tzvetan Todorov, "The Origins of Genre," NLH 8 (1976): 159-70, who perceives shared discursive strategies and their codification as the common denominators of genres.

18 This claim is made by Jürgen Beyer, Schwank und Moral: Untersuchungen zum Altfranzösischen Fabliau und verwandten Formen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1969), 118, who claims that fabliaux represent neither a certain world picture (Weltbild), nor an ideology (Weltanschauung), but rather present an inner-worldly view of a fragmented universe, an infinite row of empirical encounters.
Literary forms and genres are then neither subjective creations of the author, nor merely retrospective ordering concepts, but rather primarily social phenomena, which means that they depend on functions in the lived world.  

In the subsequent pages I want to argue that notions of amorality and subversion, often associated with the genre of the fabliau, do not hold true if one examines how its texts construct their negotiations of sexuality.

In the fabliau's discourse on sexuality, violations of conventional forms of morality are, in fact, limited to some very clearly defined scenarios. These are often determined by the antagonists' difference in age or social rank and, if anything, emphasize the normative impulse of the genre. Violations of norms all take place in a highly controlled environment, and reinscribe rather than question the genre's conservative values: social mobility and control over sexuality are two of the most predominant themes which will suffice here to illustrate the comic tales' position as literary commentaries on social phenomena.

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20 A similar situation is presented in Garin's Old French fabliau De Berangier au long cul (Long-assed Beranger), where the wife, the daughter of a "chastelain" devises a means to punish her churlish husband, himself only the "filz D'un vilain," a peasant's son, for his failure to live up to the social convention of knighthood, a status he acquired through marriage. The implicit competition between two social regulatives shows that violations of social rank justify a transgression of gender boundaries, expressed by the woman's cross-dressing as a knight.

21 See for instance Hines, Fabliaux in English, 33; Lacy, Reading Fabliaux, 37; Muscatine, Old French Fabliaux, 151.
2.2. Historical Observations

Drawing on Jauss's notion of a medieval text's *locus* in life, I want to argue that fabliaux, like the phenomenon of courtly love, reflect some of the social underpinnings of medieval feudal society, which subsequently form the subtext to the texts the feudal system produced. In addition, I want to locate the genre of the comic narrative in this historical framework since I want to argue that certain social developments form the subtext of two emerging literary traditions, which I see in close correlation to each other, namely that of courtly love and the *fabliau*-like *Märle*.

One of the underpinnings of medieval feudal society is its strong reliance on homosocial bonds, which establish a system of allegiances between males who inhabit positions of power. An essential means to consolidate these relationships between various families, and to guarantee a horizontal succession of power and property from one generation to the next, or to be more precise, from one man to another, is the passing on of women between these men of power; thus marriage becomes central to the creation of the homosocial bonds, essential to the patriarchal system. Lévi-Strauss in his analysis of early kinship systems emphasizes the importance of exchanges of presents in maintaining the ties between the members of kinship groups, and stresses in particular the exchange of women as the most precious gifts that can be given. The significance of this exchange of women for medieval European societies, in particular from the twelfth century on, is underscored by the number of marriages politically motivated in order to consolidate allegiances between various houses.

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and families of power. Gayle Rubin in her critique of Lévi-Strauss draws attention to the fact that these exchanges not merely shape and maintain political structures, but at the same time become sites of social control, with men as the givers and recipients of women, women being reduced to mere objects of exchange in this relationship.\textsuperscript{23}

Social historians, in particular Georges Duby, have argued that the twelfth century with its strong emphasis on primogeniture caused a number of social changes which affected the history of marriage and ultimately led to a novel code of behaviour between men and women: since only the eldest son of a family could expect to play a role in the marriage market, a large number of younger sons were essentially turned loose as landless knights, roaming the country. The parallel rise of the phenomenon of "courtly love" spells out an acute awareness of an aggressive sexuality among this increasing number of young, unmarried male members of the nobility, who were denied the social positions of their elders that would have enabled them to establish their own households through marriage; the resulting aggression is then controlled by means of formalizing relationships between the genders to compensate for the frustrations of the unmarried young men, whose lack of access to wives and status did not match their chivalric achievements.\textsuperscript{24} Consequently, rituals, such as courtly love,\textsuperscript{25} modelled, for instance, like the joust on the ritualization of real-life situations (in this


\textsuperscript{25}Duby, \textit{Marriage}, 13-14, interprets the ritual of fighting for the favours of the courtly lady as both an expression of hostility towards the institution of marriage, and the great
case that of combat) evolved, and became "a test in the course of a continuing education" for these youths who wanted to succeed their elders.

It is precisely at this critical juncture of the youths' challenging of the privileges of their seigneurs and the attempts of the elders to preserve them that I want to situate the fabliaux as literary expressions of an attempt to defuse this potentially harmful confrontation between the generations in order to stabilize the feudal system. While courtly love relies on the notion of the unattainability of the seigneur's wife, the sexual politics of the fabliaux, dealing in a way with the "flip-side" of courtly love, offer possibilities for the release of the frustrations of these youths' pent-up sexual desire by advocating the relatively uninhibited use of girls or women of the lower classes. Andreas Capellanus in his treatise on love makes this quite explicit when, among other things, he suggests rape if a nobleman wishes to have

importance that was attached to it: "The favours of the lady thus became the stake in the competition among the bachelors of the court, a game that was similar in every point to the tournament, for it was aimed at attaining a mock capture that derived much of its excitement from flouting the strict prohibition of adultery and was tantamount to a kind of revenge against the common seigneur."


28While Duby, Love and Marriage, 59, acknowledges the importance of the competition for wives and status as the main reason for feelings of jealousy and frustration among the wifeless young men, I disagree with his claim that sexual frustration does not play a significant role in this context. I would rather argue that "finding an outlet for that" is precisely what is regulated by the fabliaux.
sex with a peasant girl. Duby's enumeration of some of the inhabitants of this shadow-world of the courtly ideal, the peasant women, servant girls, maidens, widows, and whores shows an uncanny resemblance to the inventory of characters one encounters in the medieval comic tales. Read as a set of proscriptive rules for the sexual behaviour of young noblemen, the seemingly permitted transgressions of conventional morality in these narratives make sense indeed: examined more closely it becomes obvious that all these violations of moral injunctions are sanctioned, permitted in order to preserve the bonds between the youths and their elders, and to safeguard the continuation of their allegiances, which form the backbone of feudal society.

It may be seen as a politically shrewd move to permit, and even encourage, these young men to have sexual relationships with lower-class females, who are of no real interest in the economy of marriage. The advantage of granting them some degree of sexual licence

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29 Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964), 150. Note particularly Parry's relatively close translation of this passage in De amore et amoris remedio: "And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with anyone of their [the peasants'] women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force" (150). The Latin violentu potiri amplexu denotes, I would argue, not merely a rough embrace, but a sexual rape.

30 Duby, Medieval Marriage, 13.

31 On the nobility as the primary audience of fabliaux see for instance Nykrog, Les Fabliaux, 72-104, and especially on their German counterpart, Mark Chinca, "The Body in Some Middle High German Mären: Maiming and Taming," in Framing Medieval Bodies, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 187: "Yet in spite of their contents and their popularity the Mären were never literature of the people. They remained a literary form whose public was originally to be found among the nobility and higher clergy, though from the later fourteenth century the audience became increasingly urban."
lies elsewhere: it ensures their elders' largely unchallenged positions as guardians of the feudal, patriarchal order. However, allowing liberties, and making exceptions can be tricky: the upkeep of the status quo demands that these violations be as closely controlled as the rules of feudal relationships themselves if the danger of a general rebellion of the young is to be avoided. The main objective of this control is, after all, to ensure that the homosocial bonds, the "glue" of the patriarchal, feudal system remain intact.

A corollary of patriarchy's dependence on the exchange of women, apart from the prohibition of incest, is its reliance on a strictly enforced and controlled (hetero)sexual behaviour. Within this matrix, homosocial bonds as sites of power are dependent on clear demarcations between a lawful, i.e. a heterosexual, valence of desire and its unlawful counterparts. These social constraints also find their expression in discourses, where, as Judith Butler argues,

the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and constructing the domain of the unspeakable), the legitimate from the illegitimate.

This observation lends itself well to the analysis of the relationships in the medieval feudal system and the texts it produced. It explains why and how heterosexual behaviour can be

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32 For historical examples see Boswell, Christianity, 298-300, and his discussion of the condemnation of Edward II of England's relationships with Piers Gaveston and Hugh le Despenser (298-300), as well as Richards, Sex, Dissidence, 137-38, who identifies the young nobility as prime targets of "accusations of sexual misconduct."

33 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 65.
sanctioned even outside the bounds of conjugal relationships, while at the same time transgressive sexualities must be suppressed. For as long as the sexual behaviour of young noblemen does not pose a threat to the carefully guarded rupture between homosociality and homosexuality, their actions are of little consequence for their relationship to their peers and their elders.

As discursive manifestations of this sexual discipline, the fabliaux function as social regulators by passing judgement on specific sexual activities. I will argue that by the conservative nature of the genre, the sexual politics of the Mære reinscribe heterosexuality by representing what I term transgressive sexual acts in order to immediately foreclose them as possible expressions of sexual desire. Judith Butler in her examination of the normalization of modern (hetero)sexuality argues that it is precisely these foreclosed possibilities of alternate expressions of sexuality which constitute one of the means to enforce normative sexual positions:

For if we accept the notion that the prohibition on homosexuality operates throughout a largely heterosexual culture as one of its defining operations, then it appears that the loss of homosexual objects and aims (not simply this person of the same gender, but any person of that same gender) will be foreclosed from the start. I use the word "foreclosed" to suggest that this is a

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34 For a similar argument see for instance Christopher Baswell, "Men in the Roman d'Eneas: The Construction of Empire" in Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. Claire A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 162-63, and his discussion of the utilization of the homophobic passages in the Old French Roman d'Eneas as means to ensure the proper genealogical succession of the Angevin court under Henry II (162-63).
preemptive loss, a mourning for unlived possibilities.\textsuperscript{35}

Some examples of the specific discursive strategies used to erase transgressive sexual acts from the text are their depictions as the results of misunderstandings, of deception, ignorance, or simply of misdirected sexual desire. In the comic tale, however, this tactic of defamation is not merely self-serving: it further utilizes the suggested transgressive acts as a source of laughter, which in turn justifies their (often violent) disciplining, and finally exposes their agents to humiliation and ridicule.\textsuperscript{36}

In the following pages I want to discuss two fabliaux, both of which use very specific rhetorical strategies to establish a paradigm of normality, and thus of normative behaviour. In order to do this both texts mention transgressive sexual acts in order to pass judgement on them. This is done by depicting them as non-permissible expressions of human sexuality and exposing them to ridicule, thus issuing the audience a warning not to consider such behaviour. In taking up the topic of sexual deviance the fabliaux do in essence what some of the moral treatises, such as the \textit{Parson's Tale} fail to do, namely to speak and write about unorthodox sexual behaviour. However, despite their openness in mentioning unmentionable vices, the fabliaux' sexual politics are not very different from the moral treatise's in this respect.


\textsuperscript{36}A particularly obvious example for the use of these narrative techniques can be found in Gautier Le Leu's Old French fabliau \textit{Del sot chevalier (The Stupid Knight)}, where a misunderstanding forms the basis for a number of allusions to sodomitical acts that are never explicitly named.
3.1. Dietrich von der Glezze: Der Borte

Dietrich von der Glezze's Der Borte (1270-90) represents a rare instance of a medieval text that allows the making visible of precisely these strategies of defamation, since it enters into a negotiation of normative and deviant sexualities. Dietrich tells the story of a knight's wife who is approached by another knight while her own husband is away fighting a tournament. At the sight of the woman, the strange knight falls in love with her, confesses his minne, meets with her refusal, and in order to gain the woman's sexual favours, offers her his valuable falcon as a gift. When the woman refuses his offer, he also adds his two hounds, his horse, as well as a studded belt, the infamous borte, all of which objects are endowed with magical powers (279-315). The woman finally agrees to have sex with the stranger and later ridicules him for parting so easily with his precious possessions (365-68). A squire, however, witnesses the woman's adultery and tells her husband, Kuonrät von Schwaben, what has happened. He in turn, deeply shamed by his wife's unfaithfulness, decides to leave, and travels to foreign countries to seek adventures (392-400). After two years the woman decides to find Kuonrät; she buys a horse and armour and cross-dresses as a knight (487-96). After having adopted the name Heinrich von Schwaben (541, 545), the previously unnamed woman now passes as a man. Soon after s/he meets Kuonrät, who believes in the disguise, and they become close friends. At one point Kuonrät expresses his interest in Heinrich's hounds, his falcon, and his horse. Initially Heinrich refuses to give them to him, but then

concedes that he loves only men (739-40) and if Kuonrat would do what he wanted, he would give him the falcon, at the same time warning him that this would have to happen in absolute secrecy (744). After a brief expression of dismay, Kuonrat seems quite willing to grant Heinrich his wish (760-61). Immediately before the sexual act takes place, however, Heinrich reveals his identity as his about-to-be lover’s own wife, and accuses him of heresy (775-77). In the speech that follows the wife contrasts the venial nature of her own adulterous act with the serious nature of her husband’s offence (791-803), and all that Kuonrat can do is to ask for forgiveness for his trespass.

This text has received scant critical attention since it was first edited in 1850. A number of subsequent studies, when treating the narrative’s content at all, perhaps not surprisingly, attempt to “sanitize” it in order to make the text acceptable for inclusion into the canon of Middle High German literature: Ehrismann deliberately obscures and misrepresents the plot to erase any trace of homoeroticism: “Als Mann verkleidet zieht . . . die Frau auf Turniere aus und besiegt ihren eigenen sie nicht erkennenden Gatten; . . . und endlich gibt sie sich Ihm zu erkennen, als er im Heidenland einen Fehltritt begehen will, von dem sie ihn abhält.” [Dressed as a man, the woman goes out to fight tournaments, and wins against her own husband, who does not recognize her, and she finally reveals her true identity as he is about to commit a serious offence in a heathen country]. Van Stockum and van Dam reduce the Märe to a conventional story about marital unfaithfulness and merely mention “ein

38 Friedrich von der Hagen, Gesamtatabenteuer: Einhundert altdeutsche Erzählungen, 1 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1850), 455-78.

Ehepaar, . . . das sich gegenseitig der Untreue überführt" [a married couple, who prove each other's unfaithfulness]. De Boor also carefully skirts around any mention of male homosexuality, but at least acknowledges the "widernatürlichen Gelüste" [unnatural desires], even if he attributes them to the woman. Rosenfeld, Hotchkiss, and Hoven all give brief, but accurate accounts of the scene. Common to all but the three last quoted studies are the attempts to avoid any reference to the transgressive act which forms one of the crucial scenes of the text. In a way curiously similar to their medieval counterparts most critics resort to more or less elaborate constructions in order to avoid mentioning the unmentionable.

Rather typically for the genre, Dietrich's Märe is concerned with illicit sex. It is, however, special in that it establishes something of a taxonomy of illicit sexual acts. While heterosexual adultery is considered as excusable, sodomy is depicted as a grave offence. On the surface, Dietrich is primarily concerned with the wife's adultery: her cross-dressing, as

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42 Rosenfeld, "Dietrich von der Glezze (Glesse)," 137-39.

43 Valerie L. Hotchkiss, Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe (New York: Garland, 1996), 100-104.


45 To my knowledge this distortion of the Märe's content in critical works has never been commented on. Apart from the ideological implications of canonicity, a further explanation may be that most of the critics wanted to prevent their reputation from being sullied by talking about an unacceptable topic.
well as her attempt to seduce Kuonrāt, are both narrative strategies to restore the woman's honour.

This representation of an alternate desire is subsumed under an ideology commonly found in the genre: in its function to justify the breach of the sixth commandment by comparing it with the more serious offence of a contemplated act of sodomy, the text's strategy is to shift blame from the one offender to the other. In the light of its function as a commentary on specific social phenomena, the text's way of reproducing power rests on its passing of judgment on a contestatory expression of desire by exposing the guilty party to ridicule and shame.

The most obvious means the texts resorts to for propagating a position of normality is to set up the woman as the natural and only object-choice of any knight. Instead of presenting the typically nondescript female character, as is often the case in humorous Mären, Dietrich provides an elaborate description of a courtly lady who might equally well be at home in a Minnelied, or a courtly romance. Perhaps rather ironically, the woman, whose adultery in fact initiates the conflict, is from the beginning of the narrative depicted as a model of nobility and moral rectitude:

Er hete ein wîp zer ê gênomen,
diu was mit ganzen tugenden komen
von edelem geslechte;
der si bekande rehte,
Der gesach nie schoener wîp. (31-35)

[He had married a woman, who with all her virtues came from a noble family, and
those who knew her well had never seen a more beautiful woman]

Following the tradition of the *descriptio pulchritudinis*, or description of beauty, Dietrich then goes on for some thirty-five lines (35-70) to supply a veritable catalogue of the *vrouve's* physical qualities, which traditionally are outer signifiers of her inner, moral perfection. The purpose of the exercise is not so much a self-serving celebration of beauty and virtue, but rather, as Dietrich's comment shows, to present the female as the superior and natural object of any knight’s desire: "Swelch ritter het ein solich wīp, / der waere ein saeſiger līp" (87-88) [whichever knight [who] had such a wife, he would be a blessed man indeed], a sentiment that is confirmed by the following scene which shows the knight and his wife in an intimate embrace.

In addition to the description of the woman's physical beauty, Dietrich also invokes descriptions of nature in both instances when he makes reference to heterosexuality: the month of May is explicitly named as the time of year of the before mentioned scene of Kuonrāt and his wife in bed (93-101). The implied message is, of course, the potential fertility of the sexual union. Nature also symbolizes Dietrich’s approval of the heterosexual union in the description of the adulterous act. The blooming flowers and the singing of the birds lend the scene an almost celebratory tone, almost making the reader forget that a sin and a crime are being committed. Heterosexuality is associated with fertility and order, here epitomized by natural harmony:

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Die boum' begunden krachen,
die rösen sère lachen,
Diu vogelīn von den sachen
begunden doene machen,
Do diu vrouwe nider seik
und der ritter nach neik,
Von der rehten minne gruoz
wart dem ritter sorgen buoz.
Vil rösen üz dem grase gienk,
do liep mit armen liep enpfienk.
Dō das spil ergangen was,
dō lachten bluomen unde gras. (345-56)

[The trees began to creak, and the roses to laugh, and the birds started to sing about it when the woman sank down and the knight bent down after her. Love’s salute made the knight forget all his sorrows. Many roses sprouted out of the grass when body embraced body. When the game was over, both roses and grass were laughing.]

Dietrich’s use of the nature-trope, however, not merely signals his approval of the knight’s and Kuonrāt’s wife’s adultery, but more importantly confirms the sexual act as being in accord with the laws of nature.\textsuperscript{47} This literary device, probably a response to the emergence of

\textsuperscript{47}The significance of this affirmation of the “law of nature” becomes apparent against the background of its opposite in the opening lines of Alain de Lille’s \textit{Plaint of Nature} where the poet mourns the loss of order and the subsequent chaos. See Alain of Lille, \textit{The Plaint of Nature}, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1980): "I turn from laughter to tears, . . . when I see the essential decrees of Nature are denied a hearing, while large numbers
courtly love, was widely used from the eleventh century on and is found as a commentary on questions of morality. As John Boswell shows, the medieval assumption that order and morality are reflected by a harmonious nature is not of Christian origin, but is derived from pagan sources. Boswell documents how a harmonious concept of nature filled a void caused by the ever-increasing demand for instruction in moral issues. As the meaning of this nature trope is not a fixed one, it becomes a convenient means for each text to pursue its own particular agenda.48

This strategy allows Dietrich to juxtapose the heterosexual acts with Kuonrät's contemplated act of sodomy and his later condemnation of it. Notably absent this time is any authorial comment on the husband's humiliation and loss of honour. Though Kuonrät is dismayed when he learns about his wife's unfaithfulness, the act loses something of its immediacy against the background of its universal approval. Subsequently, Kuonrät only rather briefly laments the loss of his wife's chastity -- "der ist ir kiusch' entwichen, / si hat mich beswichen (395-96) [her chastity has left her, she has deceived me] -- and concludes his complaint with the somewhat laconic statement "ich hän verlorn mîn êre" (400) [I have lost my honour]. To add insult to injury, the deceived husband has to bear the ridicule of his wife's trespass. The underlying notion here is to shift blame onto Kuonrät in order to set him up as the negative example he is to become: his resignation to the fait accompli mirrors the crippling potential are shipwrecked and lost because of a Venus turned monster, and when Venus wars with Venus and changes 'hes' into 'shes' and with her witchcraft unmans man" (I, Meter 1).

48 Boswell, Christianity, 311.
of shame and the insidious way in which it is directed against him. His "guilt" consists simply of being a cuckolded husband, and he realizes that there is nothing he can do but accept the shame: "Daz si mich sô hât geschant, / dar umbe wil ich daz lant / Rûmen immer mère" (397-99) [since she has put me to shame, I will now leave the country]. After Kuonrât has taken his leave, the woman concedes that he had good reason to deny her his affection, but immediately afterwards she retracts her concession and claims that in due course he will come to his senses again (405-410).

In response to her husband's moral outrage the woman thinks up the strategy of cross-dressing in order to demonstrate to her husband that her own trespass is of a rather venial nature, compared to the gravity of his own offense, his wish to have sex with another man. After Kuonrât's admission of this very fact, his wife, still speaking as the cross-dressed Heinrich, seizes the opportunity to pronounce her moral judgment on the 'offender':

\[ \ldots \text{weiz Got,} \]
\[ \text{ir sît worden mir ein spot:} \]
\[ \text{Welt ir nû ein kezzer sîn} \]
\[ \ldots \]
\[ \text{Vil untugenthafter lîp!} \ (775-77, 779) \]

[\ldots by God, you have revealed yourself as a shameful figure, since you want to be a heretic, \ldots you unchaste person!]

The text's equation of sodomy with shame and heresy is pivotal, since it represents a historically accurate classification of the 'crime' by placing the offender on one of the lowest rungs of the ladder of the late medieval society of outcasts: that of the various heretical
sects. 49

The legal consequences for a detected and convicted sodomite were directly comparable to those facing the heretic. In both instances, the Inquisition, under the auspices of the mendicant orders, provided the legal machinery to deal with the offender and thus rather predictably produced similar judgments -- often recommending that the offender be burned at the stake. 50 In Dietrich’s Märe this form of punishment is clearly alluded to in order to exert pressure on Kuonrât to bring him back in line and ensure his future conformity. To drive the point home, the woman gives the offender a lecture on the vastly different nature of the sins committed by both of them:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ir habt iuch selben geschant;} \\
\text{Daz ich tet, daz was menschlTch:} \\
\text{sö woltet it unkristenlich} \\
\text{Vil gerne haben getân;} \\
\text{ir sît ein unreiner man.}
\end{align*}
\]

(794-98)

[You have brought shame upon yourself; what I did was human, whereas you very much wanted to act in an unchristian way: you have become an unclean man.]

While adultery is represented as a human failing, the man’s deviant desires are seen not only

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49 Boswell, Christianity, 238; Moore, Persecuting Society, 93.

as defiling and deeply shameful, but also as being in opposition to Christianity. The implied
difference is that the woman can be pardoned for her sin of adultery, whereas her husband, a
potential heretic, has forfeited all hope of redemption. A more immediate consequence,
however, is that the husband is excluded from the mainstream of medieval society as
indicated by the signifier "unclean," which was indiscriminately attached to a number of
marginal medieval social groups, such as lepers, prostitutes, and heretics.51 The husband's
admission of his offence at the conclusion of the Märe reflects his precarious position as a
convicted heretic, who is very much at the mercy of his wife. His words admitting his 'guilt',
and thus his declaration of his moral bankruptcy, have to be interpreted in light of the very
real possibility of his wife denouncing him, and handing him over to the ecclesiastical
authorities, in particular to the Inquisition of the mendicant orders.

In the end, all the text has done is to expose the offender to ridicule; its authority to
ensure that the sodomite steps back into line is based solely on a thinly veiled threat of
blackmail: this is what Moore terms "the language of fear." The husband's final words may be
as much a token of his own terror as the text's admission of its anxiety about the power of
transgressive sexualities, a power that cannot be conceded, and which the text attempts to
deny by relating Kuonrât's contrition: "Vergebet mir die unzuht,/ vrouwe liebe, reine vruht!"
(805-06) [forgive me my lechery, beloved lady of clean birth!]. Ultimately, these words
admitting Kuonrât's shame reflect the Märe's ideological tethering: non-normative sexual
desires are preempted by the text's own forestalling of their mere possibility. A man's wish to
have sex with another man is not a discursive possibility, and has never really been one, since

51Moore, Persecuting Society, 100-01.
the text's ideological stance cannot admit the possibility of same-sex relations.

In the concluding statement of the Märe, Dietrich directly addresses his courtly audience and makes it clear that heterosexuality is the only possible expression of sexuality. To substantiate his claim, and simultaneously to deny even the mere possibility of sexuality outside a heterosexual norm, Dietrich resorts to the well-proven method of invoking fear about the dire consequences for anyone daring to step out of line:

Ir man, ich wil iuch lêren,

vrouwen sult ir êren

Und sult in under tænik sîn;

wand iriu rôten mündelin

und ir wîzen wengelin

diu bringent iuch von grôzer pîn. (869-74)

[You men, I want to teach you that you have to honour women, and to serve them; since their red mouths and white cheeks can save you from serious trouble.]

The details of this commentary, conventional though they are, represents the clearest indication of Dietrich's intention: possible expressions of affection and sexual attraction are only permitted between members of the opposite sex. As a conclusion to the tale, this commentary seems somewhat unrealistic: contrary to what the reader might expect, the couple come to an agreement and continue to live in matrimonial harmony. This improbable

52This point becomes particularly important in my discussion of the confusions in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale; see below p 52 ff.
ending is yet another indication of the narrative's ideological indebtedness: the true power relations between Kuonrât and his wife are obscured in a deliberate attempt to move the text out from under the shadow of the taboo. The questions about the couple's future, about the man's trespass, and about the woman's threat are subsumed under the text's moral and didactic stance. A discussion about the implications of the woman's accusation does not take place, largely because the man's trespass precludes his future credibility; as a suspected heretic he has no hope of social rehabilitation. What Kuonrât exemplifies is that the stigma of sexual deviance, that is of heresy, is permanent; it has turned the deviant body into a ridiculous and perverse body, forever at the mercy of those who have knowledge of this transgression.

3.2. The Narrative as Discipline: Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*

In contrast to Dietrich's fabliau, Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* takes a much more subtle approach to the issue of gender positions and erotic practices. Although Chaucer's Miller describes a fairly typical fabliau setting, which draws on a number of confusions and misunderstandings, highlighted by the infamous "misplaced kiss," as sources of humour, the text has, nevertheless, an underlying message, which is comparable to the drastic lesson learned from the German fabliau.

In this exploration of the relationships between the various characters in the tale, I want to claim that its confusions and mishaps are important pointers to a specific narrative strategy: the disciplining of aberrant behaviour with the aim of reestablishing order in the
fabliau's confused little world. In particular, I want to argue that the male characters in the 
Miller's Tale play a number of roles, as husband, lover, and challenger, and some of those in 
certain ways, which are not compatible with the social expectations of male behaviour. The 
conclusion of the tale demonstrates that the Miller perceives all three males as in some way 
"deviant," and thus relates their individual punishments to suit their individual failures so that 
they fulfill their socially expected roles as men. The fact that the punishment takes on 
decidedly cruel and sadistic overtones shows some of the social anxieties surrounding 
"proper" male behaviour; these anxieties, however, are not immediately apparent since they 
are hidden behind by the Tale's seemingly humorous façade. In this respect the Miller's Tale 
is no different in its message than Dietrich's fabliau; where the similarity ends, however, is 
that Chaucer's tale resorts to actual physical punishment, while Dietrich's plays on the 
psychological forces of threat and shame.

The disruption of certain role-expectations in the Miller's Tale is indicative of a 
deeper running instability of gender roles within the genre. The question is whether these 
violations of norms are as accidental as they look at first glance, or whether it is possible to 
identify an alternate subset of rules which designate these very mishaps as infractions, and 
which in turn can shed light on this instability of gender roles and their surrounding anxieties, 
as well as ultimately serve to make sense of at least some of the confusions depicted in the 
tale.

In the course of the events of the tale each man will be forced to adopt other roles

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53 On which see for instance Linda Lomperis, "Bodies that Matter in the Court of Late Medieval England and in Chaucer's Miller's Tale," Romanic Review 86 (1995), 243-64.
than the one initially assumed, the roles themselves depending on their degree of involvement as more active or more passive participants in the ensuing action. One of the most obvious consequences of this multiplicity of roles is that each man enters into his own negotiation of masculinity and erotic behaviour. These negotiations are symptomatic of the concept of masculinity as an intrinsically troubled category, lacking any biological foundation and thus depending very much on socially and culturally determined negotiations of its own definition:

... masculinity is, like femininity, a concept that bears only an adventitious relation to biological sex and whose various manifestations collectively constitute the cultural, social, and psychosexual expressions of gender. ... Furthermore, given that almost all anthropologists and ethnographers agree that masculinity appears something to be acquired, achieved, initiated into -- a process often involving painful or even mutilating rituals -- there is ample evidence to suggest that there never is, never was, an unproblematic, a natural, or a crisis-free variant.54

Drawing on the notion of masculinity as a highly unstable and ultimately arbitrary signifier of manhood, I understand the concept as defined by the sum of a number of individual enactments of maleness, which are culturally and historically sanctioned, or for that matter, disciplined and thus foreclosed from the repertoire of roles expected to be fulfilled by men.55


55 Compare also Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," in Medieval Masculinities, 3, who claims that "the masculine gender is fragile and tentative, with weaker biological underpinnings than the feminine." For this reason "it requires a strong social support to maintain fictions of superiority based solely on a measure of physical strength."
The fabliau's generic characteristic of overthrowing established or expected notions of order finds its equivalent expression in the structure of the first fragment of the *Canterbury Tales* when the Miller disturbs the intended orderly succession of the Knight by the Monk, and insists that he has a suitable story to 'quite' his predecessor: "I kan a noble tale for the nones, / With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale" (I, 3126-27). This interruption of the Host's planned sequence of the pilgrim narrators is an indication of the Miller's attempt to disrupt, at least on the surface, the neatly cut out erotic relationships depicted in the *Knight's Tale*. The Miller's own admission that he is "dronke" (I, 3138), and hence cannot be held responsible for his words, allows the suspicion that what is to come is a "cheri'l's" version of the chivalric tale, his very own, decidedly impolite, perspective on sexual relationships. Despite his facetious claim to tell "a legende and a lyf" (I, 3141), the Miller, nevertheless, is quite aware that he is telling a story of a rather different calibre, when he lashes out at the Reeve and simultaneously imparts his wisdom on husband--wife relationships: "Leve brother Osewold, / Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold" (I, 3151-52). The Miller's words are evidence enough that what will follow will indeed be a "cherles tale" (I, 3169), and that stories of this kind inevitably involve marital unfaithfulness, as he puts it very succinctly in his concluding *sententia*: "An housebonde shal nat been inquisityf / Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf" (I, 3163-64).

By poking fun at the Reeve, the Miller shows his intimate familiarity with and wisdom about the nature of husband-and-wife relationships, which, it seems, invite trouble almost by necessity, since in the background there usually lurks a hopeful lover, just waiting for the appropriate moment to make his move and try to gain the wife's sexual favours, which
in case of his success, will turn the husband, as predicted, into the cuckold.\textsuperscript{56} The pattern which forms the structural underpinnings of poems and narratives dealing with one man's challenging of another man's claim to a woman is the erotic triangle. As a graphic representation of the tenuous system of social relationships played out in the scenario of the erotic exchange, the triangle assigns a specific position to each of the agents involved; these are, first and foremost, that of the woman as the desired object, and that of the husband as the figure, who has a legitimate claim to the woman as object, and who at the same time fulfills the function of a mediator of desire, and finally, that of the rival, attempting to challenge the latter's claim to his object.\textsuperscript{57} While both men are seemingly pitted against each other, the one in his pursuit of the lady, the other in his attempt to retain control over the woman, both men, albeit unknowingly, have also entered into a precarious relationship with each other, based on a bond of rivalry and erotic enticement, of simultaneous aggression and attraction which in their intensity often equal that of their ties with the desired object.\textsuperscript{58} The intricacies of the various bonds existing between both men and the woman betray the locations on the erotic triangle not as fixed, but rather as inherently dynamic and unstable demarcations of the

\textsuperscript{56}Derek Brewer, "The Couple," 129-30.

\textsuperscript{57}My notion of the triangle as a mimetic representation of the type of erotic relationships is indebted to René Girard's concept of "triangular desire" in his \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure}, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 1-52. For a detailed, but highly schematic study see also Michel Olsen, \textit{Les Transformations du Triangle Erotique} (Copenhagen: Akadmisk Forlag, 1976), 5-60.

\textsuperscript{58}See for instance George Duby, \textit{Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages}, trans. Jeanne Dunnett (Chicago, Polity Press, 1994), 62-63, who poses the question whether "courtly love [was] not in reality love between men."
interplay between notions of gender, desire, power, and identification, themselves highly contested loci in the economy of erotic exchanges. In my own use of the erotic triangle as an interpretative tool I want to emphasize its nature as a register of instability, noting the constantly shifting positions inhabited by the various characters taking part in this exchange. One of the most salient ramifications of this lack of stable positions within the triangle of desire is that each new development of the narrative upsets the already precariously unstable balance of gender and desire, thus prompting the characters as well as the readers each time to enter into a new negotiation of femininity and masculinity.

To return to Chaucer’s tale, the Miller, instead of contenting himself with a simple husband and rival story, ups the ante and, unlike the Knight, presents not one, but two erotic triangles by introducing two hopeful lovers, Nicholas and Absolon, who are both competing for Alison, the young wife of John, the third man. John, the elderly husband, considers himself lucky to have recently married such a young woman, who is very likely to arouse other men’s envy. While this may be very flattering to John’s status as a husband, the interest other men are likely to show in his wife at the same time presents a threat to his own position, both as spouse and man, a danger he is only too aware of and which is the reason for his jealousy:

\[
\text{Jalous he was, and heel hire narwe in cage,}
\]

\[
\text{For she was wylde and yong, and he was old}
\]

\[59\] I am drawing here on Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 27, and her critique of Girard’s model, which she proposes to modify “as a sensitive register . . . for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment.”
The only means to keep his wife under control, and her potential suitors at bay, is to closely guard her since her sexual drive is no match for his own waning powers, a fact the tale's narrator alludes to when he points out John's ignorance of the proverb that "youth and elde is often at debaat" (I, 3230), found in the Facetus, a collection of maxims attributed to Cato.\(^{60}\)

John, the hapless \textit{senex amans}, may not be familiar with Cato's warning, but he is by no means oblivious to his physical shortcomings, his incipient impotence, that is, and he quite correctly predicts that his failure to fulfil his proper male role and keep his young wife sexually satisfied will inevitably lead to her unfaithfulness.\(^{61}\) When the already weak biological underpinnings of men start to fail, the only alternative is to cover up this failure as husband and man.

John's attempts to lock away his young wife may display the traits of a jealous husband, only too aware that there are other, more able males out there, but he can be seen as acting merely in defense of his own status, since he certainly lacks the rancour of other fabliau-husbands, who often physically abuse their wives. In addition, John also exhibits a caring side, which becomes quite obvious when Nicholas confronts him with his concocted story about the flood, and John's first care is not about his own safety, but that of his wife:

\"'Allas, my wyf! / And shal she drenche? Allas, myn Alisoun!' / For sorwe he fil almost


\(^{61}\)Vern L. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in \textit{Medieval Masculinities}, 41-42, claims that being sexually active was an indispensable part of maleness: "It was part of his duty to keep his female partners happy and satisfied, and unless he did so, he failed as a man."
adoun’” (I, 3522-24). The concern John shows for Alison stands in clear opposition to the selfish possessiveness of other husbands in his situation, and almost seems to betray a "maternal" side in him. 62 Against the background of John's lack of sexual power, his jealousy, as well as his pronounced protectiveness towards Alison, reveals how a weakening of the "biological underpinnings" of the male have a profound impact on his social perception: the lack of sexual performance seems to go hand in hand with an exclusion from the community of other, more virile men, and in its last consequence means that he is perceived as feminized. The social category for men like John is that of the cuckold; his impotence as a purely physiological phenomenon is perpetuated as a form of social impotence, meaning that he has to adopt a largely passive role, which designates him as a potential victim, open to the attack of other men. In this respect the older man's place is equal to that of the socially enforced passivity of medieval women, who by reason of their gender were largely barred from taking on more active roles. 63 As a fabliau-figure, the cuckold is punished primarily for not being a "real," meaning primarily a sexually functional, man, and not so much for his jealousy and possessiveness, which are merely its visible consequences. John becomes the butt of the joke not for what he does, but for what he can't do and therefore for what he now is, essentially a failed man, lacking wholeness. In the violent finale of the tale, John's fall out of his tub and the fracture of his arm are highly symbolic means of punishment: the broken

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62 Lomperis, "Bodies," 246.

63 A particularly strident example of enforced female passivity is given by Constance in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale: "Wommen are born to thraldom and penance / And to been under mannes governance" (II, 286-7).
limb can be read as a public confession of his impotence,\textsuperscript{64} and his fall pays tribute to his premonition that indeed he was "fallen in the snare" (I, 3231).

Although John's impotence might make him a predominantly passive partner in the relationship with his wife, he is nevertheless very much part of the ensuing action. Even though he sleeps through most of the events, his mere presence necessitates that Nicholas has to go to great lengths to come up with the story of the imminent flood in order to gain access to Alison. John, although he is not aware of it, has become a partner in the first love triangle, consisting of himself, Alison, and Nicholas. In his function as a mediator of desire, John's presence alone, as well as his legitimate claim to his wife, makes it necessary that Nicholas first has to form a bond with him, although for quite ulterior motives: Nicholas has to establish a position of trust with John, which enables him to convince the unsuspecting husband of the "truth" of his premonition about the deluge, and to ensure the success of his strategy. The way to gain the husband's trust is to impart some invaluable piece of information to him, and to stress at the same time the privilege John enjoys by being the only other partner in this bond, based on an exchange of knowledge, as elaborated by Nicholas when he indicates that he has something important to say:

\[ \ldots \text{Fecche me drynke,} \]
\[ \text{And after wol I speke in pryvetee} \]
\[ \text{Of certeyn thyng that toucheth me and thee.} \]
\[ \text{I wol telle it noon oother man, certeyn.} \quad (I, 3492-95) \]

Nicholas's ploy, of course, falls on fertile ground since by means of his pretended insanity he

\textsuperscript{64}Derek Brewer, \textit{Chaucer: The Poet as Storyteller} (London: Macmillan, 1984), 114.
makes sure that John will be receptive to the knowledge entrusted to him.

The traits John displays when he is worried about the well-being of his lodger are remarkably similar to the "maternal" concern he shows towards his wife. His unselfish and ultimately unsuspecting nature makes it easy to manipulate him, and furthermore to ensure that he will honour the secrecy of the details of the flood, a scheme which is imperative for the success of the ruse. Knowledge or its absence becomes symptomatic in this context of the widely different positions of power held by both men: Nicholas's effectiveness as a ruthless and skilful, but above all well informed manipulator of knowledge, which merits him the epithet "hende," ensures that he can achieve his goal of sexual satisfaction, and thus prove his "manhood," while John, on the other hand, admits to his impotence and powerlessness by conceding his ignorance. The dismay he voices about Nicholas's studies not merely shows his anti-intellectual attitude, but is, I would claim, an admission of his own powerlessness, which designates him as the victim *par excellence*:

Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.

Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man

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65 H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "Newer Currents in Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Difference 'It' Makes: Gender and Desire in the *Miller's Tale*," *ELH* 61 (1994): 484, comments on the frequency with which this obviously positive side of John has been overlooked as well as "the Miller's covert and ambivalent sympathy with a man whom he knows, as the critics do, must be a fool to care for someone the fabliau has fated to betray."


67 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 50, sees ignorance as the distinctive feature of the cuckold: "Most characteristically, the difference of power occurs in the form of a difference of knowledge: the cuckold is not even supposed to know that he is in such a relationship."
That nght but oonly his bileve kan! (I, 3454-56)

Nicholas, it seems, is the one who is in charge here; his plan, once put in motion, runs with the smooth precision of a well-oiled clockwork, and it certainly has its desired effect on John, who will spend the rest of the time until his rude awakening fast asleep.

With the jealous husband safely out of the way, Nicholas seems to embody what is commonly assumed to be the successful aggressive, "go-get-it" type of male, who can achieve anything if he sets his mind to it, regardless of the consequences for others. But I want to reconsider here for a moment the events that lead up to this situation. It is not entirely by his own design that Nicholas resorts to the trick he plays on John, since he has had an earlier chance to try his luck with Alison when her husband was away at Osney on business.

Nicholas shows little hesitation when the opportunity arises, and immediately starts his advances on Alison: "And prively he caughte hire by the queynte . . . / And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones" (I, 3276, 3279). In his first attempt, however, Nicholas has definitely gone too far and has overstepped the bounds of appropriate behaviour: his approach to Alison is coarse, violent, and above all, threatening, which makes his advances look more like an attack on the woman (or perhaps even a thinly disguised attempt at rape?) than the wooing of a lovesick suitor. Alison's resistance to his brutality pays tribute to her tenacity not to accept Nicholas's terms, and instead forces him into a negotiation which takes her own wishes into account as a condition for granting him her sexual favours. Her strategy proves to be astonishingly successful and his demeanour immediately changes: "This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye, / And spak so faire, and profred him so faste . . ." (I, 3288-89). Nicholas's sudden change in attitude highlights that Alison represents much more than a passive object of
exchange, handed from one man to another. Her determination to change the rules of the
game assigns her a position of power which enables her to curtail Nicholas's aggressive
masculinity and forces him to make concessions, first by putting off his plans until a more
suitable opportunity arises, and secondly by concocting the story to deceive her husband.
Nicholas, it seems, has found his master in an eighteen-year-old woman: while John has been
comparatively easy to deal with, Alison, on the other hand, shows a great deal of dexterity as
an independent player in the market-place of erotic exchanges, and her refusal to surrender
unconditionally to male sexual aggression consequently destabilizes the previously
apparently firmly demarcated positions within the first erotic triangle. By offering her
resistance and taking an active part in Nicholas's plans, Alison trespasses into male territory
and usurps a more masculine role than, as will soon be apparent, Nicholas has bargained for.
A meek, passive, somewhat feminized husband might be no match for him, but a rebellious
and active woman is indeed able to show him his limits.

To complicate matters for Nicholas even more, Absolon, a second hopeful young
lover, appears on the scene, and demands his fair share of attention, since he also has set his
lustful eyes on Alison. Absolon, however, demonstrates an entirely different type of male
behaviour than his competitor. Nicholas's aggressive pursuit of his goal, based on his strategy
of manipulating his opponents, stands in sharp contrast to Absolon's seemingly ineffectual
flaunting of the role of the courtly lover. Instead of concentrating on the end of his pursuit,
sexual satisfaction in this case, Absolon makes the means his end. Any action he takes to win
his lady becomes self-serving: instead of being a lover, he derives his satisfaction from
impersonating one. The question is whether it really is a sexual union he is after since it
seems that a kiss is reward enough for him: "Thanne kysse me, syn it may be no bet" (3716). Similarly, his serenading underneath Alison's bedroom window makes little practical sense as long as she is together with her husband in the very same bedroom. The only thing he achieves is to declare his love to Alison, and more importantly, I would claim, to declare himself a lover, as is clearly his intention before he sets off: "To Alison now wol I tellen al / My love-longynge . . ." (3678-79), and to everyone else who happens to be within earshot, one might add. The candid nature of his approach, which stands in stark contrast to Nicholas's "derne love," exemplifies the importance Absolon places on his acting out of his favourite part, which almost by necessity demands an audience. Absolon's self-definition as a male is entirely based on this notion of performing the part of the courtly lover. He even manages to use some of his other activities to pursue his "paramours" (3354); most notable among them is his role as a "real" actor, playing the part of Herod (3384), which he utilizes to show Alison "his lightnesse and maistrye" (3883), but also his more mundane chores, such as waving the thurible during mass, which he also uses to court the ladies present, and his playing of the guitar in any pub in town that has "any gaylard tappestre" (3336). All these attempts to court pretty women are symptomatic of Absolon's behaviour: flaunting and role-


70 My argument here is indebted to Leicester, "Newer Currents," 489, who observes that Absolon's "pleasure . . . is derived from the skipping, 'wynsyng' activity of paramours itself . . ."
playing are second nature to him; instead of defining himself, like Nicholas, as a man by his activity, in order to "make things happen," Absolon's masculinity is primarily defined by the performance of a number of activities, such as his acting, his singing, and his dancing, which are all part of his favourite role, that of the refined courtly lover. The culmination of his attempts to become a credible amant is the selection of the text of the biblical Song of Songs for his performance underneath Alison's window (3698-3707). However, as the outcome of the tale shows, all his efforts are in vain: Absolon's aspirations are rudely snuffed out, and the dream of the courtly lover is revealed as a failed one.

The reasons for Absolon's eventual failure are to be found less in his lack of ability to perform any of his individual activities, as the Miller readily attests to his skills, than in his own misconceptions, both about the nature of Alison's wishes and, more importantly, about his own notion that impersonating a lover is an adequate substitute for actually being one. The first mistake that Absolon makes is that he fails to acknowledge that John's house in Oxford is as far from a noble household as Alison is from a courtly lady: in this setting, dominated by carpenters, their wives, and student lodgers, his courtly manners are quite simply out of place. This incongruity between his own, assumed role and the social class of his "audience" is also continued in the character of Absolon, whose duties as barber and clerk are hardly compatible with the persona of the courtly lover into which he tries to

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fashion/stylize himself. The second reason for Absolon's failure is equally tied to his person: as signalled by his biblical namesake, Absolon personifies a type of male beauty, which is as much out of place in the decidedly un-courtly setting as his previously mentioned occupations. A look at the text reveals that the Miller's description of his physical attributes (3314-25) is heavily dependent on the tradition of the *effictio*, which conventionally served as a model for describing female beauty. Apart from his fashionable clothing, his long, blond, curly hair, which all merit him the epithet "joly," it is in particular his rosy complexion and grey eyes which provide the feminizing touch to his appearance, or, as E. Talbot Donaldson phrased it many years ago, "it is by possessing a peaches-and-cream complexion recommended by fourteenth-century Elizabeth Ardens, [that] Absolon places himself in the almost exclusive company of Middle English damsels." Although he defies the stereotype of the passive effeminate, since the pursuit of his "paramours" seems to keep him busy during the day and for the best part of the night, all his activity is nevertheless largely ineffectual, since at no point is there any confirmation of the success of his efforts. Absolon's failure as a lover, and by implication as a man, can ultimately be attributed to his reluctance actually to seek sexual satisfaction, instead of merely pretending to do so; an explanation for the curiously asexual nature of all his "paramours" can be found in the Miller's comments on his


74 On the rhetorical tradition of the *effictio* / *notatio* as a model for the description of female beauty see Valerie Allen, "Bluneche on Top and Alysoun on Bottom," in A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck, ed. Juliette Dor (Liège: Département d'anglais, Université de Liège, 1992), 23-29.

75 Donaldson, "Idiom," 39.
person, when he varyingly refers to him as "myrie child" (3325), or at the moment of his humiliation as "a child that is ybete" (3759). These comments are an indication of Absolon's perception as an adolescent, rather than as a man. His playfulness and his feminine appearance pay tribute to his child-like state as a pretty, but largely inexperienced boy, which is in a way very similar to John's displacement and removes him from the sphere of a sexually defined masculinity.\(^\text{76}\)

For the second love-triangle, Absolon's appearance upsets the previously established positions within the first constellation, and this forces the participants into a new negotiation to define their relations once more. With Nicholas's claim to Alison's favours challenged by Absolon, the former suddenly finds himself in the role of the mediator, and he, like John before him, has to defend his position against his competitor. This time, however, the other man poses no real threat, since Alison makes it sufficiently clear that Absolon's antics do little to make him a serious proposition. Alison's rude dismissal of the unwanted suitor and her threat "or I wol caste a ston" (3712) echo her previously exhibited determination, and, if anything, confirm her refusal to be the passive object of exchange between men. These men, it seems, have precious little to say in this exchange, since again at a crucial moment Alison changes the rules of the game and makes it clear that the final decision is up to her. Nicholas's plans for his night with Alison might initially be interrupted by the appearance of the [citation needed]

\(^{76}\)On the notion prevailing from the eleventh century that the beardless youth represents a disruption of the dialectic of masculinity and femininity, see for instance Ad Putter, "Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of 'Effeminacy'," in Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the 17th International Arthurian Congress, ed. Friedrich Wolfzetel (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), 36: "Thus, male beardlessness precipitates a double crisis of categories, a collapse of both orders of male and female . . . [and] had long been linked with effeminacy . . . ."
annoying, lovesick youth, but of farther-reaching consequence is the shift of power that simultaneously takes place within the relationship of the three characters: Alison becomes a more and more dominant part in this exchange, while Nicholas, previously nothing short of the embodiment of the domineering male, quite unobtrusively fades into the background.

The tale's plot is now dominated by the verbal exchange between Absolon and Alison, and it is entirely on her own initiative that Alison tells the unwanted lover off, as it is she who is to be credited with the idea of getting rid of Absolon once and for all by granting him his kiss. During the whole exchange, Nicholas does not even so much as get a word in, and he finds himself suddenly reduced to the role of the passive spectator of the spectacle when Alison announces to him her intention to perform the joke on what in reality is his competitor: "And unto Nicholas she seyde stille, 'Now hust, and thou shalt laughen al thy fille'" (3721-22). The joke works out as planned, and Absolon's disgust, caused in part by his confusion over who precisely it was he has kissed, is the visible sign that the positions within the second triangle have been upset by Alison's refusal to accept her expected passive role. Absolon's outrage and disgust after he has "kist hir naked ers" (3734) can be traced back to the ensuing general confusion of who is who in this exchange of kisses. Although he in fact kissed a part of Alison's anatomy, the Miller's comment "For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd" (3737) means, in my opinion, that to Absolon the only plausible explanation of what has happened is that he has kissed another man; his frantic attempts to cleanse himself after the encounter by rubbing his lips are supposed to erase all traces of physical contact with

77A contrastive reading of this scene is offered, for instance, by Kolve, Imagery, 196, and Leicester, Currents, 487, who both claim that Absolon is aware that he has kissed a woman.
another male.

His confusion is in large part due to his sexual inexperience, and his interpretation of "a thyng al rough and long yherd" (3738) as a part of a male body is compounded by his expectation that females in this situation are at best passive spectators and not the instigators of jokes. This fact is borne out by almost all of the other extant versions of the Miller's Tale, which adhere to the conventional distribution of power, activity and gender within the triangular structure, since in these examples it is the figure represented by Nicholas who in both cases exposes himself to his competitor.\(^{78}\) The consequence of Chaucer's change is epitomized by Alison's "Tehee!" (3740), which flies into the face of Absolon, who is caught out by the confusion. By substituting a woman for a man, Chaucer has once more upset the conventional expectations of male and female behaviour: by making Alison the perpetrator, and thus the author of the first joke, Chaucer has invested Alison with a degree of power usually reserved for the male characters of the tale, and she thus acts in a way far more masculine than any of the other males present.\(^{79}\) Alison's practical joke of exposing her behind draws on an established pictorial tradition of obscene drawings, found in the margins of many contemporary manuscripts. As Michael Camille observes, the fascination with the ape-like Spottfigur, or "babewyn," as it is called by Chaucer, seems to express the other side of the spiritual and the divine by invoking the material and animal side of human nature.\(^{80}\)


\(^{79}\) Leicester, "Gender," 493.

\(^{80}\) Michael Camille, "Play, Piety and Perversion in Medieval Marginal Illumination," in Mein ganzer Körper ist Gesicht: Groteske Darstellungen in der europäischen Kunst und
For Alison as the instigator of the joke this demonstration has no negative consequences; this type of humour was standard fare in the fabliau, and it is rather the dupe who bears all the blame than the joke's instigator.

At this moment her position in relation to the other characters reflects very much that of the active instead of the passive party, a place which, I would argue, she has traded with Nicholas, who in turn finds himself in the largely passive role, merely acting as a commentator on Absolon's misdirected kiss: "'A berd! A berd!' quod hende Nicholas, / 'By Goddes corpus, this goth faire and weel'" (3742-43). Nicholas's gloating over his opponent's blunder underscores his position on the margin, removed from any significant development of the plot. His reinstatement as an active participant in the tale, however, occurs soon afterwards, when the call of nature doubles as his own wake-up call:

This Nicholas was risen for to pisse,
And thoughte he wolde amenden al the jape;
He sholde kisse his ers er that he scape.  (3798-800)

The idea of sex with Alison is suspended, Nicholas thinks he can do her one better and, to add insult to injury, make Absolon actually kiss another man's body. The question is, however, whether Nicholas for once is not too clever, and gets carried away by his own "jape." It can be argued that his joke actually cuts both ways, since not only will Absolon be kissing another man, but Nicholas in return will also be the recipient of another man's kiss.81

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81Literatur des Mittelalters, ed. Katrin Kröll and Hugo Steger (Rombach: Freiburg / Breisgau, 1994), 176-77.

81For the implications of the same-sex kiss for the delimitations of masculine and feminine positions, see Glenn Burger, "Kissing the Pardoner," PMLA 107 (1992): 1147-48,
By substituting his own body for that of Alison, he has manoeuvred himself not only in a literal sense into the place of woman, a position which allows him virtually no control over what is going to happen to his own male body. Moreover, Nicholas's prank, a seemingly ingenious duplication of Alison's, puts him into a passive position since all he does is cite Alison and confirm her as the true author of the joke, an act which undercuts his newly resumed activity, and against which his fart, his only genuine addition, is a somewhat ineffectual gesture, since he does not take into account that Absolon has learned from his previous experience.

In particular the exposed backside of the apes provides a second face, which is congruent with the fabliau's concern with the material side of human nature. Of particular interest here is the equation of human and animal, and the consequences of this overthrow of the order of creation:

This not only transforms the human into the animal, it approximates the hindquarters with the sins of bestiality and sodomy. The Penitential and legal canonists of the day warned married couples to avoid coitus *a tergo* and adopt only the standard 'natural' position in intercourse. To do otherwise was 'against' nature and to make man into animal.\(^2\)

Absolon's reaction to this inversion of the human body, and thus of human erotic behaviour, reflects the trouble this experience has caused him; in addition, it is also the cause which has got him into this situation, namely his own erotic behaviour. His visit to Daun Gerveys brings and his discussion of the kiss between the Pardoner and the Host.

\(^2\)Camille, "Piety, Play," 178.
him back not only with the "hoote koltour," but also with a completely novel kind of
to him; the experience of the first kiss has not merely taken the fun out of his role-
playing; it has also taught him that performance is not an adequate substitute for action.

Giving up old habits, however, does not come easy, as Absolon's complaint shows:

"Alas," quod he, "allas, I ne hadde ybleynt!"

His hoote love was coold and al yqueynt;

For fro that tyme that he hadde kist hir ers,

Of paramours he sette nat a kers. (3753-56)

His "healing" not only has the consequence that he swears off his "paramours," but also stirs
him to action, which becomes obvious when he pays his friend the smith a visit: Daun

Gerveys's ribbing about some "gay gerl" is plainly ignored since Absolon has other things on
his mind; the sole purpose of his visit is to borrow the weapon of his revenge, the "hoote
koulter."

Upon Absolon's return, Nicholas, assuming that he is still dealing with the

incompetent flaunter, makes the serious mistake of putting himself into a very vulnerable

position, and in anticipation of a repetition of the first kiss prepares to answer the kiss with

the fart. Nicholas's plan, however, fails miserably, since he is now dealing with a revenge-

seeking opponent, instead of the inexperienced, easily duped youth of before:

And he was redy with his iren hoot,

83 On Absolon's healing from his lovesickness see Edward C. Schweitzer, "The
Misdirected Kiss and the Lover's Malady in Chaucer's Miller's Tale," in Chaucer in the
Eighties, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse: Syracuse University
And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot.

Of gooth the skyn an hende-brede aboute,

The hoote koultour brende so his toute

And for the smert he wende for to dye. (3809-13)

Nicholas, it turns out, has to pay dearly for his joke; his burning is severe and his pain excruciating. The hot ploughshare (a biblical symbol of peace!) although intended by Absolon as an extremely malicious response to Alison's "tehee," has nevertheless met the intended target in the narrative economy of the tale: Nicholas has not only made the grave mistake of underestimating his adversary, but also that of transgressing his possibilities as a male by offering his own body to another man in a sexually charged scene, a possibility which the fabliau's moral indebtedness forestalls. On the textual level, Nicholas's quotation of Alison's joke is a sign that his own body, used in the joke's execution, has become the citation of another female body, and thus a feminized version of a male body, an existence which the narrative does not tolerate, and by means of the punishment forecloses its discursive possibility; a possibility which is already indicated in the beginning of the tale when the audience learns that there is another side to this clever student, who is at times "lyk a maiden meke for to see" (3202). Despite his demonstrated ingeniousness when it comes to using John's credulity for his own ends, Nicholas, by blindly following Alison's example, is equally prone to being manipulated into a situation where he relinquishes control over his own body, and thus leaves his masculinity to the discretion of others, who, as in John's case, will show no mercy and take advantage of his own position of weakness. With his severely burned backside, Nicholas joins ranks with the other two males in the tale: what unites them is less
their pursuit of the same woman, than their individual failures as men, which they all demonstrate in this pursuit, as summed up by the Miller:

Thus swyved was this carpenteris wyf,
For al his kepyng and his jalousye,
And Absolon hath kist hir nether ye,
And Nicholas is scalded in the towte.

No doubt, the conclusion to the tale, which doubles as the Miller's "moral" lectio, brings home to his male fellow pilgrims the knowledge that masculinity is a preciously tender thing indeed: one wrong move will expose its foundation on "fictions of superiority," to invoke Jo Ann McNamara's words once more. All three men in the tale are guilty of exposing the true nature of these fictions as arbitrary conventions of behaviour, which can only be upheld if their trespass is penalized: John's "swyved wyf," as well as his broken arm, one may add, is the punishment for his being a sexually dysfunctional man who has taken on more than he can handle, while Absolon gets a lesson in the physical reality of human bodies which he in his enactment of a courtly lover so desperately tried to avoid. Nicholas, the clever manipulator of husbands, receives a painful impression on his backside, which, although it will seriously interfere with his ability to sit down and study, will nevertheless add a new dimension to his existing corpus of knowledge: while it may be easy "a carpenter [to] bigyle" (3300), overestimating one's own cleverness might prove to be equally devastating to one's position as man.

But I also want to argue that the Miller not merely punishes the shortcomings of John, Absolon, and Nicholas in their roles as men; he also created his fabliau world as a "little
hell" in order to bring each of his male characters back in line by subjecting each of them to some form of "painful or even mutilating ritual," a necessary prerequisite for their (re)initiation into manhood, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau has observed. What the project of the Miller's Tale shows is that to define socially acceptable behaviour for men masculinity and erotic orthodoxy require carefully controlled narratives serving as the parameters; breaking the rules is not be tolerated, and the "failed" man is subjected to an individual and painful learning process, which will inscribe the sentence on his own body, driving home the fact that masculinity is never to be taken for granted, but always a state of existence to be negotiated carefully.

The Treatise and the Fabliau

This combination of two seemingly quite unrelated literary genres, the moral treatise and the fabliau, reveals their common social and moral underpinnings, which in turn permits us to read them in a complementary way. The moral treatise, due to its discursive restrictions, essentially fails in the discussion of deviant sexual behaviour, as evident in the attempts to silence the topic. Chaucer's Parson gives an impressive example of the attempt to censor this topic, even taking the risk of turning the priest's duty to hear confession and to give absolution into an absurdity. The farcical situation of this scenario is then played out to the fullest by Hans Folz's mock confession. This relatively neglected text is significant in its

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84 Paul A. Olson, "Poetic Justice in the Miller's Tale," MLQ 24 (1963): 234, also argues that each of the male characters receives the form of punishment specific to his transgression, which he sees as the deadly sins of lechery, pride, and avarice.

exaggeration as a critique of conventional confessional and discursive practices. What the
moral treatise and the confessional fail to achieve, however, is attainable in the genre of the
fabliau. Since conventional restrictions of morality do not apply here, the topic of
transgressive sexualities has a place in the fabliau. This does not mean that the fabliau is
more tolerant than the moral treatise in the treatment of the issue. The proximity of the
fabliau genre to the phenomenon of courtly love suggests their common ideological tethering:
both kinds of texts show ways to deal with the frustrations of the social group of young and
aggressive landless knights. And both genres have at least part of their political and
ideological function in the preservation of the homosocial bonds, which are the backbone of
feudal society.

Dietrich von der Glenze's Der Borte provides a taxonomy of "permissible" sexual
trespasses, adultery in this case, which is placed in contrast to the sharply condemned
consideration of a same-sex relationship. The narrative's outspoken nature makes it a rare
example where this negotiation can be explored at the text's narrative level. Its discursive
strategies involve the invocation of shame and ridicule, and the text's message is that of a
thinly disguised threat to its audience. Despite its frank nature the text's rhetorical means
involve a rather subtle psychological play on the audience's fears of persecution and
stigmatization without ever mentioning the direct consequences of unorthodox sexualities.

Chaucer's Miller's Tale, on the other hand, is far less outspoken in the various
violations of the "proper," male erotic discipline. Its world upside down seems to
accommodate any number of unorthodox erotic practices, but the punishment for these
arrives quite literally in the end and in both cases in no uncertain terms.
In contrast to the somewhat ambiguous description of the men’s erotic misbehaviour, their individual punishment is all the more clear. In vivid detail the Miller describes the various cruel and sadistic acts of punishment, which, being in effect the proper erotic discipline that society requires, ensures that each offender steps back in line.

What unites these texts is that they all partake in the larger discourse on orthodox and aberrant sexual behaviour. Despite their differences all the texts thematize deviant bodies, and all attempts to coerce these bodies into a social system that has very narrow limits of acceptability. The main feature of these texts is their disciplinary function. Due to the relative failure of the moralizing non-fictional texts, narratives such as the two fabliaux discussed here are used in order to establish and affirm a regimen of erotic discipline which ensures the primacy of marriage as the most important means to control the succession of power and property in medieval feudal society.
PART 6

CONCLUSION

The study of the human body as a surface that can be inscribed with a number of socially and culturally significant meanings was the objective of this project. As the evidence presented in the five parts of this study shows, these inscriptions have their primary purpose in the definition of culturally sanctioned uses of the human body, as well as in the regulation of these uses. As demonstrated, narratives, the primary focus of this study, play an important part in the formulation as well as in the propagation of these rules that govern the uses of human bodies. Since narratives never merely tell of memorable occurrences, but by necessity also offer an (explicit or implicit) interpretation of the events related, they can be read as commentaries on specific kinds of human behaviour. In particular the uses of the human body come under close scrutiny since bodies are at once the most intimate of human spheres, and yet are of intense interest to society. The human body is the *locus* where the interests of the individual are at their most immediate, and where the multitude of rules and regulations governing human behaviour become most visible.

By choosing the human body as the centre of the investigation this study has brought together a number of seemingly diverse texts that reveal facets of social practices that otherwise might have been overlooked or regarded as singular incidents. The goal of this project was to present case studies of various instances of nonconforming bodies and to document them side by side in order to map an intellectual landscape that allows us to examine some of the cultural mentalities that shaped the various regulating practices in the
late Middle Ages. Despite the wide range of the examples chosen, human diversity always seems to be surrounded by cultural anxieties that become visible in the various attempts of narratives to define, control, and contain it. As demonstrated, despite the variety of issues, ranging from ethnic diverse bodies to sexually deviant bodies, the narratives analyzed resort to remarkably similar strategies when dealing with nonconformity. One of the central concerns of all these texts is to place the nonconforming body in relation to a social norm, and then to offer paradigms that can range from the nonconforming body's reintegration into society to its elimination. The relation that is constantly under scrutiny here is, of course, that between the individual body and the notion of the "body politic." As in the classical model of the body politic, membership in it depends on a common denominator that unites all those who are represented by a particular system the body politic stands for. Viewed from this perspective the metonymic aspect of the body politic is that it depends on a system of inclusion and exclusion. As demonstrated, all narratives analyzed in this study have in common that they contribute to this selection process by defining the boundaries of the body politic, by stating who is part of it and who not, and the conditions under which this can change.

A particularly obvious example for the permeability of the boundaries of the body politic is described in chapter one. As I have shown in my discussion of the medieval reception of the biblical tale of Noah's sons, modern notions of "race" as a signifier of human otherness do not apply to the medieval understanding of this concept. Instead, the example of Noah's sons shows that cultural and "racial" properties are far less firm in the medieval understanding and that 'race,' and geographical location can be changed with relative
freedom. However, this does not mean that these changes are completely arbitrary; the overriding principle was the characters' situation within Christian History. Conversion, an important topic in Mandeville's Travels, The King of Tars, and Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale is the most visible expression of how each of the texts attempt to bring outsiders "into the fold."

It becomes more different to absorb the second medieval group of outsiders into mainstream society, namely the lepers. As I demonstrated, their disfigured bodies are seen as an outer symbol for their inner, spiritual corruption. Although they might at times be the recipients of charity, these pauperes Christi are usually seen as irredeemably lost to the world. The lepers' bodies are perceived as having been "turned inside out," baring the patients' diseased souls. Of particular interest are, however, those cases where the leper actually does get cured, even though in reality this almost never happened. As shown in my reading of Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, an important issue is the cause for the leper's disease. If it is a punishment for a particularly condemned lifestyle, such as Cresseid's supposed promiscuity, a cure is out of the question. My reading of the Testament of Cresseid as a form of medical history demonstrates the close interconnectedness between moral issues, causes of diseases, and the ascription of blame. As my investigation revealed, the cause for Cresseid's leprosy can be found long before the onset of her actual symptoms; she was considered sick long before she even contracted the disease. Spiritual corruption is equally unacceptable to the healthy body political as is physical illness.

In chapter four I demonstrated the connection of blame and the simultaneous lack of individual guilt in its most acute form, namely in the case of the body violated by rape.
Although all texts agree that Lucrece is the innocent victim of an assault on herself, the property of Lucrece's body becomes of prime importance in the discussion of the narrative by Livy, Augustine, and Chaucer. As demonstrated in my comparisons of all three versions of the tale, Lucrece never actually owns her own body. While the Roman tale associates her body with that of the res publica, Augustine and Chaucer both situate Lucrece's body in a complex network of relationships between men. As shown, Lucrece's body is seen as an extension of her husband, and thus the crime committed against her is ultimately a crime against himself. Her suicide thus has the function to clear his good name from the blame of the violation. As I outlined in my reading of the Legend of Lucrece against the background of this system of social and political allegiances between men, narratives such as this "legend" have their ultimate purpose in ensuring that the daughter, sisters, and wives of men do not become a threat to their reputation. Narratives like Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece can be read as pedagogic tales, that are addressed to females, cautioning them to seek the protection of men of their own families in order to reduce the risk of becoming the targets of attacks by other men. As revealed in my discussion, narratives, such as Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece build on their female audience's fear and thus ensure that female bodies are kept under the control of husbands, fathers and brothers who are ultimately dependent on the availability of these women as future wives to be given away in order to create political bonds with other families.

The implications of political bonds between men of power are the focus of my last chapter, which deals with sexually deviant bodies. Since sexual deviance is a topic that can not be freely talked about, as I demonstrated in my examination of confessional practices in
Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* and Hans Folz’s tale, a literary genre that breaks conventions has to be selected as the appropriate place for narratives of this kind. In the fabliaux genre where rules of conventional morality do not apply, deviant bodies can be talked about. In a seemingly humorous manner, both Chaucer’s *Millers’ Tale*, as well as Dietrich von der Glezze’s Middle High German fabliau *Der Borte* describe deviant uses of male bodies. Despite the seeming amorality of the fabliau genre, both narratives, however, describe in detail how aberrant sexual behaviour is punished. As my reading of both texts shows, they both build on the strategy of fear and ridicule in order to warn their male audience not to follow the examples related by them. In a way quite similar to the tales addressed to young women, these narratives also have a pedagogic aim: for a stable system of political bonds between noble houses it is of prime importance that young noblemen are educated to fulfil their roles as future husbands and heads of houses. Thus, as pointed out in my discussion of both fabliaux, the appropriate use of human bodies is not only a topic for young women, but also for young men. Bodies that do not fit the socially acceptable paradigm are severely punished as in Chaucer’s example, or are exposed as heretic, and thus as criminal as in Dietrich’s narrative. By using the genre of the fabliau both authors can safely talk about an unacceptable topic, and in addition, draw on the moral impetus of laughter by threatening anyone falling out of his appropriate role to become the butt of a joke.

Human bodies, whether visible in their difference, such as the Saracens or the lepers, or less visible, such as the violated women or the male deviants, are all excluded from the common ideal of the body politic. As my reading of the various examples demonstrated, the narrative and rhetorical techniques used to pass judgment on these unacceptable bodies are
strikingly similar. In addition, the underlying paradigm of the judgment passed in the
different narratives is by no means arbitrary; the notion of a social body is inextricably linked
to specific politically sanctioned uses of the individual body: the cultural anxieties
surrounding "racially" different bodies, diseased bodies, certain violated bodies, and deviant
bodies are all testimony to the considerable power with which the human body is invested.
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