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Women as Figures of Power in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*

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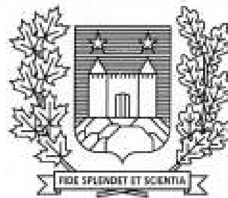

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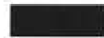

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présenté par:

Lise A. Savard

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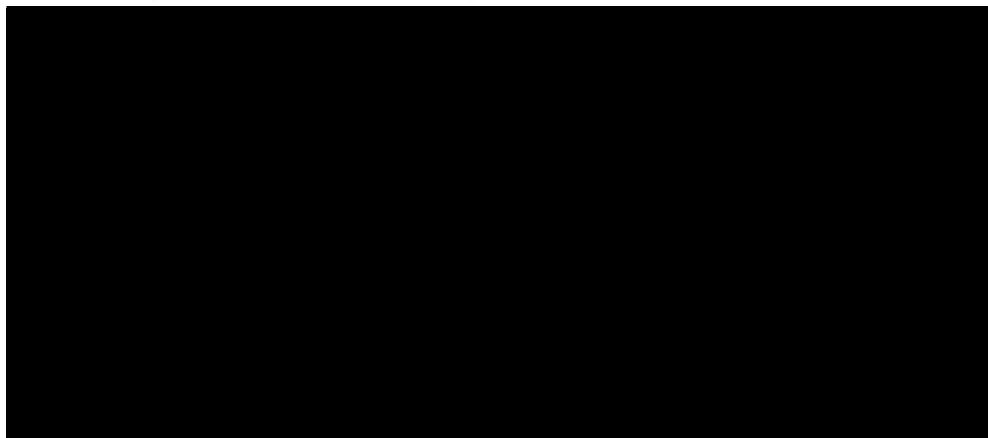

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Abstract

The early modern period shows a gradual rigid enforcement of gender hierarchy. Many economic, political and intellectual changes take place and render obsolete old gender roles before new ones can be created. There is a polarization of society and an enforcement of gender bias through the redefinition of the roles of both women and men. Over this period covering the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, women lose all public and most private power. This thesis seeks to examine the relationship of women to power itself in the period and how it is manifested in the works of two major poets, Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one deals with the historical background and literary context of this loss of power and a distinction is made between power and authority. Chapter two discusses the women in three romances in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, namely, the Knight's Tale, the Franklin's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Tale, and focuses specifically on the figures of Ypolita, Emelye, Dorigen, and the queen and the hag in the Wife of Bath's Tale. Chapter three discusses a few female figures of power in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: Acrasia, Malecasta, Radigund, and Britomart. Acrasia is a lascivious witch who attracts men with a poisonous cup. She weaves a web around the hero and prevents him from returning to his quest.

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Malecasta is a male spright dressed as a woman who succeeds in his seduction of many men. Radigund is an Amazon of the worst kind because she also transforms men into women. She can only be conquered by another Amazon, Britomart, who represents chastity. Britomart relinquishes the power she has gained because her only quest is to find her mate, Artegall, and build a noble race.

We see through the works of Chaucer and Spenser a society which becomes more centered on gender and where women lose power.

Résumé

La période couvrant la fin du Moyen Age et la Renaissance en Angleterre, soit de la fin du quatorzième siècle au dix-septième siècle, a vu une croissance de l'imposition d'une hiérarchie du genre. L'objet de ce mémoire est de déterminer si cette croissance se révèle dans les oeuvres poétiques de l'époque, et plus précisément, dans certains des *Contes de Cantorbéry* de Geoffrey Chaucer pour la période médiévale et dans l'épopée *La reine des fées* d'Edmund Spenser pour la période de la Renaissance.

Le premier chapitre présente les contextes historiques et littéraires de l'époque. Plusieurs changements économiques, politiques et intellectuels ont rendu obsolètes les rôles des femmes et des hommes avant que d'autres n'aient eu le temps d'être inventés. Il y a donc eu une polarisation de la société et une imposition d'un préjugé de genre résultant d'une redéfinition des rôles des hommes et des femmes. Les femmes ont perdu tout pouvoir public et presque tout leur pouvoir privé. Il est important de noter la distinction entre pouvoir et autorité. Le pouvoir implique la possibilité d'influencer les événements politiques alors que l'autorité se réfère plutôt à un pouvoir législatif et reconnu formellement. Au Moyen Age, les femmes avaient certainement le pouvoir mais non l'autorité. En Angleterre, pendant la Renaissance, seule Elizabeth I avait les

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deux mais elle se reconnaissait comme étant une souveraine "ayant un corps de femme mais le coeur et l'estomac d'un roi."

Les définitions de genre, à savoir ce qu'est une femme ou un homme, peuvent être divisées en deux catégories, soit la catégorie biologique et la catégorie sociale. Cependant ces deux catégories étaient inexistantes à l'époque: le mâle était dominant et la femme subordonnée. Les concepts de la femme étaient influencés par les croyances chrétiennes, la tradition romaine et les opinions germaniques. De plus, ces concepts ont été formulés par des théologiens, des avocats de l'église et de l'état, des prédicateurs ou par des auteurs qui étaient des clercs ayant choisi le célibat et qui se sentaient menacés par le puissant charme féminin.

Il existait dans la société médiévale une polarité qui forme un paradigme central à la définition de ce qu'est la "femme": d'un côté, Eve, la séductrice, en proie à sa propre sexualité, et de l'autre, la Vierge Marie, obéissante, soumise, pure et maternelle. Cette polarité s'atténue dans la société de la Renaissance et il ne reste plus que l'image d'Eve.

Au Moyen Age, les femmes possédaient l'égalité dans le mariage mais seulement parce qu'elles n'avaient aucune égalité politique. A la Renaissance, même cette égalité privée disparaîtra.

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Un autre aspect très important de la perte de pouvoir des femmes se retrouve dans le fait qu'avec l'économie florissante, les hommes ont été forcés de se choisir un métier et de faire partie des confréries alors qu'on a laissé les femmes libres d'exercer plusieurs métiers à la fois. Une conséquence marquante de ce fait a été que les femmes se sont retrouvées vite exclues de ces "confréries" et ont finalement adopté le rouet, ce qui les a reléguées dans une classe à part formant des citoyennes de deuxième classe. Cette perte de pouvoir se reflète également, et à divers niveaux, dans les oeuvres de Chaucer et de Spenser.

Le deuxième chapitre de ce mémoire concerne les *Contes de Cantorbéry*. Nous étudierons plus précisément trois contes, à savoir le Conte du chevalier, le Conte du Franklin et le Conte de la femme de Bath. Les protagonistes féminins étudiés possèdent ou désirent posséder le pouvoir. Par exemple, la reine des Amazones, Ypolita et sa soeur, Emelye, perdent leur pouvoir à cause d'une conquête militaire et doivent se soumettre au mariage. Dorigène n'a pas de pouvoir en dehors du mariage mais le possède vis-à-vis de son époux, Aurélius; elle obtient aussi la liberté qui en découle. Malheureusement, elle ne peut contrôler ni pouvoir ni liberté et, finalement, s'en remet à la décision de son mari. Seule la vieille du Conte de la femme de Bath obtient le contrôle du mari, le chevalier, car celui-ci voulant une femme jeune et belle s'en remet à l'autorité de

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sa femme. Cependant, cette femme, nous le savons, est une sorcière.

Le troisième chapitre examine dans l'oeuvre de Spenser, *La reine des fées*, certaines femmes qui possèdent ou désirent posséder le pouvoir. Le personnage de la sorcière que nous avons vu chez Chaucer est repris par Spenser mais l'image bonnifiante en a disparu. Seule demeure une image de femme qui distribue du poison aux hommes. Cela est vrai pour Acrasie, Malecaste et Radigonde. Acrasie est une sorcière lascive qui attire les hommes avec une coupe empoisonnée et, telle une araignée, tisse sa toile autour du héros et l'empêche de retourner à sa quête. Malecaste est un esprit mâle qui se déguise en femme pour séduire. Radigonde, une Amazone, est la pire de toutes les femmes maléfiques ayant du pouvoir car elle transforme les hommes en femmes. Elle ne sera conquise que par une autre Amazone, Britomart, qui, elle, représente la chasteté. L'on retrouve, ici clairement, une augmentation marquée de la misogynie car non seulement on professe l'opinion que les sorcières veulent contrôler le corps du héros mais encore qu'elles veulent aussi contrôler son âme et la damner. Seule, Britomart, chevalier de la chasteté, n'est pas sorcière mais elle se retrouve dans presque tout le narratif qui la concerne habillée en homme, en chevalier. Elle gagne le duel contre Radigonde mais redonne le pouvoir à un homme car son seul but dans la vie est de trouver son homme,

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Artegall, et de fonder une race noble.

Nous voyons donc à travers la poésie de Chaucer et de Spenser une société qui devient de plus en plus axée sur le genre et où le pouvoir de la femme s'est grandement érodée.

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Women as Figures of Power in Chaucer's

***Canterbury Tales* and Spenser's**

Faerie Queene

Introduction

Women had very little public power in the Early Modern period, namely between 1400 to 1700, and by the end of that period, except for a few female rulers, they had none whatsoever. A very important distinction has to be made between power and authority; power is the ability to shape political events (which women had to some extent), while authority is a formally recognized and legitimated power that women did not have (Wiesner 240). Their loss of power started in England long before the period with which we are concerned, namely in the second half of the eleventh century, after the Norman conquest, which imposed new laws restricting the legal rights of women. They also lost power because of the shift away from household politics towards a greater bureaucratization of Western Europe.

Another reason for that loss of power was that the public realm became increasingly male and that there was a rigid enforcement of gender hierarchy (Wiesner 255). There was also an increased gender bias throughout the period, which was the result of extending political power to a larger group of men, basing the rights of a citizen on the ownership of property (which excluded women from playing a public role), and by establishing parliamentary power over the choice of a monarch, thus removing men's dependency on

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women's biology (Wiesner 249).

The concept of "woman" in the period was based on the notion as found in the Old Testament and in Pauline attitudes, and also as defined by Thomas Aquinas, who represented man as the image of God and woman as somewhere between the beasts and the angels (Bridenthal 165). Most of the statements about women were made by theologians, lawyers, preachers, or authors, and they "embodied what celibate clerics thought about women" (Labarge xii). At a time when men were organized into a hierarchy of groups, women had no corporate identity. These statements were also based on two separate systems of hierarchy: the first that of rank or class, which was based on property, and the second that of gender hierarchy, which was based on the man being the authority (Amussen 3). Woman was a weak creature, responsible for the Fall, and she bore responsibility for the sin of sexual intercourse. She had an uncontrollable sexual appetite and was the root of social disorder because she was "unruly or unreasonable and outside of the social structure" (Wiesner 254).

The roles of women, unlike those of men, were associated with their sexual status; they were virgins, wives, widows, or mothers (Leyser 93). Their roles were justified by an increasing notion of gender that was used to simplify schemes of thought; thus, men began to think of women as a category rather than as someone they knew (Bridenthal 166). In England, up to the early sixteenth century, young women

could retire to convents and remain virgins, or go there as widows. Some, like Chaucer's Prioress, could achieve a certain degree of power within their convents, as abesses or Mothers Superior, although of course always subservient to the male hierarchy of the church. However, the privilege of withdrawing into a convent was removed with the dissolution of the monasteries during the Reformation.

In this period, as in the one that had preceded it, the foremost role that women played was that of wife and mother. The many treatises that were written about the education of young women by people like Vives and Elyot, unlike those written for young men, addressed only the private, not the public virtues and were written to prepare women to be Christian wives and mothers. Margaret King's claim that the guarding of chastity was the primary business of the daughters of the Renaissance (29), therefore makes sense in this context. A woman's power lay, then, in the home, not in the realms of professional activity. This is seen also in the fact that while women had been able to participate in the guilds in the fourteenth century through individual petitions, by the end of the seventeenth century they had no other work but repetitive and useless tasks (Margaret King 79). The professional disempowerment of women is seen at its most brutal in the ruthless quest to extinguish witchcraft, for these "wise women", many healers and midwives, some religious rebels, were perceived as posing a real threat to male-dominated professions.

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This thesis will discuss the historical background of this loss of power and how disempowerment is embodied in some of the female characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. One can expect to find in these works a reflection of the gradual erosion of power that can be charted throughout the period, stretching from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth. The corpus chosen comprises three medieval romances found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, namely the Knight's Tale, the Franklin's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Tale, and four tales from a later romance, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, namely those of Acrasia, Britomart, Malecasta and Radigund in Books II, III, and V respectively. We must remember, of course, that while Spenser was composing his work some two hundred years after the *Canterbury Tales*, and a century after the bulk of the Middle English romances, he consciously imbued his poem with medieval "atmosphere" by using archaic language and borrowing motifs from authors like Chaucer and Malory. On the other hand, he used, not a medieval queen, but Elizabeth I as both the eponym and a character in the poem and also the female ruler "par excellence". This thesis, then, constitutes a comparative study of the treatment of women in his romance and Chaucer's.

The romance is a feminine genre, writes Susan Crane, because it is elusive and has a protean capacity to reshape itself (Crane 203). Romance abounds in representations of women, and it was used by Chaucer and Spenser (both male

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authors) to discuss two different views about women: a version of feminity generated by masculine courtship and a critique of that version of feminity (Crane 55). In other words, romance had both a gender bias by constraining feminity within masculine terms and a class bias staged within the terms of social constructions of the stories. This aspect of the portrayal of women will be discussed from a historical and literary perspective in Chapter I.

In Chapters II and III, we will be discussing women and power in Chaucer and Spenser respectively. In Chaucer's Knight's Tale, we will be looking at Ypolita, Queen of the Amazons, who represents disorder but through her marriage to Theseus also personifies the perfect union between masculinity and feminity. We shall also discuss Emelye, the virgin, who represents order in the tale and finally accepts male intrusion and childbirth, the ultimate feminine experience. In the Wife of Bath's Tale, we will study the queen who stands for order and disapproves of male "maistrie" in its ugliest form, rape, and the old hag who is transformed into a young wife and, personifying men's fantasy, gains male "maistrie". In the Franklin's Tale, with Dorigen, the young wife of a knight, we find a woman who represents danger and disorder because there were no fixed roles in her marriage. In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, we will be discussing Acrasia, a Circe-like mistress of the Bower of Bliss, an enchantress who lures men to their ruin and turns them into animals; Britomart, the virgin knight of chastity, an Amazon who re-

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presents good and order in subduing the forces of lust; and Radigund, the knight of lust, an Amazon who stands for evil and disorder. Behind them all looms the Queen of Fairyland, who represents Elizabeth I, a female ruler both outside and within the poem. In our concluding chapter, we will compare the women in Chaucer and Spenser.

This thesis will combine historical and gender-and-class study. Gender was a central category in the thinking of the Early Modern period because of the importance of the maintenance of proper power relationships between men and women. It was the basis, the symbol and the functioning of the larger political system; it was also the model for authority and subordination (Wiesner 252). The social construction of gender, according to Greene, is grounded in male attempts to subvert female sexuality, which needed, or so the men thought, to be controlled by the superior male; such gender construction is inscribed in discourse (4).

The dichotomy male/female is linked to the dichotomy public/private and we believe that nowhere is this more evident than in the period we are discussing. Post-feminist and gender-and-class study is therefore eminently suited to a discussion of women in Chaucer and Spenser. While it has been used by various critics to discuss some female figures in *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Faerie Queene*, no critic has actually compared the two poets' treatment of women within such a framework.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS

Upheaval during the Early Modern period meant that the social order was very fragile. Social hierarchy was arranged by class, age, rank, occupation and gender, but gender was the most "natural" and the most important category to defend at that time. The definitions of what it is to be male or female in any political context can be divided into two categories: the biological and the social. There were no distinctions made between these two categories for the period we are looking at. The male was dominant and the female was subordinate (Wiesner 255, 240). The concepts about women were influenced by Christian beliefs, Roman tradition and Germanic views (Amt 1). They were articulated by theologians, by lawyers of both church and state, by the preachers, or by authors who "embodied what celibate clerics thought about women". These concepts stated that women were threats to their own chastity, which led to a panicky view of the strength of feminine sexuality. The "authorities" harboured a grudging attitude to marriage and fell back on the convenient stereotype of Eve's responsibility for the existence of sin in the world; to justify women's inferior position, they reinforced men's God-given right to rule over women (Labarge xii). They based their claims on Thomas Aquinas's statements on women

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found in his *Summa Theologica*, a work greatly influenced by Aristotle (Bridenthal 165). Man was made in the image of God; he was active, formative and tending toward perfection, and woman was not; she was passive, material and deprived of the tendency toward perfection. [1] Evil was thus linked to one gender (Margaret King 155). This theory easily took hold during the Middle Ages because people who could not read could understand polarities and it was spread by the schools and the universities, which taught medicine, law, ethics, and theology, by priests who reinforced such ideas in their sermons, and by lawyers building their cases on such ideas and thus creating legal precedents in court cases (Wiesner 243).

There existed one polarity in medieval society which was a paradigm central to the medieval notion of woman: on the one hand, Eve, temptress, prey to her own sexuality, and on the other, the Virgin Mary, obedient, submissive, pure, maternal. "By a series of leaps of faith, the Catholic Church renamed and refined the worship of the Virgin" and gained control over an extremely powerful female image (Anderson 1.215). All women were told they should emulate her but of course, they could not equal her. Thus, woman became an aesthetic object: decorous, chaste, and doubly dependent upon her husband, and her prince (Bridenthal 197).

The cult of the Virgin is thought by some critics to have been instrumental in forming that other cult, found in

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the romances: the love and worship of the lady in whose service the questing knight places himself. Whether this in fact be the case, it must be said that in the romances are found representations of these two poles: the temptress and the woman of virtue.

It follows that with such concepts of women, there was a discrepancy in the education of boys and girls, although customs varied from country to country (Ennen 279). Generally speaking, until the thirteenth century, boys and girls of noble and aristocratic families had the same education. By the late Middle Ages, the learned woman was a threat (Margaret King 190), and most girls learned to read just enough Latin or vernacular at home to be able to say their prayers.[2] Further education was discouraged, and universities were of course closed to women. The monopoly of medicine belonged to men (Amt 5). The peasants of both sexes had no formal education but girls received oral lore from their mothers and grandmothers: women's "gossips". At the same time, women and the woman's voice posed the most difficult challenge. A woman's treasures consisted of chastity, silence, and obedience (Larrington 189-90, 166).

Class differentiation was very important and it was believed that the nobles had different blood than the peasants. Men were defined in terms of their worldly activity, but women in terms of their sexual roles. The roles of women followed gender expectations; there was a "womanly" conduct which had been ordained by God and was

sanctioned by earthly institutions; there was also a division of labor between men and women, with no positions of power given to women (Stuard 168-69). The roles of women were determined by their social status. The status of a woman was established by birth; it was more important than her physical inheritance; it spelled out how she would be regarded, whom she could marry, and what form of religious life she could take. A woman was subject to her husband and shared his social status but remained half a step below; yet, she was superior to the males of any lower order (Labarge 25, xiii).

The roles of both men and women were determined by the three estates: those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked. The fighters were knights or noblemen whose wealth, power, and status were derived from their lands. The women did not fight but shared in the other activities of the nobility like running the household, and often in fact ran estates while husbands were away for long periods either at war or in the Crusades. Those who prayed consisted of the clergy and the monastic community; women were excluded from the first but made up a sizeable and active portion of the latter. Monasteries and convents played a key role in economic and cultural life. The nun had a pride of place because she was dedicated to God. The prioress or abbess would supervise and administer the property (Anderson 1.203). The nuns were involved in artistic activities to praise God while the lay sisters did the

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cleaning and preparing the food (Larrington 221). The workers meant those defined by their manual labor, namely the artisans, the servants, and the peasantry. The women in these classes shared in the work of their husbands. There were also many degrees of social status within the working estate, and even among the peasantry (Amt 5-6).

A common view regarding a married woman of both the fighter and the working classes was that she must remain chaste within marriage, not only by being faithful but also by obeying her husband and procreating legitimate children. The situation of the widow was more ambiguous. She was contaminated by sexual experience, but by not remarrying, she attained a certain status. The church, while accepting remarriage, frowned upon it somewhat. As for young girls, they, too, would be contaminated in due course by sexual experience (Margaret King 23) but their virginity was jealously guarded before marriage, especially in the middle and upper classes, where it was a condition of marriage and often took on economic importance in terms of dowries.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there was an economic revival: towns flourished as centers of trade, and the guilds were formed. While the men had to choose a trade and stick to it, under the English Statute of Labourers in 1363, women continued to dabble in different trades. However, what at first sight appeared as an advantage for women quickly turned out to be very restrictive. Since they could not choose one trade, they were excluded from

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the guilds. This led to their being pushed out of their trades and replaced by men; more women became domestic servants and were driven toward poverty. Prostitution became a recognized trade and was taken up by them full time or, as happened in the towns, on a casual basis to augment their revenues (Larrington 87). Fortunately, some widows could continue working in their husband's trade under a special request. That is why some critics say that women formed a fourth estate because they were all lumped together regardless of their classes when they came to be compared to men. [3] However, women had some informal political power with the arrangements of marriages, letters, rumors, networks of opinions, patronage, participation in riots and disturbances which showed the weakness of male authority structures (Wiesner 240).

Order was seen by the "authorities" as a hierarchy of fathers. A woman acting outside her traditional role of mother and wife was seen as being out of control and a threat to men. Marriage was seen as the only institution that could protect the clergy and their male believers from "the horrible powers of lust and female sexuality" and keep women subordinate and obedient (Anderson 1.243-44, 257). Marriage was the fate of almost every woman (Larrington 18).

There is a distinction to be made between power, authority, and influence: "power" is the ability to carry out one's own will; "authority" is when one can impose one's

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will within a hierarchy of roles; and "influence" is to be able to make others act differently. One can thus conclude that "Medieval women...were often powerful but they were never authoritative" (Larrington 154,162). Let us see how some categories of women fare in this respect. A young woman was legally powerless and a married one was under total domination by her husband; only a widow had some personal power. An abbess and a prioress were in a different category because they were women consecrated to God and had a powerful influence within their community.

Women saw their very limited power disappear after 1066 because of the Norman Conquest, which changed the laws and limited their access to power and self-determination. Another factor was the major change in the economy: the shift from the household as the basic unit of production to small workshops, where the workers did not share in the profits and only collected wages.

In medieval England, power was regulated by different laws: royal, canon, customary, and manorial (Labarge 29-30). Stuard is certainly right when she says that the High Middle Ages saw the birth of institutions essential to European civilization:

> But, in fact, the loss of rights accompanying the triumph of gender constituted an important transition for women, and it forced a substantial change in their lives (170).

Power was based on a gender order. However, there was a challenge to this order which was not explicit or direct,

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writes Amussen, unlike that based on class; with the new mercantile economy, the experience of women and men became more polarized and distinct (182-87). Widows were allowed some participation in the guilds through individual petitions in the thirteenth century and could run a business (even though they could not have a political function or representation). By the mid-fifteenth century, the length of time allowed a woman to manage a business was reduced. By the mid-sixteenth century, they could hire no new apprentices, journeymen, or piece workers. Women intensified their professional spinning groups as the only activity they could safely do. Misogyny increased because of a medieval belief that woman's sexual drive increased with age, so the notions of "seductress" and "witches" became more powerful (Margaret King 145, 228). By the Renaissance period, one saw "an age of exceptional brutality to women" due to the witchcraft hunt caused by this belief.

The Reformation brought many changes in England. Alongside the proliferation of misogynistic literature came the defense of educating women by some writers, either in translation or original works. Humanists like More, Elyot and Ascham defended the education of women, although their purpose was not education in and for itself, but as a means to promote female virtue. The convents were closed, being declared "Popish", which resulted in a shift of the options open to women. As a result, marriage and motherhood took on a greater importance (Wiesner 248). Women defined them-

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selves in terms of the periods before, during, and after marriage or childbirth: daughter, mother, and widow or virgin, matron, and crone (Margaret King 2, 23). Yet, at the same time, the Church continued to promote chastity as the highest ideal for woman (Larrington 125); thus, the guarding of virginity became the most important work for the daughters and their families (Margaret King 29), while much was written on the need to protect wedded women from the temptations of the flesh.

Despite the Protestant humanists' belief in women's education, however, the Reformation reinforced the gender hierarchy. It further strengthened the paternal authority "by granting male heads of household a much larger religious and supervisory role than they had under Catholicism" (Wiesner 243). Priests were husbands, and husbands priests: they had authority over the children. Women had only a subordinate role within the household; they had power especially with their sons (Larrington 84). Men achieved more political power, which was expressed in secular terms; the role of men was to be good citizens. Women were given a more domestic role that found its expression in Christian virtues such as chastity, piety, and obedience. Crafts and guilds started to use more masculine words like "brotherhood" and "fraternity" to reinforce male supremacy and eliminate the women who were still working in the trade (Wiesner 249). Thus, widows, unmarried women, and learned women were out of place and embodied disorder.

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If women wrote, they were unwomanly; if they wrote well, they were Amazons--fearsome, and unnatural beings (Margaret King 238). With the Renaissance, the work of women was devalued and became restricted to repetitive tasks within the family.

Female rulers, [4] of course, constituted a category apart. Up to the late Middle Ages, they had authority and a wide framework (Stafford 155, 197). On the Continent, they had an overlordship of monastic houses based on the model of joint rule by the king and the queen coming from the Germanic societies: a queen could endow monastic houses; she could establish double monasteries and become an abbess to rule over nuns and monks; she could watch over the land and supervise the maintenance of the shrines and the royal mausoleums. These good actions would give her sainthood and secular power (Larrington 157). In the High Middle Ages, the changes in dowry customs and in the inheritance laws weakened the queen's position and the role of the queen; there were also fewer opportunities to exercise informal power because of the change made in royal courts. Courtiers now comprised echelons of civil servants coming from the universities and trained to administer the affairs of the state. Also, church reform abolished lay patronage ("the right of rulers to appoint to ecclesiastical positions") and there were no more close alliances between the queen and the bishop (Larrington 159-60).

We shall now turn to the topic of medieval and Renais-

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sance romance and its portrayal and treatment of women and see whether it reflects what was happening in society. The history of romance in the West can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. The plot was a poetic narrative where love triumphed, with supernatural help, in a remote and exotic setting. In the early Middle Ages romance would be reborn, this time, in France. The twelfth century saw the French romance in its full flowering with its greatest exponent, Chrétien de Troyes. One of the reasons for its popularity was that it used the vernacular, rather than Latin. Romances like those of Chrétien's made history entertaining and used legends, folklore, popular superstitions; they were pure fiction but were written as history (Mungal 1). Their popularity was to spread throughout western Europe and last until the fifteenth century, moving from verse to prose. [5]

The English romances belong to this international tradition, with a time-lag of one hundred to two hundred and fifty years separating them from their French models. This is because during the creative French period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Anglo-Norman flourished in England and English was not used for secular or fictional writing. [6] Romances in English date from the late thirteenth century and reach their full potential with Chaucer and the Gawain-poet. Ní Cuilleanáin claims that the gap between French and English romances is as wide as the one between Virgil and Ovid and Apollonius and Callimachus be-

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cause of the difference of the nature of the language, English providing a more open expression and including more emphasis (4). An example she gives is of Chaucer's turning Boccaccio's *Teseida* into the Knight's Tale (Ní Cuilleanáin 5).

In general, one can say that romance is a feminine genre; it has low status, it is elusive and has a protean capacity to reshape itself; it gives a version of feminity as being subordinate, having contradictions, mystery, and a richly affective experience (Crane 202-03). Differences between Middle English romances and their Old French models have been discussed by many critics. Given the different social customs, judicial systems, and administrative organisations of England and France (even the structures of feudalism in the two countries differ), and add to this the time gap, and it is not surprising to find the women in the two bodies of romance portrayed differently. However, before discussing these differences, let us discuss their treatment in the French tradition.

Krueger writes that:

> Verse romance flourished at a period when medieval educational, religious, and social institutions articulated strict gender divisions, and when didactic literature preached restrictive social roles for women, whose intellectual and sexual autonomy was subordinated to the rule of fathers and husbands. Insofar as the male clerics who wrote romances espoused the values of chivalric society, romances furthered the interests of the male aristocracy, often at women's expense (xii).

She also asserts that noble women were "more directly asso-

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ciated with the emerging genre of romance" because they were either the dedicatee or the source of many romances; romances appeared to feature women's interests and their sentimental conflicts, unlike the epic or chanson de geste; female characters played a more active role and they were patron, or inspiration, or beloved recipient of the romances; plus, women appeared in the frame of the romances in the Prologue, the Epilogue, or as the privileged audience (Krueger xii). In short, women were dedicatees, readers, listeners, and spectators (i). She calls this phenomenon the "lady in the frame" for the following reasons: women are created within the space of amorous rhetoric and they are not real women; they are figments of male fantasy and imagination; the rhetoric of masculine amorous imagination is circular and self-enclosed; the male writer speaks to himself in a Narcissus image; there is no "real" women's response; "he speaks/sings to a lady whose inaccessibility is the very condition of his singing"; if she accepts, she becomes a love object; if she refuses, she becomes the very condition of his desire and his continued singing and storytelling: she is the "other" (187).

As we said in the Introduction, Susan Crane has argued that romance is a feminine genre; it has low status, it is elusive and has a protean capacity to reshape itself; it gives a version of feminity as being subordinate, having contradictions, mystery, and a richly affective experience (202-03). Fisher writes that representations of woman by

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male-authored texts can often ignore the life of real women (6). Yet Crane says that romance compares masculinity to feminity and is a gendered experience (202-03); also, one of its salient features is the figuring of woman as the desired opposite of man (18).

There are two types of heroines to be found in romances; the passive woman reaffirms the justice of the chivalric ethic without questioning the system; the active woman accompanies a more critical analysis of courtly relationships and woman's place. The passive, loyal woman is rewarded with protection within the chivalric system (Krueger 133, 140). On the other end, the strong, independent woman is restricted in the end either through marriage or the convent (Wiesner 255). Romances will also show women as fighters because men liked the depictions of fighting women as valkyries like Brunhild, or Amazon queens, as cross-dressing female knights, and unlike non-Western traditions; the career of the woman warrior ends either in recognition, domesticity or death by a superior male which confirms the natural, God-given order (Larrington 159).

Let us now turn to Renaissance romance in order to see whether the claims we have been making for medieval romance still hold. The male humanists said that women readers should offer resistance to the addiction of reading romances: Erasmus showed a young married woman reading Latin books, not romances, as a resistance to seduction; Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist and adviser to Katherine

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Parr on the education of the future Queen Mary, upbraided women for reading romances like *Partenope of Blois*; Roger Ascham showed Queen Elizabeth reading Demosthenes and Lady Jane Grey reading Plato's *Phaedo* in Greek with "deep knowledge of pleasure". He obliterated Malory although he revered Chaucer (Ní Cuilleanáin 6-7). Boccaccio was rejected because he was fashionable, corrupt, and foreign; he had also written "merry tales" and he was not seen as the scholarly humanist who had inspired Chaucer. [7]

In the late sixteenth century, there was however a revival of romance, which became an entertainment for serious people. A good example of this revival is Sidney's *Arcadia*, where reading is eroticised but women become a judicious and tempered delight. Sidney and Spenser took romances seriously in Protestant England and their works in turn became models for the seventeenth century; for example in Ralph Knevett's *Supplement to the Faery Queene* and Samuel Shephard's *The Fairy King*. Milton planned an Arthurian epic although he never wrote it.

This new type of romance incorporates national epic with political allegory. The *Faerie Queene*, more particularly, is also a direct imitation of Ariosto's *Orlando*, with an Arthurian component going back to its British roots and an allegorical component of *The Queste del Saint Graal* which are vehicles for serious moral and political themes. Romance epic came about because of disenchantment with medieval romance; the latter did not have unity of action and

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based its arguments on fables, not history; it violated decorum in characterization and style and in failing to observe verisimilitude and probability. Furthermore, interest in epic was growing on account of the translation of classical texts. However, Renaissance writers used the epic genre for expressing religious intentions through allegorical interpretations, which they then combined with features of romance; the result showed a multiplicity of actions and an interlaced structure which was the ideal vehicle for a polysemous narrative.

Renaissance epic also included a very important degree of nationalism, and in England this meant that poets attempted to put English poetry on a level with that of Greece, Rome and Italy. The epic retold national history and focussed attention on national heroes. Spenser clearly places himself in the line of epic poets he mentions in his letter to Ralegh: Homer, Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso. In the *Faerie Queene*, the "chronicle of Briton kings" is read by Arthur and Guyon in the House of Alma (II.10): it is the first installment of a legendary history of Britain; the second installment is introduced with Merlin's prophesy to Britomart and her nurse (III.3). Romance epic praises the reigning monarch, and the *Faerie Queene* celebrates Elizabeth I and the past glories of British Kings (II.1-4). Tales of Muses heard from the river and wood nymphs look like the pageants that greeted Queen Elizabeth at the Kenilworth Festivities of 1575, where the Queen was met by

a lady rising from the lake. With this catalogue of English and Irish rivers (IV.24-44), Spenser was "mythologizing--which is to say civilizing--his country" (Lewis *Spenser's Images*, 127-28) just as the ancient poets of Greece and Italy had done. The nature of romance epic is therefore two-fold; the two strands are of equal weight: first, a diffuse narrative form with the supernatural machinery of romance and second, the historical, national, and monarchical interests of epic. Spenser adds to these the unifying theme of Arthur's love for Gloriana "to which everything else somehow contributed" (Wynne 265-86). Book III is the romance core where Spenser follows Ariosto rather than Virgil in matters of narrative form and content; there is no single hero and no linear and conclusive action but a pattern of "Accidents" which is the starting point for the poem's dynastic plot. There is a "confluence of romance and epic, where the romance poet reveals his epic aspirations" (Fichter 156).

Spenser saw himself as the spiritual son of Chaucer and he continued some of his unfinished tales like the Clerk's Tale. He also used some of Chaucer's medieval motifs but for a very specific reason. In the letter to Ralegh, he says explicitly that he wanted "to fashion a gentleman"; he also uses his poetry for moral and pedagogical purposes. Spenser used some material from Ariosto and Tasso but he made it more moral and Christian; he thus transformed the female characters accordingly, especially

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Bradamante, who became Britomart.

The female presence in the late sixteenth-century *Faerie Queene* and *Arcadia* is represented in the former by Queen Elizabeth, Spenser's dedicatee and eponymous heroine, as the central source of political power, and in the latter by the Countess of Pembroke as the critical patroness and beloved sister and literary collaborator of the author. However, the feminine sphere is ambiguous because the texts are written by men but women are everywhere: presiding as queen, plotting as villains, founding dynasties, loving adventuring, teaching divine truth, fleeing, being victimized, seen as rescuers, which is a parody that contradicts the masculine reality and overloads the narrative with redundant female power (Ní Cuilleanáin 8).

Like their medieval forerunners, Renaissance romances show representations of women who are either good or evil; we also find a glorification of chastity and a submission of women to men. They demonstrate the paradox of gender in Renaissance literature: that women in general were weak and vulnerable but some individual women were strong and independent. Lucas has asserted that Elizabethan romance portrayed "assertive, energetic, powerful women but attempts are consistently made to neutralize that power". There are gaps and silences on the part of the female characters and readers which show woman as an "absent presence". While in medieval romances woman was the subject of passion, in the Elizabethan romance, she is the object of the romantic tale

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and the interest shifts from chivalric adventure to love and courtship (3-5). In an article which was ground-breaking in offering a paradigm of the patriarchal basis of humanism, and the place of women in the Renaissance, Kelly-Gadol wrote that "literature rationalized and perpetuated class interests and . . . reflected political and sexual relations", and the Renaissance reduced the options for women. The concept of love changed from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: from powerful feudal women, who made it responsible for their sexual and emotional needs which harmonized with the needs of their class, to powerful male princes and their courtiers with an interest in creating dependency in women because "female chastity and passivity better suited the needs of the expanding bourgeoisie and the declining nobility". This marks the continuation and intensification of the subordination of women because almost all writings about women in the Renaissance "establish chastity as the female norm and restructure the relation of the sexes to one of female dependency and male domination" (Kelly-Gadol 175, 177). As courtly love did not threaten patriarchal feudal society, women could influence it because they had actual power and could and did exercise authority. It could flourish outside the patriarchal marriage because of the model of feudalism that permitted "actual vassal homage to be paid to women".

This situation disappeared during the Renaissance and the exercise of political power by women was far more rare.

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(Kelly-Gadol 184-85). The Renaissance lady was like a courtier: she had the same virtue of mind; her education was similar: letters, music, painting, dancing, etc.; but charm was also a "primary occupation and aim", whereas for the courtier it was the profession of arms. Latin literacy and classical learning were now dispensed by male tutors, in aristocratic circles and wealthy families at least, and they, Kelly-Gadol says, "as humanists, suppressed romance and chivalry to further classical culture, with all its patriarchal and misogynous bias" (188). She continues:

> The actual disappearance of the social world of the court and its presiding lady underlies the disappearance of sex and the physical evaporation of the woman (190).

There is no mutuality, and no interaction between lovers, because this is a narcissistic experience.

The soul is in an earthly prison and the courtier is in a social one. He renounces the power of self-determination. Thus, the lady "mediates the courtier's safe transcendence of an otherwise demeaning necessity" (195), and as a result, the courtier adopts a "woman's ways" in his relation to his prince. In short, women suffered a loss of public power by being molded into "an aesthetic object" (Kelly-Gadol 194-97). Moreover, there was opposition by women to the division between public and private life and to their being relegated to the private sphere. Finally, the unforeseen results of this sharp public/private, male/female division resulted in the

individual woman's own realization that

> society viewed them, first of all, as women; and that any claim to a public role would have to be based on either a rejection of their female nature or on support for all women (Wiesner 21-22).

By the sixteenth century, the debate on the nature of women was truly engaged and female rulers were seen as a threat to the social construction of gender:

> Could a woman's being born into a royal family and educated to rule allow her to overcome the limitations of her sex? Should it? (...) Which was (or should be) the stronger determinant of character and social role, gender or rank? (Wiesner 241)

Female rulers were portrayed as being Jezebels and female rule was described as unnatural, unlawful, and contrary to Scriptures. Machiavelli wrote that an effeminate ruler was the worst kind of ruler; by "effeminate", he meant a ruler dominated by or similar to a woman. The best ruler was a male ruler; he had virility which was shown by strong same-sex attachments, an effective military leadership, and no emotional outbursts, having the ability to use reason to take advantage of every situation.

In England, the debate was particularly pertinent and not without dangers. Henry VIII was followed by the nine-day queen, Jane, then by his daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. Those who had been against female rulers would have to modify their arguments and, (John King is an example of one who did), change their terms of praise to accomodate the notion of woman's fitness to rule (Wiesner 182-266).

With Elizabeth I on the throne, a distinction was

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made between the "ruler's two bodies": on the one hand, queenship, and on the other, the queen. [8] While the queen could be a woman because of her body and her sexuality, she could also possess queenship, deriving all legal authority from God, one which would give her the masculine qualities needed to rule. Elizabeth I liked to be represented as the armed maiden, the Amazon, the rational female, the emotional force unlimited by natural order. She had real power, and she knew that her people expected a monarch to be male, so she emphasized in public her masculine qualities such as physical bravery, stamina and wisdom (Wiesner 251). In her Tilbury speech, she played up her androgyny. With the Spanish Armada on the coast of England threatening the kingdom and the sailors ready to go on a strike because they had not been paid for a while, Elizabeth spoke to the troops and is rumored to have said: "Even though I have the body of a woman, I have the heart and stomach of a king" (Wiesner 242). This notion of androgyny would be developed further by Spenser in his romance dedicated to Elizabeth, the *Faerie Queene*. We shall see several instances of it in our study of some of the female figures of power in this poem.

In this chapter, we have attempted to provide a historical and a literary background to the corpus of texts we have chosen to discuss in detail. In the ensuing chapters, we will try to answer two questions that relate to this background. Representations of women in the Middle English

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romances go from utter villainesses (Guinevere in *Landevale*), to blandly virtuous heroines (Degaré's *Leman*), from a lively, attractive fairy mistress (*Landevale*), to a vulgar, comic, unflattering and loathly lady (in the tail-rhyme *Dame Ragnell*). The alliterative romances ignore women (most of *Morte* and all *of Golagros*) or vilify them (the ending of *Morte* and the ghost in *Awntyrs*). In short, representations of women are made up of antifeminist portraits of wicked women and only a few (Guinevere in *Awntyrs*) try to behave virtuously (Buhrmann 74). One point, however, they share: none exercises any real power. By power, as we said on page one, we do not mean the ability to shape political events but a formally recognized and legitimated power. How, then, does Chaucer treat the nature of such power or powerlessness in his romances?

Secondly, how is the question of women's power treated in later romances like the *Faerie Queene*? Spenser's dilemma is that he was taking medieval romance, with powerless females, as one of his models, yet he was living in a world ruled by a female queen, he was a courtier of that queen, and he dedicated the work to her. The question of female power in his poem is therefore far more complex, as our study of Acrasia, Britomart, Malecasta and Radigund will show.

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II

WOMEN AND POWER
IN THREE CHAUCERIAN ROMANCES

In this chapter, we shall explore how the male/female sharing or loss of power is exposed in three romances in the *Canterbury Tales* [1], namely, the Knight's Tale, the Franklin's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Tale. Man is the hero or the subject in medieval romances and no woman has a major role. Woman is an object of desire; she is satirized, impersonated, divided, illusory, or absent.

For Chaucer, gender is socially constructed (Hansen 13) and his main concern is caused by the instability of gender (22). Hansen does not see Chaucer as a protofeminist because the female voice gradually enters his fiction as "a monotone making known both feminine absence and masculine anxiety" (12). Chaucer also wants to solve an urgent problem of gendered identity and to do so, he writes about male characters, with male narrators, and for male readers about the feminization of men (72). The author worries about the dubious gender difference between woman and man; there is the paradigm of homology: man represents humanity and therefore woman is not inquired into. The different issues of gender are such: heterosexual love is idealized; patriarchy devalues the feminine with its irrationality, self-sacrifice, submission, service; there is a diminished power of men over women; and, differences between men and women diminish also. The feminization of men

is hard to avoid because the rules of patriarchy are opposed to the rules of love and men are caught in a contradiction trying to establish a stable gender identity (Hansen 7).

Gender and power are closely linked because order is extremely important in the Middle Ages and order means that a man should have both power and authority: power meaning "maestry" in the private and domestic level and "authority" in the public one. We have two tales where women yield power, the Knight's Tale and the Franklin's Tale, and one, the Wife of Bath's Tale, where they keep it. In the first tale, the women who lose power are first Ypolita, the conquered queen of the Amazons who loses power on all levels as a queen and as a woman. Second her sister, Emelye, the virgin, who is more like a courtly lady than an Amazon and who also submits to marriage. Third, the Theban women, through warfare, have all lost their power and can only plead for mercy. Fourth, in the Franklin's Tale, Dorigen, a young wife who has too much power in her private life and is "charmed" by two men, the magician and the would-be lover, finally submits to the will of her husband and then is released from her pledge. Finally, in the Wife of Bath's Tale, the only tale studied in this paper where women *gain* power, we have an old hag who transforms herself into a young wife and, knowing more than the knight/rapist, gets to keep her power. We also have a Queen and her ladies who exert power over the king and the knight in the court of

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Arthur and even reverse the king's order. We will now look at each of these tales in more detail.

In the Knight's Tale, which is the most philosophical of all the tales studied here, man is the "conquerour" (861) of the "regne of Femenye" (866); Ypolita and Emelye are both Amazons from Scythia (880-82) who have been conquered by the male Athenians. Thus, Theseus marries the queen Ypolita and brings her and her younger sister Emelye "in his contree/With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee" (869-70). In short, Theseus shows not only power and authority but also "maiestry".

In classical mythology, the Amazons were a race of female warriors. Their name came from a Greek word meaning "breastless"; they removed the right breast in order to be able to draw the bowstring; it was therefore a sign of their war-making identity. Their one bare breast in battle also showed rejection of passivity and sexuality. They were said to refuse to nurture their sons and often to resist amorous relations in favor of virginity and chastity. For classical writers, they were aligned with animals and barbarians and their world was a world upside down because women had both military power and authority and men were slaves. They were a mythic adversary to Greek males and had to be subdued by rape, marriage, or battle (Crane 76-84). In romance, the Amazonian prowess and chastity became the potential model for feminity and mastectomy vanished as the Amazons were returned "to the domestic scene

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of courtship and marriage". There is no mention of this practice with either Ypolita or Emelye.

In the Knight's Tale, the marriage of Ypolita and Theseus represents, writes Mann, the union of masculinity and femininity (171). As for female rulers and warriors, their leadership and chivalry are masculine and do not correspond with their feminine identity (Crane 24-25). Emelye and Ypolita represent the "regne of Femenye" (866, 877). Ypolita is "hardy" (883), an Amazon, a woman, but one who also stands for the idea of "Woman" and the territory of womanhood. The sisters are not courtly ladies but both Amazons, writes Hansen, who are mythical, fighting, manlike, "powerful separatists", rivals to the hero and who have to be violently defeated or domesticated through marital union. Hansen wonders about the tempest of the homecoming and even questions how an Amazonian queen could be turned into a proper wife, how such a taming of a wild woman could be done in such a fast time (217-18). The text shows that the taming is complete because, after the marriage, Ypolita is referred to as only "the queene" (971, 1748, 1821) or "the faire queene" (1685).

Let us now take a closer look at Ypolita's sister, Emelye. She is defined as an "absence" (Hansen 217). She is the "Other", the idealized lady who looks like a goddess to Palamon: "I noot wher she be womman or goddesse" (1101). She is also peripheral to the main concerns of the male characters and storytellers: she is merely a name and does

not exist, writes Hansen (215-16). Crane sees Emelye as her lovers' exalted object of devotion and as Theseus's object of exchange, following Lévi-Strauss's law of kinship where sisters are exchanged in marriage in order to form a bigger clan and be able to defend oneself and one's family members more easily (93). The marriage represents a shift from epic to romance, with a parallel situation in Emelye with Palamon and Arcite, in a new register of courtship. Crane disagrees with Hansen's idea that Emelye represents absence and writes that Emelye is not a warrior but a courtly lady:

> The fairnesse of that lady that I see
> Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro. (1098-99)
>
> The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
> Of hire that rometh in the yonder place;
> And but I have hir mercy and hir grace. (1118-20)
>
> And Theseus with alle joye and blis,
> With his Ypolita, the faire queene,
> And Emelye, clothed al in grene,
> On hunthyng be they riden roially. (1684-87)
>
> The queene anon, for verray wommanhede,
> Gan for to wepe, and so dide Emelye,
> And alle the ladyes in the compaignye. (1748-50)

Because her lethal beauty replaces her prowess in battle, she is inactive (81) and has a static beauty. Only Emelye's beauty speaks to Palamon and Arcite; that beauty transforms their life compared to Ypolita's defeat: Theseus is not changed by having seen or known Ypolita but she is. Emelye gives a "freendlich ye" to Arcite and tender love to Palamon, but her fate is the same as Ypolita's (Crane 83). Her resistance comes about because of her Amazonian origin;

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it is staged in the temple of Diana and shows her powerlessness. Diana's temple is a normative, masculine world and the goddess has an uncanny prescience:

> Doghter, stynt thyn hevynesse.
> Among the goddes hye it is affermed,
> And by eterne word writen and confermed,
> Thou shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho
> That han for thee so muchel care and wo,
> But unto which of hem I many nat telle (2348-53).

She does not give any rational explanation; there is a double displacement: it is strange and out of place (Crane 179-81).

Crane claims that Emelye's resistance comes from her gender, which "accounts for the disparity between her perceptions and those of her suitors" (178); this must be compared to her alignment with Acteon which reiterates the gender differences:

> O chaste goddesse of the wodes grene,
> To whom bothe hevene and erthe and see is
> sene,
> Queene of the regne of Pluto derk and lowe,
> Goddesse of maydens, that myn herte hast knowe
> Ful many a yeer, and woost what I desire,
> As keepe me fro thy vengeaunce and thyn ire,
> That Attheon aboughte cruelly.
> Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
> Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
> Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
> I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,
> A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,
> And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
> And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe.
> (2297-2310).

She is a "hart hunted", the ultimate image of powerlessness, and this image reverses the aggression that Palamon and Arcite have attributed to Emelye. For her, love is not desirable but is a horrifying situation because her identi-

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ty is in jeopardy; her pursuing lovers are depicted as bestial: Palamon looks like a "grifphon" (2133) and he wears "a beres skyn" (2142); his hair makes him look like "any ravenes" (2144) while Arcite looks like " a leon" (2171) and on his hand, he carries an "egle" (2178). They have become beasts because they are unable to perceive her humanity. The absence of any description of her bathing brings back gender distances with Acteon's punishment, her Amazonian past, and her prayer for virginity:

> Smokynge the temple, ful of clothes faire,
> This Emelye, with herte debonaire,
> Hir body wessh with water of a welle.
> But hou she dide hir ryte I dar nat telle.
> (2281-84)

> Ther saugh I Attheon on hert ymaked,
> For vengeaunce that he saugh Diane al naked;
> I saugh how that his houndes have hym caught
> And freeten hym, for that they knewe hym
> naught. (2065-68)

Crane sees a pun from conjunction of the context and the morpheme in the gendered narration with the repetition of the word "queynte," which has a sexual connotation. The word is repeated five times in Emelye's prayer and in its answers. Crane concludes that the tale has a normative, masculine perspective while Emelye's rites are feminine. The disparity shows differences which clarify women's absence from the masculine experience of love in romance (Crane 177-8):

> I preye thee withoute moore,
> As sende love and pees bitwixte hem two,
> And fro me turne awey hir hertes so
> That al hire hoote love and hir desir,
> And al hir bisy torment, and hir fir
> Be queynt, or turned in another place (2316-21)

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The fires brenne upon the auter cleere,
Whil Emelye was thus in hir preyere.
But sodeynly she saugh a sighte queynte,
For right anon oon of the fyres queynte
And quyked agayn, and after that anon
That oother fyr was queynt and al agon;
And as it queynte it made a whistelynge.
(2331-37)

Emelye's dispersed gestures come from the fear of childbearing and the fact that she is a timid young woman. Is it fear or coyness? She is Athenian in manner but an Amazonian within: "I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye" (2307) and she brings love and peace between Palamon and Arcite: "As sende love and pees bitwixe hem two" (2317). She suffers inexplicable reversals through Fortune, Venus, and Diana: "(For wommen, as to speken in comune,/Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune)" (2681-82). Women are "apparently mistresses but finally handmaidens of destiny"; the misogyny is present when the beloved lady is seen as both an inspiration and a capricious folly; she is changeable and feminine. For her lovers, she is both attractive and resistant, and she challenges their courtship: "Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I/Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf," (2304-06); she is elusive and threatening. This, according to Crane, forms the basis for adventure in romance (Crane 175-6).

The multivoiced ambiguity comes in the Knight's Tale from the gender difference of Theseus's voice being the normative voice, the one with common sense, representing chivalry and order, and the voice of Emelye being the un-

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motivated one (Crane 174). In their courtship, Palamon and Arcite interpret their own desire while Emelye's beauty becomes an act of aggression: her unreturned gaze becomes an aggressive action upon them:

> But I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye
> Into myn herte. (1096-97)
>
> Ye sleen my with youre eyen, Emelye!
> Ye been the cause wherfore that I dye. (1567-68)

The narrator presents her like an angel and her complexion is like a rose:

> That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
> And fressher than the May with floures newe--
> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
> I noot which was the fyner of hem two-- (1045-39)
>
> And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. (1055)

On the other hand, Palamon sees her as Venus: "But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse." (1102) and even prays to her:

> Venus, if it be thy wil
> Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure
> Bifore me, sorweful, wrecched creature,
> Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen.
> (1104-07)

As ours is a gendered reading, we can say that the voice of the discourse is masculine throughout, whether it come from the lovers or the narrator. They experience Emelye in lyrical self-absorption for some years during their imprisonment; they have a distant and unchanging experience of desire (Crane 172-73). The tournament is organized to win Emelye:

> My wyl is this . . .
> That everich of you shal goon where hym leste
> Frely, withouten raunson or daunger,
> And this day fifty wykes, fer ne ner,

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Everich of you shal brynge an hundred knyghtes
Armed for lystes up at alle rightes,
Al redy to darreyne hire by bataille.
(1845-53)

It does not represent 'aventure' or 'cas' but 'destynee': "That ech of yow shal have his destynee" (1842).

Hansen sees an attempt to devalue Emelye's indifference: "She woot namoore of al this hoote fare,/By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare!" (1809-10). She is compared to small birds and animals, known for their silliness and timidity respectively, which suggests her powerlessness. Women "maken vertu of necessitee" (3042) because they are men's property and because of their foolish incomprehension of men's higher ideals: "'Why woldestow be deed,' thise wommen crye,/'And haddest gold ynough, and Emelye?'" (2835-36).

Another example of a gendered reading, one which Hansen makes, is of Emelye's ritual cleansing at Diana's temple (2282-88), which we have already quoted, that is done in such a way as to "avoid the frightening sight of the female body", and to show how from her indifference to heterosexual relations her desire is constructed in the garden from her response to May:

She was arisen and al redy dight,
For May wole have no slogardie anyght.
The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
And maketh it out of his slep to sterte,
And seith 'Arys, and do thyn observaunce.'
This maked Emelye have remembraunce
To doon honour to May, and for to ryse.
(1041-47)

She becomes the perfect romance heroine because May, the

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month traditionally associated with Venus, is a time of disorder and female sexual excess when women are powerful (that was why couples never married in May). Emelye's value is proportionate to the male desire she can arouse:

> And if so be thou wolt nat do me grace,
> Or if my destynee be shapen so
> That I shal nedes have oon of hem two,
> As sende me hym that moost desireth me.
> (2322-25)

She is the unattached Amazon in Athens, the extra female "whose sexuality--clearly deadly to at least one knight, and symbolically threatening to the bonds that unify and identify aristocratic men--must be contained by marriage". She represents the latent threat of "Femenye" which Theseus succeeds in eliminating through the tournament (Hansen 220). Thus, both Ypolita and Emelye suffer literally a loss of power.

The Theban women who encounter Theseus at the beginning of the Knight's Tale also suffer a loss of power because of the loss of their husbands' bodies through the tyranny of a male ruler.

> We losten alle oure housbondes at that toun,
> Whil that the seege theraboute lay.
> And yet now the olde Creon--weylaway!--
> That lord is now of Thebes the citee,
> Fulfild of ire and of iniquitiee,
> He, for despit and for his tirannye,
> To do the dede bodyes vileynye
> Of alle oure lordes whiche that been yslawe,
> Hath alle the bodyes on an heep ydrawe,
> And wol nat suffren hem, by noon assent,
> Neither to been yburyed nor ybrent,
> But maketh houndes ete hem in despit. (936-47)

But Theseus perceives in their lamenting only a manifestation of disorder spoiling his triumphant entry to Athens:

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'What folk been ye, that at myn homcomynge
Pertuben so my feste with criynge?' (905-06)

Only after this does he ask if indeed they have been insulted or harmed. The group of women thus represents first and foremost disorder.

In the Knight's Tale, women have no military roles but they do inspire pity because of the aftermath of male assault. Nevertheless, the Theban widows are fearless because of their devotion to their dead husbands and lovers; they represent a shadow of lost masculine courage which is not usually a feminine trait (Crane 24). They are proper, submissive, defeated, dependent and go in pairs: "tweye and tweye" (897). In this, they mirror the image of the two conquered sisters Emelye and Ypolita and also the sister-mothers of Palamon and Arcite who remain nameless: "of sustren two yborn" (1019) (Hansen 218) The Theban women tell Theseus they have "fallen" from positions of power--duchess, queen--to the position of "caitifs" which means "witches" of either sex, but the root meaning is "captifs/captives"--thus utterly powerless. They appeal to his "gentillesse"; one aspect of gentility was to help women. This is noble in one way but reinforces the idea of powerless women.

We shall now look at the Franklin's Tale in which "gentillesse" assumes a major role. In this story, Dorigen surrenders power on the domestic front. It is a problem of courtly ethics, having at its source the folk-tale motif

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of the Damsel's Rash Promise (Jordan 228). Dorigen makes a promise to Aurelius to be his love when he has succeeded in removing all the rocks "endelong Britayne" (990-98). She hopes that she will never have to fulfill this promise. Dorigen deceived without believing that she could be deceived herself. However, the tale is more than a reworking of a folktale motif and an exploration of courtly ethics. It goes straight to the heart of Chaucer's preoccupation in this tale, and those told by the Miller, the Reeve, the Shipman and the Wife of Bath, with "maiestrye" within marriage. By "maistrye" is meant power, control or, as we should say, the upper hand.

In marriage, the normal rule in Chaucer's time was for the man to have power over the wife, but in the Franklin's Tale, the situation is different: in fact, the tale is about the surrender of maistrye within marriage. In the couple's original agreement, the husband, Arveragus, surrenders maistrye:

> Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
> That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
> Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
> Again hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
> But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
> As any lovere to his lady shal,
> Save that the name of soveraynetee,
> That wolde he have for shame of his degree.
> (745-51)

He reserves for himself the right to keep "soveraynetee", which means power outside the household which, officially, he had regardless of what happens inside the household. The wife, Dorigen, promises fidelity and humility:

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'Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
Ne wolde nevere God bitwixte us tweyne,
As in my gilt, were outher werre or stryf.
Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf--
Have heer my trouthe--til that myn herte breste.'
(754-59)

Mann claims that the couple experiences no real distribution of power (113). With the crisis, Mann writes, Arveragus surrenders his maistrye (which one should read it as the "marital ideal") (111,113,120). I disagree with Mann on this point because, even though Dorigen has "maistrye" right from the beginning of the marriage, when the crisis comes, she is the one who does what her husband wants and thus she gives him his power back.

In this tale, Hansen sees Dorigen yielding power: at first, she has power because of her class since she is a noble lady, but after the crisis which comes about when she has to fulfill her rash promise, she submits to her husband: this brings a gender bias to the solution. In Arveragus's solution, there is a possibility of male bonding across class and discursive boundaries between himself and Aurelius and the notion of masculine virtue. Yet, men and women are alike and want to be free: "Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,/And nat to been constreyned as a thral;/And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal." (768-70). Whereas in the Wife of Bath's Tale, the question is "What thyng it is that wommen moost desire" (1007), in the Franklin's Tale, it is "what men desireth" (Hansen 269-70):

'Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,
My trouthe for the holde--allas, allas!'

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(1512-13)

Because of her class, Dorigen has both power and freedom; she is rescued at the last minute and is subject to the pity of men. Her freedom resides in her generosity, power, and subjectivity; she is a "fair and highborn lady of courtly romance": "For she was oon the faireste under sonne,/And eek therto comen of so heigh kynrede" (734-35) and Aurelius has submitted to her (already quoted 738-51). Her marriage shows her complicity in supporting patriarchal ideals; it is a reconciliation of courtly love and medieval marriage. Their agreement was made "pryvely": "That pryvely she fil of his accord/To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,/Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves" (741-43); what valence could the "lordshipe" have except providing ambiguity and instability. It brings about a conflict between freedom and obedience:

> For o thyng, sires, saufly dar I seye,
> That freendes everych oother moot obeye,
> If they wol longe holden compaignye.
> Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye,
> Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
> Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
> Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
> ....
> Heere may men seem an humble, wys accord;
> Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord--
> Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
> Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and
>   servage.
>
> (761-94)

Aurelius has a divided life as a husband (Hansen 271-72).

Alone, Dorigen has dangerous powers; one is her excessive and inappropriate desire: "Desir of his presence

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hire so destreyneth/That al this wyde world she sette at noght" (820-21). She sets aside the world, which is what *men* usually do for love. She also questions God's wisdom and order of Nature in what can be seen as an inappropriate exercise of human arrogance, asking him about the black rocks: "Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?" (865-72). All of this shows her irrationality (Hansen 272). Hansen also questions Dorigen's jokes which show her power: "How can a man tell whether a woman really means it when she says no, especially if she makes a joke of her refusal?" And what is worse: to want a woman who is unattainable or a woman who wants him back (Hansen 274-75). Dorigen's three-part response to Aurelius brings "implicit dangers of ungoverned female subjectivity and sexuality". In part one, Dorigen affirms her loyalty to Aurelius:

> 'Is this youre wyl,' quod she, 'and sey ye thus?
> Nevere erst,' quod she, 'ne wiste I what ye
> mente.
> But now, Aurelie, I knowe youre entente,
> By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
> Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf
> In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
> I wol been his to whom that I am knyt.
> Taak this for fynal answere as of me. (980-87)

In part two, she gives a rash promise which comes into conflict with her pledge to Aurelius:

> 'Aurelie,' quod she, 'by heighe God above,
> Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
> Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
> Looke what day that endelong Britayne
> Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
> (989-93).

The rash promise, made "in pley", shows "her (misplaced) confidence in her status, her right to play games with the

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power she thinks she has", as Hansen states. Her punishment for this use of her imagined power is that she suffers great emotional distress, released by male decisions to put her in her place. The gender rules of the game are such, as Hansen continues, that

> differences of age and rank between men may be leveled or crossed by discourse about women and that common male fears about female powers also transcend differences in genre, style, and class (Hansen 273-75).

Dorigen's playfulness thus imperils class, gender, and generic distinctions; she has the power of a sovereign lady, so her power might be real. She also knows who has the real power; she is not a perfect, bodiless courtly lady; her rebuke does not have a dampening effect but rather whets Arveragus's appetite by reminding him that she has a body and by rekindling his jealousy. Arveragus likes what Hansen calls "seconds": women that are not his exclusively; such was the basis of courtly love (275-76).

Hansen claims that the reason Dorigen has to be punished is because of her knowledge of the rules of the game which

> contradicts the illusion of female power to which she also lays claim when she tries to play, and thus she at once exposes and confirms the paradox of the feminine position in the social game: consciousness of self is consciousness of negation of self (276-77).

Unlike the Miller's Alisoun, Dorigen is punished for her knowledge that she has authority: in her "bodiless, non-

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threatening power and subjectivity, the possibility of female 'libertee' without female sexuality" (1009). The rocks are a multivalent symbol about the monstrosity of female sexuality similar to Scylla and Charibdis; they represent dangers embodied in Dorigen as heroine who does not wait for Aurelius's return as a chaste wife. When she sees the rocks, they represent some barriers to her power as a romantic heroine; she is an agent of disillusionment by telling both Aurelius and Arveragus that she might have the power they pretend to give her and showing them that she does not have it (Hansen 277-78). The counter-illusion resides in the removal of the rocks which returns Dorigen to a

> proper feminine position: stunned, terrified, all but hopeless, in retreat from sexual desire and afraid of her only remaining asset, her sexual virtue, and desperately in need of the pity and corrective guidance of both her husband and her lover (Hansen 278).

Dorigen is kept in her place; violence is threatened and averted because both men are generous and the wife is obedient. The reader does not have any sympathy for Dorigen because Dorigen herself knows it had to take place. Hansen calls this Dorigen's "a-stone-ishment"; her lament (1355-1456) is about female suicides, about self-victimization, self-destruction which impute to a female a possible power:

> 'Allas,' quod she, 'on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,
> That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne,
> Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,
> Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour;
> Oon of thise two bihoveth me to chese.

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> But nathelees, yet have I levere to lese
> My lif than of my body to have a shame,
> Or knowe myselven fals, or lese my name;
> And with my deth I may be quyt, ywis.
> Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,
> And many a mayde, yslayn hirself, allas,
> Rather than with hir body doon trespas?
> (1355-66)

There follow the stories of females who chose suicide instead of losing their honor (1367-1456). Halfway through the stories, Dorigen concludes: "I wol conclude that it is bet for me/To sleen myself than been defouled thus." (1422-23); yet, she continues her lament with more stories about female chastity (1426-1456). By an act of God, Arveragus comes back home while Dorigen was "Purposynge evere that she wolde deye" (1458), but before she actually does so: "Thus pleyned Dorigen a day or tweye/ ...But nathelees, upon the thridde nyght,/Hoom cam Arveragus" (1457-60). She is happy to hand him back her power and let him decide the outcome of the situation. The resolution in this tale shows instead male generosity, tolerance, and sympathy for women because neither narrator nor male characters want her to die. Dorigen is told "to keep her all-important word and to keep her mouth shut about doing so" because women bespeak their own silence. It is also a command against her excessive speech. As Hansen says, the threat against her life is a reminder that men as courtly lovers whether they are husbands or lovers are unmanned and thus need to restore proper manhood (280-81).

Aurelius shows pity: "his herte hadde greet com-

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passioun" (1515). By this last action, he reclaims the power from Dorigen:

> 'That made me han of hire so greet pitee;
> And right as frely as he sente hire me,
> As frely sente hire to hym ageyn.' (1603-05)

It is a chain of events which is set off by Aurelius' patriarchal generosity: "one or all men are 'fre,' that is, noble, independent generous, frank, privileged, and exempt"; then there is an equalization between the two men in lower social ranks (the younger squire, and the clerk/magician) to the knight; finally, in the last section, women are forwarned:

> But every wyf be war of hire biheeste!
> On Dorigen remembreth, atte leeste.
> Thus kan a squier doon a gentil dede
> As wel as kan a knyght, withouten drede.
> (1541-44)

Also, there is a space for social interaction among male ranks that is being opened: male subjectivity and male bonding across and within classes vs danger of trafficking in women is averted "as desire for or control over the woman's body is made secondary to a higher good, the 'gentil' ideal of keeping one's word". When they control women, men control themselves (Hansen 282-83).

I agree with Hallissy's belief that "Arveragus has tried to exert less 'maistrie' than usual in his marriage"; he has redefined virtue by giving Dorigen the male virtue of "trouthe" and by using for himself the female virtue of "self-sacrifice and abnegation". She finds this a good redefinition of the institution of marriage (Hallissy *Clean*

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Maids, 40). Both partners have failed, Dorigen in chastity and Arveragus in mastery, but have fared reasonably well because Dorigen did not suffer and Arveragus did not lose her through death. Dorigen is dishonored in a technical sense but the relationship can absorb it.

Crane also equates the Franklin with Dorigen because of his insecure social rank; he is a "new man" and does not belong to the three estates which in a way parallel Dorigen's ambivalent social position. She compares the two kinds of gentillesse: the Franklin's gentillesse relates through his behavior and Dorigen conforms to the norm. Crane also compares the kind of power both have: the Franklin has a social identity of landholding and prosperity but he has no title; and Dorigen is of higher birth but her gender makes her subordinate to men; in the romance genre, both the Franklin and the noble lady have less powerful positions than knights and both want revision of their status (106-07). Crane claims that the use of romance shows a veneration for the genre yet there is a discontinuity in the plot which shows "a comment on romance's literary authority and on the power of its hierarchies to disenfranchise by measures of gender and class". The acquiescence of Arveragus and Dorigen show how gender and estate constrain and inform identity. Finally, both the Franklin and Dorigen do not know magic; the first one because he is a modern Christian and the latter because she lacks experience and learning; Crane concludes that "estate and gender

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are interrelated social hierarchies (. . .) they can be expressed in terms of one another, and (. . .) they mutually construct social identities" (Crane 112-13).

Now, let us consider the Wife of Bath's Tale and its use of power, authority and maiestry. The narrator is a woman and a special kind of woman. Alisoun is a very independent woman who, in the Prologue of her tale, undertakes to tell her own story. She is in business, travels extensively, enjoys her "gossips," has been married five times, and is now on a pilgrimage looking (as she says) for another husband: "Welcome the sixte" (45). She quotes the "authorities" and we can surmise that the Tale will be about women in power.

In the Wife of Bath's Tale, there are three foci for discussing the topic of women and power. The first shows powerlessness in the episode of the rape of the young girl by the knight. The second is the king's judgment that is altered by the Queen and the ladies at court. This illustrates the theme of disorder: the knight represents social disorder, the women of the court should represent a certain kind of order, but do they? The last focus is on the relationship between the old hag and the knight, where the woman has power because she imposes her will on him and she makes him marry her and gains "sovereignty" over him. There is also in this last episode class disorder because the hag is of the lower classes, yet she has to teach him what he, of the upper classes, should know.

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Crane sees the Wife of Bath as an outsider to romance and unauthorized to tell her tale (113). "Sovereignty" for the Wife of Bath means authority as "a socially conceded right to exercise influence and control the actions of others". Romance has two main features according to Crane; the first one is the demanding standards of beloved ladies that men improve and the compliance to bring courtship to fruition, and the minor ones are resourcefulness, sharp wit, and magical power (Crane 117). After the Prologue comes the romance of the tale where women's emotive power is celebrated. There is no chivalric adventure but it is a story about gentillesse: King Arthur's court (857) where women direct men's emotional and ethical development and where a knight changes for the better and achieves happiness in love. Romance dignifies the claim to women's sovereignty; "frequent antifeminist touches vitiate the romantic elevation" (Crane 119-20).

In the Wife of Bath's Tale, there are several shifts which demonstrate the problem of women's sovereignty. The first is from queenly authority ("The queene hirself sittynge as a justise" (1028)) to proverbial foibles ("Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,/Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,/Somme riche array" (925-27)). The second is from fairy illusions ("I koude amende al this" (1106), "'Chese now,' quod she, 'oone of thise thynge tweye:/To han me foul and old til that I deye/...Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair" (1219-23)) to all-too-solid flesh ("A

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thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,/And she obeyed hym in every thyng/That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng." (1254-56)) The resistance of the ladies at the court shows the disparity between "satiric sovereignty, actively claimed and energetically wielded, and the passive, apparently unwilled sovereignty of women in romance" (Crane 121).

The rape scene indicates that sexual relations are power relations: "He saugh a mayde walkynge hym biforn,/Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,/By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;" (886-88) and that the context is one of masculine social authority: "For which oppressioun was swich clamour/And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour/That dampned was this knyght for to be deed" (889-91) shown in the knight's rape, his concession of authority, and his obedience which was very different from late medieval English legislation because rape was both a sexual crime and a crime against property. Here, the crime is isolated because there is no father or husband (Crane 124).

Gender lines also shift because the Wife of Bath, who is telling the story, changes Ovid's story by changing the sex of the betrayer. In Ovid's story, it is a male barber who betrays, but in Chaucer's, it is his wife who does. Thus, this shift shows the danger of putting one's trust in women. Another example of gender shift is the episode of the ladies' court of jugment which replaces Arthur's. The queen becomes judge herself and interrogates the knight.

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The women of the court join her:

> Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,
> And many a wydwe, for that they been wise,
> The queene hirself sittynge as a justise,
> Assembled been, his answere for to heere;
> And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.
> (1023-28)

> In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,
> Ne wydwe that contraried that he sayde,
> But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.
> (1043-45)

A similar shift occurs at the end of the tale when the hag comes to speak like a cleric at a time when women could not read:

> But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse
> As is descended out of old richesse,
> That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
> Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.
> ....
> Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,
> That highte Dant, speken in this sentence.
> ....
> If gentillesse were planted natureely
> Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,
> Pryvee and apert thanne wolde they nevere fyne
> To doon of gentillesse the faire office;
> They myghte do no vileynye or vice.
> ....
> Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius,
> Was thilke Tullius Hostillius,
> That out of peverte roos to heigh noblesse.
> Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece;
> ....
> Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;
> And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee
> Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
> Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon favour
> And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillese;
> And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.
> (1109-1211)

Her husband submits with wifely meekness and, again, reverses the usual male/female order of things in giving the wife "maistrie":

> This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh,

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> But atte laste he seyde in this manere:
> 'My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
> I put me in youre wise governance;
> Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance
> And moost honour to yow and me also.
> I do no fors the wheither of the two,
> For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.'
> 'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie,' quod she,
> 'Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?'
> 'Ye, certes, wyf,' quod he, 'I holde it best.'
> (1228-36)

In short, women are active movers of plot in this tale, which does not generally apply to romance; thus, this loosens the bond between maleness and authority (Crane 126).

Crane sees gender displacements in the following instances: first, in the fairy realm, the incubi are threatening women: "Al was this land fulfild of fayerye./ The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,/Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede." (859-61), also in this episode:

> And in his wey it haped hym to ryde,
> In al this care, under a forest syde,
> Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go
> Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;
> Toward the whiche dauce he drow ful yerne,
> In hope tht some wysdom sholde he lerne.
> But certeinly, er he cam fully there,
> Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
> (989-96);

The knight-rapist and the king who have power lose it: "I put my in youre wise governance" (1231), "And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille" (897); women who are not supposed to have power, actually have it: "The queene hirself sittynge as a justise" (1028), "'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie,' quod she,/'Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?'/'Ye, certes, wyf'" (1236-38).

Magic offers a depiction of gender where a fairy is

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superior to a mortal woman because of the bivalence: is "the Wife of Bath's old hag truly ugly and aggressive or truly beautiful and obedient?" (Crane 151-2). The hag's second shape and her sermon on low birth and poverty offer not substitutions but destabilizations, because they do not favor low born poverty over gentle wealth but question the distinction between the two:

> Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,
> I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.
> ...
> But he that noght hath, ne coveiteth have,
> Is riche.
>
> (1185-90)

Wealth and poverty are mobile doubles and mirror her two bodies: "To han me foul and old til that I deye...Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair," (1220-23). The knight's joy uses the metaphor of "bath" as in the "Wife of Bath":

> And whan the knyght saugh verraily al this,
> That she so fair was, and so yong therto,
> For joye he hente hire in his armes two.
> His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
> A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,
> And she obeyed hym in every thyng
> That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.
>
> (1250-56)

The shape-shifting pleases the "wordly appetit" of the knight (1218) which confirms the indeterminacy of the feminine (Crane 156).

In short, women and magic offer a resistance to effacing female characters and concerns (Crane 158-9). Sovereignty is not a meaningful problem but a rhetorical ploy to encompass all possible answers: the worth of women's sovereignty, its relation to rape and marriage, and whether

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obedience resides in it and also reasserts the subordination of feminity in romance: "This knyght of which my tale is specially" (983) (Crane 159). The hag's contradictory feminine traits in one figure have a Morganic power over life and death, a submissive and protective desire to marry and to please and an educative role (Crane 160). The Wife of Bath's tale offers a distancing of the feminine with an association with magic and the lost past: "I speke of manye hundred yeres ago" (863), with an elf-queen which shows uncanniness; there is a clash between capitalist and feudal worlds; woman is absent and alien going from old to young; women are moving between wilderness and domesticity (Crane 160-1). There is an association of magic and sexual license which goes across genders: friars and elfins act like incubus: "As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem" (868), "For ther as wont to walken was an elf/Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself" (873-74), "Ther in noon oother incubus but he" (880); from elf-queen and her company to friars and knight and back to hag to captive husband: "Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybroghte/He walweth and he turneth to and fro" (1084-85). There is a "carnival spirit in which the feminine grotesque usurps masculine sexual aggressiveness"; and the hag's ability to enforce sovereignty means freedom because she is "bound only by her own will to obey" (Crane 164).

There is a literary distortion in the female body done by magic or enchantment in the shape-shifting of the hag

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which parallels the theological, medical and legal disputations of the famous question: "Is Woman a monster?" or "Is Woman inhuman?" Her uncanniness comes from her human and her animal forms, from the juxtaposition of contradictory images of women from the loathly to the lovely which are deceiving the masculine gaze. The feminine identity is not inherent in her bodily appearance which in fact puts the emphasis on appearance. Thus, this emphasis of appearance contributes to a tyranny of the body over the feminine because her beauty is not natural (Crane 84-5). Women's beauty as a masquerade has had a long history in psychoanalytic theory but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Hallissy writes that beauty is preferable to ugliness for women but "what women desire most is not beauty but mastery" (*Clean Maids* 177). Mastery in marriage comes from education, money, and legal rights and "master" meant the one who knows. The Wife of Bath quotes *magister* about women and marriage; as the Clerk termed it, she is an "archewyf". In real life no women had authority but in fiction it is possible (Hallissy *Clean Maids*, 177). The rape of a virgin by a "lusty bacheler" in the House of King Arthur (882-83) "Maugree hir heed" (887) (against her will) is the ultimate denial of a woman's will. In the tribunal of "fayerye" (859-60), women are "the exclusive judges of a crime uniquely against them"; there is a popular outrage and an ultimate penalty (889-893) but in real life, it was seldom prosecuted. There was no status involved: "a mayde"

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(886-7). The penalty in real life would have been money; in the tale, it is psychological: the knight has to be educated and the woman is not a merciful Mary but an avenging God (Hallissy *Clean Maids*, 180). The punishment gives power to women and makes this knight, a surrogate of all men, subordinate to the will of women (905); his answer has to please an assembly of women of the three estates (1026-28). Books cannot help him because they have all been written by men (925-28), so he has to listen to the old hag. The women accepted his answer (1043-44) which is that "women most desire that the superior position that they enjoy in courtship should continue into marriage" (Hallissy *Clean Maids* 181). The knight's education is complete only when he accepts <u>his</u> wife who does not have youth, good looks, a good family background, or wealth. When he wants a private marriage, "For prively he wedded hire on morwe" (1080), it is because he wants to set it aside. He hides the whole next day: "And al day after hidde hym as an owle" (1081); in bed, he is a reluctant lover: "He walweth and he turneth to and fro" (1085) but she wants the *debitum maritale* to validate the marriage and relies on her intellectual abilities (Hallissy *Clean Maids*, 182). When the knight accepts the "maistrie" of his wife (1230-38), she "is magically metamorphosed into what men most desire": "That she so fair was, and so yong therto" (1251) (Hallissy *Clean Maids*, 183).

Another critic, Buhrmann, believes that the knight's

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conversion is genuine and helps to restore an idealism to the genre (64). The knight, she says, is a flawed hero who is perfect for the Wife of Bath's thesis of "feminine dominance"; he is full of lechery and rudeness, and prone to masculine evasions when in trouble, so the humour is directed at the knight, not at the loathly lady (Buhrman 62):

> This knyght answerde,'Allas and weylawey!
> I woot right wel that swich was my biheste
> For goddes love, as chees a newe requeste
> Taak al my good and lat my body go.' (1058-61)

I disagree that the knight's conversion is genuine. It is true though that the loathly lady has no physical description, a fact which enhances her wisdom and inner worth of gentillesse: she is a model of wisdom, reason, and courtesy, unlike the husband who is emotional, impulsive, and headstrong (74). Hansen claims that the curse and lesson of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale are as follows:

> a naive faith in language does not serve women well because language is, according to the *Canterbury Tales*, an instrument for reproducing the conventions that constrain and deny both the experience of women and the representation of that experience (39).

To conclude, let us talk about the reception of the Wife of Bath's Tale. The prefeminist critic saw the Wife of Bath as "vividly feminine"; feminist writers saw her as a strong, autonomous, free woman, a victim, manipulative and hostile suffering from the wound of gender; finally, the postfeminist shows Chaucer as a "male poet writing for and about men" and where a gendered female reader is excluded (Hansen 40-43). Hansen likes the humanist reading

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which shows the need to explore the interaction of feminine textuality and masculine identity; "Chaucer knows a lot about women (but not everything), deplores their victimization, and even espouses the cause of their freedom and equality" (Hansen 53).

I agree with Crane's comparison of Emelye, Dorigen and the Wife of Bath Tale's hag in this way: neither Emelye nor Dorigen solicits power over their men but "their suitors declare that their overwhelming merit places them in authority over their suitors' courtships and very lives." The hag actively exercises power because she is aggressive, manipulative, sexually demanding, and has high and magical attributes (Crane 120).

In the romantic tales we have seen in this chapter, we can say that women in general lose power. Only in the Wife of Bath's Tale do women have some, but it is granted under specific circumstances (the rapist-knight's judgment and salvation through the old hag's intervention) and such power does not extend beyond these events.

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Chapter III

Women of Power in the Faerie Queene

In this chapter, we shall be examining four women of power in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* [1] and the form of power they exert. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first deals with gender study and the second with some female characters in the *Faerie Queene*. The first part will be subdivided into four sections. First, we will study the general problem of female sexuality as inherited by the Chaucerian tradition. Then, we will look at the gendering of allegory. In the third section, we will consider concepts of virtue. Finally, we will focus on the problem of women of power and the problem of women wanting power. [2] The second part of this chapter will also be divided into four sections. Each one will focus on one female figure of power, namely Acrasia, Malecasta, Radigund, and Britomart. We will see how the problems of gender and power are worked out through these four women.

Gender is very important in the *Faerie Queene*. This work is an epic poem with some elements of romance; it was first published in 1596. At a time of great socio-economic changes, gender posed a very acute problem. As men were trying to redefine their roles in society, they pushed women out of the public domain into the private one, and this attitude is reflected in the *Faerie Queene*. We find that the problem of gender duality is first introduced in the

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Proem; the narrator is male while, of course, his Muse is female:

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
> As time her taught in lowly Shepheards weeds;
> . . . .
> (Proem 1.1-2)

Anatomy brings a specific destiny and gender is more important than deeds. Also, there is a largely unspoken but central subversion of women, especially in Britomart's case; as one critic says, she is an "anatomical female, whose 'gender' typically is determined by her apparel rather than her genitals" (Cavanagh 1). As in Chaucer's poetry, the old image of Eve is still present--all women inherit Eve's sin. If they are virtuous, they evoke suspicion, and women's sexuality is intertwined with images of danger which are either actual or potential. In short, woman equals wickedness.

There is also a gendering of allegory [3] which is shown in the following manner: first, conceptualizations of virtue shift according to the gender of the individual figures; second, glorification and expansion of the fetishization of female bodies are expressed by knights; third, female characters signify something other: Duessa and False Florimell are but deceptive façades, Una is a shadow and there is a question that she could be an unfaithful virgin, Britomart "looks like a man most of the time", False Florimell is a "male spright in disguise"; fourth, knights and readers are cautioned against women and their words. Female characters are tropes whose meaning is deferred, re-

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flected, or fragmented (Cavanagh 5-7).

Thirdly, there is a dilemma about the gendered role of women because of Spenser's concept of "virtue". It is in accordance with the commonly-held view in the sixteenth century that, firstly, the word "virtue" comes from the Latin *virtus*, the first meaning of which is "manliness", "manly", or "valour" , since its etymological root is *vir*, "man; and secondly, the word denotes public values, or civic values. In both cases, women were excluded. Instead, women aspired to "their" virtue--chastity--thereby opening up a new realm of contradictions and problems. Female virtue is subverted and beauty is illusory. Women are judged by beauty, and male behavior and attitudes undermine female efforts toward virtue.

The fourth problem of the question of gender in the *Faerie Queeene* comes from its own title which honors a female ruler, Gloriana, queen of Fairyland. Moreover, Elizabeth I, the virgin queen, is Spenser's dedicatee (in the 1596 version), and it marks "the text as one emanating from the body and aura of a queen" (Cavanagh 11). Besides, Arthur forever desires Gloriana but his quest is never completed and there is no present moment for Arthur and his queen. Cavanagh argues that the frustration engendered for the reader by her entrapment in the margins of the text replicates the role of woman within the epic:

> the physical expression of sexual attraction is repeatedly withheld from virtuous couples, suggesting an insuperable discomfort with the

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> potential spiritual and psychic ramifications of sex with honorable women (17-18).

Book III concerns the writing of chastity as a portrait where Elizabeth is an "ensample" (1.4) and her heart is a "pourtraict" (1.8). This image could also be seen not so much as a confrontation but rather as a dynamic interaction between a conventional view of a queen contained within a private world and the reality of a female monarch (Cerasano 2-3). When Elizabeth I appeared at Tilbury, she looked like an Amazon Queen and her speech about having "the body but of a weak and feeble woman" but "the heart and stomach of a king" created uneasiness among Englishmen (Teague 69).

With the title of the *Faerie Queene*, the reader expects Gloriana to be both the poem's chief protagonist and its principal theme, but with the letter to Raleigh which says that the aim of the poem is "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline", there is a transition "from a definite and masculine-gendered subject to one of indefinite gender" and Arthur is the prototype of his perfected gentleman:

> I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised, the which is the purpose of these first twelue bookes (Letter to Raleigh).

Thus Gloriana is expelled to the mythic margins or boundaries of the epic. She is concealed behind the golden walls of Cleopolis and all the knights' quests take them away from her. Arthur is the ruler of the immortal body

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politic of England through marriage, such marriage being foreshadowed by Britomart and Artegall's story (Berry 155-6). In the April eclogue of the *Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser was one of the first to codify the image of Elizabeth "as the self-absorbed inhabitant of a predominantly feminine world" (Berry 153). In the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser gave Gloriana/Elizabeth, "as a female beloved", greater imaginative or spiritual powers than ever before:

> Simultaneously, it restricted the exercise of these powers in the world of human affairs, by distinguishing between two different spheres of existence, the mythic and the historical, which paralleled the Platonic division between an ideal and a real world (Berry 153)

Thus, Elizabeth becomes a hermaphrodic Venus:

> The cause why [Venus] was couered with a vele,
> Was hard to know, for that her Priests the same
> From peoples knowledge labour'd to concele.
> But sooth it was not sure for womanish shame,
> Nor any blemish, which the worke mote blame;
> But for, they say, she hath both kinds in one,
> Both male and female, both vnder one name:
> She syre and mother is her selfe alone,
> Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none.
> (IV.x.41).

As we know, female rulers were not seen as part of natural law. John Knox, a renowned Calvinist divine in Scotland, attacked Mary, Queen of Scots and Queen Mary of England and published, before Elizabeth was crowned, *The First blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (1558) in which he wrote:

> To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a

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> thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally it is the subversion of good order, and all equity and justice....And first, where I affirm the empire of woman to be a thing repugnant to nature, I mean not only that God by the order of his creation hath spoiled women of authority and dominion....For their sight in civil regiment is but a blindness: their strength weakness: their counsel foolishness: and jugment frenzy, if it be rightly considered....Nature, I say, doth paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish: and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. And these notable faults have men in all ages espied in that kind, for the which not only they have removed women from rule and authority, but also some have thought that men subject to the counsel or empire of their wives were unworthy of all public office" (Aughterson 138-39).

Thomas Smith, a prominent lawyer, scholar and diplomat in *The Commonwealth of England, manner of government thereof* (1589) expressed a different point of view:

> We do reject women as those whom nature hath made to keep home and to nourish their families and children, and not to meddle with matters abroad, not to bear office in a city or commonwealth, no more than children or infants: except it be in such cases as the authority is annexed to the blood and progeny, as the crown, a duchy or an earldom; for there the blood is respected, not the age nor the sex. Whereby an absolute queen, an absolute duchess or countess (those I call absolute which have the name, not by being married to a king, duke or earl, but by being the true, right, and next successors in the dignity, and upon whom by right of the blood that title is descended); these, I say, have the same authority, although they be women or children in that kingdom, duchy or earldom, as they should have if they had been men of full age. For the right and honor of the blood, and the quietness and surety of the realm, is more to be considered...being by common intendment understood that such persons never do lack the counsel of such grave and discreet men as be able to suply all other defects (Aughterson 145).

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Elizabeth I was accepted as a female ruler because of, a-mongst other things, her exceptional individual qualities (Cerasono 2). She was both male and female, both father and mother. Cerasano claims that the queen used both ideas because of the

> patriarchal discourse [which] is, in part, a response to women's ability to reproduce, and that motherhood cannot be easily dismissed since it rivals masculine systems of power and meaning (14).

Only in this way could she exert an "authoritative monar-chic control and to act as a redemptive force for the Pro-testant cause" (15).

We will now see how these problems of power are worked out in the representation of Acrasia, Malecasta, Radigund, and Britomart. The first problem, as we have seen earlier, is that female sexuality is seen as evil in the *Faerie Queene*. This evil characteristic is present in the female representations we are studying right now except for Britomart. The second problem, the gendering of allegory, is also present, where Acrasia represents withchcraft, Malecasta lust, Radigund evil power, yet Britomart stands for innocence. The third problem, virtue, is thus possible only for Britomart because she is innocent and can travel dressed like a man without incurring our wrath. Radigund also dresses like a knight but she keeps the knights she has subdued dressed in feminine rags and occupied with

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spinning. She is evil and can only be defeated by good: another woman dressed as a knight. The fourth problem, the notion of a woman with power or who wants power, also concerns representations of evil; only Britomart, of all the women studied here, does not want power. The dichotomy of good and evil is easily divided between Britomart representing good power and the other female figures representing evil power. A second dichotomy can also be stressed between those who have power like Acrasia, Malecasta, and Radigund and the one female figure who does not have power but achieves it only to give it back to a male figure. When Britomart gains power, she gives it back to a man because the only power she wants is the power of love.

The complexity of the tradition bequeathed from the Middle Ages shows that

> Spenser could compliment Elizabeth I by identifying her with the Faerie Queene and that a woman could be burned at Edinburgh in 1576 for 'repairing with' the fairies and the 'Queen of Elfame.'" (Lewis *Discarded* 124) [4]

Now, let us see in detail the different representations of women in power. Acrasia stands for sexual disorder; she distracts men from their quest and changes them into beasts. She exerts "maestery" over them. Acrasia shows "a woman's pleasure where she takes that pleasure on her own terms and that this intersection of female power and pleasure can only appear in the male lexicon as en-

chantment and witchery" (Sowton 410):

> *Acrasia* a false enchaunteresse,
> That many errant knights hath foule fordonne:
> Within a wandering Island, that doth ronne
> And stray in perilous gulfe, her dwelling is,
> Faire Sir, if euer there ye trauell, shonne
> The cursed land where many wend amis,
> And know it by the name; it hight the *Bowre of blis*.
> (II.1.51)

Acrasia is a "venomous woman." Poison is not an honorable weapon like a sword:

> The image of the venomous woman depends on a combination of misogynistic notions and traditional role expectations; in other words, evil women stand as representatives for all women (Hallisy *Venomous*, 5, 10).

We can see that the words Spenser used to describe Acrasia, "false" and "enchaunteresse", portray her clearly as a witch. As Hallissy explains,

> Witches were long connected with poisons in general and with love potions in particular. The Latin term *veneficus*, or its more common feminine form, *venefica*, was synonymous with *poisoner* or *sorcerer*, at least through the sixteenth century (Halissy *Venomous*,64).

Furthermore, she continues and points out that the element of healer completely disappears and that the venomous woman is only a witch. There is also an increase in misogyny because while the medieval *venefica* was controlling only the hero's body, the Renaissance witch also wants to damn his soul (Hallissy *Venomous*, 79-80). For example, Acrasia is a killer: she kills Mordant through sexual exhaustion:

> Her blisse is all in pleasure and delight,
> Wherewith she makes her louers drunken mad,
> And then with words and weedes of wondrous might,
> On them she workes her will to vses bad:
> (II.1.52.1-4)

We note that his name "Mordant" comes from the Latin word

"mors" which means death. Death was also a word which meant orgasm. She exerts her "will" over Mordant and binds him in "chains of lust and lewd desires" (II.i.54.3). She has both power and authority and uses them to deceive. She is "vile", and "evil" (II.i.55.1) and knows about magic potions that she serves to her victims in a "cup" (II.i.55.3). We may also refer to the "bowle of wine":

> With cup thus charmed, him parting she deceiu'd;
> . . .So soone as Bacchus.
> (II.i.55.3-6)
>
> And strowed round about, and by his side
> A mighty Mazer bowle of wine was set
> (II.xii.49.2-4)
>
> In her left hand a Cup of gold she held,
> And with her right the riper fruit did reach,
> Whose sappy liquor, that with fulnesse sweld,
> Into her cup she scruzd, with daintie breach
> Of her fine fingers, without fowle empeach,
> That so faire wine-presse made the wine more sweet:
> Thereof she vsd to giue to drinke to each,
> Whom passing by she happened to meet:
> It was her guise, all Straungers goodly so to greet. (II.xii.56)
>
> *Sad verse, giue death to him that death does giue,*
> *And losse of loue, to her that loues to liue,*
> *So soone as Bacchus with the Nymphe does lincke,*
> So parted we and on our iourney driue,
> Till comming to this well, he stoupt to drincke:
> The charme fulfild, dead suddenly he downe did sincke.
> (II.i.55.4-9)

Spenser is, of course, playing with the idea of the "poisoned chalice"--not the true chalice of the communion. No man can escape her because there is a curse attached to each one of them. Therefore, Guyon takes upon himself to avenge Mordant's death.

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Not only is Acrasia a witch, but she is also like a spider. Her bower is a sign of "entrapment, dominations, loss of masculinity":

> As in the medieval romance, the structure of the Renaissance epic involves alternation between love and war, between the inner sphere of influence of the female and the larger world of masculine activity (Hallissy *Venomous*, 80-81).

As we see in the text:

> Goodly, it was enclosed round about,
> Aswell their entred guestes to keepe within,
> As those vnruly beasts to hold without
> (II.xii.43.1-3)

Other images of entrapment are seen in the inner "gate" whose boughs and branches "did broad dilate their clasping armes, in wanton greathings intricate" (II.12.53.8-9) and the Porch whose vine "embraces" the guests in order to entice them (54.2-3). The episode ends, however, with another image of entrapment, the "subtile net" that Guyon and the Palmer throw over Acrasia and her lover (Hallissy *Venomous* 81). Thus the "spider" is caught in a "web".

Acrasia is a very powerful woman. The Bower is a voyeuristic delight which is dangerous and seen through Guyon's ocular complicity. Sorcery needs an audience to succeed; thus, Acrasia has no fixed image except the one given her by men.

Acrasia, the sorceress, has a facility for replicating the natural realm: "The Bowre of *Blisse* . . ./A place pickt out by choice of best aliue,/That natures worke by art can imitate" (II.xii.42.2-4); she has a dual ability: first, she can delude senses with forged nature; second, she can

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disrupt the transition from the pagan/classical world to the Christian one. In short, she offers heresy and sensual temptations.

The text goes from Guyon's outrage to his concurrent sexual arousal. Acrasia's strong desire creates a fear within Guyon; and he turns inquisitor and binds the witch tightly: "her in chaines of adamant he tyde" (II.xii.82.6); his "rigour pittilesse" (II.xii.83.2). The question is: is he sexually aroused?

Acrasia commits heinous sins because of her rapacious sexuality; she changes men into animals:

> These seeming beasts are men indeed,
> Whom this Enchauntresse hath transformed thus,
> Whylome her louers, which her lusts did feed,
> Now turned into figures hideous,
> According to their mindes like monstruous
> (II.xii.85.1-4);

This is a site of unmanageable lusts, and what makes matters worse, Grill decides to stay as a pig because of the attraction she exerts upon him and, of course, because of the pleasure he gets from her:

> See the mind of beastly man,
> . . .
> That now he choseth, with vile difference,
> To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.
> To whom the Palmer thus, The donghill kind
> Delights in filth and foule incontinence:
> Let *Grill* be *Grill*, and haue his hoggish mind
> (II.xii.87.1-8).

Acrasia's life-sucking predilections turn her into a succubitic female. She uses her "female" power of seduction because the receiving of semen is pleasurable; but the giving depletes the victim of his life fluids and saps male

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energy--as a result, knights withdraw from the chivalric realm. Then, it is common knowledge that such a succubitic female will return to the devil with blood, breath and semen to produce an infernal progeny (Hallissy *Venomous*, 51-3).

The second female character we will look at is Malecasta. Malecasta represents social and sexual dis-order; she also exerts "maestery" over men. She is a "bur-lesque Venus almost instantly inflamed with the love of a young man (Britomart)" (Roberts 68). Men fear seductive and independent women. By representing women as night-marish, the poet limits the scope of their power; he also makes misogynistic assertions that women are nothing, non-beings. In the *Faerie Queene*, Malecasta is not human but she is a spright who adopts a female human beauty as a means of seduction. By using this image, Spenser alters the traditional view of witchcraft treatises where women are lured by the devil because he wants the devil to take a female form to lure men. In the *Faerie Queene*, the witches' power is male power in female forms and authority does not withstand the disclosure of their forgeries (Cavanagh 42-47). They are "forged beauty" (I.ii.36.1) because they are beautiful women with no virtue. This idea is very differ-ent from that found in the work of Chaucer, where the witch in the Wife of Bath's Tale is both virtuous and beautiful.

Malecasta is very lustful; she

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> represents the courtly love tradition carried to its extreme, not being content with a single knight to idolize her, but wanting all who pass to fall into her power (Meyer 70).

Malecasta is inconstant in love and her artfulness is repeatedly emphasized; she tempts Britomart as the Venus of her tapestry tempts Adonis:

> Then with what sleights and sweet allurements she
> Entyst the Boy, as well that art she knew,
> And wooed him her Paramoure to be;
> (III.1.35.1-3)
>
> Whom when the Lady saw so faire a wight,
> All ignoraunt of her contrary sex,
> (For she her weend a fresh and lusty knight)
> She greatly gan enamoured to wex,
> . . .
> Still did she roue at her with crafty glaunce
> Of her false eyes, that at her hart did ayme,
> And told her meaning in her countenaunce;
> But *Britomart* dissembled it with ignoraunce.
> (III.i.47.1-4; 50.6-9).

She is all false and superficial compared with Britomart who really loves (Cavanagh 35). Morgan writes that Malecasta's rule of love is based on passion being at odds with reason and overwhelming it; it is based on lust which demands servitude:

> Then spake one of those sixe, There dwelleth here
> Within this castle wall a Ladie faire,
> Whose soueraine beautie hath no liuing pere,
> Thereto so bounteous and so debonaire,
> That neuer any mote with her compaire.
> She hath ordaind this law, which we approue,
> That euery knight, which doth this way repaire,
> In case he haue no Ladie, nor no loue,
> Shall doe vnto her seruice neuer to remoue.
>
> But if he haue a Ladie or a Loue,
> Then must he her forgoe with foule defame
> (III.1.26-27.1-2).

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Malecasta is also evil because she enforces infidelity. In the Castle Joyous (III.i.34-38), she leads Adonis "And whiles he bath'd, with her two crafty spyes,/She secretly would search each daintie lim" (III.1.36.5-6) with an element of secrecy in the act. There is also a link between lust and wealth: Malecasta is "the Lady of delight" (III.1.31.9) and she has wealth (III.1.32-33) with a "somptuous bed" (III.1.41.2), compared to Britomart who despises the "rich aray" (III.4.18.4-9) and Malecasta's ways (III.1.40.9) because she is virtuous. Lust is also linked to wantonness because in Castle Joyous, Malecasta has not one but six liegemen, Gardante, Parlante, Jocante, Basciante, Bacchante and Noctante (III.1.45) (Morgan 254-55).

The third female figure who exerts evil power is Radigund. As an evil Amazon, she stands for social and moral disorder; she also distracts men from their quest. Not only does she exert "maestery" over men but she also womanizes them. She is the evil "doppelgänger" of Britomart. John Knox writes about Amazons:

> Why women ought not to bear rule nor authority (...) such a sight should so astonish them [the ancient Greeks] that they should judge the whole world to be transformed into Amazons, and that such a methamorphosis and change was made of all the men of that country as poets do feign was made of the companions of Ulysses, or at least, that albeit the outward form of man remained, yet should they judge that their hearts were changed from the wisdom, understanding, and courage of

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> men, to the foolish fondness and cowardice of women (Aughterson 139).

To have women with power and authority is to have a world that is upside-down, where men lose their masculinity. When a man comes into a house, it is because he is in need of relief and refuge. He is in a weakened state and disarms himself. He places himself in the woman's power and the risk he takes in being poisoned by her shows a balance of power in a sexual relationship; if the man is not strong enough, he succumbs, but if he is strong enough, he dominates (Hallissy *Venomous*, 5).

It is quite clear that Artegall is no match for Radigund's beauty:

> But when as he discouered had her face,
> He saw his senses straunge astonishment,
> A miracle of natures goodly grace,
> In her fair visage void of ornament,
> . . . .
> At sight thereof his cruell minded hart
> Empierced was with pittfull regard,
> That his sharpe sword he threw from him apart,
> Cursing his hand that had that visage mard
> (V.v.12.1-4, 13.1-4)

He disarms himself and Radigund renews her attack:

> Soone as the knight she there by her did spy,
> Standing with emptie hands al weaponlesse,
> With fresh assault vpon him she did fly
> (V.v.14.1-3)

Even when Artegall retreats, she fights harder and seeks "greedy vengeance" (V.v.14.9). Radigund is cruel (V.v.14.4) and "mercilesse" (V.v.14.7). Yet, Artegall submits himself to her mercy (V.v.16.9) and "of his owne accord" (V.v.17.2):

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> Yet was he iustly damned by the doome
> Of his owne mouth, that spake so warelesse word,
> To be her thrall, and seruice her afford.
> For though that he first victorie obtayned,
> Yet after by abandoning his sword,
> He wilfull lost, that he before attayned.
> . . . .
> And as her vassall him to thraldome tooke".
> (V.v.17.3-8, 18.3)

He agrees to fight on her terms: "sith he his faith had plight,/Her vassal to become, if he him wonne in fight" (V.v.23.8-9). Lewis calls this "a struggle for unconditional sovereignty or 'maistry'" (1967: 106).

Radigund is also cruel and evil because she supports gender inversion by cross-dressing her captive:

> And caused him to be disarmed quight,
> Of all the ornaments of knightly name,
> . . .
> In stead whereof she made him to be dight
> In womans weedes, that is to manhood shame,
> And put before his lap a napron white.
> (V.v.20.3-4, 6-8).

She brings shame to him because he cannot be himself anymore and also because she puts his armor to "Be hang'd on high" (V.v.21.7). Furthermore, to make matters worse, Artegall has to spin and card in order to be fed (V.v.22.4-9). Finally, because he is the best knight, she "placed him most low" among her other male captives (V.v.23.1). The poet comments that it is "A sordid office for a mind so braue./So hard it is to be a womans slaue" (V.v.23.4-5). Caroline Lucas sees this moment as the moment of complete shame and humiliation which is spelled out with Britomart's first words which show her horror at this "loathly uncouth sight" (V.vii.37.6); it is an image of disorder and morti-

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fication (117).

We will make a last comment on why Radigund is portrayed as an evil woman. Against any "rule" or "reason" (V.v.25.5), she falls in love with Artegall. Yet, the poet says, in so doing she "purchases a licentious libertie," unlike virtuous women who know they should remain humble--unless the "heavens them lift to lawfull sovereigntie" (V.25) [4]. But Radigund battles with herself for "maestry" which she is almost ready to give him if he were to return her love:

> . . . the warlike Amazon,
> Whose wandring fancie after lust did raunge,
> Gan cast a secret liking to his captiue straunge.
> . . .
> She chaw'd the cud of louers carefull plight;
> . . .
> But it tormented her both day and night.
> Yet would she not thereto yeeld free accord,
> To serue the lowly vassall of her might,
> And of her seruant make her souerayne Lord:
> (V.v.26.6-9, vi.27.2, 5-8).

She does realize she must be seen to weaken (28), yet, when Artegall refuses her advances, she reverts to her precious story character (47): Clarrida, her maid, is now said to "all her subtill nets (...) vnfold" (52), thus repeating the image of demon females we saw in the Acrasia story.

Finally, the last character we will study is Britomart. She is the most fascinating female figure, a woman with power but who has no authority, a virgin who represents the knight of chastity. She does so more as a "male" knight, primarily because she is more often dressed like one but also because she acts in a manly fashion. Her

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main private virtue is chastity, which is a female virtue, while her public virtues are those of a male knight.

As a Christian knight, Britomart's quest is one of love and courtship. One could chart Britomart's quest for chastity in this way: the places of testing are Castle Joyous and the House of Busyrane; the place of perfecting is the Temple of Isis; and the final test is the Battle with Radigund (Hankins 44). We can say of Britomart's vision in Isis' church that the picture shows

> Isis 'on top', her mercy firmly controlling the justice of Osiris....but her own androgyny privileges the masculine half of this *discordia concors*, and ensures the continuity of the father's name and identity in an unbroken chain of political patriliny (Berry 162).

Her mythical connection is not with Diana but with Athene and Minerva. Britomart constitutes, as Berry asserts, a

> serious criticism of the Elizabethan cult, which had exalted a private image [of the queen as woman] to the level of a public icon because rather than being placed in the service of the state and her royal lineage, Elizabeth's gender had become an image of political authority in and for itself, and had seriously restricted the potential of her male courtiers for action (163).

A woman of power but with no authority, Britomart is absent from the central section of Book III (cantos 5, 6, 7, 8). We encounter her in the first canto where she meets Guyon and the Palmer: "They spide a knight, that towards pricked faire,/And him beside an aged Squire there rode" (III.i.4.2-3), and then see her in retrospect (III.ii.6-52); (III.iii.22-49): Merlin prophesies her future and her descendants. After overthrowing Marinell, in canto iv,

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she is absent

> But she againe him in the shield did smite
> . . .
> He tombled on an heape, and wallowd in his gore
> . . . .
> So fell proud *Marinell* vpon the pretious shore.
> The martiall Mayd stayd not him to lament,
> But forward rode. (III.iv.16.1-9; 17.9-18.1-2)

In canto ix, however, she re-enters the narrative as an unknown (male) knight, "Another knight, whom tempest thither brought,/Came to that Castle" (III.ix.12.1-3), who is subsequently revealed to be female. She removes her helmet to let her "golden locks" fall over her shoulders like "sunny beames" (III.ix.20.4-6). Spenser brings her back into the narrative in canto xi as "the flowre of chastity" (III.xi.6.1-IV.i) and recounts her experiences in the House of Busyrane, one of the finest passages in the *Faerie Queene*. Britomart is more mobile than any noble woman; with her armour, she carries the walls around her (symbolically); she is one of the boys, beautiful when needed, safe behind her metaphoric hymen, yet she must remain martial to protect her maidenhood (Cavanagh 157).

Britomart and Radigund parallel each other. Both are fierce warriors, behaving like men. While Radigund's continual abuse of men and her degradation of Artegall do not make her a model of virtue, like Britomart, there is a linkage between the Amazon leader and the Knight of Chastity. The images and the language used by Spenser are those of male knights' combats, and the choice of two fierce animals, the tiger and lion, make the two women in-

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distinguishable:

> As when a Tygre and a Lionesse
> Are met at spoyling of some hungry pray,
> Both challenge it with equall greedinesse:
> But first the Tygre clawes thereon did lay;
> And therefore loth to lose her right away,
> Doth in defence thereof full stoutly stond:
> To which the Lion strongly doth gainesay,
> That she to hunt the beast first tooke in hond;
> And therefore ought it haue, where euer she it fond.
>
> . . . .
> So long they fought, that all the grassie flore
> Was fild with bloud, which from their sides did flow,
> And gushed through their armes, that all in gore
> They trode. (V.vii.30-31.5-8)

One can say that they both act like male knights. This therefore raised a gender issue: women and men are portrayed fighting in similar terms. We can recall the fight between Palamon and Arcite where they were also compared to a lion and a tiger. However, Spenser clearly means these animals to be female, as the pronouns make clear.

After she frees Artegall from Radigund's prison, Britomart ensures that female rule will not continue in that kingdom:

> And changing all that forme of common weale,
> The liberty of women did repeale,
> Which they had long vsurpt; and them restoring
> To mens subiection, did true Iustice deale.
> (V.vii.42.4-7)

She disappears from the poem yet she remains on the road as a male knight: "Then hoping that the change of aire and place/Would change her paine, and sorrow somewhat ease,/She parted thence, her anguish to appease" (V.vii.45.3-5). This is something that would certainly bring criticism to bear on other women but not on her (Cavanagh 170).

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Britomart acts in as manly a way as Artegall: "Meane while her noble Lord sir *Artegall*/Went on his way" (V.vii.45.6-7). How can this represent true feminine behavior? We remember Dorigen's liberty and how it got her into trouble; here, no questioning is made. Is Dorigen more of a threat because she acts like a woman and dresses like one also?

> By offering Britomart as the reputed heroine and central exemplar of this virtue, the text implicitly supports the culture's systematic denial of women. If she lived as a female in Faeryland, Britomart's virtue could never survive. If Britomart were portrayed as insightful or even intelligent, her chastity would be compromised (...) she fulfills male roles in a sharply gendered society as she purportedly models a predominantly female virtue. (Cavanagh 171)

Unlike iconic women who stay within houses and castles, Britomart was raised "to tossen speare and shield" (III.ii. 6.3-4) (202). Fichter writes that "Britomart undertakes a quest for love as if love were war"; she is a British maid in Saxon armor, an aggressor motivated by self-defense (161).

Renaissance neo-Platonism saw a real identity between the good and the beautiful (Morgan 246). The divine infusion of theological virtue is represented by Britomart's "enchaunted speare": "For death sate on the point of that enchaunted speare. . . . The secret vertue of that weapon keene/That mortall puissance mote not withstond" (III.i.9. 9; 10.5-6). It is a supernatural virtue beyond the reach of reason.

> Therewith resolu'd to proue her vtmost might,

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> Her ample shield she threw before her face,
> And her swords point directing forward right,
> Assayld the flame, the which eftsoones gaue place,
> And did it selfe diuide with equall space,
> That through she passed; as a thunder bolt
> Perceth the yielding ayre, and doth displace
> The soring clouds into sad showres ymolt;
> So to her yold the flames, and did their force reuolt.
>
> Whom whenas *Scudamour* saw past the fire,
> Safe and vntoucht, he likewise gan assay,
> With greedy will, and enuious desire,
> And bad the stubborne flames to yield him way:
> But cruel *Mulciber* would not obay
> His threatfull pride, but did the more augment
> His mighty rage, and with imperious sway
> Him forst (maulgre) his fiercenesse to elent,
> And backe retire, all scorcht and pitifully brent. (III.xi.25, 26)

The flames gave way because Britomart shows a higher power of love than is necessary for the conquest of lust while Scudamour cannot pass (Morgan 249). If Britomart needs such a phallic image (the "enchaunted" spear) to conquer lust, it is because she is acting like a male Christian knight. If she has access to sorcery with impunity, it is because she looks like a man, she has become some kind of Merlin.

Britomart's second characteristic is her female chastity. It is composed of modesty, innocence, and neutralized sexuality. She is virtuous, yet she often acts with childlike innocence when she throws a temper tantrum:

> . . . She threw
> Herselfe vppon her bed, and did lament:
> Yet did she not lament with loude alew,
> As women wont, but with deepe sighes, and singulfs few.
>
> Like as a wayward childe, whose sounder sleepe
> Is broken with some fearefull dreames affright,

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> With froward will doth set him selfe to weepe;
> Ne can be stild for all his nurses might,
> But kicks, and squals, and shriekes for fell despight:
> Now scratching her, and her loose locks misusing;
> Now seeking darkenesse, and now seeking light;
> Then crauing sucke, and then the sucke refusing.
> Such was this Ladies lit, in her loues fond accusing. (V.vi.13.6-9, 14)

She also acts in a childlike manner when she acts before discovering her mistakes, or when she uses some kind of bovine fury:

> Streight downe she ranne, like an enraged cow,
> That is berobbed of her youngling dere,
> With knife in hand, and fatally did vow,
> To wreake her on that mayden messengere,
> Whom she had causd be kept as prisonere,
> By *Artegall*, misween'd for her owne Knight,
> That brought her backe. And comming present there,
> She at her ran with all her force and might,
> All flaming with reuenge and furious despight. (V.viii.46)

She is focused only on finding her beloved and does not seek power or authority:

> For little lust had she to talke of ought,
> Or ought to heare, that mote delightfull bee;
> Her minde was whole possessed of one thought,
> That gaue none other place. (V.vi.21.1-4)

Britomart is a very ambiguous character; she is sometimes dim-witted, or plagued with repeated misapprehensions. She lacks insight and intelligence which are essential for her destiny. She shows fearful ignorance when overcome by desire or other confusions. In Malecasta's castle, it does not occur to her to tell Malecasta that she is a woman. During the pursuit of Florimell, she does not save her because at that time, she is more "female". She does not acquire insight or understanding; she represents

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innocence, a female trait. The other knights are not as blind or as ignorant as Britomart. Could it be indifference to Florimell's fate or cruelty and selfishness towards Amoret?

> Thereto her feare was made so much the greater
> Through fine abusion of that Briton mayd:
> Who for to hide her fained sex the better,
> And maske her wounded mind, both did and sayd
> Full many things so doubtfull to be wayd,
> That well she wist not what by them to gesse,
> For other whiles to her she purpos made
> Of loue, and otherwiles of lustfulnesse,
> That much she feard his mind would grow to some
> excesse.
>
> His will she feard; for him she surely thought
> To be a man, such as indeed he seemed,
> . . .
> Yet *Britomart* attended duly on her,
> As well became a knight, and did to her all
> honor. (IV.i.7; 8.1-2,8-9)

She shows no compassion for other women: to Amoret she does not reveal her sex and leaves her in a potentially perilous space; she also assumes the male role of official champion of Amoret: "At last the most redoubted *Britonesse*,/Her louely *Amoret* did open shew" (IV.v.13.1-2). Thus she shows her compliance with standard male-female constructs; she refuses False Florimell as a prize and declines to abandon her own lady:

> And she her selfe adiudged to the Knight,
> That bore the Hebene speare, as wonne in fight.
> But *Britomart* would not thereto assent,
> Ne her owne *Amoret* forgoe so light. (IV.v.20.4-7)

She thus reaffirms her male orientation but the narrator does not show any moral outrage (144). She also participates "in 'male' value systems which judge men and women respectively on their camaraderie or appearance, not their

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virtue". "Nothing can keep (her) from pursuing her man"; she has epic stature; she follows her fellow male knights; she fights first and asks questions later; she exchanges tales (both false and true) with congenial knights she meets; she rescues and protects appealing young ladies; she beats to a pulp anyone blocking her progress; Artegall is the sole focus of her boundless energies; yet she does not recognize him as the Salvage Knight. Finally, her association with Sir Satyrane, both at the tournament and in his pursuit of Ollyphant, shows disjunctures evident in her embodiment of purportedly "ideal" female chastity (Cavanagh 153-55). As Silberman says:

> Britomart fashions herself into the knight of chastity through open-ended, androgynous improvisation. She dons armor and slips in and out of male-identified modes of behavior, all the while in pursuit of her beloved. (Silberman 1995: 50-51)

One can presume that it is rather strange that Britomart is the titular knight for the "female" virtue of chastity because she can only enact this role from a position of "manliness". She dresses like a man and interacts with women as though she were a male and only rarely acknowledges her sex or gender, "most notably when she acquiesces to patriarchal prerogatives by deposing Radigund and then relinquishing her own power as soon as possible". She is a sexed body of fluctuating gender; "primarily 'male', she nevertheless remains 'female' as needed". In short, she is no behavioral model for other women because in "real life"

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she would be seen as unchaste, wanton or malevolent because she is wandering the countryside in male attire, engaging in activities marked as male; she speaks freely and interacts with a wide range of people. We remember Amoret and Florimell who are implicated as agents of their perils (Cavanagh 139-40).

When Britomart conquers Radigund, she "as Princess raised" becomes herself an usurper. When she returns power to the male order, she displays the female virtue of obedience, before returning to her "wandering" as a male knight until Artegall's return. She now "restores" women to "men's subjection" and in so doing deals "true justice" (V.vii.42.4-7). For this "wisdom", she is adored, but it is, as Berry says, an ungendered mode of wisdom:

> This 'wisdom' involves a dissociation from her body and her gender--a symbolic repetition of the beheading of the mother, as well as the female cousin. But it is a vital prerequisite for Britomart's union with Artegall. And while Britomart's denial of her ties to other women culminates in a displacement of her sexual power, Arthegall is a Herculean hero who only temporarily sacrifices the phallic attributes of the wild man, during his captivity to Radigund (163).

In the *Faerie Queene*, when women are in power they are so because they have more in common with male gender than with female and this is as true for "feminine" creatures like Acrasia and Malecasta as for those who dress and behave like male knights, Britomart and Radigund. If they do not associate themselves with the male gender, they are destroyed, eliminated or subjugated to the male realm. I

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would add that in the following stanzas (43, 44), there is a similar ambiguity: Britomart exercises her power in rescuing the knights from "thralldom" and makes them magistrates--the freeing of victims of thralldom is a chivalric gesture belonging to male knights. This is her final "male" gesture of power. Moreover, in 44 she hides her woe and "womanish complaints she did repress"--one finds a gesture to suppress her gender.

Spenser revises Ariosto by shifting "emphasis from fictitious heroines to the false men who have suppressed the exploits of heroic women"; there is an "opportunity for irony but as a challenge to language itself" because "Spenser fashions the *Legend of Britomart* in response to Platonic hierarchical dualism and Petrarchan poetics" (Silberman *Singing* 259-60). Britomart was an image of "rare chastitee" (III.Proem.5.9), worthy of his "dred soueraine" (III.Proem.3.5); no real women could model themselves on these women of power, on either Britomart or Elizabeth (Cavanagh 152). Elizabethan chastity was composed of modesty, innocence, and neutralized sexuality; on the allegorical level, it was an exemplary status, and on the literal level, her narrative shows contradictions which do not show a clear paradigm of chastity. Britomart, like Elizabeth, is an improbable woman and has an improbable role: few women could trangress gender roles with such impunity.

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Conclusion

The early modern period shows a gradual rigid enforcement of gender hierarchy because women were not clearly demarcated into social groups, and they had no corporate identity while the men were members of either a religious organisation, or an occupation; they were part of a hierarchy of groups not of individuals. The period saw many social and economic changes, but it is very difficult to pinpoint why the enforcement of gender hierarchy became stronger. There are many reasons for this enforcement. Women were breaking down the hierarchy. Men were not doing what was expected of them. The economic, political, or intellectual changes were making the old gender roles obsolete before satisfactory new ones had been created. There was a polarization of society which made women lose all public and most private power.

According to political historians, the difference between power and authority is that power means "the ability to shape political events" while authority means a formally legitimated and recognized power. Some historians, anthropologists, and sociologists claim that the dichotomy male/

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female is linked to the dichotomy public/private because men felt excluded from the most important human physical experience, that of giving birth. This polarization of gender increased during the early modern period with the power going to a few male leaders. Equality within marriage existed only because there was no political equality. Any reversal of a gender hierarchy was the most threatening way for a world to be turned upside down.

In this thesis, we have explored the status of women, the question of female power, and the nature of this gender hierarchy and authority in the works of two major English poets of the early modern period: Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser.

In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the question of power is well spelled out in the Wife of Bath's Tale: "what women most desire" is that the superior position they enjoy during courtship should continue into marriage. The old hag obtains control over her husband, the knight-rapist, because he wanted a beautiful and young wife. But we know she is a witch who has changed her appearance. However, in the Franklin's Tale, Dorigen has no power outside the marriage but she has "maestery" over her husband, Aurelius. Not only does she gain power but she also gains the liberty that goes with it. Unfortunately, she cannot cope with either and is relieved when she can at last relinquish both power and liberty and act according to her husband's will.

In the Knight's Tale, woman becomes an abstraction and

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a means for social bonding. The Amazons are conquered and their queen, Yppolita, and her sister, Emelye, are married off. Thus, female rulers lose power.

In Spenser's epic, the proper order is man-on-top. Good women disappear into the forest, out of the text or into the margin while bad women evaporate or fall back under male domination. The witch imagery is demonized and thus she loses her good quality. She becomes a venomous woman. There is an intensification of misogyny; a medieval witch wants to control the hero's body but a Renaissance one wants also to damn his soul.

Women of power are also venomenous. This is true for Acrasia, Malecasta, and Radigund. Acrasia is a lascivious witch who attracts men with a poisoned cup. She weaves a web around the hero and prevents him from returning to his quest. Malecasta is a male spright disguised as a female who seduces many men. Throughout the epic, there is a very strong current of misogyny, where women are raped, victimized, tortured, and killed.

Radigund is an evil Amazon and Britomart's "doppelgänger" of the worst kind because not only does she seduce men but she also transfom them into women. She can only be conquered by another Amazon, Britomart, who represents chastity. Women cannot achieve "virtue" or "valour" in the sense of the word's Latin root because it means "manliness"; so, women can try to gain it by preserving their chastity. Britomart is not a witch but we find her in most

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of her narrative dressed as a male knight. Once she gains power over Radigund, she quickly relinquish-ed such power because her only quest is to find her mate, Artegall, and to build with him a noble race.

We have seen that there was an increase in the culture's systematic denial of women that was mirrored in the works of both Chaucer and Spenser. For Chaucer, there is a concern about the roles of both men and women and who should exercise power. For Spenser, woman is entrapped in the epic. She cannot fashion her own destiny because homosocial bonding governs female circulation. Even "good" knights are a threat to chastity and only respect women with brothers or fathers to protect them; the others are fair game. Beauty should represent inner strength but the males in the poem are taken in by deceiving appearances. Thus, in the early modern period, society became sharply gendered and female power decreased dramatically. Such a loss of power was recorded by both Chaucer and Spenser.

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NOTES

Chapter I- Historical and Literary Contexts

[1] Aristotle writes: "For man has the most perfect nature of all animals...Woman...is also more envious, more querulous, more slanderous, and more contentious" as quoted in Kate Aughterson ed. *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Construction of Feminity in England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 44.

[2] Juan Luis Vives wrote in *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1540): "What learning a woman should be set unto, and what she shall study? I have told you: the study of wisdom, the which doth instruct their manners and inform their living, and teacheth them the way of good and holy life...And finally let her learn for herself alone and her young children, or her sisters in our Lord" (Aughterson, Kate, ed. *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Feminity in England* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) 169-70).

[3] Shulamith Shahar states that in "writings from the twelfth century onwards, women are almost always categorized separately. They are described as a distinct class, subdivided according to their social-economic, rather than 'socio-professional' position. Otherwise, they are subdivided according to their personal, i.e. marital status, a division never applied to men. . . Being thus ranged together as a class, women, like the other classes,

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have special faults and sins attributed to them. These are sometimes subdivided to match the internal division of the class, and sometimes given as applying to the feminine class as a whole." In *The Fourth Estate: a History of Women in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Chaya Galai (New York: Methuen, 1983) 2-3.

[4] On female rulers see John N. King, *Royal Iconography, Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 182-226.

[5] French romances did not, of course, suddenly appear in a vacuum. They developed out of the earlier genre, the epic. Much has been written on the differences and shared characteristics of romance and epic, both in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but the debate does not bear directly upon my study.

[6] The Anglo-Norman romances had constituted an aristocratic literature at a time when England had a bilingual elite, but, by the early fourteenth century, this elite was no longer proficient enough in French.

[7] For excerpts of the original texts of Vives, Calvin, the Canons, Aristotle, Erasmus, Knox, Poulain de la Barre and others who influenced the period see Kate Aughterson, ed. *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Construction of Femininity in England* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

[8] Carole Levin in "Power, Politics, and Sexuality: Images of Elizabeth I" (Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Condert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz, eds. *The Politics of Gender in*

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Early Modern Europe (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989) 95-110 writes that the king's two body concept was reworked under Elizabeth to present her "as both a virgin to be revered and a sensuous woman to be adored". She was also married to England and thus seen as the mother of all. In this way, "Elizabeth exerted a strong psychological hold on her subjects" (106-8). See also Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), and Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). For the weakness of the concept of the king's two bodies in Elizabethan England see Joel Hurtsfield, *The Illusion of Power in Tudor Politics* (London: the Athlone Press, 1979: 22-24).

Chapter II - Women and Power in Three Chaucerian Romances

[1] The edition used throughout the thesis is, for Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton, 1987). All quotations from this author will be taken from this edition and line numbers for the quoted passages will be given in the text between parentheses.

Chapter III- Women of Power in the Faerie Queene

[1] The edition used throughout the thesis is, for Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. E. A. Greenlaw, F. M.

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Padelford, C. G. Osgood, et al, 10 vols. (Baltimore: Md, 1932-49). All quotations from this author will be taken from this edition and line numbers for the quoted passages will be given in the text between parentheses.

[2] Representations of women also include good women who have both power and authority and who are either emblematic, iconic or mythological but they remain within a house or a castle; virgins or venomous women. Women are "*pharmakon*: something simultaneously beneficial and poisonous", as quoted in Sheila T. Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in the Faerie Queene* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1994), p. 26. The fleeing virgins do not have either power nor authority.

[3] Quilligan and Silberman also believe that allegory has to be approached through its literal level to get at the gender bias level (cited in Cavanagh 7).

[4] Spenser is thus shielding himself from insulting Queen Elizabeth who as "lawful sovereign" does not fall into the category.

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