

Woman in the Middle Ages was a subsidiary to man, and she never was “a free and lawful person” (qtd. in Power, 2) as Maitland indicates, since she was by her sex inferior to man. Only through a name endowed with by succumbing to the institution of marriage could a medieval woman become a part of an individual, through whose position in society then she could establish her own identity. Carolyn Larrington notes, “Marriage, then, was the fate of almost every woman in medieval Europe ... a woman’s marriage was the single most important event in her life, determining her future social status, personal development ... and sense of self-fulfillment” (18). What marriage could bring to a medieval woman was not only the sense of security, but “[t]he superior condition of the medieval lady [that] was further exemplified in her importance as a wife” (Power 32). Thus in the patriarchal system of the Middle Ages, woman’s position was always subordinate to man, and from a traditional point of view, the limitation imposed upon a medieval woman as to be chaste and obedient was the standard for men to evaluate whether or not the woman is “good.” In addition, male authors at that period of time also attacked against the inconstancy and disobedience of women with strict reproach. In an attempt to discuss “Christine” in Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* along with the Wife of Bath in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* as her two paradigms of medieval female characters, Susan Schibanoff states, “Even women’s courtesy books—on the art of being a good woman—were largely male authored and contain male views of ideal female behavior: modesty, obedience, chastity, humility” (100).

Yet Chaucer’s position as a “speaking subject” in *The Legend of Good Women* and Christine de Pizan’s as a “spoken object”<sup>1</sup> in *The Book of the City of*

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea of identifying the position of Geoffrey Chaucer as a “speaking subject” and that of Christine de Pizan as a “spoken object” comes from Sheila Delany’s viewpoint in “Rewriting Woman Good: Gender and the Anxiety of Influence in Two Late-Medieval Texts,” *Chaucer in the Eighties*, edited by Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse, 1986). She proposes,

*Ladies* seem to subvert the fixed opinion that considers woman to be fickle, and attempt to propagate the goodness of woman, which is a different perspective than their contemporaries'. Sheila Delany states, "Both works purport to rewrite that tradition in order to present a new image of woman, that of the good woman: courageous and loyal, prudent and kind" (76). Although Chaucer and de Pizan appear to reconstruct a new and better image of woman, throughout *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Book of the City of Ladies*, patriarchal superiority is still the dominate way of thinking in judging what a good woman is.

Chaucer's near-contemporary, Christine de Pizan, a female author and an object in the patriarchal tradition, produces her *Book of the City of Ladies*, which was however written less than twenty-five years later<sup>2</sup>, concerning the same subject as Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*. Nonetheless, Chaucer and Christine de Pizan enjoy different approaches to present their viewpoints to construct the images of good women, for Chaucer "strictly limits his portrayal of goodness in women in their roles as lovers [and] [s]uch a focus gives him no room to consider the identity of a woman apart from her relationship with a man" (Laird 58), while Christine de Pizan intends to establish a city entirely of all virtuous women, including pagans, and sets up a female model, with little concern to discuss woman's position in man-woman relationships. As Maureen Quilligan indicates that "[a]s a marginal female author Christine takes *a master discourse* and makes it speak of *her own concerns*, explicitly commenting on her own process of rewriting her tradition" (223; italics mine), *The Book of the City of Ladies* constitutes "a strategy by which to exhibit visually, orally, and performatively the female voice" (Enders 234).

---

"For Chaucer the issue is what kind of writer to be, with the representation of women the test case. For Christine the issue is the possibility of her writing at all, with the representation of women offering role models" (76).

<sup>2</sup> *The Legend of Good Women* was written around 1386 while *The Book of the City of Ladies* came out in 1405.

## I . The Image of Good Women in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*

Chaucer's good women are doomed to be the sacrifice of love or man's desire when Alcesta assigns Chaucer the narrator the theme in the *Prologue* to *Legend*:

Thow shalt, while that thou lyvest, yer by yere,

The moste partye of thy tyme spende

In making of a *glorious legende*

Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,

That weren trewe in loving al hire lyves;

And telle of false men that hem bytraien,

That al hir lyf ne don nat but assayen

How many women they may doon a shame. (*LGW* F 481-88; italics mine)<sup>3</sup>

The narrator aims to make "a glorious legende" (*LGW* F 483), yet the precondition for achieving this kind of glory on women is to make them as sufferers betrayed by "false men" (*LGW* F 486). With the dichotomy to classify male as false and female as good, Chaucer in effect reveals the pattern of superior-inferior relationship between man and woman. Although the men in *The Legend of Good Women* are dishonorable (with the single exception of Piramus for Chaucer states, "Of trewe men I fynde but fewe mo / In alle my bokes, save this Piramus, / And therefore have I spoken of hym thus. / For it is deynte to us

---

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988). Hereafter line numbers quoted from this edition will be added right after the citation in the parenthesis, and *The Legend of Good Women* will be abbreviated as *LGW*. Since the citations are from both texts in the *Prologue*, I will also indicate "F" or "G" before line numbers.

men to fynde / A man that can in love been trewe and kynde” [LGW 917-21]), they directly or indirectly are the active victimizers who cause women’s sufferings, and the good women in *Legend* are always the passive victims waiting to be betrayed, though some of them commit suicide with their own will:

For to hyre love were so trewe  
That, rathere than they wolde take a newe,  
*They chose to be ded* in sundry wyse,  
And deiden, as the story wol devyse;  
And some were brend, and some were cut the hals,  
And some dreynt for they wolden not be fals. (LGW G 288-93; italics mine)

It seems these women who intend to demonstrate their love have the mastery over their own bodies since they “chose to be ded” (LGW G 290), yet later the narrator will suggest that the cause of the suffering is the men who “doon [the women] a shame” (LGW F 488). Although they are “trewe” (LGW F 485), which is the standard virtue proposed in *Legend*, the price these women have to pay for gaining that glory is rather surprising. Peter L. Allen states:

Love is faithful to the end, and it seems, in fact, that the end must be a violent one in order to prove how good the love was. Chaucer follows this recommendation. More than half of the women in the Legend, we have noted, kill themselves.... The sensibilities of any reader are likely to be disturbed by these morbid views of love: in the Legend, we seem to move from one tragedy to another. (426)

With such “morbid views of love,” it is hard to believe the images of “goode

wymmen, maydenes and wyves" (LGW F 484) the narrator intends to establish in his text is a positive viewpoint toward female. Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* appears to limit woman's position only as a wife / lover, for the main theme that he discusses is nothing more than the love between the two sexes, and thus further negates any other possibilities for a woman to develop her real goodness except for being truthful. So the women in the *Legend* might be good according to the notion of Chaucer the narrator and his patriarchal-thinking contemporaries, yet whether or not such an image is intrinsically good will be analyzed and compared later in this paper with the woman image constructed in Christen de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

In addition, female suffering depicted in each legend instead manifests that women are really weak and have no power to resist against what befall them, which again responds to the patriarchal point of view that women are inferior to men in every respect. Robert Frank states, "Helplessness, innocence, suffering, and grief are the principle elements, above all innocence and helplessness. These elements are set off against a threatening violence, malevolent and overwhelming, leading to an assault on sensibility, usually physical as well as emotional, a laceration of flesh and feeling" (qtd. in Guerin, 90). What is indeed presented in *Legend* are innocent sufferings, and "the women described are clearly 'good' only in a very unusual sense of the word, and the rewards the women receive for their virtue are far from enviable" (Allen 419-20).

## **II. Christen de Pizan and the Concept of Equality**

Different from the limitation Chaucer the narrator sets upon his good women, the motive for Christine de Pizan to produce her feminist work is to release woman from the shackles of patriarchal thinking. Josephine Donovan suggests, "The explicit purpose of the *Cité des dames* is to refute misogynistic views of women by

means of counter examples that illustrate women's strengths and virtues" (34). In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christen de Pizan attacks against what men think to be the wickedness of women and proves woman virtues with a series of examples instead. The narrator boldly suggests an important idea: man and woman are made by the same God, and thus neither has to be subordinate to another—male and female bodies and souls are equal. She says:

God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble in the feminine and in the masculine bodies. (CL I.9.2, 23)

[I]t was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was from the body of man from which God made woman.... [W]oman is a most noble creature. (CL I.9.2, 24)

It is noteworthy that when juxtaposing the two sexes as to present the idea of equality between man and woman, Christine the narrator places “feminine” the term prior to “masculine” (CL I.9.2, 23), which in a sense seems to be a declaration that subverts the traditional patriarchal point of view to consider “the worst of the body and of sexuality was the female body”<sup>4</sup> (qtd. in Semple, 164). As for women's fickleness and wickedness accused by men, the narrator also provides the reader with novella to prove that women are not only virtuous but their abilities in many aspects are the same or even superior to men. Among the capabilities, Christen the narrator emphasizes in particular the importance of knowledge and education, and through the voice of Reason the Lady, Christen the narrator delivers both the female and male a lecture. She states, “Acquired learning ... lasts forever for those who have it, because of their fame, and it is useful for many people

---

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Legoff, *The Medieval Imagination*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), 83.

insofar as it can be taught to others and recorded in books for the sake of future generations. In this way their learning does not die with them..." (CL I.43.1, 88). What she encourages women to do is completely different from that of Chaucer, and the image of woman Christen intends to reconstruct here is an independent figure who does not have to be trapped in the relationship with man if she can recognize the real virtues of women.

After clarifying man's prejudice on woman, Christen the narrator, on the other hand, attempts to neglect the sins women are deleteriously accused, with the intention to propagate only the goodness of woman according to a female standard. When reading the misogynistic book of Mathéolus, Christine claims, "[T]he subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies, and of no use in developing virtue and manners" (CL I.1.1, 3). Her statement aggressively challenges the authority of that society, and such declarations are ubiquitous in *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Christine de Pizan, however, proposes these ideas through the voice of the authoritative figures, "three crown ladies" (CL I. 2.2, 6), that can convince the reader of the reliability of the affirmation. When answering Christine's question of whether or not married life is hard to endure because of "women's faults and impetuosity" (CL II.13.1, 118), for instance, Rectitude the Lady declares, "[S]uch foolishness spoken and written against women was and is an arbitrary fabrication which flies in the face of the truth. For men are masters over their wives, and not the wives mistresses over their husbands, who would never allow their wives to have such authority" (CL II.13.1, 119), and such an announcement coincidentally responds to the Wife of Bath's accusation against men's unfair attitude toward women in *The Canterbury Tales*. The energetic Wife claims:

For trusteth wel, it is an impossible  
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,

But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,  
Ne of noon oother woman never the mo.  
Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?  
By God, if women hadde written stories,  
As clerkes han withinne hir oratories,  
They wolde han written of men moore wikkednesse  
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (*Canterbury Tales* III: 688-96;  
italics mine.)

Both Rectitude's and the Wife of Bath's statements clearly point out women's awkward position in the patriarchal tradition in the Middle Ages, for women could never express their opinions through their own voice but were instead situated by men in the inferior status. Nonetheless, such female narrators, like Christine and the Wife of Bath, still intend to challenge the male authority and establish an identity belonging only to female. For the purpose to analyze the differences between the male- and female-oriented images of good women, I would like to discuss the same legends / novella presented both in *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Book of the City of Ladies* to investigate in what perspective Chaucer and Christine de Pizan reconstruct their images of good women.

### III. Comparative Study of the Five Legends/Novelles

#### 1. Faithfulness in Thisbe

Five characters, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, and Lucrece (Lucretia), appear in both texts, yet the ways Chaucer and Christine de Pizan define a good woman are completely different. If it is cogent to say that Chaucer emasculates the women in his *Legend*, I would like to propose that Christine de Pizan in *City of Ladies* makes her women immaculate, for the conspicuous elements kept in the nature of Chaucer's good women are only obedience and constancy while de



Pizan's female characters are all virtuous, energetic without any fault. The only duplicate characteristic presented in both texts is constancy.

In Chaucer's *Legend*, the women in their relationships with men are extraordinarily passive, and what masters the women's fates is their love toward men—if their husbands / lovers are honorable, they will hereafter lead a happy life, but what they can do is nothing more than waiting for men's fatal decision. Yet since the good women in *Legend* who are betrayed are still constant in love (or rather, the women here have to be betrayed by men to prove that they are good), their destiny is tragic. In "The Legend of Thisbe," after witnessing Píramus's death, Thisbe "ryst up withouten noyse or bost" (LGW 887) and calmly recounts:

For love shal yeve me strengthe and hardynesse

To make my wounde large ynough, I gesse.

I wol thee folwe ded, and I wol be

Felawe and cause ek of thy death ...

Thow shal no more departe now fro me

Than fro the deth, for I wol go with thee. (LGW 892-99; italics mine)

Thisbe is canonized by Chaucer the narrator as a "*martiris*" for her noble spirit, and the way the narrator depicts her dying scene is just like describing a sufferer who dies for his / her belief, which however is love. It seems Chaucer canonizes Thisbe for her "strengthe and hardynesse" (LGW 892) and the constancy in love, yet he immediately proclaims:

And lat no gentil woman hyre asure

To put hire in swich an aventure.

*But God forbade but a woman can*

*Ben as trewe in lovyng as a man!* (LGW 908-11; italics mine)

It is ironic that the reason for Thisbe to be sainted is also the way she may commit the sin of sacrilege, for God forbids a woman to transgress the boundaries set between man and woman. In other words, woman can be truthful, but she cannot be that great as man—she still has to adhere to her inferior position. Elaine Tuttle Hansen points out:

[I]n giving us a narrator who reduces the heroism and heightens the passivity, powerlessness, and innocent suffering ... [t]he narrator consistently inhibits our sympathy for their [Cleopatra and Thisbe] suffering by increasing *the sheer stupidity and blindness of his heroines...*, pointing out the ignobility of their motives, and devaluing the love for which they suffer and the men to whose charms they so willing to succumb. (24; italics mine)

It is rather true that Chaucer's "Legend of Thisbe" is simply a work of emasculation as to completely present female weakness and incapability, and thus the canonized title endowed with by the male narrator seems to be rather ironic while "the finer irony of this legend lies in her very innocence" (Spisak 204).

The Thisbe depicted in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, however, is quite different. With the focus on the character's will power and capability, Christen de Pizan's Thisbe is more energetic. When seeing the crack in the stone wall, Chaucer's Thisbe simply "lete here wordes thourgh the clifte pace" (LGW 746) while Thisbe in *City of Ladies* "immediately rushed to the crack and, with the clip of her belt buckle—for she had no other tool—*she opened up the hole* somewhat until she could stick the clip all the way through so that Pyramus might see it..." (CL II .57.1, 191; italics mine). Christen's Thisbe is practical and she is the active side in the relationship with Pyramus to accomplish their love. She even finishes opening up the hole alone simply for the possibility that "Pyramus might see it"

(*CL* II.57.1, 191). Thisbe here takes the initiative in striving for being together with her lover earlier before Pyramus has any opportunity to contribute his vigor—she is not only faithful in love but knows how to pursue love with every effort. Thisbe's dying scene, which receives much attention in *Legend*, is described in a light and moderate tone in *City of Ladies*. The narrator simply states, "Seeing her lover's spirit pass away, she mourned piteously and then killed herself with the same sword" (*CL* II.57.1, 192). Committing suicide is the means for Thisbe to prove her faithfulness in love, and yet Christen's narration arouses less sympathy than that of Chaucer's. She attempts to propose the idea that woman can also have her will and strength, instead of submitting herself to her prescribed fate.

## 2. Constancy in Dido

As for the case of Dido, Chaucer the narrator seems to present a *metamorphosis* of Dido. He at first depicts Dido the queen as a fickle and amorous woman when she meets Aeneas. He recounts:

And, for he was a straunger, somewhat she  
Likede hym the bet, as, God do bote,  
To som folk ofte newe thing is sote.  
Anon hire herte hath pite of his wo,  
And with that pite love com in also. (*LGW* 1075-79)

The statement implies that Aeneas attracts Dido's attention simply because he is "newe" (*LGW* 1077), which coincides with men's negative ideas on women proposed in *City of Ladies* that "women in particular are fickle and inconstant, changeable and flighty, weak-hearted, compliant like children, and lacking all stamina" (II.47.1, 164). In addition, the narrator mocks the queen of her stupid passion when foreseeing Dido's tragic end and says, "Of which ther gan to brenden swich a fyr / That *sely Dido* hath now swich desyr / with Aeneas, hire newe gest, to dele, / That she hath lost hire hewe and ek hire hele" (*LGW* 1156-59; italics mine).

Different from Thisbe's passivity, Dido is a woman with strong will power, for she intends to be the master of her future and acknowledges her desire to marry Aeneas. In the cave, "[t]hat *sely Dido* ... / tok hym for husbonde and becom his wyf / For evermo, whil that hem laste lyf" (*LGW* 1237-39; italics mine). The narrator, however, continuously suggests Dido as a "sely" (*LGW* 1157, 1237) woman when the queen decides to be constant in love, and he even sighs, "O sely wemen, ful of innocence, / Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience, / What maketh yow to men to truste so" (*LGW* 1254-56)? It is interesting that the narrator who intentionally presents constant and obedient female characters as to establish the images of good women is also the one to propagate that such conduct is "sely" (*LGW* 1157, 1237, 1254) and men are not trustworthy.

Chaucer the narrator also emasculates Dido's energetic disposition as an authoritative queen and depicts her simply as a woman desiring for love and the position as a wife. When Aeneas intends to leave, this noble Dido:

[F]alleth hym to fote and swouneth ther,  
Dischevele, with hire bryghte gilte her,  
And seyth, "Have mercy; let me with yow ryde! (*LGW* 1314-16)

And, so ye wole me now to wive take,  
As ye han sworn, thane wol I yeve yow leve  
To slen me with youre swerd now sone at eve!  
For thane yit shal I deyen as youre wif.  
I am with childe, and yeve my child his lyf!

Mercy, lord! Have pite in youre thought! (*LGW* 1319-24)

Robert Worth Frank, Jr. suggests, "[The scene] shows us a queen on her knees, reduced to a fundamental feminine condition, begging for love and life and

reputation" (72). In addition, Judith Laird also notes, "Chaucer's Dido functions exclusively as the object of male desire" (65). After transforming from a changeable queen to a woman constant in love, Dido at the same time loses her confidence and degrades herself to a feminine figure instead of an individual, and such an image is the common characteristic (if it can be deemed as a characteristic) throughout Chaucer's *Legend*.

On the other hand, Dido in *City of Ladies* is famous for her "prudence and erudition" (I.46.1, 91) instead of the instability in inclinations. Reason the Lady emphasizes Dido's achievements as a queen and as an individual. She states, "The way in which she founded her city and acquired and took possession of her land demonstrated *her exceptional constancy, nobility, and strength*, and without these graces true prudence is impossible" (CL I.46.1, 91; italics mine). It is clear here that Christen de Pizan's definition of "constancy" is different from that of Chaucer. In *City of Ladies*, the meaning of *constancy* is more than to be faithful in love, but including other virtue. After leaving her homeland for the danger of her life and establishing her own country, Dido is "spoken of only in terms of her outstanding strength, courage, and her bold understanding," and the reader for the first time gets the answer of why she is called Dido since she is originally named Elissa, for "Dido" the term is "the equivalent for saying *virago* in Latin, which means 'the woman who has the strength and force of a man'" (CL I.46.3, 95). Yet it is ironic that in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, for the purpose to demonstrate her constant love, Dido's "name is lost" (LGW 1361).

The images of Dido constructed in *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Book of the City of Ladies* have their own significance respectively. Chaucer's Dido at last is a vague figure only with weak feminine elements while Dido in Christen accomplishes herself with her strong will. In addition, love with man is never the main theme in de Pizan's depiction of female characters, so she again concludes the

novella with a rather light tone, which is completely different from Chaucer's description as to take Dido's subordination to Aeneas as the central theme to demonstrate Dido's constancy. She even does not provide the reader with a definite answer of how Dido ends her life. She indicates, "Indeed, after lamenting a great deal, she threw herself into a large fire which she had lit. others say she killed herself with Aeneas' own sword" (*CL* II.55.1), while Dido in *Legend* "[u]pon the fir of sacrifice she sterte, / And with his swerd she rof hyre to the herte" (*LGW* 1350-51), which is a much more impressive way to commit suicide. The constancy of Chaucer's Dido is finally demonstrated through her death, yet Dido's constancy in *City of Ladies* is achieved through her wisdom and proper conduct as a queen.

### 3. Faithfulness in Hypsipyle and Medea

In the legend of Hypsipyle and Medea,<sup>5</sup> the female characters' only wish as to be a wife is destroyed by the dishonorable man Jason, who uses them as his instruments to achieve his aims. Michael Hanrahan points out that the image of Jason in this legend is "linked to a woman-eater" (238) since the narrator claims, "Thow rote of false lovers, Duc. Jasoun, / Thow sly devourere and confusioun / Of gentil wemen, tender creatures" (*LGW* 1368-70). Regardless of the notorious images of Hypsipyle and Medea presented in mythological tradition, Chaucer in *Legend* emphasizes still their faithfulness and constancy in pursuit of love. The dichotomy manifests Hypsipyle's and Medea's impotence when they have to face Jason's betrayal, except to revenge themselves on Jason in their own ways. The women's innocence is the narrator's main concern, and as for the episodes of infanticide, which receive much attention in mythology, seem to be of little importance in *Legend*. The narrator, instead, underlines the women's chaste, although the man is a traitor to their faithfulness and constancy. In the legend of

---

<sup>5</sup> In *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer lumps Hypsipyle and Medea together owing to their being treated shamefully by one man, Jason.

Hypsipyle, Chaucer states:

And that she moste bothe hire children spyllle,  
And alle tho that sufferede hym his wille.  
And trewe to Jason was she al hire lyf,  
And evere kepte hire chast, as for his wif;  
Ne nevere hadde she joye at hire herte,  
But deyede for his love, of sorwes smerte. (LGW 1574-79; italics mine)

Such a statement that stresses Hypsipyle's chaste and constancy arouses the reader's sympathy when he / she may pay less attention to the fact that Hypsipyle is at the same time an infanticide. On the other hand, the narrator fails to mention the fact that Medea also kills her two children as the means to avenge the false man. Chaucer the narrator stops his narration right before the terrible scene occurs. On the contrary, he mourns for Medea's tragic destiny for he sighs:

This is the mede of lovyng and guerdoun  
That Medea received of Jasoun  
Right for hire trouthe and for hire kyndenesse,  
That lovede hym better than hireself.... (LGW 1662-65)

Similar to the exclamation expressed in "The Legend of Dido," Chaucer also feels sorry for Medea's fate, yet it is ironic that the very point for the narrator to grieve for the character is also the reason that she can be canonized and classified as a god woman.

Yet it is surprising that Christen de Pizan in *City of Ladies* neglects Hypsipyle's relationship with Jason. As for the marriage between Medea and Jason,

Christen the narrator simply presents the virtues and capabilities of Medea. Hypsipyle and Medea in de Pizan's text are known for their wisdom and learning. Like the way Christen narrates of how Thisbe strives for her relationship with Pyramus, Medea in the affair with Jason is not only the active one but the powerful protector of Jason. According to the narration, Medea in *City of Ladies* loves the dishonorable man with "a too great and too constant love" (CL II.56.1, 189). In addition, for the purpose to save Jason when she sees that Jason will be the right man for her, Medea "resolved to protect him from death ... [and] she gave him charms and enchantments, and, in her expertise, she taught him how to win the Golden Fleece on the condition that Jason promised to take her as his wife ..." (CL II.56.1, 190). Christen de Pizan subverts the fixed, traditional opinion that females are weak and inferior to males. Her characters, instead, are the protector and teacher to the man. Moreover, she certainly skips Medea's conduct of murdering her children because she intends to present her characters as virtuous women without faults.

#### 4. Innocence in Lucrece

As Elaine Tuttle Hansen notes that the women in *Legend* "never get angry when they are raped, left behind, or stranded on desert islands with wild beasts; they are sad but not frenzied or vindictive, and at worst they weep and swoon" (22), of which "The Legend of Lucrece" is the best exemplar. The stories of Lucrece are depicted in much the same way in *Legend* and *City of Ladies*, yet the reasons for Lucrece to kill herself are different in the two texts. In Chaucer's narration, Lucrece considers "for hir gylt ne for hir blame, / *Hir husbond shulde nat have the foule name,* / That wolde she nat suffer by no wey" (LGW 1844-46; italics mine) while Christine's Lucrece claims, "*This is how I absolve myself of sin and show my innocence.* Yet I cannot free myself from the torment nor extricate myself from the pain. From now on no woman will ever live shamed and disgraced by Lucretia's



example" (*CL* II.44.1, 162; italics mine). Ruth M. Ames notes, "The most consistent charge throughout Western history was that women were sexually insatiable..." (59). So the way Lucrece in *Legend* kills herself for the purpose not to disgrace the name of her husband can be regarded as the extreme means to demonstrate her faithfulness and constancy. According to the opinion of a man in the medieval society, such conduct must be of great significance. In addition, the reason why Lucrece in *City of Ladies* commits suicide is to free herself from the sin and to show her innocence, which reveals the narrator's intention to offer Lucrece a position as an individual instead of being an adjunct to her husband.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Judith Laird indicates, "In Chaucer, we cannot escape the hierarchical placement of men above women because the portraits are shaped in terms of masculinity and femininity, and the dependency of the latter upon the former for valuation and identity" (68). It is noteworthy that Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* fails to establish a new image of good women, and what he presents through the text is in effect some weak, feminine elements of women along with defects, like stupidity and simplicity. In addition, his intention to propose the goodness of women is contradictory to his patriarchal mind, for he on the one hand hopes to propagate woman virtues yet tends to limit the goodness of women within the patriarchal boundaries on the other, while any transgression is forbidden—women can be good, but they cannot be better than men.

Furthermore, the conduct to canonize these pagan women as "martirum" is rather ironic. Ostensibly, it seems the reason for these good women to be endowed with a sacred title is because of their constancy and virtues. V. A. Kolve also suggests that Chaucer's purpose is "to present the lives of pagan women 'martyred' for love in a fashion free of extrinsic moralization" (151). Yet the truth is that as in

“The Legend of Dido” for instance, the narrator calls the queen “[t]hat sely Dido” (LGW 1157, 1237) when she walks into the trap set by Aeneas step by step, and at last it is such “sely” love that leads Dido to her tragic end, and then, to be canonized. Carolyn Larrington states, “[A]n outstanding woman would gain a reputation for saintliness in her lifetime, by founding religious house, by missionary activity, teaching or leading, or by living an exemplary life in some other respect” (121). None of these pagan women has ever led “an exemplary life” and their passion toward their lovers/husbands is much stronger than that to religion. Chaucer the narrator simply constructs another incomplete narration on women since what he intends to present is only a part of woman virtues and the women in *Legend* are therefore reduced to feminine elements—constancy and faithfulness in love—instead of being identifiable figure. Although they are queens or daughters of noble families, their true virtues never receive attention, and the focus is always on how they are cheated and betrayed by men. When Chaucer emasculates the capabilities of his good women, he indeed increases the importance of the false men, for only through their doing women “a shame” (LGW F 488) can these women demonstrate their goodness. Such a morbid attitude toward love, in addition, can never be an exemplar for women to follow. Thus the legend of good women is forever a legend.

On the other hand, the problem of whether or not Christen the author reconstructs an image of good women and whether or not Christen de Pizan successfully achieves her aim to establish the city of ladies are different. Compared to *The Legend of Good Women*, Christine the narrator in *The Book of the City of Ladies* indeed constructs a different image of women from that of Chaucer, for the female characters in de Pizan’s text all have their own identities instead of being adjuncts to men. Benjamin Semple indicates that “all the women included in the *Cité* are an integral part of it ... [and] chastity is not a prerequisite for inclusion or

even the primary consideration, since a woman's inclusion is based on her political, intellectual, and moral achievements" (180). Moreover, they are equal or even superior to men in their virtues and abilities according to the narration. Patricia A. Phillippy notes:

Out of a tradition which she seeks to assimilate and revise, Christine establishes not only her own authority and poetic program, but also the position of women in society, which she believes has been obscured and misrepresented by that tradition. Thus her 'revision' is linked to the male literary tradition, on the one hand, in its desire to uncover and return to the correct relationship between men and women which has been confused in the past, and, on the other hand, involves a turning away from traditional authorities toward experience, and toward a future for women which has been denied them in the past. (168)

Yet Christine de Pizan's effort to establish the city of ladies is never successful. In an attempt to discuss women's writing and culture in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Elaine Showalter suggests, "The writer / heroine, often guided by another woman, travels to the 'mother country' of liberated desire and female authenticity; crossing to the other side of the mirror ... is often a symbol of the passage" (347). Through the voice of Christine the narrator, Christine de Pizan the author reveals her desire to free women from the shackles of the patriarchal system. Although the three crowned ladies offer many examples of intellectual women and propagate the goodness of women, Christine the narrator never mentally arrives that "mother country" successfully for she herself at last degrades women's position and makes it subordinate again to men's authority. It seems each time the narrator encounters with a crowned lady, Christine's journey toward the city of ladies is nearer to the end. However, Christine the author is just the impediment that avoids Christine the narrator gaining access to a real woman world, where women are regarded as autonomous individuals, despite the predominant patriarchal thinking. Her conformity to the established social order does not allow

her to transgress the limitations imposed on women. Diane Bornstein indicates, “[S]he asserts the need for a better education for women to prepare them for life, but she still accepts their subordinate role.... After all her examples of heroic women in the Bible, legend, and history, she most strongly recommends obedience for the pragmatic, everyday world” (323-24), since the narrator proposes, “And you ladies who are married, do not scorn being subject to your husbands, for sometimes it is not the best thing for a creature to be independent” (*CL* III.19.2, 255) and “[s]o, my ladies, be humble and patient...” (*CL* III.19.3, 255). It is apparent that the patriarchal superiority has firmly rooted in her mind, which prevents her from shifting from a male-dominated mentality to a real woman world.

### Works Cited

- Allen, Peter L. "Reading Chaucer's Good Women." *Chaucer Review* 21.4 (1987): 419-34.
- Ames, Ruth M. "The Feminist Connections of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*." *Chaucer in the Eighties*. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986. 57-74.
- Bornstein, Diane. "An Analogue to Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*." *Chaucer Review* 15.4 (1980): 322-31.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Delany, Sheila. "Rewriting Woman Good: Gender and the Anxiety of Influence in Two Late-Medieval Texts." *Chaucer in the Eighties*. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986. 75-92.
- Donovan, Josephine. "The Women's Framed-Novelle: The French Tradition." *Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1999. 29-42.
- Enders, Jody. "The Feminist Mnemonics of Christine de Pizan." *MLQ* 35.3 (1994): 231-49.
- Frank, Robert Worth, Jr. "Dido." *Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972. 57-78.
- Guerin, Dorothy. "Chaucer's Pathos: Three Variations" *Chaucer Review* 20.2 (1985): 90-112.
- Hanrahan, Michael. "Seduction and Betrayal: Treason in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*." *Chaucer Review* 30.3 (1996): 229-40.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. "Irony and the Antifeminist Narrator in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 82.1 (1983): 11-31.
- Kolve, V. A. "From Cleopatra to Alceste: An Iconographic study of *The Legend of Good Women*." *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*. Ed. John O. Herman and John J. Burke, Jr. Alabama: U of Alabama P, 1981. 130-78.
- Laird, Judith. "Good Women and *Bonnes Dames*: Virtuous Females in Chaucer and Christine de Pizan." *Chaucer Review* 30.1 (1995): 58-70.
- Larrington, Carolyne. *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*.

London: Routledge, 1995. 6-38.

Phillippy, Patricia A. "Establishing Authority: Bocaccio's *de Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *le Livre de la Cité des Dames*." *Romanic Review* 77.3 (1986): 167-93.

Pizan, Christine de. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards. New York: Persea, 1998.

Power, Eileen. *Medieval Women*. Ed. M.M. Postan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Quilligan, Maureen. "Allegory and the Textual Body: Female Authority in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des dames*." *Romanic Review* 79.1 (1988): 222-48.

Schibanoff, Susan. "Taking the Gold Out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman." *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*. Ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 83-106.

Semple, Benjamin. "The Male Psyche and the Female Sacred Body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan." *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 164-86.

Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." 1981. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988. 331-53.

Spisak, James W. "Chaucer's Pyramus and Thisbe." *Chaucer Review* 18.3 (1983): 204-210.