INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 9502700

"Men call me chaste": A feminine redefinition of androcentric chastity in medieval, Renaissance, and nineteenth century British texts

Weir, Mary Ellen, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1994

Copyright ©1994 by Weir, Mary Ellen. All rights reserved.

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

"MEN CALL ME CHASTE": A FEMININE REDEFINITION OF ANDROCENTRIC

CHASTITY IN MEDIEVAL, RENAISSANCE, AND

NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH TEXTS

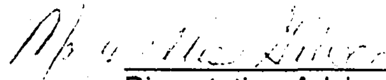
by

Mary Ellen Weir

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1994

Approved by



Dissertation Advisor

WEIR, MARY ELLEN, PhD. "Men call me chaste": A Feminine Redefinition of Androcentric Chastity in Medieval, Renaissance, and Nineteenth Century British Texts. (1994)
Directed by Dr. Mary Ellis Gibson. 237pp.

Nearly all the ideas, concepts, perspectives, and definitions that have been constructed, appropriated, and authorized in western history are androcentric. The concept of chastity is just one among the many, and this dissertation explores how women writers in the medieval, Renaissance, and nineteenth century literary periods redefine chastity to include women's experience and ideas. To show how women redefine the concept, the origins of androcentric chastity are explored, revealing its gender-specific focus and its negating and constraining of female sexuality by patriarchal codes for women's sexual behavior. This notion of chastity is variously but consistently resisted and subverted by Margery Kempe and Heloise in the medieval period, by Mary Wroth in the Renaissance, and by Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the nineteenth century. While the ways these writers resist androcentric chastity differ, conceptually their redefinitions are analogous. All focus on the genderless, intangible and virtuous qualities of integrity of the self and on emotional and spiritual fidelity to a beloved other. Further, the women writers' redefinition embraces and celebrates female sexuality, and breaks out of the parameters of patriarchal sexual codes and institutions such as marriage or religious life that negate or constrain women's sexuality. Also significant is that the redefinition is non-gender specific, and

extends and applies equally to men. The conclusion drawn by this inquiry is that women's redefinition of androcentric chastity pushes chastity out of its confinement within patriarchal sexual codes and institutions that constrain and negate women's sexuality. Redefined chastity expands and extends the possibilities of more inclusively human understandings of integrity of the self, and of spiritual, emotional and sexual fidelity and commitment to a beloved other.

© 1994 by Mary Ellen Weir

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Advisor [signature]

Committee Members [signature]

[signature]

[signature]

March 30, 1994

Date of Acceptance by Committee

March 30, 1994

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heartfelt appreciation goes to Mary Ellis Gibson, chair of my dissertation committee. Her scholarly expertise, support, and hard work have been, in a word, invaluable. I am equally indebted to the members of my committee, Denise Baker, Christopher Hodgkins, and Randolph Bulgin, for showing me what critical, comprehensive, and careful scholarship is. And to Denise Baker I am especially grateful, as she has been with me from the beginning, as graduate director who first processed my application materials, then as professor, and finally as committee member. To these scholars of the English Department of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I will always be indebted.

A lifetime of my gratitude goes to my religious community, the Sisters of Mercy of North Carolina, for their abiding support and belief in me. Those sisters I especially wish to thank are: the Sisters of Mercy at Charlotte Catholic High School, who provided computer assistance during the most difficult days; Marian Arroyo, who was constantly there to help with both expertise and emotional support during consistent and all-too-numerous computer breakdowns; and finally Pauline Clifford, whose belief, encouragement and support has manifested itself in many ways throughout

many years, the most recent of which has been her computer formatting of this dissertation, an adventure that at times kept her going until 2:30 a.m.

For all these persons, I will always say thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

APPROVAL PAGE ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION 7

Notes 23

I. "THE SUBJUGATION OF WOMAN IS IN THE ORDER OF THINGS": THE ORIGINS OF ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY . . . 24

Notes 47

II. "MEN CALL ME CHASTE": MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY 50

Hali Meidenhad: A Woman's One Gift 54
The Book of Margery Kempe: Embracing and Resisting 64
The Letters of Abelard and Heloise: Two Views of Chastity 80
Notes 105

III. "LETT YOUR CONSTANCY YOUR HONOR PROVE": MARY WROTH'S CHALLENGE TO ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY IN THE RENAISSANCE 109

Mary Wroth: Replacing Chastity With Constancy 130
Notes 160

IV. "OPENING TO A NEW SENSE": NINETEENTH CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS REDEFINING CHASTITY 164

The Heart of Midlothian: The Expected Chastity of the Female Hero 170

Ruth: Innocence, Repentance, and Redefining Chastity 189
Aurora Leigh: Woman as Saintly, Outspoken, and Chaste 205
Notes 217

CONCLUSION 220

BIBLIOGRAPHY 225

INTRODUCTION

In the twelfth century a woman named Heloise, an abbess of a religious community, resisted being called chaste. She felt that those who considered her chaste were too narrow in their definition, a definition which did not correspond to her own experience and caused her to feel false and divided: "men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am." Feeling constrained by this definition which was not compatible to her own experience, she grappled with expanding the idea to include her own perspective: "[men] consider purity of the flesh a virtue, though virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul."

Heloise's resistance is courageous and noteworthy when one considers that nearly all the ideas, concepts, understandings, perspectives and definitions that have been constructed, appropriated, and authorized in western history are androcentric. The concept of chastity is just one among the many. Chastity is male-created and male-centered and it has been rigidly imposed on women. Western literature, and British literature in particular, chronicles the story of the defining of chastity by men and its imposition on women. But the tellers of tales about women's chastity have predominately been men, since significant numbers of women have only been recently

admitted into the androcentric literary canon. Fortunately, western thought has evolved to the point where questions are just beginning to be asked about how women and men redefine the androcentric concepts that have shaped them. And it is just in the last few decades of the twentieth century that feminist inquiries into the nature of chastity have been broached--and taken seriously. In the early twentieth century, a critical examination of chastity required sheer fortitude: Virginia Woolf writes in A Room of One's Own that "chastity . . . has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest" (49-50). But thanks to the insights and persistence of contemporary feminist literary criticism, inquiries into the nature of chastity are taken seriously as are questions as to a woman's experience of the chastity imposed on her by patriarchy. What did women think of the chastity created for and imposed on them? How did they view themselves as chaste--and how might their view of their own chastity be different from the male understanding of the concept?

Feminist scholarship of the last two decades has created an exciting arena in which women's experiences are finally viewed as a valid and authoritative means of examining the human experience. We are at a stage in history when scholarship that includes women's naming of their own thought, insight, and perspective is essential. This naming is crucial for feminist scholarship in particular. The development of feminist literary criticism in the last two decades suggests that the time has come for women's naming and

redefining. As Carol P. Christ suggests, feminist criticism has undergone, thus far, two stages in its development and is now moving into a third stage. The first stage is what Christ calls the "nothingness" period, which pointed out the abuses of women by patriarchy. The second stage, which I believe we are currently in, is what Christ terms the "awakening," a period in which women's "powers of being" are discovered and proclaimed. Christ names the third stage "new naming," and I believe we are at its threshold. In this stage, says Christ, women begin "a new naming of self and reality" (13). The ramifications of this "new naming" are tremendous. The concept of what human history is, of what the human experience is, will be enormously expanded: we stand at the threshold of a new construction of human thought that includes female experience, thought, and insight. Through the feminist movement and feminist literary criticism in particular, both past and future human history is poised to undergo a period of radical transformation through this "new naming," this redefining by both men and women of the androcentric concepts that have formed them.

The purpose of this dissertation is to offer a small contribution to this grand movement of "new naming." It is an effort to expand the concept of chastity to be more representative of the <u>human</u> experience. More specifically, this dissertation examines how women from three different eras redefine the androcentric concept of chastity that shaped them. It is my purpose to show how women writers in the middle ages, Renaissance, and nineteenth century

significantly expand the idea of chastity. From chastity's androcentric sex-centered and gender-specific focus, these women remove its near exclusive concentration on female sexuality and enlarge it to include non-gender specific ideas about integrity of the self and fidelity and commitment in human relationships.

To understand how the women writers redefine androcentric chastity, we first must consider its complex definition. While "chastity" is the principal term of this discussion, it frequently intersects with the terms "virginity," "celibacy," and "continence," making consistent distinctions among them difficult. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this complexity in definition begins in the patristic period and continues into the nineteenth century. Presented here is a general overview of the etymology of androcentric chastity; specifics of its historical development appear in each of the periods I examine.

As we shall see in Chapter One, the patristic period shows us that chastity became interchanged with the terms "celibacy," "virginity," and "continence." A definition of chastity emerges from the patristic notion of virginity, which was understood as a voluntary, consecrated state of sexual abstinence. Most patristic writers, following Paul's lead in 1 Corinthians 7:8ff, asserted that virginity is the ideal (but not obligatory) state for the Christian. Thus, for the patristic writers, virginity was superior to marriage.

While marriage was viewed as a state for weaker persons unable to control or curb their sexual urges, it was nonetheless regarded as commendable for those unable to live as virgins. Augustine provided a definitive statement on marriage and sexual activity within it, instructing that marriage is a good instituted by God since its end was procreation and it provided a control for lust. However, within marriage, the church fathers urged sexual moderation, and counseled that intercourse should be only for procreative purposes. Thus "chaste" moderation was advised by the fathers for married Christians. The patristic understanding of chastity, then, was ostensibly synonymous with its understanding of continence, or sexual self-restraint within marriage.

The patristic idea of celibacy was that it applied to an unmarried state, but was not necessarily the same as the consecrated state of virginity. In their writings the fathers presume that Christians should not engage in pre-marital or extra-marital sex and that those not married should be celibate.

At the risk of oversimplifying these patristic understandings of the terms, let us for the sake of clarity reiterate that the patristic meaning of virginity was of a consecrated state of complete sexual renunciation. Chastity was applicable to the state of marriage and synonymous with continence, defined as sexual self-restraint. Celibacy referred to sexual abstinence in an unmarried state. Thus, generally speaking, chastity in the patristic period was more often than not used interchangeably with continence, defined as sexual

self-restraint. Accordingly, chastity invariably became applicable to the three states of virginity, widowhood, and marriage, so that there were "conditions" of chastity, which varied according to the state of life of the Christian.

However, as we shall also see in Chapter Two, the terms chastity, virginity, and celibacy became even more interchangeable and mutually inclusive in the medieval period. Writing in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas did not see chastity as synonymous with continence, and resisted the partitioning of chastity into the three states of virginity, widowhood, and marriage. Aquinas defined chastity not as self-restraint in sexual activity but as total abstinence from sex--and he considered virginity as that state which reveals chastity in its perfection. Thus, with Aquinas, chastity came to be associated with complete sexual abstinence.

Still, however, definitions of chastity vary widely in both the medieval and modern periods. The Middle English Dictionary defines "chastite" as "the virtue of sexual purity as defined by Church doctrine, i.e., virginity, abstinence of men and women in orders, faithfulness (or abstinence) between man and wife, abstinence of widows, continence or abstinence of men."[1] Skeat's Etymological Dictionary cites the old French-Latin "chaste" as meaning "pure, clean, modest," and notes an early use appeared in the Ancrene Wisse. The Oxford English Dictionary defines chastity as "purity from unlawful sexual intercourse; continence." This definition cites usages beginning in 1305 with St. Edmund, followed by Gower in 1393, Caxton in 1474, Bauldwin in 1547,

Spenser and Shakespeare in the sixteenth century, Goldsmith in 1774, and Morley in 1872. The references are a mix of religious and secular allusions to chastity, ranging from Spenser's description of Una in Book I of the Faerie Queene as "the flowre of faith and chastity" to Goldsmith's usage in his Natural History: "And he would instantly put her to death if he but suspected her chastity." Out of the ten references ranging from 1305 to 1872, four allude to chastity in women. The OED also gives a secondary definition for chastity as "abstinence from all sexual intercourse, virginity, celibacy." Usages for this definition extend from the Ancrene Wisse in 1225 through 1756, with references mainly to religious chastity. As for celibacy, it is not listed as a term in the Middle English Dictionary but is identified with chastity in a secondary definition as "the abstinence of men and women in orders." As will be suggested in Chapter Two, chastity and celibacy became intertwined in the patristic and medieval periods through a blending of philosophic and ascetic misogamy.[2] The Oxford English Dictionary defines celibacy as "the state of living unmarried"; its first English usage appears in 1663 in a reference to St. Paul's advice on celibacy. Hume uses celibacy in a 1754 comment on the introduction of celibacy for priests into the "English system," and Boswell remarks in 1791 that "Even ill assorted marriages were preferable to cheerless celibacy." The OED definitions for "celibate" ("unmarried, single; bound not to marry") and "celibatair" ("a bachelor; one who is vowed to

celibacy") predominately list nineteenth century usages of the terms, most of which refer to the clergy or members of religious orders.

In their modern usages, chastity, virginity, and celibacy continue to be used interchangeably. Contemporary dictionaries of Christian theology, depending upon their Protestant or Roman Catholic focus, often cross-reference the terms "virginity," "celibacy," and "chastity." The Protestant Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, for instance, defines celibacy as "life-long abstinence from marriage," and includes a cross-reference to virginity. Chastity is treated as "continence," defined as "refraining from sexual intercourse for a variety of religious reasons but not for one's entire lifetime." Interestingly, a contemporary definition of virginity is not given; its treatment is historical, and is cross-referenced to chastity. Moreover, the Protestant theological definition notes misogynistic implications of the terms.[3] The Catholic Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi does not make reference to misogyny in its lengthy discussion of celibacy and virginity; no reference for chastity is given. The New Catholic Encyclopedia has references for chastity, celibacy, and virginity, and associates virginity more exclusively with women than with men.[4]

As we see from this brief etymology of androcentric chastity, its definition includes an interchange of terms occurring from the patristic period to the present. It would be reasonable to assert that chastity, then, in ordinary

usage throughout its etymological history, is associated with both sexual abstinence and sexual self-restraint.

The writings of Heloise and Margery Kempe in the medieval period, of Mary Wroth in the Renaissance, and of Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the nineteenth century suggest redefinition of androcentric chastity. While none of these women directly declares that she "redefines" chastity, and only Heloise even uses the term (which she calls "chastity of spirit"), the women writers' concepts are analogous. This conceptual affinity is significant, given the varying ways the women each respond to androcentric chastity across disparate historical periods. Some of these writers were ambivalent about questioning the patriarchal codes that defined and imposed chastity on them, and their "redefinitions" are not overt or perhaps even conscious. But in their depictions of various situations and characters the women writers all manage to subvert the androcentric idea of chastity in some way, and in the process, they reveal their views about what a woman's chastity is <u>to a woman</u>.

To show the marked differences between the feminine and androcentric definitions of chastity, texts depicting the androcentric idea are juxtaposed with the women writers' texts. Further, the historical development of the definition of androcentric chastity is presented in the three periods to clarify the differences between it and the evolving feminine redefinition. Despite a decisive shift in the location of androcentric chastity from virginity to

marriage between the medieval and Renaissance eras, in all three periods androcentric chastity nonetheless remained conceptually the same, primarily centering itself in a woman's body and her sexuality. Women's unfolding redefinitions in the same three periods consistently resist this androcentric notion.

I begin by reviewing, in Chapter One, the history of the idea of sexual renunciation from the second century A.D. onward. The writings of the patristic fathers of the church solidified the association of women with the body and its sensual appetites, a correlation which plays itself out in the medieval, Renaissance, and nineteenth century literary texts I examine. Intrinsic to the linkage of woman and body is the pervasiveness of the patristic and medieval idea that sexuality--particularly women's sexuality--is tantamount to human weakness or sin. Women's bodies were thought to be the repositories of sin: to avoid sin one must avoid sexuality, to avoid sexuality one must avoid women. And with patristic thought which shaped medieval views on the superiority of virginity to marriage, efforts to elevate women from the inferior realm of their bodies to a superior, rational realm (associated with maleness) resulted in an insistence on female physical virginity or chastity. Chastity was thus linked to a physical sexual state--and fundamentally associated with women. Chastity was a solution to the problem of women and their bodies--to the problem of sexuality.

Another patristic concept threads itself through the medieval, Renaissance, and nineteenth century periods. From Biblical and patristic conceptions of gender and sexuality emerged the idea that the Virgin Mary, a woman who is not sexual, can redeem Eve, a sexual woman whose subordinate state lay largely in the creation of her body from Adam's, and whose disobedience to God brought sexuality to the human condition. Thus the dichotomizing of woman is created: she is split into ideas of sinful sexuality and redemptive virginity. Woman was "good" (and thus male and rational) in renouncing her body and sexuality, or "bad" in being female and sexual.

In the Renaissance period and into the nineteenth century, the dichotomizing of woman continued. The Protestant Reformation shifted the locus for chastity from the church to marriage and the family. As was the case long before the Reformation among classes that had property, women's chastity was necessary for the orderly continuation of property and inheritance rights for males. Accordingly, women in the Renaissance and up through the nineteenth century continued to be split. Good women were chaste and insured the systematic continuation of male property rights; bad women were unchaste and were considered violators of the law (which ultimately safeguarded property).

With the historical development of androcentric chastity in mind, I then turn to see how the women writers of each of the three periods manage the restraints imposed on them by androcentric chastity.

In Chapter Two I examine how two women in the medieval period dealt with the "problem" of their sexuality. The Book of Margery Kempe and The Letters of Abelard and Heloise offer Margery Kempe's and Heloise's experiences of and responses to the androcentric chastity imposed on them. We encounter the ambivalence of Margery Kempe, who is caught in disjunction: she embraces androcentric chastity while she struggles with its repression of her sense of self as a bodied, sexual person. Kempe assents to androcentric chastity by insisting on chastity in her marriage as a way to achieve union with God. At the same time she subverts, by her own sexual and bodied descriptions of her relationship with God, the idea that the negation of sexuality (associated with femaleness and sin) is essential to achieving union with God. Heloise in The Letters of Abelard and Heloise experiences none of the ambivalence of Kempe, and it is Heloise's forceful and direct redefinition of chastity that allows us to understand later formulations by Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Heloise's "chastity of spirit" embraces bodiliness and sexuality along with the non-physical qualities of spiritual and emotional fidelity and commitment to Abelard. In her redefinition, Heloise does not negate or constrain her sexuality but rather embraces and celebrates her sexual

relationship with Abelard. But while Heloise redefines chastity as inclusive of bodiliness and sexuality, her principal emphasis is on the spiritual and emotional qualities of love, fidelity and commitment to Abelard. Further, Heloise sees her spiritual, emotional, and sexual love for Abelard as credible outside the patriarchal institutions of marriage or religious life. For her, these institutions do not validate her love for Abelard nor determine her sexual status as "chaste" or "unchaste."

Chapter Three explores how a concept analogous to Heloise's "chastity of spirit" surfaces in Lady Mary Wroth's redefinition in the Renaissance. In Wroth's sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilantus, she both uses and subverts Petrarchan literary conventions to replace androcentric chastity with the notion of constancy. In the sequence, constancy, not androcentric chastity, becomes the female speaker-poet's chief virtue. I suggest that Wroth's replacement of chastity by constancy may be her circumventing of a Renaissance "code" that equated a woman's chastity with silence. Glorifying her female speaker's chastity would be incongruous--the only speaker in Wroth's lengthy sonnet sequence is the woman Pamphilia. In replacing chastity with constancy, Wroth also redefines chastity by removing it, as Heloise does, from its androcentric focus on female sexuality and gender norms. Wroth's redefined chastity is non-gender specific and is based on constancy, which she sees as spiritual, emotional, and sexual fidelity and commitment to a beloved other. And for Wroth, as for Heloise, this fidelity and

commitment can operate validly and credibly outside patriarchal institutions, which for Wroth includes marriage.

In Chapter Four, I show how two nineteenth century Victorian women writers parallel Heloise and Mary Wroth by their removing chastity from its confinement within patriarchal codes for women's sexuality. In their work both Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Barrett Browning portray "fallen" and seduced women and speak out against a Victorian taboo on women writing about such subjects. We see a corresponding version of Heloise's "chastity of spirit" in Gaskell's novel Ruth. In the first part of the novel, Gaskell refuses to negate or restrain her female protagonist's sexuality: Gaskell declares the freedom and naturalness of Ruth's sexual expression. But in the second half of the novel we find struggles like those of Margery Kempe as Gaskell vacillates between resisting and acquiescing to the patriarchal condemnation of Ruth as fallen woman. At the same time, however, Gaskell gives the characteristics of redefined chastity to a male character, the Reverend Benson, so that Gaskell's redefinition of chastity, like Wroth's, is non-gender specific. In Aurora Leigh Elizabeth Barrett Browning depicts a raped woman, Marian Erle, as saintly and outspoken: Marian forthrightly places herself and her chastity outside the patriarchal codes that censure her as "unchaste," and "fallen." Barrett Browning subverts the designation of Marian as unchaste by suggesting that Marian's purity and chastity reside in her fidelity to her child

and to herself, something that lies far beyond patriarchal sexual codes for women.

In these texts, we see how some women--Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Gaskell--both support and resist androcentric chastity. Others--Heloise, Mary Wrcth, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning--directly resist it. All react against a definition of chastity centered almost wholly on the negating or constraining of female sexuality by a patriarchal code for women's sexual behavior and expression. While Heloise, Mary Wroth and Elizabeth Gaskell include in their idea of chastity the positive embracing of bodiliness and sexuality along with the virtuous qualities of integrity to the self and fidelity and commitment to a beloved other, all of the women writers remove sexuality as central to their redefinition. And equally significant is that none of the women define chastity on the basis of a woman's sexual experience or the sexual status assigned to her by patriarchy. The women writers' redefinition does not center fundamentally on female sexuality, as does the androcentric concept. Rather, their redefinition focuses on the genderless, intangible and virtuous qualities of integrity of the self and to emotional, spiritual and sexual fidelity in relationship to a singular beloved other. Their redefinition breaks out of the narrow parameters of patriarchal sexual codes for women and patriarchal institutions such as marriage or religious life. And women's redefinition of chastity extends equally to men and to women.

Redefined by women, chastity is the creation of a self and a holding to that self's integrity, as well as loving well and faithfully in committed relationships. This redefinition also includes ideas on a woman's purity, virtue, and honor--ideas which are vastly different from the androcentric notion that confines them to just one aspect of femaleness--sexuality. A female redefinition of androcentric chastity extends the possibilities of fully human understandings of virtue, honor, purity, and fidelity and commitment in relationships as well as integrity to one's self.

The women-authored texts in this dissertation offer women's ideas on women's--and men's--chastity. Their redefinition of androcentric chastity offers, I believe, a contribution to the new and exciting historical period we are moving into, the period of "new naming."

NOTES

1. The Middle English Dictionary has no definition for "virginity" since the "V" volume has not yet been published.

2. In the Dictionary of the Middle Ages, the term "chastity" itself is not defined. It is cross-referenced to celibacy, implying that the two terms were associated through the prohibition of clerical marriage, begun in the fourth century. Other possible cross-references such as "virginity" and "continence" are not listed.

3. The Westminster Dictionary comments that "one cannot deny a certain misogyny related to clerical celibacy"; in its discussion of chastity, the dictionary notes that the historical application of chastity "has led to much misogyny."

4. While the encyclopedia notes that virginity may be attributed to men as well as to women, it acknowledges that "apart from considerations of religion and virtue, [virginity] has been more highly honored in women than in men." The discussion cites that the "existence" of virginity in women is a "verifiable fact" and that

> the purity of blood lines and the authenticity of family relationships depend more upon the virtue of the woman than of the man. The optimum of chastity, which is virginity, is therefore given more attention in the case of a woman than of a man, and the term is, in fact, rarely used in reference to a man.

CHAPTER I

"THE SUBJUGATION OF WOMAN IS IN THE ORDER OF THINGS": THE ORIGINS OF ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY

Defining a term or concept is difficult; redefining it, even more arduous. Redefining chastity both as a term that has centuries of etymology and as a concept that has indeed "wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts," as Virginia Woolf observes, is particularly challenging. To understand how a term or concept is redefined, we must first understand its acknowledged and appropriated definition. Accordingly, to recognize how some women writers in the periods of medieval, Renaissance and nineteenth century literature redefine chastity, we must first realize the androcentrism of its traditional definition.

Pursuing the origins of androcentric chastity is a formidable, complex, and sometimes circuitous task at best. It involves the culling of myth, theology and philosophy from non-Christian, Hebrew and various early Christian sects and the following of their interconnected developments. To begin an exploration of how various women writers of disparate literary periods redefine androcentric chastity, a necessarily brief review of its lineage must center on Biblical, non-Christian, and early Christian views of sexuality, marriage and virginity.

The traceable roots of Christian androcentric chastity originate with the Bible. It is from a Biblical account of the creation of humankind that Christian articulation of gender--and the relationship between the genders--begins. But most importantly for this study, it is how a Biblical account of human creation is interpreted by the fathers of early Christianity that establishes the basis for the development and systematization of misogyny and the parallel formation of its solution to the "problem" of women: chastity.

In Medieval Misogyny and the Creation of Western Romantic Love, Howard Bloch shows how the interpretation of a Biblical creation story determined Christian views of gender relations. Bloch points out that "one of the great facts of cultural amnesia" is that the West has forgotten that there are two accounts of human creation in Genesis (22). The first, the Genesis priestly account, suggests the synchronous creation of the two sexes: "So God made man in his own image, made him in the image of God. Man and woman both, he created them" (1:27).[1] Bloch argues that in this account both sexes are given the common designation of "homo," the contemporary term meaning "human being." He further points out that equality is assumed, since the terms "man" and "woman," used to distinguish the two types of human beings, "come as close as language can to a referential and syntactic equivalence through the two adjectives modifying the same pronoun" (22).[2] Needless to say, if the priestly version had been culturally appropriated, quite a different history of gender relations might have unfolded.

Yet the priestly version of human creation has largely been overshadowed by the very different account that follows it, the Yahwist version in Genesis 2:18-23. In this narrative, God creates Adam, and then is quite active in the subsequent creation of an environment in which Adam can thrive: God plants a garden in Eden for him, assigns him its care, warns him not to eat from the tree of knowledge, expresses concern that Adam is alone, and then creates for him "helpmates" of wild beasts and birds. But finding these not suitable, God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep during which God takes one of Adam's ribs and creates Eve, with the proclamation that "it shall be called Woman, this thing that was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). In this account of a gender-specific creation, Bloch notes that "woman is by definition a derivation of man who, as the direct creation of God, remains both chronologically antecedent and ontologically prior" (24). With the appropriation of this version by the androcentric Hebrew culture and, as we shall see later, by Augustine and other patristic writers, hierarchialization of gender in the Judaeo-Christian scriptural tradition begins.

On behalf of very early Christianity, Paul used the Yahwist version in I Corinthians 11:8 to argue that "The woman takes her origin from the man, not the man from the woman. . . ." [3] The later patristic writers Jerome and Augustine further reinforced and developed this view of woman's derivative status so that by the Middle Ages it was an unquestioned ethos.

Out of such Biblical notions of gender naturally emerged Christian ideas on chastity. In his book The Body and Society Peter Brown explores the development of the idea and practice of permanent sexual renunciation that emerged in early Christianity from 40-50 A.D. to the death of Augustine in 430.[4] Beginning his study around the second century A.D., Brown shows how a jostling of non-Christian, Hebrew and newly developing Christian ideas on marriage, sexuality and the body merged to create an early Christian ideology of sexual renunciation.

Non-Christian views of sexuality, Brown notes, were heavily influenced by the Platonic division of body and soul, which essentially relegated the soul to the divine realm and the body to the animal. Within the bodied-souled human being, therefore, the body and its sexual drives represented the arena of an inferior and non-rational animality, a "disorder" in uneasy cohabitation with the soul, which signified the higher order of the rational and the divine. The body and sexuality were thus to be ordered, controlled and regulated by the soul. In exploring how this fundamental Platonic notion of sexuality impacted early Christian ideas of permanent sexual renunciation, Brown primarily focuses on the Roman view of marriage and society in the second and third centuries A.D. While the Romans adopted the non-Christian concept of sexuality as "disordered," believing that the body was to be disciplined and regulated, they considered sexual activity within marriage as having a social function, necessary for the continuation of the social order. Marriage was an

essential institution equated with stability and order, an ensurer of Roman society's perpetuity.

However, around the second century A.D. Christian challenges to this view emerged. Numerous radical Christian sects formulated a variety of notions advocating permanent sexual abstinence, basing their ideas on eschatological and ascetic principles. Some sects, considering themselves part of a "new creation," upheld permanent sexual renunciation as a spiritually necessary abandonment of the human means by which society could be continued, and regarded chastity as heralding the forthcoming approach of the "new creation" (Brown 64). The hope in the eschatological "end time," God's final resolution for the ambiguities of sin and death inherent in the human condition, assumed a future time (but soon to come, it was believed) when human procreation no longer depended on the body. At the core of this eschatology, as Rosemary Radford Reuther points out, is "Platonized spirituality . . . that defined redemption as the rejection of the body and the flight of the soul from material, sensual nature" (153). Thus, immediate preparation for this "end time" called for practicing permanent sexual abstinence.

Other interpretations of sexual abstinence reflected debate among the various sects over whether human sexual desire could be eradicated by renunciation. Brown indicates that Tertullian, writing in the third century A.D., took the position, later to influence Jerome and Augustine, that sexual desire

could not be eliminated since its presence signified the immutability of human nature (8). In locating the nature of human weakness in sexuality, Tertullian decisively reinforced the early Christian ascetic correlation of sexuality with danger to sanctity. Thus the focus of the ascetic practices of various Christian sects lay in permanent sexual renunciation, a studied and disciplined attempt at separation of body from spirit in order to enhance the relationship with pure spirit--God. As Brown explains, for the ascetic, the presence of sexuality and sexual desire was regarded as "coextensive with human nature" (230).

One's awareness of oneself as sexual and of one's sexual desires pointed to areas of unruliness--such as pride, resentment, or ambition--in the human soul. Sexual desire revealed that the ascetic retained an "unopened heart" before God, a situation at glaring odds with the ascetic's goal to have an open heart, or the "purity of heart" needed to surrender the will to God. And for the male ascetic, the obvious signs of unconscious sexual desire was indicated by sexual dreams and nocturnal emissions. The diminishment of these, as Brown says, "signaled, in the body, the ascetic's final victory over the closed heart" (230). Elizabeth Clark concurs, noting that in the ascetic view, "a different body made a different self" (5). Thus the primary reason for renunciation of the body lay in its main obstacle to holiness: sexual desire. And for the male framers of ascetic thought, the primary stimulus stirring their desire was women. Since the only known early Christian ascetic writers were male, it was women and the sexual desire they roused in men who literally

embodied this peril. Considered seducers, women were constant sources of sexual temptation to men--and ceaseless reminders of a weak human nature which impeded union with God. A solution to the problem of this threat, then, was permanent sexual renunciation.

In his discussion on the factors contributing to the patristic notion of permanent sexual renunciation, Brown notes that the early Christian subversion of the Roman position of marriage and society drew itself in part from the Hebrew spiritual notion of "singleness of heart" (39). The virtue of singleness of heart (presumably spiritual sincerity, guilelessness, truthfulness, wholeheartedness) seemed particularly male-oriented since, as Brown points out, women were believed to be responsible for "doubleness of heart" by stirring manly lust and creating conflict between males (over women) (39). To strive for singleness of heart, for instance, the Jewish community of the Essenes took on celibacy in an effort to eradicate sexual desire, the primary cause of "doubleness of heart."

It is in Paul's writing that the early Christian argument against marriage best brings together the non-Christian, Hebrew and early Christian eschatological and ascetic formulation of sexual renunciation. One purpose of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is to answer the Corinthians' questions on matters of marriage and virginity, and his answers, though not intended to be definitive, nonetheless left, as Brown says, "a fatal legacy to future ages" (54).

Most commentators on I Corinthians 7 feel Paul did not intend that the early Christians adopt celibacy as he had. "About virgins," he says, "I have no command from the Lord; but I give you my opinion, as one who is, under the Lord's mercy, a true counsellor" (I Cor. 7:25). Brown argues that Paul felt himself in a situation in which he needed to speak on the issues of marriage and virginity with diplomacy and tact: he had to retain the support of wealthy married Romans. To wholeheartedly advocate marital renunciation would alienate him from this support. Conversely, Paul had to appease radical Christians who championed total renunciation of marriage. Moreover, Paul felt both the stress of the Christian persecution as well as the perceived imminence of the coming "end time":

> This, then, I hold to be the best counsel in such times of stress, that this is the best condition for man to be in. Art thou yoked to a wife? Then, do not go about to free thyself. Art thou free of wedlock? Then do not go about to find a wife. Not that thou dost commit sin if thou marriest; nor, if she marries, has the virgin committed sin. It is only that those who do so will meet with outward distress. But I leave you to your freedom. Only, brethren, I would say this; the time is drawing to an end; nothing remains, but for those who have wives to behave as though they had none. . . . (I Cor. 7:26-29)

Throughout the entire chapter, Paul is careful to demonstrate that he chooses celibacy for himself. He does not condemn marriage, but indicates it is appropriate for those who "have not the gift of continence . . . better to marry than to feel the heat of passion" (I Cor. 7:9). Paul combines his position with the Hebrew view of "singleness of heart." In marriage, Paul says, a man

cannot strive for singleness of heart because of family responsibilities: "he is at issue with himself" (I Cor. 7:33). Brown suggests that Paul sees married persons as "half Christians" because they cannot strive for or attain singleness of heart (56). Thus in all respects, Paul makes it clear that if one is to achieve sanctity in the church, celibacy is the means by which it can be attained.

It is interesting to note Paul's wording in speaking of those free to live celibately in singleness of heart. Referring to the celibate man, Paul says, "He who is unmarried is concerned with God's claim, asking how he is to please God . . ." (I Cor. 7:32). In speaking to the celibate woman, he makes differentiations: "So a woman who is free of wedlock, or a virgin, is concerned with the Lord's claim, intent on holiness, bodily and spiritual . . ." (I Cor. 7:34). Not surprisingly, the focus for the celibate woman is centered on her body. The celibate male's focus is non-specific and non-physical; he can simply devote himself to the Lord's affairs.

The writings of Paul, Tertullian and the ascetic desert fathers set the framework for later articulation of a theology of sexuality, marriage and virginity that became, as Clarissa Atkinson suggests, an anthropology as well (132). Through tackling the issues of marriage and sexuality, the fathers formulated their understanding of the nature of humankind and its reproduction. Three contemporaries of the fourth century, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, are the key framers of western Christian thought on gender relations and sexuality that became the theological, cultural, and indeed

anthropological ethos in the medieval period and whose effects are still present today.

Preaching in the last few decades of the fourth century, when Christianity had only been recently recognized as the religion of the Roman Empire, Ambrose's view of the Church in relation to the world was a defensive one. He sought to assert the divine authority of the church amidst the crumbling Roman secular authority, what he referred to as the "saeculum"--the world and its materialism (Brown 348). Part of the world's materialism included women, who, as seen in the long tradition of non-Christian and Biblical misogyny, threatened to "effeminate the male resolve of the mind" (Brown 348). In the face of these threats from the world and its women, Ambrose's view of the church, then, was of a sacred enclosure whose walls were impenetrable to forces from the outside world. Similarly, Ambrose's image of virginity was of an enclosed state of unbreakable boundaries. In his treatise De Virginibus he uses the metaphor of an enclosed garden to speak of virginity. It is a garden "inaccessible from without . . . fenced in by the wall of the Spirit, enclosed lest it should lie open to be plundered" (370). Further, Ambrose likens his image of virginity to the womb of Mary. Mary's womb was not penetrated by an outside force (the penis), causing no mixtures of outer or inner substances (the sperm and egg): "the Lord, coming in our flesh, joined together the Godhead and flesh without any confusion or mixture . . ." (365). And, the "author" of "virginal chastity . . . [is] . . . the immaculate Son of

God, whose flesh saw no corruption, whose Godhead experienced no infection" (366).[5] Thus as the virgin womb of Mary was unpenetrable and free from any mixture of outside forces, so was the church a sacred space amidst a polluted world.

Ambrose furthers his analogy between the enclosed nature of the church and virginity by contrasting ordinary human conception with Christ's conception. Because of its virgin conception, Christ's body was "perfect flesh, unsullied by a mixture or cojoining of imperfect human flesh containing the 'scar' of sexuality" (Brown 350). Ambrose's idea of imperfect human flesh as being "scarred" by sexuality lays the basis for Augustine's argument which asserts the relationship between human sexual intercourse and the transmission of original sin (Brown 352-53). These varied ideas on the nature of the church, virginity, and especially the virginity of Mary advanced the Platonic view of the separation of inferior body from superior spirit. Ambrose's views also reinforced the association of virginity with women, seen in his analogy of the virein womb as an inviolate, unbroken sacred space, like the church. Additionally, Ambrose also furthers Paul's notion that virginity is a more perfect state than marriage since, as Brown says, Ambrose saw virginity as "the highest pinnacle of Christian virtue" (361).

Ambrose's ideas provide evidence of the patristic dichotomizing of women. The nature of her sensual inferiority creates a situation in which, to use Meg Bogin's term, she must be "de-toxified" (11). To nullify her scarred

physicality and sexuality and to deal with the historical fact that Jesus Christ was born from a woman, a notion of the permanent virginity of Mary evolved. In order to conceive and bear the "perfect flesh" of Christ, Mary's flesh must be elevated, by her virginity, to the status of superior spirit. Thus an inherent dichotomy ensues between women who are de-toxed and raised out of their inferior, fleshly realm by virginity, and women who remain in the lower arena of the body.

Like Ambrose, Jerome stresses the idea of the virgin body as a permanent, enclosed space (Brown 383) and Atkinson notes Jerome's concern for safeguarding virgins from a corrupt world (135). But perhaps more than anything, it is the literalness and physicality of Jerome's ideas, his sexualization of Paul's concept of the flesh (Brown 376) that creates a noteworthy distinction between his and Augustine's views on virginity. An important clarification on the nature of patristic and early medieval ideas on virginity is the differentiation of Jerome's concept of physical virginity from Augustine's ideas about virginity as a psychological or spiritual state.

Jerome's emphasis is on its purely physical state. To him, a virgin is a person who has never experienced sexual intercourse. As John Bugge points out, the assumption behind virginity's physicality centers on Jerome's view of Eve, Adam, and the fall. Along with Tertullian and Augustine, Jerome takes literally the historical, physical existence of Adam and Eve. Unlike Augustine, however, Jerome asserts that Adam and Eve had no sexual experience before

the fall. Their state was angelic and asexual, a gnostic Christian notion that later formed for monasticism "the ideal of virginity, conceived as ontological asexuality" (Bugge 80). For Jerome, then, the idea of sexual activity is incompatible with the pre-lapsarian human state; Eve and Adam's fall from integrity is entirely seen as a fall from sexual innocence. Thus in Jerome's view, the immediate consequences of the fall are the presence of sexual intercourse, conception, and birth (Bugge 24). As Jerome himself says in his letter on virginity to Eustochium (a Roman virgin and among the women to whom Jerome gave spiritual guidance): "Eve was a virgin in Paradise. After the garments of skin her married life began. Paradise is where you [Eustochium] belong. . . . Virginity is natural and . . . marriage came after the offense . . ." (51).[6] Jerome's position reiterates the idea first articulated by Tertullian that sexuality is tantamount to human weakness, or sin. From Jerome's perspective of literal physicality, therefore, the chief way to avoid sin is to avoid sexuality.

Augustine diverges from Jerome in two significant ways. First, Augustine introduces the idea that virginity is a psychological or moral state rather than a merely physical one. Atkinson notes that this psychological emphasis regards virginity as "purity, humility, or that quality of spirit belonging to those whose primary relationship is with God" (133). Brown maintains that Augustine introduces the psychological aspect into sexuality with his refusal to associate Paul's notion of the flesh only with the body.

Augustine expands the concept of the flesh to incorporate his idea of concupiscence, broadly defined as anything that causes the self to prefer its own will to God's (Brown 48).

A second area of divergence from Jerome is Augustine's view that Adam and Eve engaged in sexual activity before the fall. Like Tertullian and Jerome, Augustine considered Eve and Adam as historical, physical beings. Augustine departs from Tertullian and Jerome, however, by arguing that before the fall Adam and Eve had sexual intercourse in obedience to God's command to "be fruitful and multiply." Thus before and after the fall the sexual purpose of Eve and Adam was procreation; sexuality is inherent in their pre- and post-lapsarian natures. Yet, as Bugge points out, Augustine emphasizes the psychological rather than the physical nature of pre-lapsarian intercourse:

> no lust or desire was involved . . . the complete control the mind held over the body . . . extended to physical activity as well, and intercourse . . . would have been accomplished by a pure act of will, without the attendance of the slightest concupiscible passion. (26)

In other words, Augustine removes passion from sexual activity before the fall and asserts that sin does not reside in the sexual act <u>itself</u>, but is found, rather, in the carnal passions that accompany sexual activity <u>as a result of the fall</u>. For Augustine, it is the human will that becomes distorted after the fall, not sexuality itself. Unlike Jerome and other traditionalist views, Augustine's position is that the body in and of itself is not responsible for the fall, since

Eve and Adam "originally enjoyed a harmonious unity of body and soul" (Brown 405). But the fall created a distortion of the human will, throwing body and soul out of harmony. With this harmony lost, sexuality became discordant, and likened to death, another separation of body from soul (Brown 308). We have seen that Ambrose tries to create a pure, sacred inviolable womb for Mary by which Christ could be born and to elevate that womb to the paradoxical state of the non-physical; similarly Augustine's idea of the pre-lapsarian harmony of body (woman) and soul (man) stimulates his desire to restore that lost harmony. And, as will be seen later, it is in the arena of sexuality, and particularly women's sexuality, that attempts to restore the original harmony are found.

While Augustine differs from Jerome and the early Christian tradition by his introduction of the psychological element of sexuality and his idea of Eve and Adam's sexual activity before the fall, he nonetheless preserves the tradition's overriding concepts. Bugge suggests that Augustine attempts to maintain the viability and credibility of the concept of virginity given him by the early tradition by restricting the term virginity to its most literal and physical meaning (26). In De civitate Dei, Augustine speculates that in the flawlessness of pre-lapsarian sex

> with perfect serenity of soul and with no sense of disintegration between body and soul . . . we have no right to reject the possibility that, at a time when there was no unruly lust to excite the organs of generation and when all that was needed was done by deliberate

> choice, the seminal flow could have reached the womb with as little rupture of the hymen and by the same vaginal ducts as is at present the case, in reversal, with the menstrual flux. (406-07)

Despite his emphasis on its psychological aspects in the pre-lapsarian state, Augustine nonetheless continues the linkage of virginity to a physical intactness, fundamentally associated with women. And further, regardless of Augustine's divergence from Jerome on the presence of sexual activity before the fall, Bugge maintains that in the idea of a "sexual fall . . . a core of often unarticulated belief that sexuality is sin" remains in the Western tradition (28).

It is in Augustine that the patristic formulation of sexuality, virginity, and marriage finds its culmination and its most formidable spokesman. To discuss how Augustine's concept of sexuality profoundly influenced views of gender, we must return to the two Genesis accounts of human creation to see how Augustine interprets.

In Volume I, Book VI of De Genesi ad litteram, Augustine attempts to explain the relationship between the first account of human creation (the Priestly version, Genesis 1:27) and the second account (the Yahwist version, Gen. 2:23ff). He posits that in the second creation account, "man" was created "in the clear and visible shape familiar to us, but in the earlier narrative [Gen. 1:27] no mention was made of the details which are given in the recapitulation" (178). The "details" given in the second Yahwist account

are those which Augustine appropriates as the conclusive act of human physical creation.

In the first account, Augustine explains that "man's" existence--on the sixth day--came at the moment of the creation of all things, which occurred on five days "before" the sixth day. The "six days" of creation are not to be understood in a temporal sense. After having created the world in five days, "man" was begot on the sixth day, a "spiritual day, mysteriously made in the beginning . . . called day in so far as it was in a sense the light of wisdom" (180). On this day, Augustine argues, was the "original creation" of human beings, "Male and female He made them . . ." (183). In this "original creation," the human being was

> created in potency through the word of God and inserted seminally into the world when He created all things together, after which He rested from these works on the seventh day. From these creatures all things were made, each at is own proper time, throughout the course of history. Later the man and the woman were created in accordance with God's creative activity as it is at work throughout the ages . . . and thus it was ordained that in time Adam would be made from the slime of the earth and the woman from the side of her husband. (183)

Thus, in the "later creation," after the seventh day, time began as we know it, "in days . . . with their corporeal light caused by the sun moving in the sky" (183). It is in these days of "corporeal nature" (179) that the details of the second account recapitulate the first account. Adam is made from the slime of the earth, placed in Paradise, and then God makes Eve from the side of

Adam, to be his "helper of like nature" (182). Thus does Augustine explain the relationship between the two accounts of human creation. That he choose the later, corporeal and temporal creation as definitive is evidenced in the title of Book VI, "The Creation of the Man's Body."

It is clear, then, that Augustine utilizes the second account of human creation to explain how male and female human beings differ, since, as he says, the "distinction between male and female can exist only in bodies" (185-86). Eve is created from the rib of Adam, and although, as Kari Borrenson points out, "in her seminal creation . . . Eve is a human being just like Adam . . . by the formation of her body in time after that of Adam, she is a woman, femina" (18). It is from Augustine's interpretation of the formation of bodied humans that medieval distinctions between the nature of Adam and the nature of Eve derive. Although often oversimplifying his argument, later medieval interpretations of Augustine, coupled with the misogynistic foundation already laid by the biblical tradition and the patristic writers, set the stage for a rather standard understanding of the nature of male and female persons in Western culture.

Bloch notes that Augustine's explanation of the second creation account posits that Adam had "substance," a term used by later medieval philosophers to mean that his nature is in the image of God, and as such, is a pure and essential spirit, being, or existence (25). Since, as Augustine says in De Libero Arbitrio, "all existing things would cease to be if form were taken

from them" (163), Adam's existence is a unity of form, a term Bloch uses as synonymous with "mind" (27). On the other hand, the Yahwist version posits Eve as a derivation of Adam, created from a part of his body and thus, as Bloch suggests, "the by-product of a part of the essential" (25). As "by-product" Eve is perceived as different from Adam, and though both Adam and Eve have bodies, her body does not in and of itself reflect essential spirit, or soul, as does Adam's. Thus, says Bloch, Adam is perceived as fully human and Eve only partially so (26). It is Eve's ontological subordinance and origination from the bodied existence of Adam which presumes her to be representative of matter, not soul. And, as Rosemary Radford Reuther and Kari Borrenson explain, crucial to this disparity is the assumption that the image of God is not matter, but spirit, or soul. Adam possesses spirit and is thus fully the image of God. Eve is not, by herself, the image of God since she followed Adam's creation and was taken from his body. Eve can only become the image of God when linked with Adam, who represents spirit.

According to this Augustinian understanding of the Yahwist creation account, Bloch points out, the fall is merely a "logical conclusion" (25) to the problem of a divided Eve, who is identified with the corporeal and its inferior position to the spirit. As numerous commentators suggest, the associations of Adam with spirit and Eve with body have at their root the Platonic dualism of body and soul, which further divides, as Reuther says, into a female-male dualism (57). Maleness is associated with the superior soul, which is linked

with the rational and intellectual. Woman is associated with the inferior body, correlated to the senses and appetites. The hierarchial nature of these dualisms requires that the rational soul keep in check the passions and appetites of the body. Thus does Augustine extend his analogy of body and soul to man and woman: "the subjugation of woman is in the order of things; she must be dominated and governed by man just as the soul should regulate the body and virile reason should dominate the animal part of being" (Contra Manichaeos 111). As Bloch asserts, the fear of women in patristic writing is largely a defensive stance against the body, resulting in a perspective that fails to differentiate between woman and her body (30).

The associations of woman, the body, and virginity are further linked to the antithetical notion that Mary, the virgin, redeems Eve, whose first "flaw" lay in her creation from Adam's body and whose later disobedience to God brought sexuality (Jerome) or disordered sexuality (Augustine) to the human condition. Who better to be associated with redemption than the virgin Mary, for, as Bloch notes, in the Christian paradigm of salvation, "redemption implies a return to the state of virginity, to the 'vita angelica'--an eschatological abolition of sexuality" (97). As Jerome maintains in his letter to Eustochium: "Death came through Eve, life through Mary. And therefore a richer gift of virginity is flowed upon women, because it began with a woman" (154). As we have seen with Ambrose's association of virginity with women in his notion of the virgin womb as enclosed, sacred space, the double and

paradoxical linkage of both sin and sexuality, redemption and virginity, is associated with women.

The neatly antithetical equation found in Jerome's letter reveals a major paradox in the Christian view of women. In this view, woman is, as Bloch says, both "seducer and redeemer," a paradox the church used as an "ideological weapon" to shift the male location of control of women from the family to the church (90). Bloch notes that the role of being a virgin of the church was perceived as "liberation" for women from the control of the patriarchal household in which women were under the guardianship of husbands, fathers, and brothers (93). However, the price to pay for this "liberation" was a renunciation of sexuality, since the cultural understanding was that woman was equivalent to sexuality and bodiliness. Thus the renunciation of her sexuality was, as Bloch and others assert, a denial of what was thought to be a woman's very self (89).

Elizabeth Castelli attempts to determine the effects of sexual renunciation on early Christian women, whose experience was largely created and recorded by men. Noting the difficulty of finding texts which contain women's <u>own</u> experiences of virginity since nearly all texts were written by men, Castelli argues that the absence of the historical record creates a lacuna in the understanding of <u>women's</u> experience of virginity. Nonetheless, she manages to piece together rare bits of textual evidence that provides some understanding of why women might have chosen virginity. For some

aristocratic virgins, a life of chastity provided an avenue to intellectual pursuits not otherwise open. Castelli cites the praises of Jerome and other church fathers for the intellectual activities of certain virgins (82). Moreover, virginity offered some women leadership in women's communities, while for wealthy women it paradoxically gave them control over their wealth, as they frequently supported male ascetics (Castelli 83). Peter Brown cites Jerome and Ambrose as recipients of the financial support of affluent virgins.

Yet, as Castelli asserts, despite the "liberation" for women that virginity touted, it was profoundly more constricting and damaging to the selfhood of women than the tyranny of the patriarchal household ever was. Castelli suggests that both the experiences of marriage and virginity for women were part of a "constraining ideology" in which women's sexuality was exchanged as a valuable commodity both in the social and spiritual "trading grounds." While virginity offered an alternative to the constraints of marriage, it failed to challenge the culture around it. Rather virginity became a component of the culture, incorporating a theological dimension into it that resulted in "perhaps an even more restrictive and coercive system" (Castelli 88). Although virginity may have given women an opportunity to avoid the control of marriage, it nonetheless demanded "a profound price, not only the abdication of sexuality through denial of passions but a far more poignant price on the level of cultural meaning, that of identity and self" (Castelli 88). Thus, Castelli argues, to renounce what was considered the essence of their selfhood was for

women to "participate in a profound self-abnegation, self-denial, even self-destruction" (88).

The basis for woman's denial of self is best seen in Jerome's writing. Heavily influenced by the gnostic view of sexuality as the cause of original sin and the association of the body with the feminine, Jerome further reinforced the gendering of the mind/body dualism (Bloch 73). Gnosticism aimed, as Bloch notes, to "reintegrate the woman [body] into the man [mind/spirit]" (73), a presumable return to the pre-lapsarian assumed equality of the sexes, a rediscovery of Augustine's original harmony of body and soul. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza points out the tidy solution to the problem in In Memory of Her:

> . . . the fathers' theological problem was: how can a Christian woman who was made inferior by her nature, law, and the social-patriarchal order achieve in her life the Christian equality which belonged to her as a disciple of Christ? The fathers answered this by declaring that a Christian woman is no longer a woman. (277)

Thus it follows that (in Jerome's view) to be considered "equal" as male and female were considered equal (in an asexual, angelic state) before the fall, woman must renounce her body and be made more spiritual through virginity. And so, the patristic solution to the "problem" of women (caused by what Bloch calls the "gendered spirit-body dichotomy" (107)) is summed up in the androcentric definition of chastity which exhorts women to renounce their sexuality.

NOTES

1. All English translations of biblical verses come from The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals, New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1956.

2. "So God made man in his own image, made him in the image of God. Man and woman both, he created them." ("Et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam; ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos").

3. Paul's letters contain several discrepancies, one of which is I Corinthians 11:7-12. It may appear that Paul contradicts v. 8 when he speaks to male/female interdependence in vv. 11-12: "Not that, in the Lord's service, man has his place apart from woman, or woman hers apart from man; if woman takes her origin from man, man equally comes to birth through woman." Nonetheless, it is apparent that Paul is relying on the Yahwist creation account that speaks of woman's derivation from man, since he repeats the phrase from v. 8. The entirety of I Corinthians 11:7-12 reads: "A man has no need to veil his head; he is God's image, the pride of his creation, whereas the wife is the pride of her husband. (The woman takes her origin from the man, not the man from the woman; and indeed, it was not man that was created for woman's sake, but woman for man's). (Not that, in

the Lord's service, man has his place apart from woman, or woman hers apart from man; if woman takes her origin from man (my emphasis), man equally comes to birth through woman. And indeed all things have their origin from God."

4. In speaking of permanent sexual renunciation, Brown uses the terms continence, celibacy, and virginity synonymously. As we have noted, these terms were and are frequently used interchangeably.

5. See also in J.-P. Migne's Patrologia latina Ambrose's Exhortatio Virginitatis 4.27:359A, also 6.35:361C and the Expositio in Evangelium Secundum Lucam 2.56, p. 55:1654C.

6. In her book Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends, Elizabeth Clark explores the apparent contradiction between the misogyny found in the writings of Jerome and John Chrysostom with their life-long friendships with certain women. Clark explains that Jerome and Chrysostom, and patristic Christianity as a whole, elevated the status of celibate and virginal women over married women. Thus, Clark argues, the dissimilarity between Jerome's view of women in general and his friendships with women--the widow Marcella, the widow Paula and her daughter the virgin Eustochium--can be explained by the fact that his female friends were not sexually active, and as ascetic women, were thought to be in "transition" from one state ("femaleness") to another ("maleness") (48). That the women "renounced their very gender identity" and were made into "something other than female"

elevated them to the status of near equals to men (49-50), making them acceptable for male friendship. However, the price women had to pay for the elevation of their status to a near equivalence with men was the disowning of their sexuality and gender identity.

CHAPTER II

"MEN CALL ME CHASTE": MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY

How did medieval women, the inheritors of the patristic notion of chastity, respond to it as implicit to themselves--the problem? Fortunately, the medieval period provides a window for us to see the responses of some women. Examining the writings of two medieval women--Margery Kempe and Heloise--gives us insight into the struggles they encountered with androcentric chastity. While Kempe's and Heloise's experience of and response to androcentric chastity are quite different, we nonetheless can discern the emergence of a common thread. In each woman's struggle to deal with her own self--while simultaneously experiencing the "de-selfing" inherent in androcentric chastity--both "redefine" the concept.

To understand the experiences of Kempe and Heloise, we must first literally "see" medieval androcentric chastity at work in order to appreciate the impossible demands its ideal placed on women. While chastity was a medieval ideal to which both men and women aspired, there were differences in expectations and applications of the ideal for men and for women. Male chastity was seen as an important virtue for men, but it predominately applied to male religious, and was not as pervasive an expectation for men in other

states of life as it was for women. As Barbara Newman observes, chastity never evoked for men nor for male religious "the same rapturous praise for its preservation or the same dire warnings about its loss" (123) as it did for both secular and religious women. Virginity and chastity for women were perceived, as Newman says, as "the quintessence of female holiness" and advice on preserving this state dominates devotional literature written by men for women. There is no tradition in medieval literature on this topic addressed to men.

To see male exhortations of virginity and chastity to women, we will first explore a representative type of androcentric literature on female virginity and chastity, Hali Meidenhad (Holy Maidenhood). A brief overview of its place in the historical development of androcentric chastity reveals how Hali Meidenhad, written in the thirteenth century, stands as a fairly typical example of the male ideal of chastity given to women.

The passing of the control of women and their sexuality from the household to the church provided women with virginity as an alternative to marriage and an opportunity for a type of pseudo-equality, but for a price. By the twelfth century, a significant but ironic appeal of Christianity to women, Howard Bloch asserts, is that they could be glorified as "Brides of Christ" in the Church. And as Peter Brown points out, the idea of sexual renunciation was viewed in the patristic period onward as "heroism," particularly for young

girls who could gain some public esteem in the only avenue for heroism open to them: the sexual sphere (64).

In his chapter "Virginity Sexualized," John Bugge begins with the twelfth century to trace the development of the "Brides of Christ" metaphor. The idea of "spiritual marriage" is attributed to Hugh of St. Victor, who in struggling with the problem of Mary's assumed virginity in relation to her marital contract with Joseph, conceived the possibility of marriage as a union souls and not bodies. Hugh adopts Jerome's belief that the physical aspects of marriage are a result of the fall and foreign to God's original plan of a purely asexual, spiritual union. Out of this idea of a sexless, "spiritual marriage" evolved the "Bride of Christ" concept which, Bugge says, came to be popularly interpreted as virginal females literally taking Christ as their husband (87). This prevalent notion was furthered by a shift in emphasis, beginning in the twelfth century, from Christ's divinity to his humanity. The new focus on Christ's humanity raised questions about his human sexuality, opening the way for speaking of one's love of Christ in human sexual terms (Bugge 83). From this emphasis on Christ's humanity emerges the image of Christ as wooer, as seen in the thirteenth century texts of the Ancrene Wisse and the Katherine Group. The notion of the "Bride of Christ" served to place marriage with Christ as an alternative to human marriage, but with the implication that marriage to a divine spouse was far more perfect and desirable than marriage to a human spouse (Bugge 87).

Much of patristic and medieval devotional literature written for women contains the topos of the "Bride of Christ." Marriage to Christ was perceived as liberation for women, as an alternative to their second-rate status in human marriage and as an opportunity, through virginity, to gain an "equal" level of esteem with men in the church. As Elizabeth Castelli argues however, this "liberation" was actually a different version of the Roman marital "system of exchange" by which a girl's body, with her virginity the measure of her value, was given in marriage as the token of agreement between families. Castelli asserts that

> in the realm of religious virginity, women's sexuality functioned in a similar way as a token offered to God as a sign of renunciation; the virgin's body belonged to the celestial bridegroom, conceptually, in the same way that it would have to his earthly counterpart. (86)

The religious system merely appropriated the idea of exchange, says Castelli, and "invested it with theological significance" (6).

Hali Meidenhad, then, is representative in showing how both the religious system and the culture did indeed "invest" themselves into a complex and pervasive systematization of a solution to the "problem" of women.

Hali Meidenhad: A Woman's One Gift

Hali Meidenhad, composed in the early thirteenth century, is among a group of devotional and instructional writings for female anchorites and solitaries. It and a number of shorter works subdivided under the "Wooing Group" and the "Katherine Group" have close affinity to the better known and longer Ancrene Wisse, a guide for female anchorites. Authorship of the Ancrene Wisse and the "Wooing" and "Katherine" group texts is unknown, but there is general agreement that all the works were written around the same period (1200-1230), in the same place (a monastery) and perhaps, in some cases, by the same author, since borrowings and references among the works are similar, perhaps indicating that the writer(s) knew well his audience (Savage and Watson 8). Scholarly debate attributes authorship of the entire group of texts to either Augustinian or Dominican friars.[1]

While the Ancrene Wisse and other works of the collection are ostensibly directed to individual anchoresses, Hali Meidenhad appears to be more generally addressed to female virgins as a group. Its form and purpose, as described in the Bodley MS, is "a letter on virginity for the encouragement of a virgin" (Millet xv). Nothing in the work is original, and the homiletic-epistolary genre of male exhortation of females to virginity has a long tradition, as found in Ambrose's and Augustine's discourses on virginity and

Jerome's letters to female virgins, the best known of which is his letter to Eustochium.

The homiletic argument of <u>Hali Meidenhad</u> is organized into four parts: an introduction, a section on virginity's advantages and rewards, a "refutatio" on the disadvantages of marriage and the pains of childbearing, and a conclusion cautioning against vice and temptation.

The introductory section addresses the virgin as Bride of Christ, setting the high and exalted state of virginity against the low state of marriage, referred to as "servitude" ["þeowdom"], in which the former virgin "ant trukien for a mon of lamþ heouenliche Lauerd" ["desert[s] the heavenly Lord for a man of clay"] (Millett and Wogan-Browne 5).[2] The height on which the virgin resides is the tower of Jerusalem, signifying the "þe hehness of meiđhad, þe bihald as of heh alle widewen under hire ant weddede badđe. For þeos, ase fleshes þrealles, beođ i wordles þeowdom, ant wunieđ lahe on eorđe . . ." ["the high state of virginity, from which as if from a height sees all the widows below it, and married women, too. For these, as slaves of the flesh, are in the servitude of the world, and live low on earth . . ."] (3-5). From her "heh" lif i þe tur" ["exalted life in the tower"] the virgin leads an "englene liflade and heouenlich . . . þah ha licomliche wunie upon eorđe" ["angelic and heavenly life . . . although she lives on earth and in the body"] (5). Precisely because the virgin does live in a body and on earth, she is subject to the temptations of the flesh, which can drag her down from the tower into the "servitude" of

human marriage. To succumb to such a temptation is to forsake her heavenly spouse for a mortal man, to become an adulteress to Christ. Being considered such is compounded by the temporal disadvantages of the married state. These disadvantages are enumerated with a rhetorical appeal to the virgin's self-interest: if a woman loses her virginity she loses her very self, as well as her only possibility for respect, status, and dignity. It is in a woman's self-interest--and her only best interest--to be a virgin.

As a virgin, a woman is exalted and given social status which includes a "rank" and the accompanying distinction of living the "vita angelica" on earth. She is "freo" ["free"] and enjoys a "seli sikernesse" ["blessed security"] (4). However, if she forfeits her virginity, all is lost. A descent from the prestige, freedom and security of the tower plunges her into slavery, where she "biki međ þeow under mon ant his þrel, to don al ant drehen þet him likeđ, ne sitte hit hire se uuele . . ." ["becomes a serf to a man . . . to do and suffer all that he pleases, however little she likes it"] (5). In this slave-state, she will be subject to the domestic annoyances of

> to dihten hus at hinen . . . to carien for se feole þing, teonen þolien ant gromen, ant scheomen umbe studne, drehen se moni was for se wac hure as þe worlt forȝelt eauer ed ten ende. [managing house and servants . . . caring for so many things, suffering trials and annoyances, and humiliation sometimes, bearing so many miseries for such poor wages as the world always pays in the end] (5).

Thus does the introduction of Hali Meidenhad set forth its basic argument, amplifying the spiritual and temporal advantages of virginity and the necessity of resisting the temptations of the flesh, which rob the virgin of her exalted rank and prestige.

In Hali Meidenhad's first section, the rewards of virginity--and the constant temptations that seek to corrupt it--are elaborated. The virgin is reminded of the power virginity gives her. It is a "tresor" ["treasure"], a "blostme" ["blossom"], a "steorre" ["star"],--and although an "eorð liche þing" ["earthly thing"], its power is "bruche ant cleane" ["inviolate and pure"] and imitative of God. Further, "engel ant meiden beoð euening i uertu in meiðhades mihte" ["angel and maiden are equal in virtue through the power of virginity"] and in it the virgin "edhalt hire burde in licnesse of heouenliche cunde . . . alswa deð meidenhad meidenes cwike flesch wið ute wemmunge" ["keeps her nature in a likeness to heavenly nature . . . [preserving] the maiden's living flesh without blemish"] (11). Virginity is awe-inspiring and is presented as the one and only realm in which women can be accepted or valued, since "meiðhah is þet an ʒeoue iʒettet the of heouene" ["virginity is the one gift granted to you from heaven"] (11). It is women's only source of power and gift--and the stakes for maintaining it are enormously high. Therefore, the virgin must be ever vigilant and she is repeatedly exhorted to "wite" ["keep guard"]. Temptations of fleshly passion ceaselessly threaten her and having understood "in he heh dignete þe mihte of meiðhad halt the" ["in

what high dignity the virtue of virginity holds [her]"], it is equally urgent for her to understand that "ah se þu herre stondest, beo sarre offea ret to fallen; for se herre degre, se þe fal is wurse" ["as [she] stands higher, [she should] be more greatly afraid of falling; for the higher the degree, the worse the fall"] (13). Therefore, it is Reason, "Godes dohter" ["God's daughter"] and maidenhood's "suster" ["sister"], who helps the virgin fight her battle against "euch fleshlich wil ant lust of leccherie þe arised i þ heorte ["every carnal impulse and lecherous desire which arises in [her] heart"] (13). Thus the virgin is the battleground for the constant and all-out war between Reason (the realm of maleness and the image of God) and Body (the realm of femaleness and its passions and appetites).

With the terms of the battle clearly articulated, the author appeals again to the exalted status and special calling of the virgin. He writes to encourage the virgin, reminding her that God's counsel of virginity is extended to only "his leoueste freond, þe lut i þisse worlde" ["his [God's] few dearest friends, who are few in this world"] (17). For, the author says, "wel wiste ure Lauerd þet alle ne mahten nawt halden ham i þe hehe of meidenhades mihte" ["our Lord knew well that not all were able to remain on the heights of the virtue of virginity"] (17). Moreover, the virgin has strength that the married woman does not, since "wedlac ilahet in Hali Chirche, as bed to seke, to ihente þe unstronge þe ne Mahen nawt stonden i þe hehe hul ant se neh heoune as meidenhades migte" ["marriage was made lawful in Holy Church, as a bed for

the sick, to catch the weak who cannot stand on the high hill and so near heaven as the virtue of virginity"] (19). And, the author reminds her, special privileges await the virgin in heaven. Her song is shared with the angels' music, her clothing shines over all others, and she is nearest to God (19-20).

In stark contrast is the sordid picture of what happens to a virgin should she fall from the high tower. To yield to the temptations of the flesh (presumably outside of marriage) would be to "driue adun swireuorð wið uten ike punge deope into helle. Of þeos nis nawt speokene, for ha beoð iscrippet ut of liues writ in heouene" ["rush down headlong without restraint deep into hell. These people are not to be spoken of, because they are scratched out of the book of life in heaven"] (21). While a fall into marriage can be "polien" ["tolerated"], it nonetheless entails a loss of "degrez of blisse" ["degrees of bliss"] since, in ranked order, maidenhood raises a woman "hundret degrez ihehet towart heouene" ["a hundred degrees toward heaven"], widowhood sixty, and marriage thirty (21).

The remaining sections of <u>Hali Meidenhad</u> attempt to "schawi we ȝet witerluker" ["show still more plainly"] the miseries of marriage, childbearing and childraising. From the heights of virginity, "os englene ilicnesse, of Iesu Christes leofmon, of leadgi heouene" ["from the likeness of angels, from the beloved of Jesus Christ, from a lady in heaven"] the virgin descends into marriage, "into flesches fulðe, into beastes liflade, into monnes þeowdom, ant into worldes weane ["into carnal filth, into the life of an animal, into servitude

to a man, and into the world's misery"] (21). And it is the sexual act in marriage that makes husbands and wives seem like beasts. The author asks the virgin to examine what her true motivations for marriage are:

> Is hit al forþi, oðer ane dale þeruore--beo nu soðcnawes--for the keli þi lust wið fulðe of þi licome, for to habbe delit of þi fleschliche wil of monnes imeane? For Gode, hit is speatewile for the þenche þron, ant for the spoken þrof ȝet speatwilre. [Is it entirely for this reason, or partly for it--now admit the truth--to cool your lust by the defilement of your body, to satisfy your carnal desire through intercourse with a man? By God, it is disgusting to think about it, and even more disgusting to talk about it]. (23)

The sexual act "hu þis vnðeaw ne eueneð þe nawt aneto witlese beastes, dumb ant broke-rugget, ibuhe towart eorðe" ["brings [the married couple] down to the level of animals which have no reason, dumb and hunchbacked, bowed down toward the earth"]--a shameful stance for those "þu þet art i wit iwraht to Godes ilicnesse" ["who are created as a rational being in God's image"] (23). Thus the virgin who is tempted by fleshly passions should consider the loss of "þe mihte ant to biheue of meiþhades menske" ["virtue and the merit of the honour of virginity"] to the "ful fulðe" ["foul indecency"] of marriage and its sexual activity (23). The counterargument to what the author calls the "falsschipe" ["falsehood"] about marriage--that it can provide the woman with support, food, comfort, and children--are all refuted with the burdens and annoyances that domesticity and materialism bring. A wife must deal with household cares and disagreeable servants. And even if husband

and wife do truly love one another, death will eventually separate them (whereas the Bride of Christ can never lose her spouse).

Further outlined are the miseries of pregnancy, childbearing and childrearing. Descriptions of the physical discomfort of pregnancy are graphic:

> þi rudie neb schal leanin, ant ase gres grenin; þine ehnen schule doskin, ant underneoþe wonnin, ant of þi breines turnunge þin haeued aken sare. Inwið i þi wombe, swel in þi butte þe bereð þe forð as a weater-bulge. . . . [Your rosy face will grow thin, and turn green as grass; your eyes will grow dull, and shadowed underneath, and because of your dizziness your head will ache cruelly. Inside, in your belly, a swelling in your womb which bulges you out like a water skin. . . .] (31)

After this comes labor: "þet sore sorhfule anglise, þet stronge ant stikinde stiche . . . þet pine ouer pine" ["that cruel distressing anguish, that fierce and stabbing pain . . . that torment upon torment"] coupled with the "scheome" ["shame"] endured by way of the "indecent" aid of the midwife (33). There is no joy in childrearing, either: sleepless nights tending to crying babies, nursing and feeding the child, and its "se slaw his þrifte . . . and eauer habbe sar car" ["growth so slow . . . and always being anxious"] (33). These are the sufferings of wives and mothers, a "servitude" in glaring contrast to the "freedom" virgins enjoy.

After recounting the dissimilarities between virginity and wifehood and motherhood, Hali Meidenhad moves toward a tempering of its extremes in its

conclusion. It is understandable that the virgin struggles with earthly desires, but she must keep in mind the heavenly compensation for renouncing them: if the maiden desires wealth or children, she should see the richness of God who will provide her with "dehtren ant sunen of gasteliche teames" ["spiritual sons and daughters"] (37). The virgin is also reminded that her state calls for "swotness of heorte . . . buhsumnesse ant stilþe . . . ant ouer al, miltschipe ant meokeschipe . . . " ["sweetness of heart . . . obedience and silence . . . and above all meekness and mildness"] (37-39)--and it is these virtues that will keep pride, the worst vice for a virgin, out of her heart. The virgin is warned against falling into pride or arrogance because of the power virginity gives her (over women who have no power) and her exalted status. She is exhorted <u>not</u> to think of widows or married persons as worthless (despite the earlier denigration of marriage!) and cautioned that pride can cause her to lose her virginity in an interior sense, emphasizing that inner virtues are more important than outward, physical virginity. She must remember that the maiden who has "wiđ unbruche ofþi bodi" ["physical integrity"] can nonetheless commit adultery against her heavenly spouse by her inner pride (37).

<u>Hali Meidenhad</u>, then, as typical of male exhortations of virginity for women, sets the parameters, like most devotional literature, on the glories and the pitfalls inherent in the ideal. Women who either aspired to or were

forced to accept a life of virginity had much to live up to: the idealized image of the male himself.[3]

What response did the women readers or listeners of Hali Meidenhad have to its exhortations and warnings? How did the women who chose virginity and accepted its justification as both divinely and ecclesiastically inspired manage to live meaningfully and wholly within its impossible demands? How did the women readers and listeners of such texts as Hali Meidenhad attempt to navigate the perilous psychic battlefield created by men and played out in their bodies--bodies which were both adored as receptacles of divine, angelic potential and abhorred as repositories of lechery and pride?

While an examination of the works of two women--Margery Kempe and Heloise--cannot be generalized as the response of women to androcentric chastity in the medieval period, their works nevertheless give us some insight into women's grappling with an ideal given to them by men. The Book of Margery Kempe chronicles a woman's own experience of attempting to embrace androcentric chastity. In contrast, Heloise in The Letters of Abelard and Heloise attempts a subversion of chastity that echoes into the texts of other women writers examined in this dissertation. Yet however differently Kempe and Heloise face androcentric chastity, their approaches work to "redefine" it. For, regardless of the diversity from which they speak, Kempe and Heloise both insist that woman is not a problem to be solved nor will her

body and its sexuality be removed from the arena of the human. Their redefinitions contribute the female experience, as told by the female voice, to a broadening of the concept of chastity.

The Book of Margery Kempe: Embracing and Resisting

The experiences of Margery Kempe may provide some answers to questions about exactly how some women may have responded to androcentric chastity. How may they have participated in, subverted, or simply struggled with it? Margery Kempe is an example of a woman who embraced androcentric chastity but experienced its disjunction with her sense of her own bodiliness and sexuality. Kempe's position on chastity in marriage is illustrative of women who, implanted with the androcentric and misogynist tradition, struggled, as bodied, sexual persons, against it.

Late in her life the illiterate Margery Kempe dictated to a priest her spiritual autobiography, thought to be the earliest autobiographical writing in English. Although actually written down and no doubt edited by a male scribe, Kempe's singular voice and energy emerge as she recounts her spiritual journey. Born around 1373 of prosperous middle class parents in King's Lynn, Norfolk, Kempe begins her story at around age 21, in the midst of a spiritual crisis. In an episode of insanity following the birth of her first child, Kempe received a vision of Christ. More visions followed the failures of her brewing and horse-mill businesses and realizing her "pride, hir coueytyse,

& desyr þat sche had of þe worshepys of þe wey of euyr-lestyng lyfe" ["pride, covetousness, and the desire that she had for worldly dignity, [she] did great bodily penance, and began to enter into the way of everlasting life . . ."] (45).[4] Shortly after, Kempe received another vision in which she heard a melody of heaven. And "euyr aftyr þis drawt" ["ever after her being drawn towards God in this way"], she lost her sexual desire for her husband, finding intercourse "so abhominabyl to hir þat sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn þe wose, þe mukke in þe chanel, þan to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens" ["so abominable to her that she would rather, she thought, have eaten and drunk the ooze and muck in the gutter than consent to intercourse, except out of obedience"] (46). Kempe nonetheless bore fourteen children. After her final pregnancy, around age forty, she began a three to four years' effort to persuade her husband to live chastely:

> & oftyn-tymys þis creatur cownseld hir husbond to levyn chast, & seyd þat þei oftyn-tymes, sche wyst wel, had dysplesyd God be her inordynat lofe & þe gret delectacyon þat þe haddyn eyþyr of hem in vsyng of oþer, & now it wer good þat þei schuld be her boþins wylle & consentyng of hem bothyn punschyn & chastysyn hem-self wylfully be absteynyng fro her lust of her bodys. Hir husbond seyd it wer good to don so, but he mygth no ȝett, he xuld whan God wold. And so he vsyd her as he had do be-for, he wold not spar. And euyr sche preyd to God þat sche mygth levyn chast, & iij or iiij ȝer aftyr, whan it plesyd ower Lord, he made a vow of chastyte, as schal be wretyn aftyr be þe leue of Ihesu. [And often this creature advised her husband to live chaste and said that they had often (she well knew) displeased God by their inordinate love, and the great delight that each of them had in using the other's body, and now it would be a good thing if by mutual

> consent they punished and chastised themselves by abstaining from the lust of their bodies. Her husband said it was good to do so, but he might not yet--he would do so when God willed. And so he used her as he had done before, he would not desist. And all the time she prayed to God that she might live chaste, and three or four years afterwards, when it pleased our Lord, her husband made a vow of chastity, as shall be written afterwards, by Jesus' leave]. (46-47)

As recounted in her later chapters, her husband John's final agreement to chastity did not come easily. Kempe tells of John's refusal to respect her desire for sexual abstinence, and when he approaches her to have intercourse, her prayer for heavenly help results in his suddenly having "no power to towche hir at þat tyme in þat wyse, ne neuyr aftyr wyth no fleschly knowyng" ["no power to touch her at that time in that way, nor ever after that with carnal knowledge"] (56). This uneasy stand-off continues for eight weeks until, when walking on a roadside, John asks her if she would rather see him killed or have intercourse with him. She replies "wyth gret sorwe" ["with great sorrow"] that she would rather see him killed, to which he responds, "ȝe arn nc good wyfe" "[you are no good wife]" (58). Finally, after negotiating, they come to an agreement: John will concede to living chastely with Margery if she will pay his debts.[5] If John "makyth my body fre to God" ["make[s] my body free for God"], Kempe contends, she will live up to her side of the bargain. John agrees, saying, "as fre mot ȝowr body ben to God as it hath ben to me" ["may your body be as freely available to God as it has been to

me"] (60). Thus their vow of chastity, if not taken on with the same enthusiasm, is nonetheless mutually agreed upon.

Kempe's understanding and embracing of chastity is essentially androcentric; yet, we see disjunctions between the chastity she espouses and her own embodied experiences as she describes them. The operative assumption that informs Kempe's understanding of chastity is that, like the overarching definition set by the church fathers, it is essentially sex-centered, meaning that intrinsic to it is the negation of sexuality. As a woman, Kempe sees her desire for a closer and more intimate relationship with God as thoroughly predicated on her sexual status. She believes she cannot achieve union with God because she is sexually active. Engaging in sexual intercourse with her husband, an experience that once gave her "great delight," becomes an obstacle to her desired union with God. Further, she realizes that sexual intercourse with her husband constitutes "inordinate love" and is "displeasing" to God. Thus, she fully embraces the idea that her body and its sexuality is an obstacle to relationship with God and must be negated.

Yet at the same time, Kempe is very aware of herself as a bodied person and sees her body as an avenue by which to draw closer to God. Interestingly, Kempe does not negate her body in and of itself, but rather attempts to separate it from her sexuality and make it "free for God." As we shall see however, in her descriptions of a physical and sexual relationship with God, she does not achieve this separation.[6] The physical and sexual

language used in Kempe's text shows that she is caught in disjunction between her awareness and acceptance of herself as a bodied and sexual person and the misogynistic tradition that reviles her as a woman--as body and sexuality.

On the surface, it appears that Kempe eagerly pursues and adopts the ideal of chastity as articulated by standard treatises such as Hali Meidenhad. And it is evident that she is deeply influenced by the male religious code for female sexual behavior and equated, as Roberta Bosse suggests, the attainment of perfection with the achievement of the sexual ideal for women. Yet, while Kempe appears to embrace the ideal, she also subverts it--a subversion that reveals itself in her conversations with Christ.

Bosse suggests that Kempe's pursuit of spiritual perfection was haunted by her primary fear that the fact that she was not a physical virgin would keep her from the first rank or "spiritual grace" set aside for virgins in heaven. Kempe has several conversations with Christ in which she recounts her anxiety over the loss of her virginity. She is continually reassured by Christ that "&, for-as-mech as þu art a mayden in þi sowle, I xal take þe be þon hand in Hevyn & my Modyr be oþer hand, & so xalt þdawnsyn in Hevyn wyth oþer holy maydens & virgynes, for I may clepyn þe dere a-bowte & myn owyn derworthy derlyng" ["because you are a maiden in your soul, I shall take you by the one hand in heaven, and my mother by the other, and so you shall dance in heaven with other holy maidens and virgins, for I may call you

dearly bought and my own beloved darling"] (88). Christ assures Kempe that her lost physical virginity is "recoverable" (something Hali Meidenhad says is impossible--"[virginity is] an lure þet is widuten couerunge" ["the one loss which cannot be recovered]" (11)). Further, Christ bids Kempe to wear white clothes, the public symbol of virginity: "And, dowtyr, I sey to þe I wyl þat þu were clothys of whyte & non oþer colowr, for þu xal ben arayd aftyr my wyl" ["And daughter, I say to you that I want you to wear white clothes and no other colour, for you shall dress according to my will"] (67).

Christ himself appears to undermine the notion, as expressed in treatises such as Hali Meidenhad, of the primacy of a woman's physical virginity. This "divine" subversion reveals a possible conflict within Kempe herself in regard to her complete acceptance of the sexual ideal for females. As Bosse points out, in conversation Christ reassures Kempe that the fact of her spiritual virginity is the primary criterion for her inclusion with the special ranks of virgins in heaven. While treatises such as Hali Meidenhad insist that virginity (as the "only gift" given to women) is unrecoverable once lost, Kempe's recounting of her conversations with Christ have him subverting this position. Perhaps the reassuring, comforting Christ of the conversations, especially in regard to sexual behavior and conduct, voices Kempe's repressed rejection of the impossibilities of the ideal as set forth by men.

In another conversation, when Christ informs Kempe she is pregnant, she feels unworthy that he should even speak to her because she is still

sexually active: "Lord, I am not worthy to heryn þe spekyn & þus to comown wyth myn husbond" ["Lord I am not worthy to hear you speak, and still to make love with my husband . . ."] (84). Kempe is reassured that this is "no synne" ["no sin]" but instead a "mede & meryte, & þow xalt haue neuyr þe lesse grace" ["reward and merit, and you will not have any less grace"] (84). Kempe remonstrates with the traditional view that "þis maner of leuyng longyth to thy holy maydens" ["this manner of life belongs to your holy maidens"] (84). Christ agrees, but with a reassuring rejoinder:

> I lofe wyfes also, and specyal þo wyfys whech woldyn levyn chast, ȝyf þei mygtyn haue her wyl, & don her besynes to plesyn me as þow dost, for, þow þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode, & þe state of wedewhode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake, ȝet dowtyr I lofe þe aswel as any mayden in þe world. [I love wives also, and especially those wives who might live chastely if they might have their will. . . . For though the state of maidenhood be more perfect and more holy than the state of widowhood, and the state of widowhood more perfect than the state of wedlock, yet I love you, daughter, as much as any maiden in the world]. (85)

The wavering and ambivalence between the androcentric tradition and the self--as part bodied and sexual--seems as present in Christ as in Kempe herself. While the androcentric sexual ideal is not <u>completely</u> subverted by Kempe's God or Kempe herself, in that virginity is the main criterion for special privileges in heaven, the near exclusive emphasis on <u>physical</u> virginity as a primary standard, as championed by Jerome and <u>Hali Meidenhad</u>, is partially subverted. In terms of the intersected concepts of physical and

psychological virginity discussed in Chapter One, it appears that Kempe's Christ leans toward the Augustinian emphasis on psychological virginity. Perhaps Kempe, reacting against popular treatises such as Hali Meidenhad and other male devotional writing for women, has Christ affirming her state of psychological virginity as a means to justify her inability to obtain the "ideal" of physical virginity.

The religious influence of the physical ideal on Kempe is profound--and although reassured by God that she will indeed dance with the virgins in heaven, she still insists on chastity in marriage with her husband. In this state, her body will be "free" for God, the vehicle by which she will reach the divine.

The ambivalence of Kempe's position further shows itself as she embraces the "Bride of Christ" concept. Despite the fact that she is married to an earthly husband (but here she subverts Hali Meidenhad's concern that the loss of a "Bride of Christ's" physical virginity will make her an adulteress to Christ), she recounts her experience of becoming married to God. (In Kempe's case her espousal is not to Christ but to God, although this distinction blurs when she wears a ring which she describes as her wedding ring to Jesus). God announces to Kempe that "I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende" ["I will have you wedded to my Godhead, because I shall show you my secrets and my counsels, for you shall live without end"] (122). That God proposes to her, and not Christ, causes Kempe

some anxiety and consternation, since "sche cowde no skylle of þe dalyawns of þe Godhede, for al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in . . . Crist" ["she had no knowledge of the Godhead, for all her love and affection were fixed on . . . Christ . . ."] (122-23). When she has no answer to God's proposal, Christ intercedes and appeals to God to excuse her. And then, in a sort of wedding ceremony in which witnesses are "þe Sone & þe Holy Gost & Modyr of Ihesu and alle þe xij apostelys & Seint Kateryn & Seynt Margarete & many oþer seyntys & holy virgynes wyth gret multitude of awngelys" ["the Son, the Holy Ghost, and the Mother of Jesus, and all the twelve apostles and St Katharine and St Margaret and many other saints and holy virgins [and] a great multitude of angels,"] God makes the wedding vow to Kempe:

> I take you, Margery, for my wedded wife, for fairer, for fouler, for richer, for poorer, provided that you are humble and meek in doing what I command you to do. For, daughter, there was never a child so kind to its mother as I shall be to you, both in joy and sorrow, to help you and comfort you. And that I pledge to you. (123)

After the wedding, Kempe experiences "both spiritual comforts and bodily comforts" (124)--and significantly, it is the "bodily comforts" on which she elaborates. Her bodily senses are heightened: she smells sweet smells, hears melodies, sees "boþe gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys" ["both spiritual comforts and bodily comforts"] (124) "white thyngys . . . as motys in the sunne" ["white things . . . as specks in a sunbeam"] flying about her both day and night, and feels (for a period of sixteen years) a "a flawme of fyer

wondir hoot & delectabyl . . . brennyng in hir brest & at hir hert" ["flaming fire of love--marvelously hot and delectable . . . burning in her breast and at her heart"](125). It is in her body that Kempe experiences her union with God. Similarly, God's desire for Kempe expresses itself in bodily and sexual terms:

> Þerfore most I nedys be homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & þu mayst boldly, whan þpu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth þe modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a good wyfe owth to loue hir husbonde. & þerfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt. [Therefore I must be intimate with you, and lie in your bed with you. Daughter, you greatly desire to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your dear darling, and as your sweet son, for I want to be loved as a son should be loved by the mother, and I want you to love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband. Therefore you can boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want]. (126-27)[7]

Kempe's focus on the bodily and sexual manifestations of her espousal to God is characteristic of female spirituality and, perhaps, typical of a female subconscious subversion of the misogynistic tradition which denied women sexuality.

As Caroline Walker Bynum points out in "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," the medieval focus on the body (despite its paradoxical attempts to negate it) ultimately viewed the body as a "means of religious access" (163). This view was particularly characteristic of female piety. Bynum speaks of the tendency of women to "somatize" their

religious experience more than men, maintaining that women respond to religious experience from a bodily perspective (167). Whether this response is enculturated, biological or both remains to be seen, yet the medieval view that associated women with the body suggests the profound influence of androcentric cultural and intellectual traditions on religious experience. Bynum notes that women are more apt to somatize spiritual experience in those cultures that identify them with service and self-sacrifice (174). This identification seems particularly true of European medieval culture. As Bynum observes, in medieval female spirituality particularly, the body was viewed not so much as an obstacle to union with God (the androcentric view) but more as an occasion for union (170). We see, for example, Margery Kempe's uncontrollable sobbing and wailing, Julian of Norwich's desire for illness, and the occurrence of stigmata in more women than men.[8] At the same time that women viewed and used their bodies as a primary means of access to spiritual experience, the intellectual tradition of misogynistic dualism exhorted women to negate their sexuality, something profoundly intrinsic to their view of themselves as bodied persons. Thus we can understand Kempe's perspective that her body must be made "free for God" primarily through sexual abstinence in her marriage. In this she unquestionably embraces the androcentric concept of chastity, yet she refuses to negate totally her body and views it (although made "pure" by sexual abstinence) as a vehicle with which to reach God.

And, if we examine the aforementioned passage concerning Kempe's and God's "sexual" relationship, we see that Kempe is unable to separate her sexuality from her body. As Bynum has suggested, medieval women's spirituality tended to somatize religious experience much more than did men's, and Bynum notes that women mystics typically speak of "tasting God, of kissing him deeply, of going into his heart and entrails" (168). Kempe asserts her femaleness, her bodiliness and its sexuality--but within the androcentric confines of the Bride of Christ concept and female chastity. While in her insistence on physical chastity with her husband she maintains and supports the traditional concept that human sexual experience and spiritual union with God are incompatible, Kempe nonetheless gives free expression to her sexuality in her relationship with God. She articulates her experience as Bride of Christ fundamentally in terms of bodied and sexual activity. And outwardly in her body, Kempe gives the public sign of her spiritual virginity and espousal to Christ (or to God) by wearing white clothes and a wedding ring engraved with "Jesus est amor meus" ["Jesus is my love"]--which she describes as her wedding ring to Jesus Christ (114).

Such wavering within Kempe also manifests itself on levels outside the body. Kempe's acceptance of the orthodox position on chastity (for females) is characteristic of her overall orthodox position in theological matters. However, Kempe's devotional behavior, characterized by uncontrollable weeping, sobbing, and wailing, and her wearing the white clothes of the virgin

made her a controversial figure, and open to recurrent accusations of being a heretical Lollard.[9] While at first glance these behaviors appear subversive--church officials felt they must "examine" or investigate her as suspected heretic--Kempe nevertheless adheres to the orthodox position in her answers to questions on the "Articles of Faith" (160). Outwardly, there is nothing with which to convict her of subversion.

Further, it is during one of Kempe's pilgrimages to Rome that the "Father of Heaven" speaks to her, saying that he is pleased with her, "in-as-meche as þu beleuyst in alle þe Sacramentys of Holy Chirche & in al feyth þat longith þerto" ["inasmuch as you believe in all the sacraments of Holy Church and in all faith involved in that"] (122). Here, God's approval of Kempe is predicated on her faith and belief in the sacraments of the church, a belief system always found to be orthodox when tested at her various heresy "examinations." Interestingly, after these prefatory remarks on her orthodoxy, God announces to Kempe that he wishes to marry her.

Yet something within Kempe consistently suggests her subversion of both the religious orthodoxy and the androcentric chastity she appears to embrace. Karma Lochri argues that Kempe "threatened" ideas on female chastity by her insistence on being public. Kempe resisted enclosure (as required of holy women) and its assumption that the female body had to be "sealed" or unbroken and therefore private. Lochrie uses Peter Brown's argument in <u>The Body and Society</u> that female chastity is different from male

chastity in that the chaste female must operate in the enclosed, private sphere. Thus, Lochrie observes, has the tradition and practice of religious life for women "consisted primarily in adopting boundaries and maintaining an unbroken body" (24). Here we see how the influence of Ambrose's idea of the female virgin as "unbroken," enclosed, or sealed--one pure from the "polluting" mixtures from the outside world--contributes to the defining of female chastity as physical and spiritual "integratas" (Lochrie 24).

Lochrie further notes the instruction Hali Meidenhad gives to the maiden to guard the "sign" of her virginity by not breaking the "seal" of her body which binds her to Christ (24). This "unbroken flesh," says Lochrie, "ultimately means bodily closure and silence" (25) and "the female chaste body exempts itself from any kind of publicity, from the world of transactions, including discursive ones" (160). Lochrie argues that in this sense Kempe transgresses androcentric definitions of chastity by being public and vocal: "monks wish her behind a wall of stone . . . archbishops pray her to leave their dioceses . . . she is advised to return to spinning and carding like other wives . . . and she is despised by men and women" (160).

In one episode in particular, Kempe refuses to comply to the silence expected of a chaste woman. Examined by the Archbishop of York, she must defend herself from charges that she violates St. Paul's prohibition against women preaching in I Corinthians 14:34-5.[10] In response to the charge Kempe says that she does not preach or " come in no pulpytt. I vse but

comownycacyon & good wordys, & þat wil I do whil I leue" ["go into any pulpit. I use only conversation and good words, and that I will do while I live]" (164). When the archbishop tries to get her to "sweryn" ["swear]" that she will not "techyn" ["teach]" Kempe refuses, saying, "I xal spekyn of God . . . vn-to þe tyme þat þe Pope & Holy Chirch hath ordeynde þat no man schal be so hardy to spekyn of God, for God al-mythy forbedith not, ser, þat we xal speke of hym" ["I shall speak of God . . . until such time that the Pope and Holy Church have ordained that nobody shall be so bold as to speak of God, for God Almighty does not forbid that we should speak of him"] (164). In her resistance to silence, Lochrie argues that Kempe "threatens the very boundaries of holiness and medieval culture" (160). Kempe, says Lochrie, insists that she speak and be visible in public religious discourse: "Kempe [refused] to play the holy woman: silent, sequestered, her body erased from public discourse" (161).

If we accept Lochrie's argument, and juxtapose it with Kempe's recognition of herself as "Bride of Christ" in the androcentric sense, we clearly see her vacillating between the orthodoxy of this position and the unorthodoxy of her refusal to be silent or sequestered. And on a more profound level, we see her sway with the struggle of disjunction between her self and the religious culture.

In her book Writing Woman, Sheila Delaney articulates well Kempe's struggle. Delaney asserts that Kempe internalized her oppression as a woman

into her religion, and in this uneasy fusion, found a way to "use the system against the system--a way to leave home, travel, establish a name for herself, and meanwhile remain both chaste and respectable" (91). Thus, Delaney suggests, Kempe used the religious system as a means to establish her independence and autonomy, while acquiescing to what the system demanded for a woman to gain any kind of respectability: chastity. Kempe's dilemma--her struggling and wavering between the misogynistic tradition and her own sense of selfhood as a woman--is acute. Enormously aware of her reputation as an hysterical woman and alleged heretic, and cognizant of the ecclesiastical alienation this brought her, Kempe perhaps compensated by embracing the orthodoxy of chastity as a way to gain <u>some</u> religious respectability and approval. From the constant pressure of public and ecclesiastical ridicule and suspicion, and from having broken out of the silent enclosure of the holy woman, Kempe perhaps found retreat in chastity, the only religious respectability available to her. Kempe, then, both reinforced and resisted the androcentric position on the "problem" her womanhood presented. She reinforced androcentric chastity by her assent to the idea that human sexual relations are incompatible for union with God. She resisted by her refusal to be silent and by experiencing her sexuality in her relationship with God.

<u>The Letters of Abelard and Heloise</u>: Two Views of Chastity

Juxtaposed with the ambivalence of Margery Kempe--caught between her own sense of self as a bodied and sexual person and the androcentric ethos of chastity--is the forthrightness of Heloise, twelfth century scholar, abbess, lover, wife and mother. It is with Heloise that a feminine redefining of chastity emerges most clearly and forcefully.

The letters of Abelard and Heloise reveal two startlingly different views on the concepts of sexuality, chastity, and other associated experiences that emerge from these--spirituality and conversion. Perhaps the best starting point for examining these differences is Jean LeClerq's brief and self-admittedly undeveloped observation on the dissimilarity in vocabularies which Abelard and Heloise use to describe their sexual experiences with one another. LeClerq notes that Abelard regards his past sexual activities with Heloise as "turpitudes," "impurities," "fornications," and "abominations," while Heloise refers to them as "desires," "delights," and "sensuous pleasures" which remain in her memory as "sweet" and "agreeable" (484). It is precisely within these very different perspectives on their sexuality and sexual experiences with one another that Heloise's redefinition of chastity emerges.

Any discussion of the letters of Abelard and Heloise must necessarily begin with mention of the scholarly debate, referred to by Barbara Newman

as an "institution of medieval studies," over the authorship of the letters. Various authorship theories conclude that: (1) either Abelard or Heloise alone wrote the letters (overwhelmingly, however, most theories point to Abelard); (2) the letters were written by one of their contemporaries; (3) both Abelard and Heloise authored their respective letters; (4) the letters are forgeries, written perhaps a century after the deaths of Abelard and Heloise. It is not my purpose here to offer an opinion for any one theory of authorship. However, a point made by Newman in her argument against Abelard's sole authorship is noteworthy in discussing Heloise's views on sexuality and erotic love. Newman observes that scholarly skepticism about Heloise's authorship of her three letters to Abelard, and particularly the first two "personal" letters, "arose in the first place from reluctance to believe that she could have felt, or at any rate set in writing, the sentiments expressed in her first two letters" (135). Moreover, Newman dismisses scholars who discount psychological arguments which insist on Heloise's authorship by asserting that these repudiations are intended to "shield the reader from [Heloise's] blaze of recalcitrant passion" (131). Newman further contends that scholarly dismissal of Heloise's authorship may be attributed not so much to the fact that she was a woman writing, but still more to the fact that an abbess, a religious woman, was writing "in praise of erotic love" (129). Because of her position, Newman maintains, Heloise's "erotic discourse has . . . been repressed ever since it was uttered"--first by Abelard, by other medieval writers such as Jean

de Meun and Chaucer, and lastly by modern (and predominately male) scholars.

The very different views of sexuality and chastity that Heloise takes can indeed startle, perhaps revealing the persistence of medieval thinking in the twentieth century. In his Historia Calamitatum, Abelard tells, with an even control, the story of his love affair with Heloise. In the letters (if we assume that Heloise is the author of the letters attributed to her) Heloise explodes with the passion of her enduring love for Abelard. As Abelard recounts, their love affair began with his calculated seduction of his pupil Heloise--and her ready yielding. Abelard relates that under the pretext of studying, he and Heloise "abandoned ourselves entirely to love . . . with our books open before us, more words of love than of our reading passed between us, more kissing than teaching. . . . In short, our desires left no stage of love-making untried . . . " ["nous étions tout entiers à l'amour . . . les livres étaient ouverts, main il y avait plus de paroles d'amour que de leçons de philosophie, plus de baisers que d'explications . . . Dans notre ardeur, nous avons traversé toutes les phases de l'amour"] (67).[11] Shortly after, they were "caught in the act" by Heloise's uncle Fulbert. Abelard, forced to leave Fulbert's house, later abducted Heloise, who had just informed him in a letter "full of rejoicing" that she was pregnant. Disguising Heloise in a nun's habit, Abelard sent her off to his sister in Brittany.

Meanwhile, to appease Fulbert, Abelard offered to marry Heloise, but with the condition that the marriage be secret "so as not to damage [his] reputation" ["afin de ne pas nuire à ma réputation"] (70). Yet, when Abelard proposed marriage to Heloise, he was met with her forceful and learned argument against it, an argument given in detail in the Historia Calamitatum. Despite Heloise's objection, however, she and Abelard were secretly married--and immediately separated. Abelard sent Heloise to the convent of Argenteuil, giving her again a religious habit, but seemingly with the understanding that she would not take religious vows. However, Fulbert apparently understood this action to mean that Abelard was in fact forcing Heloise to become a vowed religious, thus nullifying the marital contract. The enraged Fulbert sought his revenge by having Abelard castrated. Humiliated, Abelard entered a monastery, but not before he made Heloise promise to do the same, insisting that she take religious vows before he took his. The vows were taken.

Ten years passed, with Heloise and Abelard both becoming prioress and abbot of their respective monasteries. As a result of a political maneuver in which an abbot tried to seize Heloise's convent, she suddenly found herself and her nuns evicted from Argenteuil. Coincidentally, because of another political scandal, Abelard had been forced to abandon the monastery of the Paraclete which he had founded. And thus it happened that the Paraclete was

available when Heloise and her nuns needed a convent. Abelard installed the community at his former monastery, with Heloise as their first prioress.

And so Abelard and Heloise begin corresponding nearly ten years after their love affair, as they resume their relationship in their new roles as abbot and prioress. In this situation their very different views of chastity emerge.

It is in the letters that we see the perspective Abelard and Heloise have gained on their past sexual experiences with one another. As has been shown by LeClerq's observation on the different vocabulary the two use in reflecting on their experience, Abelard's is negative and Heloise's is positive. Further, in her reflections on her sexual past, Heloise does something extraordinarily subversive. She overturns the ascent-fall motif of the virgin as found in representative treatises on virginity such as Hali Meidenhad. As Newman points out, Heloise sees herself as "exalted" when she was engaging in love with Abelard and "flung down" when she "falls" into chastity, a decision that, as she points out in her first letter to Abelard, was his decision alone (116). And in Letter Three, she recounts to Abelard her unhappiness over her descent into chastity: "The higher I was exalted when you preferred me to all other women, the greater my suffering over my own fall and yours, when I was flung down; for the higher the ascent, the heavier the fall" ["Élevée par ton amour au-dessus de toutes les femes, n'ai-je obtenu cette haute distinction que pour être précipitée de plus haut par un coup qui nour a frappés également l'un et l'autre. En effet; plus grande est l'élévation, plus

terrible est la chute!"] (129).[12] Out of her radical reversal of the standard ascent-fall motif and in her positive and embracing view of her sexual activity, Heloise develops her very different definition of chastity. This definition must first be gleaned, however, from the context of the differences in the purposes of chastity for women and men, as defined from the androcentric view of male and female.

Examining Abelard and Heloise's letters, along with the writings of Theophrastus and further analysis of the writings of Jerome and Augustine, indicates that chastity, as defined from the androcentric theological view of male and female, had essentially different purposes for men and women in the medieval Church. Abelard's chastity centers on freedom from marriage so he may devote himself to the service of philosophy and the Church. Heloise's chastity, as viewed from Abelard's and the androcentric perspective, is necessary as a "purification" from sexuality. These distinct differences in purpose arise from what we have seen: an androcentric theological association of the male with "rationality"--the mind and spirit--and the female with "irrationality"--the body and sexuality. Examining these premises in light of Heloise's statements regarding chastity suggests that she never quite accepted the androcentric concept of chastity, and through her relationship with Abelard she struggled to give the term a <u>female</u> definition and purpose.

A discussion of Abelard's and Heloise's differing definitions of chastity requires an understanding of the distinctions both make between the terms

"chastity" and "celibacy." We recall how these terms often were (and are) used interchangeably. Both Abelard and Heloise, however, make distinctions between the two. Abelard defines chastity as sexual abstinence for religious reasons; Heloise, likewise, utilizes this definition, but as the basis for her redefinition. And, in view of their common understanding of androcentric chastity, it is interesting to note that neither Heloise nor Abelard chose chastity. Rather, it was imposed on both from withmut: Abelard was castrated; Heloise was forced by Abelard to enter a community of women religious who vowed chastity. However, Heloise desired celibacy for Abelard, and we must presume desired it for herself as well since she did not wish to marry him. As we will see, based on their understandings of philosophic misogamy, both Heloise and Abelard defined celibacy as the unmarried, single life. All in all, the distinctions they mutually draw between these terms are critical in understanding how Heloise "redefines" chastity. To begin such discussion, a crucial point to consider is <u>why</u> Heloise did not want to marry Abelard.

As I have mentioned, Heloise's argument against marriage is recounted by Abelard in his autobiography <u>Historia Calamitatum</u>. He writes that she was "strongly opposed" to his proposal that they marry (knowing it was brought on by pressures from her uncle Fulbert) and "argued hotly" her case (70). While Heloise insists that her uncle would not be appeased by marriage, her primary argument is that marriage would only bring dishonor, humiliation and disgrace to Abelard. His marriage would mean a "loss to the Church" and

philosophy; Abelard's intellectual gifts were meant for "all mankind" (70) and marriage would somehow diminish these gifts. Heloise gives Abelard a graphic illustration (reminiscent of Hali Meidenhad's argument) of the discord of marriage and philosophy: "What harmony can there be between pupils and nursemaids, desks and cradles. . . . Who can concentrate on thoughts of Scripture or philosophy and be able to endure babies crying? . . ." ["Quel rapport . . . peut-il y avoir entre les travaux de l'école et les tracas demestiques, entre un pupitre et un berceau . . . est-il un homme enfin qui, livre aux méditations de l'Écriture et de la philosophie, puisse supporter les vagissements d'un nouveau-né?"] (71). Such a disharmony, in this view, is disadvantageous to both the person of the philosopher and to the pursuit of the discipline. Heloise bases her argument on philosophic misogamy, a type of misogamistic thought crucial to understanding the differences in her and Abelard's views of chastity.

Heloise paraphrases Theophrastus's argument for philosophic misogamy which held that philosophers should not marry (i.e., remain celibate) so as to avoid the distractions of marital and familial concerns. The origins of this view of misogamy (with corresponding ideas found in Plato, Epicurus and Cicero) is attributed to Theophrastus' liber aureolus, which has survived only in fragment form as found in Jerome's Against Jovinianus. The basis for Theophrastus's argument is the question of whether a wise man should marry, and the answer is clearly no. Women are enormous distractions

to men. Women require material things, such as "costly dresses, gold, jewels, furniture, gilded coaches"; they incessantly chatter and grumble; they demand that men constantly praise their beauty; and they resent managing household affairs (Against Jovinianus 383).[13] These burdens of marriage are bad enough for the "ordinary" man, and even more reason for the wise man, the philosopher who needs silence and uninterrupted time for his studies, not to marry: "the wise man therefore must not take a wife. . . . His study of philosophy will be hindered, and it is impossible for anyone to attend to his books and his wife" (Against Jovinianus 383).

As Makowski and Wilson point out in their book Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage, philosophic misogamy recommends celibacy, i.e. singleness, in and of itself; the issue of chastity and sexuality are not intrinsic to it. In this understanding, "marriage is not regarded as sinful or insane, not as morally dangerous, but [simply] as unwise because it impedes the philosopher's freedom to think and study" (5). Heloise's use of Theophrastus clearly places her primary argument against marriage in the philosophical misogamist tradition, as does her concluding argument in which sexuality is inferred, but kept extraneous to celibacy. Abelard recounts Heloise's final point:

> Heloise . . . argued that the name of mistress instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honorable to me--only love freely given should keep me for her, not the constriction of a marriage tie, and if we were parted for a time, we should find the joy of being together all the

> sweeter the rarer our meetings were. [Héloïse me répresentait . . . combien le titre d'amante serait plus honorable pour moi, et, à elle plus cher, à elle qui voulait me conserver par la seule force de la tendresse et non par les chaînes du lien conjugal. D'ailleurs nos séparations nomentanées rendraient nos recontres d'autant plus agréable qu'elles seraient plus rares] (74).

In her own words, Heloise says in Letter One to Abelard: "I looked for no marriage bond . . . [t]he name of wife may seem sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore" ["Je n'ai pensé ni àquelque dousire . . . Le titre d'éspouse a été jugé plus sacré et plus fort, pourtant c'est celui de maîtresse qui m'a tourjours été plus doux et, si cela ne te choque pas, celui de concubine ou de fille de joie"] (113). As Makowski and Wilson suggest, in philosophic misogamy, sexual activity and sometimes promiscuity were considered natural consequences of the celibate state (5). Heloise's use of the words "mistress," "concubine," and "whore" suggests she expected the sexual relationship between her and Abelard to continue although both would be celibate.

Heloise's argument also makes a tacit but clear differentiation between philosophic misogamy and ascetic misogamy. Makowski and Wilson point out important differences in topoi and types of misogamy. First, from classical and medieval literature, a rhetorical topos of "limited" misogamy emerges which focuses on celibacy as applicable to and apropos for a select group, while the topos of "unlimited" misogamy espouses celibacy for all (3). These

topoi further divide into three types of misogamy: general, ascetic, and philosophic. General misogamy, pertinent for an overall understanding but not apropos to this discussion, reduces itself to blatant misogyny by merely stating that women are the cause of the world's (and men's) ills and therefore "no woman is worth marrying" (5-6). Ascetic misogamy centers on eschatology and, as we have seen, grew out of a belief of the early Christian Church that the second coming of Christ (and the end of the world) was near.[14] Marriage and earthbound relationships had no purpose in the face of the imminent end; Christians were to prepare themselves for their entrance into heaven (3-4). When it began to appear that Christ's second coming was not to be interpreted as immediate, and as Christianity became the state religion, the Church accepted marriage as an "important institution for most of its members and championed the celibate ideal only for an elite, set apart by presumed sanctity" (4). Consequently, ascetic misogamy became limited, and the "sanctity" for which the elite strove took chastity and virginity as its focus, particularly in relation to celibacy (4). Chastity and virginity, associated with the body, were means to achieve the necessary "transcendence" needed for a life of prayer via "mortification of the flesh . . . and a distrust of all appetites" (4). Thus celibacy, the unmarried life, became the means by which one maintained and sustained chastity.

However, Heloise does not mix the two concepts of philosophic and ascetic misogamy. She is clear to Abelard what she wants: she does want

celibacy for him (and presumably for herself); she seemingly does not want their relationship to be chaste, as defined by the Christian ascetic misogamous tradition, which associates chastity with sexual abstinence.

Interestingly and ironically, Heloise uses as a support for her argument Jerome's Against Jovinianus which combines the philosophic and ascetic traditions, but again, she does not intertwine the two, as Jerome does. Jerome's main purpose in writing Against Jovinianus was to exalt the state of virginity and the "chaste ideal"; his natural follow-up to a promotion of the superiority of virginity would be an attack on marriage (Makowski and Wilson 46). To show the superiority of virginity to marriage, Jerome uses Old and New Testament examples of the chaste ideal, in Chapters 5-40; his last nine chapters are a catalogue of the ideal as found in classical literature, history and philosophy (Makowski and Wilson 47). Jerome's use of Theophrastus's frgament in the final chapters of his treatise incorporates philosophic misogamy into his argument. In Chapter 47 Jerome quotes Theophrastus's extended fragment with its question of whether the wise man should marry. Springing from Theophrastus's argument, Jerome makes his own philosophic misogamist statement via Cicero: "After his divorce from Terentia Cicero was asked by Hirtius to marry the latter's sister; Cicero refused, and said that it was not possible to give attention to both philosophy and a wife" (Against Jovinianus 383). Thus, the Christian ascetic Jerome contributes to a blending of the philosophic and ascetic traditions. While Heloise maintains a clear

distinction between the two in her argument, Abelard, in expounding his views to Heloise, does not differentiate: this causes their definitions of chastity to diverge.

In Letter Four to Heloise, Abelard speaks of the grace which his imposed chastity has brought him. That grace gives him the freedom to "approach the holy altars" for the purposes of "performance of my duties! Indeed it would make me readier to perform whatever can be honorably done by setting me wholly free from the heavy yoke of carnal desire" ["l'empêcher de vaquer à aucun devoir. Et même ne suis-je pas plus dispose maintenant pour les actes honnêtes puisque je suis libéré du jong de la concupiscence"] (148). Abelard's purpose for chastity is work-oriented: he is "free" from sexual desire and distraction in order to perform duties of service to the church and philosophy. Abelard's view combines philosophic and ascetic misogamy, with the negation of sexuality emerging as the primary focus. His idea of chastity as both work-oriented and sex-centered (in that sexuality must be eschewed) is also undergirded by the Augustinian concepts of "maleness," "rationality," "femaleness," and "corporeality." To understand how these concepts operate in Abelard's view of chastity, it is best to examine his response to Heloise's feelings about the chastity imposed on her.

Heloise's imposed chastity strains her. She feels no "vocation" to it--"It was not any sense of vocation which brought me . . . to the cloister" ["Ce n'est pas la vocation . . . qui a jeté ma jeunnesse dans les rigueurs de la vie

monastique"] (116)--and if anything, she is frustrated by her inability to express physically her love for Abelard. In Letter Three to Abelard, her curbed sexual desire explodes:

> . . . it is very difficult to tear the heart awayfrom the hankering after its dearest pleasures . . .the pleasures of lovers which we shared have been too sweet. . . . Wherever I turn they are always there before my eyes, bringing with them awakened longings and fantasies . . . for me, youth and passion and experience of pleasures which were so delightful intensify the torments of the flesh and the longings of desire. . . . [ce qui est trés difficile, c'est d'arracher son âme aux désirs des plus douces voluptés . . . ces plaisirs de l'amour aux-quels nous nous livrions ensemble m'ont été si doux . . . De quelque côte que je me tourne, ils se présentent à mes yeux réveillant mes desirs; leurs trompeuses images n'épargnent même pas mon sommeil . . . chez moi les aiguillons de la chair sont enflammés par les feux d'une jeunnesse ardent et par l'expérience que j'ai faite des plus douces voluptés]. (132-33)

Abelard impatiently responds, reducing Heloise's outpouring to "a recital of your misery over the wrongs you suffer . . . [namely] your old perpetual complaint against God concerning the manner of our entry into religious life . . ." ["se résume . . . qui expriment la violence de ces anciens et éternels murmures contre Dieu au sujet de notre conversion"] (137). Abelard's discounting of Heloise's sexual passion reflects several differences in their perspectives on sexual expression and chastity. An observation made by Peggy Kamuf is helpful in clarifying differences. Kamuf suggests that Heloise attempts to find meaning and spiritual clarity precisely in what Kamuf calls the "destabilizing experience of the erotic" (19). Conversely, Abelard seeks

spiritual clarity through the negation of the erotic and the "displacement of erotic ambiguity" into what he perceives as the stability inherent in the Christian symbolism of the human and divine relationship (38). Kamuf concludes that Abelard reduces Heloise's sexual passion as a way to prompt "that other transfer on which depends the system he represents: the transfer of her [Heloise's] woman's desire from its human to a divine context" (43).

The "system" Abelard represents is, broadly speaking, androcentric theology and anthropology and more specifically, the central tension between the Augustinian purposes and definitions of male and female identity and male and female chastity. A review of the Augustinian perspective may aid both in analyzing Abelard's androcentric definition of chastity and in clarifying differences between this view and Heloise's.

In her chapter "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," Rosemary Radford Reuther points out how the major religions of antiquity, Greek, Babylonian, Jewish, Canaanite, and Persian all evolved, because of historical and cultural circumstances, from a "naturalistic," positive, celebratory view of the body to a dualistic, pessimistic, "world-fleeing" view. Christianity, she says, naturally absorbed the influence of these other religions as well as Hellenism, and as we have seen, took on a view of redemption as involving a "rejection of the body and the flight of the soul from material, sensual, nature" (153). Reuther explains how in the Latin tradition, Augustine further solidified this view by his interpretation of Genesis 1:27. Reuther

observes that in his interpretation, Augustine relies heavily on the Greek idea of monism, which asserts that the spiritual is unified and the material is dualistic. Reuther points out that Augustine's view of the "image" of God is thoroughly androcentric as he equates maleness with monism, or man as spirit.

However, the creation of a <u>bodied</u> man--Adam--poses problems. If Adam is spirit--unity--how can spirit have material substance--a body? Augustine attempts to resolve this sticky contradiction by using dualism to explain the presence of the spiritual (associated with maleness) and the corporeal (associated with femaleness) within humanity. Adam is of a compound nature, says Augustine, having male spirit and female corporeality. He draws on Gregory of Nyssa's view that in Genesis 1:27, the image of God is "purely spiritual" and, as Reuther suggests, "the reference to bisexuality in the second part of the verse does not refer to the image of God in man at all, but to that bodily nature, foreign to God, that was added to man with a view to the Fall" (154). The male, as spirit, is then cast as the "image of God" but the female, who is responsible for the Fall, becomes the symbol of "bodily nature." Consequently, the male as spiritual is the "image of God" and the female, since she is associated with the body, is not by <u>herself</u> the image of God. She can only be so when included with the male, who is spirit. Reuther thus explains how an initial body-spirit dualism further divides into a female-male dualism and establishes the association of "femaleness as body [which]

decrees a natural subordination of female to male, 'as flesh must be subject to spirit in the right ordering of nature'" (157).

Yet, if woman is defined as bodiliness, how is she then redeemable, if redemption is viewed as a "rejection of the body"? Here again is where the androcentric "solution" to the "problem" of women is apparently resolved. Augustine attempts to settle the questions of female bodiliness and redemption, Reuther says, by pointing out that although woman is "naturally inferior" to man (since body is inferior to spirit) she does have a "rational nature and can be saved by overcoming the body and living according to the spirit" (158). Reuther's synopsis suggests an assumption about the nature of the "rational" which holds converse assumptions for what is "irrational." If, by "overcoming" her bodiliness and living as spirit, woman can appropriate her rational nature, then it must be assumed that her bodily and sexual nature is irrational. Thus, everything to do with woman has everything to do with sexuality, which is considered irrational, since "sexual activity involves a loss of . . . rational control, thus enfeebling intellectual activity" (McLaughlin 233). In this view, the only way woman can become rational is to become chaste, to rise above her female bodiliness and take on spirit and rationality, which is maleness. On the other hand, chastity for men is an avenue by which they may be returned to "all those natural traits of nobility of mind and transcendence to the body that are masculine by nature" (Reuther 160).

The purposes, then, for male and female chastity are different. While chaste men revert to their "natural traits of nobility of mind," chaste women are cleansed and elevated from an inferior, subordinate realm to equivalence with man in a higher realm of rationality and spirit. For woman, chastity is the means by which she can be decontaminated and raised from her subordinate position.

Abelard utilizes these views of the inherent superiority of male to female in dealing with Heloise's "irrational" passion:

> I have decided to answer you, not so much in self justification as for your own enlightenment . . .so that you will more willingly grant my own requests [that Heloise's love and devotion be directed to Christ and not to him] when you understand that they have a basis in <u>reason</u> (my emphasis). . . . [J'ai décidé de répondre . . . moins pour m'excuser que pour t'instruire . . . Tu te rendras d'autant plus volontiers à mes demandes que tu en auras mieux compris la sagasse . . .]. (137)

Abelard exhorts Heloise to be converted (as he has been), and to embrace chastity so that she can be raised to a position of equivalence with him. In this state, Abelard says Heloise will see God's grace working in their lives as a way of "reserving us for some great ends" ["s'il nous réservait à de grandes destinées"] related to their mutual "knowledge of letters . . . and talents" ["les trésors de science"] (149). Abelard bases his appeal to Heloise on their shared interest in the intellectual life; so much more should she then, in his view, agree to accept her current situation and be "converted." Thus, if

Heloise is desexed and made rational through chastity, the problem of her womanliness can be solved. She can be accommodated into the spiritual schema of the Church, and can singularly devote herself to religious and intellectual pursuits.

Outwardly, Heloise accepts Abelard's argument in the opening paragraph of Letter Six which begins the Letters of Direction. But a question lingers as to whether she truly accepts or merely acquiesces. Her response to Abelard seems restrained:

> I would not give you cause for finding me disobedient in anything, so I have set the bridle of your injunction on the words which issue from my unbounded grief . . . for nothing is less under control than the heart--having no power to command it we are forced to obey. . . . [Il ne sera pas dit que tu pourras, en quoi que ce soit, m'accuser de désobéissance; j'ai imposé à l'expression de peine . . . il n'est rien de moins en notre puissance que notre cœur, et loin de pouvoir lui commander, nous sommes forcés de lui obéir]. (159)

This sense of restraint suggests Heloise's difficulty in seeing how her experience and desire fit into an androcentric view of chastity. She feels false and divided: "Men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am. They consider purity of the flesh a virtue, though virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul" ["On dit que je suis chaste, c'est qu'on ne voit pas que je suis hypocrite. On prend la pureté de la chair pour de la vertu, mais la vertu est affair de l'âme, non du corps"] (133). With these words Heloise begins to articulate <u>her</u> definition of chastity.

In Letter One to Abelard, Heloise refers to her arguments against their marrying as she remonstrates, "You kept silent about most of my arguments for preferring love to wedlock and freedom to chains" ["tu as mieus aimé taire presque toutes les raisons qui me faisaient préférer l'amour au mariage, la liberté à une chaïne"] (114). Heloise desires celibacy for herself and for Abelard so that, as she says, Abelard may be free to live as a philosopher. Barbara Newman suggests that Heloise was also drawn to a life of philosophic misogamy for herself; "the classical 'otium philosophicum' exerted a strong attraction, and she saw the life of contemplative leisure--which absolutely excluded marriage though not lovemaking--as a real possibility for herself as well as for Abelard" (150). Heloise saw Abelard's (and perhaps her own) pursuit of philosophy as an ideal; her wishing that he, in particular, obtain this opportunity is her way to manifest her ideal of "perfect love." Crucial to her view of chastity is her suggestion that "perfect love" ["amour parfait"] is not achieved so much through "continence" (sexual self-restraint) as through "chastity of spirit" ["la pudeur des âmes"] (114). Heloise's definition of chastity centers not on sexuality (and specifically the negation of sexuality), as does the male definition, but rather on the virtuous qualities of human relationships, their "spirit," which exceed human-made boundaries such as marriage or religious vows. As Betty Radice suggests, for Heloise, "[t]he intention towards the ideal relationship is all-important"; to this "ideal relationship" Heloise applied her and Abelard's belief in the "ethic of intention"

(18). The "ethic of intention," systematized by Abelard in his Scito ipsum [Know yourself], states that intention alone determines the morality of an act, not the act itself. For Heloise, her "intention" is her love for Abelard. No act within that intention constitutes morality or immorality; it is only the intention of "perfect love," or "chastity of spirit" that matters. She writes to Abelard: "It is . . . a blessed delusion between man and wife, when perfect love can keep the ties of marriage unbroken not so much through bodily continence as through chastity of spirit" ["Sainte erreur, heureuse trompirie entre des époux, quand un amour parfait garde intacts les liens du mariage moins par la continence des corps que par la pudeur des âmes"] (114). Thus Heloise can unabashedly express her desire to be Abelard's "whore," since she saw her chastity as not defined by nor dependent on the status of her sexual relationship with him. An "ideal relationship" for Heloise consists of fidelity and commitment to the beloved; marriage in and of itself, and most importantly, sexual activity in and of itself, constitutes no state of morality or immorality within that relationship. For Heloise, the "presence or absence of an erotic element is, in a sense, irrelevant" (Radice 18) to intentionality. Heloise attempts a definition of chastity that does not confine itself to a negative sexual-bodied view of the male and female relationship. Her definition of chastity is positive, incorporating and embracing bodiliness and sexuality along with the intangible, spiritual qualities of her love for Abelard.

Heloise's very different definition of chastity can be carried over into her very different experience of conversion. Linda Georgianna notes the "absence" of a conversion experience for Heloise, finding no indications that Heloise disowns her past (225). Georgianna asserts that Heloise continues to see her past sexual experience as a part of her current religious life, rejecting the conventional (and male) conversion experience of the "simple 'before and after' pattern of oppositions so prominent in conversion stories of the period, including Abelard's own" (225). Instead, Georgianna maintains, Heloise seeks a new--her <u>own</u>--conversion model (225). It is a model, I suggest, based on her past sexual and bodied experiences, not in spite of them. Heloise does not negate the body, as Abelard does by his renunciation of his sexual past (a renunciation obviously made easier by his castration) but she instead leaps into it, to arrive at spiritual insight. As Caroline Walker Bynum observes in "'And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," women considered physicality as central to humanity, and viewed this positively as a means of union with God (277). Bynum's argument that women "reached God not by reversing what they were [as told to them by men] but by sinking more fully into it" (274) seems appropriate to what Georgianna asserts is Heloise's attempt to seek a new model of conversion for herself.

Thus, any speculation about whether Heloise was converted to "chastity" requires an understanding of the term's androcentric basis. Rather

than conforming herself to the traditional definition, Heloise struggles to define chastity from her female perspective. She saw herself as chaste, whether she was Abelard's "whore" or the Prioress of the Paraclete. In her own mind, her pure love of Abelard was her vocation to chastity.

As we have seen in our discussion of the origins of androcentric chastity in the biblical and patristic traditions, and in its representative manifestation in medieval treatises on virginity such as Hali Meidenhad, androcentric chastity is particularly associated with women, and calls for a restraining or negating of sexuality. And chastity declares itself a code for sexual conduct (again, particularly women's conduct) in the Christian patriarchal institutions of religious life and marriage. In exploring the responses of Margery Kempe and Heloise to androcentric chastity, we not only understand how two medieval women in particular experienced it, but also discover how they "redefine" it. And, although their responses are quite different, both Kempe and Heloise assert their sense of self by refusing to fully accept that they--as "woman"--are a problem to be solved. Their assertions expand the concept of chastity by removing its emphasis on the negation of sexuality--particularly the sexuality of women. On a religious level, Kempe broadens the idea of chastity by revealing that one's body and sexuality cannot be removed from the realm of the human, nor can it be separated from one's experience of God. But Kempe is a woman caught in disjunction. She assents to androcentric chastity by insisting on chastity in her

marriage as a way to achieve union with God. However, she subverts--by her own sexual and bodied descriptions of her relationship with God--the idea that negation of sexuality is primary to union with God. As a sexual person, Kempe could not "de-self" herself, as androcentric chastity demanded.

On the other hand, Heloise's "chastity of spirit" embraces bodiliness and sexuality along with the non-physical qualities of fidelity and commitment to Abelard. While she redefines chastity as inclusive of bodiliness and sexuality, her foremost emphasis is on the spiritual relationship to one faithfully loved. Heloise's "chastity of spirit" is not a negation of her body or its sexuality but rather an embracing of her sexuality as part of her experience of faithful, abiding love. In addition, Heloise regards her love for Abelard as viable and credible outside the patriarchal institutions of marriage or religious life. For her, these institutions do not validate her love for Abelard nor her sexual status.

Heloise's redefinition in particular is analogous to those found in other women writers in other literary periods. As we see the historical development of androcentric chastity, we also see, however embryonic and at times varied, the parallel historical instances of women's redefinition. As we move into the period of the English Renaissance, we see a challenge to chastity similar to Heloise's emerge in the writing of a Renaissance woman poet, Lady Mary Wroth. The groundwork in redefinition that Heloise lays, along with Mary Wroth's, work to dislodge the negating of sexuality from chastity, as well as

remove it from confinement within patriarchal institutions. We will principally look at Renaissance texts that focus on androcentric pre- and post-marital chastity--and then explore a feminine redefinition.

NOTES

1. E. J. Dobson's extensive search in The Origins of the "Ancrene Wisse" (1967) leads him to conclude Augustinian authorship; Bella Millett argues for Dominican authorship in the "The Origins of the Ancrene Wisse: New Answers, New Questions, " Medium Aevum. 61 (1992).

2. All quotations from Hali Meidenhad are taken from Medieval English Prose for Women, eds. Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

3. Not all women freely chose virginity. Peter Brown notes that the parents of young girls frequently decided virginity for them as a way to avoid dowry expenses (261).

4. All quotations in English are taken from The Book of Margery Kempe, translated by B.A. Windeatt, New York: Penguin Books, 1985; all Middle English translations are taken from The Book of Margery Kempe, edited and translated by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS, Oxford University Press, 1940.

5. Windeatt's notes indicate that Kempe's inheritance from her father may have been the bargaining chip by which she and her husband reached a final agreement.

6. Karma Lochrie and Caroline Walker Bynum assert that the terms

"body" and "sexuality" are not equal in the medieval mind, and suggest that it is modern scholars of medieval religiosity and female spirituality who make this association. Lochrie cites Augustine's interpretation of Paul's distinction between the flesh and the body in situating the source of human weakness and sin in the flesh and not in the body. Lochrie also uses Peter Brown's summary of Pauline thought in The Body and Society to conclude that: "The body's role in human sin is merely that of a sort of lackey to the restless, rebellious, and intransigent flesh" (19). I align myself with those "modern scholars" who make the association of sexuality and body, arguing that awareness of one's sexuality is inherent in the awareness of one's body, which is clearly a twentieth century perspective. However, Margery Kempe's struggle illustrates the point that separating sexuality and body could not be achieved by her on a psychological level: her descriptions of her relationship with God contain both bodied and sexual references.

7. Windeatt acknowledges that Kempe's expression follows in the mystical tradition of utilizing sensory metaphors to describe experiences of God, but observes that Kempe's manner of vivid concreteness is uniquely hers. Further, Windeatt suggest that Kempe may have felt the need to restrain the concreteness of her imagery since at times she is "noticeably careful--perhaps because of challenges to her orthodoxy--to mention how God speaks 'to her mind', 'in her soul', and so forth" (24). Following this suggestion, I add that perhaps Kempe felt she had to temper her vivid sexual

and bodied means of expression.

8. Bynum cites Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio as the only males in history to receive all five wounds of the stigmata and notes the dozens of claims of full stigmata in medieval women, asserting that stigmata was largely known as a "female miracle" (165).

9. Lollards were considered heretical followers of John Wyclif. They principally questioned the authority and institution of the priesthood, the viability of religious orders, and held that every Christian, without the mediation of a priest, could discover the truths of the Bible.

10. "As in all the churches of the saints . . . women are to remain quiet . . . since they have no permission to speak . . . it does not seem right for a woman to raise her voice at meetings."

11. All English quotations from the Historia Calamitatum are taken from the Penguin edition of The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, translated and with an introduction by Betty Radice, New York: Penguin Books, 1974. All quotations from French are taken from Héloïse et Abélard: Lettres, Louis Stouff, ed. Paris: Union Générale D'editions, 1964.

12. All quotations in English are taken from the Penguin edition of The Letters of Abelard and Heloise; all quotations in French are taken from the Louis Stouff edition.

13. All quotations from Against Jovinianus are taken from Against Jovinianus (Book I) in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

of the Christian Church, Vol. VI, Philip Shaff and Henry Wace, eds. New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893.

14. As has been established, ascetic misogamy has classical and Christian roots; I use the term in reference to its Christian tradition.

CHAPTER III

"LETT YOUR CONSTANCY YOUR HONOR PROVE": MARY WROTH'S CHALLENGE TO ANDROCENTRIC CHASTITY IN THE RENAISSANCE

If in the medieval period Heloise lays the groundwork for a feminine redefinition of androcentric chastity, Renaissance poet Lady Mary Wroth broadens the redefinition by transforming androcentric chastity into the virtue of constancy. Wroth "replaces" sex-centered and gender-specific androcentric chastity with constancy, not centered on sexuality and not associated with a specific gender, as a woman's chief virtue. Wroth's replacement of chastity with constancy suggests not simply an effort to set the virtue of constancy against chastity and nothing more, but an attempt to redefine chastity, to place it into a more expansive arena. Although Wroth does not specifically use the word "chastity" in her redefinition, her idea, as we shall see, is analogous to Heloise's notion of "chastity of spirit."

To understand the milieu out of which Wroth challenges androcentric chastity and makes her redefinition, we must first consider the historical and cultural context of Renaissance chastity. To understand Wroth in a literary framework, especially as a female writer dealing with a Renaissance code of chastity and silence for women, we will examine some of the prevalent poetic

conventions of the day, which Wroth both uses and subverts in her redefinition of chastity.

The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century brought about a significant shift in the locus for androcentric chastity. The Protestant emphasis on marriage and the family located chastity in marriage, whereas medieval views equated chastity with virginity, regarded as superior to marriage. Protestant theology reconsidered and reinterpreted the medieval Catholic position on marriage and chastity, and replaced the Catholic ideal of virginal chastity with the ideal of chaste marriage, to such a degree that it became, as Lawrence Stone notes, the "ethical norm for the virtuous" (101). Yet, while the Reformation brought about a shift in views of marriage, the Protestant idea of chastity still, like the medieval Catholic concept, tended to associate chastity primarily with women, their bodies, and their sexuality.

In her book The Liberation of Women, Roberta Hamilton explains that the shift from a devaluation of marriage by the Catholic tradition to its valuation by the Protestants principally emerged from the Protestant theological position of the "priesthood of all believers," which asserted that all persons, regardless of their "state" in life, could be given the gift of faith. From this premise came three developments. First, Protestants objected to the Catholic belief in the superiority of celibacy to marriage, believing that a person in any "state" of life, not just priests or religious, could be among those called to a life of sanctity (53). Second, Protestants believed that

relationship with God did not require the intercession of priests, saints, or the Virgin Mary, and that the Bible could be read and studied by the layperson without the need of a "mediator," i.e., a priest. Third, (and at the root of these ideas) was the Protestant belief that one's "worldly life," which involved marriage and the family, was the locus of encounter with God (53). For these reasons, "[t]he family became the key to fulfilling the awesome goal of the Protestants; that ordinary men and women should make a total commitment to a godly life in both their public and most intimate acts" (54). And so, in contrast to the medieval Catholic ideal of virginal chastity, marriage became the ideal for the Protestants. Despite this shift, however, the Protestants continued to appropriate the idea of chastity and to associate it with women and their sexuality.

The ideal of Protestant marital chastity centered on the holiness and purity of conjugal love. While Protestant theologians such as Martin Luther and John Calvin and Protestant writers William Perkins, Richard Baxter, George Herbert, John Milton and others did place emphasis on male pre-marital sexual abstinence and sexual fidelity within marriage, the English cultural notion of chastity focused primarily on the wife, rather than both husband and wife. The rationale for this was largely socio-economic. Angeline Goreau notes that the "insistence" for women's chastity rested

> in concrete economic and social circumstance: under the patriarchal, primogenital inheritance system, the matter of paternity could most

> emphatically not be open to question. . . . As the aristocracy's chief means of consolidating and perpetuating power and wealth through arranged marriage, the undoubted chastity of daughters was a crucial concern. (9)

Lawrence Stone's account of the "economics of chastity" in England between 1500-1800 reinforces Goreau's observation, and further illuminates why the burden of both pre-marital and post-marital chastity fell on the woman. Stone notes that the value given to chastity was correlated to degrees of social hierarchy and property ownership, particularly in the aristocracy and even into the upper middle class.[1] For these classes, pre-marital chastity was a "bargaining chip" for marriage, with male and female contracting with their different goods: the male's goods were social and economic, consisting of his property and status rights, the female's goods were sexual. Goreau observes that

> To be of value on the marriage market, girls had to deliver their maidenheads intact on the appointed day; a deflowered heiress could be disinherited since her virginity was an indispensable part of her dowry; by its loss she would deprive her father of selling her to a husband whose family line she would perpetuate. (9-10).

The pre-marital repression of female sexuality ironically guaranteed the woman "power" over the man, as the withholding of her sexual favors gave her an authoritative means by which to obtain marriage, while the male was guaranteed that he was buying "new and not second-hand goods" (Stone

636-37). And according to social norm, while it was expected that the woman maintain her virginity until the wedding night, the man was presumed to be somewhat sexually experienced (Stone 501).

According to this cultural understanding, once married, the woman, more than the man, was expected to remain chaste. Stone speaks of the sexual double standard (mainly occurring in the upper classes) which was invariably part of matrimonial chastity. Any infidelities on the part of the man "were treated as venial sins which the sensible wife was advised to overlook" (Stone 501). Wifely infidelity was considered unpardonable and grievously shameful. This perspective no doubt drew itself from the "good woman/ bad woman" dichotomy discussed in Chapters One and Two. Both medieval and Renaissance physiology and folklore considered women's sexual appetites and drives to be much stronger than men's. A "bad woman" allowed herself to be controlled by these appetites; a "good woman" controlled her sexual urges. Thus the "social obligation" of pre- and post-marital chastity imposed on women "the strictest standards of sexual behavior, enforced by all the . . . moral and religious pressures of which the society was capable" (Stone 501-02). Pre- and post-marital chastity kept the socio-economic system in order: a woman's unused sexual "goods" were required for her marital marketability; once married, her chastity was crucial as a means to insure legal certitude concerning the legitimacy of heirs to property and title (Stone 502).

While the Reformation may have shifted the location of chastity from virginity to marriage, chastity nonetheless remained constant in definition. Despite attempts by many reformers and preachers to encourage male chastity, it continued to be linked with the female, her sexuality and body, and her "goodness." Allied with the idea of female virtue, it became further bound up in a sixteenth-eighteenth century notion of a woman's "honor." This notion was culturally reinforced in male-authored literature, in poems like Thomas Carew's "A Rapture" as well as in writings such as Wetenhall Wilkes' A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady which appeared in eight editions between 1740 and 1766. Chastity, says Wilkes, is "the great point of female honor." This honor not only deals with behavior and attitudes--we shall see later that a chaste woman is a silent woman--but also entails "a suppression of all irregular desires, voluntary pollutions, sinful concupiscence, and an immoderate use of all sensual or carnal pleasures" (qtd. in Stone 529). And, Stone notes that during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the worst insult of one man to another was to be called a liar; for women, the worst insult was to be called unchaste, so that "a man's honor depended on the reliability of his spoken word; a woman's honor on her reputation for chastity" (316). Given this understanding, is there a question as to whom the greater credibility should be given--to an unchaste woman who kept her word or to an unchaste man who kept his word?

In the period of the English Renaissance, such a cultural perception of chastity is mirrored in the literature written by men. Representations of pre-marital and post-marital chastity naturally emerge in various genres. Edmund Spenser's epic The Faerie Queene allegorizes, in Book III, the female knight Britomart as the virtue of pre-marital chastity; she is the ideal for chaste love leading to marriage.[2] The genre of the etiquette book prescribes the virtues of chastity and silence for both married and unmarried women. In poetry, pre- and post-marital chastity for women is the subject of lyric poems and epigrams; the sonnet sequence in particular concerns female pre-marital chastity. Two sonnet sequences which best present the idealization of pre-marital chastity for women are Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophil and Stella and Edmund Spenser's Amoretti. Spenser uses the genre of the epithalamion and its depiction of the wedding night as a model for the post-marital chaste ideal. These differing genres and texts all demonstrate how the burden of both pre- and post-marital chastity fell on the woman. As we shall first see in briefly examining Sidney's Astrophil and Stella and Spenser's Amoretti, the characterization of the Elizabethan sonnet lady clearly reveals how a woman's pre-marital chastity was prized and idealized; in Spenser's Epithalamion we see how her post-marital chastity was equally revered.

Sidney's Astrophil and Stella and Spenser's Amoretti, which continued and modified the Petrarchan love sonnet tradition, were the primary shapers of Elizabethan sonnet sequences of the 1590's. At the center of a Petrarchan

and Elizabethan sonnet is the lady--beautiful and charming but also often cruel and disdainful. Despite her sometimes contrary nature, she is an object of exaltation and near deification. Praise of the lady's physical beauty, implicitly allied with her chastity, always leads the poet to praise her spiritual virtues, which according to Italian Neoplatonism are reflections of divine beauty and love. Set against her chaste and transcendent nature is the very earthly suffering of the forlorn male lover who usually is unable to attain her, the object of his desire. As object the lady is aloof, always set apart from her male lover, and silent.[3] The speaker is the male poet-lover; the subject of the poems is his wavering passions, emotional crises, fantasies and frustrations, all of which center on the silent and chaste lady.

The English love sonnet tradition as derived from Petrarch is controlled by this motif. And it is this motif, as Nancy Vickers points out, that has had immense influence in the long history of male interpretation and internalization of the woman as image (95). Sidney's and Spenser's utilization of the conventional Petrarchan sonnet lady in their sequences provides for us a literary "norm" with which to see not only the male representation of woman as image, but also the idealized conceptualization of androcentric pre-marital chastity.

Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, the first sonnet sequence written in England, inaugurated the Elizabethan sonneteering rage of the 1590's. Probably composed in 1582, but not printed until 1591, Sidney's

sonnet sequence is modeled on Petrarch and his French imitators. The sequence of 108 sonnets and eleven songs are a first-person narration of the unhappy love of Astrophil ("lover of a star") for the beautiful, black-eyed and golden-haired Stella ("star"). The preface to Astrophil and Stella was written by Thomas Nashe, who referred to it as "the tragi-comedy of love . . . performed by starlight . . . The argument cruel chastity, the prologue hope, the epilogue despair" (qtd. in Ringler xlix).

While in Astrophil and Stella Sidney protests that he does not use the standard Petrarchan conventions and that his poetry is original (coming from the heart), his protest is itself conventional. Sidney uses, modifies, and satirizes common Petrarchan conceits, such as comparisons of Stella's eyes with the sun and various physical objects, and descriptions of love in terms of its pleasurable pains. Sidney presents Astrophil as the typical Petrarchan lover who despairingly worships a distant and indifferent lady. Sidney also employs the Petrarchan convention of the "blazon" or catalogue of the lady's physical beauties: her alabaster neck, coral lips, pearly teeth and lustrous eyes.

Sidney uses the blazon as a way of pointing to the lady's inner beauty and virtue. In acknowledging that her "eyes are form'd to serve/ The inward light" and that "true Beautie Vertue is indeed/ Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,/ Which elements with mortall mixture breed," Sidney reverts to Italian Neoplatonism, which held that physical beauty is only an intimation of inner

virtue, in union with transcendent and timeless Beauty.[4] Elsewhere, Sidney describes Stella's eyes as "Nature['s] chiefe work . . . in colour black . . . [that] sun-like . . . more dazle than delight" (sonnet 7). Stella's face is equated to "Queen Virtue's court" (sonnet 9); her face "shewes what perfect beautie is" (sonnet 77); and "Beautie's totall summe [is] summ'd in her face" (sonnet 85). In sonnet 32 the poet-lover compares Stella's "skin, lips, teeth and head" to "Ivorie, Rubies, pearle and gold"; sonnet 91 speaks of Stella's "Milke hands, rose cheeks . . . [and] lips more sweet, more red."

Sherod Cooper notes that Sidney has a total of 67 references to Stella's eyes, 21 to her lips, 13 to her hands, 3 to her hair, and 3 to her neck (Appendix 160-77). The catalogue of Stella's physical beauties is best displayed in sonnet 77:

> Those lookes, whose beames be joy, whose motion is delight
> That face, whose lecture shewes what perfect beautie is . . .
> That hand, which without touch holds more than Atlas might;
> Those lips, which make death's pay a mean price for a kisse;
> That skin, whose passe-praise hue scorns this
>   poore terme of white. . . .

These physical attributes all denote the lady's inner beauty and virtue, which reflect the perfect idea of Beauty.

Thus we see that Sidney's focus is fixed on the object of the poet-lover's desire, Stella, who is, he says, "light of my life, and life of my desire" (sonnet 68). At the same time, the poet-lover's focus on the objectified Stella

inevitably becomes subjective as he experiences the conflictual feelings associated with unrequited love.

Astrophil and Stella ends unhappily; the poet-lover never attains his love. References to Stella's impending marriage appear in various sonnets, and the sequence ends with the poet-lover's lament of pleasurable despair: "Most rude despair [is] my daily unbidden guest" but "in my woes for thee thou art my joy,/ And in my joys for thee my only annoy" (sonnet 108).

The conventional Petrarchan sonnet lady is chaste; in Sidney's Stella we see the manifestation of the Renaissance womanly ideal. Her chastity in both her pre-marital state and post-marital states is a given; it is essential to the sense of beauty that adorns her outwardly and denotes her inner virtue. Her chaste virtue is "lodg'd" in her beauty; she is "Perfection's heire [who] dost strive all minds that way to move" (sonnet 71).

It is the sonnet lady's chaste virtue that inspires the poet-lover Astrophil to noble conduct. J. W. Lever notes that the lady's role, as a manifestation of Neoplatonic Beauty and Virtue, is to "guide the lover by ascending stages to the realm of pure ideas" (74). The influence on Sidney (and Spenser) of Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier, particulary Peter Bembo's lengthy discussion of Platonic love in Book IV, is evident here. Bembo describes the "ladder of love" whereby the lover ascends from the particular love of one person to love of the abstract good. For Castiglione's courtier, the ideal of male love for a woman was not to be sensual and of the flesh but "ruled" by

reason, and ultimately aimed towards transcending sexual desire to love the beauty of the mind rather than the body. The fact remains, however, that Astrophil's lady is physically beautiful, and he must struggle to control his sexual desire for her. Even while "thy beautie drawes the heart to love,/ As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good;/ 'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food'" (sonnet 71). Astrophil's love must be led to perfection by Stella, a perfection that transcends sexual passion. Astrophil realizes that "Where love is chastness, Paine doeth learne delight" (sonnet 48) and that truly to love Stella (who marries) he must overcome his physical passion for her. He learns that the "chast mind" of Stella "hates this love [his sexual desire] in me" (sonnet 61). The struggle is difficult for Astrophil, and he frequently complains: "Late tyr'd with wo, even ready for to pine/ With rage of Love, I cald my love unkind;/ She in whose eyes Love, though unfelt, doth shine,/ Sweet said that I true Love in her should finde" (sonnet 62). Stella shall keep him on a "nobler course" and her "Love's authority" will, as Astrophil says, "anchor fast my selfe on Vertue's shore" (sonnet 62). Throughout Astrophil and Stella, then, we see the passions and struggles of Astrophil, the ardent Petrarchan lover, set against Stella, the chaste, silent, aloof and "authoritative" Petrarchan lady.

Edmund Spenser's Amoretti similarly uses the conventional Petrarchan sonnet lady. While Spenser follows most of the usual Petrarchan conventions and chronicles the amatory sufferings and torments of the male lover, the

outcome for Spenser's lover, unlike Sidney's, is a happy one. The Amoretti, Spenser's contribution to the sonnet vogue of the 1590's, was published together with the Epithalamion in 1595. In these poems we see the idealization of pre-marital chastity lead to the ideal of marital chastity. The Amoretti, consisting of 89 sonnets followed by four short lyrics, is thought to be the record of Spenser's wooing of Elizabeth Boyle; the Epithalamion celebrates the courtship's culmination in marriage. Spenser's lover attains the object of his desire and the fulfillment of his hopes in marriage, if we take the Epithalamion to be the outcome of the Amoretti.

Like Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, Spenser's Amoretti contains the Neoplatonic idealized conception of love. Unlike Sidney's and other conventional sonnet sequences, however, Spenser's Amoretti joins spiritual love with sexual passion. Spenser does not renounce physical love for spiritual love, but sees the two as united in marriage. As William Johnson observes, for Spenser, human sexual love is something that is "right" within the framework of Christian marriage; in marriage, the carnal nature of humanity finds its "perfection" (38). Further, Johnson suggests that sexual love in marriage "makes practical" the Neoplatonism Spenser uses in the Amoretti (38). Following the Petrarchan motif, the lady's physical characteristics and beauties are described by the blazon. But Spenser's blazon, in which flowers are used as analogues to the lady's body, is frankly sexual. When the lover kisses his lady, he smells a "gardin of sweet flowers":

> Her lips did smell lyke unto Gillyflowers,
> her ruddy cheeks lyke unto Roses red:
> her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamores,
> her lovely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred.
> Her goodly bosome lyke a strawberry bed
> her neck lyke to a bounche of Cullambynes:
> her brest lyke lillyes, ere thy'r leaues be shed,
> her nipples lyke yong blossom's Issemynes.[5]
> (sonnet 64)

The poet-lover is enthralled by the lady's physical beauty, which again reveals her inner virtue. He exclaims that in her "fayre eyes . . . what wondrous vertue is contayned . . ."(sonnet 7), and her ruby lips, pearly teeth, ivory forehead, golden hair and silver hands are all the outer signs of "her mind adorn'd with vertues manifold" (sonnet 15). The "feature of her face . . . adorne her beauties grace" (sonnet 12).

Despite her beauty and inner virtue, and the happy outcome for the male lover, Spenser follows Petrarchan convention and has the poet-lover suffer from the lady's cruelty. Her eyes lure the lover to her, then place him in captivity: these "guilefull" eyes are "false enimies" which seek to "entrap [him] in treasons traine" (sonnet 12). The poet is lost in the lady's "loues tempest" and he wonders: "Is it her nature or is it her will, to be so cruell to an humbled foe?" (sonnet 41). But, conventionally, the tormented lover finds this pain pleasurable: "The loue which me so cruelly tormenteth, so pleasing is in my extreamest paine:/ that all the more my sorrow it augmenteth,/ The more I loue and doe embrace my bane" (sonnet 42).

In the Amoretti, the objectified image of the lady leads the poet-lover to what Johnson calls Spenser's "right love." The entire progression of the sequence guides the poet-lover from an ego-centered love of the lady to the "outer-directed generative nature of right love" (Johnson 38) that unfolds at the end of the sequence. The lady's beauty and virtuous chastity are requisite for the lover's advancement to an understanding and experience of true Christian love in marriage.

Spenser's Epithalamion shows this true Christian marital love and its chaste ideal. His Epithalamion is an adaptation of the canzone-stanza of Petrarch, and consists of 23 stanzas and an envoy. The epithalamion ("wedding song") as genre has a long tradition. Its Greek name indicates that it was sung at the threshold of the bridal chamber, usually by a priest or friend; it was adopted by Latin poets, particularly Catullus. Its classical formula consists of an invocation to the Muses, the bringing home of the bride, singing and dancing at the wedding feast, and preparations for the wedding night; Spenser blends these into the idea of Christian marriage. Spenser's poem begins with a pre-dawn invocation to the Muses and then describes the awakening of the bride, the wedding procession to the church, the marriage ceremony, the wedding feast, the onset of night, and finally ends in the bridal chamber with a prayer for "fruitfull progeny." For his purposes, Spenser transforms the epithalamic tradition by not having the marriage hymn

sung in public by a priest or friend; Spenser's bridegroom himself is the poem's speaker.

The natural flow from the "right love" of the Amoretti to the public nature of the wedding rites and ceremonies in the Epithalamion reveals Spenser's very social and objective view on marriage. The proper channel for love is marriage, since marriage and its sexual love is a universal good. Thus the aim of marriage is procreation--to this the Epithalamion looks with anticipation.

That the bride-to-be is a virgin is clear, and that her virginity will soon be lost to fulfill the procreative ends of marriage creates anticipation in the poem. The bride is compared to Phoebe, the virgin moon goddess, and in the procession to the church the bride is "clad all in white, that seems a virgin best" (151). Further, her eyes are "modest" (159) and she does not "dare lift up her countenance too bold/ But [blushes] to heare her praises sung so loud" (162-63). Her body is like a "pallace fayre/ Ascending uppe with many a stately stayre/ To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre" (178-80). Her outward beauty and modesty indicate her "inward beauty/ . . . Garnisht with heavenly guifts of high degree . . ." (186-87) so that in her "dwels sweet loue and constant chastity/ Unspotted fayth and comely womanhood/ Regard of honour and mild modesty" (191-93). The virgins who attend her are advised to "learne obedience" from her and to "humble [their] proud faces" (214-13). The

beauty of the virgin bride's body and conduct are the outward marks of her inward beauty, grace and virtue.

Once the marriage ceremony and wedding feast are over, the bride and groom retire to the bridal chamber. Spenser is quite free in alluding to sexual intercourse, seeing it as "Without blemish or staine" (400) and as a good, natural and sacred part of married love, whose purpose is procreation. The speaker asks for "stil Silence" and "sacred peace" (353-54) to descend on the marriage bed and its "paradise of joyes" (366). And, as the moon goddess peeps into their window, the speaker asks her to be "favorable," since the purpose for the couple's intercourse is reproduction. The moon goddess, who "of wemmen's labours . . . has charge" (383) is asked to "Encline thy will t'effect our wishfull vow,/ And the chaste womb informe with timely seed" (385-86). The speaker expresses hope that the "timely fruit of this same night" (404) may be just the beginning of bearing "a large posterity" (417) that will not only people the earth but also heaven as well (420-23). In this post-marital view of chastity, the wife's "chaste womb" is as much a requisite for reproductive success and fulfillment as is pre-martial chastity a requisite for the lady to lead the lover to perfect love in Astrophil and Stella and in other conventional sonnet sequences.

Thus we see imaged in the male Elizabethan sonnet sequence the idealization of the lady's pre-marital chastity, and in Spenser's Epithalamion the ideal of marital chastity. While ostensibly Spenser presents the ideal of

marital chastity for both partners, the speaker of the Epithalamion is male--the bride never speaks. We see the male point of view on marriage and its purpose as well as the spotlight on the virginity of the bride and her reproductive potential. Spenser gives the ideal for chastity in marriage in the genre of the epithalamion. Ben Jonson uses poems and epigrams to show more specifically the expectations of wifely chastity in marriage.

In the whole of his work, Jonson refers to chastity only 22 times.[6] In view of the bulk of his poetry, these relatively few references might seem insignificant. However, Jonson's usage of the concept, like Sidney's and Spenser's, speaks to its tacit but pervasive ideological authority. Mirroring cultural theoretical understandings, Jonson associates chastity with proper female behavior as well as with the wife's body and sexuality, and particularly her reproductive abilities.

Wifely fidelity to a dead husband is hailed by Jonson in "To the Memory of That Most Honored Lady Jane, Eldest Daughter to Cuthbert, Lord Ogle: and Countess of Shrewsbury." The poem begins with the speaker's desire to write a more innovative and remembered epitaph (beyond the standard "Here lies") for Lady Jane. The speaker could "number attributes unto a flood" by telling of what "A noble countess, great,/ In wise, chaste, loving, gracious, good" Lady Jane was (6, 3-5).[7] However, he "would have thee know something new,/ Not usual in a lady . . ." (13-14). What Lady Jane can be remembered for is that "She was wife/ But of one husband" (15-16).

The poem continues to applaud the fact that Jane remained faithful to her husband's memory after his death, to the point of "wooing" sorrow, and finally death, so as to be reunited with him:

> . . . And since he left life,
> But sorrow, she desired no other friend:
> And her, she made her inmate to the end,
> To call on sickness still, to be her guest
> whom she with sorrow first did lodge, then feast,
> Then entertain and as death's harbinger;
> So wooed at last, that he was won to her
> Importune wish; and by her loved lord's side
> To lay her here, enclosed his second bride. (16-24)

What seems most important to and venerated by Jonson is Jane's chastity, regardless of the pathological nature her devotion to her husband took.

"An Epigram on the Prince's Birth, 1630" commemorates the birth of Charles II. The infant Charles is seen to be the "crown" of the "bed of the chaste lily, and the rose!" (2-3). While the adjective "chaste" is appended to "lily" (a French emblematic reference to Charles' mother, Henrietta Maria), there is no similar coordination with "rose," the English emblem for Charles' father, Charles I. Apparently, Henrietta is chaste because she has produced a legitimate heir to the throne; the like ability of Charles is seemingly not considered a requisite for his chastity.

Two more poems further emphasize the ultimate proof of a wife's chastity: her ability to produce legitimate heirs. In "Epistle to Katherine, Lady

Aubigny," Jonson praises the lady for her virtue, which consists of being faithful, dependent, and obedient as a wife:

> . . . since you are truly that rare wife,
> Other great wives may blush at: when they see
> What your tried manners are, What theirs should be.
> How you love one, and him you should: how still
> You are depending on his word, and will;
> Not fashioned for the court, or strangers' eyes;
> But to please him. . . . (110-16)

Earlier in the poem, Lady Aubigny's virtue is contrasted with not-so-virtuous, frivolous wives who "wear masks" and "follow fashions, and attires . . ./ Melt down their husband's land, to pour away,/ On the close groom, and page, on New Year's Day . . ."(70-74). Lady Aubigny is <u>not</u> like these other wives; she has "learned to shun these shelves" and maintain "a just course . . ." (89, 91). For this she is doubly praised, since this virtue enhances her reproductive powers:

> For which you worthy are the glad increase
> Of your blessed womb, made fruitful from above,
> To pay your lord the pledges of chaste love:
> And raise a noble stem. . . . (94-97)

Thus, a woman's virtue is divinely blessed by her ability to reproduce. The wife is exclusively linked to her sexuality and reproductive powers, her ability to "raise a noble stem."

The same idea creates the perfect wife in "To Penshurst," a celebration of praise for the country homes of gentry, specifically Sir Philip Sidney's estate. Utopian abundance and warm hospitality are the "praise" of Penshurst, "and yet not all." The greatest attribute of the harmonious and well-integrated estate is that of the wife's chaste fruitfulness: "Thy lady's noble, fruitful, chaste withal./ His children thy great lord may call his own:/ A fortune, in this age, but rarely known" (90-93). The products of the wife's chastity are the final evidence of what makes Penshurst great--its children can legitimately carry on its tradition. The wife's "nobility" is associated with her chastity--her fecundity in producing legitimate heirs.

Thus, Jonson's poems which deal with chastity in marriage are predominately wife-centered. The concept of marital chastity locates itself in the woman's body and sexuality as "virtue," which is singularly associated with her relationship with her husband and her ability to reproduce.

Until the recent focus by feminist scholars on the manuscripts of various Renaissance women writers, it could only be guessed if--and how--a woman of the seventeenth century milieu of Sidney, Spenser, and Jonson might define chastity differently. What if she placed chastity outside the realm of her sexuality, divorcing ideas of purity, virtue and honor from their male-imposed encasement within her body? What if she insisted that the truthfulness and integrity of a woman's word be just that--regardless of her sexual status or experience? What if she declared that the purity of her heart--

that goodness and reverence by which she related to others--is the focus of her essence, and not her sexuality alone? If her definition of chastity took itself outside the parameters of female sexuality and the body, might it reveal how ideas of virtue, honor, and purity for the woman have been terribly limited to just one aspect of femaleness? And might her definition further the possibilities of more fully human understandings of virtue, purity, honor--for both men and women alike?

Mary Wroth: Replacing Chastity With Constancy

Lady Mary Wroth, a poet of the seventeenth century Jacobean court, could well provide answers to these questions. A critique of her poetry, in particular of Pamphilia to Amphilantus, the first sonnet sequence written by a woman in the English Renaissance, offers a look at a woman who resisted the patriarchal gender norms of her day, which Sidney's, Spenser's and Jonson's poetry illustrate so forcibly. Wroth resisted these norms both in her writing and in her personal life. By the very fact that she wrote, she countered the Renaissance notion that equated women's chastity with their silence. Her poetry replaces chastity with the idea of constancy as a woman's primary virtue--a virtue that does not require her silence. Wroth's focus on constancy rather than chastity also works toward redefining chastity. As did Heloise, Wroth resists the constraints on her sexuality by the patriarchal institution of marriage. Like Heloise 400 years earlier, Wroth valued constancy, expressed

by her emotional, spiritual and physical love for a singular other, over androcentric chastity. Both Wroth's and Heloise's concentration on fidelity rather than sexuality "redefines" chastity as constituting a faithful and abiding commitment to an other that transcends patriarchal sexual norms and boundaries. Like Heloise, Wroth does not see her chastity as situated in a sexual "state" (marriage, for Wroth), and her "redefinition" of chastity does not center on the constraining of her sexuality in her singular relationship with a beloved other.

Ironically, Lady Mary Wroth was the product of the wife of Penshurst's chaste fruitfulness, so praised by Jonson in "To Penshurst." Wroth, born Mary Sidney in October, 1587, was among the Sidney family poets: her uncle was Sir Philip Sidney, her aunt (and probable mentor) Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and her father Robert Sidney, whose poetry was discovered in 1973. Wroth's poetry, which includes her romance The Countess of Montgomery's Urania, the sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilantus, and the pastoral drama Love's Victory reflects the influence of the other Sidney poets and often alludes to various family members among the Sidneys and Herberts, especially her first cousin and lover, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (Mary Sidney's son). Wroth's poetry was much respected by her contemporaries (including Ben Jonson), and shows the influence not only of the literary Sidneys but also her own knowledge of both English and continental drama, poetry, and romance.

Biographical details on Wroth's life are largely found among Sidney family papers and correspondence. In an arranged marriage in September, 1604, Mary Sidney was wed at age 17 to Sir Robert Wroth, son of a wealthy landowner. The marriage was troubled from its beginnings: Robert Sidney had to borrow money from his nephew William Herbert to finance the dowry. And in a letter to his wife dated October 10, 1604, a little over a month into the marriage, Robert Sidney comments on evident marital discord between Mary and her husband. After a chance encounter with his son-in-law in London, Sidney comments that:

> I finde by him that there was somewhat that doth discontent him: but the particulars I could not get out of him, onely that hee protests that hee cannot take any exceptions to his wife, nor her cariage towards him. It were very soon for any unkindness to begin. . . . (qtd. in Poems 12)

The early years of Wroth's marriage nonetheless placed her as an insider in the court of James I and in the literary activities of the day. Her husband was a favorite of the king, and Wroth herself a friend of Queen Anne. Wroth played a role, along with the queen, in Ben Jonson's The Masque of Blackness in 1605, and appeared three years later in The Masque of Beauty. During the period of her ten-year marriage, Wroth became recognized for her literary activities as both poet and patron, holding a respected position in the Sidney literary network. As a patron, she received several dedications from such poets as George Chapman, Joshua Sylvester, William Drummond and

Ben Jonson. Wroth received noteworthy commendations from Jonson in particular--perhaps, as Josephine Roberts observes, in an effort to enhance his relationship with the Sidney-Herbert family and his chief patron, William Herbert (Poems 17). Jonson dedicated The Alchemist to Wroth in 1612, and wrote two epigrams, both titled "To Mary, Lady Wroth." In "A Sonnet, to the Noble Lady the Lady Mary Wroth," Jonson praises her abilities as a poet of love: "Since I exscribe your sonnets, am become/ A better lover, and much better poet." And, in a personal and undeveloped comment alluding to her marriage in the Conversations with Drummond, Jonson makes the enigmatic remark that "my Lady wroth is unworthily married on a jealous husband" (Parfitt 470).[8]

In February 1614, the Wroth's first and only child, James, was born, and less than a month later, Robert Wroth died. Her husband's death left Mary in considerable debt; the death of the child James two years later caused the Wroth estate to be given to a distant relative, and Mary continued to be plagued by debts the rest of her life.

At some point, and it is unclear as to whether that point was before or after the death of her husband, Wroth bore two illegitimate children by William Herbert. The existence of the children is recorded in Herbertorum Prosapia, a history of the Herbert-Pembroke lineage written in the 1680's by Sir Thomas Herbert, a cousin of William Herbert's. Wroth's and Herbert's two children are also referred to in a second manuscript of the Herbert-Pembroke family

history, housed in the Cardiff Central Library. The birthdates of the children are not included in the record, leaving speculation as to whether Wroth bore the children while still married, or if the affair with Herbert developed after the death of her husband in 1614.

Whatever the case, after her husband's death, Wroth's favored position in King James's court declined; whether that decline was attributed to her affair with Herbert is not known. At any rate, Wroth's withdrawal from court activities after 1614 provided her time to write her lengthy prose romance Urania.

The romance, consisting of a circuitous, complex plot involving myriad characters, was published in 1621. A second, unpublished section, The Secound Part of the Countesse of Montgomerys Urania continues the incomplete first part, which had begun to narrate the reunion of the two main characters, the lovers Pamphilia and Amphilantus. The published first section breaks off in mid-sentence; the second unpublished part finishes the sentence by describing the reunion of the two lovers and their subsequent adventures.

Wroth's sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilantus is appended to the Urania; whether the sequence was intended for publication is a subject of debate. Josephine Roberts notes that an early version of the poem exists which contains emendations and revisions, and that various poems of the sequence circulated among Wroth's friends as early as 1613. This evidence suggests that Wroth worked on the poem over a number of years, and

particularly in the years before her husband's death in 1614. The final form of the sequence appears as a separate section at the end of the published Urania, and consists of eighty-three sonnets and twenty songs. While the Urania gives the plotline and action for the relationship of Pamphilia and Amphilantus, the sonnet sequence provides what Elaine Beilin calls the "meditative atmosphere" in which the nature of Pamphilia's primary virtue--constancy--is explored ("Perfect Virtue" 242). In the Urania, Beilin notes, Pamphilia as lover, queen, and poet is the allegorical figure of constancy; the sonnets are her reflection on her love experience with the unfaithful Amphilantus (Eve 214, 226).

In Pamphilia to Amphilantus, Wroth challenges androcentric chastity by claiming that a woman's virtue consists of constancy to the beloved, not in her fidelity to a patriarchally-assigned sexual status. Wroth does not locate a woman's chastity in her sexual "state," whether in or out of marriage. Unlike androcentric conceptions of chastity, Wroth's definition does not center on sexual purity or the renunciation of sexual desire. Pamphilia's reflections on constancy in the sonnet sequence contain almost no references or allusions to bodied sexuality or the sexual status of the lovers. For Wroth, a woman's chastity is her constancy, a virtue she places outside the arena of sexuality. Wroth's focus is therefore not on chastity in marriage but on constancy in love, which for her includes emotional, spiritual, and physical union, something which is situated outside and far beyond patriarchal marital

parameters. For Wroth, it is constancy that reveals the "true forme of love" (sonnet 100) and it is in her search for love's truth that she finds her own sense of virtue and honor.[9]

Wroth does not claim the notion of constancy as an exclusively female preoccupation, since the idea of constancy is used by various poets, particularly by Donne and Shakespeare in their sonnets. Both Donne and Shakespeare, like Wroth, wrestle with the inconstancy of their lovers. In "The Indifferent" and "Woman's Constancy," Donne satirizes the male lover's struggle with fears about the woman's inconstancy. In "The Indifferent," the speaker at first flippantly claims that he, too, can love as many women as his inconstant mistress can love men, and he wonders if the vice of inconstancy is the only one that can "content" women. On the other hand, if his lady were true to him, he wonders if he would become her "fixed subject."[10] Venus overhears these vacillating fears, and suggests that love is taken too seriously by "some . . . [p]oor heretics . . . [who] . . . think to establish dangerous constancy." Venus intimates, though, that the speaker is one of those "heretics" who vow to remain true to those "who are false to you." In "Woman's Constancy," the speaker declares that, following a woman's lead, a man can be just as fickle as she. In sketching the several justifications a woman may use for her inconstancy, the speaker closes the poem by claiming that he may, too, use these same excuses "by tommorow."

In several of Shakespeare's sonnets, the speaker acknowledges his beloved's (apparently the young man to whom the sonnets are addressed) inconstancy while resolving to remain true. In sonnet 93, he says he lives "[l]ike a deceived husband" but nonetheless determines to continue to love, "supposing thou art true."[11] This idea of pretending to believe the friend's constancy while knowing of his inconstancy is reiterated in Sonnet 138. And in sonnet 116, the speaker defines love as that which remains constant through trials; it is "an ever-fixed mark/ That looks on tempests and is never shaken," and it "bears out even to the edge of doom."

Wroth's focus on constancy is more like Shakespeare's than Donne's. But perhaps Wroth focused on writing about constancy for a reason that did not affect the two male poets. Wroth conceivably fixed on the idea of constancy in Pamphilia to Amphilantus as a way to "displace" focus on her own chastity, or Pamphilia's chastity. Perhaps she replaces the idea of chastity with constancy as a way to subvert the Renaissance code of silence for women and for herself particularly as a woman writer.

Wroth's predicament is reminiscent of the struggle Margery Kempe encountered with expectations that she remain silent. In Wroth's situation, Margaret Ferguson points out that in Renaissance conduct books, sermons and treatises written by men for women, the three "virtues" of chastity, silence, and obedience were a requirement of the "normative Woman" (97). Ferguson notes that the idea of chastity became so "intricately" enmeshed with notions

of female silence that silence for women came to be considered "an equivalent of bodily purity" (97). As Virginia Woolf observes in A Room of One's Own, the equation of a woman's chastity with her silence is particularly problematic for women writers. Ferguson notes Woolf's observation and suggests the difficulty for women writers of the Renaissance: to enter into the "public" arena of discourse, they had to put their chastity "most at risk" (99). Ferguson points out another obstacle for Renaissance women writers. Prescriptive literature for female conduct suggests the tendency of a woman's loquacity to draw her into "sin," presumably lust, since both loquacity and chastity were associated with female sexuality. Thus an ideological polarity is set up: on the one hand, female sexual desire is equated with loquacity; on the other, female chastity with silence (100). To be caught in this polarity is to be discounted one way or the other; this, of course, is the impasse in which Mary Wroth found herself. Wroth deals with the dichotomy by focusing on constancy, not chastity, as a woman's chief virtue. And, if used within the overall context of male literary conventions, the notion of constancy perhaps could be as germane for women as it was for men: constant women, like the constant male in Donne's and Shakespeare's poems, could speak.

While Wroth's replacement of chastity with constancy occurs within the general context of the male literary tradition, she also subverts some male poetic conventions. Like Margery Kempe, Wroth both utilizes and subverts

elements of androcentrism, and it is in this tension that Wroth's redefinition of chastity is forged.

In particular Wroth both uses and overturns Petrarchan conventions in her writing of a woman's experience of love. And it is particularly interesting to note that she reverts to Petrarchanism almost 25 years after the Elizabethan sonneteering rage of the 1590's. This return perhaps reveals, in part, the influence of her uncle Philip's Astrophil and Stella, as Naomi Miller observes; it may also indicate, as Barbara Lewalski suggests, Wroth's desire to "embed herself within the Sidney literary heritage" (252). Miller and Lewalski, along with Elaine Beilin, also point out that while Wroth uses most of the conventions, structures, and conceits of the male sonneteers, her sonnets break from the male tradition by asserting a female speaker-lover's perspective on the love experience. Miller maintains that Wroth subverts the Renaissance "code of silence" for women, an essential element of the male sonneteering tradition, in which the woman becomes objectified by the male lover and made almost totally silent. Wroth overturns this by having a woman, Pamphilia, speak.

And, unlike the male lovers in the Petrarchan tradition who fixate totally on their object of their love and chart their vacillating emotions only in relation to their love, Wroth's Pamphilia does not focus so exclusively on her lover. Rather, Pamphilia's concentration is more directed on her self, rather than on the vicissitudes of the lover, as we have seen with Shakespeare's, Sidney's,

and Spenser's sonnets. Pamphilia does not exclusively focus on her lover's behaviors, but more on her own self as she explores the nature of constancy in her love experience as well as her continual decision to remain faithful to an unfaithful lover. Pamphilia's lack of focus on her lover is borne out most conspicuously in that Amphilantus's name is only mentioned once--in the title--in the entire sequence. Further, Beilin observes that unlike sonnets in the Petrarchan tradition, Wroth's sonnets make only slight mention of the physical appeal of the beloved. The focus is not on Amphilantus or his physical qualities, but on the female speaker's inner life as related to what she recognizes as her most outstanding virtue, constancy (Eve 233). It is in the female speaker-lover's experience, exploration, and continual choosing of constancy that she finds the fulfillment of her desire. As contrasted with the male sonneteering tradition exemplified by Sidney and Spenser, her lover, in and of himself, is not the fulfillment of her desire.

In the lengthy Pamphilia to Amphilantus, Wroth garners Pamphilia's reflections on constancy in an ebb and flow that arranges itself into movements, or sequences. The 83 sonnets and 20 songs are organized into an initial sequence of 55 sonnets and songs, followed by shorter sequences, divided into four segments, which comprise the remaining 48 sonnets and songs.[12] The sequences primarily reveal Pamphilia's suffering in love, as she explores her response to the inconstancy and betrayal of her lover Amphilantus, a situation narrated in Urania.

The first sequence of Pamphilia to Amphilantus begins with Pamphilia's dream vision in sonnet 1, in which she sees "a Chariot drawne by wing'd desire." In the chariot are Venus and her son Cupid, who set a flaming heart into Pamphilia's breast. She awakens and finds herself in love. Sonnet 2 contains a rare but initially necessary focus on her lover, and in a typical Petrarchan conceit Pamphilia is pleasantly wounded by her lover's eyes. In sonnet 3 she turns from her lover to address Love (consistently equated with Cupid), requesting that it "shine in those eyes which have conquered my hart." However, immediately into the sequence, Pamphilia struggles with doubts about her lover's fidelity. Here Wroth overturns a Petrarchan convention, since the typical sonnet lady, as we have seen with Sidney's and Spenser's sequences, is chaste. Wroth also subtly calls attention to her society's double standard for sexual behavior in men and women. Pamphilia asks that Love (and not her lover) "[exile] thoughts that touch inconstancie," and expresses her first questioning uncertainty, again addressed to Love: "will you your servant leave?" Thus Wroth begins the sequence with its exploratory focus not exclusively on her lover, but on the nature of her own feelings about love and constancy. Again, while Wroth uses Petrarchan conventions, she "rewrites" them, as Lewalksi observes, to show the woman's focus on her self and her desires in love (253). Wroth's female speaker is not as outwardly fixed on the object of her love as are sonneteers in the male tradition.

Pamphilia first turns inward, rather than outward to the object of love and then inward, as is the movement in the Petrarchan tradition.

As seen in the initial doubts that surface in sonnet 3, the inconstancy of her lover is the main cause of Pamphilia's amatory sufferings. The first song following the opening six sonnets reveals Pamphilia's predicament, recalling the inconstancy of Amphilantus, which was narrated in Urania. In the first song, Pamphilia speaks as a shepherdess who "was with griefe oprest/ For truest love beetraid/ Bard her from quiett rest." To cope with her betrayal, the shepherdess commits herself to write daily on the barks of trees, "This tale of hapless mee," hoping the lines might be discovered by another sympathetic lover "Who may them right conseave,/ And place them on my tombe:/ she who still constant lov'd." While acknowledging the inconstancy of her lover, Pamphilia chooses to remain constant to him.

This acknowledgement of Amphilantus's inconstancy prompts, in the 55 sonnets of the first sequence, Pamphilia's exploration of her grief, despair and jealousy--and her continual choice to remain constant. Despite her grief that "Joyes are beereev'd . . ./ dispaire takes place, disdaine hath gott the hand . . .," Pamphilia believes in the validity and power contained in her choice to faithfully love: "Yett firme love holds my sences. . . ." (sonnet 10). In this first sequence Wroth relies heavily on Petrarchan conventions. To show Pamphilia's misery, Wroth frequently uses the Petrarchan day/night conceit: "Cloy'd with the torments of a tedious night/ I wish for day; which come . . ./

Then cry for night, and once more day takes flight/ And brightness gon . . ." (sonnet 13); Pamphilia is "Darke to joy by day, light in night oprest" (sonnet 20). However, as we have seen, while she uses these conventions, Wroth subverts them by focusing more exclusively on Pamphilia and her continual decision to remain constant than on the beloved and his behavior.

While Wroth employs the traditional convention of Cupid as having "conquered" Pamphilia by implanting the flaming heart of love in her breast, Pamphilia acknowledges that it is Cupid, rather than Amphilantus, who has conquered her: "Beehold I yeeld . . ./ I ame thy subject, conquer'd" (sonnet 8). Although Cupid conquers male lovers in the Petrarchan tradition, Wroth centers solely on Cupid's conquest--her lover does not become Cupid's object. For example, in sonnet 53 of Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, Cupid enslaves Astrophil while he is competing in a "martial sports" event. Cupid, "having me [Astrophil] his slave descried," interferes, and tells Astrophil to "Look," whereupon Astrophil sees Stella and is immediately "caught" by her dazzling eyes (so much so that the competition at hand is forgotten). Stella becomes the immediate object of Cupid's conquest, and she, not Cupid, then becomes the lover's focus. In contrast to Astrophil, Pamphilia speaks only of Cupid as her conqueror; there is no sense that Amphilantus hovers in the background to become Pamphilia's focus once Cupid has done his trick. For Wroth, it is Cupid, not Amphilantus, who drives Pamphilia's decision to love: "I doe confess, t'was thy will made mee chuse" (sonnet 8). Pamphilia laments in

sonnet 30 that love (Cupid) "left poore mee your brest to chus/ As the blest shrine wher itt would harbor still." Even though she is conquered by Cupid and it is he who propels her decision to love, Pamphilia nonetheless speaks of love as a choice she makes (although one that may be hopeless). As the first sequence concludes, Pamphilia's conscious and continual decision to love leads, despite the torments of her lover's inconstancy, to a resolution of her own constancy, a virtue that she identifies with her very self. Wroth closes the final sonnet of the first sequence with Pamphilia's decision that "Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove." Pamphilia then self-authorizes and self-legitimates her declaration by pronouncing her name: "Pamphilia."

The remaining 48 sonnets and songs are arranged into shorter interrelated sequences that are further divided into four segments. With Pamphilia having chosen constancy in the first sequence, these series of sonnets show her struggles as she progresses to what Lewalski calls Wroth's "revised" Neoplatonic understanding of love (258). Lewalski asserts that Wroth "rewrites" Neoplatonic love by showing that Pamphilia's progression from an earthly love to a "higher" love involves no renunciation of desire (258). Wroth does not specify whether the "desire" Pamphilia speaks of is emotional, physical, or both; such delineation does not seem relevant. Whatever the nature of the desire, its force never wanes for Pamphilia.

The struggles depicted in the first two segments as Pamphilia chooses to remain constant to an inconstant lover are similar to the first sequence: the

"wanton" child Cupid still continues to "finely doe his tricks" (sonnet 64), and Pamphilia still experiences the miseries of love and desire for an unfaithful lover. She still is one who "lov'd well butt was nott lov'd" (song 60). Her ardent desire prompts Pamphilia to explore the nature of her "bace jealousie" and "Cruell suspition" as she wonders: "O in how stang a cage ame I kept in?" (sonnet 66). Despite her pain, Pamphilia's desire remains fervent, and she still chooses constancy: "Yett faith still cries, Love will nott falsefy" (sonnet 68). Towards the end of the second segment, Pamphilia admits her "folly"--"Folly would needs make mee a lover bee" (sonnet 72) which leads her to recognize the deceptions of her lover. However, she makes a decision to learn from these realizations:

> I thought excuses had bin reasons true,
> And that noe faulcehood could of thee ensue;
> Soe soone beeleefe in honest minds is wrought;
> Butt now I find thy flattery, and skill,
> Which idly made mee to observe thy will;
> Thus is my learning by my bondage bought. (sonnet 69)

The choice to learn from her "folly" has brought her through the pain of doubt, despair, and jealously to an interior freedom: "Beeing past the pains of love/ Freedome gladly seekes to move" (song 75). The movement into this freedom prepares for the last sonnet in the segment in which Pamphilia recognizes her progression into a Neoplatonic, universalized concept of love. This progression is signalled by a new image of Cupid. Pamphilia apologizes to

Cupid for her castigation of him as wanton and childish in the first sequence. The pain of love and desire that is not renounced but rather accepted has led Pamphilia to see Love, or Cupid, in a new light. The next sequence, she announces, will be a "crowne unto [Cupid's] endless praise" (sonnet 76).

The fourteen sonnets that follow constitute a corona, an Italian poetic form in which the final line of each sonnet is repeated in the first line of the next. As the corona begins, Pamphilia, in typical Petrarchan fashion, reflects on her experience of the miseries of love, asking, "In this strange labourinth how shall I turne?" Despite its miseries, she again makes a choice to "leave all, and take the thread of love" (sonnet 77). Once chosen, Pamphilia finds the "thread of love" which "constant lovers seek . . . leads unto the soules content" and into the knowledge that "Love is true vertu" (sonnet 78). Here, Wroth moves into her revision of Neoplatonic love. Pamphilia speaks of the greatness of Love, who is still Cupid, but now allegorized as a noble and powerful monarch. Pamphilia discovers that the substance of love is found in the ennobling power of truth, constancy, and self-knowledge:

> Itt [Love] doth inrich the witts, and make you see
> That in your self, which you knew nott before,
> Forcing you to admire such guifts showld bee
> Hid from your knowledg, yett in you the store. . . .
> Sonnet 82)

She realizes moreover that Love is essential also to loving oneself, since "Hee that shuns love doth love himself the less" (sonnet 83). Further, Love inspires

"soules with devine love" and is itself of divine origin, "maintained by heavnly fires" (sonnets 81, 83).

However, as Lewalski observes, Wroth does not situate this divine love on the androcentric Neoplatonic ladder of love, which in its ascent leads the lover to transcend particular earthly love and its desires. Rather, Wroth's redefined Neoplatonic love directly returns Pamphilia to the earthly particularities of Petrarchanism. In a rare reference to her lover's physicality, Pamphilia is led back, as Lewalski notes, <u>into</u> her lover, as she speaks in sonnet 82 of her lover's eyes "which kindle Cupid's fire" (260). Lewalski further suggests that Wroth finds the Neoplatonic ideal of love precisely <u>in</u> the lover Pamphilia's own desire and passion, and not outside of them as with the Petrarchan Neoplatonic concept. Moreover, sonnet 84 declares that earthly desire is very much a part of love, which is divine in origin, "maintain'd by heavnly fires/ Made of vertu, join'de by truth, blowne by desires." Wroth does not renounce the desires of earthly love to find the source of eternal love. Rather, she finds it within those very desires (Lewalski 261). We see some similarity with Spenser's <u>Amoretti</u>. Spenser, like Wroth, does not negate or transcend sexual passion in the idea of Neoplatonic love. Unlike Wroth, however, Spenser sees marriage as the proper place for sexual passion. Wroth does not. She does not attempt to justify sexual desire by having it legitimated by a patriarchal institution; rather, she self-authorizes and validates her sexual desire within her self.

Wroth's redefined Neoplatonism leads Pamphilia further into her self and into a heightened awareness of her gifts, which manifest themselves as art: "Love will a painter make you, such, as you/ Shall bee able to drawe your only deere/ More lively, parfett, lasting, and more true . . ."(sonnet 83). Love leads one into the particularity of lover and self, rather than beyond them into eternal, formless love. This movement is borne out as Wroth concludes the corona by returning to Pamphilia's struggles with despair and jealousy.

Pamphilia ends the corona by asking again, "In this strange labourinth how shall I turne?", which leads into the final sequence and segment. These poems still contain expressions of uncertainty and pain: "my hart is lost, what can I now expect" (sonnet 95). Even Cupid, the noble monarch of the corona, regresses to his former wanton and childish state: "Late in the Forest I did Cupid see/ Colde, wett, and crying hee had lost his way" (sonnet 96). Pamphilia takes him in her arms, dries and warms him, carries him into the safety of a bower, "butt in the way hee made mee feele his powre,/ Burning my hart who had him kindly warm'd" (sonnet 96). Pamphilia's experience of eternal, divinely inspired love has not led her away from the torments of earthly love. Yet, the power of the true love she has encountered in the corona provides her with clarity to see her situation.

Pamphilia finds herself again torn between fear and desire: "With greedy lookes" she yearns to gaze at her beloved, but at the same time she "[fears] to bee mark'd." But precisely at this moment there appears in her

heart "Yett . . . unseene of jealous eye/ the truer Image [of Love] shall in triumph lye" (sonnet 98). While holding the vision of true, eternal love, she nonetheless recognizes that "huge clowds of smoke . . . may weel hide/ The face of fairest day though for awhile . . ." (sonnet 99). And, despite the darkness of such clouds, Pamphilia has the inner authority to know that "in my thoughts true forme of love shall live" (sonnet 100).

Wroth concludes the entire sonnet sequence with Pamphilia experiencing "the quiet of a faithfull love"--not her beloved's love for her, but her <u>own</u>. She has defined, authorized, and constructed her <u>own</u> sense of virtue--her constancy--that she has chosen to live and love by. She has found and knows her ability to love truly: "What's past showes you can love." And, as in the conclusion of the first sequence, she records her name after the final line: "Now lett your constancy your honor prove. Pamphilia."

As we have seen, Wroth simultaneously uses and subverts Petrarchan love poetry to write of the experience of a woman lover. She uses androcentric poetic convention to make a statement of resistance against the patriarchal objectification and silencing of woman in poetry. And, she proffers constancy and not chastity as a woman's principal virtue perhaps in an attempt to subvert the equation of chastity with silence so that she, as a woman poet, could write and be heard.

Interestingly, Wroth uses the term "chastity" only four times in the lengthy <u>Pamphilia to Amphilantus</u>, whereas the word "constancy" (or

"constant") is used thirteen times with the final line of the entire sequence being "Now lett your constancy your honor prove." The minimal usage of "chastity" suggests Wroth's lack of preoccupation with the ensconced idea of androcentric chastity and her replacement of chastity with constancy. Wroth's supplanting suggests also an effort to redefine androcentric chastity, an attempt not simply to position the virtue of constancy against chastity and nothing more, but an endeavor to look at chastity in a new and broader way. Wroth's usages of "chastity" are predominately non-androcentric--and, as opposed to Spenser's and Jonson's--not centered in marriage and reproduction.

Wroth's first (and only) use of chastity that is androcentrically-based is an address to "chast Diana" in the segment of sonnets immediately preceding the corona. In sonnet 70, Wroth employs the mythological image of Diana, the Roman goddess of virginity, the moon, and hunting, to show Diana's "capture" of "poore love" (Cupid). The remaining three references to chastity are all associated with constancy, and appear in the corona where Wroth redefines the Neoplatonic notion of love. Having taken "the thread of love" in pursuit of constancy, "chaste thought" guides the lover to the "Light of true love [that] constant lovers seeke" (sonnet 78). In sonnet 81, constancy's "thread of love" leads one further to "the weight of true desire/soe pleasing" that burns. Despite the desire that burns, the lover "will love the smart" of the "faithfull heate" which aspires to "Vertues which inspire/Soules with devine

love, which shows his [Cupid's] chast art." Chastity and the presence of desire are not separated. In her final usage of chastity in sonnet 84, Wroth advises lovers to "chastly lett your passions move" so that "noe thought from vertuous love your minds intise." In these three references, chastity is non-gender specific and is linked to virtuous love, which Wroth associates with constancy. No allusions to the constraining of sexuality or to sexual status are evident. Desires and passions are acknowledged and never removed from the arena of what is chaste--constant love.

Wroth thus redefines androcentric chastity by transforming it into the virtue of constancy. Wroth destabilizes androcentric chastity's centering primarily in female sexuality and female sexual status in virginity or marriage. In effect, her redefinition removes chastity from patriarchal gender norms, which associate it fundamentally with women. Wroth redefines chastity as constancy, and makes constancy Pamphilia's primary virtue. However, while Pamphilia as woman models this virtue, it is intended for all. As Miller suggests, Wroth views constancy as an non-gendered virtue, something "required of all true lovers" (301). It is the "true forme of love" for men as well as women. Further, Wroth shows that constancy is a choice, and not, like androcentric chastity, a criterion imposed on women by patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality.[13]

Wroth's refusal to conform to the patriarchal assignment of gender norms discloses itself in the absence of marriage in both Pamphilia to

Amphilantus and the Urania. In the Urania, Pamphilia is a queen who refuses to marry, noting that she is married to her people. However, in a line from a song in Pamphilia to Amphilantus, Pamphilia makes the puzzling lament, "Would that I noe ruler had" (song 59). The title of "ruler" could be applied to Cupid, who has "conquered" her heart, but a biographical reading of Pamphilia to Amphilantus could suggest otherwise. While clearly we cannot say that the sonnets are purely autobiographical, interpretation from a biographical perspective provides interesting parallels between Wroth and her fictive character Pamphilia.

Biographical details of Wroth's life suggest that she resisted patriarchal marital expectations by largely ignoring androcentric, Protestant ideas that located a woman's virtue in marital chastity. As noted, Wroth and William Herbert bore two illegitimate children; the dates of their births are not known. Critics often draw parallels between Wroth's and Herbert's lives and the characters Pamphilia and Amphilantus in the Urania and Pamphilia's reflections on constancy in the sonnet sequence. Lewalski seems to assume the parallel; Josephine Roberts explores the possibility and proffers speculation, but remains cautious about asserting the biographical certitude of the Pamphilia/Wroth-Amphilantus/Herbert connection. In "The Biographical Problem of Pamphilia to Amphilantus" Roberts provides biographical detail on Wroth's life that could suggest some basis for reading a biographical correlation. Roberts concludes that autobiography may have motivated and

provided the passion behind the composition of Pamphilia to Amphilantus, but she also asserts that Wroth moved beyond specific personal reference to a universal and generalized exploration of the struggles involved in love.

While Roberts admits the paucity of evidence to substantiate a biographical parallel, she nonetheless speculates that Wroth and Herbert may have been romantically involved during the period of their arranged marriages to others. Like Wroth's marriage, Herbert's marriage also began with hints of discord. Roberts indicates that a confidential advisor to Sidney wrote to Herbert's father-in-law in 1605, entreating him to disregard rumors concerning Herbert's marriage to Talbot:

> And let me assure your Honors that my Lady Pembroke is very much respected by all her Lord's friends, she worthely deserving it. It may be the indiscretion of some that love tattling may buss out the contrary, which occasions this protestations [sic] of mine to your Honor. ("Biographical" 122)

Further, Roberts notes that Herbert's biographer Clarendon opined that Herbert "paid much too dear for his wife's fortune" and further commented that he was "immoderately given up to women," mentioning that Herbert's "associations" with various court ladies included Wroth ("Biographical" 46). The date of any "association," and whether before or after the death of Wroth's husband, is not known. Roberts further indicates that Sidney correspondence shows that Wroth and Herbert regularly were in contact after

both their marriages, as Herbert was a frequent guest in the Wroth home and took part in family and court gatherings with Mary ("Biographical" 122).

Other evidence suggests that the involvement between Wroth and Herbert took place before the death of Robert Wroth in 1614. As I have noted, it is known that Wroth's poems were circulating among her friends by 1613, and that an early version of Pamphilia to Amphilantus exists which contains her emendations. If we assume that the circulating poems do include sonnets from the sequence, this suggests Wroth worked on Pamphilia to Amphilantus over a number of years, and particularly the years before her husband's death in 1614. In addition, Roberts indicates that a possible allusion to young William Herbert, one of the illegitimate children of Wroth and Herbert, appears in the Sidney papers and establishes a possible time-frame to his birth. In a 1615 letter to his wife, Wroth's father comments that "you have don very well in putting Wil away, for it had bin to greate a shame he should have stayde in the hous" ("Biographical" 47). If the allusion is indeed to Wroth's illegitimate son, that son was clearly born before February 1614, since 1614 is the year Wroth also gave birth to James, her son by her husband. However, in light of the lack of direct evidence, one can only speculate: it cannot be decided with certainty when Wroth and Herbert had their children, and whether their births occurred when Wroth's husband was living.

Yet, Wroth's contemporaries also tended to draw parallels between Wroth/Pamphilia and Herbert/Amphilantus. In her article "An Unpublished

Literary Quarrel Concerning the Suppression of Mary Wroth's Urania (1621)," Roberts claims that the court's reaction to the Urania was "extremely hostile" (532). Several nobles denounced the work, claiming they saw connections between members of court and various characters. In particular, Roberts cites the "quarrel" that occurred between Wroth and Sir Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham. Denny accused Wroth of writing a roman a clef, in which she exposed the personal lives of nobles (particularly himself and his family) in James I's court. Wroth denied satirizing Denny, which provoked an exchange of derogatory poems. In a bitter poetic attack which he circulated among his friends at court, Denny first calls Wroth a "hermaphrodite" and then advises her to "leave idle books alone/ For wise and worthyer women have writte/ none" ("Notes" 534). In a letter to Wroth, Denny further counsels her to "repent of so many ill spent years of so vain a book . . . [and] redeem the time with writing as large a volume of heavenly lays and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toys . . ." ("Notes" 534). Wroth responded with the poem "Railing Rimes Returned upon the Author by Mistress Mary Wrothe." Denny countered by insisting that if he appeared in Urania as the father-in-law of Seralius, a character having numerous domestic difficulties (which Wroth described in detail), then she was surely Pamphilia ("Biographical" 48).

Other similarities that Roberts suggests between Wroth/Pamphilia and Herbert/Amphilantus are that in Urania Pamphilia and Amphilantus are first cousins (as Wroth and Herbert were), and that a poem written by Amphilantus

(who is a courtier-poet in the romance) is attributed to Herbert in three of four different manuscript collections in the British Library. Lastly, both Roberts and Lewalski suggest, drawing on the observation of May Paulissen, that Wroth conceivably puns on the name "Will" in her final sonnet in which she resolves to love despite her lover's inconstancy: "Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove." Noting that Wroth uses the Elizabethan sonneteering technique of the embedded name, Roberts argues that the use of the pun is entirely possible, and is one of the few places in the poem where Wroth draws an explicit and overt Herbert/Amphilantus correlation ("Biographical" 49). And while Roberts concludes that there are no references to the illegitimate children in the sonnet sequence ("Biographical" 49), I see possible allusions as appearing in sonnets 85 and 86 of the corona. In sonnet 85, the speaker notes that if

> . . . lust bee counted love t'is faulcely nam'd
> By wikedness a fayer gloss to sett
> Upon that vice, which els makes men asham'd
> In the owne frase to warrant butt begett
>
> This child for love, who ought like monster borne
> Bee from the court of Love, and reason torne.

While "child" could refer to Cupid, Wroth perhaps satirizes the social and religious stigma attached to illegitimate children by likening them to "monsters" born from the court of love and from "reason torne." The first stanza of the next sonnet repeats the final line of the preceding sonnet and continues, "For Love in reason not doth putt his trust,/ Desert, and liking are

together borne/ children of love, and reason parents just . . ." (sonnet 86). The proximity and similarity of the phrases "children of love" might suggest Wroth's mention of the children and her resistance to their erasure by the "reason" that justifies the social stigma. The oblique resistance to patriarchal marital norms that emerges here is also found in the Urania.

In her article "'The Knot Never To Bee Untide': The Controversy Regarding Marriage in Mary Wroth's Urania," Roberts observes that the Urania offers a wide assortment of types of marital unions, ranging from the typical patriarchal arranged marriage to the most untraditional, "clandestine" pacts. Roberts maintains that Wroth's explorations of various types of marital unions could significantly contribute to the work of social historians, such as Lawrence Stone, who trace the development of marriage over the centuries ("Knot" 110-11). While in both Urania and Pamphilia to Amphilantus Pamphilia and Amphilantus never legally marry, they do contract a union in the second, unpublished section of Urania.[14] Roberts suggests that Pamphilia and Amphilantus enter into a "de praesenti" marriage, considered a type of "clandestine" union since it ignored ecclesiastical and civil law. "De praesenti" marriages were private, oral exchanges of vows between two consenting persons; no mediation, consecration, or presence of ecclesiastical or civil authorities or witnesses were involved, nor considered necessary. While offering no substantial evidence, Roberts nonetheless speculates that the "de praesenti" marriage between Pamphilia and Amphilantus in the unpublished

Urania might be either an autobiographical parallel to a possible "de praesenti" contract between Wroth and Herbert, or Wroth's imaginative desire for such a union. Roberts suggests that Wroth's focus on secret marriages such as the "de praesenti" in both the published and unpublished parts of the Urania argue for Wroth's belief in the validity and relevance of love unions that are legitimate in and of themselves, needing no external institutions to authorize them ("Knot" 127).

Further, Gary Waller declares that the women of the Sidney family, particularly Philip's sister the countess of Pembroke and Mary Wroth, were among the first women of the early modern period to "articulate" their femaleness from their own experience and in their own terms. Waller suggests that Wroth's articulation in particular may well have been the beginnings of "what may have been another opening up in the history of Western men and women, the expansion of the frontiers of bodily freedom and ego formation through sexual expression" (414) beyond the parameters of patriarchal norms. This "opening up," however, was slowed because such sexual expansion was largely expressed in women's writings such as Wroth's--and thus ignored until only very recently (414). Wroth's contribution to new ways of looking at sexuality is further manifested, Waller asserts, in the bearing of two illegitimate children as a "defiance" against the entrapment of patriarchal marriage as well as an "assertion of her sexuality against a repressive world" (410-11). Thus, in the Urania and in Pamphilia to Amphilantus, Wroth's focus is on women who,

to use Waller's phrase, "dare to make sexual choices" (411). If we assume a biographical parallel between Wroth and Pamphilia, Pamphilia to Amphilantus can be read as Wroth's declaration of her choice.

And for Wroth, the women, most notably Pamphilia, who did make sexual choices beyond the confines of patriarchy, were chaste. While Wroth as woman poet replaces chastity with constancy perhaps as a way to subvert the cultural notion of silence with chastity, she also suggests a redefinition of chastity, as did Heloise, by removing its androcentric preoccupation with sexuality and gender norms. The freedom Pamphilia chooses--and finds--in Pamphilia to Amphilantus is a glaring contrast to the parameters that objectified the pre-maritally chaste sonnet lady of Sidney's and Spenser's sequences and confined the married women of Ben Jonson's poems. In contrast, Wroth's chaste woman (and by implication, chaste man) freely self-authorizes her own sexual decisions which are solely based on the virtue of constancy--lasting fidelity and commitment, in an emotional, spiritual and physical sense--to an other. This fidelity and commitment can operate, as it did for Wroth and for Heloise, outside of patriarchal institutions such as marriage and religious life. With a concept of chastity similiar to Heloise's, Mary Wroth in the Renaissance makes, in Pamphilia to Amphilantus, a significant contribution to the expansion of ideas of chastity, fidelity, and commitment in human thought and practice.

NOTES

1. In her article "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers," Margaret Ferguson observes that this socio-economic rationale does not altogether "explain why chastity was required so insistently of all women, irrespective of their class status . . . "(99).

2. Britomart is the only knight who is female in The Faerie Queene. Again we see the cultural association of women with chastity; the chaste theme of Book III calls a female to mind. Moreover, while in Book I Redcrosse is condemned for temporarily falling into lust and unchastity, Britomart does not have the same choice for "temporary chastity" as did Redcrosse and male knights.

3. Following Petrarchan tradition, Sidney intersperses songs into his sequence; some of these do incorporate Stella's voice, although she speaks only minimally.

4. All quotations from Astrophil and Stella are taken from The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, ed., William A. Ringler, Jr. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962.

5. All quotations are taken from Spenser: Poetical Works, J.C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912, reprinted 1979.

6. Jonson's usage of chastity appears in various forms and spellings: "chast," "chastetye," "chastitie" and "chastly."

7. All references to Ben Jonson's poems are taken from Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt. New York: Penguin Books, 1975.

8. Jonson's praise of Wroth suggests the gap between androcentric chastity's theory and practice, and, as we shall see later, the Renaissance equation of a woman's chastity with her silence. While in his epigrams and poems to her, Jonson praises Wroth's poetic abilities, he, like most of Wroth's contemporaries, was certain to know of her romantic involvement with Herbert. In both cases, for Jonson, Wroth is far removed from the Renaissance idea of the chaste, silent woman, as well as Jonson's own ideal for wifely chastity as found in his poems. Or, as Roberts observes, Jonson's praise of Wroth may well have been an attempt to mollify Herbert, his chief patron. Interestingly, in Jonson's "Epigrams," Epigram CII in praise of Herbert precedes Epigram CIII, "To Mary, Lady Wroth."

9. All sonnets are taken from The Poems of Mary Wroth, Josephine Roberts, ed., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.

10. All quotations from Donne's poems are taken from John Donne: The Complete English Poems, ed., A. J. Smith, London: Penguin Books, 1971.

11. All quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets are taken from The Complete Works of Shakespeare, third edition, ed., David Bevington,

Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.

12. There is no critical agreement on the structure of the sequences. Josephine Roberts divides the entire work into four sections; in her dissertation "Lady Mary Wroth's Urania: The Work and the Tradition" Margaret Whitten-Hannah arranges the sequence into two sections. May Paulissen in her dissertation "The Love Sonnets of Mary Wroth: A Critical Introduction" argues for four sections, and Elaine Beilin in her chapter "Heroic Virtue: Mary Wroth's Urania and Pamphilia to Amphilantus in Redeeming Eve divides the sonnets into eight groups consisting of six sonnets each. I use Barbara Lewalksi's arrangement as found in her chapter on Mary Wroth in Women, Writing, and Resistance in Jacobean England.

13. Some similarity between Spenser and Wroth in regard to female choice in courtship can be drawn, and a case could be made that Spenser anticipates Wroth in this regard in sonnets 67 and 68 of the Amoretti. In sonnet 67, the male lover, after "weary chace/ Seeing the game from him escapt away" gives up the pursuit of his beloved. Once he stops the chase, she willingly comes to him: "she beholding me with milder looke,/ sought not to fly." The male lover then "in hand her half trembling tooke,/ and with her owne good will hir fyrmely tyde." However, the similarities between Spenser and Wroth diverge at this point. While in this sonnet the beloved appears to choose her lover, she is nonetheless objectified by the male speaker. She is "tyde" as a "beast": "and with her owne goodwill hir fyrmely tyde,/ Strange

thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld,/ So gladdly wonne with her owne will beguyld." While Spenser does give his female lover "choice," she is still objectified and compared to a "beast" who must be tied, or constrained. In contrast, Wroth does not objectify her lover; her focus is more on herself and her own decision to love, independent of her beloved's decision to love her.

In the Amoretti's sonnet 68 the lovers are united, and the speaker prays that their love may be imitative of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, that "we for whom thou diddest dye . . . / may live forever in felicity." The speaker further prays that the lovers may "love . . . lyke as we ought/ love is the lesson which the Lord us taught." That in Christian love the lovers may felicitously live forever anticipates the marriage to come in the Epithalamion, since for Spenser, the proper channel for love is marriage. Conversely, Wroth's desire for felicitous union with her lover does not allude to nor seem to anticipate marriage.

14. Roberts is currently editing the unpublished Newbury text of the Urania, which is forthcoming through the Early English Text Society.

CHAPTER IV

"OPENING TO A NEW SENSE": NINETEENTH CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS REDEFINING CHASTITY

After the Renaissance, the androcentric view of chastity held its strong sway in eighteenth century British culture. While Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews offered a rare reversal by considering the plight of a male struggling to retain his chastity, most literary works continued to reinforce the idea of chastity as an issue of woman's sexuality. Nineteenth century British literature continued the literal enfleshment of chastity in woman, particularly in the Victorian age, when the concept of chastity as feminine sexual purity was rigidly codified. And as in past historical and literary periods, chastity in the nineteenth century continued to be allied with a woman's "virtue."

In her book Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading 1835-1880, Sally Mitchell details the two major assumptions underlying nineteenth century, and particularly Victorian, views of chastity. The first assumption--that women's "place" is invariably and inevitably related to property--and that women are property is not new to the nineteenth century. As we have seen in the historical periods examined, a woman's physical chastity was a legal necessity to insure the legitimacy of property and inheritance rights. Female physical chastity guaranteed that property could be passed down legitimately

from one generation to the next. Thus a woman's "virtue" ensured the orderly control of property.

A second assumption inverts concepts and perceptions of gender differences found in the patristic, medieval and Renaissance periods. In examining the historical juxtaposition of cultural, scientific, and medical theories of the human body, Thomas Laqueur notes that in the eighteenth century, sex as we understand it was "invented" (149). In the Enlightenment and into the nineteenth century, biological and medical inquiries began to dispute what Laqueur calls the "one-sex model" theory fashioned by Galen and Aristotle in the second and third centuries A.D. The one-sex model held that woman was a "lesser man"; physiologically she was derived from male anatomy. Again we see the pervasive influence of the second Genesis acount of human creation in which Eve is extracted from Adam's rib. During the Enlightenment and early nineteenth century, a "two-sex model" developed, in which men and women were regarded as physiologically and biologically distinct. A woman was no longer considered a "lesser form" of a man, but fundamentally "different," so much so that by the eighteenth century, a distinct terminology emerged for physiological reference to male and female anatomies. In the one-sex model, for example, the ovary did not have a name of its own but was referred to by Galen as "orcheis," the word he uses for the male testes (Laqueur 4). In the two-sex model, a female organ, such as the vagina, that previously had not been distinguished from male organs, was

given a distinct name (Laqueur 149). Thus the patristic, medieval, and Renaissance one-sex model in which male and female beings were seen in hierarchical relationship to one another was replaced by the two-sex model of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which male and female were viewed as biologically distinct and different. In the two-sex model, male and female were differentiated in a paradigm of contrast and opposition, a model Laqueur calls "biological divergence . . . an anatomy and physiology of incommensurability" (6).

The shift from a one-sex to a two-sex model created an inversion in ideas about women's sexual appetites. The notions of the one-sex model, which asserted that women's sexual drives were much stronger then men's, and that women's passion dominated their reason (and incited men's passion to do the same)--became reversed in the two-sex model. Since women's reproductive organs were so different than men's, the natures of male and female orgasm were viewed as different. Women were thought not to experience sexual arousal and orgasm in the same way men did, and women possessed the biological capacity, much more than men, to control the "bestial, irrational . . . fury of sexual pleasure" (Laqueur 150). This view developed over time and came to be one of the primary signifiers of the differences between not only male and female bodies but also male and female morality. Thus in the nineteenth century view, women were considered

morally superior to men since they were thought to be passionless and not as affected by sexual feelings as men were.

The notion of woman's passionlessness lies at the heart of the Victorian sexual double standard and its idea of women's moral (associated wholly with sexual) superiority to men. The weakness (and near asexuality) of a woman's sexual desires was contrasted with the considerably stronger male sexual drive, so that the acting out of a man's sexual urges could be more easily justified since he was thought to be more susceptible to lust. These notions reinforced the idea that women were, by nature, pure and "chaste," and hence morally superior to men. As Angela Leighton observes, the Victorian woman was "the chief upholder and representer of morality, and also its most satisfying symbol"; consequently, the site of moral struggles for Victorians was a woman's body ("Men made the laws" 110-11). Women who experienced sex, and especially sex outside of marriage, thus "fell" from their position of moral superiority, whereas men did not. This "fall" of course, made a woman's conscious engaging in sexual activity an almost reprehensible act.

The Victorian emphasis on a woman's moral superiority also reversed the patristic and medieval Christian duality of spirituality and materiality in relation to male and female persons. Whereas in the patristic and medieval periods, women were associated with materiality, in the nineteenth century, women were associated with the spiritual and men with the material. As Mitchell observes, this reversal tied in handily to both eighteenth and

nineteenth century ideas on domination of the developing material world vis a vis economic, scientific and political expansionism. Accordingly, women's "nature," as spiritual, kept them from involvement in the political, scientific and economic arenas, leaving the control of these to men (xii). Thus the importance of women's physical chastity, which was thought to ensure their spiritual virtue and purity. And, as Mitchell notes, the importance of women's chastity to the maintenance of the patriarchal social and political system was openly acknowledged. Mitchell quotes a comment from an anonymous author in an article entitled "Moral Instincts" in the Saturday Review of 1867:

> Chastity is merely a social law, created to encourage the alliances that most promote the permanent welfare of the race, and to maintain women in a social position which it is thought advisable they should hold. (qtd. in Mitchell xiii)

In examination of the three texts that follow, we see these nineteenth century ideas on androcentric chastity played out by both male and female writers. In all three texts, women continued to be dichotomized, as in past historical and literary periods, into a dualism of "chaste" and "unchaste." As Sally Mitchell observes, the nineteenth century category of the "unchaste" woman subdivided itself into three types: the seduced woman, victimized by a dominant male; the fallen woman, consciously choosing sin and therefore "culpable"; and the "emancipated" woman who made her own decisions about her body (x). The texts that will be explored--Sir Walter Scott's The Heart of

Midlothian, Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, all deal with the unchaste "fallen" and "seduced" woman.[1] Scott's novel represents the typical androcentric position on chastity and on the fallen woman. Gaskell's and Barrett Browning's narratives both deal with the seduced woman--but they do something different. Gaskell and Barrett Browning use androcentric chastity subversively, as a means by which to point out the plight of the seduced woman as well as a vehicle with which to create a feminine redefinition of chastity.

Although the term "chastity" is not directly alluded to in these three texts perhaps as often as in the medieval and Renaissance texts we have examined, patriarchal expectations of a woman's chastity are implicit throughout. In Sir Walter Scott's Heart of Midlothian, the tacit assumption of the female hero's sexual status as chaste emerges--silently but pervasively--as the key point of her heroism. Jeanie Deans is good--and chastity is a fundamental, and expected, ingredient of her goodness. Her unchaste sister Effie--perhaps a combination of the "fallen" and "emancipated" woman to whom Sally Mitchell refers--is unchaste and thus unheroic, and condemned to a miserable life as punishment for her crime. While Gaskell and Barrett Browning also utilize androcentric views of the chaste woman, they manipulate and subvert these by portraying their unchaste women as heroic--and even saintly. Ironically, they must use androcentric chastity, and present the women who violate it, in order to offer their redefinition. Gaskell's Ruth

presents a portrait of Mitchell's seduced woman; Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh portrays the raped woman. Both writers use their characters' androcentric unchastity as a starting point from which to show--and redefine--their true chastity, heroism, and "saintliness." Gaskell and Barrett Browning implicitly redefine chastity--by removing it from its singular confinement in the arena of a woman's sexuality and sexual status--to show that women's virtue can and should be separated from a sexual status assigned by patriarchy. Thus, the unchaste, fallen and seduced woman emerges, at novels' end, as far outside the patriarchal limitations and conventions that restrained her--as hero and saint. This state of being is her chastity, redefined.

The Heart of Midlothian: The Expected Chastity of the Female Hero

Most critics of Sir Walter Scott's The Heart of Midlothian deem it unique since it alone offers, amongst Scott's network of male heroes in the Waverly novels, a female protagonist who is "hero." However, while Jeanie Deans may emerge as hero, her heroism is decidedly androcentric, crystallizing from a patriarchal backdrop of religious, cultural, and legal authority implicitly and resolutely bound to androcentric chastity. Although her chastity is rarely made reference to, Jeanie's heroism is measured by her chastity. It is assumed and expected. Jeanie's chastity is a tacit and unquestionable aspect of her heroism--as a woman, she cannot be hero without it. And again, while Jeanie's chastity is rarely mentioned, it is all-pervasive, since it is set against

her sister Effie's unchastity. Jeanie's chastity and goodness are preconditions for her heroism. Effie is unchaste and bad, and while not exactly unheroic, certainly not eligible for heroism. She is at the very least, pitiable. And further compounding this dichotomy are the generations of critics (including feminist critics) who have reinforced, by neglecting Effie's heroism, the requisite of chastity for Jeanie's heroism.

The Heart of Midlothian is a historical novel, set in Scotland in the 1730's. While it provides the political background, via its primary historical incident, the Porteous riots, for tensions between Scotland and England, its center is the story of two sisters. The fact that one sister, Jeanie, is chaste and the other, Effie, is unchaste, creates the central conflict. Effie is seduced by George Staunton, an English aristocrat involved in the Scottish criminal underworld. Effie conceals her pregnancy (a violation of English law at the time), bears a child who disappears immediately after birth, is accused of child-murder, and stands trial. Concealment of pregnancy, accompanied by the assumption of child-murder, was grounds for death. (In truth, the child was stolen from Effie shortly after childbirth by Staunton's insane ex-mistress, who also bore him a child, Madge Wildfire). Effie's sister Jeanie is faced with the dilemma of whether to lie to save her sister's life. Effie is brought to trial, Jeanie refuses to lie, and Effie is sentenced to hang. Jeanie then resolves to travel alone, under hardship and peril, to London to appeal for Effie's pardon to the king, via the mediation of Queen Caroline. With the help of the Duke of

Argyle, Jeanie sees the queen and obtains the pardon. Effie later marries the wealthy Staunton and circulates among the London aristocracy. Jeanie marries Reuben Butler and she, Butler and her father are befriended by the Duke of Argyle and live happily at Roseneath, his estate in the Scottish highlands. Effie (along with Argyle) generously supports the family while her own marriage to Staunton is childless and miserable. Staunton is later killed by a Highland outlaw who is his and Effie's son, although neither one knows the identity of the other. Effie, unaware of who killed her husband (Jeanie knows the truth but decides not to tell her), lives out the remainder of her days in a convent.

Throughout this story, Jeanie's virtue and heroism are rewarded and Effie's sexual behavior is punished. For Effie, any heroism or effort to live with integrity is overshadowed by her unchastity. The traditional dichotomization of woman plays itself out: Jeanie is the "good" woman and Effie is the "bad" woman. Effie is the foil by which Jeanie's heroism--and chastity--is illuminated and vice versa. And since "bad" women and their bad deeds are almost always sexual, A.O.J. Cockshut's observation that the issue of sexual conduct is central to The Heart of Midlothian (173) is standard. It is Effie's (not Staunton's) sexual misconduct that is on trial. Dorothy Van Ghent follows Cockshut's assumption. In a novel in which several crimes are committed and the Scottish criminal underworld is probed, Van Ghent nonetheless declares that the "real" crime of the novel is "sexual indulgence--for Effie is guilty of no

other" (117). Effie's sexual "crime" is the focus rather than Staunton's sexual and non-sexual criminal involvements: her unchastity is tacitly set up against Jeanie's chastity.

The contrasts between Jeanie as having chosen the way of moral correctness and authority and Effie as "wilful" are established early. Jeanie, the elder, is described by Scott as having an appearance

> of no uncommon description. She was short, and rather too stoutly made for her size, had grey eyes, light-coloured hair . . . and her only peculiar charm was an air of inexpressible serenity, which a good conscience, kind feelings, contented temper, and the regular discharge of all her duties, spread over her features. (93)

In contrast, Effie is characterized as

> a beautiful and blooming girl. Her Grecian-shaped head was profusely rich in waving ringlets of brown hair . . . shading a laughing Hebe countenance, [she] seemed the picture of health, pleasure, and contentment. Her shape . . . was slender and taper, with that graceful and easy sweep of outline which at once indicates health and beautiful proportion of parts. (102)

But Effie's attractiveness is couched in a tacit sense of sexual danger as Scott describes the attention she receives from the young men of the neighborhood who "[watch] her motions" (102). Her "uncommon loveliness of face and person" earns her the title "the Lily of St. Leonard's," and even the "rigid presbyterians . . . were surprised into a moment's delight while gazing on a creature so exquisite" (102). Aspects of Effie's nature occasion "strange doubt

and anxiety" on the part of her father, as well as "serious apprehension" from Jeanie. Effie is some years younger than Jeanie, the daughter of Davie Deans' old age, and as such, was given more leniency in her childhood than was Jeanie. Effie was "permitted to run up and down uncontrolled" as a child, and as she grew older, Jeanie's "authoritative influence" gradually waned, and Effie felt she was entitled to "the right of independence and free agency." Thus, as Effie advanced to young womanhood

> [w]ith all the innocence and goodness of disposition, the Lily of St. Leonard's possessed a little fund of self-conceit and obstinacy, and some warmth and irritability of temper, partly natural perhaps, but certainly much increased by the unrestrained freedom of her childhood. (103)

The fact that Effie, an "untaught child of nature," has too much freedom creates a "flaw" in her character. Scott narrates a critical scene in which Effie's flaw is revealed. Jeanie begins to notice Effie's gradual disappearances in the evenings, and on one evening in particular, is worried--not so much for Effie's safety as for her father's anger--when Effie is particularly late. As Jeanie looks for her sister from the cottage step, she sees Effie and a man "[screening] themselves from observation" (103). Once into the open the man "hastily" withdraws and Effie approaches the cottage with an "affected liveliness of manner [which] females occasionally assume to hide surprise or confusion" (104). Jeanie asks where Effie has been so late and with whom--Effie replies that she has been with no one. Jeanie reproves her, exhorting her not to "vex"

their father. Again, Jeanie seems more concerned with her father's response to Effie's conduct than with Effie herself. Effie pledges she will not "vex" their father, and in a decisive moment in which she seems to want to confide in Jeanie, she intimates that she has been to a dance. Jeanie is shocked. Their father overhears the word "dance" and flies into a rage on the sins of dancing--and Effie chooses not to confide in her sister. While Effie vows to herself not to go dancing again, she keeps the vow only for a week. In the meantime, Jeanie is worried, fearful that an imposition by her father on Effie's "hitherto unrestrained freedom" might cause Effie in her "headstrong wilfulness" to altogether ignore her father's rules, and that Effie's search for amusement might become "hazardous" (107).

Fortunately, distant relatives--the Saddletrees--are in need of help in their shop in Edinburgh, and Effie is hired. Jeanie is relieved since this serves to sever Effie from "some idle acquaintances" which Jeanie suspects Effie has formed at St. Leonard's. And thus Effie is sent off to the city, armed with Jeanie's advice on the "necessity of utmost caution in her conduct" (108). During the period of her work at the shop, Mrs. Saddletree becomes irritated with Effie's "lingering" while out on shop errands. As the months pass, Mrs. Saddletree sometimes observes Effie in tears, which she tries to conceal. She notices physical changes in Effie: "her cheek grew pale and her step heavy"; customers also observe the "disfigured shape . . . of the once beautiful but still interesting girl" (109). Effie's crying spells become more and more

frequent; she refuses to confide her difficulties and meets questions with "sullen denial" (109). Finally, Effie asks permission to return to her home for a week or two, "assigning indisposition" to her condition. But, Effie does not go directly home--a week's interval passes between the time she leaves Edinburg and her return to St. Leonard's. She finally appears at the cottage, "resembling [a] spectre" (110). Jeanie guesses at what has happened, questions Effie on the identity of her seducer and the fate of the baby, but Effie refuses to communicate anything. Jeanie struggles with whether or not to tell their father of Effie's "ruin." That decision is made for her, as police arrive at the cottage to arrest Effie for child-murder.

Jeanie's heroism is thus far amplified by her adherence to accepted standards of behavior as well as the proper fear and respect for her father's authority. Conversely, Effie's non-conformity and assertion of her freedom breaches the boundaries of fatherly authority. Jeanie's adherence to male authority and scruples on female conduct augment themselves at Effie's trial where Jeanie refuses to violate principles set out by male authority to save her sister's life.

The trial of Effie Deans centers not so much on child-murder as on Effie's concealment of her pregnancy. If a woman did not communicate her pregnancy to anyone, and if the child is found dead or has disappeared, the mother is presumed guilty of killing the child, whether the murder can be proven or not. If it can be proven that Effie told someone of her condition

before the birth (and it is largely assumed that that person would be her sister), she can be cleared of the charges. However, Effie revealed her situation to no one. The case is further complicated: while after the birth Effie confesses to having the child, she claims that the woman who assisted with the birth took the baby. But Effie refuses to reveal the woman's name. Moreover, Effie's seducer George Staunton, in a clandestine night meeting he arranges with Jeanie, exhorts her to claim in the trial that Effie revealed her pregnancy to her. Jeanie refuses, on the grounds that she "canna change right into wrang, or make that true which is false" (160). Staunton accuses Jeanie of fearing recrimination for perjury, and Jeanie responds by asserting it is not human law she fears, but God's law (the male authoritarian God of Scottish Presbyterianism). "He has given us a law," says Jeanie, that cannot be violated "even that good may come out of it" (160). To transgress God's law is to "err against knowledge"--something that Jeanie will not do. Although tormented by the consequences of her decision, Jeanie nonetheless tells the truth in court: Effie never revealed her pregnancy to her. "A deep groan passed through the court"; Davie Deans collapses; and Effie, mistakenly believing he has died, cries out that her father is dead--she has killed him (234). Jeanie runs to her father, saying, "He is my father--he is our father" (234). Based on Jeanie's testimony, Effie is condemned to death. Effie's final words ask forgiveness, insisting that she has not killed her baby but she has killed her father--and thus "deserves the waist frae man, and frae God too"

(241). The authoritarian father figure--Davie Deans and the Scottish Presbyterian image of God--is central in the dichotomizing of Jeanie as good and heroic and Effie as bad and "violator." Jeanie's obedience to father-law is heroic; Effie, as violator of the father's sexual law, is dutifully remorseful and accepts her culpability.

Perhaps to counter claims that Jeanie's refusal to lie is not heroism but extreme (and destructive) scrupulosity, Scott has Jeanie resolve to journey to London (walking barefoot) to appeal for Effie's pardon to the king, through the mediation of Queen Caroline. Jeanie makes the trip amidst hardship and peril, and is finally successful in obtaining the pardon.[2] Effie is released and elopes with Staunton (again violating the father-law), but is consigned by Scott to an oppressive and ironically childless marriage. Jeanie returns home to her father's house and, having been a good daughter to Davie Deans and a good sister to Effie, becomes a good wife to Reuben Butler. (While Reuben proposes marriage to Jeanie before her travel to London, she refuses because her family is "disgraced" by Effie's deed). Her friendship with the Duke of Argyle settles her, Reuben, and her father at Roseneath, with Davie Deans appointed caretaker and Reuben as local minister. (The move, however, is not decided by Jeanie but by the Duke and Davie Deans: Jeanie is never consulted about the move, just "surprised" with it). As a good wife to Reuben, Jeanie meets his every need and defers to him: she listens "in placid silence" to his theological discourses, but in some cases, when she feels

compelled to respond, "her views were more forcible and her observations more acute than his own" (443). However, "in acquired politeness of manners, when it happened that she mingled a little in society, Mrs. Butler was, of course, judged deficient" (443). Further, Jeanie has Reuben's "humble dinner . . . well arranged, his clothes and linen in equal good order, his parlour clean . . . his books . . . well dusted" (443). She conciliates theological disputes between Reuben and her father, and is a devoted mother to her three children. Jeanie, by all respects is, in the androcentric view, heroic. Even Effie, Lady Staunton in the last portion of the novel, sees Jeanie as the "pure heroine [of] unblemished purity" (450).

As thoroughly as Jeanie is rewarded, Effie is punished. In a letter to Jeanie, Effie (as "Lady Staunton") recounts the misery and unhappiness which underlies the surface splendor of her life with the aristocrat Staunton. Effie reveals that she and Staunton--whom she never mentions by name but merely refers to as "he"--are in hiding and live a life of lies. Sending the letter itself is a risk, since Staunton (in hiding because of his criminal past) presents Effie as the daughter of a Scottish lord, in exile because of civil war. Effie writes that while Jeanie "[lives] happy in the esteem and love of all who know you . . . I drag on the life of a miserable imposter, indebted for the marks of regard I receive to a tissue of deceit and lies, which the slightest accident may unravel" (448-49). Happiness has eluded Effie, and she does not see herself worthy of the ultimate "blessing" bestowed on every woman: bearing

children. She and Staunton are now paradoxically childless in marriage, and Staunton is consumed by "gloomy thought which make him terrible to himself and others" (448). All told, Effie, despite her self-described "wealth, distinction and honorable rank" (448) is miserable--a punishment for her youthful freedom, "wilfulness" and lack of conformity to the strictness of her father's Scottish Calvinism--a punishment for her unchastity.

It is only in the standing outside the parameters of androcentrism that Effie can be regarded as heroic--a heroism that Scott certainly did not intend and that few critics, even feminists, have examined. Effie is heroic because she is roundly human and "natural," and struggles to be true to the self she is. While she is beautiful and charming, with "all the innocence and goodness of disposition," she is also possessed of "self-conceit and obstinacy, and some warmth and irritability of temper" (103). Jeanie is presented one-sidedly: she is thoroughly good and any balance of "good" and "bad" qualities such as Effie's are not given. The "naturalness" given to Effie in Scott's descriptions of her is not also given to Jeanie--and naturalness in describing Effie is associated with behaviors that have negative connotations.[3] Scott describes Effie's "self-conceit . . . obstinacy, and irritability of temper . . . [as] partly natural perhaps" (103); Effie is further deemed an "untaught child of nature, whose good and evil seemed to flow from impulse than from reflection" (104).

Effie's closeness to nature is also portrayed with a sense of danger. When, after her trial, she elopes with Staunton, she suddenly appears to

Jeanie at midnight, on a beach at Roseneath. As Jeanie reflects, sadly, on "the fate of her poor sister . . . a shadowy figure seemed to detach itself from the copsewood . . . " (438-39). The figure--Effie--"came betwixt [Jeanie] and the moon" (439). And, years later, when Effie returns to Roseneath as the despondent Lady Staunton, the "one source" that provides her "with a pure degree of pleasure" is nature. Lady Staunton, "languid, listless, and unhappy within doors . . . [felt] . . . interest and energy while in the open air" (471) and frequently takes walks with Jeanie's two sons (it is interesting that Jeanie's daughter, Euphemia--named after Effie--does not come along: she has been domesticated?). Yet, the persistent association of nature with danger surrounds Effie. On one outing, Effie and Jeanie's son David come dangerously close to falling from a waterfall, and are saved (unbeknownst to Effie) by Effie's son, "The Whistler"--a member of a band of Scottish outlaws. Her son is wild, having a "black" face with "grizzled hair hanging down over the forehead and cheeks . . . " (472); his hair is "twisted and matted like the glibbe of the ancient wild Irish" and yet he has "keen and sparkling eyes . . . his gesture free and noble" (473). Effie's association with wildness and nature makes her, like the outlaws, one who stands outside patriarchal control. And because she is a violator of the law, her punishment is to be taken out of nature: she lives in London and in shallow social circles. As the refined, sophisticated, and domesticated Lady Staunton, her demeanor is so changed that Jeanie is not instantly able to recognize her as Effie when she appears at

Roseneath. Effie has learned--and has been taught--to keep her "naturalness" in check. When she finally reveals to Jeanie that she is Effie, she throws off her restraints. She "wept, laughed, sobbed, screamed . . . giving way at once, and without reserve, to a natural excessive vivacity of temper, which no one, however, knew better how to restrain under the rules of artificial breeding" (468). Effie is punished by having to restrain her "natural" self.

Despite the punishment that forces her to subordinate herself to patriarchal law, however, Effie is heroic in that she struggles to maintain her integrity. After her pardon, Effie returns to her father's house. She realizes that she cannot "falsely" live under her father's rules as she once did. Whereas before she covertly went to dances and had her affair with Staunton (then calling himself George Robertson), after her pardon she can only remain in her father's house for three days, preferring to make a painful but honest break to live with Staunton and the life she chooses rather than to live deceitfully with her father. But from Scott's perspective, this is not heroic, as he narrates that her father's intractibility had "tightened the bands of discipline, so, as in some degree, to gall [Effie's] feelings and aggravate the irritability of a spirit naturally impatient and petulant . . ." (421). Effie is her own person; she makes her choices and takes responsibility for the consequences of those choices. She does not blame her father's rigid discipline or narrow worldview: a few days after her departure she writes to her father and Jeanie that she left because she did not want to be a further disgrace to her family--

that her "father and sister should be partakers of her shame" (422) by her living with them. Effie wishes, rather, to bear her burden alone, since it was of her own making. And, Effie is honest: she writes that she could not endure her father's constant reminders of her "transgression." She acknowledges that her father "meant weel by her . . . but he did not know the dreadful pain he gave her in casting up her sins" (422). Effie is heroic in accepting the full responsibility for her choices. She accepts her death sentence because she has broken the law. Even in her old age, Effie follows her own needs and desires: she returns to the convent where, after she married Staunton, she was educated--while Jeanie, ever the conformist, "sorrows" for Effie's "apostacy" (498) from Protestantism.

However, none of these qualities or decisions of Effie's are seen as heroic, nor does Effie consider herself heroic. She sees Jeanie as "the pure, the virtuous, the heroine . . . [of] unblemished purity" (450) and regards herself as a liar: "I am a liar of fifteen years standing . . . [while] you [Jeanie] have been truth itself from the cradle upwards" (470). Moreover, she sees herself as rightly punished for her sin. The sin is unchastity, and for this she must be punished: having broken the law by losing her virginity outside of marriage, she is punished by being unable to conceive a child in marriage. Effie has not conformed, as Jeanie has, to the law. To reinforce even more didacticly her punishment for not conforming, the narrator makes his final admonition to the reader:

> This tale will not be told in vain, if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendor [Effie's "accomplishment" in becoming Lady Staunton], can never confer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission . . . and forever haunt the steps of the malefactor. . . . (498)

And so Effie, who never complied with her father's authority or patriarchal sexual standards, is punished as the bad woman. Jeanie, who conformed to them, is the good woman and the hero, rewarded with a happy life.

Critics uphold and reinforce the naming of the chaste Jeanie as hero and the unchaste Effie as ineligible for heroism. Avrom Fleishman asserts that Jeanie "attains the proportions of epic heroism" (79), and also observes that through the course of the novel Jeanie becomes the "heart" of Midlothian, as her heart, among other things "reaffirms the value of law and social order represented by the Tolbooth. . . ." (79). While A.O.J. Cockshut acknowledges that Effie makes "heroic sacrifice" in refusing to reveal Staunton as the father of her child (knowing that this revelation will bring about his arrest) (175), he nonetheless claims that Jeanie is Scott's heroine, whose "hard road to London must pay the price of Effie's fault" (185). Jana Davis asserts that according to Scottish common sense morality, Jeanie is "the nearly ideal moral yardstick" (61), governed by a balance of enlightened self-interest and moral responsibility. Jeanie's decision not to lie to save Effie's life is based,

says Davis, on the "primacy" of conscience stressed in both Calvinism and Scottish common sense morality (61).

Critics frequently label The Heart of Midlothian as unique because, unlike the other Waverly novels, Scott's hero is female. Susan Morgan notes that in Jeanie Deans, Scott creates a great heroine who "offers a new definition of what heroism can mean" and in this instance Scott is "unconsciously feminist" (81). Morgan suggests that Scott supplants notions of the masculine hero who seeks retribution and justice with the feminine hero who seeks mercy and focuses on connections rather than differences (80). Jeanie's heroism, says Morgan, is "based on the community principle . . . [of] . . . shared fate" (79). Morgan uses the example of Jeanie's appeal to Queen Caroline which is centered on death, the "shared fate" of all humanity: Jeanie appeals to the queen by saying that when we die, our despair and fear can be softened by the knowledge of the good we have done for others. Jeanie's argument is based on the belief that humans should be merciful to one another--and this conviction, claims Morgan, is Jeanie's code of "sisterhood"--and a new model for heroism, which signals "progressive human community" (79). However, while Morgan argues for Scott's "unconsciously feminist" focus, she fails to recognize that Jeanie is heroic only within the confines of patriarchy and its demand for women's chastity.

Mary Anne Schofield suggests that Scott creates Jeanie, his only female hero, in an attempt to explore his feminine, artistic, imaginative side.

The attempt is only "partially successful," notes Schofield, since Scott controls Jeanie's acting and speaking through varying levels of male narration (163). Schofield argues that Scott tries to create a feminine perspective through male narrations but fails to tell fully the female story, since Jeanie's voice is conclusively ordered and rational (163)--and I would add, androcentrically chaste. Schofield asserts that, although written by a man, the novel's "female texts" are Effie's and Madge Wildfire's. Effie and Madge are both ruled by their passions, and female mad and passionate states of being cannot be explained or interpreted by Scott. Scott can only reach them through Jeanie who is controlled by a rational male voice and becomes their "interpreter" and "editor" (163). Following Schofield's insight, I suggest that Effie and Madge Wildfire cannot be explained by Scott since they are violators of chastity. Scott creates Jeanie, a model for androcentric chastity, to tell their stories--and to give patriarchal warning to unchaste women. Effie lives an unhappy, sterile life as Lady Staunton, and the insane Madge Wildfire sees a mob hang her mother for witchcraft and then dies herself from the same mob's attempt to drown her.

Among the majority of critics who name Jeanie Deans as hero of The Heart of Midlothian, Judith Wilt alone questions Jeanie's heroism. Wilt suggests that Jeanie's refusal to lie to save Effie's life is actually her refusal to participate in "sisterhood." Wilt asserts that Jeanie acquiesces to the "great lie"

of patriarchy that women unconsciously accede to, pointing out that Jeanie's refusal to lie ultimately protects not her sister, but George Staunton.

Despite Jeanie's seemingly noble adherence to "truth" by refusing to say falsely that Effie revealed her pregnancy to her, Wilt notes that Jeanie lies to Queen Caroline in order to save George Staunton's life (125). Wilt observes that, when applied to a man, Jeanie's lie is not a lie but more a "mental reservation" (125). Queen Caroline, who pardoned Porteous, asks Jeanie if she has any "friends" involved with the mob who hung him. Jeanie certainly considers Staunton no friend, but Jeanie does know Staunton led the mob, and she knows where he is. But, Jeanie answers "no" to the queen, "happy that the question was so framed that she could, with a good conscience, answer it in the negative" (Midlothian 365). Here, as Wilt suggests, Jeanie will lie to save a man, since, "the bottom line in this society, the crucial topos of this novel, is that woman must save, may not kill, man. Man is the tabooed object, woman the eternal forgiver" (126). And, while Jeanie is convinced that Staunton and Effie both mutually intended to keep and rear their child, Jeanie nonetheless refuses to lie that Effie communicated the pregnancy to her. This, says Wilt, is Jeanie's "anti-sisterhood" and her acquiescence to patriarchal law and morality. Wilt maintains that Jeanie "compensates for the lie she cannot bring herself to tell [which could save the life of a woman]" by her journey to London to plead for Effie's life (137). Wilt's recognition that Jeanie will not lie to save a woman's life--but will lie to save a man's life--takes on a special

horror when juxtaposed with questions Dorothy Van Ghent asks about the novel in her 1953 The English Novel: Form and Function. Observing that the "problem . . . of the lie" is central to the plot and that the "real" crime in the novel is Effie's "sexual indulgence" (117), Van Ghent poses these questions:

> How much is a life worth in scruples as the absolute "truth" of the voiced word? . . . how much is a verbal truth or falsehood worth in the poundage of another person's life? (120)

That Jeanie, albeit unconsciously, placed a superior value to the "poundage" of Staunton's life (over Effie's) is in accord with the perhaps equally unconscious design of patriarchy that values men over women.

In this design, of course, Jeanie would be heroic. She is heroic because she conforms to the order of patriarchy: she is obedient and chaste. And, of course, the naturalness--linked with unchastity--of a female character such as Effie is represented as a danger to the patriarchal order. Some 35-40 years later, however, two prominent Victorian female writers, Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, treat the unchaste woman very differently. They make female violators of androcentric chastity, considered "sinners" by Scott, into heroes and saints. The hero of Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, published in 1853, is an unchaste woman. Unlike Effie Deans's, Ruth's strong affinity with nature is viewed positively. Ruth is saintly, a character George Watt calls "one of the first feminine savior figures in Western literature" (38). In Aurora Leigh, first appearing in 1856, Elizabeth Barrett Browning follows Gaskell's

lead in making an unchaste woman, a "sinner," into a saint. Through their depictions of unchaste women, both Gaskell and Browning subvert the androcentric idea of chastity and suggest a feminine redefinition.

Ruth: Innocence, Repentance, and Redefining Chastity

The publication of Ruth in 1853 caused Elizabeth Gaskell much anxiety. Perhaps she was all too aware that she was radically supplanting the male tradition of setting chaste women against unchaste women, as in The Heart of Midlothian. Furthermore, her brazen tackling, as a woman writer, of the taboo issue of the "fallen" woman, no doubt caused Gaskell's apprehension to surface in Ruth through the words of its most self-righteously patriarchal character, Bradshaw. When Bradshaw learns that Ruth, the heretofore respected and esteemed governess to his children, is a fallen woman whose immorality will certainly now contaminate them, he calls her a hypocrite and a wanton who has "turned right into wrong and wrong into right, [and has taught his children] to be uncertain whether there be any such thing as Vice in the world, or whether it ought not to be looked upon as virtue" (339).[4] Gaskell's fear may be similar to Bradshaw's.

In the novel itself, Gaskell frequently seems to fear, as Bradshaw does, that she has turned "right into wrong" or "wrong into right." The anxiety generated by this uncertainty, clashing with her determination to deal with the "improper" subject of the fallen woman, emerges in several of her letters.

In February, 1853, Gaskell writes to her friend, the artist Eliza Fox: "I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it, I do so manage to shock people," and then complains that the pain over the "hard things" said about the novel has given her "Ruth fever" (Letters 150). In an earlier letter, Gaskell writes to another friend that she is "in a quiver of pain" about Ruth, indicating that she has had "terrible fit[s] of crying" over the "unkind things people were saying" (Letter 148). In the same letter, she refers to critical charges that Ruth presents "an unfit subject for fiction" (Letters 148). Gaskell recounts to Eliza Fox that two male acquaintances have burned their copies. A third "has forbidden his wife to read it; they sit next to us in Chapel and you can't think how 'improper' I feel under their eyes" (Letters 150). She reports in another letter that Ruth has been withdrawn from a London library as being "'unfit for family reading'" (Letters 151). While comparing herself to "St. Sebastian tied to a tree to be shot at with arrows," Gaskell nonetheless acknowledges that she anticipated such reactions. However, she declares that she was "determined notwithstanding to speak my mind about it" and expresses satisfaction that "I have spoken out . . . in the best way I can, and I have no doubt that what was meant so earnestly must do some good" (Letters 148). She acknowledges that "I could have put out much more power, but I wanted to keep it quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or over-strained sentiment I might weaken the force of what I had to say" (Letters 148). This courageous action, coupled with the pain over public and critical

castigation, perhaps accounts for the novel's flaw, a point of wide and varied critical discussion.

Most contemporary and modern critics agree that Ruth is a divided and contradictory novel. While a few contemporary readers, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte Bronte, and W.R. Greg, praised Gaskell's courageous venture into a taboo subject, Greg in particular, in "The False Morality of Lady Novelists," notes a central inconsistency with Gaskell's position on the fallen woman:

> She has first imagined a character as pure, pious, and unselfish as poet ever fancied; and described a lapse from chastity as faultless as such a fault can be; and then, with damaging and unfaithful inconsistency, has given the world's estimate in such matters, by affirming that the sin committed was of so deep a dye that only a life of atoning and enduring persistence could wipe it out. (qtd. in Shelston xiv)

Writing over 134 years later, Jane Spencer observes that:

> first Gaskell minimizes Ruth's guilt, then writes approvingly of her excessive repentance. The core of Gaskell's problem here is the clash within her work of two attitudes of sexuality: one, almost Blakean, that it is natural and innocent, the other that (like other beauties of nature) it is a part of a fallen world, and must be renounced in favor of a higher law. (56-57)

Patsy Stoneman asserts that Gaskell's anxiety over writing on a taboo subject "produced various kinds of overstatement--a prominent guilt-and-redemption structure . . . and an excessively innocent heroine" (100). Like Spencer,

Stoneman suggests that Ruth's sexual innocence has Blakean qualities (101-02). And thus we see the radical inconsistencies in the book, which, as Hilary Schor suggests, divide it into two conflicting parts (67). Part I (the first nine chapters) is Ruth's pre- and post-seduction innocence; Part II is Ruth's life with the Bensons, in which she acknowledges her "sin" and lives a life of repentance.

Gaskell's ambivalence--her feeling of being caught between her instincts about a woman's sexuality and the social and religious mores that limited and crushed that sexuality--are reminiscent of the ambivalence of Margery Kempe. In Part I of Ruth Gaskell writes, without limitation or restraint, of a woman's freely expressed sexual activity. In Part II, her conditioned sense of anxiety over the impropriety of what she has written causes her to acquiesce to patriarchal social and religious mores that limit and deny a woman sexual expression. Ruth learns that her natural sexual freedom and expression are taboo, and she believes what she is told: she is a sinner who must repent of her sin. Despite this contradiction, however, Gaskell subverts the androcentric notion of chastity and creates, perhaps unwittingly, a feminine redefinition.

In part II of the novel Stoneman observes that, in living with the Benson's, Ruth "represses her Blakean memories of sex" (108). It is here that Gaskell's inconsistency emerges as emphasis is put on Ruth's saint-like repentance. Perhaps in an unconscious compromise that would ease her

anxiety over the topic, Gaskell conforms to Victorian mores by having Ruth acquiesce to sexual renunciation. Jane Spencer further suggests that Sally's cutting of Ruth's hair signals Ruth's "willingness" to renounce her sexuality. Noting that long hair on a woman was a traditional emblem of her sexuality, in cutting Ruth's hair Sally is actually "punishing [Ruth] for being a sexual woman and banishing sexuality from the Benson household" (55).[5] Spencer asserts that this renunciation signals Ruth's return to "innocence" (55). Stoneman observes that it is only through Ruth's rejection of her sexuality that the "mechanism" of penance and redemption can work in her (110). However, Stoneman equates Ruth's sexual renunciation with sexual repression, noting that "the only proper response to visible sex was repentance--that is, repression" (110). Gaskell thus attempts to compromise for her "impropriety" in writing the novel. Yet, the constraint she imposes on herself and the social restraint she bows to ironically create contrary assertions about female sexuality and the nature of chastity.

Stoneman alludes to a phenomenon, again similar to the experience of Margery Kempe, that deserves notice in a discussion of Gaskell's ambivalence over female sexuality and the social pressures involved in writing about it. Stoneman suggests that as Ruth's redemption gathers "momentum" as a result of her sexual renunciation, she suffers from bodily "dis-ease." When Ruth struggles with her conflicted feelings towards Bellingham at Abermouth--she is both repulsed and attracted to him--she returns to the

house but then "threw her body half out the window" (Ruth 274). Stoneman observes that Ruth has an acute bodily reaction to her rejection of Bellingham: she feels "blind," "stunned," "her heart felt sore" and she experiences "a sensation of bodily fatigue" (Ruth 304). Stoneman further asserts that the typhus that Ruth contracts from Bellingham which ultimately kills her is "metaphorically, sexual desire" (113). When Dr. Davis tries to dissuade Ruth from going to nurse Bellingham and asks if she loves him, Ruth replies "how can I help caring for him" (Stoneman 114). And, of course, as numerous critics suggest, Ruth's death is the supreme "punitive requirement" for her redemption. Stoneman, however, takes an opposing view. She argues that Ruth's death signifies a "failure" in Ruth's redemption, since her return to Bellingham destroys her former sexual repression, "[allowing] the sexual bond to come to consciousness, defying the formula that repentance=repression" (114-15). Stoneman maintains that death is Ruth's way out of her inability either to "resist" or to "accept" sexual desire (116). While patriarchal mores urge her to resist, Ruth, like Gaskell and Margery Kempe, intuitively moves to accept and fully embrace female sexuality. The conflict kills Ruth and causes Gaskell to compromise.

Yet, in spite of her compromise, Gaskell redefines androcentric chastity in two ways. First, she affirms the purity of Ruth's natural love and sexuality, maintaining that it is chaste. Secondly, Gaskell shows that feminine chastity also reveals itself in non-sexual ways, and is in fact, "virtue." Gaskell sees

Ruth's chastity as her integrity: her refusal to marry Bellingham, despite the social and religious pressures to give her illegitimate son a name and to gain her own respectability. Further, Gaskell gives an example of feminine chastity residing in a man--Benson--as shown by his fidelity and commitment to Ruth. Benson's spiritual and emotional faithfulness to Ruth recalls Heloise's commitment to Abelard and Pamphilia's to Amphilantus. While Benson and Ruth are the two main characters who manifest Gaskell's ambivalence over female sexuality as set against social and religious mores, Gaskell nonetheless turns this ambivalence into a new perspective on chastity.

In the first part of Ruth, (chapters 1-9), Gaskell gives her vision of a sexually unrestrained woman. In this section, Gaskell offers a woman's view of pristine and chaste female sexuality which is free of social and religious limitation. Ruth's love and her sexuality are free and pure, and are not defined or confined by patriarchal social and religious sexual boundaries.

To show Ruth's purity and naturalness, Gaskell establishes Ruth's affinity for and oneness with nature early in the novel, by showing how she is trapped, stifled and oppressed outside of it. The novel begins with dismal scenes of Ruth as a dressmaker's apprentice, in a dreary and tyrannical atmosphere that is inside. Trapped under the tutelage of a demanding and self-serving dressmaker, Ruth is confined long hours indoors, having been wrenched from her country home by an indifferent guardian following the deaths of her parents. Mrs. Mason, the dressmaker, works her apprentices

long and hard hours, and we enter the novel seeing Ruth and her fellow apprentices finally getting a small break at 2 a.m. Ruth, unlike the other girls, immediately "sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage" (4). She "strained her aching eyes in gazing out on the lovely sky of a winter's night. The impulse was strong upon her to . . . sally forth and enjoy the glory; and the time was when that impulse would have been instantly followed . . ." (5). Ruth's attunement with nature is recognized by others, especially Bellingham, her seducer, who thinks, when he first sees her: "It would be an exquisite delight to attract and tame her wildness, just as he had often allured and tamed timid fawns in his mother's park" (33). Ruth finds liberation in her Sunday walks through woods and meadows with Bellingham; these walks are her only opportunity to escape the indoor, unnatural drudgery of the dressmaking shop, and she is desperate for someone's interest and attention, which Bellingham readily provides.

Ruth, only fifteen, is "innocent and snow-pure"; her purity consists both in her naivete and her at-one-ness with nature. She is thoroughly unsuspecting of Bellingham's real motives:

> She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting <u>the</u> subject of a woman's life--if, indeed wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words. . . . (44)

And, Ruth responds intuitively to awareness and stimuli. Her sensual stirrings for nature enchant her: she "delight[s] at the new tender beauty of an early spring day in February . . . [and] she burst[s] into an exclamation of delight at the evening glory of mellow light . . . " (40). Yet, with Bellingham, she senses something amiss in her delight: she "wondered why a strange undefined feeling had made her imagine she was doing wrong in walking [with him]" (39). After Mrs. Mason discovers Ruth and Bellingham together on a walk and fires her, Bellingham tricks the reluctant Ruth to go to London with him, and it is here, presumably, that Ruth is seduced.

We next see Ruth and Bellingham living together in Wales, where there is no mention of Ruth's initial sense that there is somehow something "not exactly wrong, but yet as if it were not right" (41). Instead, we see Ruth thrilling in the natural and wild beauty that surrounds her. There is no mention of her sexual relationship with Bellingham, yet it is implied in the imagery. Ruth experiences an "opening to a new sense; vast ideas of beauty and grandeur filled her mind at the sight of the mountains now first beheld in full majesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight . . ." (65). She frequently goes on morning walks by herself, "brushing the dew-drops from the short crisp grass" and "pleasures" in the rain, seeing "the swift fleeting showers come athwart the sunlight like a rush of silver arrows" (65). Ruth is completely immersed in nature, and, she wears a "white gown." She is also completely unaware that she is "the object of remark" (70). Fellow guests

at the inn as well as the innkeeper and his wife comment on the irony that Ruth appears "very modest and innocent-looking in her white gown" (71) while commenting on the "shame" of having "such people" under their roof.

Ruth is wholly unaware that she is doing anything considered shameful, until one day, while stooping to play with a baby in town, she is hit by a young boy who calls her "a bad naughty girl--mamma said so" (71). The boy's physical affront to Ruth and her being called "naughty" disturbs her with a "new idea," and "she could not put into words the sense she was just beginning to entertain of the estimation in which she was henceforward to be held" (73). Until this time, Ruth is wholly unconscious that she has committed any "offense." Her sexuality--and its expression--has been unimpeded by patriarchal social or religious convention.

Further, in her presentation of Ruth's pristine sexual attunement with nature, Gaskell subverts androcentric notions of a woman's purity by using the word "white," the symbol for purity, in reference to Ruth. We are reminded of Margery Kempe and her wearing of white: in Wales, Ruth's white dresses cause consternation among the townspeople. In the most implicitly sexual scene, Ruth and Bellingham walk into a grove, find water-lilies by a pond and Bellingham adorns her hair with white flowers: "[Ruth] stood in her white dress against the trees which grew around . . . [d]own in that green hollow they were quite in harmony" (74). Later, when Ruth gives birth to Leonard, "the earth put on her beautiful robe of white" and Leonard is laid by the side

of his "white" mother (160), giving off images of whiteness and light as Ruth "lay encircling her mysterious holy child" (164). White also symbolizes Ruth's purity in another way: her sexuality is unfettered by social and religious constraints.

In contrast, Gaskell uses the color red to signify the infringement of social restraint on Ruth's sexuality, and the shame and limitation such restraint imposes. When she is struck by the young boy, his face is red. The face of the boy's nurse also reddens, while in contrast Ruth "stood, white and still . . . "(72). In particular, red specifically signifies the shame associated with the unchaste woman. When Jemima Bradshaw learns Ruth is a fallen woman, her cheeks become "flushed and red" (324); when Ruth tells Leonard he is illegitimate, she sees "the red flush come into his cheek, and it stung her as the first token of that shame which was to be his portion through life" (343). Ruth's purity is natural and white; her shame is socially induced and red.

The glaring contrast Gaskell creates between natural purity and social shame leads to a crucial question regarding Gaskell's real thoughts on the constraints imposed on female sexual expression. Hilory Schor, in a discussion of Ruth's affinity and oneness with nature, articulates the question well: "if Ruth is indeed the daughter of nature, and the way to her heart is through natural pleasures, what then is the sin of her fall into sexuality?" (65). Further, Shor asserts that Ruth's natural innocence is "perfect" and that she is a fallen woman only by the standards of social "limitations" (65). Until Ruth is

hit by the young boy, "Gaskell cannot make Ruth's sexual pleasure--or for that matter her desire--into a sin" (66). Gaskell suggests that a woman's sexual desire and pleasure is pure, natural, and spotless when it is unhindered by patriarchal social and religious codes.

While Gaskell subverts patriarchal notions of a woman's chastity by presenting a sexually active and unmarried woman as pure and "white," she also redefines chastity as Ruth's love for and fidelity to her lover. When Bellingham becomes sick while they are in Wales, Ruth's natural instinct is to care for him and never leave his side--because she loves him. Confronted with the illness, Ruth "put away every thought of the past or future . . . [she] watched, and waited, and prayed [for him] whom she loved so much . . ." (79-80). When Mrs. Bellingham comes to nurse her son, Ruth hides, under the advice of the innkeeper, so that Mrs. Bellingham will not discover her son's affair. However, Ruth's faithful concern for Bellingham cannot be deterred. Ruth sleeps outside his door, only to be discovered as a "white apparition" (85) by Mrs. Bellingham the next morning (who then immediately accuses Ruth of being a "profligate" who has led her son astray) (85). When Bellingham recovers and realizes he has grown tired of Ruth and, under pressure from his mother, decides to leave, Ruth runs after his carriage. The narrator acknowledges here that "Ruth's own love was too faithful" (92). Although rightfully considered naive by readers and critics alike, Ruth's love is nonetheless chaste if considered from the perspective of the redefinition of

chastity offered by Heloise and Mary Wroth. Gaskell, like Mary Wroth, does not specifically use the word "chaste" or "chastity" in her redefinition of the term. Since Wroth's and Gaskell's redefinitions are theoretically similiar to Heloise's use of the phrase "chastity of spirit," their analogous concepts can be included within Heloise's idea of "chastity." Accordingly, the only response Ruth knows is fidelity to one whom she thinks she loves. Like Heloise and Pamphilia, Ruth's spiritual, emotional, and sexual fidelity, love, and commitment to a beloved other are her chastity.

The second part of the novel, which narrates Ruth's life with the Bensons, appears to be Gaskell's acquiescence to androcentric chastity. In this part of the novel, Gaskell appears to contradict her earlier (and more overtly radical) presentation of Ruth as a sexual woman who is pure. Ruth's experiences of being abandoned by Bellingham and taken in by the Bensons, under the guise of being the widowed "Mrs. Denbigh," has taught her that her sexual behavior is considered unacceptable and that her life of hiding and deceit is the price she must pay for her "sin." Ruth willingly submits to this social condemnation. However, while Gaskell appears to support the notion that Ruth is (androcentrically) unchaste by having her grow ashamed of her former sexual behavior, Gaskell actually subverts this by redefining chastity in a new and feminine way.

What Gaskell does is place chastity in a non-sexual sphere, while also offering a look at womanly "virtue" which does not have sexuality at its basis.

When Ruth and Bellingham meet at Abermouth, she is at first stunned, and then thrown into a complex of emotions. While she has come to recognize the brutality of his action in abandoning her in Wales and realizes that he does not love her, she acknowledges that she still does love him (274). Yet, she feels a "strange exultant sense of power over herself . . . [and is] strangely at ease in her sense of power" (276). When she sees Bellingham she looks "straight into his face" (277), and speaks to him in a "tone of quiet authority" (281). And when Bellingham offers to marry Ruth, she refuses. She also refuses to capitulate to his threat that she is in his "power" (300). Although Bellingham offers a "name" and legitimacy for Leonard, and the making of Ruth into an "honest" woman, she refuses. In Gaskell's redefinition, as in Heloise's and Mary Wroth's, Ruth is chaste: she has integrity, self-respect, and remains faithful to herself. Her chastity is her refusal to compromise these virtues. In her essay "'Take Her Up Tenderly': Elizabeth Gaskell's Treatment of the Fallen Woman," Suzann Bick argues that Gaskell undercuts the Victorian rejection of the fallen woman by having Ruth mature and emotionally develop after her seduction. Ruth's moral development in Part II, after the seduction in Part I, causes her to realize that she can resist Bellingham's advances and assert her own will. And, Bick notes, Gaskell rejects the idea that marriage can make an "honest" woman out of a fallen woman (25). Ruth doesn't want to marry Bellingham--and she doesn't. She asserts her moral integrity and

unwillingness to acquiesce to a social norm in order to gain respectability for herself and her son. This integrity and purity of belief is her chastity.

Further, Gaskell does something new by creating a male character who exhibits the qualities of feminine chastity. Benson, the Dissenting clergyman, takes Ruth in after she has been abandoned in Wales. While Benson perhaps most clearly mirrors Gaskell's ambivalence towards female sexuality and patriarchal social and religious mores, he nonetheless undermines androcentric chastity, as does Ruth in the second part of the novel, by redefining it in a feminine way. Although the time at Benson's home reflects the period of repentance for Ruth which leads to her ultimate redemption, Benson resists patriarchal notions of unchaste women by protecting Ruth's identity. While he believes Ruth has sinned, he recognizes her goodness and loves her. His love for and fidelity to Ruth and her son is his chastity. When Ruth's "sin" becomes public knowledge in Eccleston and she insists on leaving so that the Bensons will not have to share in her "disgrace," Benson replies that her sin makes no difference to him, and that she has no "right" to leave her son--that, he says, would be the "sin" (355-56). While Benson believes that Ruth's unmarried sexual behavior must be expiated (God has placed on Ruth, he says, "a reasonable and just penance" (357)), he nonetheless subverts this by introducing what his sister Faith calls "new thinking" on the issue of fallen women. Benson tries to defend Ruth to

the outraged Bradshaw after Bradshaw has learned the truth. Says Benson to Bradshaw's charge that fallen women are "depraved":

> Now I wish God would give me power to speak out convincingly what I believe to be His truth, that not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many--how many the Great Judgement Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore penitent hearts on earth--many, many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue. . . . Is it not time to change some of our ways of thinking and acting? (350-51)

And, despite the fact that the influential Bradshaw refuses to continue attending Benson's church (which results in the withdrawal of other families), Benson remains faithful in harboring Ruth, reminding her that "nothing can alter" his and his sister's love for her (354). This then, is Gaskell's portrayal of female chastity in a male character, which suggests that Gaskell, like Mary Wroth, refuses to categorize or gender the concept.

Thus, Gaskell's Ruth shows the pressures and tensions, both inward and outward, experienced by a woman writer who dared challenge patriarchal social and religious codes on female sexuality. But the positive and creative aspects of Elizabeth Gaskell's anxiety merged to form a new way of looking at chastity. Gaskell suggests a female redefinition that expands a stultifying androcentric definition which centered itself primarily on women and the constraining of their sexuality. Gaskell, like Heloise and Mary Wroth, attempts to remove chastity from its confinement within patriarchal codes on women and their sexuality. Gaskell contributes to Heloise's and Wroth's expansion of

chastity by helping to broaden it into a more inclusively human concept of spiritual, emotional and sexual fidelity and love.

Aurora Leigh: Woman as Saintly, Outspoken, and Chaste

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell after the publication of Ruth that "I am grateful to you as a woman for having so treated such a subject" (qtd. in Leighton 145). And, as many critics point out, it is evident that the character of Marian Erle, the fallen woman of Aurora Leigh, is taken to some degree from Gaskell's Ruth. But unlike Gaskell, Barrett Browning had no reservations or qualms about tackling the subject of the fallen woman.

Barrett Browning's letters about Aurora Leigh are much different from the fears about Ruth that Gaskell expresses in her letters. In an 1844 letter to her cousin and friend John Kenyon, Barrett Browning declares that she wants to write a poem dealing with "the aspects and manners of modern life, and flinching at nothing of the conventional" (Letters 204 vol 1). She writes to Robert Browning a year later that her intention is to write "a sort of novel poem . . . running into the midst of our conventions, & rushing into drawing rooms & the like 'where angels fear to tread'; & so, meeting face to face & without mask the Humanity of the age, & speaking the truth as I conceive of it, plainly" (Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett 31). And unlike Gaskell, Barrett Browning relished hearing about the "small scandals" Aurora

Leigh generated, delighting that some women felt "morally corrupted" by the novel-poem and others forbade their daughters to read it (Leighton 43). At the heart of Barrett Browning's attack on convention is her anger over prostitution, and underlying that her exasperation over the taboo on women's speaking of sexual subjects.

The vehicle by which she criticizes these issues is her characterization of Marian Erle. Marian, a poor, lower class woman whose abusive mother tried to sell her into sexual slavery, is rescued by Romney Leigh in a hospital. Romney proposes marriage to her, but Marian is persuaded by Lady Waldemar (who is in love with Romney) to desert him on their wedding day. However, Lady Waldemar tricks Marian by setting her up in a Paris brothel where she is drugged and raped. She becomes pregnant. Later, she and her child are discovered by Aurora Leigh in Paris, and they go to Italy to live with her.

Marian Erle, however, is much different from Gaskell's Ruth. First, Ruth is a both a "seduced" and "fallen" woman, and enters into sexual activity unaware of patriarchal sexual prohibitions for women. Marian is a victim of rape: she does not willingly enter into sexual activity. We have no sense of Marian's sexual desire, as we have of Ruth's.[6] As Leighton points out, Barrett Browning's purpose in writing about a raped woman is different than Gaskell's. Barrett Browning wants to write about taboo sexual subjects to force women to abandon their "respectable" silence and end the exploitation

and victimization of women (Leighton 147). Barrett Browning directly confronts the "code" for women, just as present in the nineteenth century as it was in the middle ages and Renaissance, that equated chastity with silence. Unlike Mary Wroth who perhaps circumvented the code by writing not of the chaste but of the constant woman, Barrett Browning openly presents an unchaste woman speaking out against her sexual victimization.

In Aurora Leigh, Marian as raped woman not only speaks out but also accuses "decent happy folk" (Book 6, 1220) (particularly women) who are guilty of complicity with the crime by their refusal to speak out.[7] Marian recounts her story to Aurora and indicates the boundaries she feels in disclosing it: "We wretches cannot tell out all our wrong,/ Without offence to decent happy folk./ I know that we must scrupulously hint/ With half-words, delicate reserves, the thing/ Which no one scrupled we should feel in full" (Book 6, 1220-1224). Leighton notes that Marian Erle signifies an advancement in nineteenth century literature on the fallen woman: unlike Ruth Hilton, Hetty Sorrel or Hester Prynne, Marian accuses those whose silence makes them complicitous in the victimization of women. Marian speaks out, whereas other fallen and seduced women, like Ruth, acquiesce (149). Thus, Barrett Browning's Marian Erle "breaks the intriguing enigma that surrounds the figure of the fallen woman, and breaks the ideological association, so often used to justify her in Victorian literature, between innocence and silence" (Leighton 149). Dorothy Mermin agrees, commenting on Marian's

outspokenness as a fallen woman and her indictment of "respectable" society (especially women) who refused to breach the taboo that only kept women victimized. Mermin declares that for Marian, and thus for all women, "speaking what is not supposed to be spoken is a sign of strength and courage and a source of energy and pleasure" (217). Thus, then, does Barrett Browning redefine what female virtue and chastity are: the courage to become a self in a cramped and restricting patriarchal culture that limits and victimizes women. A woman's chastity, in part, is being true to her own convictions and sense of self as created by herself--not by a constraining culture. And Barrett Browning's conception of a woman's "saintliness" is much different from Gaskell's. Marian, like Ruth, is presented as saintly, but she is a saint who accuses--a woman who speaks.

Barrett Browning's portrayal of Marian as "saint" breaks an androcentric notion of female saintliness. Marian is presented as an outspoken saint who defies patriarchal moral law. Leighton says Barrett Browning attacks the myth of a moral law which holds women and their sexuality at its center and exposes it as the "mythologized superstructure of social inequality" ("Men made the laws" 111). As Barrett Browning narrates Marian's story, it is established early on that Marian is a victim of the social system. From birth, Marian recognizes herself as a social outcast, being born in a hut illegally located on a landlord's property: "No place for her,/ By man's law! born an outlaw, was this babe./ Her first cry . . . / Was wrong against the social code .

. ." (Book 3, 841-45). Marian also recognizes that her standing outside, or against, the social code makes her a "nettle," pricking against middle class and patriarchal law, morals and respectability: "We're nettles, some of us,/ And give offense by the act of springing up" (Book 3, 854-55). She also realizes the dangerous position she is in as a "nettle": "if we leave the damp side of the wall,/ The hoes, of course, are on us" (Book 3, 856-57).

As a woman, Marian's low standing in the social class system also marks her as a sexual victim. Barrett Browning's description of Marian largely centers on describing her hair, a symbol, as we have seen in Ruth, of a woman's sexuality. While Barrett Browning's description of Marian briefly mentions such physical characteristics as her skin color, dimple and mouth, she devotes a more lengthy description to her hair:

> The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
> In doubt 'twixt dark and bright, nor left you clear
> To name the colour. Too much hair perhaps
> (I'll name a fault here) for so small a head,
> Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,
> As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight. . . . (Book 3, 813-18)

Marian's mass of hair becomes a distinguishing part of her features. As a child, traveling from town to town with her itinerant parents, she is stopped by strangers and asked "if she meant to lodge the birds/ In all that hair . . ." (Book 3, 965-66). And, when Marian's mother attempts to sell her to the local squire, she quickly unbraids her hair:

> And snatching, in a sort of breathless rage,
> Her daughter's headgear comb, let down the hair
> Upon her, like a sudden waterfall . . .
> When the child . . .
> Could clear her blinded face from all that stream
> of tresses . . . there, a man stood, with beast's eyes. . . .(Book 3, 1044-1050)

Thus is Marian marked as a social and sexual victim. Despite this, however, she is heroic and saintly. She flees from her mother and the squire, only to collapse later and be taken to a hospital, where she meets Romney Leigh. Romney finds her a job in a seamstress's house. When one of the seamstresses becomes deathly ill, Marian, at the expense of losing her job, goes to nurse her. Unlike Gaskell's Ruth, whose heroism and saintliness seem more a consequence of her repentance for her fall, Marian here exhibits saintly qualities that have no association with her sexual status.

Other associations of Marian's saintliness are predicated on her sexual status as a fallen woman, but Barrett Browning uses these to undermine patriarchal sexual labeling of women. After Marian's rape and the birth of her child, Aurora discovers her in Paris. It is here that Marian chooses to stand outside the patriarchal law that condemns her--all the while that Barrett Browning suggests her saintlike qualities. On seeing Marian and child, Aurora's response to Marian is patriarchally "moral," as she struggles with the truth that Marian is a fallen woman. Yet, like Gaskell's, Barrett Browning's

descriptions of Marian (as fallen woman) frequently includes the word "white." As Aurora and Marian initially meet, Marian "fluttered . . . like a cyclemen/ As white" (Book 6, 445-46); her face was "white as wax" (Book 6, 485); and when she tells Aurora that she must get home because "there's one at home . . . has need of me," Marian "looked the whiter for her smile" (Book 6, 487-88). Like Gaskell's descriptions of Ruth's child, Barrett Browning also presents Marian's child as angel-like. Barrett Browning, in imagery reminiscent of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," shows Marian's baby awakening to his mother's presence: "As half perplexed between the angelhood/ He had been away to visit in his sleep . . . gradually/ He saw his mother's face, accepting it/ In change for heaven itself . . ." (Book 6, 586-90). And Marian, like Ruth, sees her child not as a sign of shame but of purity and beauty:

> She leaned above him (drinking him as wine)
> In that extremity of love . . .
> Self-forgot, cast out self,
> And drowning in the transport of the sight . . .
> then, slowly as he smiled,
> she smiled, too . . .
> And stood in it a-glow. 'How beautiful!'
> said she. (Book 6, 599-612)

Despite the love and beauty of the mother-child relationship, Aurora still holds to patriarchal law, wondering "is a woman to be fooled aside/ From putting vice down, with that woman's toy,/ A baby" (Book 6, 615-17). Marian, standing

far outside patriarchal law, reproaches Aurora, angrily asserting that she has a "right" to her child:

> I have as sure a right
> As any glad proud mother in the world,
> Who sets her darling down to cut his teeth,
> Upon her church-ring. If she talks of laws,
> I talk of law! I claim my mother-dues
> by law,--the law which now is paramount;
> The common law, by which the poor and weak
> Are trodden underfoot by vicious men,
> And loathed for ever after by the good. (Book 6, 661-69)

Leighton maintains that in this passage Marian condemns the morality by which she has been judged, and suggests that Marian's defense of herself (as having obligation only to the inner "law" of motherhood) lessens the absolutism of patriarchal moral law, revealing it as "a social commodity affordable by the rich" ("Men made the laws" 113). And in this, Leighton suggests, "the very nature of vice and virtue becomes uncertain" ("Men made the laws" 113). Aurora struggles with this uncertainty, wondering if it is merely "[making] henceforth a cushion of our faults/ To sit and practice easy virtues on?" (Book 6, 726-27). Marian remonstrates again, asking why she is thought to be "wicked," noting the disparity between God's knowledge of her, which trusts her with a baby, in light of society's condemnation of her. Aurora protests that Marian is not "wicked," but merely "complaisant" to the wrong she has done in allowing herself to be seduced. With that, Marian explodes, crying out that she has <u>not</u> been seduced, but "murdered." Aurora finally

realizes her participation in Marian's condemnation. "Utterly broken," Aurora admits her "wrong" and "weeping in a tender rage" addresses Marian as "sweet holy Marian!" (Book 6, 778-83). Aurora asserts Marian's "innocence . . . so surely is your whiteness found/ Through all dark facts" (Book 6, 790-91). As Marian recounts the story of her rape and subsequent escape from the brothel, Aurora's understanding and conversion heighten. When Marian tells of her job as a servant, while pregnant, to a vain and frivolous young married woman who is having an affair (who calls Marian "no reputable girl . . . [having] a mask of saintship" (Book 7, 44-47)), Aurora comments that such women "keep/ Their chastity so darned with perfidy" that she'd rather "take the wind-side of the stews/ Than touch such women with my finger end" (Book 7, 97-103). At that, Aurora calls Marian her "sweetest sister" and "saint" and invites her and the child to come live with her in Italy.

Later, Aurora writes to Lady Waldemar and confronts her with her crime of tricking Marian into a brothel. After she vents her rage, (and feels "satisfied") she watches the sleeping Marian and child. The image is reminiscent of Ruth and her baby, a "round of sequestration white/ In which they have wrapt earth's foundlings, heaven's/ elect!" (Book 7, 393-94). Both Marian and her child are "folded innocences, self-complete . . . there seemed no sin, no shame, no wrath, no grief" (Book 7, 383-85). This image of perfect mother-child harmony and love becomes a feminine redefinition of chastity,

something that goes far beyond a woman's sexual status as defined by patriarchal law.

Barrett Browning redefines chastity in another way. When Romney offers, for the second time, to marry Marian, she refuses. Since she feels herself outside patriarchal law, she has no need of a husband to make her honorable or to reclaim her chastity. She has learned that

> a woman poor or rich,
> Despised or honoured, is a human soul;
> And what her soul is, --that, she is herself,
> Although she should be spit upon of men . . .
> And, being chaste
> And honest, and inclined to do the right,
> And love the truth. . . . (Book 9, 325-35)

Marian sees her first "vocation" not to patriarchal law, which could make her "respectable" in its eyes, but to her own sense of chastity, as she defines it, which is fidelity to herself and her child. She asserts that "Here's a hand, shall keep/ For ever clean without a wedding ring,/ To tend my boy" (Book 9, 431-33). As Leighton comments, Marian "asserts her right to live by a morality free of any Christian or social legitimacy" ("Men made laws" 113). And, Aurora recognizes this as Marian's purity and her saintliness: she calls Marian "pure-- . . . as I'm a woman" (Book 9, 270) and comments to Romney that "Her instinct's holy" (Book 9, 454). In transcending patriarchal law, Leighton, like Sally Mitchell, suggests that Marian is a "pure" woman. Marian places herself beyond patriarchal law, and Leighton notes that Aurora supports this by

recognizing that if Marian and Romney did marry, the child of her rape and the possible children of her and Romney's union would never be equal before the law in terms of inheritance rights. Free from the legalizing limits placed on a woman by marriage, Marian "insists" that the child be hers, as mother ("Men made laws" 113).

Chastity is thus redefined by Barrett Browning through Marian's purity and fidelity to herself and her child. Marian chooses to go beyond the limitations of patriarchal law, and while considered unchaste by its standards, is deemed chaste and holy by a woman's standards. Why else would Victorian women writers, working as Barrett Browning and Gaskell did under the constraints of an oppressive patriarchal sexual code for women, make unchaste women into saints?

Thus we see, in looking at the patriarchal standards for a woman's chastity as illustrated by Scott's Heart of Midlothian, the redefinition and broadening of these standards in Gaskell's Ruth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh. Both Gaskell and Barrett Browning, like Heloise and Mary Wroth, expand the definition of chastity by removing it from the confines and controls of a patriarchal code for women's sexual behavior and expression. And we see Gaskell, like Heloise, refuse (at least at first) to negate or restrain a woman's sexuality in her redefinition: Gaskell openly embraces the freedom and naturalness of a woman's sexual expression in Part I of Ruth, much as Heloise celebrates her sexuality in regard to Abelard.

As all the women writers we have examined place themselves outside of patriarchal codes for female sexual behavior, we nonetheless see them centralize in their redefinition of chastity the primacy of spiritual, emotional, and sexual fidelity to a beloved other.

NOTES

1. Mitchell's categories do not all neatly apply to the situations of the women we will discuss in each of the three novels. Effie Deans in The Heart of Midlothian is "fallen" since she consciously chooses her relationship with Staunton; Ruth Hilton in Ruth is seduced, but chooses to continue her relationship with Bellingham after the initial seduction; Marian Erle in Aurora Leigh is raped. When referring to each of these women, I will use the term "fallen," a nineteenth century expression generally applied to an unchaste woman, regardless of the circumstances that led to her "fall" from her higher (than a man's) moral position.

2. It is interesting to note that both Jeanie and Effie undertake journeys to the city, which for women, always connotes sexual danger and temptation. (We are reminded of Jeanie's warnings to Effie to exercise "utmost caution in her conduct" before Effie leaves for Edinburgh). Men's journeys to cities usually involve either danger or success, not sexual temptation. (Wordsworth's "Michael" reveals the perils males could encounter in the city). Since Jeanie successfully negotiates London, a larger, more sophisticated and therefore more "dangerous" city for women than Edinburgh, Jeanie's resistance to temptation could be viewed as considerably stronger than Effie's.

3. The word "natural" has negative associations in the Calvinist vocabularly; it is predominately used in a positive sense in the lexicon of Romanticism. Scott seems to blend Calvinist and Romantic understandings of the term when he refers to both the freedom, pleasure <u>and</u> danger that swirl about Effie's "naturalness."

4. (All quotations from <u>Ruth</u> are taken from The World's Classics edition of <u>Ruth</u>, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, ed., Alan Shelston). Note the similarity between Jeanie Dean's phrasing when she refuses to lie by saying that Effie revealed her pregnancy to her: "I canna change right into wrang, or make that true which is false" (160).

5. Helena Michie, in <u>The Flesh Made Word</u>, observes the frequency of usage of a woman's hair as a sexual symbol in nineteenth century literature. Michie notes that Milton perhaps set in motion the association of women's hair and sexuality, commenting that "Milton's Eve's 'wanton ringlets' [are the symbol that] foreshadows her fall" (74).

6. There is some critical disagreement over this issue. Cora Kaplan, in her article "<u>Aurora Leigh</u>" says that in having Marian drugged and raped, Barrett Browning denies Marian "self-generated sexuality," which frees her from any decision to be sexual or responsible for that sexuality (154). Leighton disagrees, insisting that Marian's "unconsciousness" to the fact of her rape "is not a pretext to prove her innocence, but a truth to prove the guilt of the system" ("Men made the laws" 112).

7. All quotations are taken from Aurora Leigh, ed. Margaret Reynolds, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important question to be asked at the end of an inquiry such as this is: so what? So what has been learned about men and women and the historically unequal relations between them? In the final analysis, does the redefinition of androcentric chastity by historically and culturally diverse women writers make any difference? If so, what difference does their redefinition make, and to what vision does it point?

That the women writers examined here resist and redefine an androcentric concept tells us something important: their resistance and redefinition signal that the concept is insufficient. As this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, the androcentric concept and definition of chastity is inadequate because it does not include women's voices, their experiences, and their ideas. Androcentric chastity, like all androcentric concepts, is only a part of an idea that has much broader possibilities. An investigation such as this, however small, is important so that through diverse historical periods and literary texts, we can discern, value and appropriate what is lacking in the definition--women's perspective and contribution.

Discovering what is lacking in one particular androcentric definition suggests the possibilities of exploring what other androcentric concepts, ideas and theories might look like redefined. But most significantly,

redefinition of androcentric concepts offers an alternative to the patriarchal paradigm out of which androcentric definitions have emerged.

The patriarchal paradigm is exclusive and prescriptive. It is exclusive in that it is based on the hierarchical idea of male superiority and female inferiority. The belief in gender hierarchy and sexual superiority placed men in the exclusivist position of being recognized, validated and authorized as the sole makers of epistemology for their cultures. Men alone were seen as responsible for developing, systematizing and authorizing their culture's thought, ideas, concepts, definitions and institutions.

In this dissertation, the patriarchal paradigm reveals itself in the review of the origins of androcentric chastity in the pre-Christian and patristic eras, and in the historical examination and literary illustration of androcentric chastity in the medieval, Renaissance and nineteenth century periods. In these historical and literary surveys, we see that women's voices, experiences, and ideas are excluded from the recognized construction and articulation of the idea of chastity validated and appropriated by the various cultures. Moreover, as the recognized and exclusive creator and authorizer of ideas in general and of chastity in particular, men naturally became the prescribers of norms and behaviors for those below them--women. We see the prescribing of "codes" for women's sexual behavior played out in the historical and literary review of androcentric chastity.

But in the exclusivity and prescriptiveness of the patriarchal paradigm, we can speculate, too, that men's impositions on women and particularly on women's sexuality can confine and burden them as well. We can wonder how Abelard might have been encumbered by his medieval culture's idea of sexuality, chastity, maleness and femaleness. We can reflect on how Bellingham, the seducer of Ruth in Gaskell's novel, becomes less human because he lives out--albeit perversely--his culture's idea of how men, as superior and dominant, are to relate to women.

The patriarchal paradigm of exclusion and prescription, and the burdens it places on women and men, serves as the backdrop from which I have explored women's subversion and refashioning of ideas about androcentric chastity. The result of their reshaping of chastity is that the women writers also construct and articulate an alternate paradigm. As noted in the Introduction, some of the women writers may not have been immediately aware that they indeed were "redefining" chastity. But cognizant or not, the various ways they resist a patriarchal sexual code that narrowly defined women as chaste or unchaste causes them to challenge the paradigm in which they found themselves. For the women writers I have examined, the patriarchal paradigm proves inadequate in its insistence that male experience and insight is dominate, superior, valid and authoritative over female experience and insight.

The paradigm created out of the women writers' redefinition of chastity is inclusive and mutual. Their redefinition regards chastity as a non-gender specific, non-sex-centered "virtue" that focuses on inner qualities within both male and female. Moreover, the paradigm holds that human experience can be valid and credible outside of patriarchal institutions, law, sexual codes, and gender norms. One's experience, the women writers suggest, cannot always be categorized, confined, defined, nor legitimatized within such boundaries. Further, one's experience or behavior cannot be prescribed solely by those who create, maintain and authorize patriarchal institutions.

The feminine redefinition of androcentric chastity, and the alternate paradigm that emerges from it, goes far beyond merely pointing out the abuses of patriarchy on women. It invites women to move beyond anger and blaming men for women's historical victimization, and also invites men to move beyond seeing themselves as the victimizers, or the heroes, depending on the view. The women's paradigm is inclusive and mutual in that it sees itself not in opposition, but in relation to men.

Why the women writers' redefinition and alternate paradigm are important is because they invite us--the male and female persons who constitute humanity--to realize our capacity for transformation. The paradigm created by the women writers offers a constructive invitation to build a new, wholistic ideology and a new world, with the consciousness to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. The paradigm of inclusiveness and

mutuality offers chastity as an ideal shared by men and women. It is an ideal that refuses to gender the inner qualities that foster integrity of the self and lasting fidelity in a spiritual, emotional, and sexual relationship with a beloved other. This chaste ideal goes far beyond patriarchal prescriptions for behavior predominately created by one sex and aimed at the other. Women's redefinition of chastity urges us no longer to think of "male" chastity or "female" chastity as exclusive of or as somehow different from the other.

The feminine redefinition of an androcentric concept such as chastity, emerging across discrete historical and literary periods, offers us an invitation to look at how we have been thinking and acting, and how that thinking and acting has not been freeing to all human persons. Redefining androcentric concepts challenges and moves us to a non-patriarchal, alternate paradigm, to living and thinking differently and to expanding the possibilities of articulating who we are, and the gift we are, as humanity. The act of redefining androcentric concepts is thus "revolutionary," for, as Rachel Du Plessis observes, "the revolutionary desire [is] that feeling of infinite possibility" (152).

What redefinitions of androcentric concepts, and androcentric chastity in particular, can summon us to is indeed revolutionary and transformative. Redefinitions can invite us to fuller and more expansive understandings of ourselves and our relationships with one another. And, as Mary Wroth tells us, they can call us to "the true forme of love."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambrose, Saint. "De virginibus." Book I. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Schaff, Phillip and Henry Wace, eds. Vol. X. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Inc, 1976.

Atkinson, Clarissa. "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages." Journal of Family History 8 (1983): 31-42.

Auerbach,Nina. Woman and the Demon. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Augustine, Saint. Basic Writings of St. Augustine. New York: Random House, 1948.

---. "De Genesi ad litteram." Ancient Christian Writers. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., trans. Vol. 1, Books 1-6. New York: Newman Press, 1982.

---. "De Genesi Contra Manichaeos." Saint Augustine on Genesis. Roland J. Teske, S.J., trans. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990.

---."De Libero Arbitrio." Augustine: Earlier Writings. trans. John H.S. Burleigh. Vol VI. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953.

Beiderwell, Bruce. Power and Punishment in Scott's Novels. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992.

Beilin, Elaine. "'The Onely Perfect Virtue': Constancy in Mary Wroth's Pamphilia to Amphilantus." Spenser Studies. 2 (1981) 229-45.

---. Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Biblia Sacra. Vulgate ed. 1881.

Bick, Suzann. "'Take Her Up Tenderly': Elizabeth Gaskell's Treatment of the Fallen Woman." Essays in Arts and Sciences. 18 (1989): 17-27.

Bloch, Howard. Medieval Misogyny and the Creation of Western Romantic Love. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Bogin, Meg. The Women Troubadours. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980.

Borrenson, Kari. Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981.

Bosse, Roberta Bux. "Female Sexual Behavior in the Late Middle Ages: Ideal and Actual." Fifteenth-Century Studies. 10 (1984) 15-31.

Brown, Peter. Augustine of Hippo. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

---. The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Bugge, John. Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975.

Bullough, Vern and Bonnie Bullough. Prostitution. New York: Crown Publishers, 1978.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "'And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages." Gender and Religion. Carolyn Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell and Paula Richman, eds. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

---. "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages." Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part I. New York: Urzone, 1989.

Caddon, Joan. Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Castelli, Elizabeth. "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity." Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion. 2 (1986): 61-88.

Castiglione, Baldesar. The Book of the Courtier. Friench Simpson, ed. and trans. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1959.

Chapple, J.A.V. and Arthur Pollard, eds. The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Christ, Carol P. Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest. 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Clark, Elizabeth. Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979.

---. The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Cockshut, A.O.J. The Achievement of Walter Scott. New York University Press, 1969.

Cooper, Sherod M., Jr. The Sonnets of "Astrophil and Stella": A Stylistic Study. The Hague: Mouton and Co., Publishers, 1968.

Daiches, David. "Scott's Achievement as Novelist." 19th Century Fiction. 6 (1951): 81-173.

Davis, Jana. "Sir Walter Scott's The Heart of Midlothian and Scottish Common Sense Morality." Mosaic. 21 (Winter, 1988): 55-63.

Delaney, Sheila. Writing Woman. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

Di Cesare, Maria A., and Ephim Fogel. A Concordance to the Poems of Ben Jonson. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Dictionary of the Middle Ages. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989.

Dobson, E.J. The Origins of the "Ancrene Wisse." Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Donne, John. John Donne: The Complete English Poems. A.J. Smith, ed. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

Du Plessis, Rachel Blau. "For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production--The Debate Over a Female Aesthetic." The Future of Difference. Eds. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine. New Bruswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

Encyclopedia of Early Christianity. New York: Garland Publishing, 1990.

Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi. Karl Rahner, ed. New York: The Seabury Press, 1975.

Ferguson, Margaret. "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers." The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes, eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Fleishman, Avrom. The English Historical Novel. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.

Ford, J. Massynbaerde. "Virginity." The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

Foucault, Michel. The Case of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality. Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Georgianna, Linda. "Any Corner of Heaven: Heloise's Critique of Monasticism." Medieval Studies. 49 (1987) 221-253.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "From Patria to Matria: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Risorgimento." PMLA. 99 (1984): 194-211.

Gilson, Etienne. Heloise and Abelard. London: Hollis and Carter, 1953.

Goreau, Angeline. The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England. Garden City, New York: The Dial Press, Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1984.

Greer, Germaine, et al., eds. Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987.

Hamilton, Roberta. The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978.

Hickok, Kathleen. Representations of Women. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Hobby, Elaine. Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989.

The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals. New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1956.

Jerome, Saint. Against Jovinianus. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Vol. VI. Philip Shaff and Henry Wace, eds. New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893.The University of Michigan Press, 1989.

---. The Letters of Saint Jerome. trans. Charles Christopher Mierow. Vol. 1. (Letters 1-22). New York: Newman Press, 1963.

Johnson, William C. Spenser's "Amoretti": Analogies of Love. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990.

Jonson, Ben. Ed. George Parfitt. Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems. New York: Penguin Books, 1975.

Kamuf, Peggy. Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Kaplan, Cora. "Aurora Leigh." Feminist Criticism and Social Change. Eds. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Kelly-Gadol, Joan. "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Becoming Visible: Women in European History. Eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz. Boston: oughton Mifflin, Co., 1977.

Kempe, Margery. The Book of Margery Kempe. Trans. and Eds. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen. London: EETS, by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1940.

Kenyon, Frederic G., ed. The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.Vol. 1. London: The MacMillian Company, 1898.

Kintner, Elvan, ed. The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, 1845-1846. Vol. 1. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

Laqueur, Thomas. Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

LeClerq, Jean. "Modern Psychology and the Interpretation of Medieval Texts." Speculum. 48 (1973) 476-90.

Leighton, Angela. "'Because men made the laws': The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet." Victorian Poetry. 27 (1989): 109-27.

---. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Lever, J.W. The Elizabethan Love Sonnet. London: Methuen and Co., LTD, 1956.

Lewalski, Barbara. Women, Writing, and Resistance in Jacobean England. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Lochri, Karma. Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Lukas, Georg. The Historical Novel. London: Merlin Press, 1962.

Makowski, Elizabeth M., and Katharina M. Wilson. Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Masten, Jeff. "'Shall I turne blabb?': Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's Sonnets." Reading Mary Wroth. Eds., Naomi J. Miller and Gary Waller. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

McEntire, Sandra J. "Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine Spirituality." Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays. ed. Sandra J. McEntire. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992.

McLaughlin, Eleanor. "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology." Religion and Sexism. Ed. Rosemary Radford Reuther. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 212-54.

Mermin, Dorothy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Michie, Helena. The Flesh Made Word. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Middle English Dictionary. Vol. 2. Hans Kruth and Sherman M. Kuhn, eds. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959.

Miller, Naomi. "Rewriting Lyric Fictions: The Role of the Lady in Lady Mary Wroth's Pamphilia to Amphilantus." The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print. Eds. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty Travitsky. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.

Millett, Bella and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds. Medieval English Prose for Women. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

Millet, Bella. "The Origins of the Ancrene Wisse: New Answers, New Questions." Medium Aevum. 61 (1992).

Mitchell, Sally. The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading 1835-1880. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981. x-xvi.

Morgan, Susan. Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in Nineteenth-Century Fiction. New York: Oxford Press, 1989.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 14. Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

Newman, Barbara. "Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise." The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies. 22 (1992) 121-57.

---."Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century." Traditio. 45 (1989-90), 111-46.

The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd. ed. Vols. II and III. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Paulissen, May. The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth: A Critical Introduction. Diss. Salzburg Studies in English Literature. University of Salzburg, 1982. Salzburg: University of Salzburg. 1982.

Payer, Pierre. The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

Radice, Betty, trans. The Letters of Abelard and Heloise. New York: Penguin Books, 1974.

Rahner, Karl and Herbert Vorgrimler. Dictionary of Theology. 2nd ed. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

Reuther, Rosemary Radford. "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church." Religion and Sexism. Ed. Rosemary Radford Reuther. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 50-80.

Reynolds, Margaret, ed. Aurora Leigh. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992.

Roberts, Josephine. "The Biographical Problem of Pamphilia to Amphilantus. Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 1 (1982) 43-51.

---. "'The Knot Never to Bee Untide': The Controversy Regarding Marriage in Mary Wroth's Urania." Reading Mary Wroth. Eds. Naomi Miller and Gary Waller. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

---. The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.

---. "An Unpublished Literary Quarrel Concerning the Suppression of Mary Wroth's Urania (1621)." Notes and Queries. 222 (1977) 532-35.

Robertson, Elizabeth. Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990.

Savage, Anne and Nicholas Watson, trans. Anchoritic Spirituality: "Ancrene Wisse" and Associated Works. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

Schofield, Mary Anne. "The 'Heart' of Midlothian: Jeanie Deans as Narrator." Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture. 19 (1989): 153-64.

Schor, Hilary. Scheherezade in the Marketplace. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

Shakespeare, William. The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Third Edition. David Bevington, ed. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.

Shelston, Alan, ed. Ruth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Sidney, Sir Philip. Ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962.

Skeat, Walter W. Skeats's Etymological Dictionary. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.

Spencer, Jane. Elizabeth Gaskell. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Spenser, Edmund. Eds., J.C. Smith and E. De Selincourt. Spenser: Poetical Works. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1912. rpt. 1979.

Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800. New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977.

Stoneman, Patsy. Elizabeth Gaskell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Stouf, Louis. Héloïse et Abélard: Lettres. Paris: Union Générale D'editions, 1964.

Sutphin, Christine. "Revising Old Scripts: The Fusion of Independence and Intimacy in Aurora Leigh." 15 (1987): 43-54.

Taylor, Beverly. "'School-Miss Alfred' and 'mater familias': Female Sexuality and Poetic Voice in The Princess and Aurora Leigh." Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art. eds. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor. DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992.

Tinsley, E.J. "Celibacy." A Dictionary of Christian Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. The English Novel: Form and Function. New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc. 1953.

Vickers, Nancy J. "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme." Writing and Sexual Difference. Elizabeth Abel, ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Waller, Gary. English Poetry of the 16th Century. London: Longman, 1986.

---. "Mother/Son, Father/Daughter, Brother/Sister, Cousins: The Sidney Family Romance." Modern Philology. 4 (1991) 401-14.

Watt, George. The Fallen Woman in the 19th Century English Novel. Towa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984.

The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology. Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

Whitten-Hannah, Margaret. "Lady Mary Wroth's Urania: The Work and the Tradition." Diss. The University of Auckland, 1978.

Wilt, Judith. Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Windeatt, B.A., trans. The Book of Margery Kempe. New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One's Own. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929.