

TRANSLATING OVID'S *HEROIDES*: THREE MIDDLE ENGLISH COLLECTIONS
OF WOMEN

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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August 2019

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

This work foregrounds gendered metaphors of translation in three collections of “good” women’s lives adapted and compiled from Ovid’s *Heroides* (*Epistulae Heroidum*): Geoffrey Chaucer *Legend of Good Women*, John Gower’s *Confessio amantis*, and Osbern Bokenham’s *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. While these texts remain understudied, I argue that these collections constitute the authors’ most overt representations of themselves as English translators. As each poet restrains and restricts the “heathen” women’s complaints during translation, he likewise restrains and restricts the feminized “heathen” tongue: English. By identifying how these and other early English authors theorized their approach to translation, I demonstrate that metaphors of reproduction, exile, and female writing are replicated in important vernacular works up until the end of the sixteenth century. Chapters examine how the three authors appropriate Ovid’s poetic exile, the poets’ gendered ventriloquism as a vernacular authorial position, and the texts’ engagements with the Catalog of Women genre and its emphasis on feminine reproduction.

DEDICATION

To Patrick and my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Nancy Bradley Warren, and my committee members, Britt Mize, Nandra Perry, Justin Lake, as well as Craig Kallendorf, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. Thanks is also due to my colleagues within the department, my writing consultant at the Texas A&M Writing Center, Thadeus Bowerman, and those who served as mentors and supervisors during my graduate research fellowships, including Laura Mandell, Laura Estill, and Kevin O'Sullivan.

I extend my sincerest gratitude and love to my husband, Patrick Ryan, who has supported me in countless ways while I worked on this project. I am grateful as well for the constant support I received from my parents, brother, sister, and parents-in-law. This dissertation could not have been realized without their love and patience.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professors Nancy Bradley Warren, Britt Mize, and Nandra Perry of the Department of English and Professor Justin Lake of the Department of Classics.

All work conducted for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

Funding Sources

Graduate study was supported from fellowships from Texas A&M University, including teaching and research fellowships in the Department of English, research assistantships with Cushing Memorial Library, the World Shakespeare Bibliography, and the Center of Digital Humanities Research. This work was also made possible in part through generous support for travelling to conduct and present research from the College of Liberal Arts, the Department of English, and the Women and Gender Studies Program.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the last decade of the fourteenth century and the first years of the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan became one of the earliest (if not the first) professional woman of letters in Europe, gaining enough income from her writing and translations to support her family after her husband's death when she was just twenty-five. Her writings are remarkable for a number of reasons, but perhaps most interesting is the ways in which she rhetorically engaged with her own position as a vernacular writer and, importantly, as a female writer within an rich and exclusive, and without a doubt anti-feminist, literary tradition steeped in literary authority of authors and *auctores* of the recent and distant past. Her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, completed by 1405, is just one of her direct attacks on the authoritative misogyny that had been perpetuated in countless French vernacular translations, taking particular aim at the poet Ovid (especially his *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*) and his medieval translators. If vernacular translation had provided a breeding ground for anti-feminist rhetoric and attitudes, then Christine would propose to counter that with her own translation and creative reimaginings of these same pseudo-historical figures and exemplars.¹ The *Cité des Dames* falls into the genre of a catalog of women, or collections of famed exemplary women, and the text strategically adapts Ovid's, Boccaccio's, and Jean de Meun's texts and Christine reframes them to present positive views of women. Christine's approach to the translation of these stories from sources like

¹ Angelo, Gretchen V. "Creating a Masculine Vernacular: The Strategy of Misogyny in Late Medieval French Texts." *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*. eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 85-98.

Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* and Ovid's *Heroides* does not focus on the betrayal or mistreatment done to these women; instead the focus is on their abilities and virtues: Penelope is revered for her chastity, Dido for her queenship and steadfastness in love, Hypsipyle for her loyalty to her father, and Medea for her knowledge of science and her constancy in love.

In the prologue of her *Cité des Dames*, Christine dramatizes her marginalization from literary tradition presenting herself as a solitary scholar at home with her studies, "sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit" [*selonc la maniere que j'ay en usage, et a quoy est disposé le excercise de ma vie: c'est assavoir en la frequentacion d'estude de lettres, un jour comme je fusse seant en ma celle avironnee de plusieurs volumes de diverses mateires*].² After browsing a translation of a particularly scathing exaggeration of women's faults and vices, she cannot help but wonder why so many authoritative writers, "philosophers," "poets," and "orators" [*philosophes, pouettes, tous orateurs*], all contain "so many wicked insults about women and their behavior" [*tant de diableries et de vituperes de femmes et de leurs condicions*].³ At her lowest moment, reflecting on her own attempts to write and change these views, Christine is visited by three divine Boethian ladies sent by God (Lady Reason, Lady Justice, and Lady Rectitude), all whom vow to help her counter these claims and their repetition in vernacular translation. Christine asks

² Quotations of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames* are taken from Maureen Curnow's dissertation containing a critical edition of the Old French text. Curnow, Maureen Cheney. "The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* of Christine de Pizan: A Critical Edition." PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1975, 616. Translations from Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards. New York: Persea Books, 1982, 3.

³ Curnow, "The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* of Christine de Pizan," 618; Richards, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 4.

Lady Reason why Ovid spoke so ill of women in texts like his *Ars amatoria* and his *Ars remedia*. Lady Reason gives a miniature biography of Ovid that is somewhat adapted from the scholarly accessus and commentaries about Ovid, but that contains some crucial differences. Here exiled for his promiscuous lifestyle, Ovid is eventually allowed back to Rome, but is then castrated when he once again continues his life of ill-repute. In a move that consciously counters the metaphoric sexual violence discussed Chapters III and IV, Lady Reason pivots from castrating Ovid to bestowing on Christine a *pioche*, a pickaxe, with which she can turn to clear the field of misogynist literary tradition and build the foundation of her city of women. In the end, many of her sources come from Ovid, but it is her approach to translating these tales and highlighting the societal boons that women have provided that, like Ovid's *Heroides*, turns these sources on their head.

At nearly the same time in England, a shift was occurring that would change how Middle English writers approached the translation of continental sources into the vernacular. While vernaculars in the European Middle Ages were generally regarded as inferior in status to Latin, in fourteenth-century England, the English vernacular was also socially less prominent and was yet lower in social hierarchy than vernacular French. This dissertation seeks to explore the importance of this poetic and linguistic shift, from the late-fourteenth into the fifteenth centuries, through Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, John Gower's *Confessio amantis*, and Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.⁴ Yet, while Christine positioned herself as a marginalized writer, and thus well-

⁴ The editions used to cite lines from these texts are as following: Larry D. Benson and F. N. Robinson, eds., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987); G. C. Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901); Mary S. Serjeantson, ed., *Bokenham's Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (London: Early English Text Society, 1938). Unless otherwise stated, the edition I use for Ovid's *Heroides* is Grant

equipped to treat and translate the stories of suffering abandoned women, the male English writers appropriate a marginal stance it to talk about their anxiety about writing in this lower-status vernacular, which I argue through this dissertation, is still framed in very gendered terms and themes. As in Christine's catalog, Ovid's *Heroides* provides the blueprint for these Middle English catalogs of women and the writers' conceptualizations of themselves as vernacular translators attempting to address their own literary marginalization. I also argue that they are responding directly to a medieval commentary tradition that proposed that Ovid wrote the *Heroides* while in exile from Rome in an attempt to make up for his previous erotic poetry. While we lack physical evidence that Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham read their *Heroides* alongside such commentaries, I argue that the prologues to these tales can be read as a response to interpretation of that thought, and that this positioning and adoption of Ovidian exile is crucial to understanding how the authors chose what stories to translate and what changes to make. This project charts that assumption, starting in Chapter II by expressing how their prologues adapt these themes of exile and marginalization. Through a close reading of the prologues of these texts and the translated tales themselves, I highlight the conversation between Ovid's *Heroides* and all three of the Middle English texts, emphasizing that it is highly likely that they were not only familiar with the Ovidian material, but were also familiar with what must have been common attitudes about Ovid's exile and the relationship to the *Heroides* held in the Middle Ages. I then turn to the tales themselves to close read how the authors actually did change the tales, focusing particularly on the authors' uses of highly gendered rhetoric and metaphors of fertility in order to conceptualize their translation projects. My hope is to

Showerman, trans., *Ovid: Heroides, Amores*, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library 41 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

highlight the importance of these three Middle English texts to the growing field of scholarship on medieval translation studies and to identify what themes makes the *Heroides* stand out to not just these Middle English writers, as well as their reception by later English writers including Dryden, whose 1680 edition of translations of the *Heroides* feature his famous three-part definition of translation, and Tennyson's 1833/1842 *Dream of Fair Women*, which itself is steeped in gendered rhetorical praises of Chaucer.

These three Middle English texts are particularly interesting to and fruitful for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century scholars for a number of historically contextual reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, these texts are composed at crucial moments in the expansion of English literature. This grouping of decades (from the 1380s to the 1440s) is a paradoxical moment in the history of the English language when the demand for vernacular literature was growing, not just from a growing literate middle class looking for literary and ethical guidance, but also from politically minded individuals who wanted to promote English over French. While there were of course texts written in Middle English before the end of the fourteenth century, Middle English was particularly marginalized from academic circles, unlike other prestigious vernaculars such as Italian and French. As I will discuss in the second chapter, Middle English was often presented, whether ironically or not, by its writers as being on the lower end of a linguistic hierarchy that prized Latin at the top, then French and Italian, then less-prestigious and appropriate vernaculars like English. Numerous Middle English prologues refer to the language as “the ‘vulgar,’ ‘lewd,’ or ‘fleshly’ tongue, or, more positively the ‘kynde’ (natural) tongue.”⁵ Compared to Latin, spoken in the church and in the schools, and the Anglo-French spoken at the

⁵ Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson, *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), ix.

court, England's vernacular embodied "a subaltern or local language or style, one accessible to a particular, generally nonelite group."⁶ As many of the selections in *The Idea of the Vernacular* show, writers and translators of Middle English texts generally felt the need to justify and define their choice to write in the vernacular.⁷ Unlike Italy, where "a clear line of development may be traced from the early glosses on profane *auctores*, like Ovid, to the humanistic commentaries on 'modern authors', like Dante," England did not have a rich tradition of commentary on vernacular texts.⁸ For example, Dante provides a vernacular hermeneutics for his *Convivio*, as does Boccaccio for his *Teseida*, where he proves that epic subject matter can be appropriately conveyed through the vernacular. The French *querelle de la rose* provided the first extensive French commentary (in debate form) on a vernacular text (of which the Latin commentaries, *accessūs ad auctores*, were largely influential).⁹ The first extensive French commentary on an original French poem was Evrart de Conty's exposition of the anonymous *Echecs amoureux* produced in the 1390s.¹⁰ Vernacular authors' awareness of these pitfalls leads to a performed or sometimes ironic performance of anxiety about their use of this language as they introduce and discuss

⁶ Somerset and Watson, *The Vulgar Tongue*, ix.

⁷ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 3.

⁸ See Minnis's chapter "Absent Glosses: The Trouble with Middle English Hermeneutics" in his *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 165.

⁹ See Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae Ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum*, Münchener Beiträge Zur Mediävistik Und Renaissance-Forschung 38 (München: Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1986).

¹⁰ See Minnis, Alastair, *Magister Amoris: The Roman de La Rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

their translation processes; in fact, these works specifically explain and expand upon these processes and are thus crucial representations of medieval English translation culture.

Yet, that does mean that writers *were* writing in English and that there was a demand for English texts. And texts written in English were increasing in number rapidly at the time. Just as had happened in France in Italy in the 12th and 13th centuries, this rise in vernacular coincided with a few things: an increase in lay literacy, an increase in leisure and time to read literary and spiritual material, and an increase in “authoritative” translated texts. There was also an impetus to distance England from France, to make itself its own cultural center, and to solidify community through the increased presence of English in aristocratic and administrative circles. Linguistic arguments also arose from the politics surrounding the Hundred Years War. Janet Coleman relates that in 1377, Chancellor Robert Ashton reminded the English Parliament that the French were again preparing for war and that they wished to drive out the English language.¹¹

Second, this anxiety often centers on the poets’ relationships with authoritative authors and writers (*auctores*) that they are using. For Chaucer and Gower this is clearly Ovid, but they are also reliant on Virgil, Statius, Dante, and other classical writers. For Bokenham this includes Voragine and even Chaucer and Gower. In her article “Legends of Good Women in the European Middle Ages,” Carol Meale says that texts like Chaucer’s and Christine’s collections are “linked not only by shared material and by their common preoccupation with the re-writing of women’s history: in all three [the *Legend of Good Women*, the *Cité des Dames*, and Boccaccio’s *De claris mulieribus*] the content and structure of the narrative is shaped by the individual responses of their authors to the

¹¹ Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 52.

literary traditions within which they were working.”¹² The prologues, whose importance I emphasize in Chapter II, are sites of intense literary authority and tradition being discussed, and they set the tone for the rest of the translated tales in each collection. Finally, the authors’ anxiety and authorial posturing are performed within a genre that was popular at the time, and for long before and after, but has less cultural and aesthetic value up until recently: the catalog of women. These three collections, Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*, Gower’s *Confessio amantis*, and Bokenham’s *Legend of Hooly Wummen*, are the standout English exemplars of the genre of catalog of women, discussed in detail in Chapter IV. These English poets would have been familiar with the catalogs of Jerome and Boccaccio, as well as those found in micro-versions in Virgil’s and Homer’s epics as lists of prestigious women. These collections of examples of women serve as a collection of exemplars and as collections of mythic and historical traditions; Ovid’s collection surveys the characters and events related to the Trojan War, while Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* advertises his knowledge of Scripture and classical philosophy and myth.

The catalog of woman genre is discussed in much more detail in Chapter IV; however, it is important to note that this genre, while underrepresented in modern editions and classroom syllabi, is one deeply involved in literary tradition and authority and cultural transmission. The abandoned woman tradition has been studied in detail, as has the catalog of women, and these studies emphasize the genre’s interest in literary authority. However, I am taking this study one step further to examine the role that these genres and themes have in the poets’ exploration of English writing and translation. I argue that these themes are uniquely of interest to these poets, that the themes of exemplary women, especially a

¹² Carol M. Meale, “Legends of Good Women in the European Middle Ages,” *Archiv Für Das Studium Der Neueren Sprachen Und Literaturen* 144 (1992): 55–70, 56.

relation to Ovid, is uniquely important as English poets attempt to create a vernacular poetry.

The centuries associated with France and Italy's vernacular booms are associated with the Age of Ovid, and the 12th and 13th centuries are when Ovid's popularity reached its heights.¹³ Ludwig Traube, lecturing to German students of medieval Latin, called the 12th and 13th centuries "aetas Ovidiana."¹⁴ Peter Allen describes how, while other classical authors' popularity (like Virgil, and others) gained more popularity in the 11th century, and waned by the end of the 12th century as the reliance on classical *auctores* lessened, Ovid's popularity and the popularity of his amatory works continued into the later-middle ages and were heavily influential on western European vernacular literature.¹⁵ There were multiple, and often conflicting, perspectives about Ovid's importance to medieval western Europe; Calabrese reminds us that

Ovid takes his place in a spectrum of medieval texts in any number of guises: noble *auctor* of history, doctor of love, father of antifeminist lore, advocate of female power, prophet of mutability, and, at times, dreaded corrupter of youth and peer of Satan. The Roman poet provides medieval authors with literary models, mythic characters, and all sorts of wit, wisdom, and doctrine.¹⁶

¹³ Peter Allen, *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 47.

¹⁴ Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 1-13

¹⁵ Allen, *The Art of Love*, 46-53.

¹⁶ Michael A. Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 1.

He was identified by Chaucer as “a man of gret auctorite,”¹⁷ and praised by many who referred to him as *magister amoris*, for his *Amores* and *Ars amatoria* were long held as manuals on the art of loving. This theme is present in the vernacular works of Chaucer, Gower, and Jean de Meun, and influenced Andreas Capellanus in his *De amore*, inspiring the legacy of courtly love. Dante placed him among Homer, Virgil, and Lucan in Limbo.¹⁸ Other poets censured him: Marie de France writes of a man who commissions a mural of Venus burning Ovid’s *Amores* for his young wife’s bedroom in *Guigemar*; Christine de Pizan criticizes his attitudes, and those of his followers, towards women in the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*; and the anonymous Latin *Antiovidianus*, composed in Italy in the fourteenth century, asserted that Ovid and his works deserved to burn in hell. And, since poetry fell under the umbrella of ethics or morals, Ovid’s works were also often moralized in a highly allegorical Christian method; the *Ovide moralise* (French octosyllabic couplets) and the *Ovidius moralizatus* (Pierre Bersuire’s Latin prose) both reframed the *Metamorphoses* within Christian exegesis.

Ovid’s popularity in England is evidenced by the amount of manuscripts that were copied and read between 1200 and 1500. McKinley charts the rise of Ovidian literature and its circulation in England and notes that “England itself saw a modest but steady increase in the texts of Ovid between 1200 and 1500.”¹⁹ It is clear that Ovid was an important influence on Chaucer’s and Gower’s literary output (and, consequently, on their English protégés and imitators), and there have been a number of monographs, articles, and chapters of book collections that group the three together critically. Michael Calabrese and

¹⁷ *House of Fame*, l. 2158.

¹⁸ *Inferno*, 4.79-102

¹⁹ Katherine McKinley, “Manuscripts of Ovid in England, 1100-1500,” *English Manuscript Studies, 1100-1700* 7 (1998): 41–85.

John M. Flyer have both written monographs on Chaucer's relationship with Ovid's works. Flyer describes how medieval writers appropriated Ovid's poetic persona, especially Chaucer, who replicated Ovid's obtuseness and his playful use of paradox, juxtaposition, and inconsistencies. Calabrese's *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* successfully shows that Chaucer attempts to map his poetic career and output onto Ovid's (as Chaucer received it), convincingly comparing *Troilus and Criseyde* to Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and the *Ars remedia*, and the *Canterbury Tale's* retraction to Ovid's later exile poetry. While Calabrese does not address the *Legend of Good Women* directly, he recognizes that "Ovid is Chaucer's favorite poet, the one to whom he is closest in spirit and to whom he refers by name more than any other literary authority. Chaucer is, in many ways, the 'medieval Ovid.'"²⁰

Deschamps hails Chaucer as "Ovides grans en ta poëterie" [a great Ovid in {his} poetry],²¹ and Gower's *Venus* calls Chaucer her own poet. Chaucer's Ovidian references are replete in his earlier works. He opens *Book of the Duchess* with a retelling of the story of Ceyx and Alcyone (*Metamorphoses* 11.410-748), and he frames his *House of Fame* with Dido's tragedy. The black knight claims that "nought all the remedies of Ovyde" could banish sorrow in the *Book of the Duchess* (l. 568) and refers to the *Heroides* (ll. 714-44), and the *House of Fame* draws on and refers to Ovid throughout. And, while not overtly Ovidian in subject matter, Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, an unrhymed elegiacally coupled Latin text coming in at over ten thousand lines, is suffused with Ovidian quotes and references. While the *Confessio amantis* has been compared at length to its source in the

²⁰ Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*, 1.

²¹ Eustace Deschamps's "Autre Balade," quoted and translated by Derek Brewer, *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage. Vol 1:1385-1837* (London: Routledge, 1978), 39-40.

Metamorphoses, I believe it is important to see that the *Heroides* are just as important, if not more important, and a narrative frame and interpretive motivation.

In particular, this study is interested in how Chaucer, Gower, and consequently Bokenham translate and adapt themes from Ovid's *Heroides*. The text consists of fifteen verse epistles in Latin elegiac couplets from famous classical women lamenting the betrayal or neglect they have received from their heroic lovers, such as Theseus, Aeneas, and Hercules, and begging them to return.²² The letters were interesting to contemporary readers because Ovid had adapted the stories of numerous heroic texts, including Virgil's *Aeneas*, Catullus, Homer's *Odyssey and Iliad*, and presented them from the perspective of the women wronged by those heroes in the pursuit of fame and power. The *Heroides* were very popular in the Middle Ages; Susan Hagedorn, studying the *Heroides* influence on Boccaccio and Dante, notes that "the *Heroides* occurs among the Ovidian works most frequently listed in medieval library catalogs of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and in the thirteenth, it appears in catalogs as often as the *Metamorphoses*."²³

The popularity of the text can be attributed to its compilation and reinterpretation of various classical *auctores*, including Virgil and Homer. The text thus not only provides interesting reinterpretations of known texts, like that of Dido, but also gave versions of texts whose original was unavailable; thus Ovid's text becomes the go-to. The work specifically brings together a number of myths, characters, and events from the Trojan War and associated mytho-historical events, which were very important culturally and

²² The so-called double letters, Paris and Helen, Leander and Hero, and Acontius and Cydippe, will not be covered in this study. I hold with the scholars who see the double letters as secondary, if not apocryphal. I believe this study supports the idea that the fifteen single letters were intended to stand alone.

²³ Suzanne C. Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, & Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 34.

intellectually to medieval writers. Many surviving manuscripts of the *Heroides* are glossed, indicating that this text was sometimes the first time a student would learn these literary concepts, and perhaps served as an aid in learning Latin. The *Heroides* were clearly available to English readers either in the original Latin or in a French or Italian translation circulating; Chaucer refers to the *Heroides* a number of times in his other works outside just the *Legend of Good Women*. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer has the sly Pandarus mention *Heroides* I.652-65, from the letter of Philomela. Chaucer's Man of Law, as he astutely outlines Chaucer the pilgrim's *ouvre*, mentions that his "Seintes Legende of Cupide" (l. 61) tells of more lovers "than Ovide made of mencioun / In his Episteles, that been ful olde" (ll. 53-54).

Besides their construction as catalogs of women, featuring examples of women drawn from and translated from other authoritative sources (including Ovid's *Heroides*, Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*), the three Middle English texts share a number of important themes with these Latin collections that I would like to highlight. Like Ovid's *Heroides*, these suffering women, who are often tortured, left for dead, or commit suicide, are presented through an interpretive lens (established in each case in their prologues) that impacts how each writer translates their texts. Themes including gendered ventriloquism, complaint, authority, and fertility are present in the prologues and are perpetuated through the tales themselves, as in Christine's catalog. Each prologue includes a moment in which the poet-narrator encounters a divine authority and intercessor, who in effect lead to the creation of the following tales. Generally, this divine encounter refers to either the poet's previous works, the works of idolized literary authorities, or both, and the poets grapple

with their place within that tradition. Like the lore surrounding Ovid's *Heroides*, the prologues of Chaucer's and Gower's collections address the status and reception of the authors' previous texts, which Bokenham's, like Christine's, addresses the works of *auctores* he hopes to take to task. Each poet directly addresses and explores his marginality from contemporary and authoritative literary circles, yet while Christine focuses on her marginalized femininity, Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham focus deeply on the social problems that arise when translating works into English.

Of the three English collections, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is most clearly modeled on the *Heroides*, although it skillfully weaves together Christian and political themes while also relying on French poetic models. It has been difficult to date; however, since it is written in direct response to reception of *Troilus and Criseyde* and is mentioned in the *Canterbury Tales*, and it is generally dated to c. 1386. The *Legend* is made up of a prologue (revised at some point) and nine tales that are mock-hagiographies, although more are promised in the prologue and cited in the Man of Law's prologue. It remains unfinished, but whether this is the result of Chaucer's abandonment of the collection (which, if so, is a wonderful meta-performance of the very abandonment he writes about) for the *Canterbury Tales*, or the result of a loss of the following material is unclear. Whichever is the case, it is clear that by the time of the boom in Chaucerian manuscript production and copying in the early fifteenth century, the collection was set in the order it is received today.

The *Legend of Good Women* consistently cites Ovid as its main source, but Chaucer follows in the footsteps of other catalogues of women like Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* and Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (discussed more in Chapter IV).

Chaucer introduces and frames his tales of betrayed classical women with a dream vision in which his narrator encounters the God of Love and the mythical figure Alceste, the ideal good wife who chose to die for her husband. The two require him to write legends of women true in love to remedy the damage done by his *Troilus and Criseyde* which, the God of Love claims, has caused Cupid's believers and followers to go astray because of its representation of the fickle Criseyde. The stories that follow adapt stories of classical women, many from the *Heroides* but others pulled from Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*.

Gower's *Confessio amantis* responds to Chaucer's *Legend* in its approach to translation and citation. Some features of Gower's collection seem to be calling directly to Chaucer's text: his framing mechanism, in which Gower's narrator meets the Gods of Love who prompt the exploration of the following tales, and in the prologue he encounters Richard II, who requests the tales. Like Chaucer's *Legend*, the *Confessio* deals in the religion of love and translates and adapts tales from Ovidian and classical myth, yet his text is much more expansive, weaving together the linguistic anxiety of the *Heroides* with the encyclopedic *Metamorphoses*. Chaucer uses "approved" continental models and translates word for word, creating as he does an appropriate and courtly way to compose English poetry, which until then had not been constructed on that scale. Gower, claiming a plainer style, still imposes a hierarchical structure that prioritizes Latin. While Chaucer translates his stories with the continental models close at hand in order to model his vernacular upon their properly ornamented and courtly poetics, Gower turns to a simpler, "pleiner," rhetoric that is more accessible perhaps, and which involves a more original twist of phrasing that simplifies the complicated rhetoric of the sources. It would seem that Gower advocates for a more open and simpler access to moral and theological teachings

within the vernacular so a wider lay readership can participate. However, there are a number of textual and narrative features that frustrate that assumption. First, the bilingual nature of the text prioritizes the Latin commentary that helps support the text's structure and provides hermeneutical guide for the content. While these kinds of apparatus can be useful to a reader, it sends the signal to a reader who cannot read Latin that there yet remains an intellectual hierarchy that mediates and guides the text's meaning and content.

Osbern Bokenham's collection, given the title *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* in Mary Serjentson's EETS edition of British Library MS Arundel 37, might at first seem out of place in this study. His collection of thirteen saints' lives, found in a single manuscript and appearing in a different configuration in Bokenham's larger English translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, recounts the miracles and martyrdoms of holy women. His previous works were certainly not Ovidian, including his historical texts, the *Mappula angliae* (c. 1440) and his partial translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. He states in his tale of St. Margaret that he began his translations on September 7, 1443, while he was an Augustinian friar at Clare Priory in Suffolk. Ovid is clearly not figured as an *auctor* for this holy martyrdom, like he is in Chaucer's and Gower's collections, and Bokenham flips their parody of religious themes by presenting a collection of actual martyrs.

Even though Bokenham's collection comes much later, it is clear that he is participating in Chaucer's and Gower's approaches to translation and use of *auctores*. While Bokenham's main sources for his saints' lives are varied, he mentions Chaucer's and Gower's name throughout, citing them as rhetorical and poetic authorities in their own right (along with Lydgate, whose works in the early fifteenth century spanned both religious matters and the period of the Trojan and Theban wars, and who was a resident

fifteen miles away from Clare Priory at the Benedictine abbey at St. Edmunds). The references to Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate are not present in Bokenham's larger hagiographic collection, making it clear that this particular smaller collection of female martyrs is somehow more concerned with Bokenham's vision of himself as a vernacular English poet. And by this time, Bokenham is not comparing his English poetry to continental traditions, as Chaucer and Gower do, he is comparing his style of English poetry with the great poetics of the generation before him. He presents his English as a less ornate, less centralized, English that is at once marginal yet exemplary. He also would have known of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*, completed in 1405, a collection of both Christian and non-Christian women from classical myth, history, and Scripture that also developed deep Ovidian themes of translation and authorial citation.

Four decades after Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham compiled his legend in a different political environment. Writing after Arundel's constitutions of 1409, Bokenham was at more risk, and Sheila Delany explains how "English social life was turbulent during Bokenham's lifetime, in all social classes. In 1401 the Lollard heresy had been declared a capital offence in the statute *De Comburendo haereticis*."²⁴ Many men and women were executed as heretics in the following decades. Yet what connects Bokenham to these two earlier writers is the linguistic anxiety. Bokenham was not writing for courtly audiences in London, as Chaucer and Gower were. He instead wrote for a smaller community of like-minded religious and local noble women, outlining the details of how many well-to-do female acquaintances commissioned his translations.

²⁴ Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 9.

Each chapter follows a similar trajectory, introducing a number of contemporary conceptions about translation that the authors would know about. It considers ideas about translation as they relate to Ovid's collection and show why this text was chosen as one that helps them express their role as translator. Then, I close read each author's use of or departure from these tropes within the tales and see what that tells us about their ideas about the possibility of translation. I am most concerned with the women that appear consistently throughout the works in question: Dido, Medea, Hypsipyle (not in Gower), Phyllis (not in Boccaccio nor Christine), Ariadne (not in Boccaccio nor Christine), and Hypermnestra (not in Gower nor Christine). These women are of particular interest for a number of reasons, regardless of the fact that they are the ones who noticeably are recounted the most often and originally found in Ovid's text (Thisbe and Lucretia are not included in Ovid's *Heroides*, although they do occur in *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* II, respectively). These women are specifically abandoned women, those who have been left behind by their husbands or lovers.

The second chapter examines the prologues to these three collections, and here I address their adaptation of the scholarly prologues attached to the *Heroides* in the Middle Ages. It is clear that understanding medieval texts relies on understanding not just their own paratextual text and the source material from which they pull, but also on recognizing the paratext that travelled with the source material. Paratextual features like prologues and marginal glossing would have influenced how those medieval readers themselves interpreted the source text. This chapter does just that, setting the stage for the exploration of the tales themselves in Chapters II and III. I focus in particular on one tradition of *accessus* in the Middle Ages which asserted that Ovid wrote these stories to be allowed

back to Rome after his exile; in short, these good, true lovers were seen to be counters to the adulterous wives of his earlier erotic texts. In each prologue, the author is faced with potential literary exile from a fictional authoritative figure and is commissioned to translate the following texts. Analyzing these prologues against the medieval *accessūs* to the *Heroides* reveals two important things; first, it is clear the authors were likewise situating the adaptation of the *Heroides* within their own poetic careers and were striving to establish themselves specifically as English writers. Second, the encounters with authority in these prologues set up the hermeneutical and translation strategies that are to be undertaken in the tales themselves. This chapter stresses that these two goals, the poets' attempts to establish themselves as English writers and their treatments of the following tales, are related so deeply as to become stand-ins for one another. We will see in the following chapters that as each author manipulates and translates the stories, he too manipulates and reforms English and its poetic capabilities.

The following two chapters explain how the interpretive structure set out in each prologue does not only impact the changes made to the stories, but also dictates how the author treats and manipulates English poetics. The third chapter explores the particular importance of the abandoned woman's voice to the vernacular writer. This voice of the abandoned woman as a poetic trope has been studied in detail by Lawrence Lipking and Susan Hagedorn, who argue that male writers appropriate female voices in order to challenge the status quo and to call out masculine forms of epic narrative and linguistic hierarchies. However, the hermeneutic structures outlined in these collections' prologues allow and/or call for the restriction of those voices; the writers *do not* allow the women to speak for them, they instead speak for the women. And when they do allow the women

voice, those speeches are truncated and restricted. These approaches of appropriating and manipulating the female voice are more in line with what Caroline Walker Bynum discusses in her essay on male mystics' uses of female "unlearnedness" in order to garner authority. In order to appease their figures of authority, these writers must restrain the female voice in order to make them appropriate Christian exempla. And just as they strive to soften the "heathen" pagan Ovidian woman, so too do they attempt to soften and stabilize the "heathen," feminized English language. As the hermeneutical structures/adaptation strategies restrict the women's voices and make them into Christian exempla, so to do the translation strategies explained in Chapter II mold and manipulate English, making it look more like the learned continental models.

Chapter IV discusses themes of infertility and barrenness in light of the agro-sexual vocabulary of classical and medieval rhetoric and translation (i.e. sowing, plowing, reaping, and insemination). Standard catalogues of women, for example Herodotus's *Catalog of Women*, are meant to laud female fertility and the birth of heroic lineages. However, all of the women in these collections signal the end of a number of family lines, and they are often the ones left holding the knife. Even Bokenham's women, who chose chastity in the face of marital pressures, represent the anxiety of aristocratic feminine reproduction. I argue that through their translations, these authors emphasize a similar anxiety about English's ability to "reproduce" meaning; just as these women are the ends of their lines, English could not give birth to any relevant forms of wisdom or authority (due to its instability, lack of vocabulary, and nuance). Important to this comparison is Jerome's interpretation of Deuteronomy, because it discusses the Christian use of pagan material as being similar to the Deuteronomic instruction to "pare down" and reclothe the

captive woman of another nation until she is made appropriate to bear Israelite children. The authors discussed in this dissertation use this metaphor very consciously and strategically; they take the pagan woman's story, they apply a strict hermeneutical structure to it (involving cutting away the "chaff" and re-dressing the women in Christian raiment), and the result is an appropriate and almost Christian model of a good wife or lover. Similarly, their translation strategies pare down English and reclothe it with French and Latin trimmings, to the point that it becomes appropriate for the source material it needs to convey.

CHAPTER II

OVIDIAN EXILE IN VERNACULAR PROLOGUES

This chapter is about the prologues to three Middle English collections of exemplary women who suffer in one way or another for love: Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, John Gower's *Confessio amantis*, and Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. As these authors adapt Ovid's *Heroides*, they also adapted the medieval commentary traditions they travelled with, creating personal prologues that explore authorial roles and translatory strategies. It is not a coincidence that each of these three prologues deal with the importance of translating stories into English, perhaps more so than any of the authors' works up to that point, when they introduce their tales of betrayed women. Traditions and approaches to translation, adaptation, and imitation of *auctores*, classical authors who held special literary authority, are central to these three prologues and, consequently, of the whole collections. Chaucer's G prologue states that "myn entent is, or I fro yow fare, / The naked text in English to declare / Of many a story, or elles of many a geste, / As autours seyn" (G ll. 85-88). In Gower's extrinsic prologue, the poet discusses his intent to write "A bok for Engelondes sake" (*Prologue* l. 24), stating that "fewe men endite / In oure englyssh" (ll. 22-23). Bokenham, in a majority of his legends, requests that the saint look favorably on "the translatur / Wy[c]h þi legend *compylyd*, not wyth-out labour, / In englysshe tunge" (ll. 3126-8). These prologues are further connected by a mutual emphasis on exile and literary marginalization, themes which then prompt the "translations" of the following stories. The Gods of Love, a Venetian tyrant, the shadow of

Richard II, and growing anti-Lollard literary restrictions all loom over the authors' statements of *intentio* as they introduce their tales.

This chapter does not look at the tales themselves, but begins where the dutiful reader would: with the prologues. When studying author/translator prologues to medieval translations, we must remain aware of the prologues and hermeneutical apparatuses that travelled with the source texts and would have been important to the translators' understanding of and interpretation of the text as they translated. Thus, it is not only crucial for anyone studying these collections of classical abandoned women to be aware of this hermeneutical practice, but also specifically of how Ovid's *Heroides* were introduced in medieval prologues.

Alastair Minnis and Rita Copeland have provided extensive evidence for vernacular poets' appropriations of scholarly Latin prologues in order to solidify their own literary recognition and lend legitimacy to their translation projects.²⁵ Vernacular writers mimicked academic hermeneutical introductions for their own texts, which would aid in the reader's interpretation of the translation, an important strategy for English writers who were accused of leading readers astray and betraying the original text with their inappropriate English. Minnis's *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Middle Ages* advocates for the recognition of a highly rigorous and consistent manifestation of conceptions of authority in medieval prologues and other forms of

²⁵ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

scholarly commentary.²⁶ These writers were keenly aware of academic traditions of authority and of how authority was established in prologues that followed certain scholarly models. Minnis explains in *Translations of Authority* how vernacular writers used Latin models for their scholarly prologues in order to lend legitimacy and rigor to their projects. He specifically mentions Chaucer's and Gower's imaginative and exploratory appropriation of formal, Aristotelian academic prologues, and explicitly notes Bokenham's prologue to the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* as perhaps the most rigorous application of Aristotelian expectations for academic prologues.²⁷ Elizabeth Dearnley's *Translators and their Prologues in Medieval England* also explores Middle English engagements with scholarly prologues, showing their indebtedness to French, Latin, and Germanic models. She recognizes that Middle English translations developed a post-conquest, Romance influenced, apologetics.²⁸ Thus, as English writers appropriated these scholarly Latin prologues, they modified them to their needs, infusing them with an awareness of the inferiority of English compared to Latin. A consistent mode of apologetics became common the more that prologues aligned themselves with Latin forms of commentary, and their anxiety about the instability and inability of English strengthened in comparison to earlier Middle English prologues. And yet, vernacular poets used this "modesty topos" to

²⁶ He shows that Chaucer and Gower "exploited a few aspects of a vast corpus of sophisticated theory of literature. Scholastic literary theory did not merely provide these poets with technical idioms: it influenced directly or indirectly the ways in which they conceived of their literary creations; it affected their choice of authorial roles and literary forms." Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 160.

²⁷ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 164-5.

²⁸ Elizabeth Dearnley, *Translators and their Prologues in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016).

highlight the role and persona of the poet in a way that was less common a century earlier.²⁹

The importance of prologues to the development of Middle English literary theory has been increasingly noted by scholars comparing Middle English prologues to their continental predecessors. Elizabeth Dearnley states that “To study Middle English translation, through the lens of the prologues, is therefore to ponder the growth of the English language in the Middle Ages as a literary and learned medium.”³⁰ The editors and scholars of the *Idea of the Vernacular* draw heavily from Middle English prologues as they gather evidence for the existence of a Middle English literary theory.³¹ And as Amanda Gerber discusses the value of Ovid’s poetic personae in medieval scholarship, she emphasizes the importance of prologues, especially those that present a framing narrative for collections of shorter tales, like the *Metamorphoses*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and the texts focused on in this chapter. She states that frame narratives, like Chaucer’s and Gower’s encounters with the gods of love and Bokenham’s abandonment by the tyrant are concerned with “an internal conversation with written authorities, often self-consciously contemplating the nature of composition as each inset narrative functions as a representation of the author, of the other embedded narratives, of the framing devices used to connect tales, and of the sources to which the author responds.”³² These framing narratives contain a self-conscious reflection of the writers on their authorial positions and a direct, internal conversation with literary authorities. The successful prologue is a

²⁹ For more information on English modesty topos, see *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 3-105.

³⁰ Amanda Gerber, *Medieval Ovid: Frame Narrative and Political Allegory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

³¹ See especially “Part One: Authorizing Text and Writer,” 1-105, and Ruth Evan’s “Afterward on the Prologue,” 371-8.

³² Gerber, *Medieval Ovid: Frame Narrative and Political Allegory*, 4.

reflection of more than the authors' literary intent, it "functions as a representation of the author, of the other embedded narratives, of the framing devices used to connect tales, and of the sources to which the author responds."³³ In the case of these collections of tales about women, themes of exile and vernacular anxiety that are presented in their framing narratives are replicated and amplified in the tales of the abandoned women themselves.

These themes are adapted from themes suggested in the commentaries, hermeneutical guides, and introductory prologues that Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham would have encountered with the *Heroides*. Some scholars in the medieval period were able to read Ovid's *Heroides* as the poet's *remedia* for his earlier amatory works, works that are assumed to have in part led to his exile from Rome by the emperor Augustus. Thus, the *Heroides* were often read in the Middle Ages with Ovid's exile firmly in mind. My three Middle English authors adopt the *intentio* from the medieval prologues of the *Heroides*, which exhibits authorial anxiety about being excluded from the center of culture and literature, in order to dramatize their own perceived marginal positions as English, rather than French or Latin, writers. Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham, in addition to many of their contemporaries, used self-marginalization as a rhetorical strategy, and Ovid's exile became a token for their own use of the periphery and "vulgar" English. After providing evidence for the linguistic and rhetorical marginalization of vernacular English, I will explain how that influenced the three authors' engagement with the *accessūs* to Ovid's *Heroides*. The following chapters will reveal how these prologues' engagements with Ovidian exile and vernacular translation extends into the tales themselves. These collections of women became these poets' closest engagement with vernacular literary

³³ Gerber, *Medieval Ovid: Frame Narrative and Political Allegory*, 4.

theory and contain ripe expressions of emerging attempts to legitimize English as a literary language in the way that Italian and French were.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the marginal, and indeed feminized, status of English as a literary language, within a tense anti-Lollard climate, and highlight how expressions of marginalization from the continent and established/recognized literary circles and traditions motivate the translations of these tales. The second part of this chapter applies these themes of vernacular exile to the prologues of each collection. I address how Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham each construct prologues modeled off Latinate exegetical *accessūs ad auctores* to introduce their tales adapting and translating Ovid's *Heroides*. As the driving force behind the following tales, these prologues present each author's most direct considerations of their tenuous positions as vernacular poets, while at the same time allowing them to participate in accepted Ovidian and rhetorical models of authorship.³⁴

In the Introduction to her *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534*, Kathy Lavezzo reminds us that in the Middle Ages

³⁴ There are two medieval collections within the tradition of collection of women that fall outside of this study yet which serve as useful foils: Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (1374) and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405). The linguistic difference between these two texts and the Middle English ones is a hierarchical one that is reflected in the treatment of the women's stories. Boccaccio writes in Latin, Christine in French, both established literary languages, and neither of them focus as intently on exile and abandonment as do the Middle English collections. The continental collections are largely focused on reinforcing communal standards, providing examples of how virtuous pagan women can be: Boccaccio's collection reinforces Christian morals, and Christine's collection becomes an actual edifice that lauds the social importance of women in classical and medieval culture. Themes of exile are largely removed from their stories: Boccaccio's Medea is an example of the civic dangers of a wandering eye, while Christine's Medea is praised as an herbalist and a steadfast lover. The Middle English tales, on the other hand, are steeped in abandonment and betrayal, in isolation and barrenness. Their speakers are more unsure and anxious, their intentions more difficult to pin down.

England was seen as a remote and otherworldly country in both European literature and cartography. In these maps:

Britain occupies the border of the world, reflecting the ancient perception of the Britons as living, to cite the thirty-fifth ode of Horace, in the ends of the earth or in ultimo orbis. Indeed, due to its location not in the orbis terrarum but in its oceanic border, premodern Britain was perceived from the ancients onward as not simply marginal but also other to the world.³⁵

However, England was not just geographically isolated and marginalized, it was also linguistically an outsider. English was an un-literary language, and necessarily local; those who wrote in it risked essential exile from central, continental literary circles. While Latin was viewed as a stable literary language, supported by countless *auctores* and the cultural prestige of Rome, English was unstable because of its countless dialects and its regular change through common speech, eventually coming to “*stand for fluidity and instability, as against the stability of Latin.*”³⁶ While there were certainly literary and scholarly texts written in English earlier, English had a lower social and literary status than French and Latin, which, even by the late fourteenth century, were still the languages of the courts, universities, and Church.

Part of the discrepancy between the native status of literary English in comparison with other vernaculars like French and Italian was due to a lack of motivation for a full-scale translation of texts into English until the second half of the fourteenth century. Unlike attempts by the rulers of France, like Charles V who “patronized an exceptionally

³⁵ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁶ Wogan-Browne et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 11.

ambitious translation programme,” or by civic authorities in Italy, who provided support for public lectures on poetry, “in fifteenth-century England there was no significant attempt to promote vernacular hermeneutics.”³⁷ England had not had a similar large-scale royal or nationalist motivation to create vernacular texts, rather vernacular texts were encouraged by individual aristocrats such as Sir Thomas Berkeley and his daughter Elizabeth Berkley, who commissioned texts like Trevisa’s English translations of *De proprietatibus rerum*, *De regimine principum*, and Higden’s *Polychronicon*.³⁸ John H. Fisher, explaining the exclusive cultural realms of English and French, states that “records as we have of the libraries of Edward III and Richard II and other books mentioned in wills and inventories before 1400 are exclusively Latin and French.”³⁹ While English was spoken in England, a vast majority of literature and official documents were written in French or Latin; to write in English is to exclude oneself from these circles.

English was also unstandardized; the differing dialects and usages of Middle English did not allow for clarity of understanding between speakers or readers from different English regions. Chaucer addresses this anxiety about misunderstandings at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

And for ther is so gret diversite
In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non myswrite the,
Ne the mys metre for defaute of tonge. (V.1793-96)

³⁷ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 23.

³⁸ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 23.

³⁹ John H. Fisher, “A Language Policy for Lancastrian England,” *PMLA* 107.5 (1992): 1170. This article provides historical attitudes to the vernacular in England around 1400 and the Lancastrian use of Chaucer’s works to solidify an English literary tradition.

Even by the time Caxton was writing, translating, and printing English texts in the middle of the fifteenth century, this was still an anxiety faced by Middle English writers and translators; in his preface to his translation of the *Eneydos* (c. 1490), the epic of Troy's own exile, the ancestor of Britain's founder, Caxton states that "we Englysshemen ben borne under the domynacyon of the mone whiche is never stedfaste but ever waverynge," and like the pleasures and pains of love, "wexynge one season, and waneth and dycreaseth another season."⁴⁰ There is a clear association between the instability of English and the falseness and fickleness of love, and here in these two references, a reference to the fall of Troy and its many wronged lovers. Indeed, Nicholas Watson recognizes this "fluidity and instability" as "a female-gendered symbol," a symbol "of instability: the very quality most antipathetic to Latin notions of *auctoritas*."⁴¹ Thus, the English vernacular was conceptualized by late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century male authors as fickle woman, perhaps best represented by Chaucer's Criseyde's "slyding courage." While this association between the vernacular and the feminine is developed more in Chapter III, I mention it here in order to emphasize that English held a particular social reputation that was neither learned nor stable.

Writers in the later-fourteenth century repeatedly reference this prestige disparity in their prologues to their Middle English texts, especially those translated out of French or Latin. Anxiety about English's outsider status within recognizable literary traditions becomes a controlled rhetorical attitude, and writers more often take an apologetic tone when describing their texts vernacularity.⁴² In fact, writers' "expressions of diffidence or

⁴⁰ N. F. Blake, *Caxton's Own Prose* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), 78.

⁴¹ Wogan-Browne, et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 12.

⁴² Wogan-Browne, et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 8-10.

defensiveness about the lexical and stylistic resources of English became *more* frequent in the later part of the period, at the very time when writing in English became more established.”⁴³ Up until c. 1370, the choice of French over English was a social issue, but more authors began to highlight the stylistic gap between French and English until it became a highly developed literary trope. Translators and writers of Middle English, including Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham, express increasing concern about the language’s dullness and literary marginality and its appropriateness for literary discourse.

Yet the demand for texts translated into English was on the rise, partially from the demands of a growing middle class but also from tensions with France. A rising urban middle class demanded more literature in vernacular English, and the English corpus grew quickly in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Demand grew for both an accessible literary product and a form of linguistic nationalism and indeed, the period between 1380 and 1410 witnessed an noticeable rise in vernacular literary activity in England, “comprising not only Lollard writing but the poetry of Langland, Chaucer, Gower, and the *Gawain* poet; a great deal of other religious prose, much of it written in the first instance for or by women religious; and secular didactic texts like the prose translations of Trevisa, Chaucer’s *Melibee*, alliterative poems.”⁴⁴ However, the output was not remarkable in relation to countries such as France or Italy, where there was aristocratic and civil support for vernacular works and translations, and by the end of the fourteenth century, the Church was actively discouraging vernacular projects in England; failure to abide by restrictions

⁴³ Wogan-Browne, et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 4.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Watson, “The Politics of Middle English Writing,” in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 342.

placed on vernacular translations of scriptural texts could result in arrest, excommunication, or even execution.

The contemporary rise of Lollardy and Wyfliffitism emphasized the need for vernacular access to Scripture, which instigated a strong reaction from the Church and government, who recognized that lay access to the Scripture would result in a decentering of existing hierarchies. The Church's resistance to and anxiety about lay access to a vernacular scripture was heightened by those in power who feared that allowing the lower classes and women to have direct access to the Scriptures would "foster sedition" because it might encourage informed criticism of "existing power structures."⁴⁵ Chaucer and Gower, and especially Bokenham, would have been working and writing at a time when the literary demands of a growing middle class were at odds with the restrictions put in place by church officials and administrators.

Both Watson and Alastair Minnis describe a tense literary climate that intensified near the turn of the century as the Church's concerns with Lollardy increased. It became increasingly dangerous to write and circulate vernacular religious works, and while Chaucer's and Gower's pseudo-religious commentary was veiled behind their use of classical Ovidian sources, Bokenham's *Legend* was more fully and overtly Scriptural, advocated for feminine spiritual authority, and it was composed after more serious statutes about writing in the vernacular had taken effect. There was a real political threat for those who wished to write in English, especially about scriptural topics. John Wycliffe was dismissed from Oxford in 1381, shortly before Chaucer and Gower began work on their collections, and was working on his vernacular translation of the Bible into the 1390s. By

⁴⁵ Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, 209.

1401, Arundel's *De Comburendo haereticis* labeled heresy, in this case translating Scripture, a capital crime and was written specifically to counter the increasingly popular and subversive Lollard influence.⁴⁶ It "sought to suppress any unapproved vernacular activities in preaching and in translation, along with debate on supposedly dangerous subjects in the schools," to the point that "all English writings, no matter how much or how little theology they contained, no matter how defensible their orthodoxy may have been, could therefore fall under suspicion."⁴⁷ Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409 outlines a number of restrictions on religious writing in the vernacular, and Article 7 forbids anyone to create a written English translation of any part of Scripture or to own a copy of such a translation (written after Wycliffe's time) without specific diocesan permission. The *Constitutions* did not just address Lollard texts, but any vernacular texts dealing with theological learning or scriptural quotation. Alastair Minnis refers to a late fourteenth-, early fifteenth-century "climate of fear" in which "church and state co-operated in the suppression of many manifestations of vernacular scholarship."⁴⁸ Thus, by the end of the fourteenth century there was a tense climate in which all texts produced and circulated in the vernacular might be viewed as potentially radical. I highlight these tensions in order to underscore not just the contemporary reputation of English as a literary language, but also the competing anxieties faced by writers composing works containing theological references.

Anti-Wycliffites held that the interpretive work of translation resulted often in unfaithful translations, recognizing that it is impossible to produce an accurate translation

⁴⁶ Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822-64.

⁴⁷ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 25, 26.

⁴⁸ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 32, 34, 29.

that does not betray the original sense. This was especially a danger for scriptural texts, in which an unfaithful translation and lack of clerical intervention could result in heresy. This danger is intensified by the ineptness of English: “Error is seen as an inevitable result of translation into a barbarous tongue like English, with its small vocabulary, its lexicographical oddities, tendency toward monosyllable, and lack of inflection, which make it grammatically and rhetorically inadequate as a vehicle for truth.”⁴⁹ While other Latinate romance languages could take pride in their proximity to Latin, English’s non-romantic vernacular was viewed as subordinate. By the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, English readers were demanding more English literature, while at the same time those in power based in Latin traditions strove to emphasize the inadequacy of English as a language that can convey deep spiritual truths. To propose to do so, to appropriately convey Scripture through English, would be to willingly lead the reader astray and to betray the original meaning of the passage. It is amid this climate of suspicion that Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham highlight the vernacular nature of their projects. Far more than their other texts, the authors make explicit their intent to translate this material into Middle English for the good of everyone. I do not intend to assign Lollard sympathies to these authors, but to describe the contemporary tensions regarding the status of English.

Middle English writers felt a particular affinity for the picture of the poet in exile, and the theme of exile features prominently in both early and later Middle English texts. Corinne Saunders’s “Love and Loyalty in Middle English Romance” highlights the prominence of exile in Middle English courtly romances. From *King Horn* to *Sir Degaree*,

⁴⁹ Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England,” 842.

“love is set within the familiar context of exile and return, and in each the theme of love contributes to an important dynastic motif.”⁵⁰ Noble, errant exiles would eventually gain admittance back into their communities after performing appropriate forms of love and loyalty. The Christian undertones in a story of exile and return, of redemption and forgiveness, are obvious, but the theme of exile likewise stemmed from England’s physical remoteness from the cultural and religious centers of Jerusalem or Rome.

As I discussed in the Introduction, the *Heroides* was popular in the Middle Ages, and not just for its handling of diverse mythic stories; exile was a recognizably central and familiar theme in much of the philosophical literature circulating in the Middle Ages. Jerome and Abelard highlight their roles as outcasts in their own epistles to women, and Boethius opens his *De consolazione philosophiae* lamenting his exile and imprisonment to Lady Philosophy, who reminds him that many of her disciples have been likewise mistreated, citing “the poisoning of Socrates, the torments of Zeno, . . . Canius, Seneca, and Soranus” (I.3 7-8). The figure of the exile was also particularly strong in scriptural traditions: Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise and the fall of language, the scattering of people at the Tower of Babel and linguistic confusion, and those who wandered the desert with Moses, translating the gold out of Egypt. Not only are these figures useful for the Christian ethos of the exile, redemption, and return to God, but they also revolve around themes of communal language and metaphors of translation.⁵¹ Classical tales of

⁵⁰ Corinne Saunders, “Love and Loyalty in Middle English Romance,” in *Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Cooney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 48.

⁵¹ Indeed, many held that in the eventual kingdom of Heaven, all language discrepancies will be erased: “For Paracelsus, writing in the 1530’s, there is little doubt that the Divine providence shall one day restore the unity of human tongues,” from George Steiner, “After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation,” 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 64.

exile likewise found an eager audience; Virgil's famed exile Aeneas remained popular throughout the Middle Ages, and each medieval nation's claim of descent from Aeneas and Troy allowed them to insert themselves into Classical historical mythos.

In the Middle Ages, Ovid was widely recognized as *praeceptor amoris*, the teacher of love, a name he gives himself in the *Amores* (1. 17). He was held to the highest standards of scholarly and literary authority, and was by far the authority on love. But we know, and his medieval readers knew, that his literary career was interrupted by his seemingly sudden exile to the remote province of Tomis on the Black Sea around 8 AD. Ovid claims, and it is generally accepted, that his ruin was the result of "two offences, a poem and a mistake" ["Perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error, alterius facti culpa silenda mihi" (*Tristia* II. 207-8)]. While the mistake mentioned here remains unconfirmed, the *carmen* seems to refer to his *Ars amatoria*, which instructed men and women on how to find and keep lovers and which was believed to persuade Roman matrons to have affairs, a direct threat to an Augustan regime that had outlawed adultery in 18 BC.⁵² He was read by school children and grammarians, translated by vernacular writers all over Europe, and yet, as Jeremy Dimmick deftly states, "he is never fully restored from his Augustan exile, and remains an archpriest of transgression, whether sexual, political or theological."⁵³

⁵² Moral legislation enacted in 18 BC made adultery a public and private crime in an effort to promote monogamy and raise the birthrate. For more about the relationship between Ovid and Augustus, see P. J. Davis, *Ovid and Augustus: A Political Reading of Ovid's Erotic Poems* (London: Duckworth, 2006).

⁵³ Jeremy Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages: Authority and Poetry" in *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 264.

The tone of his poetry changed in his poems of exile, his *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, which present a more somber and serious poet reflecting on his youthful folly and anxious to return home. Medieval readers and scholars thus recognized two poetic personas that defined Ovid, the Poet of Love and the Poet of Exile, and they saw these personas as causally linked. Janet Levarie Smarr identifies these two contrasting yet complimentary roles assigned to Ovid in the Middle Ages: “one is the poet as *praeceptor amoris*—though the love is of two different kinds—and one is the poet in exile, struggling to redeem himself.”⁵⁴ Peter Knox places the *Heroides* with Ovid’s early works,⁵⁵ an assertion which goes generally unchallenged due to the fact that Ovid mentions composing the *Heroides* in his *Amores* 2:

quod licet, aut artes teneri profiteamur Amoris
 (ei mihi, praeceptis urgeor ipse meis!)
 aut quod Penelopes verbis reddatur Ulixi,
 scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relictas, tuas,
 quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iason
 Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,
 quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem
 dicat et Aoniae Lesbias amata lyrae. (ll. 19–26)

[What I may, I do. I either profess the art of tender love—ah me, I am
 caught in the snares of my own teaching!—or I write the words Penelope

⁵⁴ Janet Levarie Smarr, “Poets of Love and Exile,” in *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*, ed. Madison U. Sowell (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 140.

⁵⁵ Peter E. Knox, *Ovid: Heroides. Select Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3, 6.

sends her Ulysses, and thy tearful plaint, abandoned Phyllis; what Paris and Marcareus are to read, and what ungrateful Jason, and Hippolytus, and Hippolytus' sire; and what pitiable Dido, with drawn blade in her hand, indicts, and the Lesbian, loved of the Aonian lyre.]

However, the actual date of composition and the letters' authenticity are outside the concern of this study. I am more interested in how readers in the Middle Ages interpreted and discussed Ovid's *Heroides* and its relationship to Ovid's life and his other works. I am interested here in one particular hermeneutic tradition that held that these letters were believed to have been written after his exile and in direct response to it.

In medieval commentaries and moralizations attached to Ovid's works, the *Heroides* often functioned as a bibliographic crux between these two poetical roles, the poet of love and the poet of exile. His heroines, abandoned, exiled, and calling out in vain to their beloved, helped medieval readers imagine Ovid reflecting on his amorous poetry, while he also seemed to be looking forward to his wiser and more mature poetry of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's *Heroides* in particular thus became a good lens through which English translators explored their linguistic and poetic exile. Scholars earlier in the Middle Ages had already positioned these letters from abandoned women as expressions of Ovid's dissatisfaction with his exile, and many *accessūs* in the Middle Ages asserted that in fact he wrote these tales in an effort to be allowed back to Rome, associating the letters more with his poetry of exile, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Ovid's *Heroides*, with its elegiac epistles from betrayed and abandoned women, was recognized by many medieval scholars as a *remedia* for his previous scandalous amatory works (which were accused themselves of leading their readers astray), especially the *Ars amatoria*, and was often

figured as an attempt to return to the good graces of Augustus and to be allowed to return from his exile in remote Tomis. Translated from familiar Greek sources, Ovid's women could be seen to mimic the desolation and desire that Ovid himself felt as he found himself exiled from court and society and his books banned from libraries. In a similar manner, Chaucer's, Gower's, and Bokenham's prologues direct our attention to how the following women's stories of exile and abandonment reflect their own precarious situations.⁵⁶

It is important to recognize that the women of the *Heroides* are not simply sad that their lovers have left them; the major tragedy of their stories is that many of them have sacrificed their patriotic and/or familial relationships in order to aid their lover. The women risk, and eventually lose, their social stability and familial relationships. Ariadne describes her reactions to waking to realize Theseus had left her abandoned on a deserted island after she enabled him to escape her father's labyrinth and kill her brother the Minotaur:

Quid faciam? quo sola ferar? vacat insula cultu.

non hominum video, non ego facta boum.

omne latus terrae cingit mare; navita nusquam,

nulla per ambiguas puppis itura vias.

finge dari comitesque mihi ventosque ratemque—

quid sequar? accessus terra paterna negat.

ut rate felici pacata per aequora labar,

temperet ut ventos Aeolus—exul ero! (ll. 59-66)

[What am I to do? Whither shall I take myself? —I am alone, and the isle

untilled. Of human traces I see none; of cattle, none. On every side the land

⁵⁶ The topic of the abandoned woman's voice and its use by these poets is the subject of Chapter III.

*is girt by the sea; nowhere a sailor, no craft to make its way over the
dubious paths. And suppose I did find those to go with me, and winds, and
ship—yet where am I to go? My father's realm forbids be to approach.
Grant I do glide with fortunate keel over peaceful seas, that Aeolus tempers
the winds—I still shall be an exile!]*

Canace writes to her brother and lover Macareus after their incestuous relationship has been discovered by their father: “proditus est genitor, regnum patriamque reliqui; / munus, in exilio quod licet esse, tuli!” [*I betrayed my sire, I left my throne and my native soil; the reward I get is leave to live in exile!*] (ll. 109-10). In most cases, love for the hero encourages these women to betray their families and open their nations to outside threats: Hypermnestra refuses her father's orders to kill her cousin/husband; Medea helps Jason steal her father's Golden Fleece and kills her brother as she escapes with him; Dido upsets neighboring rulers whose advances were rebuffed in favor of Aeneas. These tales, which are as much about exile as *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* but which contain more historical myth, allowed medieval commentators to begin to mythologize Ovid's own authorial exile. It is in the prologues of these Middle English collections of stories adapted from the *Heroides* that the drama of Ovid's exile is played out by Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham, revealing their reasons for composing and compiling the tales. The exegetical rhetoric of these prologues signals the vernacular author's intent to participate in authoritative, Latin modes of literature.⁵⁷ Here they directly adapt the moralizing strategies of some of the *accessūs*,

⁵⁷ In the Middle Ages, classical texts were often introduced or surrounded by commentary that guided interpretation of that text. These introductions, called *accessūs*, functioned to direct the student to the important points of a text and often discussed biographical or historical context, identify formal literary features, or explain how and why it was written. In other words, they helped guide the reader's interpretation of the text. Like the *accessūs*,

written and circulating in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, found attached to the *Heroides*. Unlike other *auctores* studied alongside Ovid, such as Virgil and Donatus, no contemporary or late-antique commentaries of Ovid's texts were available to scholars in the Middle Ages to aid their hermeneutical approaches to Ovid's texts. Commentators thus used Ovid's other works to help reconstruct biographies and literary intents for the *accessūs*, and they focused largely on this reputation as both poet of love and poet of exile. Ovid's self-representation as a poet of exile for the *Heroides* became, in the commentaries, just as important as, if not more than, his personae of the *praeceptor amoris*.

The *accessūs* to the *Heroides* went to great lengths to establish Ovid's concern with presenting a collection of women who could be seen as exempla to Roman matrons, and they were moralized as examples of either legitimate or illicit love in contrast to his *Ars amatoria*.⁵⁸ This exemplary purpose is retained in the Middle English versions, as well as

the prologues to these collections introduce the texts and comment on how the stories should be interpreted and shape their reception. Vernacular prologues often attempted to appropriate literary authority by closely imitating available prologues to classical or scholarly texts. For more see Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, which looks at the ways authorship was constructed in the scholastically-influenced prologues to academic commentaries, and which argues that vernacular writers consciously adapted the types and structures of available academic prologues (x).

⁵⁸ *Accessus* I proposes that "The intention of this work is to castigate men and women who are held fast in the grip of foolish and unlawful love." A second *accessus* states that "The ultimate end (*finalis causa*) of the work is this, that, having seen the advantage (*utilitas*) gained from lawful love, and the misfortunes which arise from foolish and unlawful love, we may shun both of these and may adhere to chaste love" (II). The third *accessus* gives a number of similar intentions for the work, including "to commend chaste loves," "to attack unchaste love," and to compliment his manuals on the art of love where "he does not explain how someone might be courted by letter" (III). While Penelope, whose letter comes first in the collection, serves to encourage women to guard their chastity and is commended for serving and protecting legitimate love, other characters (in fact most of the other women in the letters) are blamed for their *stultus*, *incestus*, or *furiosus* love. See R. B. C. Huygens, *Accessus ad auctores, Benard d'Utrecht, Conrad d'Hirsau "Dialogus super Auctores"* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 30-32, and Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto*,

in the continental *De mulieribus claris* by Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan's *Le Cité des Dames*. Importantly, this contrast developed into further commentary traditions that moralized the *Heroides* within Ovid's own literary biography. If the teaching of illicit love and the encouragement of adultery in the *Ars amatoria* and *Amores* were the causes of his exile, then his *Heroides* could be interpreted as his *remedia* for these texts and their impact. Thus, Ovid's *Heroides*, his letters written by women who have been mistreated or abandoned yet who remain faithful to their love, served as a *remedia* for his depictions of fickle and unfaithful love. Medieval commentators took the opportunity to speculate that Ovid's *Heroides* in turn provided examples of how wives and lovers should and should not act, emphasizing the importance of chastity, loyalty, and constancy, all in an effort to return to Augustus's good favor and be allowed to return to Rome. In *accessus* III, one of the handful of intentions given for Ovid's *Heroides* states that

Ipse accusatis fuit apud Cesarem, quia scriptis suis romanas matronas
illicitos amores docuisset; unde librum scripti eis, istum exemplum
propones, ut sciat amando quas debeant imitari, quas non.⁵⁹

[(Ovid) was accused before Caesar, because his writings taught Roman
matrons illicit loves; therefore he wrote this book for them, that by setting
forth this example, they might know which they should imitate in loving and
which not.]

and *Epistulae Heroidum* (Munich: Arceo-Gesellschaft, 1986), 141-204, 229-302. Translations come from Minnis and A. B. Scotts's *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism: c. 1100-1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 20-24. See also Stephen M. Wheeler (ed.), *Accessus ad Auctores: Medieval Introductions to the Authors (Codex latinus monacensis 19475)* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015).

⁵⁹ Huygens, *Accessus ad auctores*, 32.

Ghisalberti's "Medieval Biographies of Ovid" also provides an example of a fifteenth-century *accessus* to the *Heroides* claiming that Ovid wrote it in hopes of being allowed to return to Rome from the emperor.⁶⁰

We do not know what Ovidian sources Chaucer or Gower, or even Bokenham, would have had access to, but based on the examples of *accessūs* we do have for the *Heroides*, I believe that they would have been aware of traditions positing the *Heroides* as a *remedia* for Ovid's amatory works. While Chaucer's and Gower's use of the *Heroides* is more overt, Bokenham's association with these texts may seem less clear; however, these chapters will explain how Bokenham's collection engages deeply with Chaucer's and Gower's and, thus, with Ovid's. Bokenham disposes with the amatory pagan overlay, and instead focuses on his linguistic and literary "exile." These poets present frame narratives in which they found themselves confronted by a figure of authority who threatens them with exile, which directly prompts the composition of the following tales and dictates their interpretive structures. Just as the academic *accessūs* created for Ovid's texts attempted to signal the interpretive mode to be undertaken when reading the *Heroides*, these prologues introduce the contexts in which the works were undertaken and help guide the reader's understanding of the following tales.

The following analysis of these prologues and frame narratives is crucial to the understanding of both the authors' engagement with and exercise of the vernacular. Each presents the author's narrator-persona in tenuous positions with literary authorities who have the power to banish them from their service, and each must create the following tales in order remedy that relationship. The result of these prologues is a revelation of the

⁶⁰ Fausto Ghisalberti, "Medieval Biographies of Ovid," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946): 10-59, 44.

hermeneutic guides that will shape the ways in which the authors translate and adapt Ovid's individual tales. The prologues attached to these three collections are each scholarly and rigorous, adapting the structure and contents of scholastic and Aristotelian prologues. I will look at each prologue individually and assess how each presents the author specifically as a translator of exemplary tales into English.

Chaucer began his *Legend of Good Women* around 1386, after he had completed his *Troilus and Criseyde* and before he started major work on his *Canterbury Tales*, marking it as a crucial turning point in his literary career. The *Prologue*⁶¹ to the *Legend* was at once highly conscious of Chaucer's literary past and anticipatory of his future works. It was in the form of a dream vision, like his earlier *Book of the Duchess*, *House of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowles*; it presented itself as a translation project, following his translations Boethius's *De consolacione philosophiae*, parts of the *Roman de la Rose*, and Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*; and yet it was a compilation of popular stories like his later *Canterbury Tales*. The work is a collection of nine tales or "legends" of women abandoned by their lovers, and it is here that Chaucer practices his most overt borrowing of Ovidian source material and tropes of authority. Chaucer calls attention to his engagement with the *Heroides* as source text, citing Ovid's letters in his legends for Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, and Ariadne. A number of tales are pulled from and draw heavily from the *Heroides*, with six tales coming directly from the *Heroides* and three others from the *Metamorphoses*.⁶²

⁶¹ The *Prologue* for the *Legend of Good Women* exists in two versions, called "F" and "G" by scholars. It has been widely accepted that the F prologue precedes the G prologue, and that the revisions found in G reflect a new audience. This project does not prize one or the other, but instead recognizes both as valuable reflections on the project of translation.

⁶² Including Alceste, but not including Medea, who appears in both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*.

In the prologue, Chaucer's narrator describes his use of old, authoritative books and his absolute devotion to the daisy. He falls asleep and finds himself within a dream-garden, where he meets the God of Love and his consort Alceste, an ideal "good wife" from Greek myth featured in the *Metamorphoses*, who is also a personification of the narrator's daisy. The God of Love chastises Chaucer for his previous writings, which he claims drives lovers away from his service, and he threatens to exclude Chaucer from his court because of this betrayal. Alceste suggests he do penance by writing the following tales of women true in love, the God of Love agrees, and Chaucer sets about writing the legends. Chaucer's tense encounter with the God of Love, his effectual exiling from the god's court, and his instructions to write about these abandoned women are all reminiscent of the literary biographies attached to Ovid's *Heroides*.

The connections between Chaucer's Prologue and Ovid's literary biography have not gone wholly unnoticed. Discussing Chaucer's appropriation of Ovidian authority, both Michael Calabrese and Rita Copeland have noted the structural similarities between Chaucer's *Prologue* and the commentary surrounding the *Heroides*. While Michael Calabrese's *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* does not deal with the *Legend* as much as with Chaucer's later works, he suggests that medieval literary biographies of Ovid's works may have influenced Chaucer's framing of the *Legend* as penance for his literary sins against the God of Love.⁶³ Rita Copeland likewise identifies Ovid's *Heroides* as a major influence on the collection as well as the *Prologue*, asserting that "Chaucer's *Prologue* presents an

⁶³ Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*, 17-18.

intentio auctoris that is virtually identical in theme with the *intentio* of the *Heroides* prologue, differing from it only in circumstantial details.”⁶⁴

I want to further examine this connection to consider why Chaucer chose to adapt the *Heroides* for this important vernacular project, and why Gower and Bokenham followed suit. The *Prologue* emphasizes a connection between the political realm and the project of vernacular translation, and explores the role and responsibility of a translator. Chaucer emphasizes beyond a doubt that this is an English poem for an English audience. The G Prologue explicitly provides an *intentio* focused on creating a book specifically for English readers:

myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,
The naked text in English to declare
Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
As autours seyn (G ll. 85-88)

Sheila Delany has associated this phrase, “the naked text,” present only in the G prologue, specifically with Wycliffite project of translating the Bible in English.⁶⁵ And for a while now scholars have entertained the idea that the God of Love and Alceste are presented as stand-ins, or at the least, echoes, of King Richard II and his Queen Anne.⁶⁶ This

⁶⁴ She here argues that Chaucer’s *Legend*, along with Gower’s *Confessio amantis*, appropriate academic hermeneutic traditions in order to assert the priority of vernacular translation as a medium for rhetorical exegesis. As “secondary translations,” the two texts “redefine the terms of vernacular translation itself: they use the techniques of exegetical translation to produce, not a supplement to the original, but a vernacular substitute for the original...They appropriate the discourse of academic exegesis and apply it to their own texts, so that their translations advance their own claims to *auctoritas*.” Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 179-88.

⁶⁵ Delany, *The Naked Text*, 41, 115-52.

⁶⁶ Paul Strohm argues convincingly for a clear association between Alceste and Queen Anne, without a necessary one-to-one symbolism between the two in *Hochon’s Arrow*:

connection, during what David Wallace has termed “the apogee both of Chaucer’s involvement in public affairs and his career as a ‘poet of the court,’”⁶⁷ in a text that Copeland says “represents Chaucer’s most sustained examination of vernacular authorship,”⁶⁸ points towards Chaucer’s awareness that his roles as courtier and as literary translator could be difficult to disentangle at times.

Thus, Chaucer situates his *Legend* within his own poetic biography, citing his own courtly position as well as his anxieties about writing in the vernacular, anxieties that arose from the vernacular’s instability as an elite literary vehicle and its marginalization in court. At the same time, Chaucer seems to be pointing towards the anxieties facing vernacular writers due to the argument that Wycliffite translations of the Bible lead readers astray because of a lack of hermeneutical supervision. The prologue is almost completely about the narrator’s anxiety about translating texts into English. The *Legend* is a dream vision like his earlier *House of Fame*, *Book of the Duchess*, and *Parliament of Fowls*, and also like them, it deals closely with themes of literary authority. Before he enters the dream vision proper, Chaucer describes his love for “olde appreved stories” (F l. 21) and emphasizes their importance to contemporary readers. However, because many contemporary readers in England could not read the Latin, or even French and Italian, “olde” stories, it was necessary for someone to translate them into English.

The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 95-119. David Wallace explains Chaucer’s precarious courtly position, and his resulting care in choice of rhetorical approach, in *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associated Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 349-78.

⁶⁷ Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 349.

⁶⁸ Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 186.

But Chaucer's approach to an English poetics is revealed as he eventually rejects the authority of these "olde apprevd stories," and turns instead to express his stronger love for the true object of his desire: the daisy. The daisy was a popular poetic subject in French *marguerite* poetry, *marguerite* being the French word for "daisy" as well as the word "pearl." However, the *marguerite* trope is Anglicized when Chaucer refers to "thise floures white and rede" (F l. 42, G l. 42) as "daysyes," the word for the flower "in our town" (F l. 43, G l. 43). He emphasizes the English etymology of the word, yet, as he begins to explain his devotion to the daisy and before the dream vision has even begun, the narrator laments that he does not have the proper English vocabulary and poetics to adequately praise her: "Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose, / Suffisant this flour to preyse aryght!" (ll. 66-67). He calls for aid from those who have written poetry before him, from whose poetry he himself has reaped his own poetry:

But helpeth, ye that han konnyng and myght,
Ye lovers that kan make of sentement;
In this cas oghte ye be diligent
To forthren me somewhat in my labour,
Whethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour.
For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn
Of makyng ropen, and lad away the corn,
And I come after, glenyng here and there,
And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere
Of any goodly word that ye han left. (ll. 68-77)

He goes on to explain that he has always relied on the help of these poets, translating their works into English in the service of Love:

And thogh it happen me rehercen eft
That ye han in your fresshe songes sayd,
Forbereth me, and beth nat evele apayd,
Syn that ye see I do yt in the honour
Of love, and eke in service of the flour
Whom that I serve as I have wit or myght. (F ll. 66-83)

Chaucer here describes how, because there is no proper English model for him to follow, he must turn to French sources (whom he begs not to think less of him). And he does, borrowing from the familiar *marguerite* poems by his French counterparts Froissart, Machaut, and Deschamps. His metaphor of gleaned the leftovers of what other poets have left behind indicates Chaucer has often translated love poetry from other languages into English,⁶⁹ and his use of “rehercen,” from the Anglo-Norman *reherser* which means to repeat word-for-word, often as a pledge, indicates that this was done at word-for-word rather than sense-for-sense. And in fact, what follows in the F prologue is a close rendering of lines from popular *margarite* poetry, what we would consider “translation” today. In this way, he builds up a vocabulary and tradition for discussing the daisy in English, using French constructions and vocabulary as a model. The astute scholar-translator would be on their guard at this point in the prologue: countless rhetoricians and scholars had long emphasized the preference for translating by sense rather than by word, such as Augustine, Jerome, and Horace. And that was in particular a worry when it came to English

⁶⁹ I discuss this metaphor in more detail in Chapter IV.

translations of Scripture: English had neither the skill nor the proper vocabulary to support the ideas, and even when found, the sense of Scripture was bound up in allegory and meaning that would be lost in translating word-for-word, possibly leading readers into heresy.

Chaucer next describes how, in May, he lays down in a bed of flowers and falls asleep and enters the dream vision, where he finds himself within a topical spring meadow. Within this meadow, he realizes that he sees the God of Love and his consort, yet unidentified, approach. Rather than an elaborate and more familiar description of the May flowers and surrounding fauna, Chaucer describes the attire of both this woman and the God of Love, themselves decked out like a lush garden. Their appearance and their attendant ladies are reminiscent of the *Roman de la Rose* and other French poetry as Chaucer continues to adapt his continental sources. Chaucer identifies and attempts to approach the daisy, here personified by Alceste. He is, however, accosted immediately by an intimidating and unsympathetic God of Love:

What dostow her

So nygh myn ounne floure, so boldely?

Yt were better worthy, trewely,

A worm to neghen her my flour than thow. (F ll. 315-18, G ll. 241-44)

The God of Love orders Chaucer to get away from her, claiming that Chaucer has no place in his entourage. When Chaucer questions why Cupid has insulted him, he replies that Chaucer “werreyest” against the God of Love and his “folk,”

And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,

And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,

And lettest folk from hire devocioun
To serve me, and holdest it folye
To serve Love. (F ll. 322-27, G ll. 248-53)

He says that Chaucer's poetry has caused Cupid's long-time servants to default on their duties because Chaucer has written of false women. He tells Chaucer that

Thou maist yt nat denye,
For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
That is an heresy ayeins my lawe,
And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
And of Creseyde thou hast seyde as the lyst,
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.

(F ll. 327-34; revised in G ll. 253-7, ll. 264-7)

The G prologue expands on this, claiming that the *Roman de la Rose* convinces readers that loving is for fools, perhaps referencing Reason's pontificating on the folly of serving love in Jean de Meun's portion (ll. 4629-5200) in addition to the character's railings against women's faithlessness. Both texts mentioned here by the god are decidedly Ovidian in nature, Jean de Meun is heavily indebted to Ovid's *Ars amatoria*. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, translated and adapted into English from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, which can be read as Chaucer's own attempt at an art of love, Pandarus, figures as Troilus's own

teacher of love, manipulating him and Criseyde according to the teachings of the *Ars amatoria* rather than the moralized *Heroides*.⁷⁰

By the time Chaucer was writing, use of Ovidian amatory rhetoric did traditionally run the risk of attracting the God of Love's ire, just as writing in the vernacular at the time invited possible unwanted attention from Church and state authorities. Chaucer's God of Love's distaste for Ovidian love had precedent in other vernacular texts because Ovid's works, especially the *Ars amatoria*, promoted deceit in love and painted women in an unflattering light. For example, Marie de France's *Guigemar* features a mural of Venus painted on a confined young wife's wall:

her nature and her traits were illustrated,
whereby men might learn how to behave in love,
and to serve love loyally.
Ovid's book, the one in which he instructs
lovers how to control their love,
was being thrown by Venus into a fire,
and she was excommunicating all those
who ever perused this book
or followed its teachings. (ll. 234-44)⁷¹

Venus, who values loyalty in love, censors Ovid's illicit book and excommunicates all those who follow his teachings as traitors. Chaucer's God of Love likewise has found Chaucer's texts based on this form of Ovidian erotics offensive and traitorous, effectively

⁷⁰ Allen, *The Art of Love*.

⁷¹ Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, trans., "Guigemar," in *The Lais of Marie de France* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008).

discouraging men from participating in Love's services. Christine de Pizan also calls both Ovid and Jean de Meun to task for both their unflattering depictions of women and their encouragement to deceive and slander women, a complaint she addresses to French literary circles in the *Querelle de Rose*, or *Querelles des Femmes*, and to the God of Love in her *Epistre au dieu d'Amours*. In the *Epistre au dieu d'Amours*, the men who are betrayers of women are also exiled from Love's court. Additionally, Christine, in her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, shows God himself rejecting Ovidian love through his mouthpiece, Lady Reason, who claims that his disdain for women was due to his being castrated for his promiscuous lifestyle. Chaucer's God of Love follows this pattern, and Chaucer is close to himself being excommunicated from Love's court.

In the G prologue, Chaucer expands the God of Love's complaint against the poet's choice to translate *Troilus and Criseyde*, questioning

Why noldest thou as well [han] seyde goodnesse

Of wemen, as thou hast seyde wikednesse?

Was there no good matere in thy minde,

Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thou nat fynde

Som story of wemen that were good and trewe? (G ll. 268-72)

Cupid provides a long list of Latin authors Chaucer *could* have translated that present "clene maydenes," "trewe wyves," and "stedefaste widewes" (G ll. 282-83). Among these are Ovid's *Heroides*, Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, and works by "Valerye, Titus, or Claudyan," all who write of women who would rather die than betray their lovers. The God of Love here emphasizes that Chaucer's "reherced" translations of vernacular sources, his *Troilus and Criseyde* and his *Romance of the Rose*, lead readers astray; they are in

effect translations of translations, since *Roman de la Rose* was recognized as a “translation” of Ovid’s amatory works and Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* was recognized as a reworking of Dares’s and Dictys’s accounts of the fall of Troy. And because Chaucer’s translations lack “glose,” according to the God of Love, his readers are left without a hermeneutical guide to help them understand his text, *especially* since he implies that he has been translating word-for-word rather than sense-for-sense, just as lay readers of English translations of Scripture were likely to interpret incorrectly without proper Church intervention. Chaucer’s choice of sources has instead led to his possible expulsion from the court of the God of Love, who, as a literary authority mirroring the power of Augustus to ban Ovid’s works, threatens Chaucer’s literary heritage and inclusion within poetic tradition.

It is Alceste who steps in to rescue Chaucer from possible expulsion from Love’s court and service. She intercedes for the poet with a number of possible excuses, all typical apologies for translators and compilers: someone may have lied about him (F ll. 350-61, G ll. 326-39), he probably did not even know what he was writing (F ll. 362-65, G ll. 340-45), or he might have been forced to translate these texts (F ll. 67-73, G ll. 46-53). She goes on to mention other books Chaucer wrote that indeed have “served yow [Cupid] of his kunnyng, / And furthred wel youre law in his makyng” (F ll. 412-13, G ll. 398-99):

And, for to speke of hother holynesse,
He hath in prose translated Boece,
And maad the lyf also of Seynt Cecile.
He made also, goon ys a gret while,
Origenes upon the Maudeleyne. (F ll. 417-28)

She insists that the God of Love give Chaucer a fair consideration, that the poet ought not to suffer too much; she at once forgives the result of his duty as a simple translator while also insisting that those poems that he “made,” i.e. those which he had some creative compositional involvement, actually helped bring people to Cupid’s service or else were respectable holy texts. She claims that all these texts have made “lewed folk delyte / To serve yow, in preysinge of your name” (F 415-16, G 403-4). Alceste highlights those texts of Chaucer’s that have Latin sources. While some of these texts mentioned by Alceste seem more “original” to Chaucer than the others, like the *Book of the Duchess* or *Parliament of Fowls*, a majority of them show Chaucer translating and borrowing passages from Latin texts into the vernacular. And the two texts that Cupid took issue with, Chaucer’s *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, both translated from non-Latin sources: French and Italian, respectively. Whatever the effects of the *Roman* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer has done much to translate texts for English readers, the “lewed” or non-Latinate public. Thus, it becomes a difference of interpretation: Cupid believes that Chaucer’s works are slanderous and heretical, while Alceste claims they are holy and have actually furthered Love’s interests.

But her disagreement with the God of Love’s criticism of Chaucer as translator reveals that Chaucer’s texts have left enough room open for very differing interpretations. We are again reminded of the God of Love’s criticism that Chaucer wrote “withouten neede of glose”; without a strict hermeneutic structure, differing interpretations can arise. The same body of work can be seen to both praise the God of Love and to lead his followers astray, just as anti-Wycliffites claim that lay readers could be led astray by ambiguous translations of Scripture. Chaucer, who has already told us that he translates

word-for-word rather than sense-for-sense, has led Love's servants into heresy through his imitations of Ovid as Love Poet.

Thus, like Ovid, who was also accused of encouraging ideas of disloyalty and suspicion of women, Chaucer faces the threat of literary exile. Rather than submitting to whatever form of excommunication or exile the God of Love has in mind, Alceste suggests that Chaucer perform penance for his misdeeds against love. If it is traitorous to speak of unfaithful women, then the remedy is to present stories of women faithful and constant in love. She proposes to Chaucer that

Thow shalt, while that thou lyvest, yer by yere
The moste partye of thy tyme spende
In makyng of a glorious legende
Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,
That weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves. (F ll. 481-85, G ll. 471-75)

Cupid accepts Alceste's proposition that Chaucer be allowed to do penance for his transgression, and he is charged with writing the following tales, which are largely adaptations of Ovid's *Heroides*. He tells Chaucer

I wot well that thou maist nat al yt ryme
That swiche lovers diden in hire tyme;
It were to long to reden and to here.
Suffiseth me thou make in this manere:
That thou reherce of al hir lyf the grete,
After thise old auctours lysten for to trete,
For whoso shal so many a storye telle,

Sey shortly, or he shal to long dwelle. (F ll. 570-77)

The God of Love requests a few things: that Chaucer begin with Cleopatra, that he tell stories of women who suffer for love, that he retell the stories given by old authorities, that he focus only on the essential parts (“the grete”) of the story, and that he remain brief in these retellings. He uses the word Chaucer had used earlier in the prologue to describe his writing and translating style: “reherce.” This again implies a word-for-word translation; however, it does not seem to be the problem here because it is expected that Chaucer will be using authoritative sources and he will be adhering to a very strict hermeneutical structure: the saint’s life. As we will see in the following chapters, Chaucer’s choice of the saint’s life genre, along with (or perhaps in response to) the God of Love’s hermeneutical requirements, impact how Chaucer manipulates the stories he translates.

It is clear that Gower’s framing mechanism for his *Confessio amantis* (c. 1386-90) is participating in the same conversation about literary inclusion as Chaucer and Ovid. While the text is Gower’s first large English work, it is bilingual and is contained in many ways by different forms of Latin commentary that aid in interpretation of the English text. Like Chaucer, Gower’s frame figures a narrator poet accused of betraying the God of Love and at risk of exile from Love’s court. In this prefatory dream vision, Gower, slipping into the narratorial role of “Amans,” encounters a less-than-hospitable God of Love and his consort Venus. His stressful encounters with these gods centers on Gower’s assertion that he has done due service to Love and will die without collecting his reward, and his service and loyalty are called into question; as in Chaucer’s *Prologue*, the following tales are recorded in an effort to prove the lover worthy. Again, I argue that Gower is dramatizing

his anxiety (however much it is a feigned literary trope) about his move to write in the vernacular in this his first long text in English.

The collection contains over one hundred classical Ovidian stories of Love prompted by his narrator Amans's encounter with the Gods of Love. His first long-form text in English (his earlier *Mirour de l'omme* was in French and his *Vox Clamantis* was in Latin), the *Confessio* borrows a vast majority of its material from Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*. The text's association with the latter and with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* has been explored in detail by scholars because of the mutual source material for their stories. However, the themes shared with the *Legend of Good Women*, and thus with the *Heroides*, reveal Gower's overt positioning of himself as a vernacular poet.

There are two "prologues" for the *Confessio amantis*: one extrinsic *Prologue* that lays out Gower's poetic and moral *intentio*, and an intrinsic prologue that serves as the framing narrative for the tales at the beginning of Book I and the end of Book VIII. The intrinsic prologue is most central to this chapter; however, the extrinsic prologue should not be sidestepped, for it is at the beginning of this prologue, in six lines of Latin, that Gower expounds on his intent to write in English. In the Latin lines that open the poem, Gower states that he sings through "Torpor, ebes sensus, scola parua labor minimusque" [*Lethargy, dull perception, little schooling, and least labor*], employing a widely-used humility trope used by English writers (l. 1). He intends to sing in "Engisti lingua," Hengist's tongue, English, "canit Insula Bruti," sung by the island of Brutus, England (l. 4). In the English verses that follow, he states that "for that fewe men endite / In oure Englissh, I thenke make / A bok for Engelondes sake" (ll. 22-24). Throughout the text he

excuses his ineloquent speech, in line with contemporary English humility topos, and near the end of the poem insists:

That I no rethorique have used
Upon the forme of eloquence,
For that is not of mi science;
But I have do my trewe peyne
With rude wordes and with pleyne
To speke of thing which I have toold. (ll. *3064-69)

However, while he emphasizes his plain English poetics, the vernacular is contained on all sides by Latin glosses and marginalia that guide the reader throughout the entire English text (or imply to the reader that they need to *find* someone to help them interpret it.) While Chaucer's "heretical" works were problematic because they lacked "gloss," and could thus run the risk of eliciting a number of different interpretations, Gower relies on simple English glossed throughout with Latin, and thus authoritative and stable, guiding commentary.

We do not know for certain that Gower was the author of this Latin commentary; however, consistency in the Latin glossing across manuscripts indicates that he initiated the commentary.⁷² The Latin commentary creates cohesion across the large work, and it confirmed Gower as an authoritative writer participating in long-standing practice of

⁷² To read more on Gower's Latin apparatuses: R. F. Yeager, "'Oure Englysshe' and Everyone's Latin: The Fasciculus Morum and Gower's 'Confessio Amantis,'" *South Atlantic Review* 46, no. 4 (1981): 41–53; R.F. Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other': the Page as Sign in the Work of John Gower," *Text* 3 (1987), 251-67.; Derek Pearsall, "Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. Minnis, A. J. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), 13-25.

poetry and rhetoric.⁷³ Derek Pearsall identifies four major kinds of Latin commentary in the *Confessio*: (1) elegiac verses that introduce sections and constrain moral reflections on the text, (2) scholarly prose commentaries before major sections that explain the following exemplum, (3) marginal glosses that cite authorities or explain allusions, and (4) the Latin apparatus at the end of the poem. The Latin is more complicated, poetic, and rhetorical than the (often quite literal) English text it reflects on, and Pearsall explains that Gower saw his English parts of the work as equivalent to Boethius's prose sections of his *De consolatione philosophiae*.⁷⁴ According to Pearsall, Gower's use of Latin confirms his "desire to stabilize the poem within the context of the learned Latin tradition: English is precarious, slippery, fluid—Latin acts as a fixative. The poem comes 'cased' or 'boxed' in Latin."⁷⁵ R. F. Yeager agrees that Gower's Latin not only served an aesthetic purpose, providing Gower with literary credentials, but it also served to lend him an authoritative voice, signaling that the reader was dealing with a Text.⁷⁶

The fact that this was Gower's first significant foray into English poetry is relevant to the story Gower relates about his encounter with Richard II on the Thames in the extrinsic prologue. Although he revises this passage later, in his first version of the prologue Gower asserts that he writes "a book for King Richardes sake / To whom bilongeth my ligeance" (ll. *24-25). Swearing his loyalty to this King (although this dedication would later be replaced with one to Henry of Lancaster), Gower explains how

⁷³ This practice of providing scholarly commentary on one's own [vernacular] text was rather unusual, however, it had precedent in Christine de Pizan's *Othea*. See especially Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 160-90 and Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 179-220.

⁷⁴ Pearsall, "Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*," 13.

⁷⁵ Pearsall, "Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*," 18.

⁷⁶ Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other.'"

he met the king, “under the toun of newe Troye” (ll. *37) (i.e., London), rowing down the Thames. Richard, it seems, bid Gower to come into his own boat where Gower relates that he

bad me doo my busynesse
That to his hihe worthinesse
Som newe thing I scholde booke,
That he himself it might looke
After the forme of my wrytyng. (ll. *49-53)

Although possibly an invented story, this situation is important for Gower’s positioning of himself as an English writer, even though he later excises this reference. The implication in Gower’s retelling of Richard’s demand indicates that he would like Gower to write the book “so that he himself might look after the form of my writing.” It seems Richard had not “himself” examined Gower’s previous works, and the request that the text be in English indicates that he did not read the others because they were not in English. And Gower, recognizing the progress he advocated for in his other works was not happening, knew he had to write an English text to reach a wider audience. Whereas in Chaucer’s *Prologue* the narrator is at risk of being expelled from Love’s service, Amans finds himself excluded until he has proven himself worthy.

As Gower brings the reader into the dream vision itself, we are reminded of Chaucer’s *Prologue* and the continental courtly dream visions that were their sources. Gower explains that “in the monthe of Maii, / Whan every brid hath chose his make” (ll.100-01) he found himself “further fro my love / Than erthe is fro the hevne above” (ll. 105-06). He wandered away into a wood, “wisshinge and wepinge” (l. 115) and throws

himself onto the ground wishing for death because his love has remained unrequited and his service unrecognized. He lets out a desperate complaint that he has not received his due wages as a prayer to Cupid and Venus, who suddenly appear to the lover in a decidedly sour mood, Cupid with “yhen wrothe” (l. 140) and Venus, who “cast on me no goodly chiere” (l. 152).

Cupid does not stop to speak to the lover at all, but hits him with a fiery dart similar to that of the *Roman de la Rose*:

His chiere aweiward fro me caste,
And forth he passede ate laste.
Bot natheles er he forth wente
A firy Dart me thoghte he hente
And threw it thurgh myn herte rote:
In him fond I non other bote (ll. 140-6)

And like Chaucer’s encounter, it is Cupid’s consort who takes pity on him, this time Venus, great grandmother to the founder of Britain. She stops to speak to Amans, still prostrate, and asks him who he is from and what illness he suffers. However, when he explains that he has long served her and only asked his due wage:

sche began to loure tho,
And seide, “There is manye of yow
Faitours, and so may be that thow
Art riht such on, and be feintise
Seist that thou hast me do service.” (ll. 172-6)

Rather than give succor or comfort to Amans, she is immediately suspicious, because it seems many have claimed to be doing love's work but are in fact traitors, which is at the very least a nod towards writers like Chaucer who in fact write ill of love, and is at the most a direct allusion to Chaucer's narrator's own experience of being accused of improperly carrying out Love's duties.

In Chaucer's prologue, we see a subject of love accused of falsely representing women, of slandering women, and thus causing men to flee from Love's service. By the time Gower is writing, it seems as though this problem has increased and that many writers are false servants. There is again a sense of the gods of love fearing traitors in their ranks, those who feign meaning by claiming they are true servants when in fact they are not. In each case, the God of Love makes a move to protect his servants from false lovers who would lead them away from properly serving him. We have so far seen Ovid's punishment of his *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*, which led aristocrats into adultery and portrayed women as fickle in love, the backlash that resulted from Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, and the supposed outcry against Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. But, while these authors were singled out by self-proclaimed "true" lovers (as in Marie de France's mural in *Guigemar*, Christine de Pizan's numerous diatribes against Ovidian poets, and in Chaucer's *Prologue*), Gower's service has gone unnoticed until now: neither of the gods know who he is, although they clearly seem to have recognized Chaucer and his works. Just as Gower's works went unnoticed by Richard II and the wider nation, so to have the Gods of Love failed to recognize any of Amans's service.

Before deciding whether or not she will recognize Gower as her servant and heal his wounds, Venus demands that the lover be shriven by her own priest, Genius, who will

hear the lover's confession. Gower's inclusion of Genius as Venus's priest continues to reinforce the threat of literary exile. Genius is a character borrowed from sources such as Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* and *Le Roman de la Rose*, and often is figured as Nature's Priest. In *De Planctu Naturae*, this figure of Genius arrives near the end of the narrative to excommunicate those who go against Nature's laws.⁷⁷ Gower's Genius addresses Amans and sermonizes for a bit about his dual role as Christian confessor and Venus's high priest of Love. He explains that the theme of Love will be tempered throughout by the confessional setting and that the seven deadly sins will serve as a further interpretive structure for the confession. As he questions Amans about his own practices in love, he cites over one hundred classical and medieval tales of unsuccessful romances. These tales have often been cited for their use of material from the *Metamorphoses*,⁷⁸ but Genius calls attention to the themes of *Legend* and the *accessūs* to the *Heroides*, and his stories are also translations of tragic classical love stories in which women are repeatedly betrayed in love. This "confession," in contrast to Chaucer's yearly penance of one story, consists of a series of stories of Love.

Unlike the *Legend of Good Women*, Gower's *Confessio* presents narrative closure to the frame narrative, yet it still remains in deep conversation with the *Legend's Prologue* and Ovid's own biographic exile. Once Genius and Amans have finished, Genius recommends to Amans to labor no more in the things that bring him no profit, but to

⁷⁷ "Let him who makes an irregular exception to the rule of love be deprived of the sign of love." Douglas M. Moffat trans. *The Complaint of Nature by Alain de Lille* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1972), ll. 225-30; "Let him who makes an irregular exception to the rule of Venus be deprived of the seal of Venus." James J. Sheridan trans., *The Plaint of Nature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 220-1.

⁷⁸ Alceste, Alcyone, Medea, Deianira, Thisbe, Philomela, Daphne, and Iphis (Ianthé) are tales shared between the *Confessio* and the *Metamorphoses*.

instead leave the labor of love and turn instead to Reason and Wisdom. Amans resists, pleading with Genius to deliver his supplication to Venus and Cupid, until Genius eventually submits. The letter that Amans turns to write has been compared to the “Ballad” of Chaucer’s *Prologue* and adapts typical poetic structures of complaint, which also calls attention to the complaints penned by Ovid’s heroines.

Amans waits for Venus to return, and when she does, she explains that Gower cannot profit from love and even if he could, he could not keep Nature’s covenant. In short, he is too old, and she will not heal him. She instead emphasizes his old age, his hoary looks, and likewise suggests he make a “beau retreat” while there is still time. Gower swoons, and when he looks up he sees a parade of lovers that draw deep connections to Chaucer’s *Prologue*, and less directly but no less importantly to the *Roman de la Rose*. This procession includes a large group of women that call both the *Heroides* and *Legend of Good Women* to mind: Dido, Phillis, Ariadne, Deianira, Medea, Deidamia, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Procne and Philomela, and Canace. He then mentions four ideal wives: Penelope (Ovid’s first letter), Lucrece (mentioned in the *Legend*), Alceste, and Alcione (from the *Metamorphoses* and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*). Yet this procession is followed at the end by Elde’s retinue, which includes more somber figures, including David and Bathsheba, Solomon with his hundred wives, Delilah and Samson, Aristotle, Virgil, Socrates, Plato, and Ovid himself, who here serves as the model of the resigned love poet.

As Gower falls in and out of his swoon, the lovers plead with Venus to allow him to be healed; she agrees, Cupid arrives to remove his dart, and Venus applies ointment to the wound. She hands him a mirror, he gazes at his own aged reflection, and he finally

excuses himself from Love's service and vows to dedicate himself to more serious literary efforts. In the earlier version of his conclusion,⁷⁹ Gower even has Venus call upon the poet to greet Chaucer, "mi disciple" and "mi poete" (ll. *2942). While she is thankful for Chaucer's "Ditees" and "songes glade, / The whiche he for mi sake made" (ll. *2943-4), she asks Gower to deliver her instructions to him:

That he upon his latere age,
To sette an ende of alle his werk,
As he which is myn owne clerk,
Do make his testament of love (ll. *2952-55)

It is clear that Venus is here referring to Chaucer's unfinished *Legend of Good Women*. Yeager notes that Venus associates Chaucer's "Ditees" and "songes" as his amorous poetry, and that "Venus wants Chaucer to realize that his days of amorous dalliance are past."⁸⁰ Gower invites Chaucer to join him in his exile from Love's court, an exile that represents a transitional moment in Gower's career, from court poet to moral and philosophical poet. Gower agrees to greet Chaucer for Venus and turns to go home. He ends with a prayer to Richard II, whom he claims rules with equal justice and pity and whom seems to clearly represent the ideal form of ruler that Gower expounds in Book VII. He ends by again dedicating the book to the king, restating his intent to cause both learning and pleasure.

⁷⁹ Gower revised the *Confessio* a number of times, and by 1392 he had removed this dedication to Chaucer and the mention of Richard II. See G. C. Macaulay, ed. *The Works of John Gower* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), xxii for the standard revision history of the *Confessio*, and Diane Watt. *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 11-13 for a review of recent scholarship on that history.

⁸⁰ R. F. Yeager. *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 99.

Unlike Chaucer and Ovid, the problem is not Gower's earlier texts; Gower has not in any way betrayed Love's service. However, Gower still finds himself accountable because Venus has seen other writers betray her. So in a sense Gower still has to write himself into Love's service. While he had not written yet a meaningful text in English (which made it feel as though no one were reading his texts, he did not see the social change he perhaps wished for), he likewise remained unrecognized in Venus and Cupid's court. Yet he still emphasizes the anxiety posed by such translation projects: he is certainly not welcomed with open arms into the court of Love, nor are his earnest laments taken seriously. The reader witnesses a deep suspicion of those who claim to write in the name of Love, and, if we recall Cupid's accusations against Chaucer in his *Prologue*, we will remember we was in trouble for translating word-for-word from his sources without any hermeneutical guides, potentially leading readers astray. Gower recognizes this trap, and, rather than relying heavily on the strict interpretive nature of hagiography *or* on the poetic machinations of his French or Latin sources, Gower decides to present a plain, straightforward English that is guided throughout by Latin, and therefore hierarchically sound, glosses. Additionally, where the hagiographical genre provides structure to the exemplary women's stories, Gower employs the structure of the seven deadly sins *and* the genre of the confessional, allowing the figure of Genius to stand in as an authoritative guide. While he seems to be advocating for the use of "plein" English, Gower tempers that enthusiasm with a continued reliance on the stability and hierarchy of Latin.

Osborn Bokenham is certainly not a student of Ovid, but he is a student of Ovid's students. Coming a generation later than Chaucer and Gower, he repeatedly lauds the two (as well as a third "father" of English poetry: John Lydgate) throughout his collection of

martyred women. His *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* does not follow the pattern of pagan women wronged in love, but it is instead a collection of female saints that exists in only one manuscript, British Library Arundel MS 327.⁸¹ Bokenham had focused on English subject matter both before and after compiling the *Legend*: his *Mappula Angliae* (c. 1440) translates the English sections of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, and he translates Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* into English. The legends are the earliest example of an all-female hagiographical collection in English,⁸² and the stories from the *Legend* are pulled from Bokenham's translation and expansion of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*.⁸³

Bokenham is perhaps at the most pains to emphasize his own English's marginality. He repeatedly comments on his own belatedness and his literary marginality in relation to the rest of the English canon, and perhaps most importantly, by the time Bokenham was writing his translation of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, use of the vernacular was especially fraught and dangerous when it came to religious texts.⁸⁴ Outside the more courtly literary circles of Chaucer and Gower in London and Kent, Bokenham's East Anglian literary circle was small and like-minded, and the circulation of his texts was limited. In the Arundel manuscript, Bokenham repeatedly makes reference to an idolized

⁸¹ Edited by Mary S. Serjeantson for the Early English Text Society in 1938 under the title *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.

⁸² While there were other examples of collections of saints, like the *Legend Aureae* and *South English Legendary*, Bokenham's *Legend* was the first to present itself as a collection of saints' tales dedicated solely to female saints.

⁸³ This manuscript was only recently discovered in 2004. Almost all of the tales in the *Legendys* are found in this Abbotsford manuscript in an original order. However, since Bokenham's translation of the *Legenda Aurea* follows Voragine's order, which follows the liturgical calendar, it is assumed that these legends were included in the first and last leaves of the manuscript, which are no longer extant, since that is where they fell in the liturgical year.

⁸⁴ Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409."

literary triumvirate made up of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate. He often remarks that his own diction and poetic language cannot live up to their ornate, courtly poetics. Yet, while he seems to praise these poets, alongside Geoffrey of Vinsauf, for their accomplishments in English poetry, he continually sets himself in opposition to them, highlighting his own plain style against their aureate, courtly style.

In the corresponding tales in the Abbotsford manuscript Bokenham does not include these references to Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.⁸⁵ Because the references to the three English poets are highlighted and repeated in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* but not in the Abbotsford manuscript, Bokenham's attitudes about English vernacularity and a "plain" poetics is essential to the construction of marginalized, feminized voices in his all-female collection. This is reflected in the choices of tales themselves, which although not pagan, remain in conversation with the abandoned, exiled women: Spencer notes that "Bokenham ultimately accentuates his own marginality in positive terms"⁸⁶ and elaborates:

Bokenham's chosen genre, hagiography, frequently extols the spiritual superiority of early Christians who are persecuted by the political powers that be and located at the margins of society. Bokenham may well have expected his readers to perceive certain parallels between these "angular"

⁸⁵ Except in his prologue to "The Life of Saint Agnes," where he meets with Pallas and "where Bokenham describes his banishment from the 'motleyed mede' of rhetoric by a rather supercilious Pallas, who tells him that the 'moste fresh floures' have already been gathered up by those 'persones thre.'" Alice Spencer, *Language, Lineage and Location in the Works of Osbern Bokenham*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 10.

⁸⁶ Spencer, *Language, Lineage and Location in the Works of Osbern Bokenham*, 15.

yet sacred minorities and his own professedly “minor” contributions to the canon.⁸⁷

Bokenham relishes in the role of the periphery *auctor*. He embraces the role of exile, establishing the existence of a British community and asserting the spiritual superiority of his rhetoric. Again, according to Spencer,

through his *oeuvre*, Bokenham counters the patriarchal hegemonies of literary and political history by asserting an alternative, spiritually pristine matrilineage, which also serves to legitimize his own feminized vernacular tongue and national identity. Bokenham deploys the motifs of language, lineage, and location in such a way that historical geographical and gender marginality ultimately become grounds for exaltation due to their deep rooted spiritual integrity.⁸⁸

Thus, Bokenham is seen as rejecting the aureate and ornate style of Lancastrian poetics, opting instead, like Gower, poetic exile.

Bokenham perhaps takes the most pains to emphasize his use of the academic Aristotelian prologue, indicating that “Two thyngys owyth euery clerk / To aduertysyn, begynnyng a werk, / If he procedyn wyl ordeneelly,” which are

The foure causys comprehendyd be,

Wych, as filosofys vs do teche,

⁸⁷ Spencer, *Language, Lineage and Location in the Works of Osbern Bokenham*, 17.

⁸⁸ Spencer, *Language, Lineage and Location in the Works of Osbern Bokenham*, 121. See also Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45 and Alice Spencer, “Osbern Bokenham Reads the ‘Prologue’ to the Legend of Good Women: The Life of St. Margaret,” in *Standing in the Shadow of the Master? Chaucerian Influences and Interpretations*, ed. Kathleen A. Bishop (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 160–203, 162.

In the begynnyng men owe to seche

Of euery book. (ll. 1-3; 6-9)

After a short lesson on the details of each of the four causes,⁸⁹ Bokenham begins to describe the causes for his decision to compile this collection of female martyrs. His prefatory material is definitely more succinct and perhaps less “imaginary” than Chaucer’s and Gower’s; he is direct and overtly technical here, without the narrative mask worn by Chaucer and Gower in their dream visions. Yet the following description of his *intentio* for the collection, and for the Life of St. Margaret in particular, clearly signals Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and thus the medieval Ovid’s, prologues through a number of rhetorical adaptations. He begins by recognizing that revealing his own name will influence how people receive the following tales. Bokenham makes a number of metaphorical comparisons highlighting the importance of not judging something based on its undesirable container: roses come attached to thorns, gold is found in the dark earth, and, importantly, “a margerye perle... / Growyth on a shelle of lytyl pryhs, / Yet is it precyous” (ll. 54-57). He likewise strains to present his reader with spiritual truth within an unlikely, unreliable container: English.

While his prologue rejects the courtly love setting and fictional narrative found in Chaucer and Gower’s works, Bokenham speaks more directly about his engagement with authoritative rhetorical texts. Rather than enter into a May meadow or forest, Bokenham begins to refer to Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria Nova*, which itself is a lush field filled

⁸⁹ This itself is perhaps crucial foreshadowing for Bokenham’s subsequent translation approach: Chaucer and Gower adapt elaborate fictional narratives for their prologues while Bokenham describes the requirements of such prologues in a straightforward and even didactic mode (in the sense of teaching rhetorical structures to a less-knowledgeable audience).

with the flowers of rhetoric. Just as Chaucer and Gower were outsiders in the realm of love, Bokenham is able to demonstrate how he is marginalized from rhetorical and poetic traditions and circles. He refers to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's text, informing the audience that he has never read it and now refuses to in order to tell "simply" about Saint Margaret, which he has endeavored to translate into English. Like Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham references the authority of an old text, but ultimately rejects it to tell of something that happened between him and, in this case, a Venetian tyrant and St. Margaret.

His project of translating St. Margaret's life into English is prompted by Bokenham's experience five years earlier in which, while in Italy, a "tyrant" abandoned him in a fen, foreshadowing the cruelty of tyrants one finds in his tales. The details and circumstances remain vague, but he states that "me dede dryue / A cruel tyraunth in-to a fen / Owt of a barge, and fyue mo men," a scene reminiscent of Gower's encounter with Richard II on the Thames (ll. 160-162). Abandoned by this "cruel tyrant," Bokenham is rescued by the object of his devotion, St. Margaret. He praises her one more time as someone who listens to sinful prayers, and again she becomes like Venus and Alceste: a helpful intercessor for an abandoned servant. So Bokenham, a foreigner in Italy, finds himself abandoned and moored by a Venetian tyrant, only to be saved by the object of his devotion, St. Margaret. Bokenham's decision to begin with St. Margaret also calls attention to Chaucer's prologue, where he adapted and translated French *marguerite* poetry and proclaimed his devotion to the daisy. St. Margaret, the exemplary "pearl" within the rough English shell, saves Bokenham from the wrath of an unjustified tyrant, just as Alceste stepped in as intercessor between Cupid and Chaucer and Venus agrees to attend to Gower after Cupid's attack. And just as Alceste, and for Gower Venus, steps in to rescue

him from a tyrannical figure (Gower and Chaucer Cupid who was meant to be a stand-in at once for both Richard II and Ovid's relationship with Augustine), St. Margaret steps in to recognize the poet's service and save him.

This narrative is brief and to the point, a noticeable rejection of Chaucer's and Gower's, whose work he has just referred to. There are no Gods of Love, there is only God and his intercessor, St. Margaret. Bokenham sets aside what he recognizes as Chaucer's and Gower's ornate poetic techniques and their more imaginative allegorical framing narratives, and he does not feel the need to mask his exemplary stories with a pagan allegory. For Bokenham, we see that his reflection on the need not to hide the Christian morals under a pagan veil (the use of pagan stories as a front) mirrors decision to use plain English, without the need of continental ornament or Latin guiding commentary. Bokenham, writing later than, has recognized that the strategies of Chaucer and Gower have led to an ornate and overly-poetic English, and purposefully sets himself outside that tradition.

CHAPTER III

VENTRILOQUISM AND THE ABANDONED WOMAN

In the second chapter, I described how Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham adapted a culturally-constructed explanation for Ovid's composition of the *Heroides* in order to connect their collections of tales of betrayed women with their own poetic anxiety about writing in English. In this chapter, I want to continue examining the poets' use of the *Heroides* as a methodological model for translation through a consideration of their gendered "ventriloquism": Elizabeth Harvey's term to describe "renderings of the feminine voice composed by a male author and not actually uttered by a woman at all."⁹⁰ Here, I consider why the *Heroides* in particular, with its tales of abandoned women, attracted these writers. And while Gower's and Bokenham's collections are not about (or solely about) pagan abandoned women in the strict sense that Chaucer's collection is, I show that their reliance on and modeling of Chaucer's and Ovid's collections warrants the examination and comparison. This chapter will consider how the complaints of the women in these tales and their voices are appropriated by these writers in order to highlight their linguistic marginality. I argue that the voice of these women become a stand-in for the English language, and what Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham do to expand or restrict these voices represent what they understand themselves doing for English as a literary language. As they mold the women into exemplary women through restrictions to their voices, they want their own tales to serve as exemplars for striving English poets and translators. In the following pages, I will show that they restrict the women's voices and impose rigid

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), 54.

structures on top of their tales in such a way that is reminiscent of Dante's "illustrious vernacular": a vernacular that has been shaped and made illustrious through the implementation of man-made grammatical structures and practices.

Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, completed in the early years of the fourteenth century while the poet was (coincidentally) in exile, most famously associates vernacular speech and writing with the feminine and with women. In this Latin text, the first book describes the relationship between Latin and the vernacular while identifying the most "illustrious" of the Italian vernaculars. Contrasted with this "illustrious vernacular," a higher and more learned register of rhetoric and poetic expression (i.e. one ruled by and understood through man-made grammar) not natively spoken by anyone but learned in school, Dante defines the natural vernacular as "the language which children gather from those around them when they first begin to articulate words; or more briefly, that which we learn without any rules at all by imitating our nurses."⁹¹ In his opening remarks, Dante clearly associates the spoken vernacular with women, children, and nurses; the vernacular is natural, feminine, and domestic. Dante restates what was at that point a familiar distinction "between the spoken vernacular as a *materna locutio* and written Latin as a *patrius sermo* (the language not of one's father, but of patriarchal tradition)."⁹²

English writers in particular emphasized this gendered marginality as distinctive from the hierarchically superior Latin and used it for their own purposes. As I mentioned briefly in Chapter II, Middle English writers in particular used feminine and gendered

⁹¹ Marianne Shapiro, *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 47.

⁹² Ryan Szpiech, "Latin as a Language of Authoritative Tradition," *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, eds. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63-85, 69.

metaphors to talk about their vernacular unworthiness, equating Middle English with the feminine, unstable, and fickle nature of the vernacular. Chaucer's complaint in *Troilus and Criseyde* about losing control over his text due to the misinterpretation and the changing pronunciations of the language reflect the "slyding courage" of Criseyde, where "slyding" can also be read as a pun referring to translation. Likewise, Caxton's complaint in the prologue to his vernacular translation of the *Aeneid* compares the English language to the ever-changing moon, a distinctly feminine symbol. Thomas Usk calls English, as opposed to French, "our dames tonge" (l. 29).

This association between the vernacular and the feminine was especially true of books written for women, for Dante notes in his earlier *La Vita Nuova* that women find Latin verses difficult to comprehend. Although a number of medieval women clearly did master reading Latin, women generally did not have the schooling necessary to understand written medieval Latin. In Middle English, an increasing number of authors explain in their prologues that they are writing in English because they want women to be able to understand them. In the prologue to the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century English translation of the works of "Trotula" from the northeast Midlands, the translator explains:

I thynke to do myn ententyffe bysynes for to drau oute of Latyn into Englysch dyverse causis of here maladyes, the synes that they schall know hem by, and the curys helpynge to hem, afture the tretys of dyverse mastyrz that have translatyde hem out of Grek into Latyn. And because whomen of oure tonge kunne bettyre rede and undyrstande thys langage than eny other, [that] every whoman lettyrde [may] rede hitt to other unlettyrd and help

hem and conceyle hem in here maledyes withowtyn scheuyng here dysese
to man, I have thys drawyn and wrytyn in Englysch.⁹³

In English, the figure of the woman writer also began to be appropriated by male writers considering their own marginal literary and linguistic positions. In her work on representations of women writers by late medieval and early modern English male writers, readers, and publishers, Jennifer Summit explains that

through her alienation from tradition, the figure of the woman writer became a focal point for many of the questions that were pivotal to the conceptual development of “English literature.” Thus for those concerned about the status of English letters, “the woman writer” gave shape to the question of what it meant to write from a position of estrangement from tradition.⁹⁴

This fascination with the power dynamics of the female voice, especially in the face of authoritative Latin, would explain why Chaucer and Gower might look towards the *Heroides* since Ovid presents the poems as letters written by the women associated with the fall of Troy.

In addition to the attraction of the *Heroides*'s transvestite ventriloquism, the female characters' status as *abandoned* women is also crucial to this assumed authorial position. The abandoned woman's voice has been a particular interest of male writers in all poetic traditions and, I argue, becomes powerful as a stand in for the vernacular voice. Lawrence

⁹³ Quoted from *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 157-8. See especially Elizabeth Dearnley's “‘Women of our tunge cunne bettir reede and vnderstonde this langage’: Women and Vernacular Translation in Later Medieval England,” *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066-1520)*, ed. Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2013), 259-72.

⁹⁴ Summit, *Lost Property*, 7.

Lipking and Susan Hagedorn discuss the use of the abandoned woman as literary trope, one in which male authors appropriate the literary and social marginality of the abandoned woman as a poetic position, a position that challenges the status-quo of literary authority. Like English and the vernacular, “abandoned women tend to be represented in literature as unstable and complex.”⁹⁵ Ovid, Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham, as authors interested in portraying themselves as marginal, use the figure of the abandoned women as one that represents something more than the crosses of love. It stands for the pain of not being seen, “of belonging to no one, of not being heard.”⁹⁶ Lipking’s *Abandoned Women in Poetic Tradition* is the first critical monograph to fully analyze the impact and attraction of the figure of the abandoned woman in both Eastern and Western literary traditions. The epitome of heroic femininity, the abandoned woman is present in most world literatures, and countless epic heroes, including Odysseus, Theseus, and Aeneas, leave a woman behind at some point in order to pursue their destinies and establish their lineages. It is not just their exiled and abandoned status that connects these stories with the vernacular; it is their status as abandoned *women* specifically that makes them useful for Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and Bokenham’s projects. Lipking goes on to explain that

in some cultures the role of women in literature has been virtually identified with abandonment. The work that first defined the nature of heroinism, Ovid’s *Heroides*, is a set of variations on the theme of a woman whose

⁹⁵ Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁹⁶ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, 212.

lover has left her, from Penelope to Sappho; to be a heroine, for Ovid and his legion of followers, means being abandoned.⁹⁷

Lipking highlights two established definitions of “abandoned,” the first is “forsaken or cast off,” and the second is “unrestrained or shameless,” hinting towards the uneasiness which society views them and a result of their social isolation.⁹⁸ With nothing to lose, they lash out, blaming their heroes and the societies that support the use and abandonment of women for imperialistic goals. The abandoned woman is “physically deserted by a lover and spiritually outside the law....Moreover, since neither the protection nor the inhibition of the law applies to them any longer, they constitute a potential threat to a well-ordered society.”⁹⁹ Her existence as outside the traditional social hierarchies marks her as an outsider, and her speech directly reproaches the structures that reject her. Her voice represents a challenge to the necessity of heroic action, of the need to place the instruction of the gods and the need to establish great lineages over her own feelings. Hagedorn explains how the voices of these abandoned women are “highly subverse. [They pose] a threat to two of the most ancient and respectable assumptions about poetry (at least in the West): the rule of action and the status of the canon.”¹⁰⁰ The voice of the abandoned woman thus poses a challenge to the tradition of epic forms of poetry itself. Lipking argues that sense of loss and suffering expressed by these women challenges “traditional social structures, values, and even poetic genres that enshrine and celebrate male dominance and male exploits.”¹⁰¹ Hagedorn takes up where Lipking leaves off, discussing Ovid’s legacy

⁹⁷ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, xv.

⁹⁸ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, xvii.

⁹⁹ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, xvii.

¹⁰⁰ Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 9.

in Dante's canto of Ulysses in the *Inferno* and several works by Boccaccio and Chaucer. Like Lipking, she argues that the laments of these women are presented as "a challenge to traditional social structures, values, and even poetic genres that enshrine and celebrate male dominance and male exploits."¹⁰² Hagedorn's main interpretive project is to show that these authors use the women's voices "make the reader reexamine the values of the male-oriented epic world and question the human cost of 'heroic' action. In these texts, Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer employ figures of abandoned women to expose the darker side of epic adventure and to express their disapproval of heroic forgetfulness."¹⁰³ Each woman questions the need for activities like war that drags men away, for pride that asks men to place their legacy before family, and for the national genre of epic that prizes the founding of nations over the individual's feelings.

Most of Ovid's women are in exile from their fatherland and their families, abandoned by their lovers. Alienated from their own countries, immersed in displeasing their fathers, and betrayed by men, these women have nowhere to go. Lamenting the loss of her husband and the cruelty of her brother, Dido exclaims that "exul agor cineresque viri patriamque relinquo" [*I've been driven to exile, I leave behind the ashes of my husband and my native land*] (l. 115). Ariadne cries out "accessus terra paterna negat. / ut rate felici pacata per aequora labar, / temperet ut ventos Aeolus—exul ero!" [*My father's land denies me entry. Even with fortunate keel on peaceful seas, I will be an exile!*] (ll. 65-66). And Hypermnestra, writing now as "exul Hypermnestra" after her imprisonment for disobeying her father and her abandonment by her husband, recalls how she and her family were "regnoque domoque / pellimur; eictos ultimus orbis habet" [*Forced to be driven from our*

¹⁰² Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 9.

¹⁰³ Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 18.

home, we are exiled to the furthest parts of the earth] (ll. 111-12). As Ariadne begs Theseus to return for her and not to abandon her alone, surrounded by beasts on an uninhabited island, or as Medea chastises Jason for his unfair treatment of her, Ovid could be understood as using these letters to express his own suffering and desire to return home. If the *Heroides* is read as a text coming after his exile from Rome and the subsequent banning of his books, we can imagine medieval readers interpreting the women's complaints in the *Heroides* as vehicles for Ovid's own laments about his exile.

As Middle English writers concerned with their literary and linguistic marginalization, it might make sense for Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham to use and highlight the vocal marginalization of characters like Medea and Dido to challenge the hierarchical structures, instead asserting the capabilities of that vernacular. However, Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham each manipulate and make changes to the feminine voices that they translate from their Latin sources. While Ovid's letters represent wronged women calling for justice and vengeance, sometimes violently performing it themselves, and putting words to their passions, the women of Chaucer's, Gower's, and Bokenham's collections are more socially praiseworthy, and their voices are truncated and at times wholly excised. As they turn Ovid's tragic pagan women into worthy Christian exemplars, I argue that these three poets similarly hope to present an imitable approach to writing and English that can convey classical or scriptural literary material. The three collections all present their tales as exemplary and, in the case of Chaucer's and Bokenham's translations, hagiographic, resulting in the repetitive nature of the stories and their rhetorical utility. Saints' lives represent sameness and follow a pattern of sanctity that often effaces individuality; Catherine Sanok calls this exemplarity "a regulatory fiction: saints' lives

present idealized feminine behavior and encourage female audiences to adopt it.”¹⁰⁴

Differences are minimized and similar virtues and symbolic themes are repeated from tale to tale. For female saints and exemplars, idealization surfaces often in bodily suffering and vehement chastity. St. Jerome’s defense of chastity in his *Adversus Jovinianum* outlines the hierarchy of female virtues and vices, with chaste virgins at one extreme and sexually active women at the other. Strategies of compiling the catalog of women as a collection of exemplary female role-models will be discussed more in the following chapter, but it is useful to note at this point that the authors are taking part in a tradition that presented their tales and characters as worthy or, in some cases, unworthy of imitation by their readers and audiences. Imitation is thus at the root of these tales, just as it is at the root of Chaucer’s, Gower’s, Bokenham’s, and even Ovid’s approach to translating their sources.

I begin with an examination of the women shared by Ovid’s, Chaucer’s, and Gower’s three collections (Ariadne, Dido, Medea, and Phyllis), and afterwards compare Bokenham’s complementary saints, particularly Mary Magdalene and St. Katherine of Alexandria. As I discussed in Chapter II, the God of Love’s instructions to Chaucer are themselves restrictive and led in large part to Chaucer’s using the saint’s life to structure the tales that follow. He orders Chaucer to spend a majority of his time

In making of a glorious legende
Of gode women, maydenes and wyves,
That weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves,
And telle of false men that hem betrayen (ll. 483-6)

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1.

Importantly, the shift away from first-person perspective of the *Heroides* means that the women's complaints are not the focus of the tales, and the tales are narrated completely by the poet himself, who regularly imposes this hermeneutic approach onto the stories. Most, but not all, of Chaucer's good women come from the *Heroides*; Dido, Medea, Ariadne, and Phyllis are common to Ovid's, Chaucer's, and Gower's collections, and Chaucer also includes Hypermnestra's and Hypsipyle's tales. All six of these women are quintessential abandoned women of the kind outlined by Lipking and Hagedorn; they are left behind by their lovers and husbands, sometimes for another woman, after risking family and nation to help the hero. Even when Chaucer and Gower choose to adapt tales from outside of the *Heroides*, they choose tales so steeped in similar themes of exile, abandonment, and betrayal in relation to the female voice that it becomes clear that these themes are directly related to their conceptualizations of their authorial roles.

When they translate from Ovid's *Heroides*, the exemplary genre that the three English writers adopt necessarily alters the presentation of the heroines' tales. Chaucer narrates all the events that lead up to the heroines' abandonment, whereas Ovid proposes to narrate the events (or allusions to the events) through the heroines' voice. Yet, Chaucer's tales, especially the ones based on the *Heroides*, build up towards the letters or, if they are not from the epistles, the heroine's voiced complaint just before their death. When he does mention the letters, claiming to be translating them faithfully, he often avoids having to translate the letter in full; of the six women that Chaucer adapts from the *Heroides*, all but Hypermnestra's conclusion (which does not survive or was never completed) ends with a

drastic *occupatio* referencing the letter and explaining there is little time to tell the whole contents, directing the reader instead to Ovid for more detail.¹⁰⁵

Dido is the first of these women to appear in Chaucer's *Legend*, and her tale comes third, after Cleopatra and Thisbe. Chaucer's translation of Dido's tale and of Ovid's letter continually foregrounds the poet's position as literary mediator while manipulating and restricting the character's complaints. The famous star-crossed lover from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido founded Carthage as its queen after fleeing her murderous brother, who had killed her husband. Forgetting her vow to never take another husband, Dido falls hard for Aeneas (at the instigation of Aeneas's mother, Venus) when he and his crew land in her kingdom after feeling the destruction of Troy. Their relationship develops, until Aeneas is reminded of his destiny to found Rome, and he leaves her to her fate: alone, heartbroken, and at the mercy of angry subjects and neighboring rulers. Like the martyr of the saint's life, Chaucer narrates Dido's suffering alongside the events that led up to her tragedy. Here, Dido's tale is drastically expanded before Aeneas leaves her, explaining how she aided the shipwrecked crew of Aeneas's ship and hosted the hero, eventually promising marriage to one another. Her conversations before Aeneas's departure are expanded to show her and Aeneas pledging honor to one another, as is her conversation with her sister in which she expresses her love for Aeneas. When Aeneas has left and Dido has written her letter, Chaucer says he will provide just a bit of the text, and translates the first eight lines of Ovid's Dido letter rather faithfully:

“Right so,” quod she, “as that the whyte swan

Ayeins his deeth beginneth for to singe,

¹⁰⁵ See Hypsipyle ll.197-8, Medea ll. 1678-79, Ariadne ll. 2218-20, and Phyllis ll. 2513-17.

Right so to yow make I my compleyninge.
Nat that I trowe to geten yow again,
For wel I woot that it is al in vain,
Sin that the goddes been contraire to me.
But sin my name is lost through yow,” quod she,
“I may wel lese a word on yow, or letter,
Al-be-it that I shal be never the better;
For thilke wind that blew your ship a-wey,
The same wind hath blowe a-wey your fey” (ll. 1355-65)

Ovid’s lines are as follows:

Sic ubi fata vocant, udis abiectus in herbis
ad vada Maeandri concinit albus olor.
Nec quia te nostra sperem prece posse moveri,
alloquor: adverso movimus ista deo!
sed meriti famam corpusque animumque pudicum
cum male perdiderim, perdere verba leve est.
Certus es ire tamen miseramque relinquere Didon
atque idem venti vela fidemque ferent. (VII.1-8)

*[Thus, at the summons of fate, casting himself down amid the watery
grasses by the shallows of Maeander, sings the white swan. Not because I
hope you may be moved by prayer of mine do I address you—for with God’s
will adverse I have begun the words you read; but because, after wretched
losing of desert, of reputation, and of purity of body and soul, the losing of*

words is a matter slight indeed. Are you resolved none the less to go, and to abandon wretched Dido, and shall the same winds bear away from me at once your sails and your promises?]

Yet, throughout the rest of her complaint, as in her previous speeches, Chaucer presents a far less threatening heroine. In Ovid's letter, as Dido continues she speaks of her powerful passion for Aeneas ("Uror ut inducto ceratae sulphure taedae, / ut pia fumosis addita tura rogis" [ll. 23-24] [*I am all ablaze with love, like torches of wax tipped with sulphur, like pious incense placed on smoking altar-fires*]) and often wishes ill on him for his betrayal of her ("vive, precor! sic te melius quam funere perdam, / tu potius leti causa ferere mei" [ll. 63-64] [*O live; I pray it! Thus shall I see you worse undone than by death. You shall rather be reputed the cause of my own doom*]). However, Chaucer removes all of her threats and declarations of her physical lust, and makes Dido's complaints more pitiable, mentioning her ruined reputation, their unborn child, and the fact that, once he leaves, she will likely be attacked by surrounding nations. He stops his translation short, and instead suggests that the reader resort to Ovid's letters if they wish to hear more.

The legend directly following Dido's is dedicated to Hypsipyle and Medea, who were both misled and abandoned by the hero Jason. In the section of this tale dealing with Medea's tragedy, Chaucer relates how Jason, after abandoning Hypsipyle, brings his Argonauts to Colchis to liberate the Golden Fleece from its care under Medea's father. Medea falls in love with the handsome stranger, and she decides to aid Jason in the trials, in return only asking to be his wife and return to Thessaly with him. Jason agrees, and they live together for a while, raising two children, until he infamously leaves Medea for a younger, more politically powerful princess. Over half of Medea's dialogue lines in the

Legend of Good Women are dedicated to her vowing to help save Jason's life (not featured in Ovid's letter), and the other half is a translation of Ovid's lines 11-20. The first four lines of this latter speech translates Ovid's relatively closely:

“Why lyked me thy yelow heer to see
More then the boundes of myn honestee,
Why lyked me thy youthe and thy fairnesse,
And of thy tonge the infinit graciousnesse?” (ll. 1672-75)

Ovid's passage reads: “*cur mihi plus aequo flavi placuere capilli / et decor et linguae gratia ficta tuae?*” [*Why did I too greatly delight in those golden locks of yours, in your comely ways, and in the false graces of your tongue?*] (ll. 11-12). But Chaucer greatly diminishes some of Medea's more vindictive statements; the following has no parallel in his retelling of her story:

aut, semel in nostras quoniam nova puppis harenas
venerat audacis attuleratque viros,
isset anhelatos non praemedicatus in ignes
inmemor Aesonides oraque adusta boum!
semina iecisset totidem sevisset et hostes,
ut caderet cultu cultor ab ipse suo!
quantum perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset!
dempta forent capiti quam mala multa meo! (ll. 13-20)

[Yet delight too greatly I did—else, when once the strange craft had been beached upon our sands and brought us her bold crew, all unanointed would the unremembering son of Aeson have gone forth to meet the fires

exhaled from the flame-scorched nostrils of the bulls; he would have scattered the seeds—and as many foeman as the seeds—for the sower himself to fall in strife with his own sowing! How much perfidy, vile wretch, would have perished with you, and how many woes been averted from my head!]

He removes this whole section in which Medea states that if she had not so much delighted in Jason's good looks and false tongue, he would have gone forth and died among what he had sown, a poignant foreshadowing to the death of his sons by Medea's hands. Her tone is softened and again more pitiable in Chaucer's *Legend*: "O, haddest thou in thy conquest deed y-be, / Ful mikel untrouthe had ther dyed with thee!" (ll. 1676-77). Like Dido's speech, Medea's complaint as Chaucer renders it deviates from his source in the *Heroides* in order to meet the God of Love's restrictive hermeneutic and to make the women objectively "good" (which, as we will see in Chapter IV, they are not).

Hypsipyle's story comes just before Medea's, but it is largely swallowed by the latter. Before reaching Colchis, Jason and his Argonauts rested for a time on the island of Lemnos, where Jason developed a relationship with Hypsipyle only to leave her when it was time for him to continue his quest. Thus, Hypsipyle and Medea must share a tale as they were forced to share Jason. While Medea's speech is reduced, Hypsipyle's is altogether erased. Perhaps this is because she herself in Ovid's letter speaks vindictively against Medea and Jason, whose relationship has reached her ears. She explains that "cor dolet, atque ira mixtus abundat amor" [*My heart is sick, and surges with mingled wrath and love.*] (ll. 76), and she spends a great deal of her complaint insulting Medea. Allowing Hypsipyle to speak would be to allow her to call out Medea, another of the "good women,"

whom she calls a barbarous poisoner (“barbara...venefica” [l. 19]) in Ovid’s epistle. Her speech makes both of them look bad, and by creating them into one paralleled tale, he collapses their identity as Jason’s abandoned lovers.

Ariadne’s tale follows a similar pattern; Theseus arrives in Crete to stop the practice of sacrificing children to the Minotaur, Ariadne falls in love with him, and, in exchange for Theseus’s promise to elope with her, she aids the hero in escaping from the labyrinth commissioned by her father. Ariadne’s sister Phaedra tags along, and when the travelling crew stop to rest on a deserted island, Theseus secretly leaves and takes Phaedra as a wife, leaving Ariadne alone and abandoned. Like Dido and Medea, Ariadne has more than just a few lines, but many of them are invented by Chaucer. As in Dido’s tale, Chaucer creates dialogue in which the heroine greets the hero and promises to aid him and when she talked with her sister.

At the end of the legend, Chaucer borrows and translates lines from Ovid’s epistle to give Ariadne speech; however, as opposed to his treatment of Dido’s letter, remaining at least faithful to the letter’s beginning, here the poet sifts through Ariadne’s complaints for ones he finds useful, often exchanging his voice for hers and skipping over lines that are more passionate. After relating how Ariadne awoke “And gropeth in the bedde, and fond right noght” (ll. 2186), Chaucer relates how she cries out:

“Allas!” quode she, “that ever I was wroght!
I am betrayed!” and her heer to-rente,
And to the stronde bar-fot faste she wente,
And cryed, “Theseus! myn herte swete!

Wher be ye, that I may nat with yow mete,

And mighte thus with bestes been y-slain?" (ll. 2187-92)

This drastically reduces Ariadne's violent bodily reactions and movements found in Ovid's verses, where she beats her breast, tears at her hair, and cries until her tears dull her eyes (ll.15-50). Ovid's letter portrays Ariadne's immense grief at being abandoned on a deserted island and the physical abuse she treats herself to; she wildly attempts to signal to Theseus, portraying her tears, her wild hair, and her resemblance to frenzied bacchae. Chaucer removes all of this and presents a much meeker Ariadne, who kisses the places where Theseus's feet once tread ("And doun she fil a-swown upon a stoon / And up she rist and kiste in al hir care / The stepes of his feet ther he hath fare," [ll. 2207-09]). Nor does Chaucer translate the rest of her letter, where she continues to chastise Theseus and talk about her wild appearance or about beasts tearing her body apart. Chaucer, not Ariadne, describes how she sits on the cold shore, hoists a white flag, and begs Theseus to turn the ship around. The words that Chaucer does give to Ariadne are those where he translates Ovid most closely: Ovid's "scelerate revertere Theseu! / flecte ratem! numerum non habet illa suum!" [*Come back, O wicked Theseus! Turn about thy ship! She hath not all her crew!*] (ll. 35-36) becomes Chaucer's "She cryed, 'O turne again, for routhe and sinne! / Thy barge hath nat al his meiny inne!'" (ll. 2200-01). And he stays close to his source in his translation of Ariadne's complaint to her bed.¹⁰⁶ Chaucer allows the interpretive

¹⁰⁶ Chaucer's lines are:

And to her bedde right thus she speketh tho: —
"Thou bed," quod she, "that hast receyved two,
Thou shalt answeere of two, and nat of oon!
Wher is thy gretter part away y-goon?
Allas! wher shal I, wrecched wight, become!

authority to lie with himself, interjecting to ask the reader “Hadde he nat sinne, that her thus begylde?” (l. 2199), and Ariadne’s curses become his own, as he ends this tale hoping “The devil quyte him his whyle!” (l. 2227).

Chaucer clearly silences the women’s complaints in an effort to adhere to the God of Love’s direction. Carolyn Dinshaw addresses how Chaucer approaches his translations of these tales differently than he had while writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, to which the *Legend of Good Women* is written in direct response to (see Chapter II). Chaucer’s strategy in his treatment of Ovid’s letters is not to provide a space for the women’s complaints to be heard; rather, Chaucer drastically reduces their voices to similar moral imperatives. Following Chaucer’s thoughts as he transitioned from *Troilus and Criseyde* to the *Legend of Good Women*, Dinshaw notes that he does not want to risk the slippery feminine voice getting away from him again in this collection:

He again narrates pagan fables and again positions himself as a masculine lover, as we’ll see, but this time he immediately strips and cleans up that alien woman, as he did only *after* being seduced by her in *Troilus and Criseyde*. This time he refuses to become vicariously, erotically involved in the act of *translatio*; this time he rigorously chastens the letter and controls the slippery feminine. (66)

Dinshaw recognizes in the *Legend of Good Women* how Chaucer “pares down the texts so drastically” and compares the silencing of the women’s stories to the writerly approaches

For, thogh so be that ship or boot heer come,
Hoom to my contree dar I nat for drede;
I can my-selven in this cas nat rede!” (ll. 2210-17)

to the genre of the saint's life "to see how it provides the narrator with so precise a narrative tool for control of the feminine."¹⁰⁷

Thus, we can see that Chaucer restricts the voices more than he represents and appropriates them for himself. The pattern established by Lipking and Hagedorn imply that abandoned women are used by writers who feel in some way marginalized from literary activity, and the abandoned woman's voice is a useful trope through which an author can express his dissatisfaction with that hierarchy. Yet Chaucer's restrictions seem to hinder that argument, although it would seem that he would be in the ideal position to use that rhetorical trope of abandonment. Why, then, does he choose to not show his women's most outspoken moments? Why does he transform them into saint-like martyrs? I argue it is because instead of hoping to challenge the status quo, he adheres to the restrictions imposed by the God of Love. And I have attempted to show that the women stand in for the vernacular; as Chaucer manipulates them, he likewise cuts down on the wildness of the English tongue and makes it acceptable, too. Chaucer becomes the controller of the tales, removing the singular perspective of the *Heroides*, incorporating diverse sources, and bending those sources to meet his interpretive goal. In this case, Chaucer wants to show that these women are ideal representations of good Christian wives, which requires some trimming of their more outspoken elements.

Gower's representations of Ariadne, Dido, and Medea are likewise truncated, even more so than in Chaucer's, and he moves more drastically away from the strict repetitive model imposed by Chaucer's God of Love. As I discussed in Chapter II, Gower's interpretive motivations are different than Chaucer's; rather than show one mode of

¹⁰⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 72.

interpreting these stories, Gower's *Genius* presents a variety of interpretive strategies for approaching these classical tales. Gower sometimes mentions the letters he borrows from the *Heroides*, sometimes does not, yet he, too, works towards a climax that involves the women's final speeches. Gower's collection is far more hermeneutically diverse than Chaucer's, although it still follows a visible and culturally recognizable interpretive pattern modeled on a Christian genre: the confessional in which Genius is the confessor, structured within an exploration of the seven deadly sins. Each of the (over one hundred) stories in the collection is thus presented in a form of dialogue between Genius and Amans; Genius introduces a sin, asks Amans if he is guilty of indulging in that sin, and then provides the translated tales as exemplary tales about how *not* to act. As Genius guides Amans through the exemplum, Gower guides the reader through his simpler English with his Latin interpretive glosses.

Genius's story of Dido is contained within Book IV, Sloth, and further distinguished within a discussion of *lachesse*, or procrastination. When Gower has Genius relate Dido's tale, he drastically reduces her speech, cutting it much further than Chaucer did in the *Legend of Good Women*. Genius spends more time explaining that Dido wrote a letter than he does quoting it:

A lettre unto hir kniht hath write,
And dede him plainly for to wite,
If he made eny taringe,
To drecche of his ageincomynge,
That sche ne mihte him fiele and se. (ll. 99-103)

Like Chaucer, Gower retains the image of the swan from the opening lines of Ovid's epistle, yet the words are taken out of Dido's mouth and put into Genius's:

Sche scholde stonde in such degré
As whilom stod a swan tofore,
Of that sche hadde hire make lore;
For sorwe a fethere into hire brain
She schof and hath hireselve slain:
As king Menander in a lay
The sothe hath founde, wher sche lay
Sprantlende with hire wynges tweie,
As sche which scholde thanne deie
For love of him which was hire make. (ll. 104-113)

When Dido does speak in Gower's retelling, it is very brief and does not correspond to any passage in Ovid's text. The words that Dido speaks are in fact created to relate directly to the sin that Genius is attempting to illustrate to Amans, sloth:

“Ha, who fond evere such a lak
Of Slowthe in eny worthi kniht?
Now wot I wel my deth is diht
Thurgh him which scholde have be mi lif.” (ll. 128-31)

Her anger and grief are largely removed, and her voice is put into the service of Genius and Venus. Her complaint to Aeneas derives and relates directly to the cardinal sin that Genius is at that moment teaching Amans about.

Medea and Ariadne receive similar treatments, and both women's stories are located in Book V, dealing with Avarice. While Gower's Medea is given much more action in the *Confessio*, which includes healing Jason's father (discussed in detail in Chapter IV), her speech as adapted from Ovid's letter is quite short and exposes Jason's actions as an example of perjury. Like Chaucer, Gower expands on Medea's dialogue with Jason when she decides to help him with the Golden Fleece, while her actual complaint against him is greatly reduced. The only words of complaint and accusation that Gower affords to Medea present an even more sympathetic and wronged heroine:

[She] seide, "O thou of every lond
The moste untrewe creature,
Lo, this schal be thi forfeiture." (ll. 4212-14)

Like Dido, Medea's speech is modified to adhere to the themes of avarice and perjury and calls out the hero's faults in a way that adheres to Genius's goals in leading Amans through the seven deadly sins.

Gower sets Ariadne's tale within a section about ingratitude, and Theseus is chastised for his lack of appreciation for Ariadne's aid in escaping her father's labyrinth. Ariadne's speech is less truncated than Medea's (Gower does not follow any of his sources very closely throughout the tale), and Gower expands on her complaint once Theseus abandons her:

"Ha lord," sche seide, "which a senne,
As al the world schal after hierre,
Upon this woful womman hierre
This worthi kniht hath don and wroght!

I wende I hadde his love boght,
And so deserved ate nede,
Whan that he stod upon his drede,
And ek the love he me behihte.
It is gret wonder hou he mihte
Towardes me nou ben unkinde,
And so to lete out of his mynde
Thing which he seide his oghne mouth.
Bot after this whan it is couth
And drawe into the worldes fame,
It schal ben hindringe of his name:
For wel he wot and so wot I,
He gaf his trouthe bodily,
That he myn honour scholde kepe.” (ll. 5444-61)

Like Dido’s and Medea’s, Ariadne’s speech reads more as a lesson to the reader rather than as a complaint or attack on the hero, specifically modified to bend to the particular moral lesson Genius is at that moment expounding upon.

I want to mention the final of these four main abandoned women, Phyllis, before moving on to Bokenham. In both Chaucer’s and Gower’s collections, Phyllis has the most lines and the most lines translated or adapted from her letter, although her tales are drastically understudied compared to Medea’s, Dido’s, and Ariadne’s. Second in Ovid’s collection but second-to-last in Chaucer’s, Phyllis is clearly reminiscent of many other women in the tales, and is the lover of Demophon, son of Theseus and Phaedra, Ariadne’s

sister. Phyllis, a Thracian queen, falls in love with Demophoon, who has been shipwrecked in her land when heading home after the of Troy, and repairs his damaged ships. Recalled to Athens by his father, Theseus, Demophoon promises to return to Phyllis in a month, but four months pass before Phyllis writes her letter and then ends her life by throwing herself into the sea that does not return Demophoon (or, in some versions, hanging herself from an almond tree). Her tale is of interest specifically because it so clearly recalls the other letters, and she most closely dramatizes the forms of *imitatio* that the exempla advocate.; like Dido, she is a queen who welcomes a hero from the ashes of Troy and she tells Demophoon that he is no better than his father, who abandoned poor Ariadne. Her tale is most often singled out as an example of foolish or foolhardy love. Not only does she rush into the relationship, which is reminiscent of Dido's haste in risking her political position as queen by taking a foreign suitor to bed, but she rushes to equate her plight with the tragedies of these women since traditionally Demophoon does return, just too late. It is interesting, then, that Chaucer and Gower both go to pains to imitate their own source closely, much more closely than the speech of the other women discussed in this chapter; like Phyllis, they present themselves as the loyal imitator.

Chaucer gives her two chunks of speech, which he briefly interrupts to mention that he does not want to write her *whole* letter: "But of the lettre of Phillis wol I wryte / A word or tweyne, although it be but lyte" (ll.2494-5). He goes on to provide a close, but not word-for-word translation of the first 8 lines of Ovid's Phyllis's letter, in which she justifies her complaint to Demophoon:

"Thyn hostesse," quod she, "O Demophon,
Thy Phillis, which that is so wo begon,

Of Rodopeye, upon yow moot compleyne,
 Over the terme set betwix us tweyne,
 That ye ne holden forward, as ye seyde;
 Your anker, which ye in our haven leyde,
 Highte us, that ye wolde comen, out of doute,
 Or that the mone ones wente aboute.
 But tymes foure the mone hath hid her face
 Sin thilke day ye wente fro this place,
 And foure tymes light the world again.
 But for al that, yif I shal soothly sain,
 Yit hath the streem of Sitho nat y-brought
 From Athenes the ship; yit comth hit noght.
 And, yif that ye the terme rekne wolde,
 As I or other trewe lovers sholde,
 I pleyne not, god wot, befor my day.” (ll. 2496-2512)

Chaucer pauses here after this close imitation of Ovid’s text to insist that he will not rehearse her letter for too long,¹⁰⁸ but the next thirty-six lines (ll.2518-54) continue the close adherence to Phyllis’s letter as presented by Ovid, removing certain sections as he

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But al her lettre wryten I ne may
 By ordre, for hit were to me a charge,
 Her lettre was right long and ther-to large;
 But here and there in ryme I have hit laid,
 Ther as me thoughte that she wel hath said. (ll. 2513-17)

goes.¹⁰⁹ It is here, at the end of his close translation of Phyllis's letter, that Chaucer makes his most interesting and forward statement to the reader:

Be war, ye women, of your sotil of,
Sin yet this day men may ensample see;
And trusteth, as in love, no man but me. (ll. 2559-61)

Chaucer solicits the reader's trust in opposition to "false" lovers like Demophoon, Theseus, and Jason within the context of a very close and "loyal" translation of Phyllis's letter, and he makes no mention of Demophoon's eventual, however late, return.

Like Chaucer, Gower's Phyllis has the most lines out of the four women discussed here, and he follows his Ovidian source more closely than the tales of other abandoned women. Phyllis and Demophoon's tale appears in Book IV, the sin of Sloth (like Dido's), under the sub-category of forgetfulness. In this tale, Gower spends the most time referring to and elaborating on Phyllis's letter, summarizing it for seventeen lines. And he portrays her as a much more outspoken character, threatening to expose Demophoon as a slothful knight through her death:

Sche seith, that if he lengere lette
Of such a day as sche him sette,
Sche scholde sterven in his Slowthe,
Which were a schame unto his trowthe. (ll. 795-98)

¹⁰⁹ The correlation between Chaucer's lines and Ovid's are as follows: *LGW* ll. 2518-21 — *H* ll. 25-28; *LGW* ll. 2522-24 — *H* ll. 43-44; *LGW* ll. 2525-29 — *H* ll. 49-52; *LGW* ll. 2530-42 — *H* ll. 63-74; *LGW* ll. 2543-49 — *H* ll. 75-78; *LGW* ll. 2550-54 — *H* ll. 134-37.

As I said above, Phyllis speaks more than the other abandoned women, but like the others, her complaint is created by Gower as a means for Genius to highlight the dangers of forgetfulness in love:

And seide, “Helas, thou slowe wiht,
Wher was ther evere such a knyht,
That so thurgh his ungentilesce
Of Slowthe and of Forgetelnesce
Agein his trowthe brak his stevene?”
And tho hire yhe up to the hevene
Sche caste, and seide, “O thou unkinde,
Hier schalt thou thurgh thi Slowthe finde,
If that thee list to come and se,
A ladi ded for love of thee,
So as I schal myselve spille;
Whom, if it hadde be thi wille,
Thou mihtest save wel ynowh.” (ll. 843-55)

Phyllis’s reliance on literary models (of Dido and Ariadne) to shape her understanding of her predicament, just as Genius uses her tale as a model for behavior, and Gower presents her tale as a model for appropriate English poetics. Discussing the *Heroides*, Fulkerson explains that Phyllis’s story is notable for its reference to other tales and that “Phyllis’ empathetic familiarity with these other stories caused her to refashion herself in their

image.”¹¹⁰ Fulkerson casts Phyllis as a reader and imitator of the letters of Ariadne, Dido, and Medea in the *Heroides*. Often a caricature of foolish love, Phyllis is a pale model of the other women, reading the results of their tales and modeling her own story onto it. Demophoon has not left her for another women like Aeneas for Lavinia, Jason for Creusa, and Theseus for Phaedra; he has simply not come back in time, either detained or forgetful of his promise to return to her. Fulkerson argues that Phyllis kills herself needlessly and that it is her reading of the other women’s situations that cause her to place herself in the same predicament: “Instead of believing Demophoon, Phyllis is seduced into killing herself by what she thinks she knows, by the weight of literary suggestion that presses upon her from the other members of her community.”¹¹¹ Even compared to Penelope, who similarly awaits her husband’s return (and, additionally *is* for a time replaced by another woman), Phyllis’s suicide—out of desire and not being able to part with Demophoon for longer—is an empty signifier that does not correlate with the content of her tragedy. She is no-longer-living proof of the potential for poetry to serve as a model for life, a potential that Gower’s entire project relies on.

If Sheila Delany is correct in her assertion that the order of Bokenham’s *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is directly modeled on the order of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*, then Phyllis has no correlating tale. While Delany does not account for this omission, I argue that his own treatment of the saints’ lives he translates would lead him to purposefully reject Phyllis’s foolish reliance on poetic models. For, Bokenham is concerned most with revealing the true nature of his tales and of the language. As I

¹¹⁰ Laurel Fulkerson, *The Ovidian Heroine as Author: Reading, Writing, and Community in the Heroides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23.

¹¹¹ Fulkerson, *The Ovidian Heroine as Author*, 25.

mentioned in Chapter II, Bokenham was even more anxious about writing in the vernacular English because of more dire restrictions on the possibilities of translating scriptural material into English. Yet, in the face of more dire restrictions and the fear that his work may not live on past his small reading circle, Bokenham expresses his pride in his use of his simple Suffolk dialect. Bokenham opposes himself to Chaucer and Gower (among others) and in doing so places his women in contrast with the pagan heroines of the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Confessio amantis*. Bokenham's simple style emphasizes the courtly rhetoric of Chaucer and Gower, yet his flattery of these courtly poets hides a critique of their high-flown rhetoric and their use of French and Latin models. I argue that this critique is mirrored in his translation of these saints' lives, saints that he presents as actual martyrs as opposed to Chaucer's and Gower's mock-religious texts.

I discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II how Bokenham was clearly aware of Chaucer's and Gower's literary fame and bodies of work. In this work in particular, Bokenham references Chaucer and Gower a number of times alongside John Lydgate. He refers also to Cicero, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and a number of other authors and sources, admitting that his simple Suffolk dialect cannot hope to compare to their rhetorical achievements. Yet as we will see, his flattery of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate really hides a critique, proven by his actual presentation of the martyrdom, not a parody of it like Chaucer's and Gower's. Unlike the collections of Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham's are not pagan women and pagan sources; however, he does not include any English saints, choosing instead to translate a number of foreign Christian saints into English.

In light of stricter rules about translation and about who exactly could teach about Scripture, Bokenham's collection has been seen by some modern scholars as rather liberal and progressive in its representation of vernacular scriptural lessons presented through the voices of female saints, especially because of its inclusion of Mary Magdalene, renowned as a preacher, and St. Katherine, renowned as an erudite scholar and teacher. And it is true that Bokenham's women speak much more than Chaucer's and Gower's women. They assert their faith and passion and disdain in a way that Ovid's women might have about their heroes, but which Chaucer's and Gower's women do not. They speak to people and affect the world around them, in contrast to the classical women's ephemeral letters and speeches that are never seen to reach their intended audience. And like the catalogs of women he models this collection on, Bokenham's lives work towards the women having the last word before their deaths. I would like in particular to talk about Bokenham's treatment of St. Katherine and Mary Magdalene. A number of scholars have noted that Bokenham's use of these two women, women who speak in public about Scripture and engage in theological discussions, might have raised some eyebrows during a time when female preaching and scriptural discussions in English were risky. Representations of Mary Magdalene could be met with suspicion.¹¹² Jacqueline Jenkins notes that "because of its remarkable appeal to laywomen readers, [Katherine's] legend came to be viewed as potentially subversive, and thus, on occasion at least, is the product of deliberate censorship at the level of narrative detail in the English versions."¹¹³

¹¹² Paul Price, "Trumping Chaucer: Osborn Bokenham's Katherine." *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 158–83.

¹¹³ Jacqueline Jenkins, "'This Lyf En Englyssh Tunge': Translation Anxiety in Late Medieval Lives of St Katherine." In *The Medieval Translator / Traduire Au Moyen Age*, 8:137–48. (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2003), 138.

If Bokenham was structurally using Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* as a guide for his own legendary, then Mary Magdalene's tale would mirror that of Ariadne and St. Katherine's would mirror Philomela's. In Bokenham's retelling of Mary Magdalene's life, his main focus is her missionary work in Marseilles and her hermitic retirement in the desert. After the crucifixion, Mary travels to France and becomes a spiritual mentor for the prince and princess. Her guidance of the royals, which leads to their conversion and desire for pilgrimage to Rome, has been read as a revolutionary representative of female preaching, but in reality she has very little power in this retelling. Found not in the *Heroides* but in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Philomela's tragic story is intimately connected with themes of female voice and violence that tries to silence it. Her voice is quite literally ripped from her violently when her rapist and brother-in-law Tereus cuts out her tongue to prevent her from exposing his crimes. Katherine's story makes a good parallel; she is known for her knowledge in the seven liberal arts and is perhaps best known for her debate against fifty pagan philosophers.¹¹⁴

However, the discovery of the Abbotsford manuscript shows that compared to his women portrayed there, the women of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* are rather less erudite and reasoned and scholarly. Karen Winstead and Jenkins consider how Bokenham's representation of these women actually are not that revolutionary in terms of how they present their female thinkers, preachers, and teachers. Winstead explains that Bokenham adjusted Katherine and Mary's stories in order to actually reduce their preacherly and teacherly roles. Contrasting the *Legend* of the Arundel manuscript with that

¹¹⁴ She known for intellect, learning, and the use of reasoned argument. Karen A. Winstead, "Osbern Bokenham's 'Englische Boke': Re-Forming Holy Women." In *Form and Reform: Reading Across the Fifteenth Century*, 67–87. Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 73.

of the Abbotsford manuscript, Winstead finds that Bokenham's *Legends* present women that actually do not represent teaching and preaching. She shows that the women of the Abbotsford manuscript have far more agency in their speech, and are more effective in their roles as teachers and scholars.

Similarly, Jenkins writes about how, compared to other translations of St. Katherine's life, particularly Bokenham's contemporary and fellow friar John Capgrave, Bokenham's saint in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* does *not* seem to exemplify the erudition and scholarly prowess that other writers depict in their versions of her story, and she is in general far less threatening. Bokenham resists representing Katherine's theological conversation with Adryan when she was converted and instead refers the reader to his fellow-friar John Capgrave, who translates Katherine's conversion in detail; Winstead has argued that Capgrave's translation of this spiritual conversation would have shocked "Clerics of his day who considered Middle English an inappropriate medium for discussing abstruse doctrines," and it is evident that Bokenham's life of St. Katherine is shorter and simpler than Capgrave's rendering, deemphasizing the importance of Katherine's abilities to reason and teach in comparison to his direct sources. Bokenham's Katherine instead emphasizes her dedication to speaking in a plain and simple rhetoric so that more might understand her and be converted.

However, Paul Price, who finds in Katherine "a kind of May-day triumph for the oppressed, ordinary poet, and one at the expense of those through whom he so defensively suffers comparison,"¹¹⁵ finds the saint to be most expressive of Bokenham's authorial anxiety. Like Winstead and Jenkins, Price notes that much of her rhetorical and scholarly

¹¹⁵ Price, "Trumping Chaucer," 159.

speeches have been removed. However, Price notices a change within the speech she does give, and has been the first to recognize that Bokenham has replaced Katherine's philosophical retort with an almost completely faithful translation of the Nicene Creed: "but for a few articles, Katherine's speech is a spirited recitation of this institutional act of testimony and doxology."¹¹⁶ In other words, Bokenham does not represent a Katherine whose speeches are theologically charged and, in doing so, provides Katherine with a close translation of the Apostle's Creed (or a shortened Nicene Creed) attesting to the Lord's creation of heaven and earth, incarnation in human form as Jesus Christ, and reign in heaven as he awaits those "who are stable in virtue." Price asserts that "It is fair to say then, that Bokenham's Katherine's [sic] rejects elite and rarified intellectual practice in favor of something *everybody knows*."¹¹⁷ I argue that just as the intellectual values of the philosophers are rejected by Katherine and replaced by a simpler, more imitative piety, so are notions of courtly rhetoric and over-ornate English dethroned, and their place is occupied by simple common English.

Yet it is not so simple as Bokenham makes it seem; his modesty at his dialect is a performance, since he does a number of times reflect the courtly style he seems to praise. Katherine's choice in paraphrasing the Creed reflects this, for, "Like Bokenham, Katherine is an accomplished speaker in two modes of discourse: the academic style and ordinary speech."¹¹⁸ This ability to code-switch between high-blown oratory and more accessible and understandable forms of communication is crucial to Bokenham's representation of the saint. Katherine originally attempts reasoned logic, intellectual prowess, but it does not

¹¹⁶ Price, "Trumping Chaucer," 162.

¹¹⁷ Price, "Trumping Chaucer," 165.

¹¹⁸ Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, 94.

persuade Maxentius, who rejects her attempts to use overly rhetorical and confusing speech. When she meets later with the fifty philosophers, she changes strategy; she promises to the philosophers and everyone present that she will speak “pleynly... / Wythowte rethoryk, in wurdys bare / Of argumentatyf dysceptacyoun,” and in doing so, triumphs (ll. 6761-63). The wise men are struck dumb at her recitation and convert bravely in the face of the angry emperor. Similarly, Bokenham shows that he can wield courtly, aureate English, but that he chooses to write in a simple vernacular that everyone can understand. Hilles points out that “Although Bokenham claims numerous times that he is unable to write courtly poetry, he characteristically does so while also utilizing its conventions.”¹¹⁹ Bokenham’s comparison of himself to Vinsauf and Chaucer at the same time that he demonstrates his own rhetorical proficiency becomes then a displacement of that aureate tradition; like Katherine, Bokenham chooses to reject high-blown rhetoric for speech that conveys plain truth.

Bokenham thus locates his legendary within the context of Chaucer’s and Gower’s Ovidianism in order to show his choice not to write about Christian values masquerading in pagan clothing. And although he excuses himself throughout for his rough style and “lewydnesse” (ll. 74, 209), “Bokenham utilizes the voices of the virgin martyrs to transform his dullness into a position of moral superiority.”¹²⁰ If Bokenham is following in Chaucer and Gower’s approaches, then the women of his legendary become figurative surrogates for Bokenham’s commentaries about English and his strategies of translation. For Chaucer and Gower, these women’s voices were restricted and made appropriate for a

¹¹⁹ Carroll Hilles. “Gender and Politics in Osbern Bokenham’s *Legendary*.” *New Medieval Literatures* 4 (2001): 189–212, 203.

¹²⁰ Hilles, “Gender and Politics in Osbern Bokenham’s *Legendary*,” 191-2.

Christian audience, and their stories were made to adhere closely to the masculine hermeneutic structures that are both the structure and *raison d'être* of the following tales. Their manipulation and stabilization of these once-outspoken voices represents the manipulation and stabilizing of the vernacular. Bokenham's saints, then, can be interpreted in the same way; his women become true saints delivering simple lessons, and his English conveys words and concepts in a straightforward way, without the need of external or multilingual glossing.

CHAPTER IV

LITERARY FERTILITY AND THE REPRODUCTION OF AUTHORITY

This chapter continues to discuss how Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham modified the stories they translated, focusing on prevalent metaphors of fertility in their sources and their translations, and considers how these narrative metaphors express the authors' optimism about the possibilities for vernacular English translation. Compared to romance languages such as French and Italian, English had not yielded large-scale translations of classical or scriptural Latin material. And while the contemporary rhetoric described English as a language lacking in the verbal and structural support to deal with international, scholarly, or spiritual issues, French and Italian had borne translations of classical authoritative writers and intertextual consolidations and adaptations of classical material, as in *Le Roman de la Rose* or Dante's *Commedia*. English, which did not have the deep romantic roots shared by French, Italian, and Latin, had neither the vocabulary or grammatical structure to easily translate some texts without what seemed to be a drastic strain to remain true to, or bear the fruit of, the meaning of the original text. These concepts of fertility and infertility were rooted in the ways in which medieval readers and writers thought about language, grammar, and hermeneutic activities like translation. Metaphors associating writing with sexual reproduction, writing with plowing or sowing, and sexual reproduction with plowing or sowing are deeply ingrained in Western rhetoric and literature, and these reproductive metaphors were used strategically by Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham to highlight their own literary labors. In this chapter, I explore metaphors of agro-sexual fertility and its use by medieval writers as a vehicle for

discussing vernacular translation. The first part of this chapter explores literary themes of both sexual and agricultural fertility, and then discusses the particular importance of these metaphors for Middle English writers. Then, I provide a close analysis of how Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham each adapt these themes of fertility, pointing out how they omit or amplify certain narrative details. I argue that their manipulation of these tales and the genre of the Catalog of Women are a dramatization of their goals to create a fertile vernacular.

The activity of reproduction and the sexual organs themselves have long been associated with rustic and agricultural vocabulary, and “these metaphors were quite popular in medieval Latin poetry.”¹²¹ J. N. Adams writes that

The frequency (in Latin and other languages) of the metaphor of the field, garden, meadow, etc. applied to the female pudenda reflects in part the external appearance of the organ, and in part the association felt between the fertility of the field and that of females. The metaphor complements the verbal metaphors of sowing and ploughing used of the male role in sexual intercourse.¹²²

This is hardly surprising, since these metaphors of plowing and sowing are still in regular use today in both formal and slang discourse. The connection highlights two things: (1) the similar end-goal of reproduction in which the female body is a receptacle for the male seed and (2) a physical, and often violent, act upon a female body (the act of the plow slicing through the soil). Reproduction and violence are also highlighted in similarly long-standing metaphors that associate writing and sexual reproduction. Both Jean de Meun’s

¹²¹ J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 24.

¹²² Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 82-83, 154-5.

Roman de la Rose and Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* use the ancient connection between the pen and the phallus, which impregnates the feminine page with written language and the feminine word with meaning. In *De Planctu Naturae*, Alain de Lille constructs a parallel between the rules of Nature regarding sexual intercourse with the rules of grammar and rhetoric. Venus is here Dame Nature's appointed servant, given two "hammers" that must not stray from their work on the anvil, and Nature also explains:

Ad officium etiam scripture calamum prepotentem eidem fueram elargita, ut in competentibus cedulis eiusdem calami scripturam poscentibus quarum mee largitionis beneficio fuerat conpotita iuxta mee orthographie normulam rerum genera figuraret, ne a proprie descriptionis semita in falsigraphie deuia eumdem deuagari minime sustineret.

*[I had also bestowed on her an unusually powerful writing-pen for her work so that she might trace the classes of things, according to the rules of my orthography, on suitable pages which called for writing by this same pen and which through my kind gift she had in her possession, so that she might not suffer the same pen to wander in the smallest degree from the path of proper delineation into the byways of pseudography.]*¹²³

Venus, goddess of Love and thus reproduction, is here given the tools of hammer and pen, both sexually intended puns. In *Le Roman de la Rose* and in Alain de Lille's text, Genius is responsible in both for excommunicating those who do not reproduce, or who do not

¹²³ Alanus de Insulis, *De planctu naturae*, ed. Nikolaus Häring, *Studi medievali*, 19 (1978): 806–79, 845–46; translation by James J. Sheridan, *The Complaint of Nature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), p. 156.

reproduce correctly. And in her introduction to *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, Carolyn Dinshaw explains that

literary activity has a gendered structure, a structure that associates acts of writing and related acts of signifying—allegorizing, interpreting, glossing, translating—with the masculine and that identifies the surfaces on which these acts are performed, or from which these acts depart, or which these acts reveal—the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning—with the feminine.¹²⁴

A number of contemporary authors use the metaphor of wheat to talk about their process of writing, including English writers who saw themselves harvesting the leftovers of earlier writers. Chaucer uses this metaphor in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, most extensively in the G version:

For wel I wot that folk han here-beforn
Of makyng ropen, and lad away the corn;
And I come after, glenyng here and there,
And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere
Of any goodly word that they han left. (*Prol. G*, ll. 61-65)

The metaphor is used by a number of Middle English poets writing in the late fourteenth century, indicating an increasing feeling of awareness of belatedness. Chaucer also uses the metaphor in the *Nun's Priest Tale*: “Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille” (ll. 3443), and in the *Parlement of Foules*.¹²⁵ The image is found in Higden's *Polychronicon*

¹²⁴ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 9.

¹²⁵ For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,

and in Trevisa's English translation of it (c. 1360), and Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love* (c. 1387) also uses the image: "Yet also have I leve of the noble husbunde Boece, although I be a straunger of conninge, to come after his doctrine, and these grete workmen, and glene my handfuls of the shedinge after their handes."¹²⁶ Usk laments that he has come after these "grete workmen" and picks up whatever "conninge" has been left behind. Lydgate also utilizes the metaphor for his *Troy Book* to talk about his source, Guido,¹²⁷ emphasizing the danger of forgetting the past and the work of the *auctores*.

In these texts, literary production is associated with sexual reproduction in conjunction with musings on the importance of citing *auctores* and reproducing important texts. These English poets present themselves as harvesters of old texts, preparing wheat for new English readers. While they lament their belatedness, they insist upon continuing the harvest for the sake of their readers. The connections between these metaphors are concerned with the reproduction of male authority and the perpetuation of established patriarchal lineages. Dinshaw's identification of "literary creation as a dissemination, a scattering of seed,"¹²⁸ is reflected in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3-23, the story of Christ's parable of a sower whose thrown-down seed performed better in different kinds of suitable soils. While some seed fails to take root on poor soil, some is devoured by birds on the wayside, and some seed finds good ground and bring forth plentiful fruit. In

And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh all this newe science that men lere. (ll. 22-25)

¹²⁶ Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love*, in *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 4.

¹²⁷ I gan the prolog to beholde
Of Troye Boke [Guido's text], imade be dayes olde,
Wher was remembrid, of au(c)tors us befor,
Of the dede of the verreie trewe corn,
So as it fil severid from the chaf (ll. 99-103)

¹²⁸ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 14.

the Middle Ages, hermeneutical practices tend to interpret this story as the spreading of Christian message. After telling this parable to a large crowd, he privately explains why he speaks in parables, and this explanation is given only to his chosen disciples. In the realm of translation, this parable could stand for the act of planting a text within a new language. The language becomes the soil, which is meant to nurture and give shape to the masculinized underlying meaning, and to translate is to bring the meaning of the original text to “fruition” within the soil of the new language. A fertile soil would have the capabilities to bring forth a strong new translation while a barren field could not, because it cannot provide an environment to properly nurture the seed. Similarly, to translate is to risk falling on improper soil, and, as the parable indicates, to fall on improper soil, such as English, is to fail to comprehend or convey the message: the seed does not sprout. An unsuitable target language like English would fail to convey the sense of the source text. This is a major concern for anti-Wycliffites, who were worried that translating Scripture into English just was not possible because the letter could not support the text’s meaning; the spirit or meaning of the text would be lost because English could not properly illustrate that meaning to its readers. Translating Scripture or texts written by the esteemed *auctores* into English would be like translating an issue of *Vogue* magazine into Klingon: there are likely not the words and cultural references to properly support the source text, and meaning would be lost to the target text’s readers.

There are multiple instances of Middle English writers describing their language and poetic abilities as “barren”; Lydgate utilizes the metaphor for his *Troy Book*; he prays to Mars in his opening lines:

So be myn helpe in this grete nede

To do socour my stile to directe,
And of my penne the tracys to correcte,
Whyche *bareyn* is of aureat lycour,
But in thi grace I fynde som favour
For to conveye it wyth thyn influence,
That submbleth ay for faute of eloquence
For to reherse or writen any word. (my emphasis, ll. 28-35)

He asks Mars to guide his pen, to correct his written words that are “barren” and lack eloquence. For English writers such as Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham, the figure of the abandoned barren woman, unable to sustain and propagate a stable heroic lineage, is a metaphor for the inability of English at the time to properly convey or bear the fruit of meaning in translation. The stories of Ovid’s *Heroides* are rife with parricide, filicide, and fratricide and signal the end of patriarchal lines; a perfect metaphor for English’s barbaric destruction of meaning through translation.

There are many medieval tales of abandoned, love-stricken women who are not part of any larger collection yet could similarly be recognized as part of this literary tradition: Boccaccio’s *Fiammetta*, Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre au Dieu de L’Amour*, and the numerous individual medieval retellings of Dido’s tragedy. These women’s stories are just as tragic, and often likewise result in the loss of family and heirs. However, Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and Bokenham’s collections are particularly important because they participate in the “Catalog of Women” genre: collections of tales about individual women from heroic myth. This genre offered writers, including Hesiod, Homer, and Ovid, an opportunity to participate in the reproduction of poetic myth and communal history. Because of the

genre's association with history, literary authority, and empire, the women's own patrilineal relationships are generally of central importance to the genre. Themes of infertility and destroyed family lines are picked up by these three English writers *because* they provided a chance for the authors to address the translatory abilities of English. While more classical examples of collections and catalogs of exemplary women praised female fertility and the establishment of patriarchal lines, Ovid's heroines destroy those lineages and find themselves abandoned without hope of bearing children. The English writers, by translating specifically Ovid's *Heroides*, latch onto and highlight anxieties about their inability to participate in established literary circles with roots in Latin.

The genre is a classical one that was still used during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and many earlier catalogs, including those by Virgil, Juvenal, and Jerome, were widely consumed and cited.¹²⁹ I identify four important features of the catalog of women:

1. they feature a list of women, sometimes Christian, sometimes pagan,
2. they collectively define standards of femininity, generally via passivity, fertility, fidelity, nobility,
3. while they present themselves as laudatory catalogs of famous women, the real interest lies in these women as mothers of heroes, as passive vehicles for divine male lineage,

¹²⁹ These catalogs of women are defined by Glenda McLeod as "lists—sometimes found in other works, sometimes found alone—enumerating pagan and (sometimes) Christian heroines who jointly define a notion of femineity." Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 1-5. There are other catalogs that do not have to do with women in particular, but are still centrally interested in recording lineages: cf. Genesis 10 with descendants of Noah, Jessie Trees, or many examples in Arthurian literature.

4. they are sites of authorial citation because they allowed for borrowing and translation from authoritative sources.

The central drive behind these collections are not to particularly laud individually praiseworthy women, but to show a generalized, idealized woman who is the vehicle of heroic expansion and epic narrative. The best example of this is Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*,¹³⁰ which reconstructs Greek epic and myth through the listing of mortal women who bore legendary children to the gods and, in fact, devotes its final book, Book V, to Helen and her abduction, thus culminating in the Trojan War. While Homer includes a similar catalog and genealogy during Odysseus's descent into Hades (11.225-332), Hesiod's catalog charts the development of the race of humanity through the human women who bore children to the gods, lauding these women for their fertility and for bearing the race of men down to the events of the Trojan war. A collection like Hesiod's and shorter catalogs found in the *Odyssey* or *Aeneid* highlight the importance of women as facilitators of these heroic patriarchal lines and allows for masculine and patriarchal form of poetics in which women are the facilitators of poetic authority and citation. In other words, Virgil cites Homer, who cites Hesiod, and Ovid cites them all. The presentation of ideal forms of femininity becomes a form of masculine citation and reproduction.

However, while Hesiod's women are praised repeatedly for their reproductive associations, when Ovid makes the move to produce his own catalog of women, his

¹³⁰ "After the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, the poem in five books known as the *Catalogue of Women* or *Ehoiai* was, until the fourth century AD, the most widely read of the poems that anciently went under the name of Hesiod, and the one most consistently attributed to him." M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1. The text as we have it is fragmentary, likely reaching its most complete form in the 6th century BCE, but was known and cited in Augustan poetry.

characters are noted for their abandonment and the destruction of patrilineal lines by their hands.¹³¹ Rather than a celebration of fertility and the procreation of men, Ovid's women tend to signal or outright destroy the great lineages they are part of. Medea, granddaughter of the Sun, and Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, not only run away with their fathers' enemies, but sacrifice their brothers' lives as well. Medea was also infamous for the murder of her two sons by Jason. Canace, Hypsipyle, and Hypermnestra are all involved in situations that threaten male progeny. Even though not every woman mentioned in Ovid's *Heroides* specifically kills off their husbands or their fathers' lines, their abandonment by their lovers implies that they will not have the opportunity to bear children to their partners: abandonment on an island does not leave Ariadne much opportunity to bear children.¹³² So where Hesiod's *Catalogue* provided a genealogical history of mankind and its heroes, Ovid's *Heroides* catalogued the absence or destruction of those genealogies.

Each of these Middle English collections amplify Ovid's theme of barren women through their decisions about which women's stories to include in their own collections. All the women that these authors choose to include in their collections have deep patriarchal anxieties associated with their stories. The stories would, for the reader, be associated with deaths of heirs and great dynasties cut short. It is not my intent to say that Ovid was making an association between his own use of his literary sources and his choice

¹³¹ "The two poems share an important feature, the angle on famous women and their lovers, and the Ovidian work frequently refers back to a tradition on divine amours as a kind of previous stage, now that the single *Heroides* move on to famous boy-meets-girl stories like Leander or Acontios. Perhaps the influence of *Catalogue of Women* deserves more attention." Philip Hardie, "The Hesiodic *Catalog of Women* and Latin Poetry," in *The Hesiodic Catalog of Women: Constructions and Reconstructions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 287–98, 297.

¹³² It is an interesting addendum, then, to her story when later she is said to marry Bacchus, the god of fertility.

of women; his intent is outside the scope of my project. But I do want to say that my English writers were making this metaphor/association between the barren woman and the inability to bear meaning, to properly function as a vehicle for literary matter and fame. Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham are likewise participating in the genre or mode of catalog of women and, like Ovid, focus intently on women who are disruptors of family lines rather than on famous fertile matrons. They too are obsessed with the ends of male lines and deaths of heirs, an interest that, I argue, stems from their anxiety about English's ability to accurately convey the meaning of a source text. And yet, through the manipulations of these stories and their sources, and through the resolutions these authors provide, we see the authors deftly establishing their vernacular texts as viable examples of a fertile vernacular that can be reproduced. As they choose to restrict or appropriate (make appropriate) the pagan women's stories (make appropriate for a Christian audience), they likewise manipulate and change the English language, extending and manipulating the vocabulary and thus making it something that actually *can* give birth to the meaning of source materials.

Across the three collections, women who are not introduced by their father's nobility or status is rare; women whose noble parentage is unnamed is rarer.¹³³ The writers are so obsessed throughout the tales about the women's noble parentage, almost as though to make it more tragic at the end when family lines are destroyed. Almost every story in question, both those adapted from Ovid and those added in, feature some sort of familial crisis, and while representations of women wronged in love is presented as the focus, the persistence of broken noble lines in these tales must be connected with the English authors

¹³³ Those whose fathers are not central to the introduction of the women's stories still refer repeatedly to the heroes' own noble "degre" or royal ancestry.

worry (however feigned) that English would fail to bring forth the true meaning of the source text.

Dido, Medea, Phyllis, Ariadne are shared among all four of the texts in question: Ovid's, Chaucer's, Gower's, and in Bokenham's correlating saints. Each of these women in Chaucer's and Gower's collections, falling for foreign men, are eventually faced with exile or eventual communal ousting. Chaucer also includes Hypermnestra and Hypsipyle from the *Heroides*; Gower includes Penelope, Deianira, and Canace. Hypermnestra, Medea, Ariadne, and Hypsipyle are all involved in (at least potential) murders of brothers or fathers, and Medea outright kills her two sons. There are other examples of filicide and fratricide in the *Legend* that Chaucer includes from other sources, including Lucrece, Thisbe, Cleopatra, and Philomela. Each of them is responsible for the deaths of their family lines, and many of the women commit suicide out of grief. On the other hand, Bokenham's exemplary virgins dedicate themselves to Christ, often going against their parent's wishes and rejecting powerful suitors. Their vehement chastity threatens their influential and esteemed lineages, which Bokenham takes great pains to emphasize.

I argue that these three Middle English writers are calling attention to themselves specifically as adaptations and translations of Ovid's *Heroides*; however, while Ovid counteracts the Hesiodic catalog to show a series of women who are infertile, Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham themselves counteract Ovid by defending, ignoring, or modifying the threat these women pose to family lines. They are interested in showing that English *can* be a good model and can perpetuate and "bear" new texts. Just as the "barren" women and women responsible for the ends of the family lines *can* be manipulated enough in these translations so that they are good models for Christian wives. Beginning with the *Legend*

of Good Women, we see a move to sympathize with these women: Chaucer elides their bad deeds to focus on the heroes' cruelty, Gower creates great sympathy for his female characters, and Bokenham (following Chaucer) makes them into saints. Chaucer at times intensifies these crimes and anxieties, sometimes assuages and even buries them. He makes Dido pregnant, he doubles Hypsipyle's children that Jason left behind, mirroring the two children he will lose by Medea. Chaucer also hides some of the bad deeds done by the women who he now presents as good. Cleopatra's infidelities and murders are ignored, Medea's and Ariadne's assistance in their brothers' murders is left out, as is Procne's murder and culinary preparation of her sons.

I would like to follow Carolyn Dinshaw in identifying Chaucer's model in this manipulation of the women's stories in Jerome's literary metaphor for Deuteronomy, and then I would like to expand that association to consider how this represents Chaucer's treatment of English. Chaucer's Christian hermeneutical approaches (hagiographical structure, formal confession structure) make the women into idealized models of virtue that the reader can interpret and learn from, a mirroring of Jerome's interpretation of Deuteronomy regarding the use and translation of pagan stories, metaphorized as a captive foreign woman. The particular passage in question, Deuteronomy 21:10-13, describes how Israelite soldiers might, if inspired by her beauty, take a captive Gentile woman as a wife. Jerome uses this to allegorize the Christian writer's use of pagan stories. Jerome was working within a Pauline tradition that saw poetic and ornamental trappings of a story as carnal, feminine, unstable, and distracting from the masculine wisdom of the text, and

extend that gendered metaphor.¹³⁴ As we will see, as Chaucer attempts to make these women models of virtue, so does he attempt to make English a virtuous medium of translation.

Jerome's interpretation of Deuteronomy was to be a metaphor for the way Christian writers *can* use a pagan text. The passage in question describes how one might take in the captive woman, pare her down, strip her, shave her, and then eventually she would be made acceptable for reproducing good citizens of Israel. In the same way, Christian writers could take in an attractive pagan text, scrape away its unattractive pagan qualities, and redress it in Christian wisdom, making it something that can participate in the spread of the Christian message. In Jerome's metaphor, the scraping tool of the scribe and the stylus are worked upon the body of the text, making it suitable for the reproduction of Christian texts. Dinshaw explains that "the alien woman, of an enemy people, has been won by the triumphant warrior; her pagan seductions have been removed, but her essential beauties are nurtured by washing, shaving, and clothing and are now put to Christian use."¹³⁵ For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on how Chaucer and Gower translate and adapt the tales of Ariadne and Medea, and I will explore how Bokenham responds to those two tales with his own Mary Magdalene and St. Agnes. The reason for choosing these two tales is

¹³⁴ And we know to value a text simply for its literal features is dangerous. For example, in *De doctrina christiana* (3.5) Augustine warns that we must

beware of taking figurative expression literally...For when what is said figuratively is taken as it were literally, it is understood in a carnal manner... Now it is surely a miserable slavery of the soul to take signs for things, and to be unable to lift the eye of the mind above what is corporeal and created, that it may drink in eternal light. (56)

Augustine did not see the value in pagan fable, and dismissed it "as worthless precisely because he considered it to have only false or empty 'spirit' below its enticing letter." (Augustine *De doctrina christiana*, 3.7.)

¹³⁵ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 23.

that Medea and Ariadne's tales represent two of the most destructive tales when it comes to inheritances: both facilitate the deaths of their brothers and elope with foreign princes, who in turn abandon them and leave them alone in exile.

Ovid's tale of Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, is embedded within a long-lasting conflict between Crete and Athens, ruled by Theseus's father Aeson. Minos's son was killed while visiting Athens, and the result of the following war was Minos's decree that children from Athens would be sent as sacrifices to the Minotaur: the unnatural offspring of Minos's wife, Pasiphae, and a bull. When Theseus is himself sent to face this fate, Ariadne falls in love with him, and she helps him escape with the promise of marriage; her aid comes in the form of a thread, *fil* in French, the same word for "son." She and her sister escape with Theseus, but while resting on a desert island, Theseus cruelly abandons Ariadne and takes her sister Phaedra home to wed instead. Ariadne is left abandoned on an uncivilized, uncultivated island, making a tragic end of a tale about unnatural offspring and family lines cut short. Theseus returns home to find that his father has killed himself, thinking Theseus to be dead, and in the end, Phaedra herself falls for Theseus's son.

Ovid's Medea, daughter to King Aeëtes of Colchis, is perhaps the most disruptive and violent of all the *Heroides*; she commits treason and runs away with a foreign prince, Jason. Jason has been sent to far-flung Colchis to obtain the Golden Fleece by his uncle, King Pelias, who stole the Thessalian throne from Jason's father and who hopes Jason will die on this dangerous journey. As in Ariadne's tale, Medea falls in love with the handsome prince and vows to aid him in return for refuge in marriage. When Medea and Jason escape after winning the Golden Fleece, a powerful family heirloom, she helps kill her brother and

cut up his body to leave a trail that will slow her father's troops. Later, once they have returned to Thessaly, she deceives the daughters of Jason's uncle into brutally murdering him, and, perhaps most infamously, she kills her own children by Jason after she learns he is leaving her for a rich new wife, whom she also kills. It is clear that both stories, as representatives of the larger collections they are found in, find their plots and characters motivated largely by issues surrounding royal lines and the fear of their destruction.

When Chaucer adapts these stories in his *Legend of Good Women*, he draws attention to the role that lineage plays in the tragedies' endings. Chaucer makes modifications to his sources¹³⁶ to highlight the importance of lineage to the characters. He begins by describing how Ariadne's brother, Androgeus, heir to King Minos of Crete, was sent to Athens and "was slayn, lernynge philosophie, / Ryght in that citee, nat but for envye" (ll. 1898-9). In 27 lines, Chaucer describes how Minos besieged Alcathe in Athens and his victory with the help of the king's daughter, Scylla, who had fallen in love with Minos (a tale that mirrors the coming relationship between Theseus and Ariadne). Athens is sentenced by Minos to send "From yer to yer hire owene children dere / For to be slayne right as ye shal here" (ll. 1926-7). While we know from the *Metamorphoses* (and *Heroides*) that the Minotaur's lineage lies with Ariadne's mother, Pasiphae, whom Poseidon cursed to lust after and copulate with a bull. The result was the half-man, half-bull known as the Minotaur, and it was this creature that the children of Athens were fed to. However, Chaucer makes no mention of the scandalous origins of the Minotaur nor of his relationship to Ariadne and her sister Phaedra, hiding the inappropriate reproductive themes that haunt the classical version. However, Chaucer does portray an Ariadne eager

¹³⁶ Other than Ovid's *Heroides*, Skeat cites *Metamorphoses* vii.456-8 and viii.6-176.

to benefit from Theseus's position; she repeatedly laments that such a tragic fate should befall a duke's son and is overjoyed by the prospect of becoming a duke's wife.

Chaucer perhaps follows Jerome's invitation to treat the pagan story as a wife to be scraped clean and made appropriate most closely in his translation of Medea's tale.

Chaucer's translation of the Medea story is rather short, only ninety-nine lines. Her tale is actually only the second part of Legend IV, which is shared with Hypermnestra's own abandonment by the same man, Jason, making Legend IV more about Jason's exploits than about either individual woman. Chaucer provides background from Guido de Colonna's *Historia Troiana* until l. 1655, at which point he switches over to a close borrowing from Ovid's letter, eventually ending his tale with a suggestion that the reader consult Ovid's letter if they wish to read more (ll. 1678-9). His brevity in retelling Medea's story is a result of Chaucer's excision of those characteristics that made Medea most threatening. There is no mention of her own brother, about her father's anger at Jason's request for the Golden Fleece, nor about even the death of her sons. She is King Aeëtes's "doughter and his eyr" (l. 1598), and later laments that her love for Jason was strong enough to makes her leave "hire fader and hire herytage" (l. 1666). Without the murder of her two sons, Medea becomes *much* less of a threat to established patrilineage. She does not kill her sons or her brother, she does not aid Jason's cousins in killing their father, King Pelias, and there is not mention of her lashing out at Jason's "thridde wif," daughter of King Creon (l. 1660). In "paring down" the details of Medea's story in his translation to make her more palatable for a Christian audience, as Jerome instructs, he removes all the defining details. Medea's story has become no different from Ariadne's or Phyllis's or Scylla's.

As Chaucer opens his Medea's section of Legend IV, he writes against Jason's own tendency to move seamlessly from woman to woman:

As mater apetiteth forme alwey
And from forme into forme it passen may,
Or as a welle that were botomles,
Ryght so can false Jason have no pes. (ll. 1582-85)

This comment on Jason's pattern of seducing and abandoning women calls attention to the textual/sexual metaphors discussed above: just as matter always wants form, and continuously passes from form to form, Jason will continually pursue women. Jason is the "masculine" matter, or subject/meaning of a text, while the women are the "forms" he seeks to pass through. As Jerome instructs, Chaucer has scrubbed these women clean in order to make them acceptable not just to a Christian audience, but to his patron, the God of Love. Ariadne and Medea both are made more palatable, and are reduced and reclothed in hagiographic similitudes. Their reproductive danger is scraped away. Similarly, Chaucer presents an English that is modeled on French and Latinate exemplars, establishing the heroic couplet as the vehicle for English epic.

As I explained in Chapter II, Gower's *Confessio* concludes with his exile from Venus's court of Love; he is told to give up the pursuit of his beloved and to leave off the labors of love because, put simply, he is become too old. But it is not just the implicated age difference between him and his beloved that is the issue. Gower is past the age of engaging in physical reproduction; his love and courtship of the lady is misguided because

it cannot end in an acceptable reproductive relationship.¹³⁷ Venus and Genius both suggest Gower turn his pursuit to more fitting activities, like writing, which they insinuate is adequate replacement for sexual reproduction. Venus explains that Amans cannot “plow his field” (ll. 2421–27), which is reminiscent of similar imagery used in Jean de Meun’s portion of *Le Roman de la Rose*. The tales that follow can then be understood as the offspring that Amans cannot produce. Throughout the *Confessio*, Gower emphasizes those activities that are beneficial to the community as a whole, including agricultural labor and writing. He explains in his *Prologue* that he intends to write the *Confessio* for the common good, and he is writing during a time when the ravages and deaths caused by plague outbreaks highlighted a need for dedicated agricultural workers.¹³⁸ While Gower’s *Confessio* may not be a clear example of the catalog of women genre, his collection of successful and unsuccessful love is clearly indebted to the genre, emphasizing a number of its themes of fertility and patrilineage throughout the tales.

Gower compares writing to plowing a number of times in his stories. In Book III (Wrath), Genius describes Contention or quarrelling. When Genius asks Amans if he has ever “chid” his love, he vehemently denies it, while also admitting that, just as any person who plows a field, he is bound to slip out a word every once in a while that his lady might find chidding:

Bot so wel halt no man the plowh

That he ne balketh otherwhile,

Ne so wel can no man affile

¹³⁷ The association of Venus and proper sexual reproduction is an important theme of Alain de Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae*, discussed in more detail below.

¹³⁸ See Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love’s Labor from Ovid through Chaucer* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

His tunge, that som time in rape
Him mai som liht word overscape,
And yit ne meneth he no Chestre. (ll. 515-21)

Gower insists that writers and translators work just as hard as manual laborers do:

Thus was non ydel of the tuo,
That on the plogh hath undertake
With labour which the hond hath take,
That other tok to studie and muse,
As he which wolde noght refuse
The labour of hise wittes alle. (ll. 2382–87).

He sees both agricultural work and writing as strong symbols of production, and he sets up plowing as the antithesis of war:

For as the trew man to the plowh
Only to the gaignage entendeth,
Riht so the werreour despendeth
His time and hath no conscience. (ll. 2345-9)

Genius here explains that while the warrior's activities have no beneficial product, the plowman or the farmer is interested in profitable gains. He equates his translation of these exemplary tales with the labor of the fields and highlights his role in literary reproduction: that of the cultivator.

Christine de Pizan also clearly represents her writerly labor as field work in her own catalog of women, *Le livre de la Cité des Dames*. During her conversation with Lady Reason, Christine exchanges Jerome's tools of translation, his shears and scraper, for a

“pioche,” a pickaxe, and attempts to reverse the violence that Jerome advocates for feminine texts. In order to construct her collection, her “cité,” she must first address those men whose writings fostered and reproduced misogynist stereotypes of women; she must clear the foundation. Once Reason instructs Christine to rhetorically “dig” and “strike” and “excavate” at the ground, that is, she instructs her to question the literary practice of slandering women, starting specifically with Ovid. This action coincides with Lady Reason’s explanation of Ovid’s exile and castration (a rare biographical detail in medieval texts). The literal clearing away of bad soil become the figurative clearing away of damaging attitudes to women perpetrated by “corrupt” male *auctores* and writers. For Christine, it is only by castrating Ovid and his followers, his literary descendants, that the ground can then become fertile.

The field Christine picks at has been taken root by previous writers, and as we have seen the metaphor work, she as a later writer must deal with what they have planted. This metaphor is also present in John Florio’s epistolary dedication to his English translation of Montaigne’s *Essays* (1603), where he compares himself to Vulcan, called “to hatchet this Minerva from that Jupiter’s big brain,” helping to bring forth Minerva, who was born out of Jupiter’s head. He calls himself “a foundling foster-father” to the “defective” translation: he is not the father himself, but a cultivator who raises it. He states that “all translations are reputed females, delivered at second hand.” Citing Plutarch, Page DuBois discusses historical instances in which agriculture and the agricultural economy are treated as similar to the activity of sexual reproduction. The woman becomes the passive field and the man the active husband, in both senses of the word: “like the fields of the earth, women must be cultivated, ploughed by their husbands, to ensure a new crop of children, which is

like the crops of the field.”¹³⁹ DuBois explains how the metaphor of woman as field indicates “a space marked off by culture, by human labor....the field is further marked, cut into, and ploughed by the cultivator; the body of the woman is not only the property of her husband but also the space in which he labors, a surface that he breaks open and cultivates, the terrain where his heirs are produced.”¹⁴⁰ Different from the more open metaphor of the life-giving earth, the metaphors of sowing and fields indicate the labor and effort of fathers and husbands to partition and cultivate their property.

Thus, we can imagine the writer and translator as the husband, the text as the passive wife. The description of woman as fields is rife in Ovid’s *Heroides VI*. This is especially clear in Hypsipyle’s letter, in which she addresses Jason after hearing of his affair with Medea. Hypsipyle’s and Medea’s tales are two of the most gruesome and tragic examples of fratricide, filicide, and patricide. Hypsipyle’s home-island was populated solely by women when Jason and the Argonauts arrived, because they had all decided to kill off the male citizens: brothers, husbands, fathers. Hypsipyle is the only citizen to secretly help her father escape. Hypsipyle’s letter is obsessed with metaphors of wheat and fertile fields. She describes Jason as a farmer who has chosen the wrong field (Medea) over the right field (Hypsipyle). As she continues to attempt to convince Jason to return to her, she evokes a deep contrast between herself and Medea. Hypsipyle describes herself as a fertile field compared to Medea’s barrenness: “dos tibi Lemnos erit, terra ingeniosa colenti; / me quoque dotalis inter habere potes” [*Lemnos will be my marriage portion, land kindly-natured to the husbandman*] (l. 117). Dido also refers to the winning of a bride and her

¹³⁹ Page DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 39. See also her chapter on “Field” metaphors of the body in ancient Greece, 39-64 and on “Furrow,” 65-85.

¹⁴⁰ DuBois, *Sowing the Body*, 65.

land as a field. When she questions how Aeneas expects a foreign nation to accept a stranger to their land and to allow him to rule, she asks “quis sua non notis arva tenenda dabit?” [*Who will deliver his fields to unknown hands to keep?*] (l. 16). Perhaps she forgets that this is exactly what *she* did for him. In both cases, the woman becomes a metaphor for their land holdings, a welcome thing to a wandering hero who will find a place not only to build a new nation but also to a great genealogy. She is the vehicle through which he establishes nation and dynasty; however, Ovid’s women are repeatedly abandoned, left behind like untended fields.

Gower, whose fields are partitioned off, also stripes the women down to their essential qualities, but he does not redress them in courtly language like Chaucer and retains many of the tragic actions the women take. Instead, his women are hermeneutically controlled through his Latin glossing and through Genius’s commentary and guiding voice. Gower’s Genius comes from two main sources: Alain de Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae* and *Le Roman de la Rose*. In both, but especially in Alain’s text, he is figured prominently as an authority and regulator of proper reproduction. In Alain de Lille’s *Complaint of Nature*, Genius explains that writing, forging, and plowing are all illuminating metaphors for sexual procreation, invoking metaphors of male sexual activity as the basic model for literary production itself. He explains: “Styluses and tablets, hammers and anvils, plowshares with good sharp points for the use of their plows, and the fallow fields, not stony but rich and verdurous, that need to be plowed and dug deep if one wants to enjoy them.”¹⁴¹ In *Le Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meun’s Genius is also concerned with

¹⁴¹ Ille uero calamum papiree fragilitatis germanum numquam a sue inscriptionis ministerio feriantem, manu gerebat in dextera: in sinistra uero morticini pellem nouacule demorsione pilorum cesarie denudatam, in qua stili obsequentis subsidio imagines rerum

reproductive violence, providing a lengthy diatribe against anyone who would think of castrating a man.¹⁴² Unlike Chaucer, his stories are partitioned off by Genius's instruction to Gower. He labors at each point to understand the interpretation of the tales and apply them to his own actions and thoughts.

In the *Confessio*, Ariadne's story is situated in Book V, dedicated to the sin of Avarice, or greed. Many of the women from the *Heroides* and *Legend of Good Women* can be found in Book V: Ariadne, Medea, Dido, Philomena, Criseyde (Ovid's Briseis), and Helen. Gower introduces interesting changes to the stories, adding details from the *Metamorphoses* to what he borrows from the *Heroides* and the *Legend of Good Women*, emphasizing, like Chaucer, the relationship between translation and genealogy. Like Chaucer's tale, Gower's begins with Ariadne's brother, son and heir to King Minos of Crete, being sent to Athens. He is killed (although here because he was a nuisance rather than out of envy, as Chaucer states) while in Athens, which starts the war between Crete and Athens, which results in the demanded tribute of Athenian children to be imprisoned within the labyrinth. Gower portrays a much less sympathetic family dynamic than

ab umbra picture ad ueritatem sue essentie transmigrantes, uita sui generis munerabat. Quibus delectionis morte sopitis, noue natiuitatis ortu alias reuocabat in uitam. (18.68–74). [In his right hand he held a pen, close kin of the fragile papyrus, which never rested from its task of enfacement. In his left hand, he held the pelt of a dead animal, shorn clear of its fur of hair by the razor's bite. On this, with the help of the obedient pen, he endowed with the life of their species images of things that kept changing from the shadowy outline of a picture to the realism of their actual being. As these were laid to rest in the annihilation of death, he called others to life in a new birth and beginning.]

¹⁴² "Anyone who castrates a worthy man does him a very great shame and injury; for, even though I may say nothing about his great shame and discomfort, still anyone who takes away a man's testicles robs him at least, I have no doubt at all, of the love of his sweetheart, not matter how closely she was bound to him." Genius goes on to explain that whoever castrates a man "robs him especially of the boldness in human ways that should exist in valiant men. For we are certain that castrated men are perverse and malicious cowards because they have the ways of women." (ll. 20037).

Chaucer does, with more problematic versions of Minos, Pasiphae, and their son while the destruction of sons and the production of unnatural offspring drive the opening plot and action. He explains that the Minotaur is the son of Ariadne's mother, Pasiphae, and he explains the construction of the labyrinth as a necessary way to house him. Gower's Ariadne is not the title-hungry girl of Chaucer's *Legend* and vows to help Theseus escape the labyrinth. As an interpretive metaphor, the labyrinth can represent a text that is difficult to understand or interpret, and it can also function as a metaphor of rebirth. Ariadne helps guide him out. She is an interpretive aid. Close read this better and expand. If she is the pagan text, she is helpful in getting to understand our own texts. Theseus's fault lies in not being grateful enough to Ariadne, which results in the lines of many families being compromised.

Gower's retelling of Medea's story is 900 lines longer than Chaucer's, and is also situated within Book V. In addition to the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Heroides*, Gower also borrows from Benoit's *Roman de Troie* (French, twelfth century) and from Guido de Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (Latin, thirteenth century). While Chaucer presents a spotless Medea, Gower acknowledges her crimes, but figures them as just deserts for Jason's ingratitude. Gower presents a much more detailed character in his Medea, a learned and capable herbalist who is more active in her own fate. He expands scenes depicting how Jason and Medea fall in love, and how Medea agreed to teach him how to defeat the trials and win the Golden Fleece. In an intimate scene, reminiscent of Jerome's Deuteronomy metaphor, in which Jason undresses Medea and takes her to bed. It is here, once Jason has stripped away her clothing, that she reveals her secrets on how to win the prize. Medea is a text, a foreign barbarian text, to be interpreted, and she promises

to aid Jason with family secrets. It is only once she is unclothed and once Jason promises to marry her that Medea lays out her full plan to help Jason. She spends time going point by point telling Jason how he can survive the bull, the warriors that spring from the ground, and the dragon, and explains how he can eventually win the Fleece. Afterwards, she dresses and leaves.

When they arrive in Thessaly, Medea uses her skills in herbalism and magic to heal Jason's father Aeson, a scene greatly elaborated by Gower and not present in Chaucer's *Legend*. In the end, when Medea does kill her two children by Jason, it is figured not as her fault but as Jason's, who failed to properly be grateful for her help in curing his father and aiding in his capture of his own father's legacy. The lesson of this particular story is against Avarice; Jason was not grateful for Medea's generous help; it is as though Gower warns us that our own spiritual patrimony is refreshed when approached through pagan material; Medea's aid of Aeson is like the pagan tales aid in helping Christian readers to better understand Scripture's messages.

When Gower speaks of ingratitude to these women, I argue that he is referring to the ingratitude of Christian writers to their pagan forecomers. When Medea helps revive Aeson, it is like the revival of the messages of the Church Fathers being revived through pagan tales. Those who fail to recognize the importance of these old approved books will suffer the fates of Jason and Theseus. Gower uses pagan material throughout in order to draw out the Christian and spiritual message he wants to convey: this is seen in his use of pagan figures drawing discussing pagan stories and romantic love all under the guise of the seven deadly sins and confessional modes. In that sense, he is like a cultivator, caring for his sources, nurturing them to be good mediums through which to discuss Christian and

civic morals. Gower similarly lets his English be simple, yet with Genius's commentary and the Latin hermeneutical structure, along with the strict Christian structure of the confessional, he does not leave room for much miscommunication. He regularly clarifies the boundaries of this experiment, and as he shows us that pagan women can be reined in to present a Christian exemplar, he also shows that English too can be a fruitful vehicle for Christian messages.

The work done by Genius, Amans, and Gower's Latin glosses throughout work to "cultivate" these tales and the English language. We saw earlier that the translator is indeed recognized as a cultivator, bring forth the fruits of another's planting. That labor is mimicked throughout by Genius and Amans, who rope off each tale as though it were a crop field, tending to each in turn dutifully. Similarly, the Latin "fences" in the English, keeping it within bounds and helping it to "grow" meaning for the reader. Jason, on the other hand, is a very undutiful cultivator. We saw earlier that in the *Heroides* that the women described themselves as fertile or infertile fields, the lovers as husbands to those fields. The need of agricultural workers in the decades after the plague led to communal ideas that farmers who abandoned their fields were bad people. Gower, in his *Vox clamantis*, which denigrates the peasants' revolt that was the end result of these issues, disdains those who abandon agricultural work.¹⁴³ Gower himself lamented the revolt and criticized its participants in his Latin work, the *Vox Clamantis*. In the *Vox*, Gower criticizes the failings of all the various estates, but among his criticisms of the third estate is the abandonment of agricultural work. In this sense, Jason, Theseus, and all the heroes who abandon those they swore promises to, those women they impregnated, are represented as

¹⁴³ Sadlek, *Idleness Working*, 175.

abandoners. Gower, on the other hand, takes up the pen/plow and revisits these women. He does not, like Jason, abandon Medea, he picks up her story and finds fruit in it, and the reader finds Christian wisdom in Genius's moral for it.

Like Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham remains obsessed with his saints' lineages and noble ancestors, and fertility and femininity are central anxieties throughout the individual tales. And, as discussed in more detail in Chapter II, Bokenham's main focus of devotion is Saint Margaret, the patron saint of childbirth. In Bokenham's retelling of St. Margaret's life, her final prayer includes a request that God give pity to writers who write her life and pity to women in labor who call for her to help. Bokenham thus figures himself, writing about St. Margaret, to the woman in labor, trying to bring his text to fruition.

Bokenham's collection is particularly interested in not just patrilineal connection, but in matrilineal relationships as well. As in Chaucer's and Gower's collections, Bokenham is sure to mention the parentage of each of the saints he describes. In fact, while translating Voragine's *Legenda*, when certain genealogies for saints were not provided, he included an explanation or apology for its absence.¹⁴⁴ Bokenham often extends the references to divine and strong matrilineal relationships compared to his sources. Bokenham's interest in female lineages has been linked to his loyalty to Yorkist claims to the throne, which was traced via matrilineage. Alice Spencer states that Bokenham "uses the genealogy motif to locate his saintly subjects, his Yorkist patrons and himself as author within a spiritually elite and, crucially, feminine line, which he implicitly opposes to a worldly patriarchy implicitly associated with Lancastrianism and courtly poetics."

¹⁴⁴ Spencer, *Language, Lineage, and Location*, 66-67.

Bokenham foregrounds the mother figure and celebrates female fertility.¹⁴⁵ I argue that this emphasis on female familial connections is connected to Bokenham's vernacular project, especially since he opposes himself to the established poetry of Chaucer and Gower. Throughout the translations and their prologues, Bokenham calls attention to his plain style, especially in contrast to those poets who, by the time Bokenham was writing, were referred to as the fathers of English poetry.¹⁴⁶

I argue that, like Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham strips down these women within his text, while at the same time "stripping and redeeming the fertile, feminine 'mother tongue', uncovering her spiritual fertility—her capacity to multiply the community of the faithful."¹⁴⁷ He asserts his plain style and ultimately claims an authorial identity that rests on "an authentic, incorrupt vernacular voice,"¹⁴⁸ which I claim is connected to his treatment of the stories. I want to highlight this connection between 1) Bokenham's emphasis on lineage, 2) his emphasis on pure, unadulterated English, and 3) his treatment of the tales themselves. I want to continue looking at the adaptations of Ariadne's and Medea's tales, which according to Sheila Delany correspond to Bokenham's tales of Mary Magdalene and St. Agnes.

The prologue to Mary Magdalene's life quickly situates Bokenham within the company of Lady Bouchier, whose pedigree, along with her brother Richard of York, he locates in a paternal grandmother Isabel (daughter of the King of Spain) whose family line depended on her fertility. After a quick aside to mention Isabel's four vibrant young sons and the fact that the beautiful floral details on their clothing exceeds the abilities of

¹⁴⁵ Spencer, *Language, Lineage, and Location*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁴⁷ Spencer, *Language, Lineage, and Location*, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Spencer, *Language, Lineage, and Location*, chapter 3, part 1.

Minerva's weaving, even if she included the whole *Metamorphoses* on the garment, he describes how Lady Bouchier commissions the life.¹⁴⁹ Mary Magdalene is described as the daughter of "þe most wurthy kyn" and descended from "royel blood" (ll. 5369, 5371). Born of a noble line, Mary Magdalene is the redeemed and converted woman, wiped clean of her sins, but I want to focus here on the second part of her tale, after the resurrection when Mary has travelled to Marseilles. Mary and the other disciples are travelling to spread Christianity, and Mary attempts to convert the prince and princess of Marseilles. The pagan monarchs had been barren and desperately wanted a child. The prince and princess convert, and the prince is inspired to travel to hear Paul himself preach, and his wife insists on going with him against his wishes, since she is pregnant. She dies and they have to leave her body and the baby, which was born on board, on a deserted island. The "abandonment" of the princess and the living child on the island is reminiscent of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus. However, once the prince has spent time in Rome with Paul, he passes by the island again and asks to visit his wife's resting place. On the island, the prince spots a toddler running around who, when he sees the man, runs over to the still body of a woman and nurses from her. The prince recognizes his wife and sends a prayer to Mary Magdalene to intercede and his wife is revived. Magdalene's association with rebirth here also recalls similar themes of Ariadne's tale. Rather than dwell on the

¹⁴⁹ Sheila Delany, "Friar as Critic: Bokenham Reads Chaucer," *Mediaevalitas: Reading the Middle Ages*, 1996, 63–79, 69. ["Chaucer's Ariadne opens in Athens; Bokenham's Magdalene opens with an extended reference to Athena. In Ariadne's story, thread is the means by which the heroine assists her lover, Theseus, out of the labyrinth. In Bokenham's Magdalene material, Athena appears as goddess of weaving, and the author makes much of the brilliant clothing of his patrons' children whom he observed data social occasion. Again, a shared image is the link."]

tragedy of Ariadne's plight, Bokenham's Magdalene recalls Ariadne as the bringer of rebirth, gifting the *fil* to Theseus that will lead him out of the labyrinthine underworld.

St. Agnes's tale corresponds to Medea's according to Delany. Here in the prologue to this tale, Bokenham continues to emphasize the ornate style of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, and again distinguishes himself from their style of poetics. This is also a moment where Bokenham makes an overt reference to Chaucer's metaphor of the what and the chaff and laments about coming to late and being exiled from Till's meadow. St. Agnes's tale shares interesting parallels with Medea's and in particular shares some interesting themes with Gower's Medea. Just as Medea reinvigorates Aeson, Agnes likewise (and also in private) revives the prefect's son with Christ's salve. She is repeatedly accused of witchcraft, and Medea is always the woman associated with witchcraft. St. Agnes is the one figure whose lineage is not immediately highlighted by Bokenham; while her lineage is of course still noble, Bokenham does not mention her parents until midway through the story. Her antagonists throughout are a prefect and his son. She rejects this son's advances, and thus begins a slippery slide into her accusations and torture. All of the threats to Agnes are in relation to men raping her and taking her virginity. Throughout the rest of the story, the prefect and his son repeatedly attempt to coerce, shame, and bully Agnes into conceding to the son's wishes. Eventually, she is arrested and forced to choose between two alternatives: to serve the goddess Vesta in her temple, where she can remain a virgin and honor her family, or to be forced into a brothel and into forced prostitution, which would shame her family.

She refuses to serve the pagan goddess; she says that the pagan gods cannot communicate with their people; they cannot say what they want from us in "our language."

Agnes damns to hell all those who forged these idols; she warns that the materiality of the pagan gods is bad, they contain no spirit or meaning. I argue that Bokenham is referring here to the use of pagan stories to convey Christian truths, and I argue he is of the opinion that it is truly wrong, that there is no good to be taken from the example of pagan models since they are empty idols. Following that logic, he would seem to be damning those authors that he sees to be praising throughout this manuscript, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, who certainly rely on pagan material for their English translation projects. Agnes refuses to participate in the Jeromian attempts to sexualize and reclothe her. After choosing the brothel over the temple, Agnes once again accused of being a witch and is stripped down and primed for forced intercourse. However, rather than allowing them to penetrate or reclothe her, Agnes covers herself completely with her hair, and Bokenham notes that her own hair from her own body covers her better than the clothes she had previously been wearing. Stripped down to the core, Agnes, as a text, is able to sustain herself and clothe herself. The Christian meaning does not need the help of pagan ornament to truly portray itself, just as English does not need foreign ornament to be acceptable and portray true meaning of scriptural matter. She is then covered by an angel with a white stole, which shines brightly. The brothel becomes a holy place because of the presence of St. Agnes. She is able to turn something lewd and sinful into something holy; in the same way, a true spirit or meaning of a text should be able to shine through the language, no matter how lowly the language or the translator is.

She converts many of those in the brothel, including the prefect's son's friends. The prefect's son attempts to go in and rape her, but is immediately strangled by a devil. When the prefect comes to her outraged, she agrees to bring him back to life, and asks for privacy

for her prayers, much like Medea when attempting to revitalize Aeson. I argue that Bokenham's Agnes is meant to be a rejection of Gower's translation strategy. For Gower, Medea is a facilitator, Gower shows that through her, our own patriarchal Christian themes can be enhanced and understood; it is only when Jason rejects that aid that she retaliates with her destruction of many lines. However, there is a difference in Bokenham's story of Agnes and how she helps the prefect's son. She does sooth him, however, in the end the prefect's son's attempts to strip and violate her are thwarted by the sanctity and purity of her body's underlying truth and divinity.

I argue that Bokenham is trying to get out from under the weight of both (a) pagan allegory/narrative/referencing and back to direct experience with a Christian message, and (b) continental ornament and models which make English poetry inaccessible to many readers. He wants to show a pure and simple English expressing a pure and simple Christian message. As a final thought, I want to mention Jerome's own collection of women, the *Adversus Jovinianum*, which presents a number of virtuous virgins, and ultimately counters the idea that if all Christians were virgins, then there would be no Christians; he reinforces the importance of chastity and virginity to Christianity and explores the idea that the conversions of those whom exemplary virgins inspire is how Christian spreads its message. In the same way, Bokenham's stories of virgin martyrs spurring on numerous conversions are written in a simple English that he hopes will inspire and become a model for other writers. Bokenham relishes their plainness like he relishes the simplicity of the English he uses. He does not care for reproduction; he believes that his appeal to simplicity is what will in fact reproduce Christians like Jerome advocates with virginity.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

By modern standards, these works by Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham are not “translations.” These works align more with Dryden’s definition of paraphrase, defined alongside metaphrase and imitation in his preface to his edited collection of translations from Ovid’s *Heroides* (1680). It was not until Caxton’s *Metamorphoses* of 1480 that one of Ovid’s works were translated (in our modern sense of “translation,” or Dryden’s “metaphrase”) into English, and the *Heroides* were not available in a translated edition until Dryden’s collection emerged two centuries later. Yet, the themes that Chaucer, Gower, and Bokenham developed in their collections of exemplary, suffering women continued to be relevant for and attractive to English writers even well after the vernacular was standardized and no longer a source of authorial anxiety. They have been important for countless English writers who grapple with the responsibility of interpreting, translating, and adapting classical or authoritative materials. The figure of the long-suffering or abandoned woman had remained crucial to poetic tradition and translation in English, and when authors adapt this figure it often marks important moments in their poetic careers.

Not in the least, in the late-sixteenth century, Thomas Lodge ended his literary career with his *A Margarite of America* (1596), which displays distinctly Ovidian and Chaucerian themes of betrayed love, gendered rhetoric, and tragic misreadings. Like his medieval predecessors, Lodge uses the tale of this suffering and abandoned woman to grapple with his relationship to his writing. Although the vernacular was no longer an

issue, Lodge was no stranger to feeling marginal. Left out of his father's will, ostracized due to his Catholic sympathies, and hounded by creditors, Lodge did not meet with the literary success he perhaps envisioned that would keep him afloat and involved in the London circles he became accustomed to. This essay will first analyze how Lodge adapts Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and the themes of the *Heroides*, particularly exploring the connections between Lodge's heroine and Chaucer's ideal "good woman," Alceste who chose to die instead of her husband. By demonstrating how this relates to Lodge's literary anxieties about poetic influence and political exile, I will show how the text can be defined within Lodge's own *oeuvre* and provide a deeper understanding of his subsequent abandonment of fictional literature. Ultimately, neither Margarita's innocence and naiveté, nor the medieval and romantic forms that she represents, can successfully influence readers in the increasingly imperial and colonial sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries.

Thomas Lodge's *A Margarite of America* is infamous for its violent blend of satire and tragedy and for its clash of classical, medieval, and early modern genres. In the prefatory note "To the Gentlemen Readers," Lodge describes how he discovered this tale while on the fateful sea-expedition to the New World led by William Cavendish, reminiscent of Gower's and Bokenham's prefatory boat excursions. He explains that he found the tale by "chance in the librarie of the Iesuits in Sanctum," and how he translated the tale out of "the Spanish tong" among hungry sailors, although the account is almost without a doubt fictional. The novella's plot turns on typical medieval tropes like betrothals, magic, and exotic locations, but these ideals are repeatedly assailed by modern greed and brutality, and what begins with a hopeful humanism ends in a grim killing-spree. *A Margarite* is the love story of Margarita and Arsdachus, who are betrothed as

part their fathers' peace treaty at the start of the plot, uniting the empires of Cusco and Mosco. While Margarita falls deeply in love with the corrupt Arsadachus, his desires consistently lie elsewhere. A reader of Lodge's earlier works might be surprised by *A Margarite's* dark ending; his earlier pastoral romances like *Forbonius and Prisceria* or *Rosalynde* focus on the ability of love to improve others and ended happily. This text, whose genre fluctuates between chivalric romance and revenge tragedy, instead centers on a character whose innocence and purity cannot survive in a world more invested in Machiavellian machinations and imperialistic brutality than in the penitential formulas that Lodge found himself attracted to. Standing as Lodge's last published literary work, the *A Margarite* betrays Lodge's disillusionment with contemporary literature and politics.

Margarita seems out of place in the story, being more fit for medieval romance than revenge tragedy; she simply cannot function in a world where tyrants stand in for hero-knights. The stage is thus set for an ending that cannot be anything but tragic. Readers can recognize that, as a type of Chaucer's "good women," Margarita must "chose to be ded" rather than "take a newe" lover, which is especially apparent once her mentor Arsinous is unable to convince her of Arsadachus's duplicity or tyranny. Unlike Alceste, Margarita cannot see the hypocrisy of her consort, and so cannot correct it. She represents the medieval forms that served as muse for Lodge, just as Alceste represents the inspirational powers of the daisy. Her brutal murder emphasizes Lodge's intuition that medieval plots and structures were no longer viable in a world of Machiavellian tyrants, greedy councilors, and endless decadence. It is no surprise that this is Lodge's final fiction publication.

Lodge's characterization of Margarita most closely calls attention to Chaucer's *Legend*, not least because of her name. As I explained in Chapter II, the *marguerite* tradition was adapted overtly by Chaucer and Bokenham in their collections and is present to a lesser extent in Gower's frame narrative. Margarita is the ideal chaste and devoted virgin, the narrator describes her as "the chiefest, fairest, and chastest Margarita,"¹⁵⁰ and her epitaph describes her as "a precious pearle in name, a pearle in nature."¹⁵¹ As described in Chapter II, Chaucer's Alceste, Gower's Venus, and Bokenham's St. Margaret of Antioch all functioned as a stand-in *marguerite*, representing the purity and divine reflection embodied in both the pearl and the daisy. This imagery, and the description of the lady as being dressed like a daisy, is appropriated by Lodge to describe Margarita and to firmly place her within the tradition. When Margarita appears at Philenia's wedding with her entourage, Lodge is clearly referencing Chaucer's Alceste:

her alabaster neck was encompassed with a coller of orient perle, which seemed to smile on her teeth when she opened her mouth, claiming of them some consaguinity; her bodie was apparrelled in a faire loose garment of green damaske, cut upon a cloth of tissue, and in euerie cut, was inched a most curious Jewell.¹⁵²

Later, Lodge again describes Margarita appareled like the daisy:

For no sooner gan bright day to chase away blacke darknesse, and the stooping stares doe homage to the rising sunne, but Margarita arose,

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Lodge, "A Margarite of America," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge, 1580-1623*, vol. 3, (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 1-94, 8.

¹⁵¹ Lodge, "A Margarite of America," 93.

¹⁵² Lodge, "A Margarite of America," 26.

apparelling herselfe freshly like Maie, in a gowne of greene sendall,
embrodered with all kind of floures in their native colours.¹⁵³

But Margarita resembles more than just the divine intercessors of these Middle English catalogs. Like those intercessors, Margarita mirrors the themes of the abandoned and suffering women who populate the catalogs. A martyr for love, her tragedy lies with her ill-fated devotion to Arsadachus, a foreign prince who leads her on, leaves her to return home, and takes a new wife. And there are numerous other moments in which Margarita's actions or characterizations mirror that of the women found in the medieval catalogs. For example, the lion that kills Margarita's friend Fawnia but refuses to harm Margarita recalls the lion from Thisbe's tale. Her friend Philenia's fate (not to mention her name), in which Margarita's betrothed rapes her best friend and violently silences her with his sword, resembles the story of Philomela and Procne. When Margarita is asked by Arsadachus to persuade her father that someone is attempting to sneak into his chambers and stab him, she enacts a reflected and inverted version of Hypermnestra's story; Hypermnestra had been instructed by her father to stab her husband on their wedding night, but chooses to warn her husband instead. Thus, like the repetitive nature of the catalogs of women, Margarita consistently functions as an exemplary model.

By placing this pure, naïve, and exemplary figure alongside a deplorable and false Arsadachus highlights Lodge's anxieties about the place of classical literature in a world filled with courtiers steeped in the teachings of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, the latter of which was translated by Thomas Hoby in 1561 as *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio*, the same Thomas Hoby whose widow, Lady

¹⁵³ Lodge, "A Margarite of America," 36.

Elizabeth Russell, is the dedicatee of *A Margarita*. Arsadachus repeatedly exemplifies the values expressed in Machiavelli's treatise and while many characters, including Margarita, praise him for his courtly ways, his language and manners hide a treacherous and false villain. Arsadachus's falseness is perhaps best exhibited when all the young lovers gather in a very medieval garden of love and discourse on the true nature of love and the senses ("the eie, the touch, or the eare") which best convey it.¹⁵⁴ Here, Arsadachus's treachery is highlighted as he pontificates on the importance of sight for love, citing a number of unnatural unions (including Narcissus and Xerxes, who fell in love with a tree). The women in the group politely point out that the eyes cannot always be trusted alone, and Margarita notes that "diuels are not so blacke as they be painted (my Lorde) nor women so wayward as they seeme."¹⁵⁵ However, by the end of the night, Arsadachus realizes he has Margarita's heart completely, and pens two poems to her; one, the one she receives, depicts a conflicted lover, while the other, unsent, betrays his true nature and false behavior:

Iudge not my thoughts, ne measure my desires,
By outward conduct of my searching eies,
For starres resemble flames, yet are no fires:
If vnder gold a secret poison lies,
If vnder softest flowers lie Serpents fell,
If from mans spine bone Vipers do arise,
So may sweet lookes conceale a secret hell,

¹⁵⁴ Lodge, "A Margarite of America," 51.

¹⁵⁵ Lodge, "A Margarite of America," 57.

Not loue [in] me, that neuer may suffice.¹⁵⁶

Margarita repeatedly misreads Arsadachus, in essence because they are “reading” different books. Margarita falls for Arsadachus because it is what women in stories like hers do. She reads Arsadachus as a true lover, because she projects the relationship between Philenia and Minecius onto her relationship and reads Arsadachus as her own Minecius. In this sense, Margarita is like Phyllis, she reads her own situation in light of other lovers’ fortunes, which leads to tragic results. Margarita does everything that a classical or medieval romance heroine might do: she falls in love with the hero from an opposing nation, she performs courtly love and reads it in her lover, and she defies her father by chasing after Arsadachus when he does not return to her. All the while, Arsadachus has mutilated and imprisoned his own father, has taken a new wife, Diana, whose associations with the moon directly opposes the sun-reflecting Margarita, and has borne a child with her. The final tragedy occurs when Margarita reaches Arsadachus’s corrupt court. Sitting down with Diana and their extravagant entourage to feast, Arsadachus suddenly remembers a token from Margarita: a box given to her by Arsinous, which he directed she should “keepe vntill such time as he she loued bests should depart from her” and which she sent to Arsadachus when he left Mosco.¹⁵⁷ Jesting with Diana about owing Margarita such a small remembrance, Arsadachus opens the box and is driven mad by the magic inside. Lodge describes Arsadachus’s violent madness in gruesome details, murdering his closest companion, Diana, and their infant son without remorse. When Arsinous and Margarita reach the city and learn of Arsadachus’s state, Arsinous reveals that the magic inside the box “was such, that if Arsadachus were constant to her, it

¹⁵⁶ Lodge, “A Margarite of America,” 58.

¹⁵⁷ Lodge, “A Margarite of America,” 63.

would increase his affection; if false, it would procure madness.”¹⁵⁸ Even as Arsinous explains to her that this must mean that Arsadachus has betrayed her, Margarita still runs to him and claims him as her spouse. Seeing her, Arsadachus retrieves a rapier and thrusts it through her. The box, like Lodge’s classical and medieval source texts (which, I argue, includes of Chaucer’s and Gower’s collections, if not Bokenham’s as well) is only given power by its interpretation; it is hardly harmful on its own.

Themes of translation are rife in the tale, and false words and their power to damn souls is a prevalent theme carried over from the anxieties expressed in Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and Bokenham’s contemporary politics. While the Middle English translators of this dissertation strive to show that English *can* support classical, scriptural, or Latinate material, Lodge creates an exemplary character that *cannot* survive among the falsity of contemporary court discourse. Just as Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and Bokenham’s women were reflections of the language they were translated into, Margarita represents the failure of true or “pure” meaning to succeed.

Like the Middle English writers that are the focus of this dissertation, Lodge changed the trajectory of his literary career after completing his *Margarite*. While he still published medical treatises after he entered the medical field (he received his physician’s degree while in self-imposed exile in France), his only literary works after *A Margarite* consisted of metaphrastic translations of Josephus (1602) and Seneca (1614). *A Margarita* thus stands as Lodge’s public resignation from literary forms that carry no weight in the rhetoric of contemporary courtliness. These exemplary women fashioned around the figure of the *marguerite*, the daisy, the holy pearl, are thus continually also fashioned as

¹⁵⁸ Lodge, “A Margarite of America,” 88.

metaphors about the ability of words to create meaning for different “readers” and highlight the dangers of misreading and of linguistic falsity.

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