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THE "DOUBLE SORWE" OF THE WIFE OF BATH: CHAUCER AND THE MISOGYNIST TRADITION

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There are several historical approaches that might be taken to the lengthy discourse of Alisoun, Chaucer's Wife of Bath. From the dated one known as exegetical criticism, her revelations mark her as a "hopelessly carnal and literal" exegete of holy scripture (Robertson 317). In this view, she serves to represent and embody the very complaints that moralists were making about widows who re-marry and wives who demand sexual pleasure. Hence she rails against the admonitions of "clerkes," particularly the "cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome" (674).¹ Chaucer, devoted to the poet's moral duty to set forth in his fictions examples of *caritas* and *cupiditas*, is thus exhibiting in Alisoun living proof of precisely those wrongdoings that the Wife, to her anger, has heard condemned by church authorities. The most minor of these is her own admitted tendency to gossip (531-42). Various authorities, among them Thomas Aquinas and Gulielmus Peraldus, whose *Summa vitiorum* figures in the Parson's Tale, "repeatedly denounced female chatter as the source of the new age and called for its suppression" (Dalarun 40). When more serious charges are examined, she is seen in context as, supposedly, Chaucer means her to be seen: an offender against incontrovertible moral and social codes.

From a viewpoint closer to neo-historicism, we would still situate in historical context the Wife's disclosures, but rather than judging them from

contemporary moral standards, exclusively androcentric and, generally, of the rigorist clerical school, we would analyze the text from our own vantage point. What her discourse would then reveal is a striking example of oppressive male hegemony. Nor would we be interested in any putative intentions of the author, these being unverifiable. We would concentrate on the evidence found in the text for the light it sheds on contemporary ideology and abuses to be ascribed to it. We would hesitate before accepting Donald Howard's praise of Chaucer's "unusual interest and empathy with women, especially victimized women" (1) for, as another critic has pointed out, the benefits of "the late medieval cult of womanly 'pitee' which Chaucer certainly helped promulgate" were "illusory" (Green 20).

From either viewpoint, it is obvious that the "disease"² apparent in the Wife's monologue has grown out of two conjoined sources: the doubts enforced upon Alisoun about the propriety of frequent re-marriage by widows and the inconsistency between biblical injunctions to be fruitful and multiply and clerical admonitions that privilege virginity above sexuality even in its legitimate married state. Alisoun's response to both problems is vehement. On the question of re-marriage she demands "Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileyne?" (34) and on married sexuality she declares "In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument / As frely as my Makere hath it sent," adding defiantly "If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!" (149-51). The boldness of her oath about fulfilling (or demanding?) the marital debt shows her contempt for those "clerkes" who held that "the worthiest couple was the one in which each spouse attempted to outdo the other in abstinence" (L'Hermite-Leclercq 227).

This expression of defiance, together with the stream of similar outbursts, should not be dismissed merely as resentment over clerical denunciation of the carnal impulses she acknowledges in herself. Her malaise goes deeper. Over the years she has learned the bitter lesson that Maureen Fries sums up so eloquently:

To all women were ascribed the sins of Eve: women as a class represented, as she did, the Flesh or Lower Reason, while men, like Adam, stood for Higher Reason. Because Adam had failed to guide his wife properly, and because all women shared in Eve's sin, women should be silent and submissive to their husbands. (29)

Alisoun's combined anger and inquietude resound in her tirade so strongly as to show how this animus against women has wounded her. For male voices of authority have never ceased reminding her that

Women, through whom death, suffering, and toil came into the world, were creatures dominated by their sex. . . . To control and punish women, particularly their bodies and their dangerous disruptive sexuality, was therefore man's work.³

Such were the traditional patristic doctrines, enhanced by scholastic learning and firmly grounded in sacred scripture and Aristotelian pronouncements. These may have reached the Wife through the preaching of priests like the Pilgrim-Parson, who, when at last his opportunity comes, turns out to be zealous in rigorist standards, a latter-day Jerome, and through the teaching of men like Jankyn, her fifth husband. He seems representative of those who have laden her with the collective guilt of women "for death, suffering, and toil," recalling which she reflects bitterly,

Lo, heere expres of woman may ye fynde,
That woman was the los of al mankynde. (719-20)

One response, then, to Alisoun's discourse is to take it as the reaction of one who has heard the harshest voices of authority and not the milder ones, let alone the more generous. That the voice of Holy Church, in her experience, is always raised against widows who remarry and wives who take pleasure in the carnal side of marriage comes down to disparagement of womankind itself. She proclaims that her theme is the "Wo that is in mariage" (3), but what we hear is the double woe that lies in her own heart, stirred not so much by her dubious status or by her natural sexuality as by her very worth and value as a woman. Even more revealing than her lament, "Allas, allas! That evere love was synne!" (614), are the words she utters after recapitulating Jankyn's misogynistic aphorisms, some garnered from Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, some directly from the Bible:

Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,
The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne? (786-87)

In these lines, the poet focusses on a marital situation that supposedly began as a love-match, if one-sided, but ended with an explosion of the wrath stored up in Alisoun over long exposure to traditional anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial prejudices. The irony lies in her evident unawareness that those voices of prejudice, epitomized in Jankyn's book, were, while the loudest, not the only voices. There were a few more liberal ones that might have lent her some assurance, had she heard them, that love was not necessarily sin.

Not only does Jerome's treatise rank virginity ahead of chaste widowhood in some kind of immutable, eternal heavenly hierarchy and that in turn ahead of re-marriage, itself ranking only above fornication.⁴ It also shows a distaste for carnal intercourse even in legitimate circumstances, one that recurs in Jerome's other writings such as his letter to Pammachius, a *liber apologeticus* for the attack on Jovinian. This letter, as well as others sent to certain virtuous Roman ladies,⁵ may also have figured in the kind of reading inflicted on Alisoun by her fifth husband. In all these writings, married life is denigrated. As Jean Leclercq has observed, Jerome, in refuting Jovinian, seems to have devalued marriage itself, perhaps partly under the influence of "certain pagan moralists, especially the Stoics, whose attitude to sexuality was negative" (17) — as negative as was the even more influential teaching of Aristotle.

In Alisoun's long life, Jerome's unfavourable views form only a part of what she has absorbed. A frequenter of pilgrim shrines and church festivals, she tells her listeners

Therefore I made my visitaciouns
To vigilies and to processiouns,
To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages, (555-57)

and thus could hardly have avoided the admonitions of preachers versed in the rigorist tradition.⁶ As one critic puts it, the Wife in her matrimonial career has been fighting books more than fighting people.⁷ Some of these books, if not all, seem to have come from "auctoritees" bent on sustaining the anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial views of the Jerome tradition and to have been drawn on by "clerkes" preaching to women about marriage. To some of these authorities who upheld rigorist positions, as well as those few who presented a more liberal view, we now turn.

Representative of the first of these contrasting schools of thought are such well-known figures from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries as Innocent III, St Raymund of Pennafort, and John Bromyard, and of the second Hugh of St Victor, Alan of Lille, and Bartholomew Anglicus.⁸ The first group, while unlikely to have all been found in Jankyn's book, are typical of rigorist authorities on marriage studied in the Wife of Bath's time by preachers and confessors, to whose attention the very titles borne by these treatises point.

To consider Innocent III first, his *De Miseria humanae conditionis* or *De Contemptu mundi*, derives in part out of concern over the contrast between

orthodox Catholic asceticism and the extreme position of Catharist dualism. In the words of a recent editor, Donald Howard,

Whereas the Church taught that the biblical command to wax and multiply was the justification, however weak, for sexuality, and that marriage was therefore among the grades of perfection, the extraordinary otherworldliness of the Cathars swept all that to one side — the race, they believed, should let itself become extinct. (xix)

Hence for all the concessions made by Innocent toward sexual intercourse in marriage that seem at first to give his treatise a less grudging tone than Jerome's, his aim is not so much to support marriage as to refute Catharist heresy. Indeed, he makes all too evident his repugnance for the sexual act and his preference for virginity.⁹ Reflecting the "common medieval belief that original sin is transmitted by carnal intercourse," Innocent affirms that "even between married persons" it is never performed "without the itch of the flesh, the heat of passion, and the stench of lust."¹⁰

This widely read treatise is not concerned chiefly with the impurities of sexual intercourse and the improprieties of ill-mannered wives. Innocent discusses marriage at greater length in the allegorical treatise *De Quadripartita specie nuptiarum*, whose four divisions correspond to the conventional four levels, subsuming the carnal, the sacramental, the spiritual, and the personal. In the "carnal" level, parallel to the literal level, we find that for all Jean Leclercq's descriptions of the treatise as "a long and beautiful prelude" whose theme is "real, existential marriage" (37), the tone of *De Quadripartita* generally reaffirms Jerome's anti-feminist rigorism.¹¹ In his analysis of the sacrament of marriage Innocent teaches that it was a two-fold institution, the one designed before the fall, the other after. The first served as a duty for the propagation of nature, the second as a remedy to restrain the forces of fornication. The pre-lapsarian duty lies in the commandment to increase and multiply, the post-lapsarian remedy in St Paul's injunction "[F]or fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife" (I Cor. 7:2). But soon after, in his shifting argument, Paul adds, "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord: how he may please God" (I Cor. 7:32). This text Innocent uses, as did Jerome, to prove that virgins chaste in heart as in body will be closer to Christ the King in heaven than will wives or widows.¹²

Thus does Innocent perpetuate the idea that virginity ranks as superior to marriage, however chaste, both in the temporal and celestial worlds. That this arbitrary ranking is one of the sorest grievances Alisoun has against her mentors on marriage is signalled for us, I believe, in that striking detail:

In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
 That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;
 And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she
 That she was out of alle charitee. (449-52)

If it is galling not to be foremost in the offering procession, what must Alisoun feel every time she is reminded of Jerome's verdict that in the eternal ranks of heaven she will forever rank far behind? Furthermore, whenever Innocent cites the same Pauline passage that Alisoun herself picks for support, what he draws from it is not an excuse for but an indictment of the flesh. Paul's concession that "It is better to marry than to be burnt" (1 Cor. 7:9), well exploited by Alisoun (46), is used by Innocent not as a text in favour of marital intercourse but as a reminder of the misery endured by both the continent and the wedded alike: "Only as fire does not burn, does flesh not lust. . . . He [Satan's messenger] goads the flesh and sorely buffets the soul, kindles the fire of nature with the bellows of suggestion, puts fuel thereto. . . ." ¹³

For this affliction the remedy is the sacrament of holy matrimony. Given the proper intention, coition between lawfully wedded spouses essentially lacks the mortal sinfulness of the same act when practised unlawfully. But two problems arise. First, the carnal pleasure taken in the act is the same for either condition. Hence some degree of ambiguity lay in official pronouncements on the issue, ranging from the extreme rigorist school to the more liberal. Secondly, since the licitness of marital intercourse rests upon intention, regulation is not a clear cut matter. Peter Lombard, the exponent of church doctrine cited by Robertson, writes: "There may hardly be found now persons experiencing carnal intercourse who do not sometimes come together without the intention of generating offspring. . . . Where these goods are lacking, that is, faith and children, coitus may not properly be defended from the charge of crime." ¹⁴

The Wife of Bath's awareness of this doctrine is made clear in two ways. First, early in her discourse she lays emphasis on the generative function of the sexual organs. Thus by associating female sexuality with the begetting of children, even though she evades specific personal reference, Alisoun is trying to call authority to her defence. Secondly, if by her outcry "Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!" (614) she is admitting to what Peter Lombard describes as "crimen," then it must be because the essential Augustinian conditions of "fides" and "proles" have not always been met. Yet by giving that ambiguous word "synne" to Alisoun, the poet may be telling us that what Alisoun's mentors have taught her is mortal sin may

be regarded by other authorities as merely venial, if sinful at all. Peter Lombard's *distinctio* concludes that if "fides" is present in the act, even if not "bonum proles," the act involves no more than venial guilt.¹⁵ As Jean Leclercq has put it, marriage "with the faithful love it required and made possible" did possess a traditionally recognized value (60), a point he supports by citing Egbert of Schonau (d. 1184):

Congress in marriage without the intention of begetting children and for the sole purpose of sexual pleasure is in itself a sin, though the sin is only venial: it is excused by the other benefits of marriage and is the object of an indulgence, a permission. It is allowed so that the greater evil of fornication might be avoided. (9)

The tone of regret in the double *exclamatio* that Alisoun attaches to the word "synne" suggests, at worst, that the vital distinction between "mortal" and "venial" may not have been conceded by her mentors or, at best, that even "venial" strikes her as harsh: why should there be sin at all in the act? For there were authorities on marriage with views more benign than those of the rigorist school to which Alisoun appears to have been subjected.¹⁶ One such view was expressed in a treatise from her own nation, the *De Proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomew Anglicus, an encyclopaedic work read throughout the period and translated, in Chaucer's century, into English and French. In John Trevisa's translation of 1397, this Franciscan account of married life displays a fair-minded spirit quite at odds with the anti-feminism that suffuses Jankyn's "book of wikked wyves." Bartholomew explains that in the wedding contract the husband

plighteth his troth to lead his life with his wife without departing, and to pay her his debt, and to keep her and love her afore all other. A man hath so great love to his wife that for her sake he adventureth himself to all perils; and setteth her love afore his mother's love; for he dwelleth with his wife, and forsaketh father and mother. . . . No man hath more wealth, than he that hath a good woman to his wife. . . . (56-57)

On the procreative purpose of carnal intercourse, the Franciscan presents a benign picture of woman, even if constrained by orthodox views:

Such a wife is worthy to be praised, that entendeth more to please her husband with such womanly dues, than with her braided hairs, and desireth more to please him with virtues than with fair and gay clothes, and useth the goodness of matrimony more because of children than of fleshly liking. . . . (58)

The implication of venial guilt in "fleshly liking" for its own sake could hardly be conveyed more gently.

Other voices fundamentally of a more optimistic note than the *contemptus mundi* strain and, consequently, hardly misogynistic at all would include those of Hugh of St Victor and Alan of Lille, the former representing the Victorine school of thought and the latter the Chartrist.¹⁷ The first-named, as Beryl Smalley notes, was called by his contemporaries "a second Augustine"; his aim was to recall learning "back to the scriptural framework of the *De Doctrina Christiana*" (85–86). Between 1131 and 1141 Hugh "wrote at length on the psychological and spiritual human contents of conjugal union" and "other cloistral witnesses" also spoke eloquently on the "dignity of marriage" (Leclercq 25ff.). As testimony in praise of marriage by the liberal school, Hugh of St Victor's description of the sacramental union binding husband and wife into one flesh seems like a ray of light amid the rigorist gloom:

Henceforth and forever, each shall be to the other as a same self in all sincere love, all careful solicitude, every kindness of affection, in constant compassion, unflagging consolation, and faithful devotedness. (26)¹⁸

Another Victorine work, the *Quaestiones in Epistolas Pauli*,¹⁹ not only reflects equally benign views on marriage but also draws from the same Pauline dicta that the Wife of Bath has heard in uncompromisingly anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial contexts. Dealing with the problematic I Corinthians 7, the writer displays the Victorine allowance for the presence of Grace in created nature and hence the possibility of good in marriage.²⁰ Sometimes he is silent on passages that loom large in the Wife of Bath's recollection of the Apostle's words, sometimes the reverse is true. His starting point (*Quaestio LI*) centres on I Corinthians 7:25, an important crux. What does the Apostle mean when he says that concerning virgins he has no commandment to give but only counsel? On this difficult point, which Chaucer's Wife of Bath interprets as favourably as she can (65), the commentator distinguishes between *praeceptum* (commandment), *consilium* (counsel), and *permissio* (permission) by analogy with Christ's words: "Of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again" (Luke 6:30).²¹ This *dictum* supplies *permissio* to demand them back but at the same time *consilium* not to do so; a *praeceptum*, however, refers to something without alternative, e.g. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In this exegesis the words of St Paul could be applied to the Wife of Bath in more accommodating fashion than has been her experience: "The Apostle therefore is showing what is allowed to the weak, but the Lord is showing what is suitable for the perfect."²²

A major problematic in the text of I Corinthians 7 is Paul's declaration that it is good for a man not to touch a woman, yet "for fear of fornication" every man is to have his own wife and must "render the debt." The concession gives the Wife of Bath no little perplexity:

Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette
That man shal yelde to his wyf here dette? (129-30)

The Victorine's commentary might have helped her. The "diligent reader," he writes, can find here a three-way treatment of marriage that corresponds to his earlier *distinctio*. It too is a question of commandment, permission, and counsel. From his analysis comes a precise definition of matrimony for the faithful: "a marital union between legitimate persons who maintain an indivisible relationship in life." Consent in the presence of the church, its efficient cause, is explained as being essentially spiritual because "it is not the joining of bodies but the willingness of their minds that make a marriage," in which three kinds of good are involved: fidelity, offspring, and the sacramental and inherent nature of inseparability.²³

The Victorine then turns to St Paul's reminder that his words signify an indulgence, not a commandment, a statement that the Wife of Bath takes in a favourable sense:

And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve
Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve
To wedde me, if that my make dye,
Withouten excepcion of bigamy. (83-86)

The commentator is precise: "An indulgence" is a concession to a more lax way of life; what is thereby lawful would be unlawful and sinful were no concession made.²⁴ In lawful marriage, therefore, coition is no longer sinful. Nevertheless, in the qualification the Apostle places upon his concession, a wish that all men were as himself, the commentator is faced with the same perplexity that troubles the Wife of Bath (81, 103). He asks, "If this were the case, in what way could the human race be propagated?" The solution lies in St Paul's term "volo," implying that "It would please me if all were such as I; perhaps if all those men who exist at present were good, the numbers of the predestined would be filled up by them."²⁵ The commentator suppresses any latter-day restatement of Jerome's point that with the Antichrist on the way no further need exists for procreation.²⁶

On the statement "It is better to marry than to be burnt," which also perplexes the Wife of Bath (46), the commentator is silent; but he does use St Paul's next admonition to unbelieving spouses in order to dilate upon a

related problem of much concern to the Wife: whether the married state is a greater good than virginity. Significantly, perhaps, it is in that reverse order that he frames his *quaestio*.²⁷ For him, marriage seems to be a greater good because "there is more anguish, pain, and toil in the married than in the virgin state, and each man's reward is rendered to him according to his labour."²⁸ Ironically or not, he at once adds that what counts, however, is not the greater labour but the greater glory. This conceded, he tempers St Jerome's hard principle by commenting that while virginity does count as a greater good than marriage, "certain married persons are not of less merit than certain virgins."²⁹ The Victorine's rationalizing does not seek to glorify virginity but denigrate marriage as earlier authorities had done.

In the writings of Alan of Lille married life appears in an equally attractive light. Noteworthy for his classical learning, his Neo-Platonism (coupled with impeccable orthodoxy), his recognition of the beauty and goodness of God's creation, this proto-humanist puts forward views on the dignity and sanctity of marriage at variance with those of his contemporary, Pope Innocent III.³⁰ The opinions of Alan of Lille would have been known to Chaucer through *De Planctu naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*,³¹ but more conventional works such as *De Fide Catholica contra haereticos* and *Summa de arte praedicatoria* should also be considered.³² In *De Fide* Alan makes a strong defence of the marital state against the Albigenians, whose Catharist doctrines he is no less concerned than Innocent III to refute. It sometimes appears that in Innocent III, as in Jerome, there may have lurked a certain disgust for the flesh somewhat akin to the Manichaean heresies both sought to crush. Alan, however, defends the institution of marriage against Catharism because in the conjugal state he finds an aspect of the goodness of creation.

Asserting that in the writings of St Bernard of Clairvaux there is evidence about "the absence of sin and the meritorious nature of matrimonial union," Leclercq cites Bernard's comment that "if a man embrace his own wife there is surely no fault in it" (21).³³ In a parallel statement in *De Fide* Alan recognizes that marriage requires consummation through carnal intercourse, which is therefore not always sinful: "It comes about, through the sacrament of matrimony, that carnal knowledge is either not a grave sin *or is not a sin in any way*" [emphasis added].³⁴ While even a liberal-minded statement like this is indeed no encomium on married intercourse, it is still a far cry from the attitudes that have roused the Wife of Bath's resentment, such as the advice given by Jerome, that "clerk at Rome" (673), to a friend:

If you have a wife, and are bound to her, and render her her due, and have not power of your own body — or, to speak yet more plainly — if you are the slave of a wife, do not allow this to cause you sorrow, do not sigh over the loss of your virginity. . . . Wait till she follows your example. If you only have patience, your wife will some day become your sister.³⁵

Against such advice, Alan of Lille's view of married intercourse reflects a concept of goodness and beauty drawn from creation itself. His section (*De Fide*, cap. VI) dealing with heretics who "forbid marrying because they condemn marriage"³⁶ bears the significant heading "Quibus auctoritatibus probatur, quod Deus bonus creavit mundum." Because Christ specifically reminded the Pharisees that God made man and woman and ordained they should be one flesh (Matt. 19:4), marriage itself must be good. Further on, refuting the attempts by Catharists to prove nuptials to be "exsecrables" (Cap. LXIV), Alan replies that Christ "did not call John away from marriage because marriage is damnable or evil, but because he was inviting him to a greater good, virginity" — a better state, that is, because more expedient.³⁷ Moreover, his acknowledgment that married persons are indeed involved in "many concerns" (*multis negotiis*) lies far from Jerome's reasons for preferring the virginal to the marital state. To incur a disadvantage is not the same as losing merit. Clearly, then, intercourse between lawfully wedded partners is without sin, for the honorable state of marriage saves them from falling into fornication.³⁸

But Alan goes well beyond the familiar grudging concessions; he speaks of marriage in what we would call positive terms. The natural law, to which carnal intercourse pertains, is not opposed to or hindered by marriage but in fact is adorned by it; for in holy wedlock humans enter into a union, a oneness. In Alan's interpretation of St Paul, more subtle than Jerome's, when the Apostle expresses the wish that those he is addressing be released from marriage in order to live in continence, it is not because the married state is bad but because the virgin or the widowed state is the more expedient one: "That matrimony is holy and good and that natural intercourse is rendered without blame through the goodness of matrimony can be proved by various arguments and by authorities."³⁹

Equally mild in tone is Alan of Lille's advice in the *Summa de arte praedicatoria*.⁴⁰ Here the "Universal Doctor" reminds preachers that in addressing married folk "the state of matrimony should be praised and the fidelity of the marriage bed and virtue of the sacrament"; they should show how "matrimony had its beginnings in paradise" and how the Patriarchs "in the married state merited the attainment of life everlasting."⁴¹ Alan

even supplies a brief sample sermon headed "Ad Conjugatos," showing how, through skillful pulpit rhetoric, the "dignitas" of the conjugal state should be extolled.⁴² Thanks to that state, sexual intercourse is excused from guilt and the vice of incontinence removed; fellowship of life is held together; children are freed from disgrace. Indeed, Christ himself, in "commendation" of matrimony, willed to be born of an espoused maiden. As if cognizant of seeming to praise sanctified carnal intercourse merely for its own sake, Alan adds a reminder: "But even though it excuses carnal intercourse from sin, still marriage is celebrated for the purpose of begetting children and not for fleshly pleasure"⁴³ — a conventional warning tempered by the qualification that at least there must be the hope of procreation, the intention of a "good work."

Generous as Alan of Lille's praises of marriage appear in this manual, they sound almost austere when set beside his allegory, *De Planctu naturae*. In Prose VIII, he breaks off Dame Nature's discourse on curbing self-indulgence and practising moderation, to describe the dignified aspect of the God Hymen and then his garments, which depict the events of marriage. Though faded with time, "the eloquence of the picture spoke of what was woven therein — the holy faith of marriage, the peaceful unity of wedlock, the equal yoke of matrimony, the indissoluble bond of the wedded."⁴⁴ Lyrical these iconographic details may be, and, regrettably, far from Alisoun's own experience, but they are not inconsonant with the account of marriage given by the allegorist in his more sober treatises. All told, the evidence from the marriage discussions in Victorine and Chartrist writings seems to confirm Leclercq's statement that "from the beginning of the twelfth century we notice a relaxation, so to speak, of the severity inspired by Saint Jerome" (69).⁴⁵ Leclercq tells us that

In monastic writings in which conjugal union is transformed, sublimated, and, so to speak, retrieved as a metaphor of union with God, then the lovemaking between married persons is acknowledged and given an honorable place in cloistral literature. (70)⁴⁶

But for all Leclercq's optimism, this softer expression of idealized conjugal union by no means replaced the rigorist severity that seems to have been all that Chaucer's Wife of Bath was taught. Strong advocates of that harsher position remained outspoken in the century before Chaucer's and continued to be heard in the period in which he situates his Wife of Bath. One of these was St Raymund of Pennaforte, author of the *Summa casuum de poenitentia et matrimonio*, to give it its full and significant title.⁴⁷ From this massive treatise Chaucer draws extensively for the Parson's homily that

is evidently designed to conclude the "sentence and solaas" contest on the pilgrimage.

Raymund, in his preface to Book IV, explains the title: "Because there frequently occur, in the penitential jurisdiction, doubtful cases concerning marriage, even indeed perplexities, I have subjoined after the treatise on penitence a discourse specifically about marriage, to the glory of God and for the profit of souls."⁴⁸ Indicative of the serious view Raymund takes of the question, he divides it into twenty-five headings, several headed "De Impedimento" and the rest dealing with such diverse problems as impotence; mixed marriages; affinity and consanguinity; legitimacy and dower; *divortio propter fornicationem*; and various other aspects of marriage. The crucial section is headed "De Matrimonio," itself divided into sixteen sub-sections (503-04).

After defining marriage, discussing the manner of making vows "per verba de praesenti," and considering the question of consent to carnal intercourse, Raymund passes on to the different kinds of matrimony and the reasons for its institution. "There are two principal reasons and many secondary ones. The principal ones are the undertaking to beget offspring to be brought up in the worship of God, and the avoidance of fornication."⁴⁹ The first refers to the pre-lapsarian command in Genesis, the second is "propter peccatum." Among the numerous secondary reasons are included "beauty of the woman, riches, and such like"; these are held to be shameful. Raymund then deals with such practical matters as the conditions for contracting marriage, the question of consent *in absentia*, the permanence of the bond, the treatment of accusations of adultery, until he comes, in sub-sections 12 and 13, to the heart of the matter: the "bona matrimonii," these being the standard "fides, proles, sacramentum." He then considers the question of the marriage bed and specifically the reasons why copulation takes place: "Sometimes married couples come together for the sake of begetting offspring, sometimes in order to render the debt, sometimes because of incontinence or the avoiding of fornication, and sometimes for the satisfying of desire. In the first and second cases, there is no sin; in the third there is venial sin, and in the fourth mortal sin."⁵⁰

On the first reason Raymund refers to St Augustine and the generation of children and on the second again to Augustine, in both cases with I Corinthians 7 as authority: the rendering of the debt is a matter of what one owes to the partner ("uxori," the wife), rather than what one is owed. On the third reason Raymund also relies on Pauline *dicta*, in this case the matter of concession. The distinction is finely drawn: incontinence is

"malum," for then the husband "knows" the wife "beyond the need for begetting children"; yet "this sin is accounted venial on account of the good of marriage."⁵¹ All this teaching sounds closer to the experience endured by Chaucer's Wife of Bath than do the commentaries of more liberal minded theologians.

Drawing both from Aristotle (the "Philosophus") and from St Jerome, Raymund places the fourth case unequivocally in the area of mortal sin. "That man is an adulterer," he states, "who is too ardent a lover of his wife"; and, recalling from Jerome that a wise man loves his wife with prudence, not with passion, and neither gives in to voluptuousness nor initiates intercourse, Raymund concludes: "There is nothing more loathsome than to make love to one's wife as if she were an adulteress."⁵² The terms "veniale" and "foedius" give rise to extremely full glosses to Raymund's text by John of Freiburg, probably inserted early in Chaucer's century. The glossator, also a Dominican, makes an important if cautious comment on Raymund's "veniale": "nevertheless certain men say that in this case [Raymund's third kind] there is no sin, for it uses marriage to a good end."⁵³ But he is quick to point out that this view is contradicted by Augustine. It is obvious from this extensive and tortuous gloss that the distinction between incontinence and the avoiding of fornication remained a problematical area of opinion.

More serious is the view expressed in the gloss on "foedius," where the distinction is not between sinlessness and mere veniality but between venial and mortal sin or "crimen." The glossator is at pains to reiterate that it is a mortal sin for a man to have carnal intercourse with his wife for reasons of lust. Yet at the same time he seems open to concession: "Yet others say that coition of this kind is a venial sin, so long as the order of nature is observed. This can be conceded in the case of those married persons who come together in this way in the confidence of marriage and the right which each has over the body of the other, and who would otherwise not do this were they not married." Here the glossator reverts to Jerome's *dictum* that intercourse of this sort ranks as mortal sin, for there is a distinction between coition due to incontinence and that done for the satiating of desire ("causa libidinis implendae").⁵⁴

Even though the glossator takes some note of the "liberal" view ignored by Raymund himself in the *Summa*, there are few signs to suggest that a woman like the Wife of Bath would have found much relief in the latter-day rigorist position. The uncompromising view that marital intercourse for the gratification of desire meant mortal sin is reiterated all too strongly in the discourse of the Wife's fellow pilgrim, the not always "benygne" Parson,

who warns: "And for that many man weneth that he may not synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wyf, certes, that opinion is fals" (x. 859); it is nothing less than adultery ("avowtrie") when a man and his wife "take no reward in hire assemblynge but oonly to hire fleshly delit, as seith Seint Jerome" (x. 904).⁵⁵ If the Wife of Bath is the poet's conception of a woman who, faulty as she may be, has not received any comfort from liberal views on married sexuality, then certainly his Parson, citing the dreaded name, is designed as a preacher who expressly disdains those views.

There remains a still more formidable figure, even closer in time to the poet, one with opinions that in general reflect those of the traditional school of thought.⁵⁶ John Bromyard, the Dominican whose *Summa Praedicatorum* was probably completed around the time of Chaucer's birth,⁵⁷ presents a trenchant commentary on contemporary morals. It reflects the mediaeval preacher's view of the world as a place to die in, a pilgrimage where recurrent disasters reflect divine judgment.⁵⁸ Through this sombre world-view, so different from that of Alan of Lille, Bromyard lays stress upon the retribution exacted through providential justice. In the lengthy section on "Matrimonium" Bromyard presses his argument with hard logic and copious *exempla*, drawn mainly from scriptural but partly also from classical authorities.⁵⁹ He does attempt to demonstrate the dignity and excellence of the married state and, as well, to discuss the love of fidelity required by it. But he also makes plain that while the sacrament of matrimony is worthy, the "cleanness" (*mundicia*) of virginity and continence is to be preferred. Nor does he omit to set out the punishment incurred by married persons whose sexual intercourse arises from bad intentions or goes against the law.

For the sacrament to retain the dignity that Bromyard proves from Scripture, there must exist the right intention of begetting children. There are three reasons for procreation: service to God, increase on earth, and restoration of the losses among the heavenly host (*angelicum ruinam in caelo*). A further use of marriage is so that lust may thereby be held in check (*refrenatur*). Those joined in marriage who keep to these conditions are dear to God. Fidelity is essential, as the apocryphal Book of Tobias shows. For husband and wife carnal intercourse is permissible and salvation possible, providing the conditions are met. Here Bromyard resorts to his love of striking analogy. Lot, having been ordered to leave Sodom but not wishing to ascend to a refuge in the mountains, was allowed to enter the city of Segor. Citing Gregory and St Paul (1 Cor. 7), Bromyard develops the analogy: as Segor was an intermediate state between Sodom and the

mountain refuge, so is matrimony a state between inordinate carnal lust and "the mount of chastity" or continence; thus as Lot could be saved in Segor, so can man be saved in holy matrimony. Nevertheless, while merit does pertain to those so joined, the merit derived from chaste widowhood is worth more, and virginal continence is worth still more. Thus does Bromyard's relative scale repeat that designed by St Jerome nearly a millennium earlier.

After an account of the inconveniences suffered in marriage, Bromyard goes on to assert that much in marriage hangs on good or bad fortune. If good, the husband may be rich, strong, agreeable, and in every way pleasing to his wife; if bad, the wife will be troubled by the absence of these qualities. Indeed, as Alisoun's stormy career gives proof, few criticisms of marriage hit home as do Bromyard's pragmatic cautionings. His treatment of the Pauline text, that widows and virgins should remain so, is also conventional. But his support for this principle also has a pragmatic side. All kinds of misfortunes may befall a wife. The husband may have little money and the wife many children. Then there will not be enough food; and, Bromyard reflects, "It is wearisome to have many children and not much bread."⁶⁰ If the husband is wealthy, there will be anxiety, for the cares attached to riches lead to avarice and tyranny. Many drawbacks come with a beautiful wife, and a dominant trait of women is contrariness. From Theophrastus he draws *exempla* reminiscent of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* and from St Paul the same citations used by Alan of Lille for an argument not on the disadvantages of marriage but on its worth.

It is evident from the labyrinth of mediaeval *dicta* on marriage that the inconsistencies in evaluation could well produce such a predicament as Chaucer invented for his Wife of Bath and for his ironical treatment of the question.⁶¹ Bromyard's own *dicta* would intensify such a woman's uncertainties not only over marriage itself but also over the legitimacy it provides for natural instincts. The Dominican is emphatic in his insistence that if one indulges libidinous passion in marital intercourse, one is doing wrong. It is also wrong to enter into the married state for reasons of accumulating wealth rather than for the begetting of children, an admonition that raises questions not only about the marital motives of all Alisoun's husbands but also about her own. It is even worse to take a wife to gratify lust rather than to avoid fornication. The sacrament was ordained by God for the offering up of children to His greater glory. Over and over, Bromyard returns to the Book of Tobias for his *exemplum* of a marriage undertaken not for lust but for procreation. Even the modest claims for companionship made by Alan of Lille receive not so much as a glance. Finally, if men and women enter

marriage for motives not ordained by God, they may suffer retribution by being frustrated of children.

In Bromyard's closing peroration may lie a hint to explain in part the contemporary attitudes at the root of the uneasiness implanted in the Wife of Bath's discourse. The frequency with which she misuses the term "love" in her account of the first three husbands may indicate some underlying awareness that if "auctoritees" have dealt harshly with the physical side of married love, she herself has turned the spiritual side into the material:

They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;
 Me neded nat do lenger diligence
 To wynne hire love, or doon hem reverence.
 They loved me so wel, by God above,
 That I ne tolde ne deyntee of hir love!
 A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon
 To gete hire love, ye, ther as she hath noon. (203-10)

If her motives for marriage, then, have been fully as wrong in intent as those denounced by Bromyard and if she is conceived of as listening to those preachers — "clerkes" — who echo his and similar doctrines, then here may be a partial answer to the old problem set by Alisoun's silence about her own child-bearing. How near to her own recital does Bromyard's dry comment strike home: "Daily experience would seem to suffice," he says, when dealing with the penalties due those who marry out of wrong intent or who make wrong use of the sacrament. Those who marry on account of beauty or lustful desire or riches at once put aside all peace and quiet both of heart and body. Such marriages turn to hatred, discord, chastisement, adultery. At last, when old age overcomes those who marry for beauty, "love ceases and enmity grows." From all this, Bromyard concludes, it is clear that a marriage wrongly undertaken overflows in pain and misery as much for the husband as for the wife and even for the children: "Therefore let them who have wives be as if they had none."⁶²

Bromyard's sombre reflections serve as paradigm for the "auctoritees," early and late, to whose pronouncements on marriage and sexuality Chaucer's Wife of Bath has listened. From Jerome to Bromyard, the *sententiae* vary but slightly; and the occasional gleams of humanistic light cast by the Schools of Chartres and St Victor hardly dispel the shadow of guilt under which, in Chaucer's portrait of this defiant yet troubled woman, married love seems to have been confined. Where, then, does the poet stand on the "liberal" versus the "rigorist" schools? There is certainly direct evidence of rigorist attitudes in *The Canterbury Tales*, but that does not mean he is in

accord with them. Nor, if there is no direct evidence in his text supporting liberal attitudes, need that mean he is unaware of their existence. Leclercq speaks of the "literary and doctrinal trend" by which was spread abroad in claustral writings "a positive and healthy attitude towards marriage" (35-36). With this one would no doubt wish to associate Geoffrey Chaucer, but at the same time one would wish also to associate his fictive Wife with the "conviviality of conjugal affection" (Leclercq 18) that seems to be missing in her own feelings about marriage.

Not every critic might wish to go as far as David Aers in thinking that Chaucer's work "invites readers to de-sublimate authoritative texts, to humanize texts that have become fixed as 'auctoritee'" (83-84). For Aers, Chaucer puts into new perspective "authoritative, allegedly impersonal doctrines propagated in a dominant ecclesiastical tradition" and thereby provides a "critique of the anti-feminist tradition." Whether or not Chaucer did have such advanced views, he has designed a complex and ironical portrait that shows how entrenched misogynistic doctrines have produced in one particular woman mingled distress of spirit and defiance, for part of her nature yearns for acceptance while another part rejects it. Ambivalent herself, Alisoun is aware of the unfairness in authority's words on women and sexuality — but unaware of the ambivalences in those words. That the long-lasting rigorist position held its place in Chaucer's lifetime the evidence makes clear and that the more liberal position did not drive it out seems equally clear. To present Alisoun as a woman made subject to the one and not to the other affords an occasion for the poet to depict one more time the anguish of the pilgrimage through life. In that depiction, few passages ring more sharply than Alisoun's regret that "evere love was synne." How much blame, one wonders, in teaching her that harsh belief is borne by preachers of the rigorist school, men who display the asperity of her companion pilgrim, the Parson?

One answer to that question lies in the significant change made by the poet in adapting one of his sources for the Parson's homily on penitence. In the "Remedium contra peccatum luxurie" (x. 915) the Parson extolls Christian marriage, hallowed by God. It comes in one of the Parson's Tale sections where Kate Petersen's collation sets out a close correspondence with the *Summa virtutum et vitiorum* of Gulielmus Peraldus. One effect of marriage, the Parson declares, is that "it chaungeth deedly synne into venial synne bitwixe hem that been ywedded" (x. 920). How grudging this concession actually is can be seen by comparing the terms in the Parson's source

book. Peraldus states that the "opus carnale quod sine eo (sc. "matrimonio") esset mortale, cum eo est veniale, *vel omnino sine peccato*" [emphasis added].⁶³ Chaucer's Pilgrim-Parson chooses to omit the generous concession, squarely in his text, that married carnal love can be without any sin at all, not even venial. In turn, Chaucer presents his Wife of Bath as a woman who, flawed as she may be, has had the pilgrimage of life, hard enough as it is, made even harder by men like the Pilgrim-Parson.

To return to my opening dichotomy: old or new historicism? Does the text reveal the author's approval of anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial dogma, or does it reveal the injustices to women prevalent when it was written, whether or not the author and his contemporaries perceived that injustice or cared about it—if they did? More or less categorically, I answer that Chaucer is neither condemning this woman (or any woman) nor is he arguing against the authoritative voices that have caused her pain. He is giving the response of one whose experience makes her break the silence shrouding women's response. Aware himself of the diversity in those authoritative voices, he leaves us with the protests of a woman who has heard only the worst of them.

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NOTES

¹ All citations from the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" will be from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. Wherever translations or paraphrases from the Latin occur, they are my own unless otherwise noted. I should like to record my gratitude to Professor John Lawlor and Professor Roger Blockley for their generous assistance.

² "Disese" is frequently used by Chaucer in the sense of "distress," e.g. *MLT* 616.

³ Christine Klapisch-Zuber, 12.

⁴ According to James William Spisak, Jerome's attitude was partly modified by the *De Bono coniugali* of Augustine, from which "most commentators on sexuality and marriage in Chaucer's time derived their discussions" (15). In Spisak's view, Chaucer in *WBP* is mocking Jerome. In recent years much research has been done on the relationship between *Adversus Jovinianum* and *WBP*. See in particular Robert A. Pratt, "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Antimatrimonial Propaganda in the Universities," and the same author's "Saint Jerome in Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves." Daniel S. Silvia, Jr., in "Glosses to the *Canterbury Tales* from St Jerome's *Epistola Adversus Jovinianum*," cites the glosses against certain passages in *CT*, including *WBP*, that were taken from Jerome's treatise. The same author, with John P. Brennan, Jr., in "Medieval Manuscripts of *Jerome Against Jovinian*," refers to it as the "most important and central document in the history of Western anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial literature" and cites the number of MSS. located in British and Continental libraries. In "The Predicament of Chaucer's Wife of Bath: St Jerome on Virginity," I compare the treatment of Pauline *dicta* by Jerome with the responses of the Wife of Bath. See also James L. Boren,

"Alysoun of Bath and the Vulgate 'Perfect Wife'," for a discussion of elements in Jankin's book apart from Jerome's treatise.

⁵ It was on the initiative of Pammachius that Jerome undertook the refutation of Jovinian's heretical teachings. In "Chaucer and St Jerome: The Use of 'Barley' in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*," Katharina M. Wilson notes that the Wife's references to "whete-seed" and "barley-breed" (139-46) find a more explicit parallel in the Pammachius letter than in *Adv. Jov.* itself; for Jerome, "wheaten bread signifies purity and barley bread marriage" (248).

⁶ On the question of the "rigorist" as opposed to the "liberal" school, see Henry Ansgar Kelly; also J.T. Noonan and J.W. Spisak.

⁷ Hanning, p. 17. In Barbara Gottfried's perceptive analysis, the Wife reconstructs "her 'experience' in relation to men, and by extension, in relation to the patriarchal society in which she lives and the 'authority' of the misogynist literature it spawns." The "psychic costs" are also apparent in her revelations, for her experience "runs counter" to the prevailing ideas, and the ideology of her world, which gives her "dis-ease," is dominated by men (202-03).

⁸ Innocent III, Hugh of St Victor, and Bartholomew Anglicus, as well as St Augustine and St Jerome, are among the authorities included by Robert P. Miller in *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*. St Raymund of Pennaforte is the author of the *Summa Casuum de poenitentia et matrimonio* drawn on extensively by Chaucer in *Parst*. John Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum* ranks, according to John W. Fisher, among "the sermons, penitentials, treatises with which Chaucer had been familiar all of his life" (206). On Innocent III, Hugh of St Victor, and Alan of Lille, see the entries in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* by, respectively, Michele Maccarrone, Vol. VII (2) (Paris, 1971) cols. 1767-1773; Roger Baron, Vol. VII (1) (Paris, 1969) cols. 901-939; J.-M. Canivez, Vol. I (Paris, 1937) cols. 270-272. The selections in Miller's anthology are "drawn from works Chaucer is known to have used, as well as from works representing significant medieval attitudes toward matters with which he, like many other authors of his day, concerned himself" (vii). I believe this to be true also of the well-known documents on marriage and sexuality cited in the present paper.

⁹ Concerning Innocent's attitude on married sexuality, Spisak observes that Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* became the standard framework for discussions on marriage and that in the twelfth century, which "brought a mixture of rigorists and liberals to the scene," Huguccio of Pisa was one of "the most strict commentators on the marriage act"; his "extreme and rather naive position was influential because Huguccio was a teacher of canon law whose prize student became Pope Innocent III" (16).

¹⁰ I.iii, "De conceptione infantis," trans. Dietz, p. 8: "Quis enim nesciat concubitus etiam coniugalem nunquam omnino committi sine pruritu carnis, sine fervore libidinis, sine fetore luxurie?" (ed. Maccarrone, p. 10).

¹¹ The text of *De Quadripartita* is from PL 217:928A. The Vulgate text, slightly transposed by Innocent, reads "Propter fornicationem autem unusquisque suam uxorem habeat."

¹² PL 217:966A. St Jerome explicitly affirms that the highest rewards in heaven will go to virgins, e.g. in his letter to Pammachius, XLVIII.4; 9; 10 and *Adv. Jov.* I. 12; 36; 40.

¹³ *De Miseria*, I.xvii. 1, 2, trans. Dietz, p. 19: "Si potest ignis non urere, potest caro non concupiscere. . . . Qui [angelum Sathane] carnaliter stimulat et graviter colaphizat, ignem naturae flatu suggestionis succendit, materiam apponit. . . ." (ed. Maccarrone,

pp. 22–23). On the principle that Douay-Rheims renders literally how Chaucer would have understood the Vulgate (“quam uri”), I follow the sense of “to be burnt” rather than “to burn.” There are several schools of thought on the interpretation of I Cor. 7:9 if this is regarded as a present infinitive passive; and whether or not the Apostle had hell-fire in mind is a vexed question.

¹⁴ Preface 429. Robertson is translating from the *distinctiones* in *Libri IV Sententiarum* (Ad Claras Aquas, 1916) XXXI, 8: “Et vix aliqui reperiri possunt adhuc carnales amplexus experientes, qui non interdum convenient praeter intentionem procreandae prolis,” and from XXXI, 5: “Ubi autem haec bona desunt, fides scilicet et proles, non videtur coitus defendi a crimine” (pp. 943, 939). For authority Peter Lombard relies mainly on Augustine, in particular *De Bono coniugali*; he also cites *Adversus Iovinianum*.

¹⁵ “Quando vero, deficiente bono prolis, fide tamen servata, conveniunt causa incontinentiae, non sic excusatur, ut non habeat culpam, sed venialem” (XXXI, 5).

¹⁶ Kenneth J. Oberembt, in “Chaucer’s Anti-Misogynist Wife of Bath,” argues that the Wife’s opposition to misogynistic doctrine and Pauline theology shows her to be a shrewd critic of accepted sexual views, whose experiences prove the wrongness of the traditional association of women with sensuality and men with rationality. As to the author’s view, Oberembt adds that there is “no real clue as to whether Chaucer personally sided with the rigorist moralists or with the moderate” (298). Earlier, Joseph Mogan in an important study, “Chaucer and the *Bona Matrimonii*,” examines Chaucer’s treatment of the “goods” of marriage, set forth by St Augustine and moralists of the Middle Ages, and argues that the Wife is seen as more advanced than the theologians in her attitude toward pleasure in marital intercourse; see especially pp. 123–25 for an analysis of Augustine’s and Peter Lombard’s views as against the rigorist views, including the *Summa casuum de poenitentia* of St Raymond. Mogan considers the Parson as not expressing the more moderate attitudes of his day on married sexuality.

¹⁷ The schools of St Victor and Chartres are described, and the works of Hugh of St Victor and Alan of Lille discussed, by M.-D. Chenu.

¹⁸ Leclercq is translating from *De Virginitate Beatae Mariae*, PL 176:860.

¹⁹ Smalley, p. 97, citing B. Hauréau, *Les Oeuvres de Hugues de St-Victor* (Paris, 1886) 27, denies Hugh of St Victor’s authorship of the commentary on St Paul. In Migne (PL 175:431–634) it is not placed with *Exegetica dubia*. Smalley suggests the name of Walter of St Victor as possible author.

²⁰ See Howard, ed. *De Miseria*, xviii.

²¹ Vulgate: “Qui aufert quae tua sunt, ne repetas.” The commentator rephrases this, “Si quis abstulerit tibi tua, noli repetere” (PL 175:523A).

²² “Apostolus ergo ostendit quid licet infirmis; Dominus autem ostendit quid conveniat perfectis” (PL 175:523C).

²³ “Est itaque conjugium vel matrimonium maritalis conjunctio maris et feminae; inter legitimas personas individualem vitae consuetudinem retinens. . . . Consensus, qui in anima est, coram Ecclesia debet demonstrare, sine quo non est conjugium, unde legitur: Matrimonium non facit copula corporum, sed voluntas animarum. Causa propter quam contrahitur, est procreatio prolis, et vitatio fornicationis. . . . Tria sunt bona conjugii: Fides, proles, sacramentum scilicet inseparabilitas” (PL 175:524C).

²⁴ “Indulgentia est concessio laxioris vitae; quam licitum sit, quod esset illicitum et peccatum; ubi nulla concessio esset” (PL 175:525A).

²⁵ “Si enim hoc esset, quomodo generis humani fieret propagatio? Solutio. Conditio est implicita quasi dicat volo, et bonum est, vel mihi placeret omnes tales esse: forsitan

si omnes boni essent, qui modo sunt, de illis, impleretur numerus praedestinatorum" (PL 175:525A).

26 For Jerome's warnings about the Antichrist, see Letter XXII, 21.

27 "Quaeritur an majus bonum sit conjugium quam virginitas" (PL 175: 526A).

28 "Et videtur quod sic; quia majores angustiae, et dolores, et labores sunt in conjugio quam in virginitate, et merces unicuique secundum suum laborem reddetur" (PL 175:526A).

29 "Quidam tamen conjugati non sunt minoris meriti quam quaedam virgines" (PL 175:526A).

30 For a brief account of Allan's life and works, see James J. Sheridan, trans. and ed., *Anticlaudianus or the Good and Perfect Man*. See also Derek Brewer, ed., *The Parlement of Fouyls*, pp. 26 ff., and G. Raynaud de Lage, *Alain de Lille*. For the *De Planctu naturae*, see translation by Douglas M. Moffat. Both these poetical and allegorical works seem to have been known to Chaucer, as were probably other writings by or attributed to Alan of Lille. Brewer, pp. 26-30, points out that the *contemptus mundi* attitude, exemplified by Innocent III and Bernard of Clairvaux, "was never exclusive or uncontested." Against it lies the concept of nature developed by Macrobius and the School of Chartres, particularly in the work of Alan of Lille. See also Chenu, p. 20 and passim.

31 Robertson refers to Anticlaudianus as "a work of enormous influence" (60); he also cites among Alan's influential works the *Summa de arte praedicatoria*.

32 PL 210:305-430 and 111-198 respectively. These texts are described by Sheridan, ed., *Anticlaudianus*, pp. 17-19; he points out that the Migne text of the latter treatise is confused and defective, the sermons being Alan's but the compilation coming later.

33 Leclercq, p. 21; elsewhere he describes as "fictitious" charges of anti-feminism attributed to St Bernard: "Generally it is the secular writers like John of Salisbury or Andrew the Chaplain who are misogynic. They follow in the steps of the pre-Christian satirists from whom they take their inspiration" (71).

34 Leclercq, p. 21. The quotation from Alan of Lille is from *De Fide contra haereticos*, I.64: "Concedimus etiam conjugium non posse consummari sine carnali coitu, verum carnalis coitus non semper peccatum est; nam per conjugii sacramentum fit, ut carnale commercium aut grave non sit peccatum, aut omnino peccatum non sit" (PL 210:366C).

35 Letter XLVIII.6 ad Pammachium: "Etiam si habes, inquit, uxorem, et illi alligatus es, et solvis debitum, et non habes tui corporis potestatem; atque (ut manifestius loquar) servus uxoris es, noli propter hoc habere tristitiam, nec de amissa virginitate suspires. . . . Expecta dum sequitur. Si egeris patienter, conjux mutabitur in sororem." The Latin text is from the edition of Abbé Bareille, I, 189; the translation is that of W.H. Fremantle, VI, 69.

36 *De Fide*, cap. VI: "Ipsi prohibent nubere, quia nuptias damnant" (PL 210:314A).

37 *De Fide*, cap. LXIV: "Quod non ideo Christum Joannem revocavit a nuptiis, quod nuptiae essent execrabiles, vel malae, sed ut ad majus bonum invitaret" (PL 210:366C).

38 See n. 34 above. Alan continues: "Quot enim non caderent in fornicationis periculum, nisi esset conjugium? Excipitur autem in honestate conjugali, fornicationis peccatum" (PL 210:366C). Not unexpectedly, he cites the familiar dictum of St Paul (I Cor. 7:2). An adverse view of the Wife of Bath's understanding of the marriage sacrament is taken by James W. Cook in "That She Was Out of Alle Charitee": Point-Counterpoint in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*"; he comments upon the psychic stresses observable in Alisoun, deeming these to be symptomatic of the uneasy state

of her soul and of the bondage she is in to her appetites. For another view, in which extensive investigation into the Wife's promiscuity and her resentment of men is made, see Beryl Rowland, "Chaucer's Dame Alys: Critics in Blunderland"; the wife is seen as displaying only "the deepest animosity and malice" toward the men themselves (389). This critic regards the Wife's "precocious sexual experience" as having caused trauma, hence resentment (391).

39 "Quod autem conjugium bonum et sanctum sit, quod naturale commercium per bona conjugii excusetur, variis rationibus et auctoritatibus probari potest" (PL 210:367B). For proofs Alan produces a substantial array of quotations from the Evangelists and from St Paul. Some of these are the very references that Chaucer has the Wife of Bath, evidently aware only of their citation in unfavourable contexts, try to argue down.

40 Cited with *Liber poenitentialis* by Canivez, I. 270-72 (see n. 8 above).

41 "Si conjugatis proponat sermonem, commendetur status conjugii, fides tori, virtus sacramenti. Ostendat quomodo conjugium in paradiso habuerit initium, quomodo antiqui Patres in conjugali statu meruerunt vitam aeternam adipisci" (PL 210:185C). The texts are the familiar Pauline concessions (I Cor. 7:2, 9), the O.T. commandment (Gen. 1:28), and Christ's injunction on the inseparability of the marriage union (Matt. 19:6).

42 Alan draws attention to his knowledge of Ciceronian eloquence in his prologue to one of the most interesting exegetical works of the period, his *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum* (PL 210:53A). His "hymn" in praise of marriage, beginning "O quanta est dignitas conjugii," is in PL 210:193B (cap. XLV); for a translation see Leclercq, p. 111.

43 "Sed quamvis a peccato excuset carnale commercium, celebratur tamen ad susceptionem prolis non ad voluptatem carnis" (PL 210:193C). The concession, "Sit etiam ibi spes prolis, scilicet, boni operis intentio," may be designed to mitigate the rigour of the old maxim "He who is too ardent a lover of his wife is an adulterer," which Alan finds himself obliged to cite.

44 Trans. Moffat, p. 78. "Ibi tabulam sacramentalem testimonii, fidem [sic "finem"] matrimonii, connubii pacificam unitatem, nuptiarum inseparabile jugum, nubentium indissolubile vinculum, lingua picturae fatebatur intextum" (PL 210:472B). The work has been described as Menippean in form, presenting Alan's vision in which he expresses sympathy for Nature "faced with the prevalence of the unnatural vice of sodomy." Earlier than *Anticlaudianus*, its subject matter could be the work of a younger writer. See Sheridan, pp. 20-21.

45 Kelly draws attention to the liberal view of marriage expressed by Laurence of Spain who taught at Bologna in the thirteenth century; his work was developed in the next century "by the influential married canonist John Andreae," who offers reasons for the pre-eminence of the sacrament of marriage. His interpretation of the Cana miracle is particularly interesting in the light of the "rigorist" exegesis offered by Jerome (*Adv. Jov.* I.40): "'Marriage is of such power that it transforms water, that is, corporal delight, into wine, that is, a good work, which is sometimes meritorious'" (257). In "'Pacience in Adversitee': Chaucer's Presentation of Marriage," Velma B. Richmond points out the important positive values of marriage that are shown in mediaeval narrative. In particular, the "Marriage Group" in *CT* should be seen "not as statements of opposing arguments, but as part of a central argument about the nature of marriage as a human relationship in which happiness can be achieved only through self-sacrifice and abnegation rather than assertiveness and self-seeking" (331.)

46 This aspect of marriage finds some corroboration in the practical world of the English courtroom, where evidence from the end of the thirteenth century to the end of

the fifteenth indicates some signs of humanity and compassion in marital matters and the existence of love as a frequently mentioned motive for marriage. See R.H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* and the review by M.M. Sheehan; see also Leclercq, p.61.

47 Citations here are drawn from the Rome 1603 edition, together with the marginal glosses of Ioannes de Friburgo, who died in 1314.

48 "Quoniam in foro paenitentiali frequenter dubitationes circa matrimonium, immo etiam perplexitates occurrunt, ad honorem Dei, et animarum profectum post summam de paenitentia, specialem de matrimonio subieci tractatum."

49 4.2.6 (p. 514): "Causa institutionis matrimonii sunt duae principales et multae secundariae. Principales causae sunt susceptio sobolis educandae ad cultum Dei et vitatio fornicationis."

50 4.2.13 (p. 519): "Quod aliquando commiscentur coniuges causa suscipiendae prolis, aliquando causa reddendi debitum, aliquando causa incontinentiae, sive vitandae fornicationis, aliquando causa exsaturandae libidinis, in primo et secundo casu nullum est peccatum, in tertio est veniale, in quarto mortale."

51 4.2.13 (p. 519): "Quod vir cognoscit uxorem ultra necessitatem procreandi filios. . . . Sed illud malum fit veniale propter bonum nuptiale."

52 4.1.13 (p. 519): "Adulter est suam uxorem amator ardentior. . . . Sapiens iudicio amat coniugem, non affectu, non regnat in eo impetus voluptatis, nec praeceps fertur ad coitum. Nihil foedius, quam uxorem amare, quasi adulteram. . . ."

53 Gloss to 4.2.13 (p. 519): "Quidem tamen dicunt nullum esse peccatum in hoc casu, nam ad bonum finem utitur coniugio."

54 Gloss to 4.2.13 (p. 520): "Alii tamen dicunt, quod huiusmodi coitus peccatum veniale est, dum tam observetur ordo naturae; quod potest concedi de illis coniugatis, qui taliter ex confidentia matrimonii coeunt et iure quod habet uterque in corpore ulterius, non aliter hoc facturi, nisi essent conjugati. . . ."

55 Here Chaucer is making the Parson allude to *Adv. Jov.* I.49.

56 Noonan makes it clear that the rigorist position held only the procreative purpose in coition to be excusable; some authorities of that school would regard the purpose only of avoidance of fornication as merely venial, others would deem it mortal. Alongside a rigorist such as St Raymund (whose *Summa* Noonan calls "the bible for confessors") there also existed the "milder Augustinian view" held by many theologians. While intercourse was tied to procreation, and the preferred status of virginity and celibacy continued right through Chaucer's time, nevertheless "married love was an ideal for the theologians" and love for one's wife, "founded on the union of the flesh," was deemed lawful and in the order of charity (250-56, 276-78).

57 Scholarship has succeeded in pushing back the date of Bromyard's work. Workman was inclined to place it around 1410, Coulton around 1390, Owst in the 1380's. Later research determined that the *Summa* must pre-date 1354, and in "The Date of the *Summa Praedicatorum*" Leonard Boyle adduces evidence to establish 1348 as the probable date of completion. Bromyard's own dates are uncertain. The author of *SP* was presented for license to hear confessions in 1326, and may be presumed to have died by 1352, when a successor was licensed in his place at Hereford Dominican convent. See Emden, I, 278.

58 See on this point the *articuli* "Audire" (*SP*, I, fol. 74) and "Damnatio" (*SP*, I, fol. 173). The edition used is that of Venice, 1586, 2 vols. There is as yet no modern edition, much less a complete translation, of the *Summa*. Extracts are often studied

from the versions cited or paraphrased in G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. On Owst's tendency to extract portions that emphasize the more sensational side of Bromyard's social criticism, see the review article by Leonard Boyle.

⁵⁹ The following summary is from Part II, fols. 14v to 17r.

⁶⁰ "Secundum antiquum proverbium tediosum est magnam habere prolem, et modicum panem" (fol. 15v).

⁶¹ In *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, David Aers advances the view, after summing up patristic and scholastic tendencies to downgrade women, that Chaucer is presenting the Wife's rebellion as real and as disclosing social and ideological complexities; her thesis represents "an affirmation of the traditional and orthodox failure to integrate love, sex, and marriage" (149).

⁶² "Ex quo patet, quod matrimonium male contractum tam in mariti, quam uxoris, quam etiam prolis redundat poenam et miseriam. Ergo qui habet uxores, tanquam non habentes sint [I Cor. 7:29]" (fol. 17r). Hope Phyllis Weissman, in "Why Chaucer's Wife is from Bath," finds evidence linking the Wife with prostitution: the bath was a "sign of sexual indulgence, indeed, of lust" (12) and all five of the histories cited in *WBP* on Alisoun's marriage career "are variations on the theme of wedlock as prostitution" (27).

⁶³ Kate Oelzner Petersen, p. 77.

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